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British Representations of the Kurds and the
Armenian Question 1878-1908

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Abstract

There are still gaps in the understanding of British representations of the Armenian question which was an important issue for Britain for decades. Notably, the Kurds were one of the most influential parties in the Armenian question and had a significant impact upon it. However, to date, there has been no study about how the British, who were the Europeans closest to the Armenian question, regarded the Kurds and their position in this conflict. It is this issue, therefore, that this thesis addresses.

The thesis investigates the British perceptions of the Kurdish position and contributes to a better understanding of the image of the Kurds in the late Victorian period. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Kurds were seen in Britain through the prism of the Armenian question and were generally presented as oppressors of the Christians. This thesis examines the British views, official and public, of the Kurds and shows the effects of these perceptions in shaping British attitudes towards the Kurds, which in turn influenced British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The study highlights the growing British attention to the Kurds as part of wider British concerns relating to the Armenian question and eastern Anatolia, which was an essential area for British interests in the East.

This thesis is based upon analysis of British primary sources that have not previously been systematically analysed in relation to the history of the Kurds and their relations with the Armenians. While historians have used considerable amount of Foreign Office Papers regarding the Kurds and the Armenian question, other categories of British sources, in particular Parliamentary Debates and British newspaper material, have not been systematically studied. Through studying British attitudes to the Armenian question, as represented through these sources, many aspects of Kurdish and Armenian history can also be revealed during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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List of Abbreviations

et al. and others

FO Foreign Office

Incl. Inclosure

MP Member of Parliament

Introduction

Kurds and Armenians co-existed relatively peacefully in Anatolia (Asia Minor) in the period before the late nineteenth century in spite of their different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, language and religion. They had friendly relationships in different fields especially in economy, culture and social affairs. As James Shiel, after a long journey through “Kurdistan” in the first half of the nineteenth century stated, Kurds were tolerant towards the Armenians, valued them highly and treated them well.¹ However, with the increase of internal and external problems for the Ottoman Empire, this good relationship between the Kurds and Armenians changed bit by bit and became tense in the second half of the century. This relationship mainly deteriorated with the start of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and then the Congress of Berlin in 1878 which led to the birth of a problem called the Armenian question. The Armenian question lasted for more than four decades and the period between 1878 and 1908, covering most of the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), shaped a crucial stage in the history of this question and in the history of Armenians and Kurds and drew the attention of Britain strongly.

The Armenian question became a significant part of the Eastern question² and constituted the “ripest and most urgent part” of it³ particularly during in the 1890s. Britain was a Great Power in the nineteenth century and the Armenian question was an important matter to British interests. Therefore, the British seriously followed this

¹ James Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabríz, Through Kurdistan', *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 8 (1838), p.57.

² The “Eastern question” referred to the problems which arose as a result of the decline of the power of the Ottoman Empire. It was a tangled issue which emerged in the late eighteenth century and continued until the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 and involved the Great Powers and many different peoples in a struggle for control and influence over the Empire and its properties. However, the term “the Eastern question” was used for the first time in the Congress of Verona in 1822 in the wake of the Greek uprising against the Ottoman authorities in 1821. For more details on the Eastern question see: M. S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A study in international relations* (London: Macmillan, 1966); William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801-1927*, 3rd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 1966); Salahi Ramsdan Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* (London: K. Rustem and Brother, 1987), pp.27-30. The Eastern question, as the Duke of Argyll said in 1879, “has stirred more deeply the feelings of the country [he meant Britain] than any other question of our time”. The Duke of Argyll, *The Eastern Question from the Treaty of Paris 1836 to the Treaty of Berlin 1878 and to the Second Afghan War*, Vol. I (London: Strahan, 1879), p. v.

³ ‘The Prospects of Armenia’, *The Times*, 16 Aug 1890.

question and British sources covered it and its links, including the relationship between the Armenians and Kurds, in considerable depth. Thus, British material is an essential source for studying the Kurds and the Armenian question during the late Ottoman Empire.

1. The significance of this research

This study will make an important contribution to our understanding of how the British represented the Armenian question and the Kurdish position in relation to it in the late Ottoman period, a topic that has not yet been adequately researched. In doing so it will contribute to the wider historical debate about the Armenian question, which is still a controversial subject among historians. This question is highly relevant not only to the history of the Kurds and Armenians but also to other nations, especially the Turks who are continuously accused of not recognising the Armenian atrocities. In 2014, the Turkish Government announced its apology to the Armenians owing to their adversities in the late Ottoman Empire.⁴ However, The Armenian question still strongly affects Turkish external relations especially with the EU.

British views of the Armenian question and the Kurds are significant as well because they can be used as a comparative study to analyse narratives of others who were involved in this question including Turkish narratives and Armenian accounts. British primary sources, in terms of quantity and quality, are essential to understand the Armenian question in general. Finally, through the study of British ideas about the Kurds and Armenians as two peoples in Anatolia, this research can also contribute to our understanding some aspects of the stereotype of Oriental society in Britain.

2. Literature Review

The Armenian question is a widely studied subject in historiography. However, a survey of the secondary sources shows that although it is covered from many different angles, there are few serious and specialist works about the Kurdish position in this question. In addition, the Kurdish image in British and Western perspective has rarely,

⁴ Aljazeera Arabic Channel, 29-30 April 2014.

if ever, been discussed. Apart from a few hints by historians regarding the Kurdish reputation in the West, there are no studies of the Kurds and their position in the Armenian question as perceived by the West. In general, the existing literature is not directly relevant to the theme of this study and deals with more general aspects of the Armenian question and Kurds in the late Ottoman period.

Many published and unpublished secondary works, ranging from books, journal articles and unpublished research theses, have been used to construct the framework of this thesis. This literature can be classified into a number of categories according to the fields and subjects that they focus on and according to their approaches to the Armenian question as a whole.

Historical surveys

This category includes the work of researchers whose accounts can be characterised as not overtly biased regarding the Armenian question and the subject of Kurdish and Armenian relations. Studies of the history of the Kurds in the late Ottoman Empire are a significant part of this category, of which one of the most significant is *The Kurdish National Movement Its Origins and Development* by Wadie Jwaideh⁵, an Iraqi-American professor. This book studies the Kurdish revolt of 1880 under the leadership of Sheikh Ubaydullah of Nehri which was the most developed movement in terms of Kurdish nationalist sentiment up to that time. The revolt was the focus of the attention of British diplomats who recorded many reports about it. Jwaideh argued that one direct reason for the outbreak of the Kurdish revolt was the Armenian question. He added that Ubaydullah's uprising against the Persian state and the Sheikh's efforts for an independent Kurdistan were partially a reaction against the growth of Armenian interests in the area, especially the reforms promised to the Armenians by Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin in 1878. Jwaideh, however, does not consider in detail important questions such as the effect of the Kurdish factor on the Armenians' demand for autonomy.

⁵ Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

One of the most debatable subjects relevant to this research is the Hamidiye brigades that were mostly formed from the Kurds by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1890. They had a very controversial function in terms of the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians and were criticised heavily by British diplomats and the press. Janet Klein's work *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone*⁶ that focuses on the Hamidiye regiments from 1890 to 1914 and beyond is one of the most prominent references on this organisation. Klein discusses the main purposes of founding the Hamidiye in chapter one, portrays the administration of the Hamidiye brigades between 1890 and 1908 in chapter two and allocates chapter three to the circumstances of the Hamidiye under the new Young Turk rule from 1908-1914. While chapter four focuses on the Hamidiye and the question of land control in eastern Anatolia, the final chapter includes general information about the Hamidiye during the First World War and their influence and legacy in modern Turkey. In her 2007 article, Klein briefly looks at the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II. She argues that this relationship was not entirely based on hostility and conflict, but saw collaboration at the same time.⁷ Klein's accounts, which were mostly presented in her monograph, are important to understand the structure of the Kurdish community and to understand some aspects of the nature of its relation with Armenian society in the late Ottoman period. However, her book mostly focuses on the Hamidiye in the context of Kurdish history rather than on their impact on the relation between the Kurds and Armenians. In addition, Klein briefly identifies the views of Turkish, Armenian and Kurdish nationalist writers on the functions and influences of the Hamidiye besides the more recent approach that showed the Sultan as a "far-sighted ruler" who used all means to protect his state and its borders against internal and external threats.⁸ However, she does not focus on the perspectives of the British towards the Hamidiye at the time who looked at it chiefly from the angle of its impact on the Christians.

⁶ Janet Klein, *The Margins of Empire: Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). This book was based on her thesis: 'Power in the Periphery: The Hamidiye Light Cavalry and the Struggle over Ottoman Kurdistan 1890-1914', PhD thesis (Princeton University, 2002).

⁷ Janet Klein, 'Conflict and Collaboration: Rethinking Kurdish-Armenian relations in the Hamidian period 1876-1909', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 13, Nos. 1&2 (2007), pp.153-166.

⁸ Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, pp.7-8.

A Modern History of the Kurds by the British author David McDowall includes some information on the Kurdish Hamidiye brigades. He also mentions the conflict and some cooperation between Kurds and Armenians during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II) and during the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) 1908-1918.⁹ Although this book studies Kurdish history over a very long period from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, McDowall does not discuss the Kurdish and Armenians relationship in detail; however, his work is still important for understanding the general framework of the subject. Martin Van Bruinessen's *Agha, Shaikh and State* studies power sharing among powerful families in Kurdish society in detail but does not consider in any depth the Kurdish role in the Armenian question except for some information regarding the Hamidiye.¹⁰ Robert Olson has also studied the Hamidiye but mainly through the lens of their effect on Kurdish society especially with regard to Kurdish nationalism rather than their effects on the Armenian cause.¹¹

The works of a few Kurdish researchers can be briefly mentioned here as well. To some extent, they reflect the Kurdish nationalist approach and tend to defend the Kurdish position in the Armenian question. They are generally concerned with the issue of the Armenian "massacres" but put the main responsibility on the Ottoman Government. For instance, in the case of the Hamidiye, they blame the Government for recruiting the Kurdish tribes in the face of the Armenians and for implementing a policy of divide and rule among the Kurds.¹² This group of researchers are best represented by the Kurdish Professor Kamal Madhhar Ahmed who allocates a chapter "The Kurds and spilled Armenian Blood" in his book to illuminate Kurdish attitudes towards the Armenians. He asserts that not all Kurds, but rather a minority of them, acted against the Armenians and highlights the Ottoman authority's negative impact on the relationship between both peoples. He records many instances of Kurdish-Armenian

⁹ David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), pp. 59-63, 89, 97-8.

¹⁰ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed Books, 1992).

¹¹ Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

¹² Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p.8.

cooperation and how the Kurds helped them during and before the First World War.¹³ He also points out the positive contribution of the Kurdish newspaper *Kurdistan* (1898-1902) in confirming the friendship between Kurds and Armenians.¹⁴ Ahmed contends that although some Kurdish chiefs and their followers oppressed Armenians and confiscated their farms, Kurdish hostility towards the Armenians has been exaggerated and Kurds have been condemned more than they deserve. He asserts that the Kurdish and Armenian relationship has to be studied in the framework of the complicated situation of the Ottoman Empire and external factors and foreign intervention in the Armenian cause.¹⁵

Research on Britain and the Armenian question is also highly relevant. These researchers mostly concentrate on British official positions on the Armenian question but rarely point out the role of the Kurds in this question nor do they discuss the British representation of the Kurds and the Armenian question in any detail. For instance, Akaby Nassibian argues that the aim of British policy during the period of this research was to prevent Russian penetration of Anatolia, Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. While criticising the role of the Ottoman authorities in agitating the Kurds against the Armenians and blaming the Great Powers for not working effectively regarding the application of Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin,¹⁶ Nassibian is also critical of the Armenian revolutionaries during the 1890s. She states that they were under an “illusion” that demonstrations or terrorist actions might cause the intervention of the Great Powers.¹⁷ She explains why the British public was concerned about the Armenian question, concentrating on pro-Armenian and humanitarian groups in Britain who believed that Britain had a special duty to secure good government in “Armenia”. She categorised British pro-Armenian and humanitarian movements up to 1918 into three groups: concerned individuals, pressure groups and relief organisations.¹⁸ Although

¹³ Kamal Madhhar Ahmed, *Kurdistan fi sanawat Al-Harb Al-Alamiat Al-Aula [Kurdistan in the years of the First World War]*, translated by Mohammed Mala Abdulkareem, 2nd ed. (Baghdad: Dar Afaq Arabiya for Printing and Publishing, 1984), pp.295-300.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.292-294.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 244-259.

¹⁶ Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p.19-21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.33-66.

Nassibian's research is thorough, some of her accounts about the Armenian question are subject to criticism. As an Armenian whose family was destroyed during the Armenian massacres of the First World War, Nassibian's perspective and interpretation was clearly influenced by a nationalist agenda. It was difficult for her, as David M. Lang stated, to have "a completely dispassionate view of the events".¹⁹ She is not very accurate in choosing terms regarding the Armenian problem and uses the same terms which are used usually by writers from the Armenophile camp; there are also a number of mistakes related to the dates of certain events.

Within this category as well, are the works of historians who referred to issues concerning the Kurds and the Armenian question in the context of subjects related to the history of the Ottoman Empire. This type of study does not focus on political issues of the Ottoman Empire as much as other issues such as demography. One prominent figure in this field is the Turkish academic Kemal H. Karpat. In *Ottoman Population 1830-1914*²⁰ and *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*,²¹ he studies the Armenians and Muslims, including the Kurds to some extent, in terms of their numbers and areas of population. The importance of his writings is that they include information about statistics collected by British officials relating to the population of eastern Anatolia during this research period. British statistics, as well as Ottoman statistics, relating to the Anatolian populations are important for understanding the feasibility of applying the Armenian Reforms and for evaluating Armenian claims.

Pro-Armenian literature

This category includes books and articles written by researchers who tend to directly accuse the Ottoman state and Sultan Abdulhamid II personally for oppressing the Armenians by many different means including exploiting the Kurds. This group includes many Armenian writers and western historians who believe that "the Armenian massacres" during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid were one episode in a series of

¹⁹ David M. Lang [review], 'Akaby Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923* (London: Croom Helm, 1984)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 48, No.3 (1985), p.554.

²⁰ Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985)

²¹ Kemal H. Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

actions by Ottoman statesmen to end the Armenian question by force which culminated in the “Armenian Genocide” during the First World War. This group study Kurdish and Armenian relations in the margin of the Armenian question and consider the Ottoman authorities and the Kurds to have been the main causes of Armenian ordeals. They particularly focus on data relating to Armenian victims and pay less attention to other historical aspects of the conflict, such as the fact that the Armenians were a minority and the Kurds were the majority of the population in eastern Anatolia. Nor do they directly point out the negative consequences of Armenian revolutionary activities that greatly exacerbated the situation of eastern Anatolia and led to the death of many Muslims including the Kurds.

In *The Great Game of Genocide* Donald Bloxham accused the Ottoman authorities from the reign of sultan Abdulhamid II to 1923 of implementing a policy of collective persecution against the Armenians. He accused the Kurds of contributing to that policy as well.²² He also pointed out very briefly British public opinion towards the Armenian adversities in the mid-1890s, stating that while the pro-Armenian sentiment was “at the zenith”, Britain's ability to act in favour of the Armenians was “at its nadir”. He dismisses the “general rumour” that Britain was behind the actions of the Armenian revolutionaries.²³ However, the book mostly focuses on the “Armenian genocide” during the First World War and centres on this matter in its international context, criticising international attitudes towards the Armenian cause for being indifferent and not recognising widely the “Armenian genocide”. In addition, Bloxham’s accounts were criticised by a number of researchers such as Donald Quataert, the American historian. He argues that although Bloxham’s book can bring an important contribution to genocide studies, it has “many faults and shortcomings” and “the author has strong biases”. He adds that sometimes he presents inadequate proof for his arguments about some aspects of the Armenian “massacres”.²⁴

²² Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.50-52.

²³ Ibid., pp.53-57.

²⁴ Donald Quataert, *The Massacres of Ottoman Armenians and the Writing of Ottoman History* [review], ‘Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the destruction of the*

British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question from the 1830s to 1914 by the Armenian author Arman J. Kirakossian is an important reference for understanding British official attitudes towards the Armenian cause. However, it does not focus enough on the correlation between British policy and British public opinion regarding this cause and how they influenced each other. Like many other Armenian writers, Kirakossian believes that eastern Anatolia was a part of greater Armenia. However, this region was a disputed area as will be explained below. He believes in political Armenology that uses the term Armenian question to indicate:

the implementation of reforms in Western Armenia, the establishment of autonomy, liberation of Armenia from foreign domination, unification of two parts of Armenia, reestablishment of an independent Armenian state on the Armenian Plateau, as well as the Armenian national liberation movement, and international efforts to achieve recognition and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide.²⁵

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the book, such as the wide use of archives especially British consular reports, it seems he has been selective in choosing those documents on a number of occasions. As can be seen through his interpretation of events of the Armenian atrocities during the 1890s, he has mostly chosen those documents that point out the oppression of the Armenians while he has not paid adequate attention to those that include information about the other side of the story. He has used some British consular reports regarding the Armenian adversities as exact facts without enough investigation and without comparing them with other British sources that show different views.²⁶ In other words, he does not pay enough attention to the other side of the argument regarding the Armenian cause that is supported by others particularly pro-Turkish writers. Other writers to whom this thesis has referred such as

Ottoman Armenians (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 37, No. 2 (2006), p.250-51.

²⁵ Arman J. Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question from the 1830s to 1914* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2003), p. xi.

²⁶ For instance, see his accounts of the Sasun uprising of 1894 in pp.191-92 that contradict a number of British primary sources especially accounts of the British representative in the Commission of Inquiry concerning this uprising. The Sasun uprising will be discussed in chapter four.

William Miller and Peter Marsh can be identified for having Pro-Armenian views as will be pointed out through relevant topics.²⁷

Pro-Turkish literature

The matter of the Armenian adversities particularly the “Armenian Genocide” is a heavy legacy for modern Turkey, and one that continues to have negative consequences for its foreign relations. For many Turks, defending the attitudes of the Ottoman Empire towards the Armenian question is a national duty. This fact is even more evident given that the Turkish state was founded on a national basis foremost and that most of the Turkish literature on the Armenian question was written during the last century, during the period in which nationalist trends were most influential in Turkey. Therefore, official circles in Turkey and many Turkish institutions have tried very hard to defend the position of their ancestors (the Ottoman Empire) in the Armenian question for almost a hundred years. One example is the Türk Tarih Kurumu (Turkish Historical Society) in Ankara, which was established in 1931 by the initiative of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. This society has consistently endeavoured to show an acceptable picture of the Ottoman Empire regarding the Armenian question.

Turkish academics such as Bilâl Şimşir, Muammer Demirel and others have worked extensively on archives relating to the Armenians, using both Ottoman and British documents. During the 1980s, Şimşir collected many British documents on the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire between 1856 and 1895 in 4 large volumes; volumes two to four were dedicated to the period between 1880 and 1895.²⁸ Later, Demirel completed his colleague’s mission and collected British documents from 1895 to 1918, published in one volume.²⁹ Şimşir provided each volume with an introduction and arranged the documents chronologically with a short title for each document in English, while Demirel listed the documents chronologically also but with a short title for each

²⁷ Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801-1927*; Peter Marsh, 'Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman Massacres', *Journal of British Studies*, 11, No.2 (May, 1972).

²⁸ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *British Documents on Ottoman Armenians*, 4 Vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1982-90).

²⁹ Muammer Demirel, *Ermeniler hakkında İngiliz belgeleri (1896-1918) British documents on Armenians* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayinlari, 2002).

document in English and Turkish. Although both editors collected a host of the British documents they did not include all those relating to the Ottoman Armenians for their respective periods. Both also wrote the introductions of the volumes in a way that supports their views on the Armenian question. Besides, by checking Şimşir's collection, it can be noticed that he dismissed many relevant British documents and was selective in that he chose those documents that tended to support the Ottoman state's side and those that attributed blame to the Armenians and even the Kurds. There are also many mistakes with regard to the titles and numbering of the documents. At the same time, Şimşir also collected the Ottoman diplomatic documents about the Armenians between 1886 and 1900 in 4 volumes.³⁰ This work includes the majority of the Ottoman correspondence related to the Armenian cause with London, Washington and elsewhere. Some documents were recorded in French and others in English. These are significant for understanding the Armenian question in its diplomatic framework and British attitude to the subject.

Authors in this category differ from those of the Armenophile group in several areas in the interpretation of the events and even the terms they use for labelling the incidents. A survey of titles and their contents shows that they frequently use loaded phrases such as “the Armenian conspiracy”. They use terms such as “rebellion” instead of “revolution”, relocation instead of deportation and incident instead of “massacre” which is commonly used by the opposite group. Sometimes pro-Turkish writers admit that the Armenians suffered during the Armenian question, but they place the major responsibility for the Armenian misfortune on the Armenians themselves. Salahi Sonyel, for instance, insists on the negative role of Armenian parties and separatists in escalating the conflict by striving to separate eastern Anatolia, the most essential part for the Ottoman Empire, while they the Armenians were a minority. Historians of this group tend to defend the attitude of the Ottoman Empire towards the Armenian question as much as possible and focus on foreign factors rather than the responsibility of the Ottoman state for this question. Conversely, these writers try to dismiss the idea that the Armenian cause ensued from the accumulated problems of the Ottoman Empire and the

³⁰ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Documents Diplomatiques Ottomans: Affaires Armeniennes*, 4 Vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1985-99).

unfriendly atmosphere among the peoples of eastern Anatolia. Sonyel focuses on the “negative” interference of the Great Powers especially Russia and Britain in the interior affairs of the Ottoman Empire, the action which created many problems to the Ottomans including the Armenians themselves.³¹ He argues that those Powers exploited the issue of Ottoman minorities for their interests, which finally led to the destruction of the Ottoman Empire.³²

A number of historians within this group blame western policies for agitating the Armenians against the Ottoman state. For instance, Prof. Taha Niyazi Karaca argues that the European national ideologies made a strong and bad impression on the Armenian cause. He believes that British attitudes to this question incited the Armenians against Ottoman sovereignty by supporting Armenian revolutionary activities and pro-Armenian campaigns. Karaca argues that some British writers such as Edwin Pears (1835-1919) played a fundamental role in denigrating the reputation of the Ottoman state in front of British public opinion to justify British policies.³³ Karaca criticizes British policy towards the Ottoman Empire directly, claiming that some key British politicians exploited the Armenian question for colonial purposes. In *Büyük Oyun [The Great Game]*,³⁴ he accuses the British Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone of being a “crusader warrior” and of acting in an “ominous” role to demolish the Ottoman Empire deliberately. He blames Gladstone during his long period in politics for stirring up Christian nations, especially the Bulgarians and Armenians, against the Empire state.

The Turkish authors pay only a little attention to the Kurdish role in the Armenian question and sometimes they blame the Kurds despite the fact that many of them were on the side of the Ottoman Government during this question. For instance, as Janet Klein states, the Turkish nationalist writers employ the Hamidiye as a scapegoat for blame in the Armenian problem. They seek to focus on the distasteful activities with

³¹ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp. xiii-xiv.

³² Salahi Ramadan Sonyel, *Minorities and the Destruction of the Ottoman Empire* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 1993).

³³ Taha Niyazi Karaca, ‘ERMENİ SORUNU İLE İLGİLİ BİR İNGİLİZ KAYNAGI ÜZERİNE ELESTİREL DEĞERLENDİRME [A critical evaluation of a British source concerning the Armenian problem]’, *Bellekten*, 67, Issue 249 (2003), pp.519-529.

³⁴ Taha Niyazi Karaca, *Büyük Oyun: İngiltere Başbakanı Gladstone'un Osmanlı'yı yıkma planı [The Great Game: The British Prime Minister Gladstone's plan to destroy the Ottoman Empire]* (İstanbul: Timaş Tarih, 2011).

which the Kurdish tribal militia were associated in order to turn aside responsibility from the Ottoman Government in anti-Armenian violence. They usually blame the Hamidiye as wild tribesmen who liked revenge and violence, rather than as an organization supported by the Government.³⁵

Most writers of this category are Turks, in addition to a number of historians in the West who do not agree with the accounts of Armenian and pro-Armenian writers in many aspects. An example is Justin McCarthy who is well-known for his writings on the history of the Ottoman Empire in its last period and the Armenian question. His interpretation of the Armenian cause is different from that of many historians in the West in that he seeks to broaden the focus out from the Armenian cause alone. In *Death and Exile* he argues that the Armenians were not the only people who suffered from violence during the late Ottoman period but Muslim peoples suffered as well. He criticises western understanding of the history of the Ottoman Empire for focusing on Christian adversities and neglecting the tragedies of Muslim nation groups who suffered greatly from the policies of the Great Powers, especially Russia. He also criticises western imperialism and nationalism, which caused the death of millions of Muslims in Anatolia, the Crimea, the Balkans and the Caucasus.³⁶

With three Turkish writers, McCarthy wrote a critical book *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*,³⁷ which mostly studies the Armenian parties and Armenian revolutionary actions in Van in the late nineteenth century up to the end of the First World War. *Sasun The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* by McCarthy, Ömer Turan and Cemalettin Taşkıran is one of the most detailed works on the Sasun uprising of 1894. The authors disagree with most of the accounts recorded by western historians regarding this Armenian uprising. They contend that an alliance of missionaries, Armenian revolutionaries, British Liberal politicians and members of the Armenian communities in the West campaigned to push the Great Powers to interfere in the Ottoman Empire for the Armenians. They also argue that the British press coverage of

³⁵ Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, pp.7-8.

³⁶ Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922* (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), p. xv and pp.1-3.

³⁷ Justin McCarthy, Esat Arslan, Cemalettin Taşkıran and Ömer Turan, *The Armenian Rebellion at Van* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006).

this incident was not professional and claim “Virtually every aspect of the widely circulated story of Sasun was wrong”.³⁸ Although McCarthy is one of the most knowledgeable experts on the Armenian question and his accounts on this matter are serious studies, he somewhat dismisses the responsibility of the Ottoman authorities for the Armenians who suffered greatly during the reign of Abdulhamid II and the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress.

Literature mediating between a pro-Armenian stance and a pro-Turkish stance

While the works of the pro-Armenian and pro-Turkish writers discussed above can be characterized as partisan in their interpretation of some aspects of the Armenian question, other historians attempt to take a more neutral stance. These researchers criticise the opinions of both pro-Armenian and pro-Turkish historians. In other words, they blame all the parties involved in the dispute: the Armenians, the Ottoman Empire, the Kurds and sometimes the Great Powers.

One notable name within this category is the German-born American historian Guenter Lewy. He believes that both Armenian and Turkish writers have used the historical sources selectively, citing only those ideas that suited their interpretation and overlooking what Max Weber named “inconvenient facts”.³⁹ Lewy shares the point of view of the Turkish historian Selim Deringil that both Armenian and Turkish historians “have plundered history”.⁴⁰ Lewy asserts that the violent strategy of the Armenian revolutionaries, the impractical procedures of the Ottoman Government and the harassment of the Kurds especially the Hamidiye regiments, should all be considered in evaluating problems in eastern Anatolia.⁴¹ Lewy allocates chapter 12 of his book “Who were the perpetrators of the massacres?” to a critical study of the role of the groups in the plight of the Armenians during the First World War, including the Kurds who had been in dispute with the Armenians for several decades. Roy Douglas’s accounts of the Armenian cause can be considered within this group as well. His calculations regarding

³⁸ Justin McCarthy, Ömer Turan and Cemalettin Taşkıran, *Sasun: The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2014), pp.1-2.

³⁹ Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), p. xi.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.17 and p.267.

the Armenian population are more plausible than those of pro-Armenian and pro-Turkish historians. In general, his use of terminology regarding names of places is also more neutral. For instance, he prefers using “eastern Anatolia” rather than “Armenia”.⁴² Douglas also gives some brief information about the British parties and the Armenian question especially “the Liberals - traditionally the Turcophobic party” but without discussing the British views of the Kurdish role in this question.⁴³

Literature on British perceptions of issues related to the Ottoman Empire

Works discussing British ideas regarding the Ottoman Empire and its peoples in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are particularly useful in understanding British perspectives on the Armenians, Kurds and the Ottomans in general. *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* by Jo Laycock,⁴⁴ studies some of the ways in which British ideas about the Armenians and the Armenian question were shaped. She traces the roots of British interest in the Armenians in the nineteenth century and the reasons behind British sympathy towards them at the time. However, Laycock mostly focuses on the subject after the period of this research and she is not concerned with the Kurdish and Armenian relationship. ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’ by Helen Odams is one of the most detailed studies of British attitudes towards the Ottomans in the last period of their history. She argues that many British views were negative in the extreme and were greatly influenced by religious, cultural, political and nationalist bias.⁴⁵ However, she pays no direct attention either to the image of the Kurds in Britain or their position in the Armenian question; instead, her thesis covers the Balkans and its residents in detail. It is also important to take into account studies of the wider context of British history – and political history in particular – in order to understand the framework of British foreign policy and the ideas and characteristics of the politicians who were influential in shaping British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. For example, Peter Stansky in *Ambitions and Strategies*

⁴² Roy Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question 1894-7’, *Historical Journal*, 19, Issue 1 (1976), p.114-15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁴⁴ Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Helen Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’, PhD (University of Oxford, 1996), p.3.

analyses how the leadership problem of the Liberal Party between 1894 and 1899 was reflected in the weak position of the Party towards the Armenian question.⁴⁶

To sum up, none of the studies or approaches discussed above focuses directly upon British representation of the Kurds and the Armenian question and there is no single study that concentrates on this subject. Therefore, to obtain a general view on the themes of this thesis, we need to refer to the different sources mentioned above.

3. The limits of this thesis

The focus of this thesis starts in 1878 when the Armenian question can be said to have clearly emerged following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and ends in 1908, which is the date of the coup of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). This coup put an end to the actual power of Sultan Abdulhamid II and inaugurated a new set of circumstances in terms of relations among peoples in eastern Anatolia and their relation with the central government. The importance of the period 1878-1908 is not only due to its long duration but also because it includes many crucial and controversial subjects such as the position of the Hamidiye brigades who were greatly criticised by the British for oppressing the Armenians. In addition, this period is also the era when British foreign policy towards the Armenian question was particularly influential, as Britain was the main power interested in the implementation of the Armenian Reforms.

3.1. A Brief introduction to the Kurds and Armenians

Kurds do not have their own independent country. Therefore, it is not easy to determine Kurdistan's borders or to distinguish them exactly from the lands of neighbouring peoples owing to the overlap of Kurdistan with the lands of neighbouring countries and the abundance of ethnic groups inside Kurdistan and its borders. This fact can be seen clearly in this study because the Kurds and Armenians shared a large territory in eastern Anatolia together. Kurds have generally been an immediate neighbour with the three main ethnic nations in the Middle East: Arabs in the south,

⁴⁶ Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The Struggle for the Leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

Persians in the east and Turks in the northwest. A number of small ethnic groups were neighbours with the Kurds as well: Georgians and Lazs in the north, Armenians in the north and northeast, Azerbaijanis in the northeast, Elamites and Lurs in the southeast and Turkmens (an ethnic minority living in the north of Iraq) in the southwest.⁴⁷ Kurdistan (land of the Kurds) is that region where the prominent majority of its population are Kurds. Kurdistan takes the form of a vast crescent area in the centre of the Middle East, and comprises most of eastern Turkey, north-eastern Iraq, a large area of north-western Iran, parts of north and northeastern Syria and some small areas on the southern borders of Armenia.⁴⁸ Throughout its modern history, from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the First World War from 1914-18, Kurdistan was geographically divided between two main states: the Ottoman Empire (1299-1923) that ruled the larger part of Kurdistan comprising the north, west and south of Kurdistan while the other part, the east of Kurdistan, was ruled by Persia.⁴⁹ In the wake of the First World War, instead of two parts, Kurdistan was divided into five parts: the main parts in Turkey (43%), Iran (31%), Iraq (18%), Syria (6%) and a small part in the Republics of the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

Historically Armenia has been taken to mean those lands, where the Armenians have dwelt for a long period, so that it became the geographical term for the region.⁵¹ Armenia is located in the west of Asia, bordered to the north and northwest by the Caucasus and the areas located on the Black Sea coasts, to the south by Iran and the northwest plain of Mesopotamia, to the east by the Azerbaijan plateau and the southern coast of the Caspian Sea and by Asia Minor (Anatolia) to the west.⁵² Like Kurdistan, Armenia was a field for conflicts between the Sasanian Empire (224-651) and the Roman Empire, which lasted for four centuries and caused it to often be divided between them, the eastern part under the rule of the Sasanians and the western part under Byzantine rule.⁵³ One of the prominent features of Armenian history is the

⁴⁷ Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (Washington: Crane Russak, 1992), p.1.

⁴⁸ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p.3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.17-18.

⁵⁰ Izady, *The Kurds*, p.3.

⁵¹ Samir Arbash, *Armenia: Ard w Shaab [Armenia: Land and People]* (Beirut: [n.pub.], 1991), p.12

⁵² Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp.2-3.

⁵³ Ghassan Al-Jawadi, 'Al-Masalat Al-Armaniyat fi Al-Dawlat Al-Othmaniyat [The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire] 1878-1918', PhD thesis (University of Mosul, 2010), p.12.

prevalence of Christianity in Armenia from an early period. Armenians accepted Christianity and the Armenian Church was founded in the first century and called “The Armenian Apostolic Church” and sometimes “The Gregorian Church” which is part of Eastern Orthodoxy. Following the conversion of the Armenian King in around 300 AD, Christianity became the state religion of the Armenians. Armenia was the first nation and country to embrace Christianity officially.⁵⁴ During the first half of the seventh century, Islam spread throughout the region and Muslims defeated the Sasanian Empire, which ruled most of Kurdistan and Armenia. Like many other nations in the region, the majority of the Kurds embraced the new religion whereas the Armenians remained loyal to their Christian beliefs. In this way, in addition to the language and the ethnicity, religion became another significant difference between the Kurds and Armenians.

Armenia was an area of conflict between the Turks, Persians and Russians. As a result of the frequent wars between the Safavid Empire (1501- 1736) and the Ottoman Empire, Armenia was divided into two parts. The area which came under the control of the Safavid Empire was known as eastern Armenia and included Yerevan (the capital of the present Republic of Armenia), and western Armenia became part of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵ The former part of Armenia fell under Russian control in the wake of the treaty of Turkmenchay 1828, which concluded the Russo-Persian War 1826-28 in which the Russian army defeated Persian troops.⁵⁶ Thus eastern Armenia became part of the Russian Empire while the Ottoman Empire kept its sovereignty over western Armenia in eastern Anatolia, where it was a disputed area between Kurds and Armenians.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp.3-4.

⁵⁵ Mohammed Al-Imam, *Al-Qadiyat Al-Armaniyat fi Al-Dawlat Al-Othmaniyat [The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire] 1878-1923* (Cairo: [n.pub.], 2002), p.15.

⁵⁶ Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, p.3; Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), p.47.

⁵⁷ See Map 1: Kurdistan, Armenia and the borders of regions claimed by the Armenians in the late Armenian question.

3.2. "Eastern Anatolia": A disputed area

This study concentrates geographically on eastern Anatolia which was the main theatre of the events of the Armenian question. During the period of this study most of eastern Anatolia was administratively organised by the Ottoman authorities in “the Six Vilayets” (provinces):⁵⁸ Van, Bitlis, Erzurum, Kharput (Mamurtul Aziz), Sivas and Diyarbakir.⁵⁹ With regard to the peoples who lived in the Six Vilayets, there were Kurds, Armenians, and Turks. At that time, the Kurds believed that these provinces were part of “Kurdistan”. Whereas the Armenians argued that they were “western Armenia” and the Turks believed that they were an integral part of their empire. In addition to these three main peoples, there were small ethnic groups in the Six Vilayets who had less influence in the Armenian question. In the Hakkari area there were ancient Christian groups, notably Assyrians (Nestorians) and Jacobites and there were Arabs in the Diyarbakir Vilayet. Since the mid- nineteenth century, eastern Anatolia saw the arrival of Muslim refugees in the hundreds of thousands because of Russian expansion, especially in the Caucasus. At the forefront of these refugees were the Circassians who mostly settled in Sivas Vilayet and Lazes who were an indigenous ethnic group living in the south eastern Black Sea coastal regions. Many Albanians, who left their homeland because of conflicts in the Balkans, moved to the region as well.⁶⁰ The arrival of these peoples to eastern Anatolia exacerbated disputes in the region and complicated the Armenian problem further.

Before concluding this section, it is worth clarifying several terms which have been used by observers and involved parties in the Armenian question during the period of this study and later by historians to refer to “eastern Anatolia”.

⁵⁸ See Map 2: The Six Vilayets within eastern Anatolia during the period of this study. See also Map 3: Cities and major towns in eastern Anatolia in the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁵⁹ Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question 1894-7’, pp.114-15.

⁶⁰ Mark Levene, ‘Creating a Modern “Zone of Genocide”’: The Impact of Nation-and State-Formation on Eastern Anatolia, 1878–1923’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 12, Issue 3 (1998), pp.393-96; Hogr Tahir Tofeeq, *Al-Kurd w Al-Masalat Al-Armaniyat [The Kurds and the Armenian Question] 1877-1920* (Erbil: Dar Aras for Printing and Publishing, 2012), pp.67-70.

“Armenia”:

Armenians and pro-Armenians often used the term “Western Armenia” instead of “eastern Anatolia”. The Armenians preferred to use “western Armenia” to distinguish between the western part of Armenia and its eastern part which was under the rule of consecutive Persian states and the Russians from 1828. The use of this name by the Armenian nationalists had political aims because they believed that this region was within the historical boundaries of Armenia in the past and it should be freed from the Ottoman Empire and be part of “the greater Armenia” or “the United Armenia”. They thought that this hope could be achieved, and continued to do so, even after the First World War. The term “Western Armenia” has also been used in the West. Sometimes the British press used the terms “Turkish Armenia” or “Ottoman Armenia”,⁶¹ as well. A number of British observers and politicians had reservations about using the term “Armenia” because of its association with a specific ethnicity. For instance, the Earl of Dufferin, the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (1881-84) stated that “If the term Armenia was used, it was in a geographical rather than in an ethnic sense”.⁶² Justin McCarthy argues that in spite of frequent use by Europeans, there was no “Ottoman Armenia” demographically. The region purported to be Armenia, was predominantly inhabited by Muslims and the Armenians were a minority.⁶³

“Kurdistan”:

Kurdish writers usually prefer to use “Northern Kurdistan” in addition to terms such as “eastern Anatolia”. The Kurdish academic Hogr Tahir Tofeeq prefers using the term “Northern Kurdistan” instead of other names. He added that the term “Western Armenia” was employed by the Great Powers ethnically and politically, due to the influence of the Armenians, in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ As will be pointed out in chapter one, British officials called the British Consulate in Erzurum the

⁶¹ ‘The Armenian Question’, *The Times*, 5 Feb 1895.

⁶² F.O. 424/123, p.120, No.75, The Earl of Dufferin to Earl of Granville, Therapia, Aug 23, 1881.

⁶³ Justin McCarthy, 'The population of the Ottoman Armenians' in Türkkaya Ataöv (ed.), *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period* (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2001), p.71.

⁶⁴ Tofeeq, *Al-Kurd w Al-Masalat Al-Armaniyat [The Kurds and the Armenian Question] 1877-1920*, p.25

“Consulate of Kurdistan” in the 1880s which covered most of “eastern Anatolia”. Despite the fact that the Kurds were more numerous than any other ethnic group in eastern Anatolia and most of this region is inhabited by Kurds in the present day, using “Northern Kurdistan” can still be arguable. The reason for this is that the term mostly indicates a political meaning and neither the Kurds nor Armenians and even Turks had their own independent countries during the Armenian question. Janet Klein argued that the term “Kurdistan” is problematic in the Ottoman context. Although “Kurdistan” has long referred to the geographical region resided in mostly by Kurds, using this term was confusing because this region had partially overlapped with historical Armenia. In addition, there were significant non-Kurdish populations in “Kurdistan”, especially Armenians.⁶⁵

“Eastern Anatolia”:

As a consequence of the emergence of the Armenian question, the Ottoman authorities never wanted to use the term of Armenia. After the Congress of Berlin, they deliberately dropped the terms “Armenia” and “Armenian provinces” from official use. Henceforth, they used the terms “Anatolia” or “Kurdistan”.⁶⁶ Writers such as Bilal Shimshir argues that the use of the terms “Armenia” or “Turkish Armenia” for the region are incorrect and they insist on using “eastern Anatolia”⁶⁷ which was used by western academics as well. Having reviewed the terminology and its historical context, it is clear that “eastern Anatolia” is the most appropriate term to use in referring to the region in this period because it is more neutral than other terms and indicates the region geographically not politically.

In writing the thesis I have attempted to use neutral language as much as possible. For example, with regard to the Armenian suffering during 1894-96, the pro-Turkish writers usually use terms like “events” and “insurgency” and put the main responsibility for what the Armenian suffered on Armenian agitators. Whereas, the pro-

⁶⁵ Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, p.3.

⁶⁶ Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian, 'The history of Armenian-Kurdish relations in the Ottoman Empire', *Armenian Review*, 39, No.4-156 (1986), p.31.

⁶⁷ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *The Genesis of the Armenian Question* (Ankara; Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 2003), p.13.

Armenian writers usually refer to the “massacres” of the Armenians and lay the responsibility upon the Ottoman authorities and Kurds. Not only do historians use different words to describe the events but so did British observers, similarly depending upon their particular points of view. This study uses in-between terms to avoid being biased. This research does not deny that the Armenians suffered more than any other peoples in Anatolia, but the different uses of language by the British contemporaries and historians later simply show that there were different interpretations about what happened during that time.

4. Methodology and sources

The thesis discusses the opinions of most of the principal British individuals who wrote on the Armenian question and Kurds at the time. The Ottoman perspective upon the subject has not been directly discussed, unless in terms of analysing the British perceptions of the subject or for understanding the nature of the diplomatic correspondence between the British and Ottoman diplomats in connection with Kurdish attitudes towards the Armenians. Sometimes opinions articulated by Kurds and Armenians have been included when they illuminate particular aspects of British perceptions on the subject.

The Armenian question is one of the most controversial topics in modern history and some of its aspects are still a matter of debate among historians. Therefore, making a balanced approach between the interpretations of different historians is challenging. In contrast, as the literature review has shown, there are few secondary sources covering Kurdish and Armenian relations or British representation of the Armenian question including the Kurdish role. However, there is an abundance of British primary sources, particularly consular reports relating to the Kurds and the Armenian question, many of which have not previously been discussed in the literature. This study is mainly based on three main types of British primary sources: official sources, the press and printed sources, which are explained briefly as follows:

Official sources

A wide range of British official sources has been used which are primarily important to understand British policy towards the Armenian question. British Foreign Office Papers at the National Archives include the despatches, reports and memorandums which were sent by British diplomats from the British Embassy in Constantinople and consuls in eastern Anatolia or even from Persian cities such as Tehran to officials in London, and their replies and instructions. These documents are essential because British ambassadors in Constantinople and consuls in eastern Anatolia reported regularly on the situation of the region and their accounts are the richest primary source we have on the subject of the Armenian question. Therefore, Foreign Office Papers have been consulted constantly through the whole period of this research. However, the influence of these Papers on public opinion was restricted because circulation of their contents beyond the Foreign Office was limited, especially after the British Government banned the circulation of diplomatic reports respecting the Armenian question during the 1890s (as will be pointed out in chapter two).

The thesis also makes extensive use of British Parliamentary Papers known as Blue Books. The contents of these documents are very similar to British Foreign Office Papers but they were mostly organised according to relevant issues and events. Unlike Foreign Office Papers which were for use within the Foreign Office, Parliamentary Papers were presented to both Houses of Parliament. However, although these Papers are important to trace details of the Armenian question and understand British official opinions about the subject they also did not have a great influence in the shaping of public opinion because as James Bryce stated, they were hardly read at all outside a small group of politicians. He even suspected whether more than a dozen people in the House of Commons had read the three books that mostly covered the Armenian adversities during 1894-96.⁶⁸ British Parliamentary Papers also include reports of the British delegates who were sent to eastern Anatolia on a number of occasions to investigate specific events, such as Hammond Smith Shipley the British representative

⁶⁸ Mr. J. Bryce, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.102.

in the Commission of Inquiry concerning the Sasun revolt of 1894. Shipley's reports were presented to Parliament in 1895.

The thesis has made extensive use of British Parliamentary Debates. Both Houses of Parliament, Lords and Commons, discussed the Armenian question, including the role of the Kurds, on many occasions. The significance of these parliamentary debates is that they present general views of British politicians on the Armenian cause, and in particular the Kurdish position in it. The debates were also important to track the party politics of both the Liberals and Conservatives and their different views on the subject. In addition, as a researcher states, through Parliament the citizens were able to speak to the Government and it carried out its expressive function on foreign affairs well. Therefore, the House of Commons had "an expressive function", representing the opinion of the British people on matters which needed attention.⁶⁹

The newspaper and periodical press

The British press, both daily and periodical, has been utilised widely in this research because it had an effective influence on the public in Victorian Britain and shaping and reflecting wider public opinion extensively. Newspapers were the main way of communication and the views they expressed essentially influenced the positions of the public. In addition, British policy was greatly influenced by the popular opinion represented in the press. The public had a more significant position in foreign policy in the late nineteenth century than earlier. The Government had little dominance over the press and was more under the influence of public opinion than its controller.⁷⁰ There was a close relationship between politicians and the press as well. Comments of political figures were an important source of information of foreign news of national newspapers (London newspapers), beside the news from Reuters and from their 'own correspondents'.⁷¹ Two newspapers have proved particularly valuable: *The Times* because it was the most famous British national daily newspaper and reflected the

⁶⁹ Hugh St. Clair Cunningham, 'British Public Opinion and the Eastern Question 1877-1878', D. Phil Thesis (University of Sussex, 1969), p.41

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.9-22, p.210, pp.242-43.

⁷¹ Lucy Brown, *Victorian news and newspapers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.240.

official view of the Government and specifically the Conservatives, and the *Daily News* because it held Liberal views and reported the Armenian question continuously and aimed at a more popular readership. The *Daily News* led the liberal propaganda from the time of Gladstone's first administration 1868-1874. At that point its price was decreased to one pence, and it became the official organ of the Liberal Party.⁷² Other nationwide newspapers which covered the Armenian cause frequently have been consulted such as *The Standard* that held a Conservative stance. Likewise, the thesis consults provincial newspapers especially *The Manchester Guardian* that represented a non-metropolitan and Liberal view of politics and was a daily in the second half of the nineteenth century. Its circulation rose to 43,000 by the end of the century. In addition, many other provincial newspapers have been used given that the penny dailies in the provinces grew in numbers and in circulation later in the century such as the *Leeds Mercury* that held a Liberal view and *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* that was a Conservative newspaper.⁷³ In general, the provincial press did not have its own correspondents abroad and their news was more derivative. The provincial newspapers derived their foreign news from Reuters, through the Press Association, and from the reprinting paragraphs from London papers.⁷⁴ Therefore, this study mainly utilizes the nationwide newspapers especially *The Times* and the *Daily News* rather than provincial newspapers. As for periodicals, many influential British magazines have been referred to such as *The Contemporary Review*, *The Nineteenth Century* and *The Fortnightly Review* which mainly had Liberal views besides *The Saturday Review* and *The Spectator* which had Conservative perspectives. The importance of British periodicals is that they included longer and more detailed expressions of views which could not easily be found in newspaper columns.

Printed primary sources

This group of sources includes travel literature and the books of contemporary commentators. The importance of travellers' accounts is that, more than other British observers, they had personal experience of the peoples of eastern Anatolia. However,

⁷² Ibid., p.177.

⁷³ Ibid., p.32.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.240-41.

not all British travellers who journeyed in eastern Anatolia had the same level of interest in the Armenian question. A number of travel books did not discuss the Armenian question at all. The reason for this is likely to have been that the Armenian question was basically a political issue and it was mainly of interest of officials and politicians rather than travellers. In addition, the nature of much travel literature tends to focus on peoples' daily affairs and their style of life rather than political affairs. For instance, Isabella Lucy Bird studied some aspects of Kurdish attitudes towards Syrians but not Armenians. She expressed her view about the Armenian question frankly "I must ask my readers to believe that I crossed the Turkish frontier without any knowledge of or interest in the "Armenian Question",⁷⁵ despite having travelled through the region in the early 1890s. In the preface of his book, Walter B. Harris stated that "For many reasons I have avoid political controversy on the vexed question of the Armenians"⁷⁶ without giving any explanation for his avoidance. However, his statement does not mean that he did not pay attention to the Armenian question at all. Harris was a journalist, writer and politician as well and published an article on this question in 1895.⁷⁷ In general, travellers who had political interests paid more attention to the Armenian question and its details than other travellers. For instance, H. F. B. Lynch, who was an MP, recorded many details of the Kurdish and Armenian relationship. On this basis, books written by British military and intelligence officers who traversed or were sent to eastern Anatolia have also been considered alongside more traditional travel literature. The most obvious example here is Mark Sykes who outlined many ideas about the Kurdish stance towards the Armenians based on his many journeys in the region.

A number of contemporary British writers wrote at some length on aspects of the Armenian question or the Ottoman Empire. Some of these observers were in close contact with key players of the Armenian question because they either lived in the Ottoman Empire such as Edwin Pears, or visited eastern Anatolia such as James Bryce, or met Abdulhamid II such as Sidney Whitman. The significance of these writings is

⁷⁵ Isabella Lucy Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, Vol. II, (London: John Murray, 1891), p.330.

⁷⁶ Walter B. Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad Viâ Tiflis, Tabriz, and Persian Kurdistan* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and sons, 1896), p. preface page.

⁷⁷ Walter B. Harris, 'An Unbiased view of the Armenian Question', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 158, 960, (Oct 1895).

that they are representative of many aspects of British attitudes towards and perceptions of the Armenian question and they also helped to shape the wider public debate. These works can be divided into two groups: proponents of the Armenians such as Malcolm MacColl who strongly accused the Ottoman state and Kurds of oppressing the Armenians, and those writers who expressed more moderate views on the Ottoman state, such as Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett. A few works of American writers who published in Britain have also been consulted as well. These writers had a close relationship with a number of British politicians such as Frederick Davis Greene, the American missionary who lived for a number of years in Van in 1890s and who had good contacts with Gladstone.

5. Research questions

In order to critically examine British perspectives on the Armenian question in general and the Kurdish position in this question in particular in the late nineteenth and early twenties centuries, this thesis aims to answer this main question:

How did the British respond to the Armenian question and how did that affect the way in which the Kurds were represented?

To clarify this overarching question, the thesis precisely seeks to answer these subsidiary questions. First, how did British interests in eastern Anatolia contribute in shaping British policy towards the Armenian question including the Kurds? And how did the British Government view the demands of the Armenians and Kurds for autonomy and independence in the light of the Armenian Reforms? Second, did the Conservatives and Liberals differ from each other regarding the Kurds and the Armenian question, with a focus on the role of the Kurdish Beys and the Hamidiye regiments? Third, what factors contributed most in shaping British views of the Armenian question and the Kurds in late Victorian Britain? In other words, why were the British sympathetic to the Armenians and why did they blame the Kurds in this period?

6. Thesis structure

Chapter one focuses on the topic of the emergence of the Armenian question, which is essential to understanding this question through the period of the thesis. It particularly studies the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1878 and Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin (1878) that determined the British responsibility in the Armenian question and formed the grounds on which talks and discussions in Britain about this question were undertaken during the period of this study and later. The chapter traces the beginnings of pro-Armenian activities in Britain which emerged directly with the appearance of the Armenian question in 1878. It goes on to study the application of the Armenian Reforms that were a significant part of British policy regarding the Armenian question, particularly in terms of restraining Russian influence over eastern Anatolia. It also investigates the attitudes of the Kurds and the Armenians to the arrival of British consuls in the region in 1878. Lastly, obstacles in front of the British Government in following the process of the reforms in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire are discussed in some detail, particularly the difference between the Liberal and Conservative Parties regarding British commitments to the Armenian question according to the conventions which Britain had signed in 1878.

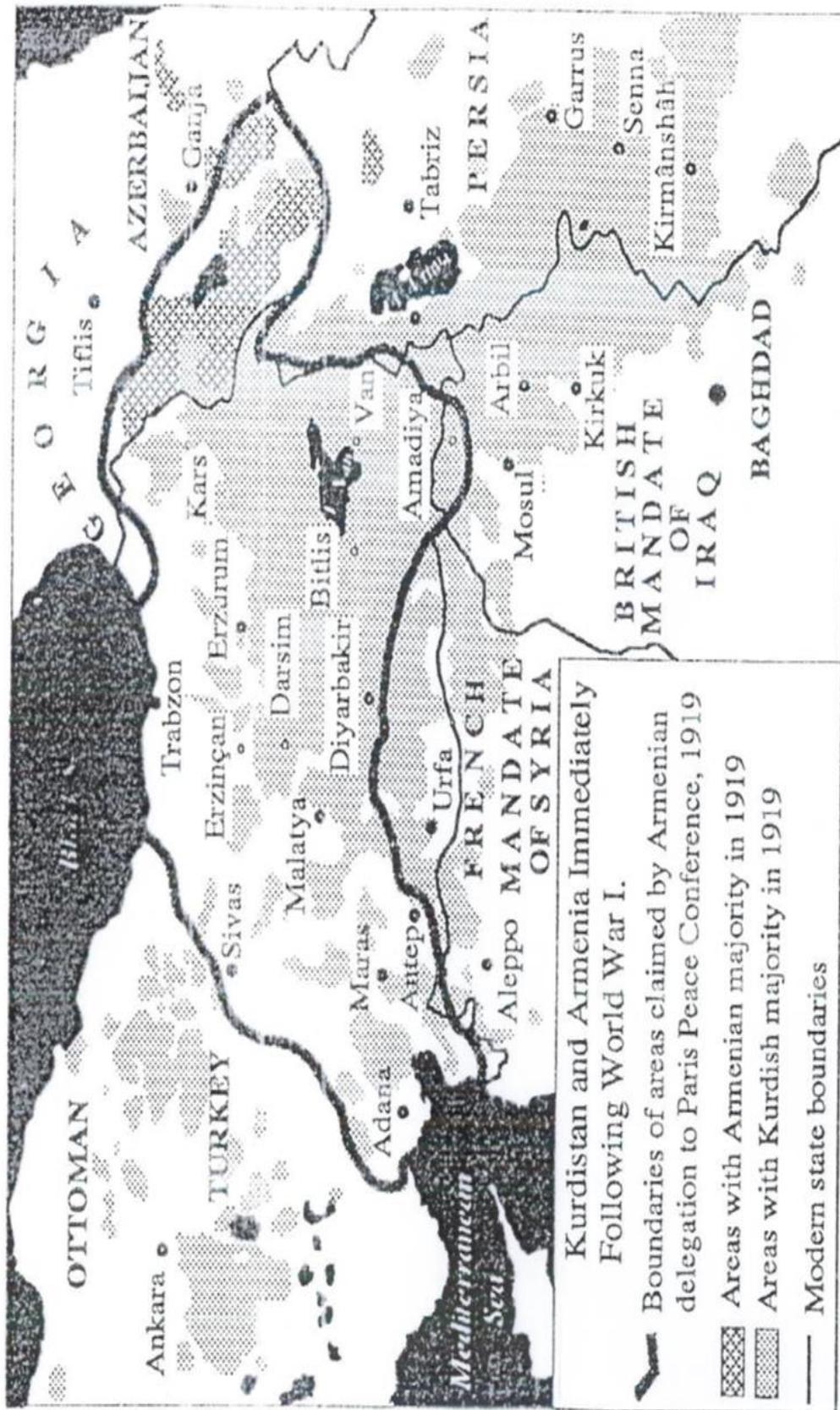
Chapter two studies British representations of the conduct of the Kurdish Beys during the second half of the 1880s and early 1890s. It aims to illustrate that British officials opposed the supremacy of the Kurdish Beys because they could disturb the situation of eastern Anatolia, which was not in favour of British interests. The chapter discusses in detail the matter of the Kurdish Beys in the British political context between Conservatives and Liberals. It explains how Conservatives and Liberals differed in their responses to the Armenian question which was a key subject for the Liberals. The chapter shows that the Kurdish Beys badly affected the reputation of Kurds in Britain. Finally, the chapter examines how British newspapers and diplomatic reports covered the attitudes of the Kurdish Beys towards the Armenians and discusses their accuracy, focusing on the *Daily News* coverage in particular.

The Hamidiye regiments and their effects are still a controversial subject in the history of the Kurds, and to a great extent, the image of the Kurds in the West was

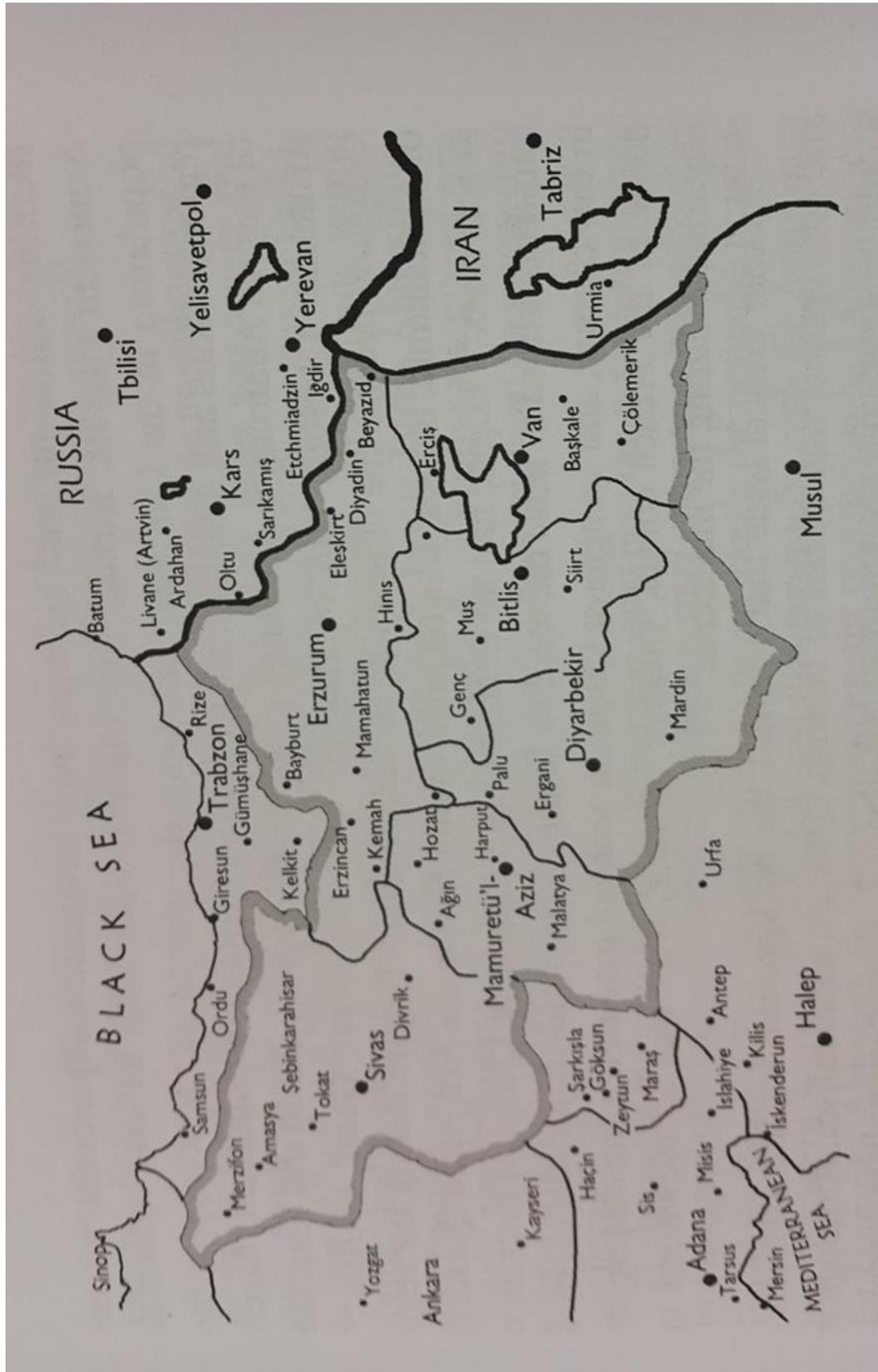
shaped through the Hamidiye. Therefore, chapter three is dedicated to discussing the position of this organisation from the British perspective. This chapter particularly focuses on the attitudes of the Hamidiye towards the Armenians because the British assessed it from this angle more than any other. It also discusses other relevant issues such as the opinions of British observers on the Hamidiye in terms of their ability as a military organisation and their impact on the situation in eastern Anatolia in general.

Chapter four examines British representations of the attitude of Kurds to the Armenian adversities during the mid-1890s, when the Ottoman Government and Kurds were regularly accused of oppressing the Armenians. It mainly focuses on the Sasun Armenian revolt of 1894 as one of the most controversial subjects in British perceptions of the Armenian question. The chapter examines the accuracy of British consular reports and British newspapers about this event, with particular focus on the testimonies recorded by Hammond Smith Shipley, the British representative in the Commission of Inquiry concerning the Sasun revolt. The channels that directly affected the formation of British public opinion on the Armenian adversities during this period will be closely examined. In turn, the opposing views of those who were critical of British public opinion on the Armenian adversities are discussed as well.

Chapter five studies British representations of the Kurdish and Armenian relationship between 1897 and 1908 especially the land problem, for which the Kurds were blamed. The chapter portrays in detail the image of the Kurds and Armenians in Britain in the late Ottoman period, tracing the reasons behind British sympathy towards the Christian Armenians and criticism of the Kurds. Close attention is paid to the religious and cultural backgrounds besides the activities of pro-Armenian associations in Britain that influenced British public opinion on the Ottoman Empire and Kurds. The chapter also examines the Armenian question in the context of the party politics of the Liberal and Conservative Parties and examines how the British representation of the Kurdish position in the Armenian cause during the period of this study influenced changes in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. Finally, the findings of this research will be discussed in the conclusion.



Map 1: Kurdistan, Armenia and the borders of regions claimed by Armenians in the late Armenian question. Taken from Izady, *The Kurds*, p.60.



Map 2: The Six Vilayets during the period of the study. Taken from Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 201.

Chapter one: The increase of British interest in the situation of the Armenians and Kurds 1878-82

1. The historiography and the argument of this chapter

This chapter will concentrate upon analysis of British views of the Armenian question between 1878 and 1882 and the position of the Kurds and Armenians in the events of eastern Anatolia in this period. In particular, it will focus on the Armenian question in 1878 when it emerged and became part of the wider Eastern question, the beginnings of pro-Armenian activities in Britain, and the Armenian Reforms which were the core of the Armenian question. Subjects such as British pro-Armenian activities and attitudes towards the Kurds in British political circles at that period have not fully been studied yet. Likewise, British views on Kurdish influence on the application of the Armenian Reforms particularly the Armenian demand for autonomy in eastern Anatolia need more consideration. Therefore, this research is an effort to shed light on these subjects mainly through studying a range of primary sources especially parliamentary debates and newspapers many of which have not been systematically studied.

Studying British diplomacy is essential to comprehend the Armenian question because Britain, more than others, was the main Power who closely sponsored the Armenian Reforms. One of the most prominent studies of Britain and the Armenian question is *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question from the 1830s to 1914* by Arman Kirakossian. However, because the book covers the Armenian question over a long period, it does not focus on the Kurdish position in the Armenian question in detail. Turkish studies, that represent a large part of the literature on the Armenian question, have mostly avoided mentioning the Kurdish role because most were written in the last century when the policy of the Turkish Government was to ignore almost anything that alluded to the Kurds. For instance, Salahi Sonyel, in *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy* scarcely mentions the Kurds and their attitudes towards the Armenian question. Nor have studies of the Armenian community in Britain given adequate attention to the emergence of the pro-Armenian movement in

Britain. *Merchants in Exile*, for example, by Joan George¹ is primarily a narrative account of Armenian settlers in Manchester between 1835 and 1935. However, it pays less attention to how this community influenced British politics in their attitudes towards the Armenian question.

British public interest in the region and its residents was low before the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. This chapter argues that Russian military successes in this war that resulted in the treaty of San Stefano 1878 between Russia and the Ottoman Empire drew the attention of British politicians towards the region and its residents, especially the Kurds and Armenians who were targeted by Russian propaganda in order to control the area. It will be shown that the British Government tried hard to change the terms of this treaty, especially Article 16, which gave Russia, but no other European Powers, the right to interfere in the affairs of the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire under the pretext of the Armenian issue. It will be argued that the main aim of British policy was to curb Russian dominance in eastern Anatolia, which led to the Congress of Berlin and its treaty in 1878 that covered the Armenians and Kurds in Article 61.

This chapter also analyses Armenian demands for an independent or semi-independent country from the British perspective. It argues that Britain did not support these demands because British politicians considered them impracticable due to the predominance of the Muslims, especially Kurds, in the area and because they feared that an autonomous province would fall under the control of Russia in the future. Therefore, Britain supported the option of reforms in the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire to be implemented under the supervision of and through the participation of European representatives. This chapter argues that the matter of the application of the reform projects, stipulated by Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin, was a direct reason for the British Government to send military consuls to the main cities of Anatolia in 1878. Data about the population of eastern Anatolia, was of interest to British consuls because it was essential for the British Government in formulating its policy towards the Armenian question. British consuls started reporting on the Kurds

¹ Joan George, *Merchants in Exile The Armenians of Manchester, England 1835-1935* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2002).

and their position in relation to the Armenian question from 1878. The consular reports henceforth became essential sources of information regarding the Kurds and the Armenian cause due to the amount of detail that they provided. Thus, sources of information about the region, which mostly came from narratives of travellers in the past, widened and British attention was drawn more towards its peoples, especially the Kurds who had previously been largely anonymous to them. Finally, this chapter will argue that pro-Armenian activities and propaganda in Britain started to emerge with the appearance of the Armenian cause. A number of British figures supported Pro-Armenian activities which gradually grew during the period of the study and negatively affected the image of the Kurds in Britain.

2. Britain and the emergence of the Armenian question

2.1. British attitudes towards the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the treaty of San Stefano (1878)

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 broke out on 24 April 1877 when the Russian army attacked the Ottoman Empire on two fronts, Asia (the Caucasus) and Europe (the Balkans).² The Ottomans were heavily defeated on both fronts. In the Balkans, the Russian army continued its advance until it arrived at the outskirts of Constantinople at the beginning of March 1878.³ On the eastern front, Russian forces started to overrun the Ottoman territories on the first day of the war and gradually overcame the Ottoman army in many battles and took Ottoman cities including Bayazid, Kars and Ardahan in 1877 and Erzurum in 1878.⁴ As a result, Russian troops took control of a large area of eastern Anatolia.

In Britain, which had stood beside the Ottomans against Russia in the Crimean War 1853-1856, the Russian victories were received with concern and alarm and were considered a real threat to the British position in the East. In January 1878, the Conservative Government despatched a British fleet to the Dardanelles to stop any

² H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol. III (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935), pp.1040-1.

³ *Ibid*, p.1041.

⁴ McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, pp.109-10.

further Russian advance towards the capital and as a sign of British willingness to enter the war against Russia.⁵ Meanwhile Britain with other European Powers demanded that Russia should stop the war. Therefore, Russia and the Ottoman Empire held joint negotiations, which led to a convention known as the treaty of San Stefano, which was signed on 3 March 1878.⁶ According to Article 19 of this treaty, Russia kept the areas they had seized during the war on the eastern front namely Batum, Ardahan, Kars, Bayazid and several other strategic places.⁷ The Russians also imposed Article 16 regarding the Armenians, deciding that the Russian army would not withdraw from places where the Armenians resided until the reforms provided in this Article were carried out. The Article stipulated that:

As the evacuation by Russian troops of the territory which they occupy in Armenia and which is to be restored to Turkey, might give rise to conflicts and complications detrimental to the maintenance of good relations between the two countries, the Sublime Porte engages to carry into effect, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians and to guarantee their security against the Kurds and Circassians.⁸

The terms of the treaty of San Stefano were an unconditional capitulation of the Ottomans to Russia. The Russians forced the Ottomans to give up their remaining forts in Bulgaria and agreed that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria would obtain autonomy. Russia had full rights to use the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and the Porte was forced to pay war compensation as well.⁹ Great Britain regarded the Russian triumphs as a direct threat to her interests in the East. On 21 March 1878, the terms of the San Stefano agreement were reported by the British press and were met with public condemnation. Meanwhile, Lord Salisbury, who was about to become the Secretary of

⁵ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol. III, p.1041.

⁶ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp.30-31; Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp.187-88.

⁷ F.O. 424/68, pp.176-77, Incl. in No.328, Memorandum by Major-General Sir A. Kemball, Constantinople, Mar 8, 1878.

⁸ Şimşir, *The Genesis of the Armenian Question*, p.7.

⁹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, p.187.

State for Foreign Affairs, stated that the conditions set out in the San Stefano agreement were completely unacceptable to Great Britain. He thought that by the agreement Russia would threaten the balance of power in the Aegean region, menace the Greeks in the Balkans with extinction, jeopardise the Straits and make the Ottoman Empire a vassal of Russia which would be damaging to British interests.¹⁰

Britain acted resolutely to limit Russian influence on the Ottoman Empire and tried to reduce Russia's political and military gains in the Ottoman Empire, in the Balkans and in the East. Even Lord Salisbury, who a few months earlier had thought Russia could not seriously threaten the position of Britain in the Mediterranean, was willing to go to war unless the Russian emperor was ready to submit the whole treaty of San Stefano to the Powers so as to change its provisions.¹¹ Meanwhile anxiety increased among the British public after the Russian victories over the Ottomans in the war. Campaigns were held in Britain, especially in London, demanding that the Government should enter the war to stop the Russians gaining military and political advantages at the expense of the Ottomans.¹² Europe, as H.A.L. Fisher described it, was never closer to "a great firestorm" than in the spring of 1878. War was about to erupt but the peace of Europe was rescued by the tact of Bismarck the German chancellor, the proficiency of Lord Salisbury and the readiness of Austria to align with Britain for the sake of her interests in the Balkans.¹³ Salisbury stated that the treaty of San Stefano violated the balance of power in Europe and that the European Powers should be called to sign a new agreement. He informed the Russians that the terms of the treaty of San Stefano should be discussed again. He kept up efforts for a new congress to deliberate all the outstanding issues of the Eastern question again. Therefore, Russia agreed to hold a new congress and revise the terms of the San Stefano treaty.¹⁴ Consequently, a congress took place in Berlin in June 1878 in which the European Powers participated to discuss the affairs of the Eastern question including the condition of the Armenians. In this

¹⁰ Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), pp.167-68.

¹¹ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol. III, p.1041.

¹² For more details on the conservative and Liberal opinions and the British domestic opinion on Britain's entry into the war, see: Leslie Rogne Schumacher, 'A "Lasting Solution": The Eastern Question and British Imperialism, 1875-1878', PhD thesis (University of Minnesota, 2012), pp.117-75.

¹³ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol. III, pp.1041-42, Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, pp.189-90.

¹⁴ Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp.189-91.

way, the Armenian question emerged and became a part of the Eastern question. From that point, British politics started to focus on eastern Anatolia more than ever before.

2.2. British policy towards eastern Anatolia and the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1878

Great Britain opposed Russia's expansive policy and had wide political and economic interests throughout the Ottoman Empire. Restraining the influence of Russia which had taken significant parts of eastern Anatolia, in addition to maintaining British influence over the Ottoman Empire, was the most essential part of the British agenda. A detailed summary of British views on the Russian occupation of eastern Anatolia and its impact on British interests can be observed in a long despatch by the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Austen Layard, to the Earl of Derby in December 1877. According to him, annexation of the Ottoman territories in Asia by Russia was a matter of "the most vital importance" to Britain and would be "dangerous to our interests and influence in the East".¹⁵ Layard assured the Foreign Office that control of Batum, Kars, Ardahan, Bayazid and other places in the region by Russia would cause real political, economic and strategic troubles for Britain. The Ambassador suggested that the occupation of eastern Anatolia by Russia should be considered from four points. These can be summarised as follows (1) It would be evidence of Russian military supremacy and of British incapacity to resist Russians from advances in the East. That opinion would impact on the Muslim population of central Asia and menace British power in India. (2) It would afford facilities to Russia for further conquests in Persia and Asia Minor. (3) It had ramifications for Britain's direct communication with India. Although he pointed out that the Suez Canal had become a major route to India, Layard emphasized the necessity of not allowing Russian to take control of the traditional route to India which passed through Syria and Mesopotamia. He thought it could be used as an alternative route if the Suez Canal route was threatened by another Power. (4) It would undermine British commerce.¹⁶

¹⁵ F.O. 424/63, p.86, No.124, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Dec 4, 1877.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp.86-89.

One interesting idea in the report was that Layard proposed that, after the war was finished, the Ottoman Government should be convinced to construct a railroad between Constantinople and the Persian Gulf. He believed that it would secure the way to the Persian Gulf through Syria or Asia Minor and safeguard British interests in the area.¹⁷ Other British politicians observed the threat of Russian occupation of eastern Anatolia to British interests. During a sitting of the House of Commons in 1878, Sir Gabriel Goldney, the Conservative MP, stated that with the control of Kars, Ardahan, and Batum, Russia would be able to dominate the trade of Armenia, and through Armenia that of Persia, which was assumed to be predominantly British.¹⁸ Concern about the Russian occupation of parts of eastern Anatolia can be observed in the British press as well. For instance, *The Times* pointed out the impact that the extension of Russian influence would have on British interests, upon British ground and marine commerce in the area and beyond, in addition to the military threat to the British position in the area in any future war.¹⁹

The Russian military victory in the War of 1877–78 and its aftermath made British officials reconsider the situation in eastern Anatolia more carefully. This required British officials to keep a very close watch on the affairs of peoples of the area, especially the Armenians and Kurds. This fact was clearly stated in Layard's despatch of 18 March 1878. The despatch shows that, as the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 had done, the treaty of San Stefano increased antagonism between the Kurds and Armenians. Article 16 of this treaty had encouraged the Armenians' hopes for nationhood, especially when they perceived that their case would be included in the Congress of Berlin. Layard reported that a year earlier (1877), Archbishop Narsis, the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople, had been anxious to persuade him that the Armenians were not discontented with Ottoman rule and they preferred remaining under it to being transferred to that of Russia. He even commented on their willingness to be recruited to the Ottoman army, or to be shaped into a local force to defend Ottoman lands. However, during his confidential meeting with Layard on 17 March 1878, the Archbishop admitted that since the Russian victories, and more specifically

¹⁷ Ibid., p.89.

¹⁸ Mr, Goldney, 30 July 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 242, col.737.

¹⁹ 'The Annexation of Armenia', *The Times*, 17 Apr 1878.

since it had become known that Russia had provided an article of the treaty of San Stefano for administrative reforms for Armenians, the situation had entirely changed. He claimed that the outrages of the Kurds against the Armenians in Van province and Bayazid district during the War had increased the Armenians' hatred of Muslim rule, and they were resolved not to accept Muslim dominance anymore.²⁰ Thus, the new circumstances of eastern Anatolia since 1878 were an issue that would have to be taken into account by British diplomats as it would affect the balance of power and create instability in the region. This could lead to further Russian intervention in the affairs of the region in the future under the pretext of protecting Christians.

The Balkan nationalist movements, such as those in Serbia and Romania that had led their fellow-countrymen to rid themselves of Ottoman rule, had also influenced the Armenians to demand their national rights. According to Archbishop Narsis, the fact that many Armenians had been transferred to Christian rule [he meant Russia] after Russia assumed control of a part of "Armenia" and that autonomous government was about to be permitted to the Christian people of European Turkey, pushed the Armenians to demand the same rights. He warned the British Ambassador that if the Armenians were unable to obtain a self-governing province through the assistance of the European Powers, they would implore Russia for help and would not stop agitating until they were annexed to her.²¹ Therefore, Britain, for her interests, was willing to support the Ottoman Empire and give greater attention to the Armenian question to curb Russian hegemony over the territory.

Even before the Congress of Berlin, Britain was not satisfied with Russian control over large areas of Ottoman territory in eastern Anatolia after the war. Russia was in a position to make an advance towards the Mediterranean or to the Persian Gulf or to rouse uprisings and disorders among Armenians and other inhabitants. Therefore, the British Government wanted to secure the integrity of Ottoman possessions in Anatolia.²² Thus, Lord Salisbury gave his instructions to Layard to encourage the Ottoman Government to conclude a defensive alliance between the two countries. Lord

²⁰ F.O. 424/68, p.346, No.639, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 18, 1878.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, p.190.

Salisbury proposed that Britain would militarily defend the Ottoman Empire against any threats in Asia Minor in the future and would force Russia to retreat from all territories she occupied during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. In return, the Porte promised to apply necessary reforms in the government for the safety of Christians and other Ottoman residents in the region, and the Porte would agree to assign Cyprus to be occupied and administered by Britain.²³ Salisbury, as Andrew Roberts mentioned, instructed Layard to allow the Sultan just twenty-four hours to approve the suggested convention, and in case of his refusal to suggest that Britain would leave Russia to make more advances and think about an agreed partition of the Ottoman Empire.²⁴ Layard and Safvet Pasha, the Ottoman Minister for Foreign Affairs, signed the confidential Convention of Defensive Alliance between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire, commonly called the Cyprus Convention, at the Yeldiz Palace in Constantinople on 4 June 1878.²⁵ Article I of the agreement stipulated that:

If Batoum, Ardahan, Kars or any of them shall be retained by Russia, and if any attempt shall be made at any future time by Russia to take possession of any further territories of His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in Asia, as fixed by the Definitive Treaty of Peace, England engages to join His Imperial Majesty the Sultan in defending them by force of arms. In return, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan promises to England to introduce necessary Reforms, to be agreed upon later between the two Powers, into the government and for the protection of the Christian and other subjects of the Porte in these territories. And in order to enable England to make necessary provision for executing her engagement, His Imperial Majesty the Sultan further consents to assign the Island of Cyprus to be occupied and administered by England.²⁶

It seems that the Porte signed this convention hoping that, with the assistance of Great Britain, the terms of the treaty of San Stefano would be changed in their favour in

²³ Turkey No. 36 (1878), pp.1-2, No.1, The Marquis of Salisbury to Mr. Layard, Foreign Office, May 30, 1878.

²⁴ Roberts, *Salisbury*, pp.192-93.

²⁵ Turkey No. 36 (1878), p.3, No.2, Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Therapia, June 5, 1878.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3, Incl. in No.2.

a way which would enable the Ottomans to retake the eastern territories they had lost in the war. On the other hand, many Armenians regarded the publication of the Cyprus Convention as proof that deliverance should be looked for from Britain. By establishing herself in Cyprus, by her assurance of the integrity of the Ottoman territories and by the promise of reform which she got, it was understood that Britain would oppose any possible advances of Russia into the region.²⁷

2.3. British representation of the Armenians and Kurds in the Congress of Berlin (1878)

The Congress of Berlin opened on 13 June 1878 in the presence of the great European Powers: Germany, Great Britain, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, Italy and the Ottoman Empire. The Armenians tried vehemently to persuade the Powers, especially Great Britain, to support them and hoped that their demands would be clearly addressed in the Congress. When the Conference was holding its meetings, Archbishop Narsis visited Layard and asked him to recommend the cause of the Armenian people to Benjamin Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield) the Prime Minister and Lord Salisbury at the Congress. Narsis' demand came after the Porte objected to him travelling to Berlin. The Archbishop was hopeful that British politicians would give favourable consideration to his cause and claimed that the Armenians looked to Britain alone for help and protection.²⁸ He again requested Lord Salisbury to obtain specific mention of Armenians in the treaty of Berlin claiming that the only hope of the Armenians was the protection of Britain in the Conference.²⁹ It is worth noting that, about three months prior to the Congress, Narsis had also delivered a letter to Bismarck entreating his support for the Armenian issue. He sent it through Prince Reuss, who was in frequent communication with the leaders of the Armenian community.³⁰

While Narsis was constantly encouraging the top British officials, through the British Embassy in Constantinople, to take meaningful measures in support of the Armenian cause, he sent an Armenian delegation to Europe in order to generate

²⁷ 'The Prospects of Armenia', *The Times*, 16 Aug 1890.

²⁸ F.O. 424/72, pp.46-47, No.65, Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Therapia, July 1, 1878.

²⁹ Ibid., p 68, No.99, Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Therapia, July 10, 1878.

³⁰ F.O. 424/68, p.347, No.639, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 18, 1878.

sympathy and support for Armenian “autonomy” in the coming Congress.³¹ The deputation consisted of the former Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Khirimian, Archbishop Horen Narbey, Minez Ceraz and Istephan Papazian as translator and secretary. They visited St. Petersburg, Paris, Rome, London and Berlin and were welcomed by officials who promised to back their issue in the Congress of Berlin.³² On 8 April 1878, the deputation visited Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador in Paris and a day after went to London. Most of the activities of the Armenian deputation prior to the Berlin Congress, according to an Armenian historian, were in England as they stayed there until the Congress opened on 13 June.³³

The Armenian deputation went to Berlin and presented proposals consisting of seven clauses to the Congress. They demanded the foundation of a semi-independent authority (administrative autonomy) for “Ottoman Armenia”.³⁴ Besides the proposals of the Patriarch Khirimian and his fellows, the Armenian notable Nubar Pashas, the former representative of the Khedivate of Egypt, submitted another proposal to the Congress regarding the Armenian demands.³⁵ The Powers in the Berlin Congress (13 June – 13 July 1878) did not accept either of the Armenian proposals. However, the Armenian request was discussed in the Congress for the first time on 4 July 1878. The discussion started with a proposal by Lord Salisbury asking that Article 16 of the treaty of San Stefano be modified and that the condition that Russian evacuation be dependent on the reforms be cancelled. After discussions on 6 and 8 July, the delegates of the Powers concluded a new Article respecting the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire,³⁶ which was Article 61 that provided that:

The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out, without further delay, the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the

³¹ F.O. 424/69, p.54, No.107, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 25, 1878.

³² Musa Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms for the Armenians in Eastern Anatolia 1877-1897* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), p.7.

³³ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.51.

³⁴ Kamuran Gurun, *The Armenian File: The Myth of Innocence Exposed* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2007), pp.127-32.

³⁵ Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms*, p.15.

³⁶ Gurun, *The Armenian File*, pp.132-33.

Circassians and Kurds. It will periodically make known the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application.³⁷

Unlike Article 16 of the treaty of San Stefano which restricted the supervision of reforms in areas inhabited by Armenians to Russia only, through the inclusion of Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin, which referred the implementation of reforms in Armenian-populated areas to the Powers, Britain could reduce Russian influence upon Armenian affairs. Britain had a direct hand in shaping Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin, more than any of the other states who participated in the Congress. This was because Britain had already engaged with the Porte regarding the situation and residents of the eastern provinces of Turkey according to the Cyprus Convention. Through that Convention, Britain had responsibility for the successful application of necessary reforms in government by the Porte, and for protecting Christians and other inhabitants of the region. In this way, Britain would have an effective position in relation to the fate of the peoples of eastern Anatolia and the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians. The treaty of Berlin also formed a new era in the Kurdish-Armenian relationship because it widened gaps between them. On the one hand, it diminished the loyalty of the Armenians to the Ottoman state and made them look towards the Great Powers to achieve their demands. On the other hand, it pushed the Kurds to seek a closer relationship with the Ottoman authorities in the face of the support of the Great Powers for the Armenians.

Another significant point regarding Article 61 is that Britain was sympathetic to the Armenians but wanted to redress the Armenian problem within the sovereignty of the Ottoman state and not as a separate issue. According to Layard, Britain had to try to direct the Ottoman Government to work for the welfare of the Armenians and other peoples, Christian and Muslims, in the region. In his letter to the Foreign Office, Layard stressed that the Armenians were worthy of assistance from Britain and something should be done at the Congress of Berlin to ensure their security in the future, particularly for those living in the eastern parts of Anatolia. Through Article 61 as well,

³⁷ Turkey No. 38 (1878), p.30, the Marquis of Salisbury to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, Berlin, July 13, 1878.

the Kurdish factor officially became a part of the Eastern question and was directly considered in that regard. He stated that, above all, protection was required from the Kurdish tribes, “to whose excesses and outrages they have been constantly exposed”.³⁸

3. The beginnings of pro-Armenian activities in Britain

When the Armenian question emerged in 1878, pro-Armenian activities found fertile ground in Britain especially among the Liberals. Anti-Ottoman Empire feelings already existed because of the “Bulgarian Horrors” in 1876. In *Democratic Subjects* Patrick Joyce alludes to the time of the “Bulgarian Horrors” agitation that established anti-Turkish feelings and increased moral passion in support of the Christians of the East among a wide range of British citizens. In less than six weeks in 1876 five hundred demonstrations were held across Britain against the Ottoman regime. The detailed accounts of offensives against Christians in the Balkans in 1876 published by the newspapers stirred British feelings strongly. This agitation assisted in re-establishing popular Liberalism in the country. Many British figures such as W. E. Gladstone³⁹ and W. T. Stead (1849–1912), the famous Liberal journalist, made significant contributions in mobilising British public opinion against “the cruel Turks”.⁴⁰ Stead was a close friend of Gladstone and he obtained fame in 1876 for his coverage of the agitation of the “Bulgarian Horrors” when he was editor of *Northern Echo*. Likewise, he was a noticeable figure in the protest movement against the Ottoman regime in support of the Armenians during 1895-96. He demonstrated how journalism could be utilised to influence public opinion and government policies, especially during his editorship of the London liberal *Pall Mall Gazette* in the 1880s.⁴¹

³⁸ F.O. 424/69, p.54, No.107, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 25, 1878.

³⁹ For more details about Gladstone’s strong criticisms of the Ottoman rule, see his pamphlet W. E. Gladstone, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London: John Murray, 1876).

⁴⁰ Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp.207-12. For more details on the Eastern question and effects of the “Bulgarian atrocities” in Britain see Richard Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1963).

⁴¹ Baylen, Joseph O. "Stead, William Thomas (1849–1912), newspaper editor and spiritualist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-36258>.

Following the treaty of San Stefano in March 1878, the Ottoman Armenians under the leadership of the Patriarchate of Constantinople started an active campaign to secure the support of Western ambassadors and representatives in the Ottoman Empire for their cause. The Armenian campaign directly targeted the Kurds and was constantly trying to depict the Armenians as victims of Kurdish harassment. The Armenians tried hard to influence Western public opinion in support of the Armenian cause, especially in Britain given the existence of the Armenian community there. During their stay in Britain from April to June 1878, before the inauguration of the Berlin Congress, the members of the Armenian delegation actively promoted the Armenian cause among politicians and citizens. In April, *The Times* reported the arrival of the former Armenian Patriarch Khirimian, the head of the deputation, at Charing Cross station on Thursday 11 April. He was welcomed by several prominent members of the Armenian community in London and took up his residence with Mr. Seth Apear, of 74, Lancaster Gate.⁴² Khirimian was in contact with notable Armenians in London and Manchester who had come to Britain from the Ottoman Empire for commercial purposes.⁴³ It is worth noting that the Armenian community in Manchester, whose roots dated back decades prior to the appearance of the Armenian question, was one of the most influential, active and prosperous communities in Europe.⁴⁴ Khirimian and his comrades also met the Archbishop of Canterbury to get his support. In London, Khirimian presented to Lord Salisbury an administrative scheme for the establishment of “an autonomous Armenian province”.⁴⁵ According to the Turkish historian Musa Şaşmaz, the Armenian deputation brought reports from Constantinople regarding Kurdish outrages to be submitted to the British Foreign Office. However, it is not known whether these were handed over.⁴⁶ Khirimian also worked hard to influence British public opinion by encouraging pro-Armenians to write articles in the British press. He held meetings with British citizens to encourage the Foreign Office to support the Armenian cause at the Congress of Berlin.⁴⁷

⁴² 'Conscience Money-The Chancellor of the Ex', *The Times*, 13 Apr 1878.

⁴³ Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms*, p.8.

⁴⁴ George, *Merchants in Exile*, p.133.

⁴⁵ Şaşmaz, *British Policy and the Application of Reforms*, p.8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.

The pro-Armenians in Britain started organizing activities in favour of the Armenians from 1878. As a result of meetings of the Armenian deputation with officials and British pro-Armenians, the House of Lords discussed the Armenian question on 6 June 1878 for the first time a few days before the Congress of Berlin. The Kurds were not far from the criticism of the British Parliament. At that sitting, Lord Salisbury attended and alluded to “the ravages of the neighbouring hordes of Kurds”,⁴⁸ and the Earl of Shaftesbury and the Earl of Carnarvon asked the Government to take appropriate steps at the upcoming conference for protecting the Armenians. Shaftesbury asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to try his best in the conference to support the cause of Armenian Christians and to raise the interest of “this great nationality” in order that they might be saved from “the ravages of the Kurds and Circassians” in the future.⁴⁹ Carnarvon referred to “barbarous Kurdish tribes”, accusing them of committing atrocities against the Armenians and of committing depredations across eastern Anatolia “with fire and sword”.⁵⁰ Carnarvon also stated that while the misfortunes of the Armenians were greater than those of some of the Christian groups in Europe [he meant Christians under Ottoman sovereignty in the Balkans such as Bulgarians], public opinion in Europe was less aware of them. He called for more attention to the Armenians and other Christian races in the region who were living far away from the sight of the European Powers.⁵¹ These accusations against the Kurds were mostly due to the behaviour of some Kurdish tribal chieftains who were accused of killing Christians during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.

The pro-Armenian activities in Britain, mostly in London, can be seen in the British newspapers when the Congress of Berlin was holding its meetings. As reported by *The Times*, the Armenian Committees of London and Manchester presented a Memorial to the Secretary of State for Foreign affairs “on behalf of the Armenian residents in England” regarding the sufferings of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire and the measures that were needed “to deliver them from present evils and secure their

⁴⁸ The Marquess of Salisbury, 6 June 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 240, col.1243.

⁴⁹ The Earl of Shaftesbury, 6 June 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 240, cols.1242-1243.

⁵⁰ The Earl of Carnarvon, 6 June 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 240, col.1245.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

future welfare”.⁵² The statement urged the British Government to support the cause of the Armenians so that their claims would be looked upon positively by the European Powers in the Congress. The Memorial, which was written in exaggerated language and filled with religious feelings, labelled “a large part” of the Muslim population as “half-savage nomad” and praised the Armenians as superior to the Muslims both in natural intelligence and in education. While it blamed the Porte for many “evils” from which the Armenians suffered, the Kurds were considered as “the greatest evil by far” besides “other predatory tribes”.⁵³ It is worth noting that some demands in this petition were similar to the scheme of required reforms which Lord Salisbury summarized in three points in August (mentioned below) as a mechanism for carrying out the proposed reforms of Article 61. The petition asked Lord Salisbury to make the case for the creation of a military force from Christians and Muslims alike (a gendarmerie) to maintain order in the areas inhabited by the Armenians with the assistance of the European Powers as well as a system to help administer territories, particularly regarding taxation. Given the timing, it is possible that this petition had some influence on Salisbury’s decision to support the Armenians.

The Earl of Carnarvon was one of the most enthusiastic of the British defenders of the Armenians in the late 1870s. There were other British politicians who were also known for their support of the Armenians such as James Bryce (1838-1922), the Liberal MP, who supported the Armenians for more than forty years in Parliament and in the press. He was known as the British MP for Armenia.⁵⁴ Bryce was a historian and author who had travelled to eastern Anatolia and climbed Mount Ararat. His book *Transcaucasia and Ararat: Being Notes of a Vacation Tour in the Autumn of 1876* went into three editions between September 1877 and 1878.⁵⁵ His 1876 visit to the area meant that he was in touch with Armenian residents of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶ He

⁵² 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 5 July 1878.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ George, *Merchants in Exile*, p.40.

⁵⁵ James Bryce, *Transcaucasia and Ararat: Being Notes of a Vacation Tour in the Autumn of 1876*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1878).

⁵⁶ Harvie, Christopher. "Bryce, James, Viscount Bryce (1838–1922), jurist, historian, and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32141>.

founded the Anglo-Armenian Association,⁵⁷ whose main aim was to appeal to public opinion to secure the execution of the administrative and judicial reforms in “the Armenian provinces of Asiatic Turkey” which had been stipulated in Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin.⁵⁸

The pro-Armenian figures continued campaigning for the Armenians. On 27 June 1879, Carnarvon drew attention to the condition of the Armenian people again and attacked the Ottoman Government for trying to deceive the British Government regarding Article 61. Carnarvon, who accused the Kurds of looting and plundering the Armenians in Mush, Bitlis and other places, praised the efforts of those who advocated Armenian rights as a matter of humanitarian principle. For him, the Armenians entirely deserved sympathy because of their high intelligence.⁵⁹ Based on what has been discussed above, it is clear that pro-Armenian activities in Britain started with the emergence of the Armenian question and were eagerly trying to influence the British public through the press and political circles. Pro-Armenian activities in Britain grew in the coming years especially during the 1890s when the Armenian question saw more tension. Accordingly, these activities increased anti-Ottoman Empire feelings and badly affected the image of the Kurds in Britain as will be shown further through the coming chapters.

4. The Armenian Reforms

4.1. The reform project and the arrival of British consuls in eastern Anatolia

Among the Great Powers who signed the treaty of Berlin, Britain was the most interested in the application of Article 61 as it was basically a British scheme. Germany and Austria-Hungary had no interest in the fate of the Sultan’s Asian subjects, and France and Italy considered the matter as of special interest to Britain only.⁶⁰ Russia did not favour the application of the reforms because she opposed the idea of the

⁵⁷ Details about pro-Armenian associations in Britain including the Anglo-Armenian Association will be covered in chapter five.

⁵⁸ F. S. Stevenson, ‘Armenia’, *The Contemporary Review*, 67, (Feb 1895) p.206; Şimşir, *Documents Diplomatiques Ottomans*, Vol. II (1894-1895), p.364.

⁵⁹ The Earl of Carnarvon, 27 June 1879, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 247, col.811 and cols.815-16.

⁶⁰ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p.99.

regeneration of the institutions of the Ottoman Empire in its Asiatic provinces and was also worried that the reform project might cause an increase in British influence in the regions adjacent to its Caucasian territories. In contrast, Britain was interested in applying the reforms because she considered them the practical means to strengthen the Ottoman Empire and to make her a strong barrier against Russia's southward expansion.⁶¹ In addition, Russia opposed the suggested reforms because any future prestige won by the Ottoman Armenians such as independence or self-authority could raise awareness among the Russian Armenians and lead them to demand their national rights at the expense of her sovereignty.

Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin 1878 demanded that the Ottoman Government should apply, without any delay, "ameliorations and reforms" in those regions inhabited by Armenians in eastern Anatolia and assure their "security against the Circassians and Kurds".⁶² However, the Congress of Berlin did not discuss in detail how to apply this article nor the conditions of the places where the Armenians lived. The measures by which it was to be executed were left to be determined by the Sultan's government and in agreement with or under the direction of the Great Powers who signed the treaty and who reserved the right to superintend their implementation. Furthermore, the British Government proposed to oversee the governmental reforms in the Asiatic provinces of the Empire. Therefore, the Ottoman Government agreed with the British Government about the detail of the reforms to be introduced and the intention was that the reform programmes should basically be carried out in the territories of eastern Anatolia where most of the Ottoman Armenians lived.⁶³

The matter of the reforms was a priority for Disraeli's Conservative Government (1874-80). Days after the announcement of the treaty of Berlin, the British Cabinet began to put pressure on the Ottoman Government to implement reforms in Anatolia. In August 1878 Lord Salisbury sent a despatch to Layard, including necessary details about the application of the reforms that should be carried out by the Ottoman

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Turkey No. 38 (1878), p.30, the Marquis of Salisbury to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State, Berlin, July 13, 1878.

⁶³ Turkey No. 51 (1878), p.1, No.1, the Marquis of Salisbury to Sir Henry Layard, Foreign Office, Aug 8, 1878.

authorities. At the end of his despatch Salisbury summarized the scheme of the required reforms on which he asked his Ambassador to attain a formal agreement from the Sultan:

1. The Sultan will found a gendarmerie in the Asiatic provinces of the Ottoman Empire, to be organised and instructed by Europeans.
2. He will institute Central Tribunals at a certain number of the chief Asiatic towns of his Empire, which will have jurisdiction over the lower Courts. In each of these Tribunals shall be a European expert in the law, whose consent shall be necessary in every resolution.
3. He will employ a Collector in each vilayet, who will be responsible for the revenue of the province. He also will be charged to put an end to tithe-farming and to impose ten-year resolutions at the earliest date. This administrator also should be in most cases a European.⁶⁴

After the Congress of Berlin, the British Government started sending military consuls in order to supervise the implementation of the reforms in Anatolia. The access of British military consuls to the region was stipulated by the Cyprus Convention of 4 June 1878.⁶⁵ By the end of 1878 several British consulates had been founded in the major cities of eastern Anatolia. The most active and important British consulates in the Six Vilayets (provinces) in which the Kurds and Armenians lived together respectively were: Erzurum, Van, Sivas, Diyarbakir and Bitlis. The main mission of the consuls was to ascertain the seriousness of the local Ottoman authorities and the competent committees in applying and supporting the scheme of reform. They were also expected to report Armenian grievance, disagreements and disputes with the neighbouring Kurds.

The arrival of the British consuls in eastern Anatolia was the start of a new era of British interest in the Kurds and Armenians and other residents of the region. Most British information about ethnic groups especially Armenians and Kurds and religious minorities such as Nestorians came through those consuls. Before the Congress of Berlin 1878, in the Six Vilayets in eastern Anatolia, British diplomatic affairs were

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.1-4.

⁶⁵ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.6.

mostly run through the British consulate in Erzurum. After that date and because of the issue of the reforms, consulates opened in the other cities and started their activities.

The appearance of European consuls, especially the British consuls, and the sympathy they showed for the Christians, increased the hopes of the Armenians. For the Christians the consuls were “a beacon of hope to the oppressed and repressed Christians of eastern Turkey, encouraging them to crave for justice”.⁶⁶ In contrast to the Kurds, as will be shown in the next pages, the Armenians welcomed the arrival of European consuls. When Captain Emilius Clayton was designated as the Vice-Consul at Van in 31 July 1879, the Armenians of Mush welcomed him enthusiastically. Clayton later reported that the Armenian Archbishop of Van had sent him a letter stating that the Vali of the city had made complaints to the Porte against him (the Archbishop) demanding his dismissal and exile from Van and that a memorandum had been sent to the Patriarchate at Constantinople by the Porte in this regard.⁶⁷ The Vali’s reasons for that step were: firstly, the Archbishop, with his citizens had gone out to meet the Vice-Consuls of Russia and England on their arrival at Van. The Vice-Consul of Russia Major Kamsaragan arrived about a week before Clayton and was greeted by the Archbishop with a large crowd of Armenians. The Vali had also informed the Archbishop that he did not wish him or other Armenians to go out to meet Clayton. Secondly, the Archbishop had attended an objectionable theatrical performance that took place under the patronage of Major Kamsaragan and Clayton. One part of the play was a farce showing life in an Armenian village. In the course of one scene a Kurd or Bashi-Bazouk assaulted the villagers saying, “Long life to the Sultan”. Thirdly and most important of all, according to Clayton, the Archbishop was too close to the foreign Vice-Consuls, and encouraged the Armenians’ discontent and incited them to go and report their position and make their complaints to the Vice-Consuls.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.6.

⁶⁷ F.O. 424/106, pp.517-18, No.257, Captain Clayton to Major Trotter, Van, May 14, 1880.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

4.2. Armenian demands for autonomy

In 1878 the Armenians thought that Britain would take control of Anatolia imminently and support them in establishing autonomy. This kind of feeling was mirrored in the memoirs of Khan-Azad, one of the Armenian revolutionaries who observed: ‘In each and every one of them, there was but one fixed idea, hammered in, as it were, like a nail: Bulgaria was freed by the intervention of Russia, why not Armenia with the help of England?’⁶⁹ Like other Armenians, he neglected to observe that there were obvious differences between their case and that of the other Christian nations of the Balkans, especially as they were a minority in eastern Anatolia. The Armenians were supported by many British pro-Armenians in their demand for self-government, who asked politicians and the public to assist them in achieving their claims. In a letter to the editor of *The Times* on 20 March 1878, Bryce stated that it was high time that the claims of the Armenians received more attention in Britain than they had before. He argued that Armenia needed self-government with an armed local force to keep the Kurds under control. For someone such as Bryce it was obvious that “the Armenians in Armenia” formed a minority that would be increased through the immigration of other Armenians from the rest of Anatolia and from Persia and through many Muslims who would have liked to intermingle with the Christians.⁷⁰ He called upon the British Government not to forget this people who had “clung to its faith and its nationality through many centuries of misery” in the international congresses. Finally, Bryce asserted the necessity of appointing more consuls in “Armenia” to whom the Armenians could resort for protection.⁷¹ A few months later the pro-Armenians also held a meeting on 1 July 1878 in support of the Armenian issue in Jerusalem Chamber in London. Carnarvon was again at the forefront in supporting the Armenians and applauded the idea of “the creation of a separate Armenian Province”.⁷²

Not everyone in Britain agreed with the arguments of the pro-Armenians and some writers and politicians criticised their approach. For instance, William Gifford

⁶⁹ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.62.

⁷⁰ Bryce, J., 'The claims of the Armenians', *The Times*, 20 Mar 1878.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 5 July 1878.

Palgrave (1826–1888), a British traveller, orientalist, diplomat, and leading explorer and scholar of the Middle East,⁷³ disagreed with Carnarvon’s resolution proposed on 1 July 1878 in the meeting of the Anglo-Armenian Committees of London for establishing a separate province for the Armenians. In his letter to *The Times*, he wrote that the resolution was totally misguided and could not be supported by practised statesmen. Palgrave, who had lived in Asia Minor for several years, argued that Carnarvon’s recommendation was based on several fallacies; the foremost was that the wide district which Carnarvon referred to as “Armenia” was a historical memory of centuries past, not an actual fact. He argued that the recommendation focused attention on the Armenians who were a minority and ignored peoples such as the Kurds and others who were the majority. Finally, he added that “The intelligence and good sense of English readers will easily supply the deficiency”.⁷⁴ Carnarvon and Bryce replied to Palgrave’s statements in *The Times* which seemed to be a platform for debates regarding the Armenian question. Carnarvon rejected “Palgrave’s propositions” that the Armenians were a minority and asserted his belief that they were much more numerous than the Kurds and Turks in the provinces of Van, Erzurum and Diyarbakir.⁷⁵ However, his opinion was based on speculation rather than accurate data. He also criticised Palgrave for arguing that “there is no such country as Armenia” and that the Armenians had neither desire nor capacity for self-government, entire or partial. At the end he ridiculed Palgrave’s argument that Britain would not assent to autonomy for Armenia, saying that the vast majority of Englishmen would never hesitate to accept liberty for others.⁷⁶ Argument and counter argument between the pro-Armenians and their critics was not only about Armenian autonomy, but also about many aspects of the Armenian question as will be seen through the coming chapters.

British politicians also discussed the possibility of establishing Armenian autonomy and the Kurdish reaction that might be expected and were much more

⁷³ Thompson, Jason. "Palgrave, William Gifford (1826–1888), traveller and diplomatist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-21159>.

⁷⁴ 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 5 July 1878.

⁷⁵ Carnarvon, 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 8 July 1878.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

cautious in their approach. In his meeting with Layard in March 1878, Narsis the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople proposed the appointment of an Armenian as governor-general in eastern Anatolia under Ottoman tutelage to stop the Armenians from listening to Russia and to make them satisfied to remain under the Sultan's dominance.⁷⁷ Britain, however, disapproved of such a proposal for the establishment of an autonomous Armenian province for a number of reasons. Layard warned that the proposed autonomous Armenian state would end in annexation by Russia which was trying to extend her sovereignty over a larger part of Anatolia.⁷⁸ He also stated that the provinces which the Patriarch proposed should be the self-governing province of "Armenia" included a very large area out of the territories remaining to the Sultan in Anatolia and a large majority of the residents in those provinces were Muslims. Therefore, neither the Porte nor the Muslims would accept the formation of such an administration.⁷⁹ Lord Salisbury also shared Layard's opinion that the Armenians were only a minority in the region. At the House of Lords in June 1878, he contended that though the Armenians were a people of a distinct faith and might be of a separate nationality, they were, however, very scattered in the region and thoroughly mixed with the other populations. Therefore, he asserted that forming a separate entity for the Armenians in the region was not a practical solution.⁸⁰ "Even in Armenia the Armenians are in a minority" as Gladstone stated in the House of Commons.⁸¹ Layard added another point which was that the application of such demands for autonomy would excite the desires of other populations of the Ottoman Empire for independence. This phenomenon in turn would encourage intrigues in all parts of the Empire to throw off Ottoman authority, which was not in line with British policy towards the Empire at the time.⁸² For the reasons above, as Layard stated, what the British Government had to demand for the Armenians was good government, their fair share in the local

⁷⁷ F.O. 424/68, pp.347-48, No.639, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 18, 1878.

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp.346-47. Two years after this warning, Layard reiterated the same opinion and reported that even if an Armenian autonomous or independent state was established, it would not be able to maintain its existence. Russia would not permit such a state, and any attempt to establish one would only end in the absorption of the Armenians into the Russian Empire. Turkey No. 7 (1880), p.7, No.3, Sir A. H. Layard to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Constantinople, Apr 27, 1880.

⁷⁹ F.O. 424/68, p.347, No.639, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 18, 1878.

⁸⁰ The Marquess of Salisbury, 6 June 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 240, col.1244.

⁸¹ Mr. Gladstone, 30 July 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 242, col.697.

⁸² F.O. 424/68, p.347, No.639, Mr. Layard to the Earl of Derby, Constantinople, Mar 18, 1878.

Administration and the immediate introduction of the reforms into the provinces which they lived.⁸³ Likewise, *The Times* reiterated the same view, stating that autonomy was impracticable and the British Government needed to focus on applying reforms to redress the Armenian problem.⁸⁴

A number of British observers focussed on the issue of the Kurds with regard to the application of reforms and the Armenian demand for autonomy. For instance, Valentine Baker (General Baker Pasha), who was appointed as the Inspector-General of reforms in Anatolia in November 1879,⁸⁵ believed that Armenian demands would be unworkable and dangerous. He reported:

From conversations which I have had with many leading Armenians, I am quite sure that they have formed ambitious ideas for the future, which are not only impracticable, but dangerous in their own interests. It is only necessary to know this country in order to see the utter absurdity of any scheme of Armenian autonomy. The Armenians are everywhere in a minority, generally comprising only one-third to one-fifth of the inhabitants. An autonomy would place them entirely at the mercy of the Kurds who form the great majority of population. Their condition would be ten times worse than at present.⁸⁶

Baker attributed “the utter absurdity” of the Armenian demand for autonomy to the low numbers of Armenians and the large numbers of Kurds in eastern Anatolia. In a despatch to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in April 1880, Layard reinforced Baker’s view above. But he also noted that the Armenians had been heartened by the sympathy which they had received in Britain and believed that the new British Liberal Government would force the Ottoman Empire to fulfil its obligations towards the Armenians. This pushed them to seek establishing a semi-independent Armenia. Layard repeated his view that such an attempt by the Armenians was wrong and would lead to

⁸³ Turkey No. 7 (1880), p.7, No.3, Sir A. H. Layard to Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Constantinople, Apr 27, 1880.

⁸⁴ ‘The Prospects of Armenia’, *The Times*, 16 Aug 1890.

⁸⁵ F.O. 424/91, p.180, No.139, Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Pera, Nov 30, 1879.

⁸⁶ F.O. 424/106, p.201, Incl. No.94, Baker Pash to Sir A, H. Layard, Diyarbakir, Feb 1, 1880.

dangerous consequences and to tragedies to the Armenians themselves. The reason was, as he stated, because they were a minority in eastern Anatolia and “It is foolish and dangerous to seek to disprove this fact by ignoring the Kurds”.⁸⁷ The Armenian attempts for autonomy would cause a wide reaction and might lead to massacres against the Armenians by Muslims who were not disposed to submit to the rule of a Christian minority, the circumstance which would cause the instant interference of Russia.⁸⁸

The composition of the population of eastern Anatolia could be a reason why, when the British Government reshaped the British Consulate in Erzurum (the hub of the British diplomatic activities in eastern Anatolia), they named it the “Consulate of Kurdistan”, despite Armenian resistance. The Consulate included the Vilayets of Erzurum, Diyarbakir, Kharput, Mush (a province in Bitlis vilayet) and Van [the Six Vilayets excluding Sivas]. Major Henry Trotter was designated Consul of Kurdistan in 1878.⁸⁹ In October 1878, Layard gave Trotter a number of instructions, and in particular informed him to watch the activities and propaganda of the Russians in the region. Trotter took up his position in Erzurum in November 1878.⁹⁰

The composition of the population of the region was an important matter discussed by British officials and studied later by historians and is worth discussing briefly here. Arguments regarding the balance of the population of eastern Anatolia were widely raised after the Congress of Berlin. Article 61 had required reforms in “the provinces inhabited by the Armenians”, but had not specified precisely which provinces. Britain as the Great Power supervising the reforms, needed to pay keen attention to the population proportion of the region to determine which provinces required reform. Data in this regard “become exceedingly important” to officials in London, as George Goschen the new British Ambassador at Constantinople wrote in 1880.⁹¹ It was also a concern for British diplomats at that time such as Major Henry Trotter and Sir Charles W. Wilson (Wilson was a British Army officer, geographer and

⁸⁷ Turkey No. 7 (1880), p.7, No.3, Sir A. H. Layard to Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Constantinople, Apr 27, 1880.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.6-7.

⁸⁹ F.O. 424/86, p.108, No.163, Major Trotter to the Marquis of Salisbury, Erzurum, July 15, 1879.

⁹⁰ F.O. 424/76, p.28, Incl. in No.20, Sir A. H. Layard to Captain Trotter, Therapia, Oct 22, 1878.

⁹¹ F.O. 424/106, p.550, No.273, Mr. Goschen to Earl Granville, Therapia, July 6, 1880.

archaeologist and the Consul-General at Sivas). According to Kemal Karpat, the Turkish historian and expert in Ottoman demographic studies, both were trained in statistics. After he replaced Layard as ambassador at Constantinople, Goschen summoned several competent officials from Anatolia to Constantinople to discuss the issue of the population estimates of eastern Anatolia. Trotter and Wilson were responsible for the provision of reliable estimates of the population of eastern Anatolia for the British authorities.⁹²

Armenians and Pro-Armenians tried to show that the number of the Ottoman Armenians was high. For instance, in the Memorial of the Armenian Committees of London and Manchester published in *The Times*, the number of Armenians living in “Armenia” [meaning eastern Anatolia] was estimated to be about 2,000,000 out of the total number of 4,000,000 in the whole Ottoman Empire.⁹³ These numbers were obviously exaggerated by comparison with accounts given by the British diplomats who disagreed with both the Armenian Patriarchate at Constantinople and the pro-Armenians. The figures shown by the Armenian Patriarchate at Constantinople, as George Goschen stated, caused “surprise in many quarters”. Charles Wilson’s statistics as to the Sivas Vilayet also suggested that the figures of the Armenian Patriarchate were “very much exaggerated”.⁹⁴ Wilson estimated the total number of the Armenians in the Six Vilayets plus the Vilayets of Aleppo, Adana and Trebizond in the early 1880s at 925,000 at the most, which was only about 15% out of the total population of about 6,130,000.⁹⁵ Later commentators have also estimated the population numbers of the Six Vilayets and confirmed that the Armenians were a minority.⁹⁶ Despite the differences between the sources, primary or secondary, regarding the number of the Armenians, the reality that the Armenians were a minority was a fact believed by most of the British.

⁹² Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p.53.

⁹³ 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 5 July 1878.

⁹⁴ F.O. 424/106, p.550, No.273, Mr. Goschen to Earl Granville, Therapia, July 6, 1880.

⁹⁵ C. F. Dixon-Johnson, *The Armenians* (Blackburn: Geo Toulmin & Sons, LTD., 1916), part VII.

⁹⁶ Modern historians have come up with estimates for the size of the Armenian population of the Six Vilayets in the early 1880s ranging from around 23% as Roy Douglas recorded to 15% of the total population in eastern Anatolia versus about 80% Muslims including the Kurds according to Sonyel. A number of historians estimate the percentage in the average such as Karpat who contends that they formed about a fifth of the population in eastern Anatolia. Douglas, 'Britain and the Armenian Question 1894-7', p.114; Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p. xiv; Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History*, p.378.

4.3. The Kurds and the Armenian Reforms

The Kurds became more concerned about their situation and future particularly after the declaration of the treaty of Berlin in July 1878. They were dubious about the probable impact of the reforms promised to the Armenians on their interests. They thought that the Great Powers intended to support the Armenians at their expense and were worried that the rising influence of the Great Powers in the Ottoman Empire might lead to more intervention and the occupation of eastern Anatolia later on behalf of local Christians. Therefore, the advent of European consuls including the British consuls intensified the worries of the Kurdish inhabitants about their status in the area. As reported by British diplomats, the appearance of the consuls made the Kurds suspicious of the Armenians and made many Kurdish tribesmen more hostile towards the Christians. Captain Clayton, the British Vice-Consul at Van, who toured Mush and Bitlis provinces in August 1879, reported these developments; the Kurds of one area “defiantly tell those that they maltreat and rob to go and make their complaints to the foreign Consuls”.⁹⁷ Clayton reported that according to two Nestorians from Julamerk who visited him on 12 September 1879, the Kurds were greatly outraged by the arrival of European Consuls at Van, regarding this development with “mixed feelings, partly of resentment and partly of fear because they do not know what it may portend for them”.⁹⁸ According to those Nestorians the Kurds would respond unfavourably if they suspected that the events were taking place in favour of the Christians: “if they see no result ensue, it is to be feared that they will be encouraged in their evil ways”.⁹⁹ Both Nestorians indicted the Kurds for looting and plundering villages. They also informed the Vice-Consul that the Kurds of Julamerk at the time, although very excited, would be unable to join Sheikh Ubaydullah in the event of a rebellion since the area was under the control of the Ottoman military.¹⁰⁰

In the next year, the Kurdish revolt of 1880 broke out under the leadership of Sheikh Ubaydullah. Largely, the revolt was a reaction against the growth of Armenian

⁹⁷ Turkey No. 4 (1880), pp.51-4, Incl. in No.30, Captain Clayton to Major Trotter, Van, Aug 19, 1879.

⁹⁸ Turkey No. 4 (1880), p.79, Incl. 2 in No.49, Captain Clayton to Major Trotter, Van, Sep 13, 1879.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

interests and privileges in the area after the proclamation of Article 61. The proposed Armenian Reforms obsessed Kurdish people and spread anxiety among them because they believed that the application of this article would lead to the superiority of the Armenians over them. British consuls pointed out this feeling clearly. Major Trotter informed the British Ambassador at Constantinople that he personally perceived that there was strong anger among the Kurds as a result of the wide mention of Armenian Autonomy. He reported that Kurdish chieftains alluded to the matter during their conversation in Van in the summer of 1879.¹⁰¹

In addition, from the point of view of the British, Sheikh Ubaydullah had nationalist ideas and his activities exceeded traditional Kurdish tribal limitations. According to many British documents, Ubaydullah attempted to forge an independent and united Kurdish sovereignty.¹⁰² He opposed the Armenian Reforms because he considered that the promised privileges to the Armenians would lead to the creation of Armenian sovereignty and would be a big obstacle to his ambition to establish a Kurdish authority or state. Kurdish notables and chieftains in general had the same feeling towards the Armenian issue. About four months before the start of the revolt, Captain Clayton heard from Toussoun Pasha, the Mutessarrif (Governor) of Van, that Sheikh Ubaydullah expressed his opinions about the Armenian Reforms and said to an Ottoman Officer:

What is this I hear, that the Armenians are going to have an independent state in Van, and that the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves subjects. I will never permit it, even if I have to arm the women.¹⁰³

The sensitivity of the Kurdish issue in relation to the situation of Christians was evident to British politicians. In general, British diplomats had doubts about the Sheikh's future plans concerning the Christians. They thought the dominance of the Kurds could harm the Christians in eastern Anatolia but this did not mean that they

¹⁰¹ Turkey No. 5 (1881), pp.16-17, Incl. in No.22, Major Trotter to Mr. Goschen, Therapia, Oct 20, 1880.

¹⁰² For more details on Ubaydullah's aims and plans see: Turkey No. 5 (1881), pp.44-5, No.61, Mr. Thomson to Earl Granville, Tehran, Oct 31, 1880.

¹⁰³ F.O. 424/107, p.105, Incl. in No.71, Vice-Consul Clayton to Major Trotter, Bashkala, July 11, 1880.

recommended Armenian autonomy. Abbott, the British Consul-General at Tabriz, was suspicious of the Sheikh's purposes and thought that whether he was a tool in the hands of the Ottoman Government or a dissident against the Government, he would not hesitate to decimate the Christians in his path.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Clayton reported that the Sheikh and possibly other Kurds would be hostile to any advantages that might be granted to the Armenians or Nestorians and he believed that autonomy or representative government was the wrong choice in eastern Anatolia at that time.¹⁰⁵

British policy toward this movement is noteworthy here. British strategy opposed the Kurdish revolt for two main reasons. The revolt was inconsistent with British policy towards the region as a whole and British policy regarding the Armenian question. On the one hand, because Sheikh Ubaydullah aimed at establishing a Kurdish authority in border areas in the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the revolt would have threatened the integrity of both states, which was not supported by Britain at the time. On the other hand, the revolt opposed the application of Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin and its obligations towards the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, which was an important part of the British agenda. Therefore, the British Government endeavoured to bring the views of both the Ottoman and Persian governments together to put an end to the Kurdish revolt.¹⁰⁶

4.4. Britain and obstacles in front of the application of the reforms

It is important to note that there were a number of difficulties that dampened the keenness of British officials for pursuing the application of reforms "in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians" stipulated in Article 61. The low proportion of Armenians in the population made the application of the reforms promised to the Armenians difficult. As the majority of the population in eastern Anatolia were Muslims, they would oppose any advantage awarded to the Armenian minority at their expense. The fact that the Armenians were a minority is one reason why the British Government was not able to pursue the issue of the reforms eagerly or press the Ottoman Government

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.126, No.82, Consul-General Abbott to Earl Granville, Tabriz, July 31, 1880.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.105, Incl. in No.71, Vice-Consul Clayton to Major Trotter, Bashkala, July 11, 1880.

¹⁰⁶ More details on British diplomacy in this regard can be found in F.O. 424/107, pp.245-46, No.142, Mr. Thomson to Earl Granville, Tehran, Oct 11, 1880.

strongly to carry them out, especially given the complex situation of the region politically and economically.

The second obstacle was that the Ottoman Government was not serious about carrying out the reform programmes and used the resentment of the Kurds towards the reforms in order to deflect expected pressure from the Great Powers regarding the Armenian cause. Jwaideh has pointed out that the Turks were responsible for disseminating rumours among the Kurds and provoking Kurdish resistance to the reforms for their own purposes.¹⁰⁷ According to a British consular report in 1880, an influential Turkish newspaper stated in one of its articles that the Kurds were much more deserving of support than the Armenians.¹⁰⁸ Such statements suggest that the Ottoman Government was trying to exploit the Kurds' swelling disapproval of the Armenian Reforms for its own political interests. This issue was discussed by several British observers such as Athelstan Riley.¹⁰⁹ He accused the Porte, who was trying unsuccessfully to deceive the British Embassy in Constantinople about the events in eastern Anatolia, of shutting its eyes to the grievances of all its Christian subjects. Ottoman diplomacy, he argued, tried to confront the application of Article 61 by inciting the Kurds against the Armenians, by raising a "Kurdish question" versus the "Armenian question" on the pretext that the Kurds were the majority.¹¹⁰ The opposition of the Kurds and the Ottoman Government to the Armenian Reforms can be understood better when it is remembered that the reforms would have impacted the position of many Kurdish chieftains. Through the application of the reforms, British diplomats in Constantinople and sometimes the consuls in eastern Anatolia, pushed the Ottoman authorities to subdue these Kurdish chieftains. Sometimes British officials demanded the Porte should exile Kurdish aghas who were believed to be obstacles to the operation of the reform commissions sent to the area. However, the Porte certainly was not

¹⁰⁷ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p.83.

¹⁰⁸ F.O. 424/107, p.56, No.38, Mr. Goschen to Earl of Granville, *Therapia*, Aug 3, 1880.

¹⁰⁹ Athelstan Riley (1858-1945) was an English Anglican clergyman. He travelled in Persia and Anatolia and championed the Christians of the Ottoman East. At the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury, he undertook a journey in 1884 to North-Western Persia and Kurdistan to find out about the condition of the Assyrian or Nestorian Christians. Michael Yelton, *Outposts of the Faith: Anglo-Catholicism in Some Rural Parishes* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009), p.55.

¹¹⁰ Athelstan Riley, 'Christians and Kurds in Eastern Turkey', *The Contemporary Review*, 56, (Sep 1889), p.465.

willing to agree because it would disrupt the balance of power in the area between Kurdish and urban notables and also, if implemented widely, could have aroused insurgency among the Kurds. In addition, it would alienate the Kurds from the Sultan who had already made plans to benefit from them for political support and defence.¹¹¹ In general, the Ottoman Government had no wish to alienate any of the Muslim community in an area where the Christians were strongly suspected of collaborating with the European Powers.

As pointed out earlier, Russia was not in favour of the application of the reforms or an independent Armenia in eastern Anatolia either, because it could encourage the Armenians in “eastern Armenia” in the Caucasus to seek independence from Russia in the future. Instead, as was reported by British diplomats in 1879 and 1880, Russia through her diplomats and spies endeavoured to incite the Armenians, Kurds and others in the eastern Anatolia to work with Russia and oppose the authority of the Porte.¹¹² Russia mostly wanted to take advantage of the uneasy situation of the region that had ensued from the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, because any unrest there could only boost Russian plans to annex the region to its sovereignty.¹¹³ The attitude of Russia towards the Armenian question was articulated clearly in *The Armenian Question Its Meaning to Great Britain* by the British Captain C. F. Dixon-Johnson who argued that Russia had opposed the application of the reforms from the beginning. He argued that Russia, through her agents, encouraged the migration of Armenians into Adana and Trebizond to secure the situation in the case of occupation of the most important harbours on the Black and Mediterranean Seas.¹¹⁴ According to him, Russia objected to the proposed reforms for four reasons. The reforms would increase the influence of Britain in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, a situation that would undermine Russian ability to send her provocateurs to stir up troubles in the region. The country would be in better contact with the Western Press and the British diplomats on

¹¹¹ Stephen Duguid, ‘The Politics of Unity: Hamidian Policy in Eastern Anatolia’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 9, No.2 (May, 1973), p.144.

¹¹² F.O. 424/86, p.231-32, No.310, Sir A. H. Layard to the Marquis of Salisbury, Therapia, Aug 8, 1879; F.O. 424/106, p.269-70, No.138, Captain Everett to Major Trotter, Erzurum, Mar 12, 1880.

¹¹³ Justin McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2001), p.70.

¹¹⁴ C. F. Dixon-Johnson, *The Armenian Question its Meaning to Great Britain* (Leeds: Nutt & Co, 1914), p.1.

the site would freely report the true facts. The reforms could strengthen the Ottoman Empire and make the provinces prosperous and contented. Finally, the excuse for her intervention would cease.¹¹⁵ As for the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians, Dixon-Johnson argued that until 1877-78 that relationship was generally friendly. However, Russian policy led to a distance opening between the two sides. Russian Consuls and agents, especially until the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, actively disseminated propaganda among the Ottoman Armenians, inculcating the belief in a future Armenian kingdom under Russian patronage. This policy incensed the Kurds and made them more suspicious.¹¹⁶

The effects of party differences in Britain can also be added to the reasons that lessened the enthusiasm of British officials for following up the issue of reforms. The Armenian question was a matter of debate between the Liberal and Conservative Parties on many occasions. Liberals and Conservatives were not only in disagreement regarding some aspects and details of implementing policy towards the Armenian question, but also about some clauses of the conventions that had been signed in 1878 and that were considered the basis for British policy. After the Congress of Berlin, the British Parliament discussed the Armenian question including the position of the Kurds many times. Both parties criticised each other and discussed the policy that Britain should adopt. For instance, during a sitting of the House of Commons just a few days after the conclusion of the Congress of Berlin, Viscount Sandon the President of the Board of Trade (1878-1880) defended the approach of the Conservative Government to the Eastern question. He also criticized the opinions of Lord Hartington the leader of the Liberal Party (1875-80), Gladstone and some other Liberal MPs who “show no intention” to offer some realistic alternative policy to the Conservative policy.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, Gladstone criticised the decisions of the Congress of Berlin regarding Armenia and the Anglo-Turkish Convention (the Cyprus Convention) which he was convinced would be to “the astonishment-it may possibly be the calamity-of our children and of our children's children”.¹¹⁸ He claimed that the clauses of both treaties

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.3-4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.6.

¹¹⁷ Viscount Sandon, 30 July 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 242, cols.645-48.

¹¹⁸ Mr, Gladstone, 30 July 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 242, col.696.

about Armenia conflicted with each other stating that the Conservative Party provided “so far as Armenia is concerned, an alternative and a conflicting policy”.¹¹⁹ The Liberal politicians did not lose opportunities to criticise the Conservative Party. In June 1879, in the House of Lords, several Liberal figures strongly criticised many aspects of the Anglo-Turkish Convention and Article 61. The second Earl of Granville (1815–1891) believed that the Conservative Government overlooked important facts in asking the Ottoman Empire to apply reforms especially her lack of money.¹²⁰ The third Earl of Morley’s criticism was stronger when he criticised Salisbury as the mastermind of the Anglo-Turkish Convention and Article 61. He argued that through that Convention, the Conservative Party had placed a responsibility upon Britain which was impossible to implement, and described Article 61 as unclear and the whole arrangement of the Conservative Government for the reforms as “no better than a sheet of waste paper”.¹²¹ Discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of both Treaty and Convention were a point of disagreement between both parties many times especially given that the proposed reforms in the areas inhabited by the Armenians were not executed.

In his campaign for the General Election of 1880, Gladstone accused the “oppressive government of the Turk” of being a cruel regime based upon oppression but “not resting upon superior civilization, not upon superior knowledge”.¹²² He criticised the colonial policy of the Conservative Government and its position on the Armenian question and the application of the provisions of the Congress of Berlin 1878. He also denounced the Conservative agreement with the Porte (the Cyprus Convention) of 1878 that would have put heavy burdens and undesirable obligations upon Britain.¹²³ He believed that British foreign policy should be based on “right principles”, especially preserving peace between the nations of the world and maintaining the concert of Europe by coordinated actions to keep the European Powers in union together.¹²⁴ He promised the electorate that in cooperation with the European Powers the Liberal Party

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, col.699.

¹²⁰ Earl Granville, 27 June 1879, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 247, cols.829-30.

¹²¹ The Earl of Morley, 27 June 1879, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 247, cols.827-29.

¹²² W. E. Gladstone, *Midlothian Speeches 1879* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1971), p.92.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.119 and pp.125-26.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.114-15.

would pursue strict policy to force the Ottoman Government to apply the articles of the Congress of Berlin.¹²⁵

The Liberals came to power in 1880. The Liberals were more sympathetic toward the Armenians as will be explained in the following chapters, but they also confronted the same difficulties in pushing the Armenian Reforms forward. When the Liberals were in power (1880-85), Britain was the only Power which was serious regarding the application of the reforms in eastern Anatolia. International relations and British involvement in other affairs overseas also limited Britain's ability and choices regarding the application of the reforms. In the early 1880s, Bismarck refused a request from Prime Minister Gladstone to join Britain in putting more pressure on the Sultan and in raising the question of the implementation of the Armenian Reforms internationally again.¹²⁶ The emergence of the Egyptian question in 1882 further distracted the British from Armenia. Thereafter the Liberal Government softened its pressure on the Porte to apply Article 61 in order to ensure that Germany and the Ottoman Empire would not oppose a British presence in Egypt.¹²⁷ The Liberal Government gave priority to the Irish matter and the Egyptian question, which were of greater public interest than the Armenian problem. Joan George states that in spite of his anti-Ottoman regime tirades during the five years of his premiership, Gladstone made no real attempt to use the disliked Cyprus Convention in the interests of the "subject population" he claimed as his "friends".¹²⁸ In effect, the policy of the Liberal Government was not much different from that of its predecessor with regard to the Armenian question. Even some British observers at the time such as Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, the British writer and poet, argued that the Liberal policy towards the Eastern question did not differ from that of the Conservative Government, either in 1880 when Gladstone returned to power or later. He added that "Mr Gladstone in office became undistinguishable in his treatment of the Eastern Question from Lord Beaconsfield".¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid., pp.50-53.

¹²⁶ Walker, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation*, p.124.

¹²⁷ D. C. Weeks, 'The Armenian question and British policy in Turkey 1894-96', M.A. dissertation (University of London, 1950), p.58.

¹²⁸ George, *Merchants in Exile*, p.38.

¹²⁹ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, 'Turkish Misgovernment', *The Nineteenth Century*, 40, Issue 237 (Nov 1896), p.840.

Therefore, because of issues detailed above, Britain was not in a situation to achieve much in favour of the Armenians. The Armenian question remained unsolved and the relationship between the parties in eastern Anatolia became increasingly tense during the coming years as we shall see through the following chapters.

5. Conclusion

British interests towards the area increased after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War 1877-78 and the occupation of considerable parts of eastern Anatolia by Russia which posed a threat to British interests in the Ottoman Empire. Following its emergence in 1878, the Armenian question became a matter of great interest to British politicians. Therefore, the British paid greater attention to the condition of eastern Anatolia and focused on the interrelationships between the Kurds and Armenians.

The Armenian question, which became a part of the Eastern question following the Congress of Berlin, turned into an important element in British policy in the east. This fact led the British to follow the Armenian cause closely. British attention on the region was mainly to secure British interests in that area in the context of the competition between the Great Powers, especially Russia, over the property of the “sick man” of which Britain's acquisition of the island of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 was a clear example. Through its energetic foreign policy, Britain was successful in preventing Russia from taking over eastern Anatolia and keeping the region and its inhabitants under her hegemony.

Britain did not favour political changes in eastern Anatolia at this time. British policymakers judged that the population in eastern Anatolia was not advanced enough to assume autonomy. Therefore, they considered that the introduction of self-government would lead to more disorder in the region and would harm British interests. They strongly believed that the foundation of a semi-independent authority for the Armenians would separate them from the Ottoman Empire and sooner or later they would become a dependency of Russia. This was the reason why British policy focused on the application of the reforms in the area through coordination with the Ottoman Government rather than supporting the Armenians' pursuit of autonomy. In other

words, Britain wanted to address the Armenian cause within the framework of Ottoman sovereignty and not as an independent issue.

British diplomatic reports show how the Armenian Reforms affected relations between the Kurds and Armenians who were struggling to obtain more rights and gains at the expense of each other. They demonstrate that the Armenian Reforms increased Kurdish anxiety and caused misunderstanding, rivalry and disputes between both peoples in the late Ottoman period. Therefore, the Armenian Reforms directly provoked the outbreak of the Kurdish revolt of 1880.

The chapter has also shown that the pro-Armenian activities in Britain clearly emerged alongside the Armenian question in 1878. They were prompted by a number of famous politicians such as James Bryce and the Earl of Carnarvon and supported by Armenian residents especially in London and Manchester. The pro-Armenians brought the Armenia question in front of official platforms such as Parliament, where the Armenians were depicted as victims and the Kurds as offender.

Chapter two: British representations of the affairs of the Kurdish Beys 1886-92

Introduction

From the mid-1880s onwards, the Kurdish Beys and their behaviour towards the Armenians attracted the close attention of British observers who believed that they could affect the situation and fate of the Christians in eastern Anatolia negatively. The prominence of the Kurdish Beys dated back to the period after the Ottoman Government eliminated the semi-independent Kurdish Emirates in the mid-nineteenth century. This development created disorder throughout Ottoman Kurdistan in which the control of large proportions of the territories of the former Kurdish principalities transferred to numerous Kurdish Beys. Consequently, these trivial chieftains who had been held in check by powerful princes, were able to assert their influence in their local areas.¹

The 1880s was a crucial period in the Kurdish and Armenian relationship due to the different perspectives of the Armenians and Kurds towards the Armenian Reforms and the nature of the relationship of each side with the Ottoman Empire. On the one hand, the Armenians were disappointed that the anticipated Armenian Reforms were being vehemently opposed to by the Ottoman Government. On the other hand, the Kurds believed that they should align themselves with the Ottoman authorities against the Armenians who were supposedly supported by the Great Powers. As a result, relations between Kurds and Armenians were increasingly aggravated and, as Clifford Lloyd, the British Consul at Erzurum reported, the relation between both peoples had become more unfriendly in 1890 than ever before. That year's record of troubles between both sides was exceptionally large.² This increasing tension came especially after the emergence of Armenian revolutionary parties³ that strongly affected the course

¹ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p.75.

² Turkey No. 1 (1890-91), p.80, Incl. 2 in No.190, Consul Lloyd to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Oct 2, 1890.

³ The Armenian political parties emerged after the disappointment of the Armenians over the application of reforms stipulated by Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin. Therefore, from the mid-1880s they started forming political parties practising militant struggle. The main influential Armenian revolutionary parties

of the Armenian question and enlarged the gap between the Armenians and Kurds in upcoming years.

1. The historiography and the argument of this chapter

There is very little literature concerning the Kurdish Beys, and there is no study on the Kurdish Beys from the perspective of British political history. Pro-Armenian writers typically tend to cover this subject to substantiate it as a proof against the Ottoman policy regarding the Armenian question. They argue that Sultan Abdulhamid assisted the Kurdish chieftains and utilised them as an effective tool against Armenian revolutionary actions. For instance, Arman Kirakossian gives some information regarding the violent actions of the notorious Kurdish Bey Mousa Bey and the British mission which followed his trial in Constantinople in late 1889.⁴ On the other side, a number of pro-Turkish authors, such as Esat Uras, who assigned most of his huge book *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* to condemning “Armenian Terrorism”, alluded to the case of Mousa Bey very briefly.⁵ The main reason for that was perhaps because much of the literature published in Turkey that included information on the Kurds was written during the last century, when discrimination against the Kurds was at a very high level. In addition, the pro-Turkish authors tend to avoid mentioning the Kurdish Beys as they can be seen as a sign of misrule by the Ottoman Government in the region.

The image of the Kurds in the West has still not been analysed in depth. Some information can be found about the image of Muslims in the West in the nineteenth century. Typically, pro-Turkish authors tend to cover this subject due to the fact that they want to criticise unsupportive western attitudes towards the Muslims and the Ottoman Empire. However, this information is very general and chiefly concerns westerners’ understanding of the Ottoman Empire and Muslims in general rather than the Kurds specifically. Justin and Carolyn McCarthy give some information about how

during the period of the study were three parties founded successively; Armenakan in 1885, Hunchak in 1887 and Dashnak in 1890.

⁴ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.155-56.

⁵ Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question* (Istanbul; Documentary Publication, 1988), pp.715-16.

the conflict between the Ottoman authorities and the Armenians was reflected in the West but they focus on the image of Turks and Muslims in the United States of America rather than in Britain and mostly rely on American sources such as the *New York Times*.⁶ They also illuminate links between Armenian nationalists and American missionaries and the American schools in Anatolia and the activities of Armenian revolutionary organizations in the United States. They argue that Armenians in the United States had an influential impact on American public opinion and were the only voice heard in the United States. They believe that the Americans missed the other side of the story of the Armenian question.⁷ However, a comparable study for the Kurds and their status in the West does not exist.

The topic of Kurdish Beys still needs more investigation. British primary sources, particularly consular reports and parliamentary papers, newspapers, and periodicals provide much information about the subject that has not been studied yet. In particular, these provide information such as the names of the Kurdish Beys and their attitudes towards the Armenians. This chapter argues that British official policy opposed the superiority of the Kurdish Beys because they could harm the Armenians and also disturb the stability of eastern Anatolia, which would serve the Russians, who might exploit the situation in the area. The main source of information for the British public concerning “the cause of those poor people” of Armenia was the press that reported extensively on the behaviour of the Kurdish Beys in the late 1880s and early 1890s.⁸ Therefore, it will be argued that the reputation of the Kurds among the British public was affected badly through British newspaper articles about the Kurdish Beys. The image of the Kurds in Britain was formed through the conduct of the Kurdish Beys towards the Armenians more than any other issue. In addition, this study particularly focuses on the conduct of the Kurdish Beys towards the Armenians in the British political context. Therefore, it will analyse the way in which the actions of the Kurdish Beys were discussed between the Liberal Party as opposition and Conservative Party in power between 1886 and 1892. This chapter will review discussions regarding the

⁶ For more details, see Justin McCarthy and Carolyn McCarthy, *Turks and Armenians: A Manual on the Armenian Question* (Washington, D. C.: Assembly of Turkish American Associations, 1989), pp.70-76 and pp.81-85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁸ ‘Cruelties in Armenia’, *The Times*, 14 June 1889.

Kurdish Beys in the periodical press, which was one of the main ways for the politicians and observers to express their points of view on topical issues. This chapter also examines how British sources covered the subject of the Kurdish Beys and argued that there were differences in representation between the different British sources regarding the subject. In particular, it will raise questions regarding the accuracy of British newspapers coverage of the Kurds and Armenians.

This chapter studies British perspectives of the Kurds at the early part of the Armenian crisis. However, to understand what the changes in the British views are, it is important to look at what the established image of the Kurds was before the Armenian question.

2. The image of the Kurds in Britain before the Armenian question

British opinions on the Kurds before the emergence of the Armenian crisis were shaped mostly by travel literature. In the nineteenth century, many British travellers visited eastern Anatolia, and some of them wrote at length about the Kurds. Before 1878, there were just a few British consuls in eastern Anatolia and the British press rarely reported on the Kurds. Therefore, most of the British knowledge about Kurds and Kurdistan at the time came from travellers' accounts. Travellers wrote about many aspects of Kurdish society identifying many vices and virtues of the Kurds. They were also interested in comparing them with the ethnicities surrounding them within the Ottoman Empire and Persia.⁹

A varied picture of the Kurds was shown by British travellers; some aspects were negative while others were positive. Some British observers counted Kurds within the whole oriental people and emphasised their negative features. For example, the Kurds were presented as a cruel ethnicity by a number of British travellers, and some of them exaggerated in describing the sense of violence among the Kurds. George Flower, who had travelled in the 1830s considered that the Kurds were brutal and said their

⁹ For more details about Kurdish society in the view of the British travellers see Qadir Muhammad, 'Kurds and Kurdistan in the View of British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century', PhD thesis (University of Leicester, 2017).

violence could be compared with the Vandals and Goths.¹⁰ James Bailie Fraser believed that they were aggressive, fierce tribes and clans and prone to fighting amongst themselves.¹¹ Furthermore, another negative characteristic which travellers associated with the Kurds was robbery. Robert Mignan was a British officer who visited the region and then wrote about Kurds in the 1830s. He believed that almost all Kurds were robbers. For example, he claimed that the Kurds in the northern part of the Kurdistan, namely those tribes who were situated near the border with Georgia, frequently attacked Georgian villages. In the southern part of the country they robbed merchants who traded with cities, in particular, Baghdad.¹² Bird also recorded that the Kurds robbed Armenians, but she noted that sometimes the latter overstated their hardship.¹³ Similarly, James Bailie Fraser considered that the Kurds in the Hakkary districts favoured robbery and did not give it up unless they were prevented from it.¹⁴

However, some British travellers who visited and wrote about Kurds in the early nineteenth century, presented many positive aspects of the Kurds. Regarding the Kurdish tribes and their form of ruling, they presented them positively. Travellers considered that the Kurds had a primitive form of democracy, which had remained for a long time. According to the travellers, the main person of the tribe was the chief, and he had to be the best one amongst them, therefore when he died, the “whitebeards”¹⁵ tried to choose the best person amongst the Chief’s family for the leadership of the tribe. Claudius James Rich who visited Slemani and some parts of Persian Kurdistan in 1820 believed that when the tribal chief passed away among the Bilbas Kurds and the eldest son of the deceased chief had no charismatic features, the tribal council chose the bravest one in the tribe because the tribe did not want to take a risk by choosing a weak

¹⁰ George Flower, *Three Years in Persia with Traveling Adventures in Koordistan*, Vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), p.18.

¹¹ James Baillie Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia, Including an Account of Parts of Those Countries Hitherto Unvisited by Europeans with Sketches of the Character and Manners of the Koordish and Arab Tribes* Vol. I (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), p.57.

¹² Robert D. Mignan, *Winter Journey Through Russia, the Caucasian Alps and Georgia: Thence Across Mount Zagros by the Pass of Xenophon and the Ten Thousand Greeks, into Koordistaun* (London: Richard Bentley, 1839), p.235.

¹³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, Vol. II, p.330.

¹⁴ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, Vol. I, p.61.

¹⁵ Whitebeards were the distinguished tribesmen who helped the chief in ruling the tribe, and they represented a kind of council (council of elders) and normally held meetings nearly every night in the guesthouse to solve the tribe’s issues. Frederick Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1870), pp.284-86.

person to a such an important position of leadership. He also confirmed that when someone became a tribe's leader formally, no one had the right to dethrone him.¹⁶ He described how, among the Jaf tribe, when the chief passed away and the chief's successor was a child, the whitebeards nominated the brother or uncle of the chief instead.¹⁷ From both points we understand that Rich believed that the position of chief among Kurds was really significant, and the person who led a tribe as a socio-politic entity had to demonstrate their capacity for leadership. In addition, in the matter of ruling the tribe, Frederick Millingen considered that the role of chief was very significant but for making any decision which related to the tribe's interests, he needed the agreement of the white-bearded council who had a vital role in ruling the tribe.¹⁸

As Kurds were seen as a primitive ethnicity, they were also presented as a hospitable people particularly in the earlier nineteenth century. Through reading travelogues many kinds of hospitality were found such as offering the best kinds of food and offering to travellers to stay and obliging visitors to taste their food. Claudius James Rich, who was one of the Britons that came to the region and remained for around six months, considered that Kurds were the most hospitable people in the region. He described the Kurds as very kind people, who had "unbound hospitality".¹⁹ In addition, Fraser, who visited most parts of the country, in his account narrated a nice story about the Kurds' hospitality. He said that when he visited Soujbulack and wanted to stay at Caravansarai (a place like a modern hotel), the Darogha (the local administrator) obliged them to stay at his house, and received them warmly.²⁰ J. G. Taylor had the same story with the Kurds in the Mesopotamia, he was prevented from leaving unless he tried their tasty foods like Pilaw, a famous Kurdish dish.²¹

Furthermore, some other positive features were highlighted by British travellers. Rich was one of those who praised the Kurds over other ethnicities in the region. He

¹⁶ Claudius James Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*, Vol. 1 (London: James Duncan, 1836), p.152.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.112.

¹⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, pp.284-5.

¹⁹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, Vol.1, p.67.

²⁰ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, Vol. I, pp.105-6.

²¹ J. G. Taylor, 'Journal of a Tour in Armenia, Kurdistan, and upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deysim Dag, in 1866', *Journal of Royal Geographical Society of London*, 38 (1868), p.309.

considered that Turks did not love their families like the Kurds. In this regard, he recounted how Divan Effendi, one of the Turkish officers in Baghdad went directly to his office after the funeral of his one-year old son. However, a Kurdish prince named Mahmud Pasha of Baban had a different attitude to Divan Effendi because he became very sad when his child passed away. Rich narrated that Mahmud Pasha told him that “I loved that poor child better than Jacob loved Joseph”.²² Therefore, Rich considered that Kurds were more devoted to their children and families and that their love for their families was like that of Europeans.²³

British travellers portrayed a very positive picture of Kurdish women. They noted that the level of freedom among the Kurds was much higher than the freedom among the women in Persia and the Ottoman Empire. They particularly approved of the fact that Kurdish women did not cover their faces like the Arabs, Turks and Persians. They even considered that Kurdish women could rule their community, and some of them became the leaders of their tribes, which was not seen in the east except amongst the Kurds.²⁴

In general, the relationship between Kurds and Christians before the emergence of the Armenian crisis was neutral if not friendly. As James Shiel recorded in 1838, the relations between the Kurds and Armenians was friendly.²⁵ Except during the campaign of Bedr Khan Pasha of Botan against the Nestorian Christians, there is no record of conflict and hostility between Kurds and Christians. Bedr Khan Pasha treated the Nestorian Christians badly in the 1840s. He was accused of killing numerous Christians in eastern Anatolia. That conduct stimulated the Western Powers especially Britain and France to press the Ottoman Government to put an end to the authority of Bedr Khan Pasha at a time when the Ottoman Empire was trying to bring down the Kurdish Emirates throughout Kurdistan. Therefore, the Ottoman Army invaded the Botan Emirate and ended his rule in 1847.²⁶ The conduct of Bedr Khan Pasha made British

²² Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, Vol. 1, p. 303-7

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Muhammad, 'Kurds and Kurdistan in the View of British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century', pp.176-203.

²⁵ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabríz, Through Kurdistan', p.57.

²⁶ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp.179-80; Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', pp.113-5.

observers more critical of the Kurds and Ottoman rule. In 1852 George Percy Badger, the English Anglican priest and delegate of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Christians of the Nestorian Church in Kurdistan and Mesopotamia, accused Bedr Khan of carrying “an innate hatred of Christianity”.²⁷ He labelled him as “a brute” ... “this monster”, tyrant and oppressor of Christians.²⁸

The British views of the Kurds briefly mentioned above were what British people knew about the Kurds before the Armenian crisis. The British depiction was relatively neutral, sometimes negative and sometimes positive, but gradually the Kurdish characteristics were viewed more negatively in the British consular reports and popular representation. In other words, a key change in the British perspectives on the Kurds emerged in the late nineteenth century. British travellers in this period tended to show more negative views on the Kurds. Their derogatory perspectives were generally linked to theories of race and civilisation, which portrayed the Kurds as inferior Oriental people. They believed that the Kurds were a tribal community rather than being a nation. Therefore, their accounts were more critical of the Kurds than those of earlier travellers.²⁹ In the late nineteenth century, British writers, particularly travellers were generally influenced by the industrial development in the West and growth of Social Darwinism, which inspired anthropological theories regarding racial hierarchy. These phenomena spread in the West the idea that European society was intellectually superior over eastern societies. Therefore, these ideas of supremacy influenced British opinions on the Kurds during the period of this research who were already portrayed as backward people. As a result, opinions of the British in the late nineteenth century were more critical of the Kurds than their opinions in the earlier part of the century.³⁰ In addition to these preconceptions in late Victorian Britain, the Armenian crisis, more than any factor, strongly affected the British perspectives on the Kurds in which they were viewed and described as violent people.

²⁷ George Percy Badger, *The Nestorians and Their Rituals*, Vol. I (London: Joseph Masters, 1852), p.266.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.303.

²⁹ Muhammad, 'Kurds and Kurdistan in the View of British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century', p.233.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.237.

The actions of the Kurds in the Armenian crisis was considered negative by the British and decreased sympathy towards the Kurds in Britain. In 1889, an article in *The Saturday Review* discussed how, due to the Armenian crisis, the Kurds lost some of the sympathy which they had earned from their distinguished record in the war of 1877-78 because of their martial efforts against the Russian invasion of eastern Anatolia. It pointed out that the image of the Kurds was negatively affected by the Armenian question.³¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that the Kurdish Beys were represented as violent, pillaging and primitive in British literature during the 1880s as can be seen below.

3. The Kurdish Beys and the politics between 1886 and 1892

The British sources, official and press, widely reported on Kurdish Beys who were accused of pillaging, looting and murdering the Armenians in the late 1880s and early 1890s. The Ottoman authorities, especially after they established the Hamidiye brigades in 1890, were also accused of assisting the Kurds against the Armenians and encouraging the Kurdish Beys to settle and take the Armenian villages in order to undermine the Armenian independence movement. The British sources mainly focused on the case of Mousa Bey from Mush in the Vilayet of Bitlis, who it was claimed, had committed atrocities against the Armenians, particularly in Mush. Beside Sheikh Ubaydullah of Nehri, he was the most reported Kurdish figure in the British sources through the Armenian question. He became a symbol of Kurdish oppression of the Armenians in the British press and official circles in the late 1880s.

The case of Mousa Bey was covered between 1883 and 1894 by *The Times* almost 62 times, by the *Daily News* about 96 times and by the *Manchester Guardian* roughly 38 times. Although the majority of those articles were short, the commonest relating to Mousa Bey's reported his attacks on the Armenians, his trial by the Ottoman courts and the demands of certain British diplomats and the British Embassy in Constantinople for his trial and follow-up his case.³² *The Times* included many reports

³¹ 'Kurds and Armenia', *The Saturday Review*, 67, 1750, 11 May 1889, p.560.

³² For instance, see 'Special morning express; Moussa Bey and the Armenians', *The Manchester Guardian*, 22 Oct 1889; 'The Crimes of Moussa Bey', *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 Sep 1889.

relating to this subject. For instance, on 5 February 1890, it reported on his trial by the Ottoman court in Constantinople in late 1889, the role of the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople in his case and the duties of the Armenian petitioners in the court.³³ Outrages he was supposed to have committed according to British accounts were rape, murder and the plunder of Christians.³⁴ British local newspapers also covered the conducts of the Kurdish Beys. For instance, The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* referred to the Kurds as “often ruffianly brigands”.³⁵

The outrages of Mousa Bey and his trial in Constantinople in late 1889 was one of the most closely documented matters in British diplomatic reports in 1889; the case was reported on more than 43 times between 26 May and 23 December.³⁶ The British Ambassador Sir William White stated that when he met Sultan Abdulhamid II, they discussed the problems created by Mousa Bey’s “dreadful outrages” against Armenians and that the Sultan showed his readiness to provide any required information about the case through his first secretary in order to bring Mousa to justice.³⁷ In a Memorandum from the British Embassy to the Grand Vizier, Mousa Bey was accused of having committed five murders, arsons and robbed and stripped several people, but he and his accomplices had not yet been arrested. According to the Memorandum, after the plaintiffs left for Constantinople to testify in front of the Judge of Instruction, Mousa’s brother and his brother-in-law, who should have been arrested as well, committed crimes of robbery and murder.³⁸ Towards the end of the 1889 and the beginning of 1890 the case of Mousa Bey became a controversial point between Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire as British officials thought the Ottoman authorities were biased towards Mousa and criticised the Ottoman Judicial authorities in the conduct of his trial, as Mousa Bey, was acquitted, but exiled. According to British reports, there had been irregularities in the trial proceedings.³⁹

³³ 'Foreign and Colonial News', *The Times*, 5 Feb 1890.

³⁴ 'The Turkish cruelties in Armenia', *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889.

³⁵ 'Atrocity Hunting', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 27 Aug 1889.

³⁶ F.O. 424/162, Administrative Reforms in the Asiatic provinces of Turkey, 1889.

³⁷ F.O. 424/162, p.28, No.35, Sir W. White to Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, May 20, 1889.

³⁸ F.O. 881/5900, pp.97-98, Incl. 1 in No.93, Memorandum presented to the Grand Vizier, Nov, 1889.

³⁹ F.O. 881/5900, p.97, No. 93, Sir W. White to Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, Nov 21, 1889.

The conduct of the Kurds towards the Armenians was the subject of political debates between the Liberals and Conservatives between 1886 and 1892. The Armenian question was a key issue for the Liberal Party during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In foreign and imperial matters, the Liberals were generally more interested in minority issues in the Ottoman Empire including the Armenian question than the Conservatives. This theme can be seen in British publications when the Liberal Party was the opposition between 1886 and 1892. The *Daily News* lined up plainly with the party politics of the Liberal Party with regard to the Kurdish position in relation to the Armenian cause. In contrast, newspapers like *The Times* and periodicals like *The Saturday Review* supported the Conservative view in the same matter.

The Liberals through the *Daily News* tried to use exaggeratedly sensitive news about the Ottoman regime and the Kurds as propaganda against the Conservative party policy in order to influence public opinion. The *Daily News* accused the Ottoman authorities of supporting the Kurdish Beys in oppressing Christians. It compared the treatment by the Ottoman authorities of the Bulgarians in 1876 to their treatment of the Armenians in 1880s by using the Kurds against them. The *Daily News*, because of its Liberal orientation, was proud of its eagerness to cover the issues of the Armenians and other Christians more than other major British newspapers as it did during the Bulgarian crisis thirteen years before (1876),⁴⁰ when its correspondent J. A. MacGahan reported the Ottoman oppression of the Bulgarians. His account aroused popular discontent against the Ottomans in the West.⁴¹ It criticised the Conservative approach to the Armenian cause as Disraeli, the Prime Minister, years before, had scoffed at the news of horror that was cited in the House of Commons during the Bulgarian problem, and described it as “Coffee house babble”.⁴² It criticised the ruling Conservative Government for adopting “the old, discredited tactics” regarding the Kurds and the Armenian cause, hoping that the Armenians would be protected from the horrors of persecution without the option of war. The *Daily News* also stated that the Tories

⁴⁰ 'Mr. Gladstone and the Armenians', *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889.

⁴¹ T. P. O'Connor, 'Mr. J. A. MacGahan', *The Athenaeum*, Issue 2642, 15 Jun 1878, p.764. According to this magazine, the Bulgarians had to show a great appreciation to MacGahan, who almost as much as the Czar, was their liberator. *The Athenaeum* believed that it was MacGahan's reports that brought the Eastern question to a crisis.

⁴² 'Mr. Gladstone and the Armenians', *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889.

derided “our telegrams” from Tiflis about the Kurdish oppression of the Christians in the same way as they had ignored the reports of the atrocities in the Bulgarian crisis.⁴³

The attitudes of the Kurds particularly the Kurdish Beys towards the Christians were the subject of parliamentary debate between the Liberals and Conservatives between 1889 and 1890. The *Daily News* disapproved of a statement in Parliament that described the Nestorians as a “turbulent” denomination, anxious to dispute with the Kurds, who were armed by the Sultan so that they might pillage them with impunity. The *Daily News* blamed the Conservative cabinet (1886-92) for being indifferent towards the Ottoman Christians. It added that although Sir William White, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, protested regarding the Christian suffering, he was not allowed to take effective steps and his remonstrance was not listened to or read.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Clifford Lloyd, the Consul at Erzurum, dismissed the claim that had been expressed in the House of Commons that the British Government was unable to exert pressure at Constantinople with respect to Armenian suffering. He was responding to Liberal criticisms in Parliament of the policy of the Conservative government regarding the Armenian question.⁴⁵ In trying to refute the parliamentary criticisms of the approach of Salisbury’s Government to the matter, Lloyd acknowledged the support extended to him by the British Ambassador at Constantinople⁴⁶ who highly esteemed Lloyd’s efforts to boost the Armenian cause.⁴⁷

Gladstone personally raised the matter of the Kurdish Beys many times. It seems that he used Kurdish behaviour as a political agenda to influence public opinion. In August 1889, in a letter to the editor of the *Daily News*, he hoped that the Conservative Government would seriously investigate the reports about the misdeeds of the Kurdish Beys, and would avail itself of “the powerful aid of public opinion in the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Details of the trial of Mousa Bey in Constantinople and proceedings against him were recorded in Turkey No. 1 (1890) and Turkey No. 1 (1890-91) which were presented to Parliament in 1890 and 1891.

⁴⁶ Turkey No. 1 (1890-91), p.82, Incl. 2 in No.190, Consul Lloyd to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Oct 2, 1890.

⁴⁷ Rigg, J. M. "Lloyd, Charles Dalton Clifford (1844–1891), magistrate and diplomatist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-16824>.

cause of humanity and justice”.⁴⁸ Gladstone argued that the Government ought to draw the attention of the Ottoman Government to the fact that under the Cyprus Convention of 1878, Britain had the right to demand that the sultan put an end to the outrages of the Kurdish Beys and punish them and to demand the reform of the abuses in ruling of “Armenia”.⁴⁹ The *Daily News* reported that Mr. Gladstone, in “his generous tribute to the services of this journal”, had supplied them with a noteworthy letter about “Mousa Bey and his accomplices in Armenia”.⁵⁰ The record of Mousa Bey’s wrongdoings, according to the *Daily News*, was painful to read, but for the sake of humanity and in the hope of eventually overturning “the foulest tyranny on earth”, it argued that his disgraceful behaviour should be made known to the public.⁵¹

At this point it should be remembered that British public perspectives were mainly built on news and articles in newspapers and periodicals. The official sources, particularly the consular reports, were mostly out of reach for citizens, especially if we take into account that the British Government banned the circulation of consular reports concerning the Armenian question in 1889.⁵² In addition and as pointed out in the introduction, Blue books that included British diplomatic correspondence were very little read in Britain. The British press therefore was far more important in influencing public opinion regarding the Kurdish position in the Armenian question than the diplomatic reports. As Aled Jones contends, British newspapers not only grew in numbers and circulation in the nineteenth century but also, became ‘embedded in the culture’ and journalism actively aided in forming ideas among the public (readers) in England in that period.⁵³

⁴⁸ ‘The Turkish cruelties in Armenia’, *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889; ‘Mr. Gladstone, writing on Sunday last from Hawarden to the’, *The Spectator*, No.3192, 31 Aug 1889, p.259.

⁴⁹ ‘The Turkish cruelties in Armenia’, *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889; ‘Mr. Gladstone’s letter on Armenia’, *The Spectator*, No.3192, 31 Aug 1889, p.264.

⁵⁰ ‘Mr. Gladstone and the Armenians’, *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² In a number of sources, “Consular reports relating to Armenian affairs have been withheld from Parliament since the year 1889”. ‘The Armenian Christians’, *The Standard*, 18 Dec 1894; ‘London, Tuesday, December 18’, *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894. However, according to Malcolm MacColl the ban is dated back to 1892. Malcolm MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia* (London: Longmans, 1895), p.26.

⁵³ Aled Jones, *Powers of the Press Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), p. xi.

Conservative writers generally had different opinions regarding the Kurdish and Armenian discord in some respects. The Conservatives mostly expressed more moderate opinions about the Kurds. Unlike most Liberal politicians, this group of writers, alongside the Kurds, blamed the Armenians for their problems, especially Armenian revolutionaries. They studied the Kurdish position in the Armenian cause on a wider scale, paying more attention to both internal and external dimensions of the subject. One of the most prominent and active figures in this regard was Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, the Conservative politician who was the MP for Eye, Suffolk (1880-85) and then for the Ecclesall division of Sheffield (1885-1902).⁵⁴ He accused the Armenian Revolutionary Committees of inventing misleading stories regarding Armenian suffering and spreading them over Europe. He also criticised Gladstone's "disgraceful attack" on the Ottoman Empire over the Armenian issue.⁵⁵ Among other British politicians and officers who had the same opinions were Mark Sykes who criticised the Armenians, especially their revolutionaries, and Captain C. F. Dixon-Johnson.⁵⁶

The pro-Conservative press differed from the views of the Liberal Party and its coverage of Kurdish and Armenian relations. *The Saturday Review* pointed out that criticism of the Kurds was a matter of party interest for a number of British politicians and there were political aims behind the exaggerations in some accounts about Kurdish "atrocities". It questioned the authenticity of some of the stories regarding Kurdish outrages against the Christians and was highly critical of the Liberal approach towards the Ottoman Empire,⁵⁷ arguing that a number of Liberals were scattering "appalling" stories of the Kurds, as part of the "old game of political encroachment" to deceive the British public for the sake of political aims.⁵⁸ The atrocity card, it was claimed, was being used against the Kurds in the same way that it had been used during the Bulgarian

⁵⁴ Anderson, J. P. "Bartlett, Sir Ellis Ashmead (1849–1902), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-30627>.

⁵⁵ Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation, Its Genesis, Method, Truth and Consequences* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1895), p.2 and pp.7-8.

⁵⁶ Dixon-Johnson, *The Armenians*, part V.

⁵⁷ 'Kurds and Armenia', *The Saturday Review*, 67, 1750, 11 May 1889, p.560.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

crisis in 1876.⁵⁹ As Salisbury's daughter, Lady Gwendolen Cecil,⁶⁰ pointed out, during the Bulgarian agitation the Liberal press greatly exaggerated Gladstone's accounts about the Bulgarian atrocities. She referred to the example of how the report of the secretary of the British Embassy at Constantinople, who was sent to Bulgaria to enquire about the Bulgarian atrocities, made public in August 1876, did not support the report published in the *Daily News* account in many details and that it directly mentioned the provocation that the Turks had received before the outbreak of the events.⁶¹

Lord Salisbury's Government, according to *The Spectator*, the weekly British Conservative magazine, was successful in its policy toward the Armenian matter and it had "every confidence" in his aims and his prudence. Salisbury, it argued, had not been naive to believe the Turkish accounts of the Armenian situation. The British Government, it noted, had reprimanded the Porte for its claim that there was a close analogy between the "legends" reported about the Kurdish outrages against the Armenians and the Bulgarian atrocities that occurred previously.⁶² It defended Conservative policy against the Liberals' criticisms on the basis that there were evident differences between the Bulgarian atrocities in 1876 and the Armenian outrages. While Gladstone strongly believed in intervention in the Armenian question, the Conservatives thought that intervention in the affairs of the Ottoman Empire for the sake of the Armenians should be the last option. If the Porte was not able to control "such offenders as the Kurdish robbers", then it would not be reasonable for "democratic England" to repel the intervention of a Great Power in the Armenian issue.⁶³ But rather than blaming the Porte for provoking the wrongdoings, it placed responsibility on the "lawless" Kurdish Beys, whom the Ottoman Government had always found difficulty in controlling.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lady Gwendolen Gascoyne-Cecil (1860–1945), was knowledgeable in history, religion, and politics and her father's confidante. She wrote her father's biography in four volumes. Although inevitably partial, her work *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury* was lucid and highly appreciated by scholars. Cecil, Hugh. "Cecil, Lady Gwendolen Gascoyne- (1860–1945), biographer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-46553>.

⁶¹ Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Life of Robert Marquis of Salisbury*, Vol. II (London: Hodder and Stoughton limited, 1921), pp.82-83.

⁶² 'Mr. Gladstone's letter on Armenia', *The Spectator*, No.3192, 31 Aug 1889, p.264.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.264-65.

The case of the wrongdoings of the Kurdish Beys towards the Armenians in the 1880s was a way for a number of politicians, especially Liberals, to influence the course of British foreign policy. According to *The Saturday Review*, some Liberal politicians exploited Kurdish “notoriety” among the British to influence British policy in abandoning the traditional policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire. Instead of that, they thought Britain needed to establish an alliance with Russia.⁶⁴ The effects of British criticism of the position of the Kurds in the Armenian cause on policy towards the Ottoman Empire that have been identified above, will be addressed in more detail in the final chapter.

4. The accuracy of British sources about the Kurds and Armenians

A number of British observers pointed out the necessity of being accurate in covering news of Kurdish actions against the Armenians. For example, *The Saturday Review* published an article under the title ‘Kurds and Armenians’ on May 1889 demanding more precision in studying the Kurdish and Armenian relationship. The article critiques some of the news coverage and stated that although the hostilities of the Kurds against their Christian and Yazidi neighbours, too often, had some basis of truth, they had been “very much exaggerated”.⁶⁵ The writer stressed that much of the news concerning the Kurdish outrages on the Christians was still “so exceedingly vague”. Many stories were dubious; for example, a bride burnt somewhere, a bride a day or two later immersed in boiling water in another place. The writer suggested that news stories needed to be cross-examined and suggested that the disputes between the Turks and Armenians and their respective efforts to defend their position had a role in spreading these kinds of stories.⁶⁶

Sometimes the reason for inaccuracy in British newspapers materials was owing to the fact that British correspondents obtained information from sources which were not impartial. In general, information from Armenian individuals tended to be biased. According to Hampson, the British acting consul in Erzurum, two Armenians from

⁶⁴ ‘Kurds and Armenia’, *The Saturday Review*, 67, 1750, 11 May 1889, p.560.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.560.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Bayazid, Narsiss a priest and Kaspar a merchant, were arrested on the charge of giving information to an English newspaper correspondent, presumably Mr. C. Fitzgerald, of *The Standard*, at the town of Igdir.⁶⁷ Many British diplomats emphasized the necessity of being accurate and having proofs in reporting on the Armenian matter. The Ambassador Sir Clare Ford believed that the sympathisers with the Armenian matter in eastern Anatolia in England should follow the greatest care in the charges they made against the Ottoman Government. He thought publishing inaccurate news would harm the cause of Armenia. The statement was made after a long inquiry by the British diplomats in the Ottoman Empire regarding an allegation by the Archbishop of Zeitun and the Archbishop of Furnous against the Ottoman authorities.⁶⁸

In general, British newspapers characterized the Kurds, at least the Kurdish Beys, as violent people. Those newspaper articles mostly shaped the image of the Kurds among the British at the time. However, further research and analysis of other British documents, particularly consular reports, highlights the level of exaggeration in a number of British newspaper reports and leads the researcher to criticise many of the allegations regarding the Kurds in British newspapers especially the *Daily News*.

There were serious investigations by a number of British diplomats of the authenticity and accuracy of the information as regards Armenian and Kurdish relations mainly in British newspapers. In his Memorandum about Armenian grievances, Devey, the British Vice-Consul at Van, complained about the deceptive views in a number of British newspapers, particularly the *Daily News* for including false information on Kurdish-Armenian relations. After a long investigation based on his visit to Bitlis to establish how far the “vague reports” about Mousa Bey’s crimes were true, Devey concluded that some accounts in this regard were unfounded.⁶⁹ He stated that the alleged event reported in the *Daily News* of 20 August 1890 regarding a massacre

⁶⁷ F.O. 424/172, p.5, No.9, acting consul Hampson to Mr. Fane, Erzurum, Jan 16, 1892.

⁶⁸ F.O. 424/172, p.84, No.107, Sir Clare Ford to the Earl of Rosebery, Constantinople, Nov 28, 1892.

⁶⁹ Turkey No. 1 (1890), pp.24-25, Incl. 2 in No.16, George Pollard Devey, Van, Sep 3, 1889. According to a number of British sources especially consular reports, some acts of Mousa Bey such as burning Armenians near Mush were doubtful: F.O. 424/162, p.28, No.32, Sir W. White to Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, May 26, 1889.

against Christians in Mush never happened.⁷⁰ One reason for publishing this kind of false information may have been the role of Armenian publicity in the area. The correspondent was seemingly under the influence of Armenian propaganda as he had met and interviewed a priest who had escaped from Van by crossing the Persian border a few days earlier.⁷¹

Devey argued that *Daily News*' insinuation and statements were generally false and incorrect. The Vice-Consul emphasized that the content of articles about the condition of Kurds and Armenians headed "Anarchy, trouble, or Disturbances in Armenia" constantly published in certain newspapers, particularly the *Daily News* throughout 1890, was more often than not either "wholly without foundation or most grossly distorted". He also assured the British high officials that these kinds of rumours scarcely required serious notice.⁷² To take another example, Devey denied the truth of a statement in the *Daily News* of 10 March 1891. Under the title "The Kurdish Cavalry for Armenia" it claimed that "Mr. Deney [sic] the British Consul in Van"⁷³ was reported to have sent a written protest to the Ottoman Government against the foundation of such an armed corps and stated that Devey had thought it likely that it would push the Armenians to acts of insurrection.⁷⁴ However, according to William White, Devey had not made any verbal or written objection as the *Daily News* alleged.⁷⁵ The *Daily News* took that allegation from Dalziel's news agency. It is not clear whether the misreporting came from the agency or the *Daily News* but in the light of its record, it seems likely to have come from the *Daily News*.

The inaccuracy of the *Daily News*' reports about the Kurds and Armenians was an issue that made many British diplomats, in Constantinople and London, critical of its approach to events in the region. For instance, in his letter to Sir Clare Ford, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Hampson described the figures given on 12 February

⁷⁰ F.O. 424/169, pp.16-18, Incl. 3 in No.17, Vice-Consul Devey to Sir W. White, Van, Jan 12, 1891.

⁷¹ 'The Outrages in Armenia', *Daily News*, 20 Aug 1890.

⁷² F.O. 424/169, pp.16-18, Incl. 3 in No.17; Turkey No. 1, (1892), pp.10-12, Incl. 3 in 10; Vice-Consul Devey to Sir W. White, Van, Jan 12, 1891.

⁷³ The *Daily News* recorded his name incorrectly. The correct name is Devey. In addition, he was the Vice-Consul in Van not Consul as the *Daily News* recorded.

⁷⁴ 'The Kurdish Cavalry for Armenia', *Daily News*, 10 Mar 1891.

⁷⁵ F.O. 424/169, p.25, No.22, Sir W. White to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, Mar 16, 1891.

1892 respecting the number of Armenian prisoners in the areas of Van, Erzurum and Mush awaiting trial on political accusations as “grossly exaggerated”.⁷⁶ A few days later, Hampson reasserted the mistake of the *Daily News* regarding 700 Armenians who were held in prison on political charges. In his report, the Acting Consul gave more detail about the imprisoned Armenians in the respective Vilayets and the circumstance of their detention.⁷⁷ As has been explained, the consular accounts are necessary to assess the British newspapers reports regarding the Kurdish and Armenian relationship.

As explained, the *Daily News* in particular and a number of local newspapers, who usually quoted from it, can be criticised for their inaccurate depiction of the Kurds and the Armenian question. Their accounts can be characterized by weaknesses as below:

First: Exaggeration in narrating the events and publishing sensationalist news and materials without clear evidences at times. For example, in his report to the Earl of Rosebery the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sir Clare Ford denied a rumour in an extract from the *Daily News* of 1 October 1892. It suggested that the Sultan had forwarded an Irade to the Grand Vizier telling him that he proposed to send a Commission to Armenia to inspect and report on conditions in the area. The Ambassador confirmed that no Imperial Irade had been sent to the Porte, nor had anything been laid before the Council of Ministers and described the extract as “entirely without foundation”.⁷⁸

Second: The information they provided about particular events is sometimes confusing and unclear. Compared to the consular reports, the information in British newspapers on the Kurdish-Armenian problem was less specific in terms of the date of the events or the name of the reporters.⁷⁹ This is characteristic of most newspaper reporting at the time. It means that the information provided in the newspapers is less precise; therefore, scrutiny is needed in using the newspapers for studying this subject.

⁷⁶ F.O. 424/172, p.16, No.24, Sir Clare Ford to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, Mar 22, 1892.

⁷⁷ F.O. 424-172, p.21, No.29, Acting Consul Hampson to Sir Clare Ford, Erzurum, Mar 26, 1892.

⁷⁸ F.O. 424/172, p.66, No.88, Sir Clare Ford to the Earl of Rosebery, Constantinople, Oct 11, 1892.

⁷⁹ For example, see 'The Eastern Question', *The Times*, 20 Nov 1895.

Thirdly: British newspapers often relied on Armenian witnesses, who were not usually neutral observers, for information on the Kurdish-Armenian problem. For instance, on 5 December 1894, the *Daily News* and *The Times* accused the Hamidiye of committing atrocities against the Armenians. Both newspapers had taken the news from Reuter's special service in Athens that reported what it cited from twenty Armenian refugees who had arrived in Greece after fleeing from the Sasun incident in 1894.⁸⁰

Fourthly: Many mistakes are made in the names used to refer to the region and places within it. For instance, it is rare to find any name except Armenia in the British newspapers for the disputed area in eastern Anatolia. They considered cities like Mush, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakir and so forth part of Armenia, whereas the area as a whole was mostly populated by the Kurds and other Muslim elements, and the Armenians were a minority.⁸¹

Inaccuracy in publishing and representing was not just related to articles in British newspapers. A number of writers as well published misleading information about the Kurdish position in the Armenian question. It is true that some Kurdish Beys suppressed the Armenians on many occasions in the late 1880s but the reasonable question is how common were such wrongdoings? For instance, the accusation that Kurds had committed outrages against Armenian women was one of the common indictments mentioned by the British pro-Armenian writers. Sometimes they exaggerated their statements in this regard. For example, Canon Malcolm MacColl⁸² firmly believed that it was hard to find an adult Christian woman in "Armenia" who had

⁸⁰ 'The Massacres in Armenia', *Daily News*, 5 Dec 1894; 'The Porte and the Armenians', *The Times*, 5 Dec 1894.

⁸¹ For instance, see 'The Armenian disturbances', *Daily News*, 3 Dec 1890; 'The disorder in Armenia', *Daily News*, 16 Sep 1890.

⁸² MacColl (1831–1907) was a clergyman and rigorous critic of the Ottoman Empire. He had a close and long-term relationship with Gladstone and was an obvious influence on Gladstone's anti-Ottoman attitudes and his hostility to the Kurds. MacColl was supportive of the rights of Christians and his liaisons with Orthodox Christians enabled him to have an important part in the campaign against Ottoman conduct against the Christians of the Balkans which started in 1876. His messages to Gladstone heartened him in his campaign for the Bulgarians and publishing his pamphlet entitled *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* against the Ottoman Empire in that year. Matthew, H. C. G. "MacColl, Malcolm (1831–1907), Church of England clergyman and religious controversialist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34688>.

not been outraged by Kurds or Turks who were doing that daily.⁸³ In his allegation, MacColl claimed that he depended on the information of a special correspondent, who he believed to be from *The Times*, sent out to “Armenia” who had claimed that there was hardly a Christian woman who was not outraged before her marriage. Moreover, he believed that British readers would see nothing was improbable in that claim.⁸⁴ By referring to the reports of consuls who had better knowledge on the events of eastern Anatolia, it is evident that the outrages committed by the Kurds on Christian women were not at that high level that MacColl asserted. The British consuls named the Kurds who were blamed for committing atrocities against the Armenians (chiefly Kurdish chieftains such as Mousa Bey, Hussein agha of Patnoss from Van, Dersimly Kaya and Mustafa Pasha of Miran and others). They also referred to Kurdish clans who harassed and attacked the Armenians such as the Hassananli clan who raided the Armenian village of Piran in Gop area in 1890 and the Shadili tribe who carried off properties from the Armenian village of Haros.⁸⁵ But overall the numbers were far fewer than had been suggested by MacColl.

British consuls on the spot had better sight of what was really happening between the Kurds and Armenians. They criticised the accounts of some politicians and observers in Britain regarding the position of the Kurds. In 1889 for instance, Colonel Herbert Chermiside, the British Consul at Erzurum pointed out that some statements in the House of Commons regarding the situation in eastern Anatolia were based on exaggerated information and that James Bryce’s description of the extensive Kurdish outrage on Bledar was far from being confirmed by facts.⁸⁶ Chermiside, who did not like the seditious intentions of the Armenians, argued that the region was generally quiet but the *Hayastan* (the Armenian journal published in London) and such papers were trying to exploit every lawless act against the Christians, while disregarding those against Muslims.⁸⁷ Despatches from Devey and Boyadjian confirmed Chermiside’s view that

⁸³ MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia*, p. iv.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.56.

⁸⁵ Turkey No. 3, (1896), pp.47-48, Incl. in No.74, Memorandum by Consul Graves to Sir Clare Ford, Erzurum, Oct 8, 1892.

⁸⁶ Turkey No. 1 (1890), p.23, Incl. 1 in No.16, Colonel Chermiside to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Sep 14, 1889.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the situation in eastern Anatolia and the relationship between Kurds and Armenians in the late 1880s were not as bad as described by Armenians in Europe and newspaper correspondents. While Devey stated “The Kurds are quiet as lambs” in many areas, Boyadjian, himself an Armenian, reported that in many of the outrages, the victims were Kurds. According to him, the opinion that the Kurds were solely acted against Armenians and aimed at their extermination was mostly exaggerated.⁸⁸ In addition, the Kurdish Beys were not generally representative of the Kurds because they were tribal chieftains and sometimes oppressed the Kurds as well. For instance, Gevdan Kurds looted Mamkoran and Tayib Agha’s men were in quarrel with each other.⁸⁹ However, the British people generally did not make clear distinction between the Kurds and the Beys.

Another important point regarding the British consular accounts about the Kurds and Armenians is that while they were more accurate than the information found in newspapers and claims of some writers, it does not mean that the statements of all diplomats were above criticism. British diplomatic reports were objective in general but they were not always as straightforward as they may appear given that the consuls had a duty to promote the interests of the British Government, which would influence the way that represented events. Sometimes, consular reports were shaped by expectations and sometimes by government policy to some degree, because essentially diplomats tended to collect information to support its policy. Many of the British diplomats were very successful in their profession such as Devey who analysed the events between the Kurds and Armenians in depth, and had a balanced opinion regarding both peoples, blaming the Kurdish Beys and the Armenian revolutionaries alike. In contrast, a few consuls were evidently biased in favour of the Armenians. For instance, Cecil M. Hallward was known for his exaggerated reports in favour of the Armenians, which will be discussed in detail during the coverage of the events of 1894-96 in chapter four.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.21-23, No.15, Colonel Chermiside to Foreign Office, Erzurum, Sep 12, 1889 and its Incls. No.1 and No.3.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.21, Incl. 1 in No.15, Vice-Consul Devey to Colonel Chermiside, Aug 29, 1889.

5. Conclusion

In the British perspective, the Kurdish Beys had negative impact on the relationship between Muslims and Christians in eastern Anatolia. The publication of numerous reports in the British press respecting the conduct of the Kurdish Beys can be interpreted as a sign of British public concern for the Ottoman Christians and of the significance of eastern Anatolia in the context of British interests. Different British sources, ranging from the Press, diplomats and contemporary writers criticised the Kurds due to the misdeeds of the Beys.

The Kurdish reputation in Britain was greatly shaped by the British reports about the conduct of Kurdish Beys towards the Armenians, because in general, the British people did not draw strict distinctions between the Kurds and the Kurdish Beys. Therefore, Kurdish characteristics were usually seen through the conduct of those Beys. Due to the large number of reports and articles about notorious Kurdish Beys in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the Kurds were generally imagined as wrongdoers and oppressors to the Christians. British perceptions of the Kurds were generally a reflection of their attitudes to the Armenians and their cause. This was natural because the views about the Kurds in Britain at the time were not a separate issue but were mostly shaped by reports of Kurdish behaviour towards Christians. The British sources, largely, covered the Kurds in the margin of the Armenian question. This phenomenon can be traced throughout the history of the Armenian question.

In general, the British, officials and public, simply believed that the Kurds were the main cause of the Armenian hardship. However, this chapter has shown that there were two different views in representing the Kurdish image in the late 1880s: a strong Liberal opinion and a moderate Conservative view. Although both parties directly condemned the Kurds regarding the Armenians, they had different views on certain points, such as the level of responsibility of the Kurds in the Armenian question and the way to solve the Armenian problems. This chapter has shown that the British newspapers widely concentrated on the misdeeds of the Kurdish Beys and Kurdish attacks on the Armenians. However, a number of British observers especially the diplomats in the Ottoman Empire criticised the *Daily News*'s accounts regarding the

Armenian crisis for spreading inaccurate and exaggerated information. In spite of the exaggerations of a number of British newspapers of the wrongdoings of the Kurdish Beys, and the divergent views between the Liberals and Conservatives, there were common perspectives among the British that measures should be applied to restrict the Kurdish Beys who were of the embodiment of the negative reputation of the Kurds in Britain.

Chapter three: British representations of the Hamidiye regiments and their position towards the Armenians from 1890

Introduction

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, the Kurds had a well-established reputation for their horsemanship and their martial skills, and British travellers recognised their potential as cavalry units to defend the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds were presented as a military ethnicity. When Mignan came across the Kurdish tribes during his journey through the Caucasus and Kurdistan he presented them as the ‘military tribes’.¹ The Kurdish tribes were depicted as cavalries which comprised their own armies. Travellers considered that these Kurdish cavalries were well ordered and organised, and their chiefs were in the position of their army leaders. James Shiel, for example, who travelled to Kurdistan in the 1830s, considered that the Shulu, Hamza-Begi, and Haidaranli tribes who settled near Van were the best cavalries.² Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, writing about the Kurds in Persia, described Kurdish tribes such as the Zerza, Mukri, and Blbas as athletic, fine, active, and said they were the most warlike ethnicity in the whole of Persia.³ However, as we can see through this chapter, the perception of what were often regarded as admirable qualities of the Kurds changed and started being constituted negatively in the context of the Armenian question because of the position of the Hamidiye who came to symbolise the Kurds as a violent and martial race. Consequently, the more varied and multifaceted picture of the Kurds in the mid-century disappeared and, in a similar way to the Kurdish Beys, the Hamidiye became a symbol for the Kurds in the British minds.

¹ Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, p.220

² Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz', p.66.

³ Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', *Journal of Royal Geographical Society of London*, 10 (1840), p.17.

1. The historiography, the argument and sources of the chapter:

1.1. The historiography

The Hamidiye light cavalry regiments were an irregular militia established mostly from Kurdish tribes in northern “Kurdistan” by Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1890. The Hamidiye regiments influenced Kurdish society and the history of other peoples in the eastern Anatolia especially the Armenians and the Ottoman Empire as a whole. The role of the Hamidiye brigades in the Armenian question is still controversial, demanding more analysis through comparison of various historical sources. However, there are no comprehensive studies about the Hamidiye and academic articles that address the subject are few.⁴

A number of secondary sources have been used in order to contextualize the position of the Hamidiye in the Armenian question. *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* by Martin Van Bruinessen mostly covers the social structure of Kurdish society and power structuring among different influential groups and families in Kurdistan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This book includes a brief account of the Hamidiye, particularly the role of two main Kurdish leaders of the regiments, Mustafa Pasha of the Miran and Ibrahim Pasha of the Milli. Bruinessen’s writing is useful for understanding the general framework of this force without including substantial knowledge about the relations between the Kurds and Armenians.⁵

David McDowall, in *A Modern History of the Kurds*, studies the Hamidiye regiments briefly as he covers the history of the Kurds during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He points out a few but not all of the reasons for the creation of the Hamidiye and he dates back the authorization of the Hamidiye to 1891 even though it was officially established in 1890. The author studies the effect of the regiments on Kurdish society at the time. He also examines the conflict between the Armenian revolutionary parties and the Ottoman authorities with several indications of Hamidiye

⁴ Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, pp.2-3.

⁵ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, pp.185-89.

attitudes to the Armenians in the mid-1890s.⁶ In contrast, Robert Olson studies the Hamidiye in more detail and his analysis on the subject is deeper than that of McDowall. He mainly stresses the purpose of the foundation of the regiments, the nature of their relationship with the Ottoman Government, their number and their advantages and disadvantages to Kurdish society. He focuses on the Hamidiye in the context of Kurdish nationalism and argues that they were significant in the appearance of the Kurdish national movement between 1891 and 1914.⁷

The most comprehensive work on the Hamidiye is Janet Klein's studies that include many details on the structure of the Hamidiye between 1890 and 1914 and beyond.⁸ Klein uses a wide range of original documents from English, French and Turkish archives in addition to numerous secondary references. Klein mainly studies the purpose of the foundation of the Hamidiye and the incentives given to the Kurdish tribes to participate in the regiments. She points out effects of the Hamidiye on Kurdish society and how the Ottoman state and Kurdish society influenced one another through the Hamidiye. Her work also sheds light on the activities of several famous Hamidiye chieftains and their tribes such as Miran. Although Klein has studied the Hamidiye more widely than any other researcher, the majority of her work focuses on the Kurds rather than on the relations between the Kurds and Armenians. In general, her study focuses on the Hamidiye in the context of Kurdish society and its relationship with the government rather than stressing its position towards the Armenians. Nor does she focus on British views of the Hamidiye and its image in Britain. The significance of this chapter is that although historians have studied the Hamidiye in its general context they have not focused on British attitudes towards it or on the representation of the Hamidiye position in the Armenian question in British sources. In addition, there are many British primary sources particularly the official documents and newspapers that have not yet been covered in this regard.

⁶ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp.59-63.

⁷ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.12.

⁸ Klein, *The Margins of Empire* and 'Power in the Periphery'.

1.2. Outlines and the argument of this chapter

This chapter is essential for understanding British attitudes towards the Kurdish role in the Armenian question in general as the Hamidiye is one of the most controversial points regarding the relation between the Kurds and Armenians. First, the chapter covers several aspects of the Hamidiye regiments. It sheds light on the structure, number and purposes of the foundation of the Hamidiye. These aspects are necessary to give a wider view on the role of the regiments in the Armenian question in the 1890s and later. For these matters, a number of primary sources have been used such as the reports of British consuls who followed the formation of the regiments, in addition to several secondary sources that are needed to understand the general context of the subject.

This chapter discusses British attitudes towards the Hamidiye and how British sources depict the Hamidiye position towards the Armenians. The argument of this chapter can be clarified further through several questions such as: To what extent was the Hamidiye covered by the British sources? Were they unanimous in their description? How did they differ in their coverage? How did the sources cover the circumstance of their foundation and the hurdles which faced the Ottoman authorities in recruiting the Kurds for the regiments? According to the British, did the Hamidiye act only against the Armenians or against Muslims including the Kurds as well? And were criticisms made of the regiments purely because of their actions against the Armenians or were they criticised for their treatment of the Kurds as well?

The chapter argues that the British Government closely followed the Hamidiye from many different angles, especially its impact on the Armenians. The chapter investigates the extent to which the Kurds participated in the Hamidiye and whether all Kurdish tribes were involved in the Hamidiye. It also tries to answer the question as to whether all the Hamidiyan Kurds had harassed the Armenians or not, asking to what extent British observers differentiated between these cases. The chapter argues that, except for a few infrequent favorable attitudes regarding a few leaders of the regiments in the British travel literature, the Hamidiye had a very poor image in Britain. It also argues that, like the Kurdish Beys discussed in the previous chapter, the Hamidiye negatively contributed in the defamation of the Kurds among the British, politicians and

public alike. For the British, the Hamidiye were a symbol of the backwardness of the Kurds and of terror against Christians. It will be shown that the popular view in Britain about the Hamidiye was that the regiments had been formed against the Armenians. That prevailing idea was mainly articulated in British periodicals and newspapers. Some writers did not spare any effort to condemn the Hamidiye such as the journalist Dr Emile J. Dillon, F. S. Stevenson who was an Armenian supporter in the House of Commons and through his writings, and others who were well-known for their supportive attitudes towards the Armenians.

1.3. Sources of this chapter

The research depends on key British primary sources, mainly diplomatic correspondence that provides extensive information, more than other sources, about the Hamidiye. The consular reports are indispensable and include much information on the subject such as British views concerning the foundation of the Hamidiye, their strength and activities in the area, details about their actions towards the Armenians and so forth. It can be argued that the study of Kurdish and Armenian relations in the late Ottoman Empire would be impractical without British consular reports. It is important to note that although some the British consular reports include judgments and interpretations of Kurdish attitudes towards the Armenians, including the issue of the Hamidiye, many of them cover the subject in a narrative style. This is the reason why other sources are needed in order to have a complete picture of the Hamidiye.

Apart from the consular reports, travellers covered the subject to a lesser extent. For instance, H. F. B. Lynch, the traveller, journalist and Liberal MP, travelled in eastern Anatolia in the 1890s and recorded many details about the Hamidiye. Walter B. Harris, traveller and journalist, who visited the region, wrote about the Armenians, Kurds and Turks in the area. His article includes a few hints about the Hamidiye brigades and how the Turks exploited the Kurds to suppress the emerging Armenian movement.⁹ The observations of travellers to the region are essential sources because they provide a more precise evaluation of the Hamidiye than that which is found in

⁹ Harris, 'An Unbiased view of the Armenian Question', pp.483-92.

other sources such as newspapers. At the forefront of travellers is Colonel Sir Mark Sykes, the English traveller, conservative politician and diplomat. Sykes was one of the leading specialists in Kurdish affairs in the late Ottoman Empire and travelled through almost all parts of Ottoman Kurdistan at the start of the twentieth century. Sykes's works, particularly *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire*, are indispensable in understanding Kurdish and Armenian relations in the period of this study. He claimed to quote directly from many characters including Hamidiyan leaders who played a significant role during the problems between the Kurds and Armenians and ordinary people who witnessed the events.

The British press, newspapers and periodicals, covered the matter of the Hamidiye regiments on a lesser scale before 1894. This is because they generally mentioned the Hamidiye in the context of the Armenian question which was in a quiet phase between 1890 and 1894. British newspapers started reporting on the regiments widely during 1894-96 when they accused them of oppressing the Armenians as will be examined further in the next chapter which will be dedicated to study of British perspectives on Kurdish attitudes to the plight of the Armenians in that period.

2. Aims of the foundation of the Hamidiye

Outlining the purposes of the foundation of the Hamidiye is necessary for understanding the role of this force in the Armenian question. Although the exact goal of Abdulhamid II in forming the Hamidiye is not easy to state, it is believed there were several reasons behind the creation of the Hamidiye regiments.¹⁰ Klein argues that there were many goals behind of the foundation of the Hamidiye regiments and there was a “manifold mission” that the Sultan and his officials hoped to achieve through them and she stresses that the varied reasons should be taken into account in this regard.¹¹ Robert Olson believes that the formation of Hamidiye was not only for use against the

¹⁰ Mark Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey through ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (London: Bickers & son, 1904), p.287.

¹¹ Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, pp.5-7.

Armenians but should be studied through the context of the wider objectives of the Sultan's policies.¹²

Several British primary sources suggest that one of the primary purposes of the Hamidiye was to counter any probable Russian threat and counterpoise the Russian Cossack regiments.¹³ This opinion seems plausible if we consider the existence of the Kurds along the frontier of Russia which was a traditional adversary of the Ottoman Empire. A number of historians believe that the Hamidiye were established in response to the possible threat not only of Russia but also of the Great Powers, especially with a view to impeding Great Britain's policy of penetration in eastern Anatolia.¹⁴ As the Great Power most interested in the implementation of the Armenian Reforms it may have been thought that she might intervene. However, the threat of Britain to the unity of the Ottoman Empire seems less likely given that British policy during the nineteenth century was to prevent Russian expansion and invasion of the eastern Ottoman territories.

Confronting the Armenian question was another significant objective in establishing the Hamidiye. The plausibility of this argument can be seen clearly by focusing on the timing of the creation of this force at the start of the 1890s after the foundation of the main Armenian revolutionary parties. The Ottoman authorities thought that the Kurds were the main adjacent people who could be exploited against the Armenian revolutionaries who posed a threat to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire in the east.¹⁵ Klein claims that the government offered freedom to the Hamidiye chiefs to usurp the lands where the Armenian peasants resided and force them to leave with the long-term effect of dispossessing the Armenian population who were considered as "internal enemies" by the Ottoman authorities.¹⁶

The Hamidiye was part of the Ottoman Government's project to control the Kurdish tribes and guarantee their loyalty to the Sultan and the Empire. This project can

¹² Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.7-8.

¹³ F.O. 424/192, p.241, Incl. in No.236, Vice-Consul Maunsell to Sir P. Currie, Sivas, Dec 7, 1897; Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, pp.287-8.

¹⁴ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p.185; Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.8.

¹⁵ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.126.

¹⁶ Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p.5.

be seen as an attempt by the Sultan to secure the allegiance of the Kurdish tribesmen at the expense of emergent Kurdish national loyalty.¹⁷ The majority of the Ottoman Kurds were indignant at the Ottoman policy in Kurdistan and the unfair treatment of the government towards them prior to the establishment of the Hamidiye. This was particularly the case since the mid nineteenth century when the government enforced a centralising policy and ended all local Kurdish authorities, the 'Emirates'. Since that time, an administrative vacuum and political unrest prevailed in the area and many Kurdish notables were in conflict with the official authorities and awaiting opportunities to start rising up against the government as happened between 1878 and the formation of the Hamidiye cavalry in 1890.¹⁸ These uprisings were led by either the influential elites such as the sons of Bedr Khan Pasha of Botan who led the Badrkhani uprising in 1878¹⁹ or sheikhs such as Sheikh Ubaydullah who led the revolt of 1880. Therefore, the Sultan sought to secure the loyalty of the Kurds by recruiting them into military units.

Several researchers believe that the creation of the Hamidiye was an effort by the Ottoman Government to decrease the possibility of cooperation between Muslims and Christians, specifically the Kurds and Armenians. Dividing two peoples in the region would ensure the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire in eastern Anatolia especially after the weakness of the state in the area as a result of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78.²⁰ It has also been argued that Sultan Abdulhamid II instituted the Hamidiye regiments to support his "Pan-Islam" idea, by attaching Sunni Kurds and other Muslim elements that lived in the region to the Sultan and the Caliphate institution, especially in the event of a British-Russian-Armenian Christian alliance.²¹ The Sultan, who was well known for his religious piety, had a pan-Islamic policy for uniting Muslims even outside of his Empire.

¹⁷ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p.268.

¹⁸ Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', pp.115-124.

¹⁹ F.O. 424/77, p.204, No.240, Constantinople, Nov 30, 1878; F.O. 424/79, p.104, No.149, Erzurum, Dec 9, 1878; Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and state*, p.181.

²⁰ Duguid, 'The Politics of Unity', p.151; Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London, 1948), p.66 quoted in Michael G. Lortz, 'Willing to Face Death; A history of Kurdish Military Forces-the Peshmerga- From the Ottoman Empire to Present-Day Iraq', M.A. dissertation (Florida State University, 2005), p.5.

²¹ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p.268.

As has been shown, it can be argued that the Hamidiye was established for many different purposes. In other words, the Hamidiye were simultaneously used against Armenian activities and to impose sovereignty of the Ottoman Government over eastern Anatolia. The Hamidiye assisted the Sultan to gain the loyalty of many Kurdish tribes, and they also influenced the Kurdish social and political structure at the time and later.

3. Structure of the Hamidiye

The Hamidiye regiments were basically formed from the Kurdish tribes, nomadic or semi-nomadic, in northern "Kurdistan" and, to a lesser degree, from other ethnic groups such as the Turkish tribes (Qarapapakh)²² and Arab tribes particularly in the area near the present Turkish-Syrian border.²³ The majority of the regiments consisted of Kurds because they were the dominant Muslim ethnic group in eastern Anatolia, near the frontier with Russia and Iran. In addition, there was a common religious affiliation (Islam) among the Kurds and Turks.²⁴ Kurdish tribes from only particular parts of "Kurdistan" joined the Hamidiye, whereas the majority of them did not participate in this organisation. The Kurds in Persia had no direct connection with the Armenian question. The Hamidiye also did not include any Kurds in that part of Kurdistan which is now called Southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan). It was formed from a number of Sunni Kurdish tribes in northern Kurdistan, especially the areas close to the Russian and Persian frontiers, while in general the Shiite Alevi Kurds and Yezidis did not contribute to this organization.²⁵ In addition, even in northern Kurdistan, many famous Kurdish families such as Nehri who held high religious

²² Ibid., p.185; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p.59; Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p.49.

²³ David Gillard (ed.), *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and papers from the Foreign Office confidential print*, Part 1, Series B, Vol. 17 (University publications of America, 1985), p.229; Ahmed, *Kurdistan fi sanawat Al-Harb Al-Alamiat Al-Aula [Kurdistan in the years of the First World War]*, p.84; Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p.49.

²⁴ Ibid., p.50; Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', p.87.

²⁵ See the Map of Hamidiye Regiments, 1900, in Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p.185, p.50; Majid Mohammed Zakhoei, *Al-Fursan Al-Hamidiya [The Hamidiye Cavalry]* (Duhok: Spirez press and publisher, 2008), pp.97-101; Kemal Borkay, *Kurd w Kurdistan [Kurd and Kurdistan]*, translated from Greek by Ali Fathi (Hawler: Dazgai Wargeran, 2008), p.425.

authority and Bedrkhani, the most famous educated family, rejected the request of the Sultan to join the Hamidiye.²⁶

Opinions differ as to the number of men in the Hamidiye regiments. According to Bruinessen the number of the regiments was 40 in 1892, 56 in 1893 and 63 in 1899.²⁷ While Colonel Herbert Chermiside, who was the British Consul in eastern Anatolia and then the military attaché in Constantinople, reported in late 1894 that the number of the regiments was 64.²⁸ Klein also fixes the eventual number of the regiments at 64 or 65. It seems that the latter number is likely correct as Klein has greater expertise in the subject than Bruinessen. In her statement, she mainly depends on Turkish archives translated from Ottoman Turkish in Ankara in 1995.²⁹ Olson argues that each regiment had to have at least 512 men and not more than 1,152 and on the basis of those figures has calculated that there was a total of between 29,184 and 65,664 Kurds in the Hamidiye. Taking an average of 832 people in each regiment, the total number would have been about 47,000 armed men.³⁰

After the overthrow of the authority of Sultan Abdulhamid II by the Young Turks in 1908, the Hamidiye regiments, the loyal supporters of the Sultan, were disbanded as an organized force. However, because of the need for Kurdish tribal forces as a complement to the regular military, particularly in the harsh terrain of the eastern borders, most units of the Hamidiye were soon reinstated in a form not very different from the past and kept in government service.³¹ These regiments, alongside the regular army, participated in several military actions during the reign of the Young Turks and the First World War. Afterwards, their existence naturally came to an end with the end of the War.

²⁶ Zakhoey, *Al-Fursan Al-Hamidiya [The Hamidiye Cavalry]*, pp.101-103.

²⁷ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and state*, p.186.

²⁸ F.O. 424/178, p.324, Incl. 1 in No.413, Colonel Chermiside to P. Currie, Constantinople, Dec 6, 1894.

²⁹ Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', p.34.

³⁰ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p.9-10.

³¹ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p.189.

4. British representations of the Hamidiye and their attitudes towards the Armenians

4.1. British view on the ability of the Hamidiye as a military organisation

With the appearance of the Hamidiye project, British diplomats in the Ottoman Empire, started to investigate and to send many reports to London about them, which are now the main British sources on the Hamidiye brigades. British officials paid great attention to the Hamidiye cavalry from different angles: their establishment and aims and their role. Sir William White, the British Ambassador, observed that the Sultan's aim in establishing them was to organize the Kurds in a military fashion, introduce greater discipline and create a very efficient and loyal cavalry, "thus strengthening the defence of the border provinces of his Empire against a powerful military neighbour".³² He noted that the Sultan had compared the Hamidiye to the formation of Cossack militia brigades in Russia or even the Highland regiments in Britain after 1745. These comments suggest that he was inclined to believe that the foundation of the Hamidiye brigades might have a positive military function in the future, especially against Russian threats in eastern Anatolia.

But over time, British observers realised that the Hamidiye was not an effective military organisation. British diplomats asserted that the regiments had very little instruction and training and the tribes who participated in the regiments were not organised as real troops and remained within their tribal style. For example, in his report to Ambassador Currie in 1894, Colonel Chermiside recorded many defects of this organisation. The regiments were armed with local weapons and different patterns of rifles. Few irregulars had official uniforms. Except for the head-quarters at Melasgird, the regiments did not have buildings at the regimental centres. Chermiside doubted that the officers, who were sent from Constantinople as instructors, would be able to strengthen the regiments. He also added that the reports of Consuls and travellers were unanimous in their opinion regarding the inefficiency of this force and behaviour of its members. Many tribal Kurds who were arrested for robbery in Erzurum were Hamidiye

³² F.O. 424/169, p.21, No.19, Sir W. White to the Marquis of Salisbury, Constantinople, Feb 24, 1891.

officers and troopers. Furthermore, as Chermiside reported, a number of the Ottoman officers such as Ibrahim Sirri Pasha, who was in the command of a Hamidiye division, stated that the Hamidiye was a poor and ineffective institution.³³

In general, British observers believed that the Hamidiye was not an effective military institution within the Ottoman military system. H. F. B. Lynch, who was in eastern Anatolia in 1893, stated that he witnessed the parade of the Hamidiye brigades in Erzurum and reported that each regiment had a nominal strength of about 600 men, but they did not exercise together. He also had doubts about whether the project would be successful because he thought that the Kurds would not submit to the regular control of camps.³⁴ F. S. Stevenson thought that instead of producing the results which had been expected from their subjection to military discipline, the Hamidiye worsened the situation of the region and increased the problems of its peoples.³⁵ Even Mark Sykes who believed that the Hamidiye units were fine horsemen whose abilities should be taken into account in any probable battle beside the Ottoman army, did not have much confidence in them in offering firm opposition or pushing home an attack.³⁶ Depreciating accounts concerning the Hamidiye can be seen throughout the period of the research. In late 1903, after his travel through the area, Captain G. E. Tyrrell, the Vice-Consul in Van wrote that “I had good opportunities of studying the Hamidie”, describing them as useless. He stressed that “some of the regiments in reality exist only on paper”, and in the Vilayet of Van at least four regiments had never received any rifles from the Government. He did not think that the Hamidiye “can fulfil any useful object whatever when it comes to fighting”.³⁷

Many historians agree with these negative evaluations of the Hamidiye and believe that it was an unsuccessful organisation. Christopher J. Walker states that “their military value as auxiliary frontier troop was practically nil”, instead they only caused

³³ F.O. 424/178, p.324, Incl. 1 in No.413, Colonel Chermiside to P. Currie, Constantinople, Dec 6, 1894.

³⁴ H. F. B. Lynch, ‘The Armenian Question. III (Conclusion) - In Turkey’, *The Contemporary Review*, 66, (Sept 1894), pp.435–56.

³⁵ Stevenson, ‘Armenia’, pp.202-3.

³⁶ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, p.238.

³⁷ F.O. 424/206, p.9, Incl. in No.6, Vice-Consul Tyrrel to Sir N. O’Conor, Van, Dec 24, 1903.

chaos and trouble to the region and its residents.³⁸ Klein argued that the Hamidiye was a worthless military institution and their training were infrequent at best.³⁹ David McDowall also states that the regiments were obviously a failure, and in general there was little indication of incorporation into a wider Ottoman context.⁴⁰ Despite the accounts above, the underdeveloped conditions of the Ottoman Empire should be considered concerning the ability of the Hamidiye as a military establishment. Compared with European armies, the Ottoman military system was backward as a whole, so it was not to be expected that the Hamidiye would be a strong force.

4.2. The Hamidiye and the Armenians

The British mostly discussed the Hamidiye regiments in terms of their potential effects on the Armenians in particular and Christians in general, however, and not in terms of their military strength. This is the reason why this chapter focuses on this aspect more than any other issue regarding this organization.

A number of British diplomats, even in the beginning, pointed out probable disadvantages and dangers posed by the regiments to Christians including the Armenians. In February 1891, the British Acting Consul Hampson in Erzurum stated that the arming of the Kurds was regarded with anxiety in the area and the Armenians of Erzurum were very worried and many of them had expressed their determination to leave the city soon. He suggested that this feeling was strengthened by the behaviour of the Kurds themselves as many of them claimed that they had been appointed to quell the Armenians and that they had received guarantees that they would not be called to account by the tribunals and courts for their acts against Christians.⁴¹ Later, Hampson warned the British officials of the probable hazard of the plan of the Sultan in forming the Hamidiye corps. He stated that “this measure of organising the Kurds is regarded by all Christians and foreigners, and by many Turks with the greatest dread and anxiety.”⁴²

³⁸ Walker, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation*, p.134.

³⁹ Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, p.167.

⁴⁰ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p.62.

⁴¹ F.O. 424/169, p.30, Incl. 1 in No.29, Acting Consul Hampson to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Feb 28, 1891.

⁴² Turkey No. 1 (1892), p.37, Incl. 1 in No.34, Acting Consul Hampson to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Apr 4, 1891.

The misdeeds of the Kurdish Beys, as discussed in the previous chapter, were a reason why the British officials were not in favour of the Hamidiye and had doubts about it. They thought that the Kurdish chieftains would harm the Christians further if they were to be provided with weapons and more support by the Government. For example, Hussein agha of Patnoss, who was previously accused of harassing the Armenians by the British, was qualified by the Ottoman authorities to hold a position in the Hamidiye. Hussein, who was described by Hampson as a “dangerous person”, left Erzurum for Alashgerd with a number of his followers in January 1891 at the request of the Vali in order to arrange issues of the proposed cavalry among several small Kurdish tribes there.⁴³

British officials were concerned about the growing strength of the Kurds which could pose a threat to Christians. This was the main reason why the British did not favour the Hamidiye. There are several instances of investigation by British politicians and reports in newspapers about claims that British weapons were being used by the Kurds against the Armenians. This kind of news was not welcome by the British who were basically sympathetic to the Armenians. In February 1890, under the title ‘Arming the Kurds’, the *Daily News*’s correspondent alleged that the Persian Kurds were constantly supplied with British weapons namely “Martini-Henry rifles” by the Ottoman authorities, and that more than 50,000 rifles had been provided from different Government stores. According to the *Daily News*, the armament of the Kurds caused worry in Tehran and alarm among the Armenians and Nestorians who were afraid of a massacre.⁴⁴ The news created discontent among many in Britain that those weapons might be used by the Kurds against Christians. A few days later, *The Times* reported that F. S. Stevenson, MP for Eye in Suffolk, asked Sir James Fergusson the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs whether he had any confirmation about the use of the British arms.⁴⁵ In his response, Fergusson stated that there was none and that the British diplomat on the spot described the statement as absurd.⁴⁶ It is noticeable that foreign news was susceptible to a far wider margin of error than internal news.

⁴³ Ibid., p.15, Incl. 1 in No.12, Acting Consul Hampson to Sir W. White, Erzurum, Jan 23, 1891.

⁴⁴ ‘Arming the Kurds’, *Daily News*, 19 Feb 1890.

⁴⁵ ‘House of Commons’, *The Times*, 25 Feb 1890.

⁴⁶ Francis F. Stevenson, 24 February 1890, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 341, cols.1023-1024.

Parliament was an appropriate place where rumours could be publicly discussed.⁴⁷ It seems that because of concerns about the fate of Christians, the matter of “Martini-Henry rifles” was a serious issue in British political circles as the suggestion was repeated by a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons on 7 August 1890.⁴⁸ The news made British diplomats examine the truth of the matter more closely. In his report to William White, George Pollard Devey the Vice-Consul at Van described it as an outrageous claim. According to Devey even after refutation of the news, the accusation that the Ottoman Government was distributing weapons and inciting Kurds to exterminate Armenians was preserved.⁴⁹

The British Parliament discussed the matter of the Hamidiye on several occasions. Before the General Election of 1892, Liberals and Conservatives in Parliament debated their probable impact on Christians. On 28 March 1892, F. S. Stevenson asked James William Lowther, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, whether it was true that the Turkish commander of the 4th Army Corps based at Erzurum had forced the Armenians to supply the horses necessary for the formation of the Hamidiye cavalries and that the owners had received no payment for the confiscated animals. Stevenson also inquired whether any protest had been made by British diplomats in “Armenia” against the alleged acts and whether the acts mentioned were in violation of article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin?⁵⁰ Lowther announced that no information in support of the allegations had been received up until that point and added that although it was claimed that the Kurds had borrowed and stolen the horses of others, the Vice-Consul Devey was unable to confirm the allegation. Consequently, Lowther stated that there was no ground for representations by her majesty’s Embassy in Constantinople without giving more details.⁵¹ Two points should be taken into account with regard to Stevenson’s questions to the Under-Secretary: first, he was a pro-Armenian figure in Parliament and a president of the Anglo-Armenian Association in

⁴⁷ Brown, *Victorian news and newspapers*, p.241.

⁴⁸ F.O. 424/169, pp.16-18, Incl. 3 in No.17, Vice-Consul Devey to Sir W. White, Van, Jan 12, 1891.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.16-18.

⁵⁰ Francis F. Stevenson, 28 March 1892, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 3, col.28; 'House of Commons', *The Times*, 29 Mar 1892.

⁵¹ Mr. J. W. Lowther, 28 March 1892, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 3, cols.28-29; 'House of Commons', *The Times*, 29 Mar 1892.

1892 and had made active contributions for the Armenian cause. Second is the political context, Stevenson was a Liberal MP and the government was at the time led by the Conservative Party. Stevenson probably saw the opportunity to investigate the matter as a part of the election campaign of the Liberals to criticise the Conservatives for being pro-Ottoman Empire. In addition, it can also be said that there was a high level of correspondence among the various British official circles about the Hamidiye and its influence on Christians.

Many times, British diplomats criticized the Ottoman Government for not applying effectual measures to control the Hamidiye regiments. For instance, Sir Philip Currie pointed out to the Grand Vizier (prime minister) the grave responsibility which the Ottoman authorities had accepted by enrolling the Kurdish tribes in the Ottoman army without taking enough action to direct their behaviour. In his response, the Grand Vizier said that he hoped that the Hamidiye regiments would gradually be changed into regular troops by the Ottoman officers who had been appointed to command them.⁵² British officials repeatedly asked the Ottoman authorities to take earnest steps to protect their Armenian subjects from the Hamidiye. As usual, the “Bulgarian atrocities” of 1876 were an issue of preoccupation for British politicians in dealing with the Kurdish Hamidiye and the Armenian question. In his letter to the Grand Vizier, Sir Philip Currie criticised the Ottoman authorities regarding the alleged news that three ‘Kurdish regiments of irregular cavalry’ were being sent against the Armenians in Sasun in 1894. He reminded him that it was the actions of irregular cavalry in Bulgaria that had made a very painful impression in Europe and caused many misfortunes to the Ottoman Empire. He added that if the news was true, a situation would emerge which would lead to lamentable results for the interests of the Empire. Therefore, at the end of his letter, he stressed the need to prevent the Kurdish regiments from approaching the disturbed districts.⁵³

⁵² F.O. 424/178, p.224, No.240, Sir P. Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, Therapia, Oct 3, 1894.

⁵³ F.O. 424/178, pp.200-201, Incl. 2 in No.206, Sir P. Currie to the Grand Vizier, Therapia, Sept 2, 1894; Turkey No. 1 (1895), part I, p.4, Inclosure 2 in No.7. In many other occasions, the British officials, in diplomatic correspondences with the Ottoman Government, condemned the Kurds regarding the Armenian sufferings. For example, see F.O. 424/178, pp.289-90, No.344, the Earl of Kimberley to Sir P. Currie, Foreign Office, Nov 30, 1894.

The image of the Hamidiye in Britain was mainly formed by the press that concentrated their reports on the Armenians rather than through consular reports and travel literature. The *Daily News* regarded the announcement of the Hamidiye as a great irritation to the Armenians, arguing that the measure was an obvious infringement of the provisions of Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin.⁵⁴ British newspapers reported on the Hamidiye widely between 1894 and 1896 when the regiments were accused of committing atrocities against the Armenians. The *Daily News* and most of the British newspapers accused the Hamidiye of killing the Armenians in Sasun in 1894.⁵⁵ For example, *The Times* published stories of cruelties which were arguably committed by the Hamidiye and regular troops in the village of Kelichzen. It reported incidents of extreme brutality such as burning people before dawn while they were still sleeping, killing men and women with red hot irons and murdering children and burning a priest alive.⁵⁶ The Hamidiye were constantly charged with oppressing the Armenians and making trouble in the region in the British newspapers. For instance, in 1898 it was reported that a group of Hamidiye attacked Dr Belck, a German Professor in the Van Vilayet and left him for dead on a mountainside, killing his Armenian escort as well.⁵⁷ In July 1899, several British newspapers reported “further outrages committed by the Kurds” on “the unfortunate Armenian inhabitants” and that detachments of Hamidiye “burned and plundered” the town of Hoschgeldi and several Armenian villages.⁵⁸ As can be seen, sometimes the British newspaper articles circulated information about the alleged outrages committed by the Hamidiye to condemn the Kurds and generally discussed the Kurds in terms of the actions of the Hamidiye.

The discussions about the Hamidiye in Britain were mostly held in the context of the Armenian question, not as a separate issue. Like many other British observers, E. J. Dillon, the special correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, argued that the plan of the

⁵⁴ ‘The Kurdish Cavalry for Armenia’, *Daily News*, 10 Mar 1891.

⁵⁵ ‘The Massacres in Armenia’, *Daily News*, 5 Dec 1894.

⁵⁶ ‘The Porte and the Armenians’, *The Times*, 5 Dec 1894. Those kinds of narratives are questionable, cannot be definitely substantiated, and were doubted by many sources. More explanations about the position of the Hamidiye and the Kurds in the Armenian adversities during 1894-96 can be found in the next chapter.

⁵⁷ ‘The Professor’s Adventure’, *Dover Express*, 11 Nov 1898.

⁵⁸ ‘Fresh Outrages in Armenia’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 3 July 1899; ‘Fresh Outrages in Armenia’, *York Herald*, 4 July 1899.

Sultan in forming the Hamidiye was to eradicate the Armenians. He directly linked the formation of the Hamidiye and the Armenian question, stating that the Ottoman Government was nurturing the regiments against European pressure for the promised introduction of the Armenian Reforms and against probable betrayal from the Armenians who were suspected of being allies of Russia in wartime.⁵⁹ His lengthy article accused the Hamidiye, who were supported by the Ottoman Government, of killing, plundering, robbing rich Armenians, looting houses, burning, dishonouring women and suppressing helpless Armenians. He strongly pleaded that Britain had to take a more decisive line and argued that the English nation had to offer her support to stop the Armenians from being terrorised by the “diabolical policy” of the Government.⁶⁰ The writer narrated many instances of wrongdoing carried out against the Armenians, particularly outrages on women, as he claimed, by the Kurds and regular soldiers.⁶¹ Dillon, who went to eastern Anatolia in disguise and reported about the Armenian sufferings of 1894-96, published other articles in the Pro-Armenian periodical *the Contemporary Review*, and *The Fortnightly Review*.⁶² F. S. Stevenson similarly argued that the reforms of 1878 were neglected by the Ottoman Government, and the Armenians were left without protection from the Kurds and Circassians. He accused the Ottoman authorities of supporting the Kurds against the Armenians. He argued that the organisation of the Kurdish irregular cavalry under Turkish officers had placed “a new weapon of offence in the hands of the oppressors” and had “rendered them more powerful for evil”.⁶³

The channel that increased British public dislike of the Hamidiye was their denouncement by British politicians and pro-Armenians especially during the public meetings that were held for the purpose of supporting the Armenians between 1894 and 1896. A number of famous British politicians, especially Liberal leaders openly condemned the Hamidiye. On 6 August 1895, in a long speech at Town Hall in Chester, Gladstone strongly criticised the Hamidiye. At the beginning of the speech, he stressed

⁵⁹ E. J. Dillon, ‘The Condition of Armenia’, *The Contemporary review*, 68, Aug 1895, p.156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.154-57.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.158-89.

⁶² ‘Armenia: An Appeal’, *The Contemporary review*, 69, Jan 1896, pp.1-19; ‘The Fiasco in Armenia’, *The Fortnightly Review*, 65, Mar 1896, pp.341-58.

⁶³ Stevenson, ‘Armenia’, pp.201-2.

the importance of the Armenian matter as a humanitarian issue. Gladstone denounced the Sultan and his Government for enrolling the Kurds in the Hamidiye while they disarmed the Armenians. He accused the Kurds of Armenian atrocities and depicted them as “a band of robbers organised as a cavalry regiment and then set loose to harry and destroy the people of Armenian” alongside the regular army, police and tax collectors. He also portrayed the character of the Kurds as savage clans and demanded that the Kurds be disarmed as part of a wider proposal by the Powers to resolve the Armenian crisis.⁶⁴

While the majority of the British sources laid a heavy responsibility on the Hamidiye for the Armenian sufferings, a few British observers argued that the responsibility for the Hamidiye’s treatment of the Armenians should not be laid on the entire Kurdish people and that most of the ordinary Kurds did not wish to be involved in conflict with the Armenians. Nor were all Hamidiye leaders against the Armenians. There is some evidence of the positive attitudes of a few Hamidiye commanders in high ranks who did not spare any effort to assist the Armenians during the Armenian adversities of 1895-1896. Mark Sykes pointed out the positive stance of Ibrahim Pasha Milli, one of the most famous Hamidiye Kurdish chiefs, towards the Armenians. Sykes highlighted Ibrahim’s accurate familiarity with the affairs of Europe and Britain and other matters which was a sign that he had access to sources of information other than Turkish ones. After his journey to Constantinople, Ibrahim was appointed to the rank of Brigadier-General. He assisted Christians, including Armenians, to find shelter in the Viranshehr area and then during the Armenian disturbances in 1895-6, he protected Christians of all sects. Sykes estimated that he saved around 10,000 Armenians from extermination.⁶⁵ Sykes also cited how an old Kurdish villager in the vicinity of Khinis expressed his sense of sadness on the tense situation between the Kurds and Armenians. In the past they had lived together like brothers and their sole difference was religion but all of them now suffered, the Kurds and Armenians. The old man blamed the Ottoman soldiers, the Hamidiye, the Vali and the Mudir (local governor) for all the daily problems in the region. Sykes expressed his opinion that it was very obvious that

⁶⁴ ‘Mr. Gladstone on the Armenian question’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 Aug 1895.

⁶⁵ Mark Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: A Short History of the Turkish Empire* (London: Macmillan and Co., limited, 1915), pp.317-324.

the Hamidiye did not spare the Sunni Kurds who did not cooperate with the regiments any more than the Armenians.⁶⁶

Major Edward William Charles Noel, who was a famous specialist in Kurdish studies and held several consular and political functions in Iran and Kurdistan, did not share the common British perspective on the Hamidiye either. He disagreed with the commonly held belief that the Hamidiye were ranged entirely against Christians. He thought the raising of the regiments was mainly dictated by the government plan to break the power of the Kurds by using their tribal feuds in such a way that would prevent any combination against the government. Like Sykes, he believed that the Hamidiye harmed Muslims as well as Christians.⁶⁷ The excesses of the Hamidiye increased the criticism and dislike that the British felt towards the Kurds, and they directly influenced the reputation of the Kurds in the West.⁶⁸

Based on the above, it is evident that the British newspapers presented a certain narrative of the Hamidiye as being responsible for atrocities against Christian Armenians. However, in fact, the evidence of a number of British observers on the spot indicated that the Hamidiye harmed Kurds as well. The newspaper coverage omitted certain information and failed to reflect the accounts of travellers and to some extent the contents of consular reports which indicated that not all the Hamidiye members were anti-Armenians. The reason for this can be ascribed to the nature of the newspapers in reporting the events that aimed at influencing the readers more than examining the reality of the situation. However, diplomats had a responsibility to scrutinize the incidents and understand the position of each party that was involved in the Armenian situation.

4.3. The impacts of the Hamidiye on society in eastern Anatolia

Although a number of Kurds, especially the chieftains, obtained some benefits from the Hamidiye, the general impact of the regiments was damaging upon the lives of the people in eastern Anatolia. According to British consular reports, the situation of

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.406.

⁶⁷ E. W. C. Noel, *Note on the Kurdish Situation* (Baghdad: The Government Press, 1919), pp.5-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.5.

eastern Turkey was unstable and insecure after the Hamidiye's foundation. In 1893, twenty-seven famous merchants and traders of Erzurum had addressed a wary petition to the Ottoman Government in Constantinople complaining that the level of insecurity in their area brought all business to a standstill and ravaged the population. The British diplomats at the time attributed the main reason for their anxiety to the problematic actions of the Hamidiye regiments. Consul Graves, who was close to circumstances of the vilayet of Erzurum, revealed that the actions of brigandage and cattle raiding were more common than had been the case for years past. The expansion of such activity was general and in his view could be ascribed to the lawlessness of the Kurds who were enrolled in the new Hamidiye foundation. The petitioners in Erzurum were not bold enough to name the Hamidiye Kurds as the perpetrator in their petition to Constantinople but referred just to "Kurdish brigands" in general terms.⁶⁹

The violence of the Hamidiye not only targeted the Armenians and other Christians but also harmed Muslim peoples including the Kurds. This was because the structure of the Hamidiye regiments was tribal and was not based on national loyalties. Arshak Safrastian, who was an Armenian and the Acting British Vice-consul in Bitlis before the World War I, stated that the Kurdish cavalry groups were a bane to all without exception and caused hostile feeling between the Kurds and Armenians who had enjoyed an "unwritten pact of friendship" in the past.⁷⁰ According to H. F. B. Lynch, the Kurdish bandits attacked the plains between Pasin and Lake Van where a large proportion of the population were Kurds. Erzurum suffered from their open raids on the industrious peasantry. Muslims and Christians alike were harassed by the banditry. For instance, in Hasan Kalam, Muslims petitioned the government for protection. They did not dare to identify the assailants as Kurds but described them just as brigands. Lynch claimed that the bandits were led by officers in the Hamidiye units.⁷¹ Several British consuls reported on the misdeeds of Mustafa Pasha of Miran, the powerful leader of Hamidiye against Christians, Kurds and other Muslim inhabitants. For example, the British Vice-Consul in Diyarbakir reported that Mustafa Pasha had

⁶⁹ F.O. 424/175, p.178, Incl. in No.172, Consul Graves to Sir A. Nicolson, Erzurum, Aug 3, 1893.

⁷⁰ John Joseph, *Muslim-Christian relations and inter-Christian rivalries in the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p.91.

⁷¹ H. F. B. Lynch, *Armenia Travels and Studies, Vol. II: The Turkish Provinces* (London: Longmans, 1901), p.219.

plundered not just Christian residents from the village of Fishapoor but also many other wealthy villages, both Christian and Muslim, in the Jezireh district where the Kurds formed the majority of the population. He added that Mustafa Pasha who was a “daring lawless man” caused the burning of an Imperial Farm in the Mosul Vilayet and killed a notable of his Miran tribe and his two children in 1894. He also caused injuries to several blameless Muslims who were passing through the area to go to Baghdad for pilgrimage, and committed robbery, atrocities, murders and other crimes against Muslims and Christians. According to the document, agha Isor was another notorious Kurdish chieftain in Bitlis Vilayet blamed for bad behaviour.⁷²

The Hamidiye were the cause of harassment and trouble for the residents of many places to the south of Diyarbakir where the vast majority of inhabitants were Kurds. In many regions of eastern Anatolia, the Hamidiye was a factor for instability rather than helping to impose order and security. The government hoped to secure the loyalty of the Kurds especially in war through the Hamidiye rather than preserve the peace of the area.⁷³ The privileges granted to the Hamidiye chiefs influenced Kurdish society as power was unfairly redistributed, bolstering some tribes at the expense of others. For instance, at a Kurdish Sunni village of the Shaderli in the vicinity of Mollah Khalil, the village agha had complained that, because of the policy of the government in founding the Hamidiye, the poor became wealthy and the wealthy became poor.⁷⁴ The impact of the regiments on the economy of some Kurdish areas was harmful. During his visit to Mardin prior to 1904, Mark Sykes pointed out how the regiments negatively affected the business of inhabitants of the town and surrounding areas since the predatory actions of the Hamidiye stopped their trade with Arabs and Kurds in the region which had been one of the mainstays of business. He thought that the Hamidiye regiments were hated as they caused the residents of the adjacent neighbourhoods to fall into poverty and Mardin was crowded with broken tradesmen and beggars.⁷⁵

⁷² F.O. 424/182, pp.413-14, Incl. 3 in No.384, Acting Vice-Consul Boyajian to Sir P. Currie, Diyarbakir, May 18, 1895.

⁷³ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, pp.134-35.

⁷⁴ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p.407.

⁷⁵ Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam*, p.134.

4.4. British views of the responsibility for Armenian suffering

The British sources generally believed that the Ottoman Government bore most responsibility for the Hamidiyan acts against the residents, Muslims and Christians, of the region, because the Government had provided the Hamidiye with power at the expense of the local citizens. According to Sykes, the Ottoman Government were indulging the Kurds of the Hamidiye and excusing their excesses, and the military officers were aware that the Hamidiye regiments were disloyal and yet they were obliged always to condone their misdeeds and errors.⁷⁶ British sources blamed the Ottoman Government for supporting the Hamidiye. Graves, the British Consul in Erzurum, stated that the Hamidiye irregulars were refusing to obey the civil authorities and local law courts. Because they were regarded as enjoying the special favour of the Sultan and support of Mushir Zeki Pasha⁷⁷, who was married to a sister of Abdulhamid II, no one had ventured to report the misbehaviour of the Hamidiye to Constantinople.⁷⁸

Because the Hamidiye was accounted a part of the military forces, Hamidiye officers and soldiers could only be tried through military courts and not by civil administration and in case of any conflict with the civil authorities they were supported by Zeki Pasha. The only result of these privileges, as G. R. Driver noted, was a growth of lawlessness.⁷⁹ According to Bruinessen, Zeki Pasha usually protected members of the Hamidiye who frequently transgressed law and order and offenders generally went unpunished.⁸⁰ Mark Sykes claimed that military courts were instructed by secret commands to release Hamidiye criminals or impose only nominal sentences upon them.⁸¹

It seems that the Ottoman Government bore the responsibility for the Hamidiye harassment against the Armenians more than the Kurds themselves. The Government was acting intentionally against the activities of the Armenians in order to curb their

⁷⁶ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p.420.

⁷⁷ 'Mushir' was a high military rank in the Ottoman army.

⁷⁸ F.O. 424/175, p.178, Incl. in No.172, Consul Graves to Sir A. Nicolson, Erzurum, Aug 3, 1893.

⁷⁹ G. R. Driver, 'Studies in Kurdish History', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 2, No.3 (1922), p.500.

⁸⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p.187.

⁸¹ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p.420.

expected threat as they strove to gain their independence. This would have meant the secession of an essential part of the empire which was unacceptable to the Turkish leadership in Constantinople. A number of British diplomats believed that if the Ottoman rulers ‘really provided justice and security to the people’ the Armenian cause would vanish to a great extent. Similarly, the Vice-Consul at Van thought there would ‘no longer be any Armenian question’ if the Ottoman Government put an end to the Hamidiye cavalry and ruled the Kurds with fairness and firmness.⁸² Major Noel, the British politician, thought that the causes of hatred and distrust between the Armenian and Kurds were created because of the policy initiated by Abdulhamid II and continued by the Committee of Union and Progress.⁸³

It is worth mentioning that there was an essential difference between the behaviour of the Turks, especially the officials, and the Kurds towards the Armenians. The hatred of the Turkish officials for the Armenians was deeply entrenched compared with that of the Kurds. The Ottoman officials regarded the Armenians as political rivals and considered them as traitors while the Kurds were in conflict with the Armenians over property rather than over political issues. This phenomenon is emphasised by Frederick Davis Greene who served almost four years as a missionary in Van in 1890s. He spent great effort and endangered himself to meet Mostigo, a Kurdish Hamidiye officer who was subjected to special restrictions and was in prison in Erzurum. During his interview with Frederick, Mostigo said “The Turks hate them, and we do not. We only want money and spoil, and some Kurds also want their lands, but the Turks want their lives”. When questioned about killing the Armenians, he added “We only want booty, not lives. Lives are of no use to us. But we had to drive bullets through people at times to keep them quiet; that is, if they resisted”. Frederick blamed the Kurds for persecuting the Armenians but thought that the impunity which was granted to the Hamidiye leaders like Mostigo by the government had made them feel absolutely safe as long as the victims were Armenians.⁸⁴ Greene also criticised the inactive policy of the Western Powers for not acting actively for the Armenians in the mid-1890s when

⁸² Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, p.22.

⁸³ Noel, *Note on the Kurdish Situation*, p.4.

⁸⁴ Frederick Davis Greene, *Armenian Massacres or the Sword of Mohammed* (Philadelphia: American Oxford Publishing Company, 1896), pp.214-17.

they suffered greatly. It should be noted, however, that Frederick's book was clearly prejudiced in favour of the Armenians owing to his religious affiliation as he was a missionary. He tried to condemn almost everything regarding the Turks and Kurds and it is hard to find any criticism of the Armenians throughout the book of about 500 pages.

5. Conclusion

The British Government kept pace with the Kurdish Hamidiye cavalry and its position as a militia in the Ottoman military system. At the beginning the British Ambassador in Constantinople believed the Hamidiye could have an effective function in defending the Ottoman eastern frontiers against Russian threats. However, in Britain, the Hamidiye units were mostly evaluated through their potential effects on the Christians not through their military abilities. Many British consuls thought that recruiting the Kurds into irregular forces could harm the Christians.

British disapproval and dislike of Kurdish attitudes regarding the Christians and the Armenians in particular, which had already existed years before, increased further because of the Hamidiye cavalry. While the Kurdish Beys were blamed for being violent, the Hamidiye upraised the level of the negative representation of the Kurds. The Hamidiye were shown as an example of the atrocities against Christians. Due to their harassment particularly of the Armenians, the Hamidiye had a bad image in the British press, which directly distorted the picture of the Kurds in Britain. The Hamidiye harassment, especially against the Armenians portrayed the image of Kurds abroad as "primitive, uncontrollable and brutal",⁸⁵ although not all Kurdish tribes were part of the Hamidiye as explained earlier. The British newspapers, both the national and the local press, were the main sources of information for British readers about the Hamidiye and played an active role in condemning the Kurds among the British people. For the British public the Hamidiye were just an oppressive military organization which were used by Ottoman authorities against helpless Christians. The reputation of the Hamidiye in Britain significantly deteriorated especially following the Sasun Armenian uprising

⁸⁵ Martin Strohmeier, *Crucial images in the presentation of a Kurdish national identity Heroes and Patriots* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p.16.

in 1894 when British newspapers widely accused the Kurds and the Hamidiye of committing atrocities against the Armenians, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Beside common British ideas regarding the Hamidiye, some moderate opinions can be found from a few British politicians such as Sykes and Noel, who observed the events closely and had more contacts with the Kurds and Armenians on the spot. Their perspectives are essential to better understand the position of the Hamidiye in the Armenian question and obtaining the whole picture of the Kurdish and Armenian relationship in the late Ottoman period. Finally, it should be remembered that the Hamidiye was not a Kurdish national organisation. Its oppression of the Armenians was not based on nationalistic grounds as they terrorised Christians and Muslims, Armenians and Kurds indiscriminately.

Chapter four: The British perspectives on the Kurds and Armenian adversities 1894-96

Introduction

The chapter studies the British perceptions of the position of the Kurds in the Armenian adversities¹ between 1894 and 1896. This period was the hardest time for the Armenians throughout the reign of Abdulhamid II who was blamed for the Armenian atrocities and labelled as the “Red Sultan”, “butcher” and other notorious synonyms.² The Ottoman Kurds were blamed in Britain as accomplices in the Armenian calamity.

The literature regarding the Armenian question between 1894 and 1896 is extensive. In general, it is divided between the Pro-Armenians and Pro-Turks, in addition to a number of secondary sources that are characterized by neutrality.³ However, the Kurdish role in the Armenian adversities has not been focused upon directly and is in need of further research. Studying this Kurdish position can shed more light on several subjects that are still controversial between historians, such as the position of the Hamidiye regiments in the Sasun Armenian uprising of 1894. The researchers who believe that the Armenians in Sasun were killed in their thousands have sought to place responsibility on those regiments, in contrast to those who basically deny that the Armenians were murdered in large numbers.

¹ Although I believe that the Armenians were oppressed badly during 1894-96, I try to use neutral language for what happened to the Armenians during that time such as sufferings and adversities. In order to avoid being biased, I do not use words such as “insurgency” which are often used by the Turkophile historians or words such as “massacres” which are usually used by the pro-Armenian writers.

² Duguid, ‘The Politics of Unity’, p.148.

³ There is a very extensive secondary literature regarding the Armenian adversities during 1894-96: Some of the key texts can be categorised as follows: First: Works of the Pro-Armenian historians and writers who mostly defend the Armenian side, like: Robert Melson, ‘A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian Massacres of 1894-1896’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24, No.3 (1982); Vahakn Dadrian, ‘The 1984 Sassoun Massacre: A Juncture in the Escalation of the Turko-Armenian Conflict’, *The Armenian Review*, 47, No.1-2 (2001); Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.187-224 and pp.227-73. Second: Works of the Pro-Turkish historians and writers who mostly defend the Ottoman Empire side, like: Gurun, *The Armenian File*, pp.178-206; Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, pp.726-89; Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp.155-16. Between these two groups, there are works of the writers who are characterized by neutrality, for instance, Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p.20-29; Duguid, ‘The Politics of Unity’, pp.148-49.

This chapter mainly concentrates on the British representations of the Kurds and the Sasun uprising of 1894 with brief consideration of the actions committed against the Armenians during late 1895 and 1896. The reasons for this can be ascribed to: First, the Sasun uprising was the main event, in which the Kurds were widely accused of suppressing the Armenians. Secondly, the Sasun incident is the most controversial subject among historians not only during 1894-96 but also throughout the whole period of the study. Thirdly, the events of 1895-96 (i.e., after the Sasun uprising), which started in Constantinople, were basically a wide conflict between Armenian revolutionaries and the Ottoman authorities, in which Turks, Circassians, Armenians, Kurds, Arabs and others were involved. Fourthly, in addition to eastern Anatolia, the incidents of 1895-96 took place in many other places where the Kurds did not exist or they were just small minorities, such as Constantinople, Trebizond, Merzifon, Amasya, Yozgat, Kayseri, Iskenderun, Adana, Mersin and other places.

Sasun was an isolated district located in Mush province in Bitlis vilayet. As the British Ambassador in Constantinople Philip Currie said, the district of Sasun was the “wildest and most mountainous part of Guendj, which is described as the worst governed Mutessariflic in the Empire”.⁴ According to a European traveller who visited the area in 1894, Sasun was “the wildest part of Armenia”. The residents were the most backward in education and intelligence in the whole of Ottoman land.⁵ The Armenians and Kurds of Sasun were rural people. As a result of the policy of the Armenian revolutionaries, the misdeeds of some Kurdish tribes and the mistakes of the Ottoman local authorities, the Sasun uprising broke out which led to the killing of many people in the Sasun district.

1. The Kurds and the Sasun uprising in the historiography

More than a century after the Sasun revolt of 1894, it remains a controversial subject, including the nature of the Kurdish role in the uprising. The differences are mostly about the numbers of the Armenians who perished, the scale of the involvement of the Kurds and the Ottoman troops in the event and the role of the Hamidiye

⁴ F.O. 424/178, p.234, No.260. Sir Philip Currie to Earl of Kimberly, Oct 15, 1894.

⁵ 'The Armenian troubles', *The Standard*, 10 Jan 1895.

regiments. There are two different opinions about these matters among historians. The first group accuse the Kurds and put the main responsibility on the Kurds and then the Ottoman authorities without pointing out the responsibility of the Armenian agitators clearly. This chapter will use evidence, especially the accounts of the European delegates attached to the Commission of Inquiry, to show that those writers exaggerated their accounts. For instance, William Miller states that the Kurds, with the support of the Ottoman army “butchered, with the most revolting cruelty, every Armenian whom they could find” in the district of Sasun in late summer of 1894.⁶ Many other historians have repeated the same opinions. Donald Bloxham, for example, accuses the Kurds and the Ottoman troops of killing a minimum of 3,000 of the Armenians irrespective of age, sex, or fighting status and of committing rape on a large scale.⁷ He accuses the Sultan of exploiting the agenda of the Armenian revolutionaries to play on Kurdish fears of the loss of Kurdish land to Armenians. Such writers either dismiss the negative agitation of the Armenian parties or justify their policy in the incidents of 1894-96. Bloxham considers the agenda of the Armenian revolutionaries a natural development of the Armenian nationalist movement to lead Armenia towards liberty.⁸ There are even researchers who put more responsibility on the Kurds. For instance, Peter Marsh accused the Kurds of slaughtering 10,000 to 20,000 Armenian civilians just in Sasun in 1894.⁹

On the other hand, there are historians who have quite different views about the Sasun uprising. This group of writers usually put the main responsibility for the troubles in Sasun and other Armenian sufferings during 1894-96 on the Armenian revolutionaries and less responsibility on the Ottoman authorities and the rural Kurds. Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw accused the Hunchaks of planning a major coup in Sasun and agitating the Armenians against the local governor not to pay tax arrears. They accused the revolutionaries of ravaging the Muslim villages in the district and fleeing to the mountains, leaving the remaining Armenians suffering from what they had done after the arrival of the regular troops and the Hamidiye brigades who

⁶ Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its Successors 1801-1927*, p.429.

⁷ Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide*, pp.51-52.

⁸ Ibid., pp.49-51.

⁹ Marsh, 'Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman Massacres', p.74.

plundered Sasun. The Ottoman troops and local officers undertook the killing of Armenians, entirely on their initiative and without any command from the Ottoman Government.¹⁰ One of the most important books about the Sasun uprising of 1894 is a newly published book *Sasun The History of an 1890s Armenian Revolt* by Justin McCarthy, Ömer Turan and Cemalettin Taskiran. Although the writers focus on the Sasun problem in general rather than on the Kurdish side specifically, the book examines essential accounts of the subject. They reject the allegation that the Ottomans killed between 3,000 and 10,000 Armenians in Sasun and question the reliability of the detailed reports of heinous measures including torture by the Ottoman troops in the area. The writers argue that an Armenian insurgency had led to conflict with tribal Kurds and with far fewer deaths on both sides before the arrival of the Ottoman troops and that the number of the Armenian victims was highly exaggerated.¹¹ However, it seems that McCarthy and his co-writers have tried to dismiss any evidence accusing the Ottoman authorities in the events and put the main responsibility on the Armenian nationalists. Therefore, it seems that their findings regarding the Sasun revolt may be biased in favour of the Ottomans.

The role of Western media and European politicians regarding the Sasun uprising are controversial points. The effect of foreign factors in the incidents of 1894-96 is still debated among historians. Pro-Armenians usually have different ideas from the Pro-Turks in this regard. The former shows the Sasun uprising as a normal reaction against the injustice of the Ottoman authorities and repression by the Kurds, ignoring Armenian and foreign agitation. However, the latter directly criticise the Western side in the uprising. McCarthy and his colleagues criticise the Western media including the British press for providing incorrect information about the event.¹² They blame Armenian revolutionaries, British Liberal politicians and Armenians abroad for campaigning to destabilise the situation in eastern Anatolia through imaginary stories of Ottoman oppression and massacre in Sasun.¹³ Shaw and Shaw also focus on the revolutionary propaganda that aimed to stimulate European popular opinion in favour

¹⁰ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, pp.203-4.

¹¹ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, pp.116-170.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.38-39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

of the Armenians as had been done for the Bulgarian cause. They deny the claim that the Ottoman Government was behind the destruction of 25 villages and the killing of 20,000 Armenians in the Sasun area, and are critical of the European public who were ready to believe the worst regarding Muslims.¹⁴ Most Turkish historians support these opinions also. Salahi Sonyel, for example, argues that public opinion in Europe, especially in Britain was agitated by Armenian propaganda.¹⁵

2. The argument of this chapter

In comparison, the British sources about the Armenian question during 1894-96 are more numerous than the British sources about any other period of the study. Although the period covered by this chapter is relatively short, British writings about the Armenian question during this time are very extensive. The level of Kurdish participation in the Armenian adversities during 1894-96 still needs more consideration. Many British sources have not yet been consulted that will shed more light on the Kurds and Armenians in the mid-1890s and the British perception of that issue. This chapter analyses the responsibility of the Kurds in the Armenian adversities, asking how far the British public were aware of the reality of the Kurdish role in the Armenian question or whether they just had prevailing information that circulated through the newspapers. It reveals that some aspects of the Kurdish-Armenian dispute during the Armenian adversities that were confirmed by a number of British observers were missed by the public and some officials. This chapter will examine the accuracy of some aspects of the way in which the Kurds and Armenians were represented, such as the differences in the numbers of the Armenian casualties in Sasun as reported in the consular reports, the British newspapers and the accounts of some British observers. Further, this chapter also points out inaccuracies in several British consular reports during the Armenian adversities, especially the accounts of Cecil M. Hallward the British Vice-Consul at Van.

This chapter will examine reports of and responses to the Armenian cause during the Armenian adversities, asking to what extent they were reliable and accurate.

¹⁴ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, p.204.

¹⁵ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.164.

Newspaper coverage and other reports during turbulent situations such as wars and conflicts are susceptible to exaggeration. This fact particularly applies to the Armenian adversities throughout the Armenian question when each rival group tried to utilise the events for their own interests. On the one hand, the Ottoman officials attempted to minimise the number of Armenians killed in every strained situation. On the other hand, the Armenian agenda tried to show that their adversities were worse than reality and that the numbers of their victims were higher than the actual number who were killed. Therefore, this chapter tries to identify the British perception concerning the Kurdish position in the Armenian adversities between the agenda of the Armenian propaganda to influence the British public and the observers who disagreed with the common British perception. This chapter analyses the way in which the British reported the Armenian adversities, showing what aspects were exaggerated, which were overlooked and which were misrepresented regarding the Kurds and Armenians during this period, and explains several reasons behind this misrepresentation. This chapter argues that British public opinion and the British press, like those of other European countries, were influenced by Armenia propaganda. Studying the subject of the Sasun uprising is an obvious example in this regard.

This chapter examines the role of the Kurds in the Sasun problem in detail. It studies the British newspaper coverage of the matter and refers to the efforts of the British consuls who investigated the event. It will show that the accounts of the British newspapers, the consular reports, and the British representative in the Commission of Inquiry to Sasun differed substantially from each other and that there was no unanimity in British representations of the Kurdish position in several aspects of the Armenian sufferings of 1894-96. To depict the whole picture, those different sources should be consulted in order to arrive at a better understanding of this controversial subject. The research focuses on the testimonies recorded by the European delegates attached to the Commission of Inquiry concerning the Sasun revolt and particularly on the notes recorded by the British representative in the Commission, Hammond Smith Shipley about the role of each side. This chapter argues that their findings were more accurate than other information sources but had little influence on the British public because they were not in the hands of the public who were already influenced by newspaper reports of misdeeds of the Kurds during the 1880s and 1890s.

This chapter shows that, in general, there were two different points of view among the British observers at the time regarding the Armenian adversities during 1894-96. It refers to the opinions of several observers who criticised the prevailing British perception of the subject such as Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett who challenged the conventional British view regarding the Armenian question. He endeavoured to establish a different opinion from that of the prevailing public and directly said that British people were influenced by Armenian agitation.

3. British representation of the Kurds and the Sasun Armenian uprising of 1894

The Sasun events started on 19 August 1894 and continued until 10 September. British newspapers reported on the Sasun uprising on an extensive scale. In general, they directly accused the Kurds of killing and oppressing the Armenians. For the first time, the Liberal *Daily News* of 12 November 1894 published some details of what happened in the Sasun region. It stated that “From our correspondent” in Constantinople, details had been received by merchants and others of very grave outrages committed against the Armenians, without naming the informants. It was stated that about 3,000 had been killed including women and children, and twenty-five villages were destroyed in the region of Sasun. Kurds pillaged the villages and then troops were sent in who ruthlessly attacked those villages. Later many other British newspapers started publishing the same narrative which became the main account of the Sasun troubles in the British newspapers and among the public.¹⁶

In general, British newspapers accused the Hamidiye of killing the Armenians and directly alluded to their participation in suppressing the Sasun Armenian uprising. Even those newspapers that had conservative tendencies accused the Kurdish Hamidiye of oppressing Armenians. For example, *The Times*, *The Morning Post* and *Leeds Mercury* stated that the Vali of Bitlis sent “a detachment of Kurdish troops” [meaning the Hamidiye] against the Armenians in Sasun, killing and wounding many of them. Later, it was reported that the Kurds, without any reason, attacked the village, set fire to

¹⁶ 'Massacre of Armenians', *Daily News*, 12 Nov 1894.

the houses, killed the people and committed pillage.¹⁷ After a few days, the *Daily News* published a letter, which had been written by an Armenian from Constantinople and received through the Reuter's Agency which stated that the Hamidiye cavalry were the force who ruthlessly massacred the residents of twenty-five Armenian villages that numbered 6,000 Armenians. It also claimed that the Hamidiye burnt down those villages.¹⁸ However, although *The Times* had earlier reported upon the brutality of the Hamidiye, in another issue, it accused the Ottoman Government and the regular troops, not the Kurds and the Hamidiye of committing revolting cruelties against the Armenians.¹⁹

Emile J. Dillon, the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that alongside the regular troops, tens of thousands of Kurds participated in the Sasun operation against the Armenians on the request of the Government. He claimed that the Hamidiye units had attacked the Armenians, and as a result, thousands of Armenians were killed.²⁰ Again, in 1895 the *Daily News* published many stories regarding the Sasun uprising including the torture, burning and rape of Armenians, and attacks by thousands of Kurds with thousands of Armenians killed.²¹ As for the Armenian victims in Sasun, the British newspapers were not unanimous in their accounts either. In general, the numbers were between 2,000 and 10,000 although several other newspapers gave a much higher number.²²

With regard to British consular reports and the Sasun uprising, the British consuls in eastern Anatolian cities sent many reports to the British Embassy in Constantinople about the Sasun incident. The main British consuls who reported the matter were Robert Windham Graves, the British consul in Erzurum, Cecil M. Hallward

¹⁷ 'Trouble in Armenia', *The Times*, 17 Nov 1894; 'Trouble in Armenia', *The Morning Post*, 17 Nov 1894; 'Further Trouble in Armenia', *Leeds Mercury*, 17 Nov 1894.

¹⁸ 'The Armenian Atrocities Horrible Details', *Daily News*, 6 Dec 1894.

¹⁹ 'Disturbed Armenia; The Massacres Confirmed', *The Times*, 4 Dec 1894. Several other newspapers also accused only the regular troops of killing the Sasuni Armenians, such as 'The Porte and the Christian Nationalities', *Aberdeen Journal*, 17 Dec 1894.

²⁰ 'The Truth about Armenia', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Feb 1895, cited from McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.50.

²¹ For instance, see 'The Armenian Atrocities', *Daily News*, 26 Mar 1895; 'The Armenian Troubles', *Daily News*, 7 May 1895.

²² 'The Reported Atrocities in Armenia', *The Times*, 19 Nov 1894; 'The Porte and the Christian Nationalities', *Aberdeen Journal*, 17 Dec 1894.

the British Vice-Consul at Van and Charles Seymour Hampson, the British Acting consul at Erzurum who was sent to Mush after the incident at Sasun. Apparently, the diplomatic professionalism of these three diplomats, especially Hallward is still controversial. Historians such as Christopher J. Walker believe that “It would be difficult to praise the activities of these two men, their tenacity and their bravery, highly enough”²³ [Walker refers to Graves and Hallward], whereas historians such as Justin McCarthy and his co-writers doubt their proficiencies and their information sources.²⁴

The Kurds and Hamidiye were frequently accused of oppressing the Sasuni Armenians in the consular reports. In his own report Graves pointed out in detail the background of the crisis and the hostilities between the Kurds and the Armenians in 1893. He also mentioned the roles of the Ottoman officials, especially in Bitlis, in escalating the crisis and gave details of the attack by the Ottoman troops supported by Kurdish tribes on the Armenian villages in Sasun. According to Graves, there was reason to believe that the Bitlis authorities had secretly encouraged the nomad Kurds to pick a quarrel and attack the Armenians and used them in order to break the strength of the Sasuni Armenians.²⁵ The nomad Kurds entered the district and, at the beginning of August 1894, raided one of the villages and a fight broke out between the Armenians and Kurds. At the beginning, the Armenians showed serious resistance against the attackers but later when they saw the futility of further resistance, they surrendered and were “slaughtered in cold blood”. Graves finally mentioned that it was “said” that 32 villages were destroyed and 3,000 to 4,000 people killed during the riot that continued twenty three days.²⁶

In his report to Philip Currie on 9 October 1894, Hallward reported some details regarding the Sasun incident with the possibility that several thousand of the Armenians had been killed,²⁷ and on 6 November 1894, he stated that 8,000 Armenians of some 25 villages were killed by the Kurds and Turkish troops. He narrated many details of the

²³ Walker, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation*, p.142.

²⁴ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.106.

²⁵ F.O. 424/181, p.22, Incl. 2 in No.36, Memorandum by Consul Graves, Dec 27, 1894.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.22-23.

²⁷ Turkey No. 1 (1895), part I, pp.13-16, Inclosure in No.28, Vice-Consul Hallward to Sir P. Currie, Mush, Oct 9, 1894.

“butchery” that was “carried through without mercy or distinction of age or sex”, burning alive, killing priests, children, women, raping, burning corpses, destroying houses, “tearing children to pieces”.²⁸ Among the British diplomatic reports regarding the Sasun uprising, the accounts of Hallward are the most controversial and have been criticised by many researchers.²⁹ Nonetheless, his accounts became the information sources for those who were sympathetic with the Armenians at the time and later.

Hallward was not correct in many of the details he provided. His estimate of the number of Armenians killed was much exaggerated and his assessment of the role of the Armenian rebels in the events was wrong given that they had clearly played a significant role according to the reports of the Commission of Inquiry and of Shipley the British representative in the Commission. The Ottoman Government strongly denied the substance of Hallward’s reports and the Grand Vizier told the British Ambassador that his information sources were unreliable.³⁰ A number of researchers argue that Hallward’s reports were formed far from the scene and came from “second hand and third hand sources” because he was unable to go beyond Mush and could not reach the Sasun district.³¹ In addition, Hallward did not speak Kurdish or Armenian and relied on an Armenian interpreter, Nushan Effendi. His usual contacts were with missionaries and Armenians.³² Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett stated that Hallward was a “young and inexperienced” British diplomat being only twenty five years old and quite new in Asiatic Turkey, and that he had been made the victim of “Armenian fraud”.³³ In some aspects, Hallward’s account also differed from that of newspaper correspondents such as Emile J. Dillon of the *Daily Telegraph*. In his detailed despatch of 6 November 1894, Hallward modified his previous despatch of 9 October which reported that the Kurds had not been chiefly responsible for the “massacre”. Instead he stated that at the

²⁸ Ibid., pp.36-38, Inclosue 2 in No.60, Vice-Consul Hallward to Sir P. Currie, Van, Nov 6, 1894; F.O. 424/178, pp.285-87, Incl. 2 in No.339.

²⁹ Jeremy Salt, ‘The narrative gap in Ottoman Armenian history’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 39, Issue 1 (Jan. 2003), p.27.

³⁰ F.O. 424/178, p.224, No.242, Sir P. Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, Constantinople, Oct 9, 1894.

³¹ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.161.

³² McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.110.

³³ Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation*, p.8.

instigation of the soldiers, “the worst excesses” had been committed by the Kurds.³⁴ Dillon however, acknowledged that the Kurds had participated in oppressing the Armenians, but emphasized that the cruellest atrocities were committed by the soldiers not the Kurds, “The savagery of the Kurds was tame compared with the diabolical cruelties perpetrated by the soldiers of the regular army, who flayed people alive”.³⁵ The evidence discussed above from British newspapers and the British consuls show that although there was general agreement that that the Kurds participated in the campaign against the Armenians in Sasun, there were considerable differences of opinion as to the extent of Kurdish participation.

4. The Commission of Inquiry and the other side of the story of the Sasun uprising

In the wake of the Sasun events, and as a result of pressure from British public opinion, the British Government, alongside European Powers, pushed the Ottoman Government to conduct an official inquiry. For this purpose, a Commission of Inquiry was formed, consisting of five officials of the Ottoman government. However, Europeans were aware that the Ottoman investigation was likely to be biased. Therefore, Britain with the support of France and Russia started to press the Ottoman Government on the necessity of accepting European representatives alongside the Ottoman investigators.³⁶ After some opposition, the Ottoman Government accepted the European demand. A team of three European observers (consuls) from Britain, France and Russia was attached to the Commission. The European delegates were not members of the Commission of Inquiry. They were independent of the Commission but were authorised to accompany the Ottoman Commission and observe and remark on the proceedings of the Commission and to offer propositions regarding the investigation.³⁷

³⁴ Turkey No. 1 (1895), part I, pp.36-38, Inclosue 2 in No.60, Vice-Consul Hallward to Sir P. Currie, Van, Nov 6, 1894; F.O. 424/178, pp.285-87, Incl. 2 in No.339.

³⁵ ‘The Truth about Armenia’, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Mar 1895. Many other newspapers published the report of Dillon, citing from the *Daily Telegraph*, such as ‘The alleged outrages in Armenia’, *Glasgow Herald*, 6 Mar 1895; ‘The Truth about Armenia’, *Blackburn Standard*, 9 Mar 1895. *Western Gazette* published the statement as well but instead of the “the soldiers of the regular army” as perpetrators wrote “the Turks” ‘The Truth about Armenia’, *Western Gazette*, 8 Mar 1895.

³⁶ F.O. 424/178, p.335, No.444, The earl of Kimberley to Sir P. Currie, Foreign Office, Dec 13, 1894.

³⁷ F.O. 424/178, p.320, No.407, Sir P. Currie to the earl of Kimberley, Constantinople, Dec 9, 1894.

Shiple, the British Vice-Consul at Monastir, represented Britain and kept the Consuls in Erzurum informed of the Commission's deliberation.³⁸ Ultimately, the final power about how to conduct investigations was left only to the Ottoman Commission.³⁹

The Ottoman Commission announced its findings in which they indicted the Armenian revolutionaries as being solely responsible for the troubles in Sasun. They estimated that the number of Armenians killed in Sasun during the fighting was no more than 265,⁴⁰ far less than had been reported in the Western press and consular documents. Although the accuracy of the information of the Sasun Ottoman Commission of Inquiry has been debated by historians, the findings of the Commission are significant sources about the Sasun problem, even for those historians who criticise many of the Commission's procedures.⁴¹

The reports of the commission of European delegates (The Consular Commission) and the accounts of Shiple, the British representative, are essential in our research to understand the British representation of the events of Sasun for two reasons. First, they include many details about the role of the Kurds in the Sasun uprising that cannot be found in other British sources. Secondly, in spite of some criticism about the accuracy of the reports of the European delegates,⁴² their reports can be considered in-between accounts regarding the Sasun events compared to the widespread accounts in the West including Britain and the accounts of the Ottoman Commission.

The European delegates, who observed the proceedings of the Commission, issued their own final report in Mush on 20 July 1895 "to set forth below the results of

³⁸ 'The Armenian Question', *The Times*, 19 Dec 1894.

³⁹ F.O. 424/178, p.320, No.407, Sir P. Currie to the earl of Kimberley, Constantinople, Dec 9, 1894.

⁴⁰ Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey*, p.20.

⁴¹ For instance, see Rebecca Morris, 'A Critical Examination of the Sassoun Commission of Inquiry Report', *The Armenian Review*, 47, No.1-2 (2001), pp.79-80.

⁴² For instance, McCarthy and his co-writers believe that the reports of the European delegates were influenced by their anti-Ottoman prejudice. They claim that the European delegates' intention was to prepare "evidence and a verdict" against the Ottoman authorities and the Kurds. McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, pp.183-84. Despite the fact that the reports of the European delegates, like other contemporary accounts, need to be handled carefully, these reports can still be considered in-between accounts regarding the events of Sasun especially given that McCarthy and his co-writers suspect almost all accounts of the Armenian adversities recorded by western observers.

the inquiry”.⁴³ The report consisted of four main sections and an Annex including four chapters. The European delegates pointed out the causes of the deteriorating relationship between the Kurds and Armenians in Sasun, putting responsibility on the Kurds and Armenians alike; the religious propaganda of the Kurdish Sheiks; and the agitation fomented by Armenians such as Damadian who represented to the Armenians that their subjugation to the Kurds was a kind of slavery, while the Government afforded them no safeguard.⁴⁴ At the beginning of section three, the delegates again ascribed the problems between both sides to the Armenian agitation. They pointed to how, in the spring of 1894, an Armenian named Hamparsum Boyadjian came to the district of Talori, taking the name of Murad to avoid recognition. Alongside an armed group, amongst whom was Damadian, he travelled through the district to persuade the Armenians to free themselves from the supremacy of the Kurds.⁴⁵

The delegates pointed out many outrages committed by the Armenian bands on Kurds such as thefts, murders, and rape. The report gave many examples regarding the Armenian offensives on the Kurds and approved several of them.⁴⁶ Those actions provoked a reaction from the Kurds and led to the conflict between both sides. The report also mentioned the possibility that the authorities had stirred up the Kurds against the Armenians. Further, it accused the Armenian bands of attempting assassinations, and the Kurdish tribes, Bekranli and Badikanli, of attacking as well, and stated that in the initial stages of the conflict, both sides had attacked each other.⁴⁷

With regard to who was responsible for the deaths of Armenians in Sasun, the delegates stated that the tense situation led the Ottoman troops to interfere and put down the Armenian threats and enforce order. They did not agree with the way in which the Ottoman troops proceeded to suppress the outrages of the Armenian bands and they

⁴³ The “joint report” of Consular delegates is recorded in: Turkey No. 1 (1895), Correspondence Relating to the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey, Part I: Events at Sassoon, and Commission of Inquiry at Moush, pp.133-89, Incl. in No.252, Sir P. Currie to the earl of Kimberley, Therapia, Aug 15, 1895. The report is in French and translated to English.

⁴⁴ Turkey No. 1 (1895), Part I, p.163.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.163.

⁴⁶ The details of those actions committed by the Armenians were recorded in the Annexes; Chapter II; Acts of Murder, Brigandage, and Lawlessness attributed to the Armenians during the summer of 1894: (A): Acts of Theft, Brigandage, and Murder directed against the Kurds. Ibid., pp.176-81.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp.163-64.

accused the army of killing some Armenians during the attack on the villages. As to the participation of the Kurds, they wrote that the Ottoman troops supported the Kurds and took advantage of them in the operation.⁴⁸ During the Operation, a number of Kurds accompanied the Ottoman troops with limited participation. The report mentioned much evidence to prove that the Armenian bands openly acted against the Government and carried out many outrages and attacks on the Kurds before the Sasun incident took place. To sum up, they affirmed that the Armenian agitators committed “certain misdeeds against the Kurds; the latter are excited and assemble, attack the Armenians, and the fighting commences”.⁴⁹

The delegates also stated that the army did not fulfil its responsibility to prevent the riots in the area and protect the civilians. They reported that although the army and Kurds burned villages and killed many Armenians, the depositions of the Armenians claiming that they killed a considerable number of them, men, women and children, were false, and their losses were small. The delegates could not provide exact numbers of Armenians killed because of the absence of any regular registration and were unable to find decisive confirmation for the alleged acts of ‘revolting cruelty’ such as ‘barbarous mutilation’, reporting that, “the evidence on this subject is either isolated” or “rests on hearsay”, therefore, “no decided opinion can be pronounced on the point”. The European delegates did not believe the Armenians allegations that a major massacre had been carried out against them.⁵⁰

Although the consular delegates blamed the Ottoman authorities for making problems in front of them especially when they had tried to interview Armenian witnesses, their joint report is an important document for the depth of detail that it contains. By searching the report of the delegates, the reader can understand that the responsibility of the Armenians in the events was not less and possibly more than that of the Kurds. As explained, the European delegates put responsibility for the Sasun incident on the Armenians, Kurds, and the Ottoman authorities, whereas in the West it was usual to argue that the Kurds and the Ottoman army were guilty and the Armenians

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.168.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp.169-70.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.171-72.

were purely innocent. The European representatives in the Commission of the Inquiry did not identify any role for the Hamidiye regiments in the events and did not put a figure on the number of Armenians that were killed in Sasun. They reported only the names of 265 Armenians killed in Sasun that had been fixed by the Commission of Inquiry.⁵¹ The report of the European delegates puts the most widespread accounts in the West, including Britain in doubt.

To conclude, the views of Shipley the British representative in the Commission are important because he made many individual investigations with the people of the area, beside his notes and records during the proceedings of the Commission. At the beginning of his report, Shipley criticised many common British opinions regarding the Sasun incidents. He started with the number of victims, saying that the facts had showed that the estimates of Armenian victims reported in the English and Continental press, from 5,000 to 10,000, were “altogether beyond the mark”.⁵² In order to estimate the Armenian losses Shipley calculated the number of the houses in the area and the average number of inhabitants to each house as a base and concluded that there had been no more than 10,000 Armenians in the area before the conflict. He argued that by estimating the numbers of the Armenians who returned to their ruined villages after the conflict, the total number of the victims including those who “perished from want or exposure, would amount to some 900 in all”.⁵³

Shipley did not deny that the Armenian villagers had been killed with savage brutality by the soldiers, zaptiehs, and Kurds.⁵⁴ However, he criticised “certain of the British newspapers” for attributing “sensationally exaggerated stories of massacre” to the Turkish soldiers. He stated that “the epithets applied to the conduct of the Turkish soldiers and Kurds by the same press are in any way too strong”.⁵⁵ Like the report of the European consular delegates, Shipley’s memorandum did not allude to any role for the Hamidiye regiments in the Sasun incident. He reported that the stories of wholesale

⁵¹ See *Ibid.*, pp.182-89: The Annexes; Chapter IV; Victims of the Events at Sasun.

⁵² Turkey No. 1 (1895), Part I, p.203, Incl. in No.267, Memorandum on the Joint Report of the Consular Delegates to the Sasun Commission of July 20, 1895 by Shipley, Therapia, Oct 12, 1895.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.204.

⁵⁴ Turkey No. 1 (1895), Part I, pp.205 and p.206, Memorandum by Shipley, Therapia, Oct 12, 1895.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.206.

butchery of the civilian Armenians, except for the killing of a number of prisoners, had not been confirmed at all, either in the evidence of the Armenians offered before the Commission or by special investigations made by himself.⁵⁶ At the end of his report, Shipley criticised the way in which Ottoman officers dealt with the Sasun incidents and denied that the Armenians in Sasun were in open revolt against the Government. He did not believe that the Armenian outrages on the Kurds were on a wide scale and also did not believe many Armenian claims regarding the events.⁵⁷ As has been shown, unlike British newspapers and consular reports, Shipley criticised both participating sides in the Sasun incident, the Ottoman authorities and Kurds on one side and the Armenians on the other side. However, his accounts had no influence on the British public because they were read by just a very few British politicians.

A few other observers shared Shipley's view. Richard Davey, one of the British writers who criticised public opinion in Britain regarding the Armenian question, agreed with Shipley's view of the number of Armenian victims, claiming that the number of those killed in Sasun did not exceed 1,000. He argued that the estimated number of victims (10,000) reported by Western sources was obviously false because it was more than the total number of the population of the whole district. Nor did Davey agree with common British perspectives regarding some aspects of the British representation of the Armenian question.⁵⁸ Senor Ximénez, who was a Spanish geographer and traveller, had been in the Sasun district when the events happened. He went to Britain in 1895 and was interviewed by a correspondent at Reuters about the events and his statements were published in several British daily newspapers. He argued that the stories of the Sasun troubles which had been widely circulated in the European papers were "not only exaggerated, but unveracious in every particular".⁵⁹ Ximénez argued that the Armenian Revolutionary Committees played a major role in spreading the false information about the Sasun incident with which the English newspapers had lately been deluged.⁶⁰ He stated that fewer than 300 Armenians had

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.204.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.206-7.

⁵⁸ Richard Davey, 'Turkey and Armenia', *The Fortnightly Review*, Feb 1895, pp.197-210.

⁵⁹ 'The Armenian Question', *The Morning Post*, 10 Jan 1895; 'The Armenian troubles', *The Standard*, 10 Jan 1895.

⁶⁰ Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation*, p.5.

been killed and it was a local disturbance, not a massacre. He also stated that no Hamidiye cavalry took part in the operation and that the reports of atrocities against them were unfounded.⁶¹

After the Sasun uprising, the situation in eastern Anatolia deteriorated further leading to the oppression of the Armenians across a wide area between late 1895 and 1896. The conflict started in 30 September 1895 when the Armenian revolutionaries protested in Constantinople, demanding the application of the proposed reforms. The protesters made their way to the offices of the Sublime Porte but the protest was suppressed by the Ottoman police.⁶² The Ottoman authorities exploited the situation to wage extensive campaigns from October 1895 to mid-January 1896 against the Armenians, starting from Trebizond and including different cities and towns in Anatolia. Problems between the Ottoman authorities and the Armenian revolutionaries continued. 1896 saw three main confrontations between the two sides: The Armenian revolt in Van in June 1896, the seizure of the Ottoman Bank in Constantinople by a group of Dashnakists on 26 August 1896, and the Armenian revolt in Zeitun (1895–96).⁶³ The 1895-96 conflict caused the death of a large number of Armenians, and also many others from other groups. There is still an obvious disagreement between historians regarding the number of victims.⁶⁴ The Kurds during 1895-96 were criticised for supporting the Ottoman authorities against the Armenians. The Hamidiye were also accused of oppressing the Armenians in some areas like Diyarbakir. The Armenian adversities aroused more sympathy among the British for the Armenians and more dislike of the Kurds and Ottoman rule. As an article in *The Speaker* claimed in late 1896, there was a deep-seated sentiment of sympathy among the British people regarding the matter of the “Armenian atrocities”. There was no person in Britain, it suggested, who failed to sympathise with the Armenians who had been massacred by the “the monster who sits upon the Turkish throne”.⁶⁵ The main reason for this wide

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Edwin Munsell Bliss, *Turkey and the Armenian Atrocities* (Philadelphia: Hubbard publishing Co., 1896), p.398-99; Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, pp.180-83.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.155-220.

⁶⁴ Salt, ‘The narrative gap in Ottoman Armenian history’, p.21; Duguid, ‘The politics of unity’, p.148.

⁶⁵ ‘Armenia and England’, *The Speaker*, 14, 24 Oct 1896, p.429.

sympathy for the Armenians can be attributed to the influence of the channels of information that affected British public perspective on the Armenian adversities.

5. The channels that affected the British public perspective on the Armenian adversities 1894-96

British public opinion was supportive of the Armenians during their adversities in 1894-96. After the reports of Armenian suffering in Sasun had reached London, demands for taking action were raised by the press and by religious and humanitarian societies across the country. The Armenian hardship was a subject of significant public concern in which the British Government was obliged to show an interest.⁶⁶ Reactions were “violent” and angry feelings spread through the country immediately. Later, when the Conservatives were in power Lord Salisbury stated that “Feeling ... even on the Tory side, was ... much more adverse to the Turks than it used to be”.⁶⁷ The British public were not ready to believe anything less than that the Armenians were victims and the Ottoman authorities and Kurds were guilty. It was difficult for the British public, who were already infuriated by appalling stories of Sasun, to accept the Ottoman account which denied that any massacre had been carried out. There were three main factors that influenced British perspectives on the Armenian adversities. The first one was the information sources that, to a great extent, relied on missionaries and Armenian patriots who were sympathetic towards the Armenians. Secondly, the agenda of the Liberals who were very supportive of the Armenian cause. The third point was the effects of pro-Armenian campaigners and public meetings which significantly directed British public opinion.

5.1. Missionaries and Armenian patriots as sources of information for the British

In general, the missionaries had doubts about Islam and its attitudes towards Christians.⁶⁸ The missionaries had good relations with the Armenians, however. They

⁶⁶ Weeks, ‘The Armenian question and British policy in Turkey 1894-96’, pp.96-101.

⁶⁷ Douglas, ‘Britain and the Armenian Question 1894-7’, p.117.

⁶⁸ For instance, see Henry Harris Jessup, *The Mohammedan Missionary Problem* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1879), pp.26-58. The writer accused Islam of incompatibility between morality and religion, intolerance, immorality, untruthfulness and many other bad features.

reported the narratives of Armenians without enough investigation about their validity. McCarthy and his co-writers argue that the missionaries were supporters of all things Armenian, and tried to convey the Armenian concerns to newspapers, American congregations, and foreign consuls. They believe that the missionaries always supported the Armenian position whenever Armenians were in dispute with Ottoman officials or Turks and Kurds.⁶⁹ Jeremy Salt also contends that the missionaries occupied a negative position in the Armenian question and suspects the reliability of the information of the missionaries who influenced the public opinion in the West.⁷⁰ Both Salt and McCarthy and his co-writers emphasise that the American missionaries were important sources of information for the British press and British politicians, including consuls, on many occasions.⁷¹ The two missionaries who were most active in providing information on events in Sasun to the press were William Nesbitt Chambers in Erzurum and George C. Raynolds in Van. On 1 May 1895, Chambers mentioned “I have furnished correspondents here with copy of translation [of Armenian statements on their suffering] and placed the original with translation in the hands of the English Consul here”. He also sent a copy to F. D. Greene in London.⁷² Greene was an American missionary writing a book *Armenian Massacres or the Sword of Mohammed* published in Britain and America in 1896, which narrated many exaggerated and sentimental stories about the Armenian sufferings.⁷³ Chambers also gave material to British reporters in Bitlis who had come to Erzurum to report on the Armenians. Raynolds stated that he would give the letter that he had written on the Sasun problem in November 1894 to the Associated Press. A few days later he added that he sent material to America that should be given to the Associated Press and to Edwin Munsell Bliss, the missionary who was writing a book on the Sasun incident.⁷⁴ In her article ‘The shadow of the Kurds’ in which Isabella Lucy Bird, who was an evangelical, blamed the

⁶⁹ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.73.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians 1878-1896* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p.5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.115-16; McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.77.

⁷² McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.77.

⁷³ Greene, *Armenian Massacres*, p.20-24.

⁷⁴ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.78

Kurds sharply for oppressing the Armenians, her informant for some of the information was a Protestant pastor.⁷⁵

American missionaries enjoyed a close connection with British diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. They sent many messages to the Ambassador and the British diplomats encouraging them to support the Armenians. An example is the memorandum of an American missionary resident in Therapia to the Ambassador A. Nicolson, regarding events in Van and Bitlis, in which Kurds were strongly accused of stealing from and harassing Armenians. The missionary wrote “What a shame it is! When Kurds do atrocious things, it is no more than we expect from them: but for the Government deliberately to follow their example is barbarous”.⁷⁶ Another instance is the American missionary J. W. Fowle, who lived for nine years in Kayseri. During his meeting with Ambassador Currie in Constantinople, he stated that the proceedings of the Ottoman authorities in the Yozgat district had driven the Armenian residents to desperation and agitation, and might cause an outburst of Muslim fanaticism. Currie, as a result, dismissed the Ottoman accusation that the missionaries were encouraging the Armenian revolutionary movement.⁷⁷ Henry O. Dwight was also active in delivering the missionaries’ messages to the British Embassy at Constantinople. He was a famous American missionary serving in the Constantinople Bible House. For example, Currie sent a letter to London from Dwight who had sent him some extracts from the report of G. P. Knapp, a missionary in Bitlis which accused the Kurds and the Hamidiye regiments of oppressing the Armenians in the strongest terms.⁷⁸

The link between the missionaries and Armenian activists in Britain was strong. The missionaries were often the channel of information to the British supporters of the Armenians. For instance, many details about the Armenian adversities were reported in a number of letters received from the Association of Missionaries, as it was announced at a meeting of the special Committee of the Anglo-Armenian Association in London

⁷⁵ Isabella Lucy Bird, ‘The shadow of the Kurds’, *The Contemporary Review*, Part II, 59, Jun 1891, p.829.

⁷⁶ F.O. 424/175, p.158-60, No.154, Sir A. Nicolson to the Earl of Kimberley, Therapia, July 25, 1893.

⁷⁷ F.O. 424/178, pp.139-40, No.133, P. Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, Constantinople, May 17, 1894.

⁷⁸ F.O. 424/178, pp.105-06, No.97, P. Currie to the Earl of Kimberley, Pera, Apr 15, 1894.

on 13 Dec 1894.⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly the Ottoman Government blamed missionaries for taking the Armenian side. The Rev. Dr. Wenyon, one of the medical missionaries of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in London, was incarcerated for three weeks in Central Turkey on a charge of “active sympathy” with the persecuted Armenians.⁸⁰ The missionaries were also information sources for a number of British journalists and writers, including Edwin Pears, the *Daily News* correspondent in Constantinople.⁸¹ Most of his information about the Armenian adversities was derived from “American missionaries and from consuls, British and others”. He stated that in all cases of massacre the victims were entitled to be classed as martyrs.⁸²

Missionary writers accused the Kurds and the Hamidiye of murdering the Armenians remorselessly. The stories that accused the Kurds and the Ottoman soldiers were published widely in Britain. For instance, William James Wintle, the English journalist and writer who was a Roman Catholic convert, covered the Armenian adversities in a very emotional manner, accusing the Kurds and the Ottoman authorities of oppressing the Armenians. His book is full of terms such as massacre, plunder, burning houses, carrying off girls, raping, sacking churches, selling priests’ robes and church ornaments, burning Armenians alive, blowing them up with powder and burning the corpses.⁸³ The missionary Frederick Davis Greene also claimed that 10,000 Armenians were slain in Sasun. He stated that eight to ten Hamidiye regiments participated in the Sasun event and Kurds gathered in numbers up to about 20,000 and

⁷⁹ ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *The Standard*, 14 Dec 1894; ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 Dec 1894; ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 14 Dec 1894. The title of the articles and the quotation are the same in those three newspapers.

⁸⁰ ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 14 Dec 1894; ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Dundee Courier*, 14 Dec 1894.

⁸¹ Edwin Pears, *Forty Years in Constantinople* (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1916), p.20.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁸³ W. J. Wintle, *Armenia and its Sorrows* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1896), pp. 68-71. His source of the information was an extract from the report of the Vice-Consul Hallward dated 9 October and 5 November 1894. Some other similar stories in pp.72-78, as Wintle stated, were taken from American citizens and missionaries, and published in Britain and the United States by Rev. F. D. Greene. Wintle claimed that the American citizens and missionaries took those information from “reliable eyewitnesses”, without mentioning who those eyewitnesses were.

participated in attacks against the Armenians. He reported many exaggerated stories against them.⁸⁴

Sometimes the Armenian patriots were the source of information for British readers. They usually tended to interpret the events in support of the cause of their nation. Sometimes those Armenians were members of Armenian associations or even had close links with Armenian revolutionaries. For instance, the *Leeds Mercury* highlighted an article with “Thousands killed and imprisoned” in Sasun which was based upon an interview with Avedis Nazarbek (Nazarbekian) the editor of the *Heutchak* an Armenian publication, and one of the leaders of the Armenian Patriotic Association. The article repeatedly accused “the bands of the Kurds, who burnt, pillaged and murdered wherever they passed, and seized cattle in all direction”.⁸⁵ Garabed Hagopian, the Chairman of the Armenian Patriotic Association, was particularly active in promoting the Armenian cause in Britain especially in political circles. The Sasun events gave him an opportunity to widen his activities. On 15 November 1894, he addressed a memorial, enclosed with a copy of a letter which he had received from Bitlis, to the Earl of Kimberley, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on the subject of the alleged atrocities in Armenia. The letter directly accused the Kurds, including many stories of torturing, raping, and burning of Armenians. He begged him to interfere on behalf of those who were massacred “in thousands for being Christians and Armenians” in Sasun. Hagopian compared the Sasun events to the “Bulgarian atrocities” in 1876 “with all their most horrible and sickening details of fiendish lust and atrocious cruelties on unarmed Christians”.⁸⁶ Hagopian continued sending letters to the editor of *The Times*, defending his opinions in the hope of attracting the attention of more British citizens to the “diabolical outrages” against his fellows.⁸⁷ As explained, the accounts of the Armenian sufferings conveyed to Britain by missionaries and Armenian revolutionaries influenced British public opinion to give a bad reputation to the Kurds and Ottomans.

⁸⁴ Greene, *Armenian Massacres*, p.11, pp.20-24.

⁸⁵ ‘Turkey and Armenia’, *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Nov 1894.

⁸⁶ ‘Reported atrocities in Armenia’, *The Times*, 17 Nov 1894.

⁸⁷ G. Hagopian, ‘The Massacres in Armenia’, *The Times*, 10 Dec 1894.

5.2. The Liberals and the Armenian adversities during 1894-96

In general, Armenian nationalists and pro-Armenians in Britain had close contacts with the Liberal politicians in Government and Parliament such as Gladstone and James Bryce, who were great supporters of Armenian demands. The Anglo-Armenian Association, the leading pro-Armenian society in Britain, had close association with British Liberals. Bryce was one of the strongest “chivalric” proponents of the cause of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and played an important part in mobilizing the retired Gladstone in his last support for the Armenians in 1895-96.⁸⁸

Until his death, Gladstone was a great supporter of the Armenians cause in Britain and it formed an important part of his Liberal agenda. The *Liverpool Mercury* praised Gladstone’s activities after his retirement for the sake of the Armenian cause. His expected participation in the meeting convened by the Anglo-Armenian Association at St. Martin’s Town Hall London on 17 December 1894 to demonstrate against the Armenian misfortunes was considered as a matter of supreme satisfaction to all Liberals.⁸⁹ Gladstone’s Liberal ideas were an essential motivation for pro-Armenian activities in the country. This quotation “To serve Armenia is to serve civilization” is the best proof of how the matter was essential to Gladstone’s legacy and agenda.⁹⁰

Despite his age, Gladstone was very energetic in defending Armenian rights. At Hawarden he commented on the Armenian victims of Sasun, saying that “Old as I am, my feelings have not been deadened with regard to matters of such a dreadful description”.⁹¹ The Armenians aimed at his support and the powerful effect of his influence in British political circles, even when he was not in office. When the Sultan called upon the British Government for a disavowal of Gladstone’s speech in which he described the Sultan as a tyrant, this demand was regarded as "foolish enough" by the

⁸⁸ Harvie, Christopher. "Bryce, James, Viscount Bryce (1838–1922), jurist, historian, and politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32141>.

⁸⁹ 'Our London letter', *Liverpool Mercury*, 14 Dec 1894.

⁹⁰ American Armenian Relief Fund, *The Cry of Armenia* (New York City: [n.pub.], 1916), p.i.

⁹¹ 'The Truth about Armenia', *Daily News*, 12 Jan 1895.

pro-Armenians.⁹² The *Daily News* blamed “anonymous correspondents of obscure newspapers” for ignoring the Armenian suffering, and an Admiral (most likely meaning Woods Pasha -Sir Henry Felix Woods) who thought Ottoman soldiers would never do anything ferocious, and others who alleged that “the peaceful Kurds and the tolerant Turks” had suffered due to "the turbulent Armenians" for a long time.⁹³

In late 1895, Gladstone was very active in his participation in the pro-Armenian campaign. In early August, at the Town Hall in Chester, he participated in a meeting chaired by the Duke of Westminster and attended by many renowned British pro-Armenians and Armenian notables in the country. In his long speech, Gladstone condemned the “savage” Kurds for suppressing the Christians. He directly announced that because of British commitments to the Berlin treaty and the Cyprus Convention, Britain had a right to interfere in “Armenia” and take the government out of the hands of the Sultan.⁹⁴ On 24 September 1896, Gladstone, at the age of 86, gave his last public speech on the Armenian question in Liverpool. In front of about 6,000 citizens, he accused the Sultan of committing massacres in the last two years against “our fellow Christians”.⁹⁵

As we have seen the British Liberal press, especially the *Daily News*, played a key part in conveying the pro-Armenian voice to the public. As the *Daily News* claimed, there were usually common points of view between the Armenians in Britain and this newspaper itself. It regularly published articles by pro-Armenian activists. For instance, in one week, it published letters from M. J. Paul, the treasurer of the Anglo-Armenian Association, Canon Malcolm MacColl, and many other pro-Armenians.⁹⁶ The Pro-Armenians, such as the Rev Prof Agar Beet, hoped that the press and the campaigns for supporting the Armenians would be able to influence British public opinion. He heartened the Armenians in their appeal to the Great Powers and Europeans. He believed that international protests and petitions would engage the attention of the press, and if they were united, the Armenians would soon achieve their

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ ‘Mr. Gladstone on the Armenian question’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 Aug 1895.

⁹⁵ ‘Mr. Gladstone on the Armenian Question’, *The Times*, 25 Sep 1896.

⁹⁶ ‘The Armenian Christians’, *Daily News*, 27 Nov 1894.

rights.⁹⁷ Canon MacColl who was a committee member of the Anglo-Armenian Association believed that the Association “will do its best to open the public mind to the true state of things in Armenia”.⁹⁸ The *Daily News* was a platform to convey and direct the voice of pro-Armenians in Britain to the public. It published details of any pro-Armenian activities throughout the country; the news about public gatherings to support the Armenians, details of the meeting of pro-Armenian associations, resolutions of religious bodies activities of MPs and so forth.

The Liberal press tended to influence the British public in a way that was compatible with the Liberal Party political agenda that was in favour of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. The *Daily News* expected that the existent Liberal Government and the public would be able to assist the Armenians, on the basis that there were no politicians like Lord Disraeli and Lord Derby in power “to chill enthusiasm” to the narration of suffering.⁹⁹ In 1895, the *New York Times* published an article under the title 'The Armenian Troubles: An Intimation That Reports Are Made for Political Effect', pointing out the existence of political agendas in a number of British newspapers. It quoted from British newspapers the *St. James Gazette* and the *Globe* that doubted the language, contents and sources of some of the reports in other British newspapers from their agents in “Armenia”. The *Globe*, which had had a Conservative orientation since 1866, added that “There is serious danger of the English losing their heads over this matter and forcing the Government into taking action which they will bitterly regret”.¹⁰⁰

The Liberals were continuously trying to utilise the cause of the Armenians in their political programmes in competing with their rivals, the Conservatives. The National Liberal Federation Conference held in Huddersfield on 27 March 1896 strongly expressed its support for the Armenian cause. The Armenian question was part of the agenda of the conference that reaffirmed its confidence in Lord Rosebery and his comrades, and pledged itself not to rest until the triumph of Liberal party was again

⁹⁷ 'The Armenian Massacre', *Daily News*, 28 Nov 1894.

⁹⁸ 'The Armenians and the Porte', *The Times*, 28 Nov 1894.

⁹⁹ 'The Armenian Christians', *Daily News*, 27 Nov 1894.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Armenian Troubles An Intimation That Reports Are Made for Political Effect', *New York Times*, 30 Mar 1895.

assured”.¹⁰¹ Prof John Massie presented a resolution expressing “deep sympathy” for the Ottoman Armenians and pressed on Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, the great responsibility that rested on his cabinet. For the Liberals, the Armenian question, as Massie believed, was a national issue, and the British nation would reckon the Government guilty unless everything possible was exerted to redress Armenian suffering.¹⁰²

Emile J. Dillon, the correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, was one of the most prominent figures who had a great influence on public opinion in Britain and the West regarding the Armenian sufferings during 1894-96. Dillon knew many languages including Armenian. To some extent, his influence was due to his well-known reputation in the press and his wide knowledge of foreign affairs. He served the *Daily Telegraph* for almost three decades from 1887 and was a monthly contributor of articles on foreign affairs to a number of British periodicals like *Contemporary Review* and several American periodicals as well. His wide renown was mostly due to his reporting for the *Daily Telegraph* about the Armenian sufferings during 1894–95. His descriptions of the Armenian sufferings aroused British public opinion and provided Gladstone with the evidence to accuse the Ottoman authorities and Kurds of the Armenian ‘horrors’.¹⁰³ Later, in his address, published in the *The Manchester Guardian*, Gladstone cited from Dillon’s reports to condemn the Kurds and the Ottoman Government attitudes regarding the Armenian matter.¹⁰⁴

However, Dillon’s reports about the Armenian adversities are still a controversial subject. Dillon, who was known as “a man of mystery ... whose business in life it was to know and understand foreign affairs in a way peculiar to himself”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ 'National Liberal Federation', *Dundee Courier*, 28 Mar 1896.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Baylen, Joseph O. "Dillon, Emile Joseph [pseud. E. B. Lanin] (1854–1933), journalist and philologist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32828>.

¹⁰⁴ 'Mr. Gladstone on the Armenian question', *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 Aug 1895.

¹⁰⁵ Baylen, Joseph O. "Dillon, Emile Joseph [pseud. E. B. Lanin] (1854–1933), journalist and philologist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-32828>.

was criticised for his exaggerated accounts at the time and by a number of historians later. After a meeting with Dillon, Graves, the British consul in Erzurum, in his despatch to the Ambassador Philip Currie criticised him regarding his coverage of the Armenian sufferings and called him “an unpleasant sort of person, and a mischief-maker” and “a liar of almost phenomenal capacity.”¹⁰⁶ McCarthy and his co-writers believe that Dillon and the *Daily Telegraph* were not acting professionally regarding the Armenian adversities.¹⁰⁷ They also stated that the accounts of Frank Scudamore, the correspondent of the *Daily News*, relating to the Sasun uprising including the extent of the participation of the Kurds and the numbers of the Armenians killed were wrong. They argue that Scudamore mostly derived his information from Armenians and missionaries.¹⁰⁸

5.3. The effect of pro-Armenian campaigns and public meetings

There was a kind of sympathy and cooperation among British Liberals and Armenian activists in Britain who were all campaigning for the Armenian cause. In the context of this campaign, the Kurds and the Ottoman Government were shown as an oppressive power on one side and the Christians as oppressed people on the other side. The pro-Armenians tried to direct the sympathy of people in the West to influence their governments to act in favour of the Armenians. Many supportive meetings for the Armenians were held in Britain between 1894 and 1896. During that period, many British people, from across the political and social classes, supported the public meetings to promote the Armenian cause. They were organised by pro-Armenian associations and were attended by politicians, mayors, MPs, clergy and academics.

The Sasun events were widely discussed in Britain. On 27 November 1894, the pro-Armenians convened a conference at the Offices of the Anglo-Armenian Association, No. 3, Plowden-building, Temple, London. F. S. Stevenson, MP, the President of the Association, presided over the meeting which was attended by many pro-Armenians including J. Iskender, the President of the Armenian Association in

¹⁰⁶ F.O. 424/182, p.316, Incl. 4 in No.227, Graves to Currie, Erzurum, May 11, 1895.

¹⁰⁷ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.53.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.56-58.

Paris. The Kurds were accused of terrorising the Armenians. The secretary read letters and telegrams expressing support for the meeting and a proposal was approved to hold a large meeting in London the following month. Stevenson criticised, as he had done in the House of Commons, the policy of the British Foreign Office for not taking the Armenian cause seriously enough. He thought that the Earl of Kimberley, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had failed to understand the feeling of Englishmen in the matter, or to notice the determined tone of the *Daily News* and other Liberal organs of press across the country.¹⁰⁹

On 17 December 1894, a great meeting was held at St. Martin's Town Hall London by the Anglo-Armenian Association to demonstrate against the Armenian misfortune which was reported the next day in, many newspapers across the United Kingdom.¹¹⁰ Stevenson was the chair again. Gladstone sent a letter, which was read by the Secretary of the Association, Edward Atkin. Gladstone wrote that the events in Armenia commanded the attention of the world, and under the Cyprus Convention, the British had "a separate, deep, and painful interest" towards the Armenians. He confirmed his support to the Anglo-Armenian Association and its "every effort for bringing out the truth". Letters from many other politicians and religious figures, who were not able to attend, were read. They protested against the outrages against the Armenian Christians and demanded the intervention of the British Government in concert with other European Powers.¹¹¹

The pro-Armenian meetings were usually supported by significant personalities in Britain ranging from politicians to leading clergymen from different religious denominations, who had great influence on the British public. The public meeting at St. Martin's Town Hall, was a crowded event, and attendees included a large number of

¹⁰⁹ 'The Armenian Massacre', *Daily News*, 28 Nov 1894. For more details, see also 'The Armenians and The Porte', *The Times*, 28 Nov 1894; 'The massacres in Armenia', *The Standard*, 28 Nov 1894.

¹¹⁰ 'Great indignation meeting in London' *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894. Other British newspapers covered the meeting but not as detailed as the *Daily News*. For example, see 'indignation meeting in London', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 Dec 1894; 'Editorial', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 18 Dec 1894; 'The Armenian Massacres', *Gloucester Citizen*, 18 Dec. 1894; 'Mr. Gladstone on the Armenian Atrocities', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 18 Dec 1894, and many other regional newspapers.

¹¹¹ 'Great indignation meeting in London' *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894.

priests, MPs and delegates from the Armenian community in Paris.¹¹² The Arch president of the Armenian congregation in Britain also attended the meeting which was even covered in the American press.¹¹³ In addition to F. S. Stevenson seven other MPs attended the meeting. Ten other MPs and a number of politicians sent supportive letters to be read to the audience. Clergymen also made a significant contribution to the meeting. Cardinal Vaughan, the Duke of Westminster, the Duke of Argyll, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Bishop of Manchester, Dr. George Barrett, (Chairman of the Congregational Union), the Rev. Dr. Booth (Secretary of the Baptist Union), and many others from different cities wrote letters expressing their sympathy.¹¹⁴ Telegrams were read from the Armenian and Macedonian communities of Sofia and from other places to show gratitude to the Anglo-Armenian Association “for its courage and perseverance in the holy cause of the Armenian Christians”.¹¹⁵ Among the posters on the wall of the hall, was Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty in bold type demanding protection of the Armenians from the Kurds and Circassians. On the platform was a big banner displaying the phrase, “the Armenians claim the right to live peaceably in their native land”.¹¹⁶

Many of the speakers and the letters read out at public meetings directly pointed to the aggressive actions of the Kurds towards the Armenians. The Kurds were portrayed as wrongdoers and oppressors of the Christians. For instance, Charles E. Schwann, MP, believed that it was a shame on the British nation and the other Powers that the Turks and Kurds were able to commit outrages against the Armenians.¹¹⁷ Prof Agar Beet argued for the need to appoint a Christian Governor of “Armenia” with the approval of the Powers, who would have a sufficient body of militia or armed police at his disposal for keeping the peace and for use, if needed, against “the hordes of savage

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ ‘Indignation in London’, *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, 18 Dec 1894. See also ‘In Behalf of Armenia’, *Denver Evening Post*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹¹⁴ ‘Great indignation meeting in London’ *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894. For names of the most famous notables who participated in or sent letters to the public meeting of St. Martin’s Town Hall, see Appendix No. 1.

¹¹⁵ ‘The Armenian Question’, *The Times*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹¹⁶ ‘Great indignation meeting in London’ *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Many other newspapers published the opinions of the contributors of the meeting, but in less detail than the *Daily News*, such as ‘Multiple News Items’ *The Morning Post*, 18 Dec 1894; ‘The Armenian Christians’, *The Standard*, 18 Dec 1894; ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Leeds Mercury*, 18 Dec 1894.

Kurds who overrun Armenia”.¹¹⁸ Dr R. F. Horton did not think that there was a single person in Britain who would hesitate to raise his voice to oppose the persecution of the Armenians. “The people of this great country” should exert themselves to ameliorate the condition of the poor Armenians.¹¹⁹ Canon Gore argued that the British Government was doing what could be done in respect of the Armenians, but that it should feel that it had behind it a great wave of popular enthusiasm and strong moral feeling.¹²⁰

The pro-Armenian agenda was active not only in London and other big cities such as Edinburgh,¹²¹ and Manchester, where there was an active Armenian community¹²², but also in small cities where there were few if any Armenians. For instance, “A large and enthusiastic public meeting” was held in Bradford on 17 December 1894, under the auspices of the Mayor (Ald. W. Wood). On the platform, there were several MPs and academics. At the end of the meeting, it was decided that copies of the resolutions should be sent to the Prime Minister and the Earl of Kimberley.¹²³ In Huddersfield, nearly one thousand citizens in connection with the Millen Church P.S.A. attended a meeting, chaired by the Mayor. A resolution was announced to call the attention of the British Foreign Office to the Armenian “massacre”.¹²⁴ A well-attended meeting was convened at the Mechanics’ Institute, Halifax protesting against the Armenian adversities. The Mayor presided and W. Rawson Shaw, MP, was one of the speakers. A sympathetic letter from Stansfeld, MP, was read as well. Similar to almost all the public assemblies convened during 1894-96, the meeting sent resolutions in favour of the Armenians to the British Government.¹²⁵ The “protest meeting” in Oxford on 14 June 1895 was also another prominent meeting “against the massacres” carried out against the Armenians. It was presided by the Dean of Christ Church and attended by many famous British figures including clergymen,

¹¹⁸ Multiple News Items’ *The Morning Post*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹¹⁹ ‘Great indignation meeting in London’ *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894

¹²⁰ ‘Multiple News Items’, *The Morning Post*, 18 Dec 1894; ‘Great indignation meeting in London’ *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹²¹ ‘This morning’s News’, *Daily News*, 3 Dec 1894.

¹²² ‘Turkey and the Treatment of Armenians’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 30 Jan 1895.

¹²³ ‘The Armenian Atrocities’, *Leeds Mercury*, 18 Dec 1894.

¹²⁴ ‘Armenia’, *Daily News*, 13 Dec 1894.

¹²⁵ ‘The Armenian Inquiry’, *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Dec 1894.

politicians and academics.¹²⁶ Jeremy Salt has noted how the events in Sasun were exploited by Armenian lobbyists in Britain who used it to open “the floodgates to a torrent of Turcophobia in Europe and the United states”.¹²⁷ The British officials did not deny that there was active Armenian agitation in Britain. When Rustem Pasha, the Ottoman Ambassador in London (1885-95), called the attention of the Earl of Kimberly to the action of revolutionary agents and societies in Britain, Kimberly admitted there “undoubtedly were some revolutionary agents at work”.¹²⁸

6. The opposite view in Britain regarding the Armenian adversities

Alongside these expressions of public support for the Armenians, different views on the conflict were expressed which were critical of the pro-Armenian stance. For instance, an editorial in *The Times* disagreed with many points in the content of the memorial sent to the Earl of Kimberley by Garabed Hagopian that accused the Ottoman Government of mass murder of the Armenians. The editor criticised Hagopian for not giving proofs of his claim that the alleged atrocities were carried out under direct orders from Constantinople. The editorial argued that it was not true that the Porte had not exerted himself to control the violence of the Kurds and that the Ottoman officials’ perspective on the events in Sasun that needed to be heard. Although it acknowledged that abuses had taken place it suggested that the Armenians’ revolutionary ambitions had led to a distortion of the truth whereby the lawlessness of the Ottoman authorities and their troops had been exaggerated.¹²⁹ The editorial claimed that the account of the alleged atrocities propagandised by the Armenian Patriotic Association bore signs of its political origin, and that its purpose was to raise agitation in Britain, similar to that of 1876 after the Bulgarian atrocities which had provided Russia with the excuse to invade the Ottoman Empire, leading to its partition at the Berlin Congress. In short, it warned that exaggeration and distortion of the facts had consequences in 1876, which it would be futile to think of reproducing.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ 'The Armenian Atrocities', *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 22 June 1895.

¹²⁷ Salt, *Imperialism, Evangelism and the Ottoman Armenians 1878-1896*, p.75.

¹²⁸ F.O. 424-181, p.254, No.303, The Earl of Kimberly to Sir P. Currie, Foreign Office, March 28. 1895.

¹²⁹ 'We publish in another column a memorial' *The Times*, 17 Nov 1894.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

There were other politicians, MPs, and journalists, generally from the Conservatives, who similarly disagreed with the prevalent views in the country and criticised Armenian propaganda. In his pamphlet *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation, Its Genesis, Method, Truth and Consequences*, sent to Parliament in 1895, Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, MP, stated that the first aim of writing his pamphlet was to warn British citizens of “the source and motive power of the remarkable and mischievous agitation” that had been carried on in Europe, particularly in Britain after the Sasun uprising. He believed that "the deliberate object of the agitation, was not to obtain redress for the Armenian sufferings, but to excite public feeling in this country against Turkey".¹³¹ In 1897 again, Bartlett expressed his regret that a large section of the politicians and the press in Britain had used a language of violent abuse towards the Sultan and his ministers. Although he decried the misdeeds carried out in eastern Anatolia during 1894-96, he condemned “sham sentiment and atrocity-mongering” in Britain as well. He argued that the violent denunciations in Britain of the Sasun revolt and its repression were based on journalistic fictions that either had no existence in reality, or at best had little basis in fact. He argued that the atrocity cry was used for party aims in Britain [meaning by the Liberals].¹³² Bartlett, who met the Sultan in January 1896, criticised British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. He thought that the stories about the Armenian sufferings were a pretext for political purposes in order to dominate the Ottoman Empire. He denounced the agitation that had been aroused in Britain during 1895-96 and argued that the “sham sentiment” caused injury to Turkey, Armenians and Britain herself. It strengthened the idea, which had been widespread among the Ottoman people, that there was a conspiracy among the Christian Powers led by Britain for the overthrow of Ottoman rule and for the destruction of the Muslim faith.¹³³

While the numbers of the Armenian victims were the focus of attention for the pro-Armenians, it was the same for those who disagreed with them. Bartlett stated that the revolt of Sasun was suppressed at the cost of 262 lives or at the highest estimate 500

¹³¹ Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation*, p.2.

¹³² Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, *The Battlefields of Thessaly: With Personal Experiences in Turkey and Greece* (London: John Murray, 1897), pp.4-5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

or 600 people, not 30,000 as some channels claimed.¹³⁴ Bartlett also criticised the accounts of pro-Armenian agitators in Britain. For instance, he criticised the “ridiculous exaggeration” mentioned in a letter of M. J. Paul the treasurer of the Anglo-Armenian Association, published in the *Daily News*, reporting that 50,000 Ottoman troops including the Hamidiye cavalry participated in the Sasun campaign against the Armenians. Bartlett argued that there were not more than 5,000 troops in the whole of the two vilayets of Bitlis and Van.¹³⁵ Captain C. F. Dixon-Johnson, argued that British public opinion regarding Armenian victims had been deceived by prejudiced reports. He drew a comparison between the original accounts of the number of Bulgarians killed in the risings of 1876 and of Armenians killed in the Sasun revolt of 1894, with the successive official estimates. While the British were informed that there were 60,000 Bulgarian victims, subsequent official estimates showed that the death toll of the Bulgarian and Turkish Soldiers was not more than 3,500. Likewise, he stated, that while the common report was that 8,000 Armenians were massacred in Sasun (the common account of British newspapers and Hallward's consular report of 1894), subsequent official estimates fixed the number at 900 victims [he meant Shipley's report of 1895]. Dixon-Johnson accused Armenian agencies of creating exaggerated stories that were circulated to the press.¹³⁶ He argued that the British figures who were supporting the Armenians such as James Bryce and Sir Edwin Pears had been influenced by some “well-known hand” of the affluent Armenian Committees in Europe and America, who had political purposes in opposing the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁷

Sidney Whitman, the correspondent of the *New York Herald*, who had made several visits to European and Asiatic Turkey between 1896 and 1908, emphasized the same idea about the Armenian agitation. He stated that “Everything had been carefully prepared in Asia and in the press of Europe and America before the Armenian outbreak [he meant the period of 1894-96] to boom a second Bulgaria”. He believed that the revolutionary movement was the reason for the massacres that took place.¹³⁸ Whitman, moreover, argued that the agitation supported by individuals in Britain, such as Canon

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp.5-6.

¹³⁵ See Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation*, p.3; ‘The Armenian Question’, *Daily News*, 26 Jan 1895.

¹³⁶ Dixon-Johnson, *The Armenians*, part VII.

¹³⁷ Ibid., part VI.

¹³⁸ Sidney Whitman, *Turkish Memories* (London: William Heinemann, 1914), p.121.

McColl and the Duke of Westminster, had a great impact on representing the Turks as fanatics thirsting for the blood of the Christian.¹³⁹ He added that a “vast Armenian conspiracy”, which had been nurtured in Russia and promoted by the Nonconformist element in Britain, concealed important aspects of the Armenian crisis. Whitman also criticised a number of correspondents of foreign newspapers in Constantinople for sending harrowing accounts that fanned a flame of hatred directed against Muslims. This was particularly the case in Britain and America.¹⁴⁰

Many of those who were more critical of the Armenians had close contact with Ottoman figures and were sympathetic towards the Ottoman Empire and Muslims. Like Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, Whitman interviewed the Sultan many times and had a great respect for Muslims. In general, the pro-Armenians were those who were anti-Ottoman Empire, and conversely those who defended the Ottoman official side and expressed sympathy for Muslims, held critical views of the Armenians. Earlier also Captain James Creagh, who criticized the Armenian attitude during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, showed his commiseration with the hapless Muslims and strongly criticised those British figures who tended to damage the reputation of Muslims and the Ottomans.¹⁴¹

Walter B. Harris, the correspondent of *The Times* wrote an important article ‘An Unbiased view of the Armenian Question’ about the responsibilities of the main participants in “the vexed question of Armenia”. The fact that he had travelled to the area enabled him to have a wide knowledge about the Armenian question. He pointed out the effect of the British press coverage of the Armenian sufferings on the public, saying that the accounts that filled the British newspapers during the early months of 1895 caused “a horror in England as is only possible amongst a philanthropic and generous nation”. These feelings were incited into a desire for retaliation by the representatives of the Armenians in Britain. Harris made an important observation about the impact of pro-Armenian propaganda on the British public, “This flood of pity, noble as it was in one way, was accompanied by at least one disadvantage, if not danger. It closed the eyes of the English people, and Europe in general, to any other

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.10-11.

¹⁴¹ James Creagh, *Armenians, Koords, and Turks*, Vol. I (London: Samuel Tinsley & Co., 1880), p. xii.

side of the question that might exist”.¹⁴² Harris did not agree with the British public opinion on the Armenian question. He asserted that before judging, the British public ought to know more about the Armenians and the Armenian question, and that there was a tendency by some writers to ignore significant elements of the case. For these reasons, he thought ignorance and even biased opinions were found in Britain.¹⁴³ Harris put the responsibility for what happened to the Armenians in the mid-1890s on the Armenians, Turks and Kurds alike. While he strongly condemned the cruelties against the Armenians, he also blamed the Armenians especially the revolutionaries for what happened in the area.¹⁴⁴ Harris denied the argument that the massacres against the Armenians were because of religious persecution. He argued that the religious pretext was put forward by the agitators in the West to obtain “the more hearty co-operation of Powers in redressing their wrongs”.¹⁴⁵

While the pro-Armenians focused on the points that would show the Christians as victims and the Kurds and Turks as oppressors, their critics tried to draw the attention of the British public to some other issues. Briefly, we can point out to two different writers in this regard. Minas Tcheraz the editor of *Armenia* and Professor of Armenian studies in King’s College, London, criticized Woods Pasha (Sir Henry Felix Woods) the British-Ottoman admiral, who was joined to the British Embassy in Constantinople for publishing an article in *The Morning Post* of 26 November 1894 in which he attacked the Armenians, supported the policy of the Sultan and denied the persecution of Christians.¹⁴⁶ Woods responded with an article in *The Times*, in which he questioned the sources of the information of the Armenian Rev Garabed Thoumaian, who had written in *The Times* about “the alleged massacre of Armenians”. Woods remarked that the Ottoman Government had many enemies, who had biased opinions in favour of the Armenians and that the Armenian societies in Europe contained a number of writers, who were unscrupulous in their campaigns against the Ottoman administration. He also pointed out the role of Athens as the active centre of Armenian agitation and argued that the Armenian revolutionary committee there had mistranslated

¹⁴² Harris, ‘An Unbiased view of the Armenian Question’, p.483.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp.483-84.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.484-85.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.485.

¹⁴⁶ Minas Tcheraz, ‘The state of Armenia’, *The Morning Post*, 27 Nov 1894.

and misinterpreted news regarding their cause that reached Britain.¹⁴⁷ Bartlett also pointed out the impact of Armenian nationalists in Europe especially in Athens who were sending false information to the British press. He blamed the method of the English newspapers in covering the Armenian adversities, arguing that the proprietors of the great English journals had a serious responsibility because they, as he claimed, recklessly printed different tales; many of them were very absurd, which had been produced by the “Armenian manufactory of lies”.¹⁴⁸

7. Conclusion

In general, the British supported the Armenians and condemned the Kurds for suppressing them during 1894-96, which increased Anti-Kurdish feelings in Britain. Overall, the British newspaper coverage of the Sasun uprising including the Kurdish role, is characterised by inaccuracy and exaggeration. However, the accounts of the British newspapers were different and not in agreement regarding Kurdish participation in the incident, the role of the Hamidiye regiments and the death toll of the Armenians. Similar to the earlier periods, the Liberal press, especially the *Daily News*, was more critical of the Kurds during the Armenian adversities than the Conservative press such as *The Times* which was sceptical about some of the coverage of the Kurds and Armenians.

This chapter has tried to present a realistic idea about what really happened in Sasun. On one hand, it establishes the mistaken and exaggerated accounts of a number of historians such as Shaw and Shaw who claim that the military actions of the Ottoman army and Hamidiye in Sasun were retaliation for the atrocities carried out by Armenian revolutionaries who had already wiped out “the entire population” of the nearby Muslim villages.¹⁴⁹ On the other hand, it demonstrates that the prevailing popular idea in the West of the mass killing of the Armenians in Sasun is not correct and was exaggerated as well. It has shown that after more than a century, many exaggerations and much incorrect information are still reiterated by a number of historians regarding

¹⁴⁷ Woods Pasha ‘Disturbed Armenia, *The Times*, 6 Dec 1894.

¹⁴⁸ Bartlett, *Armenian "Atrocity" Agitation*, p.6 and pp.8-9.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw and Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Vol. II, p.204.

the Kurds and the Armenian adversities in 1894-96. For instance, researchers like Schaller and Zimmerer still claim that “Kurds killed up to 100,000 Armenians” during the events of 1894-96.¹⁵⁰

There is no doubt that Armenians were the main victims in Sasun. However, there is much British evidence to show that the Armenian question has a different aspect and the story was not exactly as it was reported by many British sources. While the majority of the British newspapers and several British consuls showed the Kurds as the main perpetrators in the Sasun events and exaggerated the number of Armenian victims, the testimonies recorded by the European delegates attached to the Commission of Inquiry expressed a different opinion on roles of both sides. This chapter has shown that the British were not informed about all aspects of the Kurdish attitudes towards the Armenians. While the newspapers were full of news about the Hamidiye’s alleged atrocities and several British consuls condemned them for the same reason, other sources who closely investigated the incident, namely the European and British representatives to the Commission, did not mention that they played any role during the Sasun troubles. Moreover, although the Hamidiye units were aggressive towards the Armenians, some of their leaders, as Sykes pointed out, had saved many Armenians during 1895-96.¹⁵¹

There were two different views in Britain about what happened to the Armenians in 1894-96. First, the opinion of the majority of the public was sympathetic to the Armenians and condemned the Ottomans and Kurds for being fanatical against the Christians. This group mostly included the Liberal politicians who were able to influence public opinion regarding the Armenian question. It has been shown how the Armenian adversities during 1894-96 were an important element in the political agenda of the British Liberals. The Liberals tried to put forward the idea that the Christian Armenians were being oppressed and needed a British response. The alternative view

¹⁵⁰ Dominik J. Schaller and Jürgen Zimmerer, ‘Late Ottoman genocides: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish population and extermination policies – introduction’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, Issue 1 (2008), p.9. The researchers claimed that the Hamidiye regiments ravaged the Armenian population in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the Hamidiye was formed at the last decade of the century.

¹⁵¹ Such as Ibrahim Pasha Milli who protected the Armenians and other Christians as pointed out in chapter three.

which, pointed out the negative role of the Armenian agitation in Britain, included observers like Ellis Ashmead Bartlett and Walter B. Harris, who challenged the conventional Liberal position. However, they were not able to change the common British view regarding the Kurds and Armenian question because the press had greater influence over British citizens than other channels of influence.¹⁵² Therefore, the events of 1894-96 had a negative impact on the reputation of the Kurds in Britain more than ever before.

¹⁵² The effect of the pro-Armenian agitation and the Kurdish position in the Armenian question upon British policy towards the Ottoman Empire will be studied in the next chapter.

Chapter five: The Armenian question and the image of the Kurds in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Introduction

The situation in eastern Anatolia during the period between 1897 and 1908 was relatively quiet and did not see any significant events similar to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, the wide disturbances that happened during the mid-1890s, or a revolt such as the Kurdish uprising of 1880. This period also saw some détente between the Kurds and the Armenians and there were demands for conciliation by a number of notables from both sides. In 1898 the *Kurdistan* newspaper was inaugurated which called for conciliation and coexistence between both nations in several of its issues between 1898 and 1902. A number of Kurds, especially intellectuals in exile, called for friendly Kurdish-Armenian relationships. On the Armenian side, although the Armenian revolutionaries continued fighting against Kurds and Turks loyal to the Ottoman Government, a number of Armenians attempted to establish cordial relationships with neighbouring people.¹ However, the Armenian question saw no noticeable progress and remained an unsolved matter and relations between the Armenians and Kurds remained tense. Furthermore, the new proposals for reforms in favour of the Armenians which emerged in 1895 in the wake of the Sasun troubles and as a result of a wide public demand in the West (particularly in Britain) failed to solve the hardships of the Armenians. Because the Ottoman Government avoided carrying out the reforms and also the Great Powers, who were in disagreement regarding the Armenian question, ignored the application of them afterwards.

1. Historiography

The secondary sources relating to the themes of this chapter are varied and can be categorised according to the subjects on which they focus on. A number of historians

¹ Hofmann and Koutcharian, 'The history of Armenian-Kurdish relations in the Ottoman Empire', p.19.

have studied the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians in the margins of Kurdish history. David McDowall, for instance, who studied Kurdish national awareness before the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, identified cooperation between Kurdish chieftains and Armenian village chiefs on a number of occasions. He recorded the attempts of Armenian revolutionaries in 1897 to encourage several Hamidiye leaders to take part in a joint struggle against the Sultan's rule.² In 'Power in the Periphery' Janet Klein mostly focuses on the Hamidiye in the context of Kurdish history and Kurdish relationships with the central government in Constantinople. She particularly studies the Hamidiye and the "Agrarian Question" in the late Ottoman period. She argues that this problem led to a deterioration in the region's situation and that, especially after 1896, the Hamidiye and powerful lords seized the agricultural land of the helpless residents especially the Armenians who were less supported by the Ottoman authorities.³

Another group of historians covered the Armenian cause during 1897-1908 in the context of the history of the Armenians and the Armenian question. There are two different interpretations of the events that took place in the late years of the reign of Abdulhamid II, which witnessed the rise of activities of Armenian guerrillas. Historians such as Salahi Sonyel, and Justin McCarthy and his Turkish co-writers are inclined to condemn the activities of the Armenian revolutionaries, indicting them for following a strategy of violence.⁴ McCarthy and his co-writers share Klein's view that the Kurdish tribal attacks in eastern Anatolia were against all the population, Christians and Muslims alike, including Kurdish peasants.⁵ With regard to the opinion of Westerners on the Armenia question and the Kurdish-Armenian relationship, McCarthy and his co-writers argue that European citizens were biased in favour of Christians and knew 'nothing' regarding Muslim hardship or Armenian offences against Muslims.⁶ Similarly

² McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp.88-98.

³ See chapter four in Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', pp.256-340.

⁴ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.233 and pp.247-50; McCarthy et al., *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, pp.41-47 and pp.78-129.

⁵ Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', pp.280-81; McCarthy et al., *The Armenian Rebellion at Van*, p.37 and pp.81-83.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.44.

Klein stated that European representatives in the Ottoman East were rarely sympathetic to Kurdish chieftains of any kind.⁷

On the other hand, historians such as Christopher J. Walker argue that the activities of the Dashnak fighters in eastern Anatolia in that period were not opportunistic, but arose from the needs of the people, because the Armenians were gradually being deprived of property and land and the means of subsistence through the collusion of the central Government.⁸ Akaby Nassibian accuses successive Ottoman Governments of following a policy of discrimination towards the Armenian peasantry and the land question. She argues that, because they realised that the peasantry was an important element of nationhood, the Ottoman authorities constantly tried to uproot the Armenian peasantry from their land by use of Kurdish tribes.⁹ Arman Kirakossian in *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question from the 1830s to 1914*, indicts the Ottoman authorities and Kurds for oppressing the Armenians. However, he also argues that British policy was incapable of making the Ottoman authorities carry out reforms in “Armenia” and providing security for the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire. His book covers the link between the Armenian question and party politics in Britain. He analyses the policies of successive British Governments, Liberal and Conservative, towards the Armenian question, including the reluctance of Rosebery’s Cabinet towards the question in 1895 and the stance of Salisbury’s cabinet 1895-1902 on the matter.¹⁰ Kirakossian also discusses British diplomatic contacts with the Great Powers regarding the Armenian question. However, he does not probe deeply either the British perspective on the Kurdish-Armenian relationship or the basis on which British perceptions on the Ottoman Empire were based.

In general, the secondary sources mentioned above do not address the theme of this chapter that is mainly concerned with studying the image of the Kurds and Armenians in Britain in the late Ottoman period. Therefore, this chapter engages principally with works which focus on British perceptions of some aspects related to the

⁷ Klein, 'Power in the Periphery', p.209.

⁸ Walker, *Armenia the Survival of a Nation*, p.178.

⁹ Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, p.25.

¹⁰ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.201-211, pp.212-224, pp.273-80.

Ottoman Empire and its peoples in the late Ottoman period. Jo Laycock studies many aspects of British views on the Armenians and their cause. She also analyses the attitudes of British Liberals and Conservatives towards the Armenian issue in the 1890s, besides liberal pressure groups. To mobilise the public in supporting the Armenians, Armenophiles in Britain focused on two main elements: Christianity and civilisation.¹¹ However, Laycock does not cover issues such as the nature of the Armenian diaspora in Britain and their influence in any depth, which is important to better understand the British perception of the Armenian question.¹² Helen Odams¹³ has analysed the views of late Victorian society towards the Ottomans in detail more than any other researcher. She contends that British ideas about the Ottomans were mostly formed through their religious, cultural, political and nationalist background. However, British perspectives on the Kurds are not the focus of her thesis.

2. The Argument of this Chapter

Interest in the Armenian cause in Britain decreased after the incidents of 1894-96. Therefore, the volume of material, especially periodicals and newspaper articles, published about the Kurdish-Armenian problem in Britain between 1897 and 1908 is less extensive compared with that of other periods. However, British representations of the Kurdish-Armenian problem remained the same in terms of how the issues were perceived, although discussion about the subject declined.

Up to the late twentieth century, there was no comprehensive study, as Odams states, of the place of the Ottoman Empire in British or European thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ideas and the role that they had in affecting relations between Britain and the Ottoman Empire have been rarely studied.¹⁴ Nor is there any detailed research on the image of the Kurds in Britain. Therefore, this chapter examines the bases on which the British perceptions of the Kurds and the Armenian

¹¹ Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, pp.80-81.

¹² For more details on the book, see Andrekos Varnava, [review], 'Jo Laycock, *Imagining Armenia: Orientalism, Ambiguity and Intervention* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009)', (review No.876). www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/876 [accessed 20 Jan 2017].

¹³ Odams, 'British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908'.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

question was built in the context of wider British perceptions of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter argues that the patterns of representing the Armenians and Kurds which were established in the 1880s continued through the 1890s and into the twentieth century. The prejudices that emerged were reinforced and repeated in different contexts with increasing force. Religious and cultural backgrounds continued to have a direct influence in shaping British ideas about the Kurds and Armenians, and pro-Armenian associations and Armenian publications in Britain determined the image of the Kurds in Britain. In general, the Kurds were described as fanatic Muslims and Armenians as Christians who deserved aid and support.

This chapter also examines the Armenian question in the context of the party politics of the Liberal and Conservative Parties and argues that although both sides had common views on the Armenians, they also differed from one another in important aspects. They both criticised the position of the Kurds and the Ottoman authorities in the Armenian cause but had different approaches to solving the matter. This chapter argues that the Armenian question influenced the positions of the British parties in opposition and in power, and that a number of factors, domestic and international, affected Britain's stance regarding the Armenian question including the application of the scheme for the second Armenian Reforms (1895-1900).

This chapter discusses how the British representation of the Kurdish position in the Armenian cause during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II influenced general British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. In other words, what was the role of the Kurdish factor in the British political equation and her relationship with the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? By referring to contemporary sources, this chapter argues that the wide denouncement of the Kurdish position in the Armenian question, especially in the press, directly influenced British public opinion and officials in adopting more disapproving views of the Kurds and the Ottoman Empire. This denouncement increased British criticism of the Ottoman rule and distanced Britain further from supporting the Ottoman Empire which had been an ally during the nineteenth century.

In the first place, this chapter will evaluate the British coverage of the relationship between the Kurds and Armenians between 1897 and 1908 as a prelude to the discussion of the general themes of the chapter.

3. British sources and the Kurdish and Armenian relationship between 1897 and the Young Turk Revolution of 1908

During the period from 1897 to 1908, the dispute between the Kurds and Armenians, or rather between some Kurdish tribes and Armenian bands, continued. A number of skirmishes and armed conflicts happened between Armenian militia and Kurds or between Ottoman forces and Armenian insurgents. The British newspapers occasionally reported on these disturbances in eastern Anatolia.¹⁵ Usually they accused the Kurds of harassing the Armenians. For example, on the basis of a telegram from the *Daily News'* Vienna correspondent, several newspapers reported that the Kurdish chieftain Halil agha and his retainers held 80 Armenian families living in Kara Aglul as prisoners, and surrounded the area.¹⁶ Sometimes the Kurds were accused of assisting the Ottoman troops in killing the Armenians. The *Evening Telegraph*, Scotland, reported in 1900 that the Kurds supported the regular troops in massacring all the residents of an Armenian village (Spaghank) in the Sasun district, and then burned the village, and pillaged three other villages in the district.¹⁷ The British newspapers also accused the Hamidiye of oppressing Armenians. In July 1899, the *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* accused the Hamidiye of committing outrages against the Armenians and burning and plundering a town and several Armenian villages.¹⁸

At the same time, however, the Armenian bands continued to be engaged in revolutionary activities and attacked the Kurds and the Ottoman soldiers on a number of occasions between 1897 and 1908. British diplomats reported on the activities of

¹⁵ For instance, see 'Rescuing the Sultan's Prisoner', *Daily Mail*, 30 Mar 1897; 'Kurdish outrages in Armenia', *Leicester Chronicle*, 12 Nov 1898.

¹⁶ 'Kurdish Excesses in Armenia', *Derby Daily Telegraph*, 24 July 1901; 'Kurdish Excesses in Armenia', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24 July 1901.

¹⁷ 'Armenian Horror', *Evening Telegraph*, 10 Aug 1900. The *Cambridge Independent Press* narrated the event but in a different way. 'More Armenian Massacres', *Cambridge Independent Press*, 17 Aug 1900.

¹⁸ 'Fresh Outrages in Armenia', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 3 July 1899; 'Fresh Outrages in Armenia', *York Herald*, 4 July 1899.

Armenian revolutionary parties and their violent actions on several occasions.¹⁹ In 1904, for example, one British diplomatic report recorded that a large number of Armenian revolutionaries had crossed from Russian and Persian territory as they did in 1897-98. They killed some Kurdish soldiers, and another report was to the effect that they attacked Turkish gendarmes and shot them.²⁰ In a debate in the House of Lords about the situation in Van and Mush, the attacks of the Armenian insurgents on Turkish troops, and the necessity of protecting the Armenians against “the predatory raids of the Kurds” were discussed as well.²¹ However, British newspapers rarely covered the Armenian revolutionaries’ attacks, and when they did so, they usually mentioned their activities without reference to their attacks on the army or residents.²²

Another factor that caused a further deterioration in the relationship between the Armenians and Kurds during 1897-1908 was the land question. It was a problematic issue and dated back to the 1880s when a number of Kurdish chieftains, taking advantage of the weak control of the Government in the region, had gained influence and appropriated the agrarian lands of others, Armenian or even Muslims. The establishment of the Hamidiye in the early 1890s further aggravated the land problem because the balance of influence changed in favour of some Hamidiyan leaders at the expense of residents, especially the Armenians who were less strong and more vulnerable especially after the Armenian adversities of 1894-96. In addition, the Ottoman authorities usually condoned Kurdish Beys in appropriating Armenian arable lands, as they considered that the appropriation of Armenian lands would weaken the position of the Armenians in eastern Anatolia and their liberation movement in the future. The land issue remained unsolved even after the reign of Abdulhamid II and the rise of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) when the issue became increasingly complex.²³

¹⁹ For instance, F.O. 424/205, pp.181-82, Incl. in No.151, Acting Consul Hampson to Sir N. O’Conor, Erzurum, Oct 19, 1903.

²⁰ The Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 19 May 1904, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 135, cols.411-12.

²¹ The Marquess of Lansdowne, 12 August 1904, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 140, col.386.

²² For instance, see 'Activity in Turkey', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 14 Nov 1903.

²³ For more details about the land question, see Janet Klein, ‘Power in the Periphery’, pp.256-340.

British diplomats expressed concern on the land question and discussed the Kurdish harassment of the Armenians many times during the period of 1897-1908. For instance, in 1906, a despatch to Edward Grey, the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, expressed worry about the increasing destitution of the Armenian residents, whose land was progressively passing into the hands of Turks and Kurds.²⁴ For a writer like E. J. Dillon the plan of the Ottoman Government was to drive the Armenians out from their lands through using the Kurds, especially the Hamidiye, to create a situation in which the number of the Armenians would be considerably reduced such that the need to implement reforms would elapse. That would mean, as he stated, ending the Armenia cause which would “disgrace Christianity and laugh civilisation to scorn”.²⁵ The land question, therefore, was a symbol of the tyranny of the Kurds and the suffering of the Armenians in the British point of view.

4. “Fiendish Kurds” and “oppressed Christians”: Images of the Kurds and Armenians in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

The majority of British literature about the Kurds in the late Ottoman period was produced in the context of the Armenian cause. Numerous articles about Kurdish misdeeds, especially in British newspapers, published during the period of this study, showed the Kurds as agents of the Ottoman state to suppress the Christian peoples of Anatolia especially the Armenians and, as Malcolm MacColl stated, to sweep them out of the region. His book *England's Responsibility towards Armenia* which included many accounts of Kurdish behaviour, was recommended by the Duke of Westminster to be read by all.²⁶ As a result, the reputation of the Kurds in Britain was strongly affected by the Armenian crisis and even some positive images that the Kurds had enjoyed earlier, as pointed out briefly in chapter two, had faded. Sympathy for the Armenians and criticism of the Kurds in Britain arose from a variety of reasons which can be considered as follows.

²⁴ F.O. 424/210, p.177, No.117, Mr. G. Barclay to Sir Edward Grey, Constantinople, Nov 13, 1906.

²⁵ Dillon, ‘The Condition of Armenia’, pp.156-57.

²⁶ MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia*, pp. ii-iii.

4.1. Religious feelings

The religious background was one of the most significant factors in British sympathy towards the Armenians. To a great extent, British society was still a committed Christian society in the nineteenth century. Odams argued that common opinion in Britain about the Ottoman Empire during the reign of Abdulhamid II was negative and subject to assumptions and bias. Those notions saw the reign of the Sultan as pan-Islamic, anti-Christian, and anti-Western.²⁷ The public asserted the importance of defending the Christians who were under Ottoman Islamic rule, especially given that Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) was known for his strong Islamic beliefs as the definitive “anti-Christian and pan-Islamic sovereign”.²⁸ Generally, people in the West opposed the idea of Islamic rule over Christians. For many of them, defending the Armenians from cruelties was a religious duty. James F. Oswald, MP, asked members of Parliament not to forget that the Armenians were a Christian nation and that the Queen was called by the title of "Defender of the Faith".²⁹ In addition, treaty commitments were a principle on which some British observers built their argument that Britain had to defend the Armenians. They argued that the British were responsible for the Armenians politically and morally. They were responsible politically because, as Oswald stated, Britain was the main Power who had argued for Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin. As such, she was bound to the Armenian cause, and had a duty to address the grievances of the Armenians.³⁰ They were responsible morally because, as Canon Malcolm MacColl argued, Britain was responsible before God and humanity with regard to the Armenian cause and ought to stand against the Armenian atrocities as one of the greatest felonies in the history of Christendom.³¹ Even a number of clergymen asked for more radical steps. For instance, in a Diocesan Conference in Lichfield, a bishop who accused the Ottoman Government of applying a policy of exterminating its

²⁷ Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’, p.3.

²⁸ Arman Kirakossian, *The Armenian Massacres 1894-1896: British Media Testimony* (Dearborn: The Armenian Research Center, 2007), p.60.

²⁹ Mr. J. F. Oswald, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, cols.99-100.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia*, pp. iv-v.

Christian subjects, demanded that the Church of England extend missions in the East to subdue both Turk and Kurd to the obedience of Christ.³²

Many British writers believed that the Armenians were the most significant race among the Christians in the East. C. G. Curtis, the Chaplain of the Memorial Church at Pera, Constantinople, believed that humanity in general and Christianity in particular, owed the Armenians a debt since they were the first nation to become Christians, and were the only Christian nation in the area which had played a great role in defending Christianity before and after the rise of Islam. He argued that the Armenians should be assisted to obtain their rights because they were famous for their intelligence and industry and genius especially outside their homeland and also because they were more numerous than some European nations.³³ Curtis demanded all to call on Britain to listen to the voice of the Armenians who facilitated the first settlement of the British in India. He cited an example of an Armenian who was full of grief because, unlike the Bulgarians, his nation was forgotten by Europe, particularly by Britain.³⁴ Seemingly the Armenians hoped that Britain, rather than other European Powers, would help them to achieve their goal of independence. This belief was reflected in Isabella Lucy Bird's observation when travelling in the Vilayet of Van that no question was more embarrassing and pitiful than the one asked in every village, "Will England help us?" followed by the request "Will you speak to 'The Consul' for us?".³⁵

The religious dimension was almost always present in speeches of the Pro-Armenian writers. Many British Statesmen and politicians had strong religious affiliations such as Gladstone and James Bryce. Bryce praised the efforts of the American missionaries in supporting the "ancient seats of Christianity" on behalf of modern Christian nations. "The tribes of robber Kurds" who were plundering, murdering and burning, were the main cause preventing the Armenians from enjoying peace and progress, in addition to the encouragement of the Ottoman Government to those "evil-doers". Bryce argued that the fanaticism stimulated by the Sultan who

³² 'Lichfield', *The Times*, 23 Oct 1895.

³³ C. G. Curtis, 'The Armenians', *The Times*, 6 Jan 1877.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bird, 'The shadow of the Kurds', p.827.

claimed to be Caliph, among the Muslim population, made the Armenian situation worse. In appealing to Muslim feelings, he revived their anti-Christian sentiment. The massacre of the Armenians was a deliberate plan by the Sultan in order to exterminate the Christian population.³⁶ In the House of Commons, Bryce expressed his belief that the Armenians who died for their faith during the mid-1890s were a symbol of sacrifice for Christianity in modern times and as worthy of reverence as the Christians who were martyred earlier under Nero and Diocletian. He argued that the Christian peoples in the West needed to glorify the Armenians as they did the martyrs of early Christendom who had bravely chosen “death rather than deny their Lord”.³⁷

The clergy in Britain provided a strong base for growing sympathy and support for the Armenians. For some clergy like the Reverend Malcolm MacColl, who was famously anti-Turks and Kurds, serving the Armenian cause was a religious duty. Canon MacColl, who as H. C. G. Matthew said, “established for himself an unusual niche in British public life”,³⁸ attributed the cause of the Armenian atrocities to the religious system of the Ottoman rule. He was convinced that no non-Muslim subject of the Ottoman Empire had security of life property, honour, or religion, as long as that system existed. He believed that the Armenian outrages were committed under the Sacred Law (Islamic law) of the Empire, and unless it was changed, the situation of Christians would not improve. According to him, the only solution was to deliver the Christian population from this rule.³⁹ However, like other issues relevant to the Ottomans and Armenians, there was an opposite opinion on the consequences of Islamic law for the Armenian situation. In his letter to the editor of *The Morning Post*, “An English resident” in Constantinople disagreed with MacColl’s argument. He claimed that the present criminal law was adapted from the Code Napoleon, not from Sharia law, and that there was no distinction whatever made between Muslim and Christian

³⁶ James Bryce, ‘The Armenian Question’, *The Century Magazine*, 51, Nov 1895, pp.150-51.

³⁷ Mr. J. Bryce, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.110.

³⁸ Matthew, H. C. G. "MacColl, Malcolm (1831–1907), Church of England clergyman and religious controversialist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34688>.

³⁹ ‘The Armenian Christians’, *The Standard*, 18 Dec 1894; ‘Multiple News Items’, *The Morning Post*, 18 Dec 1894.

evidence.⁴⁰ Nevertheless opinions in favour of the Ottoman Empire and its system were in decline in late Victorian society, and therefore these supportive opinions failed to influence many British citizens.

It was not only the Church of England that exercised its considerable influence in directing public opinion and British policy towards supporting the Armenians. Analysis of activities in support of the Armenians shows that the Nonconformist churches were more active in supporting the Armenians compared to the Church of England which was closely affiliated with the Conservative party. The Nonconformists held strong positions on moral and social questions in Britain and they were known for their defence of Christian populations abroad which was called the ‘non-conformist conscience’. The Liberal Party had a strong relationship with British Nonconformity which was what Gladstone called “the backbone of British Liberalism”.⁴¹ There are many examples of the support of Nonconformist churches in Britain for the Armenians. For example, in December 1894 a meeting of pastors and delegates of the north-east district of the London Congregational Union, unanimously declared an announcement that the Union expressed its aversion concerning the “horrible cruelties” executed against the Christian Armenians. The meeting asked the MP for the area to use his best endeavours to call on the Prime Minister to employ the power of the nation to make sure that “these atrocities against every law, human and divine, shall never again be perpetrated”.⁴² The Evangelical Free Churches also strongly supported the Armenians. On 24 September 1896, the Council of the Evangelical Free Churches in Manchester, Salford, and district, unanimously passed a resolution, supported by upwards of 350 Nonconformist churches in the district of Manchester, expressing deep indignation at

⁴⁰ 'Multiple News Items', *The Morning Post*, 22 Dec 1894.

⁴¹ W. E. Gladstone, 'The County Franchise and Mr. Lowe Thereon', *The Nineteenth Century*, 2, Issue 9 (Nov 1877), p.552. For more details about the relationship between the Liberal Party and Nonconformist Churches see, for example, John F. Glaser, 'English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism', *The American Historical Review*, 63, No.2 (1958). Glaser argues that throughout its history the eminence and decline of the British Liberalism was substantially connected to the greatness and decline of British Nonconformity.

⁴² 'Armenia', *Daily News*, 13 Dec 1894.

the cruelties against the Armenians. They requested the British Government to secure freedom for the “oppressed Christians” under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.⁴³

4.2. The cultural background

In general, widespread ideas in the West in the late nineteenth century ranged from extreme condemnation of Ottoman society to less critical views that mocked rather than condemned. There was a common language of portrayal which was imbued with ideas regarding the racial, religious and cultural superiority of the West and suppositions concerning civilised and uncivilised races.⁴⁴ The Ottoman Empire was depicted as a backward and decadent society and the Turks as inferior and unable to progress or change. By contrast, with few exceptions, the Christian peoples of the Empire were portrayed as progressive, linked to Europe by religion, race and culture and eligible for improvement. In general, those views outweighed accounts that were more favourably disposed towards the Ottoman Empire and Muslims.⁴⁵ In the view of many British, the Kurds were worse than the Turks. For instance, after her visit to the Vilayets of Van and Bitlis, Isabella Lucy Bird wrote “In their ignorance and wild fanaticism they (Kurds) rather represent the wild hordes ... remorseless robbers, stimulated by religious hate”.⁴⁶ In contrast, Bird believed that the Armenians were “the most capable, energetic, enterprising, and pushing races in Western Asia, physically superior and intellectually acute, and, above all they are a race which can be raised in all respects to our own level”.⁴⁷

The opinions of public figures reflected widespread attitudes towards non-European societies in late Victorian Britain, which saw itself as superior to non-European societies in terms of morality, economy and culture. The effect of public debate arising from the Eastern crisis was to reinforce the image of the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire in the mind of the British public.⁴⁸ Orientalist perspectives can be seen during the discussion of British scholars regarding how the Western Powers dealt

⁴³ ‘The Porte and Armenia’, *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 26 Sep 1896.

⁴⁴ Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’, pp.3-4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁴⁶ Bird, ‘The shadow of the Kurds’, p.820.

⁴⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, Vol. II, p.336.

⁴⁸ Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’, pp.8-9.

with the Ottoman Empire in relation to the Armenian question. James Bryce argued that the Western Powers were morally responsible for the hardship of the Ottoman peoples, because they had propped up a monarchy which deserved to have collapsed a long time before. He criticised the European countries for treating the Ottoman Government as if it was a civilized state. The Turks “have no title to be so treated, and ought never to have been admitted to a place among civilized communities”. He openly supported those who denounced the idea of considering them to be a part of the European states system. Bryce argued that in the Ottoman Empire the ruling men and the system were equally corrupt, and “to try reform in the Turkish monarchy is like trying to repair a ship with rotten timbers”.⁴⁹

Armenia and its people were highly regarded by Europeans for two main reasons: as the stronghold of Christianity in the East and for their civilisation. The British clearly sympathised with the Armenians because of their cultural background. One writer considered Armenia “the ancient cradle of the Human race”, that needed more attention and help from Westerners. He mostly attributed the Armenian backwardness and problems to the Ottoman authorities and the Kurds, and reminded British readers of many appalling stories against the Armenians in his article.⁵⁰ Jo Laycock argues that during the Armenian question there was a growing tendency to show Armenia as a part of the cultured European world. The idea of Armenia as the ‘cradle of civilisation’ was obvious in British images. Laycock states that throughout the late nineteenth century, British Armenophiles accepted the idea of Armenia as the last base of Europe and the final defence of civilization and Christianity against any challenge from the East.⁵¹

In contrast to the positive notions concerning the Armenians, Kurds were mostly shown as fanatic Muslims and as a backward and savage people. In his article *Armenia: An Appeal*, E. J. Dillon directly condemned the Turks and Kurds for exterminating the Armenians as a nation, who were “the sole humanising-elements in Anatolia ... industrious and hopeful ... the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are moulded”. Dillon

⁴⁹ Bryce, ‘The Armenian Question’, pp.152-53.

⁵⁰ ‘News of the Day’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 Dec 1894.

⁵¹ Laycock, *Imagining Armenia*, p.34.

held some intolerant views, arguing that the Turks and Kurds had not been “accredited torch-bearers of civilization” and at best they were “stagnant, sluggish and utterly averse from progress”,⁵² and that “unclean spirits” seemed to have taken up abode in their soulless bodies.⁵³ He openly demanded that everyone in the British Isles should assume a share of the joint indirect responsibility for Armenian atrocities, which he labelled as one of the greatest crimes in human history. He added that conformity of ideals, aspirations, and religious faith conferred the “heroic” Armenians fair claims on the sympathy of British citizens, whose forefathers never hesitated to die for it. The British, as the dominant power in Europe, he argued, should be responsible for protecting the Armenians, more than any other nation.⁵⁴

Kurds were considered to be wild and primitive people. The notoriety of the Kurds was usually linked with their conduct toward Christians and was reiterated by many British newspapers in the period following the Armenian adversities in the mid-1890s. In 1901, the *Dundee Courier*, indicted the Kurds for massacring one hundred Armenians in two months, calling them “monsters”.⁵⁵ Another British newspaper article narrated a story about a Kurd in Constantinople who was depicted as a liar in a dispute with an Armenian.⁵⁶ The Kurds were also accused in 1899 of killing Armenians, seizing their belongings, destroying their villages and abducting Armenian women.⁵⁷ Another article in 1905 wrote that seeing so much Armenian sorrow, made one pro-Armenian and to consider the Kurds as being as bad as the devil. The article gave an example of how a Kurd at Bitlis attacked an unfortunate Armenian and then killed him in the middle of the street and in broad daylight just because he was wearing a dagger.⁵⁸ “Fiendish Kurds” was the title of an article in the *Nottingham Evening Post* about Kurdish behaviour against the Armenians in 1904.⁵⁹ At the same time, “Dastardly outrages by Kurds”, was the title of another newspaper column, stating that they

⁵² E. J. Dillon, ‘Armenia: An Appeal’, *The Contemporary review*, 69, Jan 1896, pp.1-2

⁵³ Ibid, p.3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp.1-4.

⁵⁵ 'News', *Dundee Courier*, 17 Sep 1901.

⁵⁶ 'Turkish Police Justice', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 4 Aug 1900.

⁵⁷ 'Foreign intelligence', *Belfast News-Letter*, 4 July 1899.

⁵⁸ 'What the Armenian Endures', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 16 Dec 1905.

⁵⁹ 'Fiendish Kurds', *Nottingham Evening Post*, 11 Aug 1904.

wantonly demolished Armenian hamlets, drove away the cattle, committed murders, assaulted and kidnapped the Armenian women, and plundered shops and houses.⁶⁰

Before the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Arnold Toynbee expressed some of his orientalist ideas about the Empire and Muslims in *Turkey: A Past and a Future*. With the first sentence he disparaged the Empire, “What is Turkey? It is a name which explains nothing, for no formula can embrace the variety of the countries marked "Ottoman" on the map.”⁶¹ He thought the Empire was established and existed by force not by civilisation. The Ottoman people were “the strangest congeries” of ethnic and social types that had ever been located in one Government’s mercy. He degraded the Turks who “are hardly a race” and their “artificial language”.⁶² In his view, the Kurds, who were more dispersed than any other ethnicity in the Empire, were no more civilised than the Turks. He denied that the Kurds had their own language, claiming that they spoke a Persian dialect.⁶³ Toynbee argued that the Ottomans were culturally backward, but made an exception for some Christian peoples: not all the elements in the Empire were primitive. The Greeks and Armenians, for example, were “the most energetic, intellectual, liberal elements in Turkey, the natural intermediaries between the other races and western civilisation”. He accused the Ottoman Government of taking brutal actions to eradicate these “two most valuable elements” among its subjects.⁶⁴ Toynbee cited a contemporary writer who argued that the Turkish rulers were afraid of the Christian nationalities, Armenians, Greeks and Syrians, because of their cultural and economic superiority.⁶⁵ The reader should note that Toynbee wrote his book during the First World War when the British were fighting the Ottoman Empire on many fronts. At that time, Toynbee was a key British propagandist in the Ministry of Defence with his colleague James Bryce and his strident criticism of the Empire and its supporters should be seen in the context of the war. However, to a great extent, Toynbee’s view can be seen as the realistic result of the anti-Turkish and anti-Kurdish sentiment that had been building up and spreading in

⁶⁰ 'Dastardly outrages by Kurds', *Evening Telegraph*, 11 Aug 1904.

⁶¹ Arnold Toynbee, *Turkey: A Past and a Future* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), p.1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.4-5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.6-7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.37.

Britain in the late Ottoman period. For instance, the Earl of Carnarvon, who strongly accused the Kurds of committing depredations in eastern Anatolia, had expressed almost the same ideas many years before Toynbee. He asserted in the House of Lords in 1878 that the Armenians merited more consideration because of their distinct religion and nationality. They were “ancient in history” and “a peaceful, industrious, and highly commercial people”.⁶⁶ He added that after the Greeks the Armenians were the second nation in intellectual power among the Christian peoples of the East.⁶⁷

4.3. Activities of the Armenians and pro-Armenian associations in Britain

In general, the pro-Armenian agenda in Britain influenced the British in two main ways: first, Armenian nationalists and Armenian publications, secondly, pro-Armenian associations. With regard to the first, the Hunchak Party led the Armenian revolutionary movement. It, as Dr Cyrus Hamlin said, had branches in almost every city and village in “Armenia” and in Western countries as well.⁶⁸ After Geneva, Athens was the main centre of the revolutionary activities of the Hunchak Party. The Party leaders convened conferences in 1891 and published their newspaper there until the end of 1894, when the organizational hub was moved to London. The Hunchak Party then began to influence public opinion in Britain, Europe and the USA through the press.⁶⁹

The Armenian diaspora in Britain was very active in mobilising the public to support their cause. In London, two main Armenian periodicals were published, including the *Heutchak* which was the organ of the Hunchak Party and *Hayastan*, which was published in English and French,⁷⁰ and was an outspoken newspaper of the Armenian Patriotic Association. One of the most active Armenian nationalists was Avedis Nazarbek, the leader of the Hunchak Party and editor of the *Heutchak* and also one of the most active members of the Armenian Patriotic Association. He had arrived in London in the mid-1890s from Athens, where his campaign against the Ottoman authorities made him the target of Ottoman agents who sent a Turkish spy, as he

⁶⁶ The Earl of Carnarvon, 6 June 1878, *Hansard*, 3rd Series, Vol. 240, col.1244.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ F.O. 424/178, p.59, Incl. 2 in No.49, extract from the *Presbyterian* of Feb 23, 894.

⁶⁹ Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians*, p.132-33.

⁷⁰ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, p.281.

claimed, to Athens to arrange his assassination.⁷¹ After his arrival, London became a centre for his activities and in 1896 the Hunchak Party held a congress at Frithville Gardens, Shepherd's Bush.⁷² Some British politicians argued that his publications were potentially seditious and could create political confusion, endanger their compatriots in the Ottoman Empire, and provoke the Muslims into massacres of Christians. Provocative literature was printed in London and there was also an Armenian "inflammatory newspaper" in English type.⁷³

Through their own publications in Britain the Armenians were constantly publishing news on the Kurdish outrages. The *Armenian News* of October 1904, for example, published a number of extracts from Armenian compatriots in the Ottoman Empire about the wrongdoings of the Kurds, in addition to accounts of outrages committed by Turks and Circassians. The Kurds were accused of espionage for the Government in the villages of Van, carrying away Armenian girls, driving out the residents of a number of Armenian villages from their homes, killing the Armenians, extortion, and cutting down fruit trees. The publication also rebuked the oppression of tax gatherers and accused the Hamidiye of abducting Armenian women, and "the Red Sultan" and the Kurds and Turks were blamed for the burning of the Armenian quarters and bazaars in Marash, Zeitun, Van, Bitlis and other places.⁷⁴

With regard to pro-Armenian associations, there were a number of them in Britain in the late nineteenth century. The most active association was the Anglo-Armenian Association which was founded by the Liberal politician James Bryce in 1890. F. S. Stevenson, the Liberal MP, became its President in 1892, and it also included some prominent ecclesiastics among its members. Stevenson also served on two other pro-Armenian societies in London; the Grosvenor House Committee and the Armenian Relief Fund Committee.⁷⁵ The British pro-Armenians led by the Anglo-Armenian Association, were constantly urging British politicians and officials to act in

⁷¹ 'Turkey and Armenia', *Leeds Mercury*, 22 Nov 1894.

⁷² Joan George, *Merchants to Magnates, Intrigue and Survival: Armenians in London, 1900-2000* (Princeton and London: Gomidas Institute, 2009), p.9.

⁷³ Mr. Gibson Bowles, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.119.

⁷⁴ 'Latest Armenian News', *Northampton Mercury*, 28 Oct 1904. The news was printed first by the *Armenian News* and then the *Northampton Mercury* copied some extracts from it.

⁷⁵ Mr. Francis Stevenson, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.124.

favour of the Armenians. Their endeavours can be seen easily through the numbers of letters sent to the British Government and British worthies during 1894-96. The Anglo-Armenian Association was actively trying to exercise influence over the British Government and British officials. In a resolution of its annual meeting that was sent to the Earl of Rosebery who was the Secretary of State, the Association expressed its deep grief at “the systematic persecution and cruel atrocities to which the Armenians are subjected at the hands of official and non-official Turks, Kurds, and others” and requested the British Government to take a more decided stand for the Armenians.⁷⁶

The second influential pro-Armenian association in Britain was the Armenian Patriotic Association founded by Garabed Hagopian.⁷⁷ The association was formed at a general meeting of Armenian societies held under his presidency in Paris in 1886. The Association, as Hagopian stated, was formed to “carry forward in Europe the policy of the great Patriarch Nerses [Narsis the Armenian Patriarch in Constantinople], as the embodiment of our national aims and objects ... Not only ourselves, but all right-minded people would sympathize with our Armenian brethren who took up arms in self-defence against lawless hordes”.⁷⁸ Later the headquarters of the Armenian Patriotic Association was based in London and Hagopian was its chairman. During 1890s, he sent many letters to *The Times* and the Foreign Office⁷⁹ and met with Gladstone on a number of occasions and had good contacts with James Bryce and many other pro-Armenians in Britain. *Hayastan*, the journal of the Armenian Patriotic Association, was produced in his home at 25 Chesilton Road, Fulham, London.⁸⁰ The Association had good contacts with other Armenian committees on the continent and in Egypt with which it corresponded.⁸¹ There were other pro-Armenian societies in Britain, but these had less influence on the public. The Friends of Armenia was established in London in

⁷⁶ F.O. 424/178, pp.7-8, No.7, Anglo-Armenian Association to the Earl of Rosebery, London, Jan 17, 1894.

⁷⁷ Professor Garabed Hagopian (1850-1926) was an eminent academic and linguist. He was born in Marsovan, and attended school in Constantinople, and then was sent to the English Boys' school in Constantinople. Later, as librarian of the British Literary and Scientific Institute in Pera (a quarter of the Ottoman capital) he lectured on Armenian subjects before travelling to London in 1874. George, *Merchants to Magnates*, p.4.

⁷⁸ G. Hagopian, 'The Massacres in Armenia', *The Times*, 10 Dec 1894.

⁷⁹ 'Reported atrocities in Armenia', *The Times*, 17 Nov 1894.

⁸⁰ George, *Merchants to Magnates*, p.5.

⁸¹ 'Armenia', *Daily News*, 13 Dec 1894.

1897, chaired by Lady Cavendish, and published a monthly called *the Friends of Armenia*. The society participated in many fundraising campaigns for the Armenians at the end of 1890s. Another group was the Armenian United Association of London, which was established in 1898, and issued a magazine in English, *Ararat: A Searchlight on Armenia*.⁸²

The pro-Armenian associations in Britain were closely connected to the Liberal political agenda. Most of the leading members of the Anglo-Armenian Association were Liberals. Besides its founder and the President, it had 4 Vice-Presidents, 2 Treasurers, 2 Secretaries and 23 Committee members in 1893. All the 15 MPs who were officers or Committee members of the Association were Liberals except Sir George Reresby Sitwell and Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen who were from the Conservative Party.⁸³ The Grosvenor House Committee was also presided over by an eminent Liberal politician the Duke of Westminster (1825–99), with a number of bishops also part of it.⁸⁴ The Duke of Westminster was also the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Armenian Relief Fund.⁸⁵ The Committee included notable characters such as F. S. Stevenson, William McClaggen the Archbishop of York 1891-1908, James Bryce, Lord Edmond Fitzmaurice the Liberal politician, Charles E. Schwann, the Liberal MP and John H. Kennaway, the Conservative MP.⁸⁶ The purpose of the Armenian Relief Fund Committee, as Stevenson said, was only to send funds for the relief of the distress of the Armenians.⁸⁷

⁸² Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.281-82.

⁸³ Francis S. Stevenson, *The Case for the Armenians* (London: Harrison and sons, 1893), p.27. In his despatches to Said Pasha the Ottoman Foreign Minister, Rustem Pasha sent information about the Anglo-Armenian Association; the ways to attain its objective and its Committee members. Şimşir, *Documents Diplomatiques Ottomans*, Vol. II (1894-1895), pp.364-65 and p.543. Some details about the Anglo-Armenian Association and the Armenian Patriotic Association and their activities can be also found in McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, pp.87-94. In contrast, because some other pro-Armenian societies were less active, information regarding them are rare in both primary and secondary sources.

⁸⁴ Mr. J. Bryce, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.111.

⁸⁵ 'The Duke of Westminster and the Armenians', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 14 Sep 1895.

⁸⁶ Mesrob K. Krikorian, *Armenians in the Service of the Ottoman Empire, 1860-1908*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp.1-17. The writer wrongly named the Duke of Argyll as the President of the Committee and Stevenson as the chairman.

⁸⁷ Mr. Francis Stevenson, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.124.

In addition to the Liberals, the British pro-Armenian associations included a number of clergymen among their members who were known for their radical views and their sympathies towards their fellow Christians. Among their members as well, there were many British Armenians who influenced the British public through the press. For instance, the Rev Garabed Thoumaian, an Armenian clergyman living in Britain, was a professor and one of the Armenian activists in the country. He claimed that he had been a prisoner in his homeland, and Ottoman dungeons were full of Armenian Christians: Archbishops, Bishops, pastors, preachers, and teachers. Thoumaian did not spare any efforts to talk about the hardship of the Ottoman Christians during the public meetings which were held in London and other British cities in the wake of the Armenian adversities in the mid-1890s.⁸⁸

The presence of the pro-Armenian associations in Britain made a significant contribution in raising British awareness of the Armenian question and increasing pro-Armenian sentiment in Britain. For instance, in a letter to the Grosvenor House Committee in 1898, the Duke of Westminster wrote that he deeply deplored the acceptance of the German Emperor of the hospitality of Abdulhamid II “who by a series of crimes unparalleled in history had placed himself outside the pale of civilisation”. *The Spectator* stated that the Duke of Westminster had openly expressed what thousands of Englishmen were feeling.⁸⁹ The Armenophile organizations in Britain were constantly trying to influence British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The British Armenian elites were always ready to exploit any opportunity for this purpose. In his petition to the Earl of Kimberley, Garabed Hagopian denounced the killing of defenceless Armenians according to “orders received from headquarters at Constantinople”. Because the policy of the Porte had become anti-Armenian since 1880 and the Armenians had been persecuted, the time had come to abolish the standing administration and to substitute it by another regime accepted by Britain and the other signatory Powers to the Berlin treaty.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ 'Great indignation meeting in London', *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894; 'The Armenian Atrocities', *Leeds Mercury*, 18 Dec 1894.

⁸⁹ 'The Pall Mall Gazette of Wednesday Is Very Angry With', *The Spectator*, 19 Nov 1898, No.3673, p.727.

⁹⁰ 'Reported atrocities in Armenia', *The Times*, 17 Nov 1894.

There was a relatively big Armenian community in Britain especially in London and Manchester, and the pro-Armenians had a strong influence on British public opinion. However, there was no real Turkish or Kurdish society in Britain. In contrast to the Armenian lobby groups in Britain who vigorously attempted to establish public sympathy for the Armenians among the British, the Turkish lobby was inactive, and there was rarely a voice heard in favour of the Kurds. Pro-Turkish activities in Britain were weaker and less effective than those of the Armenians. The Ottoman Ambassadors in London, especially Rustem Pasha during 1885-95, were the hub of pro-Turkish activities in Britain. Although there was a strong pro-Armenian lobby in Parliament, there were very few pro-Turkish members. The pro-Turkish lobby in Britain, as James Bryce stated, formed a very small circle. He criticised them for being sympathetic with the monarch [he meant the Sultan] who had been called "our ancient ally," which had no longer been supported by the British.⁹¹ During the latter period of this study, only three Conservative MPs defended the Ottoman views on the Armenian question; Thomas Gibson Bowles, the MP for King's Lynn (1892-1906)⁹², James Lowther, the MP for the Isle of Thanet (1888-1903) and Ellis Ashmead Bartlett.⁹³ William Legh (1828-98), the Conservative MP, stated that the Armenian excitement was a result of the firm and effective manner in which the agitation was directed and that the Armenians were much more intelligent than the Turks in conducting campaigns for their respective cause. He added that while the clergy, many prominent notables and politicians embraced the Armenian cause, the "Turks" [He meant Ottoman Muslims in general] had only very few supporters to speak for them. As a result, the Armenians were able to place their cause effectively before Europe, but the Turks were not.⁹⁴

While the Armenian campaigns and propaganda in the West actively exploited the wrongdoings of the Kurds, especially the Hamidiye, there was almost nobody to speak for the sake of the Kurds in Britain during the period of the research. Major Edward William Charles Noel's pamphlet helps to highlight the one-sided nature of the debate. Under the subtitle "Common misconception in regard to the Kurds" Noel

⁹¹ Mr. J. Bryce, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.102.

⁹² Gibson was re-elected as Liberal Party MP in 1910, and later he stood as an independent in the Harborough by-election in 1916.

⁹³ Mr. T. W. Legh, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.93.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

disagreed with the Armenians who wanted Westerners to believe that the Kurds had massacred Christians and to see them as wild bandits. He refused to deem the Kurds as the natural killers of the Armenians who were actually protected by the Kurds against the Turks on many occasions.⁹⁵ Noel also criticised Armenian propaganda in the West for using inaccurate reports and data to achieve their demands. Under the subtitle “False statements and misrepresentations which the Armenians make use of to bolster up their case” he stated that the Armenians’ allegations had been constantly presented to the public for years but there had been nobody to represent the view of the Kurds or to rebut the many deceits that the Armenians had used for the sake of their cause.⁹⁶

5. The Armenian question between the Liberal and Conservative Parties in the late nineteenth century

Analysis of the opinions of Liberal politicians demonstrates the centrality of the issue of the Christians in the East to their ideas. However, they differed from each other regarding the means of solving the Armenian question and the policy that Britain should follow towards the matter. When the Armenian adversities started in late 1894, Rosebery’s cabinet (March 1894-June 1895) was in power. The Liberal Party at the time was suffering from internal problems and the lack of strong leadership following Gladstone’s retirement from the premiership and the leadership of the Party in 1894 until the election of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman as party leader in 1899.⁹⁷ Rosebery, W. V. Harcourt (1827-1904) and John Morley (1838-1923) failed to decisively lead the Liberal Party and did not let other leaders do so. They wasted the Party’s determination to win the confidence of their comrades and the citizens. Rosebery’s influence was not at the level of Gladstone’s, and “if Rosebery had any policy, it was nationalistic, and did not significantly differ from that of the Tories”.⁹⁸ In addition, Rosebery protested to the Ottoman Government, but he acted mildly. Within the Cabinet, Harcourt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1892-95) and James Bryce the

⁹⁵ Noel, *Note on the Kurdish Situation*, p.6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.

⁹⁷ Barry McGill [review], ‘Peter Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies: The Struggle for the Leadership of the Liberal Party in the 1890s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964)’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 80, No.4 (1965), p.642.

⁹⁸ Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, pp.295-96.

President of the Board of Trade (1894-95) did not agree with their Prime Minister's policy regarding the Armenian adversities, which had demanded a strong reaction as Gladstone did during the Bulgarian problem. Harcourt and Bryce called upon the Earl of Kimberley, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to take stronger action. However, there was no effective pressure on the Porte, on the pretext of that Britain should act in cooperation with France and Russia, not alone.⁹⁹

When Rosebery was the Prime Minister, there were differences between his views and those of Gladstone about how to deal with the Armenian question, although they were both strong supporters of the Armenians. Gladstone, who was supporting the Armenian cause actively at the time, wanted the Government to assert a stronger attitude towards the Ottoman Empire. Yet, Rosebery was wary of taking radical actions regarding the Armenian question because he believed that the British Government could do little about it and that there would be no consensus to change international policy towards the question, especially considering that Russia had informed his Government on May and June 1895 that she would not countenance anything like force against the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Britain found herself alone because the other European Powers were not ready to act jointly against the Ottoman Empire. The attitude of Rosebery towards the Armenian cause was not up to the expectations of Gladstone and several members of his government as well as the liberal masses who were more sympathetic towards the Armenians after the Sasun incident of 1894. Consequently, the failure of Rosebery's cabinet to take decisive action regarding the Armenian cause had a clear impact on his decision to announce his resignation in June 1895.¹⁰¹

The disagreement among Liberal figures continued even after the resignation of Rosebery from the Cabinet. As the Armenian question had an effect on Rosebery's resignation from the Cabinet, it also had a role in his resignation from the leadership of the Party. The Duke of Westminster, Canon Malcolm MacColl and James Bryce supported Gladstone's strong agitation against the Ottoman Government and advocated

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.125-27.

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Gibson Bowles, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.121.

¹⁰¹ For more details about Rosebery's cabinet and the Armenian question see Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.201-211.

independent British intervention. In 1896, other famous Liberal characters also took their side such as H. W. Massingham (1860-1924), the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* 1897-99, who argued that Rosebery's leadership was a tragedy for the Liberal Party and that Harcourt should be in charge of the Party.¹⁰² In late September 1896, Gladstone made his last public speech in Liverpool, which expedited Rosebery's resignation as party leader.¹⁰³ Gladstone called for action on behalf of the Christian Armenians, even if it was unilateral, against the Ottoman Empire. This was an attitude backed by Harcourt and many other party members. Rosebery, who "was determined either to have his own way or quit", used his disagreement with Gladstone as his excuse and resigned as leader of the opposition in early October 1896 and Harcourt became the leader.¹⁰⁴

The Armenian question was a part of the election campaign in the British General Election of 1895 as well. When Britain was preparing for the General Election of 1895, the Armenian question was a pressing matter in the country, and it was a disputable issue between the Conservatives and Liberals, who wanted to exploit it in their election campaigns. For the British Liberals, the Armenian question had an important status in their political agenda. Just as Gladstone made political gains to win the General Election of 1880 through criticising Lord Beaconsfield's "reluctant mind" towards the Bulgarian atrocities, the Liberal press criticised Conservative politicians and newspapers regarding the Armenians in the 1890s. The *Daily News* stated that the "Armenian atrocities" received ridiculous denials in the same way in which the Bulgarian atrocities had been received.¹⁰⁵ After their loss of power, the Liberal party turned the liberation of the Armenians and the Armenian Reforms into campaign issues in 1895, while Gladstone in passionate speeches denounced the Sultan for his suppressive policy towards the Armenians, demanding strong British intervention against the Ottoman Empire.¹⁰⁶ The Liberals tried to use the indignation raised in the

¹⁰² Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, pp.205-12.

¹⁰³ H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries: With Cabinet Minutes and Prime-ministerial Correspondence*, Vol. XIII: 1892-96 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p.427.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.296; Stansky, Peter. "Harcourt, Sir William George Granville Venables Vernon (1827–1904), politician." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-33693>.

¹⁰⁵ 'The Truth about Armenia', *Daily News*, 12 Jan 1895.

¹⁰⁶ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.187-211.

country because of the Armenian atrocities as a way to unite their followers.¹⁰⁷ *The Speaker*, the weekly Liberal magazine, wondered what Lord Salisbury was going to do to resolve the Armenian issue, while he had condemned the policy of the outgoing Liberal Government and claimed that it led to “nothing”. *The Speaker* stated that because the Conservative Party had Turkophile associations, it was not expected that Lord Salisbury’s action for the Armenian cause provided any grounds for hope. This magazine also suggested that the General Election would be fought amid committing atrocities against the Armenians similar to those of had been committed against the Bulgarians in 1876. It doubted that Lord Salisbury’s Government would be successful in filling up “the discreditable gaps in his work of 1878” [meaning the Cyprus Convention] and concluded that this task would only be completed by a strong Liberal Government.¹⁰⁸ However, the result of the General Election of 1895 was not in favour of the Liberal party who were heavily defeated by the Conservative and Liberal Unionist Parties who formed the Unionist Government 1895–1905.

Although Armenia was often discussed at public meetings in Britain between 1894 and 1896, these meetings did not have the same effect as those during the Bulgarian crisis in the 1870s. During this crisis, through defending the Christians of Bulgaria, Gladstone’s campaign had an influential effect in swinging the General Election of 1880 in favour of the Liberals and brought Gladstone back into the Government. A lot of Liberals with long memories tried to ‘Bulgarianise’ the issue of the Armenians in the mid-1890s and to use it as a means to win the General Election of 1895 but it did not work. A few causes can be briefly pointed out in this regard. The foremost reason was the weak leadership of the Liberal Party which was not in a position to be able to compete with the Conservative Party in this election to win the Cabinet. The leadership of the Liberal Party after Gladstone’s resignation in 1894 was undergoing infighting and internal rivalries as discussed above, unlike Salisbury’s strong position which faced no serious opposition in the country. In addition, the size of popular support for the Bulgarians in Britain was greater than that for the Armenians in the mid-1890s. The Armenian question was important to many Liberals, but it seemed

¹⁰⁷ Stansky, *Ambitions and Strategies*, p.205.

¹⁰⁸ ‘England’s foreign policy’, *The Speaker*, 11, 29 June 1895, p.702-3.

to not be an issue that was significant to the whole parliamentary party and it did not have much resonance for the whole electorate compared with the Bulgarian question. Therefore, many observers and citizens, as pointed out in chapter two, were not ready to believe appalling stories regarding the Armenians. They were considered to be “old game” by politicians to delude the British people for party objectives. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that the argument for the Bulgarian case had stronger grounds than that of the pro-Armenian campaigns because of the differences between the situation of the Armenians in eastern Anatolia and that of the Bulgarians in the Balkans. The British were aware of that the Bulgarians were the majority in their homeland while the Armenians were a minority in eastern Anatolia. Therefore, Bulgarian separation from the Ottoman Europe was easier than the independence of the Armenians in eastern Anatolia, the territory which was considered by the Ottomans as indispensable land to their Empire.

After the Liberal Government, Lord Salisbury led the Government between 1895 and 1902. Compared with other former Conservative statesmen such as Disraeli, Salisbury was not enthusiastic about the fate of the Ottoman Empire, believing that there was no need for Britain to defend the Empire any longer. A long time before his Premiership during (1895-1902), he had written in 1861 “that the enormous efforts which England has made to uphold the Turkish Empire will not avail to avert its fall”.¹⁰⁹ To some extent, Salisbury was an anti-Ottoman Empire politician. Peter Marsh argues that Salisbury differed little from Gladstone or Rosebery in his indignation towards the Ottoman regime and Salisbury shared Gladstone’s religious sympathies. His dislike of the Ottoman state and sympathy for the Armenians was mostly based on moral and religious conviction.¹¹⁰ McCarthy and his co-writers believe that Salisbury was a strong believer in the traditional faction of the Anglican Church, and his religious beliefs in the supremacy of Christianity greatly directed his opinions and policies on the Armenian question.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Roberts, *Salisbury*, p.149.

¹¹⁰ Marsh, 'Lord Salisbury and the Ottoman Massacres', pp.65-66.

¹¹¹ McCarthy et al., *Sasun*, p.100-1.

Salisbury showed that his cabinet would act seriously in favour of the Armenians. However, concerns regarding the balance of power in Europe had restrained him from taking serious action against the Ottoman Empire in favour of the Armenians. He was prepared to use military force and send British warships to the Bosphorus if the Sultan did not redress the Armenian problem. In August 1895, Salisbury approached Russia with the suggestion of force, and in November he made a speech and threatened the Sultan. Again, in January 1896, he proposed asking Russia to join with Britain in using force against the Ottoman Empire, but Russia refused to take part in any such enterprise. Therefore, due to the opposition of Russia and France and due to the advice of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Salisbury dismissed the military plan.¹¹²

Britain's options for dealing with the Armenian problem were rather limited. In his last public speech in September 1896, Gladstone argued that because the Great Powers were not ready to act with Britain to interfere in favour of the Armenians, and they were opposed to Britain acting alone, he recommended the withdrawal of the British ambassador from Constantinople and dismissal of the Ottoman ambassador from London as a first step and before taking further action. This policy, as Gladstone said, was not war but the alternative to war. *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, the weekly Conservative newspaper and the rival newspaper to the Liberal *Manchester Guardian*, disagreed with Gladstone's approach.¹¹³ *The Manchester Courier* thought that to go forward alone would cause a war. That was the general view among the British statesmen- including many Liberal politicians such as Rosebery-, except for a few enthusiasts whose voice was for war. We should also not forget that, more than other politicians who were holding party or official positions, Gladstone could speak passionately about the Armenian question since he had retired from politics in 1895. If Britain interfered in the Armenian cause without the cooperation of the other European Powers, it would cause a European war, a "frightful risk", which as the *Manchester Courier* said, was not supported by any accountable politician.¹¹⁴ *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and several other newspapers with Conservative stances opposed Gladstone's radical views on the Armenian question. *The Standard* believed

¹¹² Mr. Gibson Bowles, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, cols.121-22.

¹¹³ 'The Porte and Armenia', *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 26 Sep 1896.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

that Mr Gladstone had no “practical counsel to offer” regarding the Eastern question and doubted the potency of the Liberals’ public demonstrations for the sake of the Armenians. *The Globe* claimed that Gladstone had contributed no practical suggestion to resolve the Armenian problem. The *St. James Gazette* believed that his attempts were “deliberate exhibition of policy” and would be futile. Even a number of Liberal newspapers such as *The Westminster Gazette* and *the Pall Mall Gazette* disagreed with his calls for more British intervention in the Armenian question.¹¹⁵

As has been shown, the demand for military intervention or practising a strong diplomatic reaction in favour of the Armenians was dismissed. First, because of the opposition of the other Great Powers. Secondly, because the British, especially the politicians, were not unanimous in their opinion in this regard. They believed that they had to avoid a procedure that would place their country in a state of war with a united Europe, particularly for the sake of a foreign issue which was a controversial matter both internally and externally. Therefore, the British Government tried to compel the Porte to apply reforms in the eastern provinces of the Empire which had been neglected since 1882. A short time before the fall of the Rosebery’s cabinet in June 1895, Britain through its Ambassador in Constantinople Philip Currie had presented a reform project to solve the Armenian question. The Ambassadors of France and Russia in Constantinople supported the project which was presented to the Sultan’s Government on 11 May 1895. The project consisted of a memorandum and a “scheme of administrative reforms to be introduced in the eastern provinces of Asia Minor”.¹¹⁶

Under pressure from the European Powers the Porte agreed to the project in late 1895. However, the reform project (the second Armenian Reforms) did not succeed in resolving the Armenian crisis because of many different internal and external factors. Internally, the Sultan and the Ottoman Government were trying to avoid the application of those reforms which had been imposed on them without their will. In addition, the Armenian crisis was renewed again when conflicts between the Ottoman authorities and the Armenians increased in Constantinople and Anatolia in late 1895 and continued

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The full text of the memorandum and the scheme of reforms are available in ‘The Powers and the Porte’, *The Times*, 6 June 1895.

until late 1896. Externally, the outbreak of the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 gave the Ottoman Government a pretext to avoid the implementation of the reforms. The Powers, who were not in agreement regarding the Armenian question in the 1890s, also gradually abandoned the issue of the reforms. Therefore, the reform project, as Nicholas O’Conor, the British ambassador at Constantinople, said in 1900, remained “a dead letter”.¹¹⁷ Kirakossian argues that, although Britain was actively putting pressure on the Ottoman Government to implement the reforms, she was unable to make the Ottomans execute the second Armenian Reforms.¹¹⁸ Because of the complexity of international politics in the early twentieth century, Britain did not raise the Armenian question fearing that it might result in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and cause instability in the area, which would be harmful to British interests.¹¹⁹ The programme of reforms had led to no results and British policy became less active in the Ottoman Empire, a development that influenced the Sultan to shift his policy towards Germany.¹²⁰

6. Kurds in the context of the change of British policy towards the Ottoman Empire

The period of between 1878 and 1908 was a time of change in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire, from protecting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire to abandoning and even opposing it. The Kurdish position in the Armenian question had contributed to that change. Although demands for changing British policy towards the Ottoman Empire dated back even before the emergence of the Armenian question, the widely condemned behaviour of the Kurds towards the Christians expedited the process.

A number of writers have identified the change in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. Odams states that the publication and perpetuation of negative notions regarding the Ottoman regime influenced the future of

¹¹⁷ F.O. 424/200, p.51, No.56, Sir N. O’Conor to the Marquess of Salisbury, Constantinople, May 28, 1900,

¹¹⁸ Kirakossian, *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question*, pp.201-211, pp.212-224, pp.279-80.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.293-313.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.313-30.

British relations with the Ottoman Empire.¹²¹ However, the significance of the Kurds in this process has not been identified. This thesis seeks to make a clear contribution in this regard.

The Kurdish role in the Armenian question played a part in the declining voice of the pro-Ottomans in Britain in the late nineteenth century. In 1878, Captain Charles Boswell Norman¹²² argued that the outrages and savagery that the irregular Kurdish soldiers “Bayazid criminals” had committed against the Christians during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 and the possibility of the failure of the Ottoman authorities to bring them to justice “must surely alienate” the Ottoman Empire from the support of the allies who held to her.¹²³ General Sir Arnold Burrowes Kemball the British military commissioner in the Turkish headquarters during the War, directly impressed on Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha, the Ottoman Commander in chief on the eastern front, the necessity of inflicting prompt punishment on those irregular soldiery. Likewise, Captain M’Calmont, who was attached to the camp of Ismail Pasha, had been instructed to point out to him the concern with which those cruelties would be considered by the “whole civilised world”, and the injury that would face the Ottoman Empire because of the maltreatment of the Christians by Kurdish irregulars.¹²⁴ H. F. B. Lynch thought as long as the Ottoman authorities supported the Kurds against the Armenians, the Armenian question would continue “with us”, and it probably would cause a serious war which might involve other parties in addition to those who had been involved during the 1890s. He added that unless British diplomacy was able to convince the Ottoman Government that in continuing their present policy towards the Armenians “they are digging the grave of their empire in Asia” the consequences were likely to be “momentous” not only for Turkey but also for Britain.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’, pp.8-9.

¹²² Norman was an officer in the Royal Artillery. He was sent to eastern Anatolia to observe the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78. His book *Armenia and the Campaign of 1877* is one of the most important sources about the Kurds and Armenians during that war. At the same time, Captain Norman was also the correspondent of *The Times*.

¹²³ Charles Boswell Norman, *Armenia and the Campaign of 1877*, 2nd ed. (London: Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1878), pp.274-75.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.274.

¹²⁵ H. F. B. Lynch, ‘The Disturbances in Armenia’, *The Times*, 20 Nov 1894.

Most of the accounts in the British press demanding that the British Government should change policy towards the Ottoman state because of the Armenian cause, focused on the conduct of the Kurds against the Armenians. For example, *The Spectator* under the title *A Vanishing Treaty*, linked the situation of the Armenians in 1890 and their problems with the Kurds with recommendations for British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The article vilified the Kurds for their “love of violence and revenge” and accused the Kurdish chieftains of burning and murdering in the Vilayet of Mush and in the plain of Alashgird which had forced the inhabitants to migrate to Russian territory. The article pointed out the dangers that lay behind the story of violence concerning the Armenians, arguing that if Britain did not protect them from the Kurds, the Armenians would naturally seek assistance from Russia, as she was willing to give her support in the most effective way.¹²⁶ In another issue, *The Spectator* discussed future consequences that might arise if Britain continued to neglect the Armenian and Kurdish problems. The article associated the Armenian atrocities with the government of the Sultan and Kurds alike. The Porte was accused of neglecting reform and granting the Kurds impunity. The Muslims, it was said, had been secretly armed to face the eventuality of an Armenian insurrection.¹²⁷

Because of Kurdish attitudes towards the Armenians, demands for a change in British policy towards the Ottoman Empire were reiterated by a number of British newspapers. The *Dundee Courier*, which had charged the Kurds with massacring the Armenians and doubted the intention of the Ottoman Government to protect them, disagreed with the view that said that Ottoman possession of Constantinople was necessary for the peace of Europe. It argued that it was becoming increasingly necessary that the Ottoman Empire as a Power should be obliterated, and the helpless residents of the Empire ought to be ruled by the normal principles of humanity and civilization.¹²⁸ *The Daily News* directly accused the Porte of supporting the Kurds against the Armenians. It claimed that if the Porte wanted to not be accused of the murder, rape and plunder of Armenians and Assyrian Christians, it had to restrict the misdeeds of the Kurdish Beys against them. *The Daily News* linked British policy

¹²⁶ ‘A Vanishing Treaty’, *The Spectator*, No.3241, 9 Aug 1890, pp.172-73.

¹²⁷ ‘The True danger in Armenia’, *The Spectator*, No.3246, 13 Sep 1890, pp.329-30.

¹²⁸ ‘News’, *Dundee Courier*, 17 Sep 1901.

towards the Ottoman Empire and the attitude of the Ottoman Government towards the Kurdish actions against the Armenians, writing that there “is no chance of our ever again fighting for the integrity and independence” of the Ottoman Empire. It added that every Great European Power, and “England more than any other” was morally responsible for the excesses of a “barbarian Empire” maintained in Europe by statesmen who feared what might happen if it disappeared.¹²⁹

The British pro-Armenians usually focussed on the Kurdish factor when demanding change in British policy towards “the sick man of Europe”. In a long letter read at the conference of the Anglo-Armenian Association in November 1894, Canon MacColl, accused the Kurds of oppressing the Christians and claimed that the Sultan enrolled a large number of them into the Hamidiye in order to terrorise the Armenians and diminish them. He argued that the Porte should be compelled to fulfil its duties under the treaty of Berlin by the joint pressure of the Powers or by a British initiative in concert with Russia. Therefore, Britain should immediately release herself from the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1878, by which Britain was engaged to repel any Russian invasion in “Armenia” by force, because the convention had made Britain morally responsible for the injustice of Turkish rule in “Armenia”.¹³⁰

The Liberals were the spearhead in the British policy change. The Duke of Argyll¹³¹ had a noticeable effect in raising the anti-Ottoman Empire feelings in Britain in the late nineteenth century. He was very suspicious of the Ottoman state and protested against its policy towards the Armenians. In *Our Responsibilities for Turkey: Facts and Memories of Forty Years*, he strongly condemned the Ottoman Empire for the Armenian adversities of 1894-96, and stated “our first indignation should be directed

¹²⁹ 'MR. Gladstone and the Armenians', *Daily News*, 27 Aug 1889.

¹³⁰ 'The Armenians and The Porte', *The Times*, 28 Nov 1894.

¹³¹ The Duke of Argyll (1823-1900) was a liberal politician and writer on science, religion and politics. He was a committed Christian person. He held several official posts most importantly the Secretary of state for India, 1868–1874. He associated with Liberalism about the Eastern question and published his book *The Eastern Question* in two volumes in 1879. Matthew, H. C. G. "Campbell, George Douglas, eighth duke of Argyll in the peerage of Scotland, and first duke of Argyll in the peerage of the United Kingdom (1823–1900), politician and scientist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 24 May. 2018. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4500>.

against the infamous Government of Turkey”.¹³² Because of the treatment of the Armenians, he argued that the policy of unconditionally supporting the Ottoman Empire in her continued dominion over the Asiatic provinces was immoral and “as stupid as it is iniquitous”.¹³³ In the last part of the book, under a subtitle of “A new policy required”, he argued that “The Cyprus Convention is dead”, and Britain should change her policy towards the Ottoman Empire and should no longer care about her existence: “The very first thing we must do is to clear ourselves of the guilt of any more identification of Turkish role”. He believed that the balance of power had brought changes in Europe that required Britain to think about her alliances and argued that Britain needed to approach closer to Russia, stating that “we must seek some reasonable understandings with Russia about the future”.¹³⁴

Since the Armenian adversities in the mid-1890s, the demand for establishing an alliance with Russia sharply increased in the British political circles, especially among Liberals. For instance, during a debate in the House of Commons regarding the Armenian Christians in 1896, Samuel Smith, a Liberal MP, argued that:

Turkey had utterly failed to perform her part; she could no longer be treated as a civilised Power, and we had every moral right, not merely to permit, but to ask Russia to occupy the provinces where the massacres had occurred. No doubt it would be said that this could not be done without a break-up of the Turkish Empire. He granted it. Was there a man of common humanity who would wish to delay that break-up?¹³⁵

Other Liberal MPs such as Herbert Roberts (1863–1955) agreed with Smith on the basis that Russia was the power suited, by her geographical position, to impose order in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁶ Although asking Russia to occupy eastern Anatolia was an extreme position in the view of most British politicians and ridiculed by a number of Conservative MPs such as Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett and

¹³² The Duke of Argyll, *Our Responsibilities for Turkey: Facts and Memories of Forty Years* (London: John Murray, 1896), p.118.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.130.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.148-54.

¹³⁵ Mr. Samuel Smith, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.44.

¹³⁶ Herbert Roberts, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.95.

Thomas Gibson Bowles who described the proposal as “extravagant and absurd”,¹³⁷ it was a clear sign of changing British policy toward the Ottoman Empire. Many Conservatives also agreed that British policy should be changed. During that debate in Parliament, John Kennaway (1837-1919), a Conservative MP, quoted from the Prime Minister Salisbury that “in the past England had been the close friend of Turkey. She was not wanting in a disposition to renew that friendship, but as long as blood was flowing the indignation of this country would be too strong to allow it to be reconciled to Turkey by any political consideration”.¹³⁸ Kennaway also believed that three-quarters of the British people would share the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he said that “Turkey had not fulfilled her obligations and we were, therefore, dispensed from ours, and should not think of intervening to save her”.¹³⁹ Those kind of statements showed that the Armenian question influenced the Conservative Party to adopt more radical and critical opinions about the Ottoman Empire.

In general, the Liberals were pro-Armenians who believed that Britain ought to ally with Russia and abandon policies that were supportive of the Ottomans. However, there were still a few pro-Ottomans, basically from the Conservatives, such as Ellis Ashmead Bartlett who opposed the likely Russian expansion at the expense of the Ottoman Empire in the future. He demanded that Britain should remain allied with the Ottomans and try to improve the Ottoman Government.¹⁴⁰ However, most British politicians, Liberals and Conservative, at that time shared the ideas of the First Lord of the Treasury [the Prime Minister] who believed that the Armenian atrocities of 1894-96 had made a crucial impact on public opinion in Britain, and that the Ottoman Government had squandered the belief of British public opinion in the possibility of Ottoman reform.¹⁴¹ James Bryce argued that because European policy towards the Armenian question was unsuccessful, the scheme of reforms had failed, and the Armenians were oppressed very badly, all opinions about any future coalition with the Ottoman Empire should be abandoned forever. He added that any British Minister ought not to attempt to talk about being a potential ally with a ‘detestable Government’ or

¹³⁷ Mr. Gibson Bowles, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.118.

¹³⁸ Sir. John Kennaway, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.47.

¹³⁹ Sir. John Kennaway, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, cols.47-48.

¹⁴⁰ Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, cols.56-57.

¹⁴¹ Sir E. Grey, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.71.

endeavour to prevent it “from that vengeance of Heaven which its crimes had so long and so richly merited”.¹⁴² Many other Liberal politicians shared Bryce’s views, such as Edward Grey, the Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs (1892-95) who stated in Parliament in 1896 that the fundamental policy of Britain ought to be the abolition of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴³

During the late nineteenth century, the balance of power changed in Europe. Germany became a strong military power in Europe representing a threat to British interests and her naval supremacy and made diplomatic and economic gains in the Ottoman Empire at the expense of Britain. Therefore, Britain moved towards establishing a better diplomatic and military alliance with Russia who considered the growing power of Germany as a real threat to her interests in Eastern Europe. In 1902, the Conservative Government (1895-1902) signed a bilateral agreement with France, the traditional rival of Germany, and then the Liberal Government signed a treaty of non-aggression with Russia in 1907. Thus, Britain abandoned her traditional policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴⁴ In effect, the Liberals were in power when the First World War broke out. Therefore, it was normal for Edward Grey who was the Secretary for Foreign Affairs and his comrades to be in the same camp with the Russians and to declare war against the Ottoman Empire, Britain’s long-time former ally.

7. Conclusion

The “Agrarian Question” increased British concern about the fate of the Armenians and damaged the reputation of the Kurds further. This problem caused a deterioration in the situation in eastern Anatolia and a degeneration in relations between the Armenians and Kurds during the period of Abdulhamid II and later. Land tenure was an essential matter for the Kurdish tribes and the Armenians alike, because it was affecting the balance of power between Kurdish landlords and the Armenian peasantry.

¹⁴² Mr. J. Bryce, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.115.

¹⁴³ Mr. Gibson Bowles, 3 March 1896, *Hansard*, 4th Series, Vol. 38, col.117.

¹⁴⁴ Mim Kemal Oke, *The Armenian Question 1914-1923* (Nicosia: K. Rustem and Brother, 1988), pp.35-37.

British perceptions of the Kurds during the period of the study were formed mostly through the prevalent notions among British citizens in the late Victorian age towards the Ottoman Empire and the Orient in general. Because the Kurds had been seen as part of the Ottoman system, attitudes towards the Kurds cannot be separated from the general ideas of the British about the Ottoman Empire as a whole. The religious feelings and cultural background of the British people alongside pro-Armenian activities determined the British representation of the Kurds and Armenians. It has also been shown that the Armenian question was an essential issue for English Nonconformity, the traditional proponent of the British Liberalism. Both jointly tried to direct British public opinion energetically to support the Armenians.

British public opinion was concerned about the Armenians, but successive British Governments were acting according to the principle of the balance of power in Europe which was handicapping unilateral actions by any Power through the period of the study. Although British pro-Armenian agitation was active in the 1890s and had influenced the position of many politicians, it was not sufficient to make the British Governments, Liberal and Conservative, resort to decisive action in favour of the Armenians. This was basically due to the attitudes of the Great Powers, especially Russia, who opposed the option of military action and partially because of differences between some British politicians at the time.

The chapter has proved that the Kurdish factor in the Armenian question had an obvious influence in shaping British policy towards the Ottoman Empire. The period of the study was a transition phase of British policy towards the Empire. Britain gradually found out that there was no hope in reforming the Empire, which had become, for many British citizens, a symbol of corruption and tyranny against Christians. Although the Armenian question mainly concerned the Liberals, it also influenced the Conservatives to absorb more critical views about the Ottoman regime. The call to abandon the traditional British policy towards the Ottoman Empire grew during the period of the study, especially after the mid-1890s, because of the British disapproval of the attitudes of the Kurds and misrule of the Ottoman Government in "Armenia". This policy which was supported mostly by the Liberals and partially by a number of Conservatives, led

Britain to start establishing a closer relationship with Russia on the eve of the First World War.

Conclusion

There are gaps in historical knowledge regarding the Kurds and the Armenian question. As Brad Dennis states, there are some lacunae in the understanding of the Armenian question especially during the period between 1878 and 1894-96, which is studied less compared to the subsequent periods. He added that “The Kurdish question” in the context of the Ottoman policy toward the Armenians in the late nineteenth century is “the one glaring lacuna” for scholars to study.¹ Therefore, this thesis can contribute to knowledge regarding the Armenian question as a whole and the British perspective on the Kurds and the Armenian question in particular.

Before the Armenian question, the Kurds had varied picture in Britain. As Qadir Muhammad’s PhD has shown, the nineteenth century representation of the Kurds varied; there were some negative and also some much more positive representations of the Kurds.² However, the Kurdish reputation gradually became very poor from the late 1870s onwards. By the early twentieth century, the Kurds were shown as fiendish figures and the image of the Kurds as a backward and fanatic people found expression in British literature. For instance, in his novel, *Greenmantle*, John Buchan linked Kurds with savagery, wickedness and iniquity, and depicted them as wrongdoers.³ How and why did the Kurdish image in Britain change? This thesis has sought to answer this question. As this thesis has shown, the events of the Armenian crisis and the way in which the Kurds were represented in British politics and the British literature were the fundamental reason for this change.

This study has begun by questioning why Britain was interested in and involved with the Armenian question. In chapter one it was argued that British interests towards eastern Anatolia grew significantly after 1878 when Russia defeated the Ottoman Empire in the Russo-Turkish War 1877-78 and took control over extensive territories in the region. The Ottoman defeat was confirmed in the treaty of San Stefano (1878). This

¹ Brad Dennis, ‘The Debate on the Early ‘Armenian Question’ 1877–1896: Strengths, Weaknesses, Lacunae and Ways Forward’, *Middle East Critique*, 20, No. 3 (2011), p.271 and p.286.

² Muhammad, ‘Kurds and Kurdistan in the View of British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century’, pp.145-48, pp.164-69.

³ John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), pp.256, 258 and 321.

new situation represented a real challenge to British interests in the Ottoman Empire and the East as a whole and gave birth to what became known as the Armenian question. British policy vehemently tried to change the terms of this treaty in the Congress of Berlin (1878) which included the Kurds and Armenians in Article 61 of the treaty of Berlin as two rival peoples in eastern Anatolia. Therefore, the region and the Kurds and Armenians became a matter of great interest in the context of British strategy.

British diplomats were concerned about relations between the Kurds and Armenians and observed the situation in eastern Anatolia very carefully. British policymakers did not favour any disturbance in this region because it might allow Russia to intervene on the pretext of protecting the Christians which would have threatened British political and commercial interests directly. Many British observers articulated this fact, such as Austen Layard, the British Ambassador in Constantinople, who constantly reminded the Government in London of this matter. This fact was the main reason why the British Government pursued reforms in eastern Anatolia as the best way to check any potential Russian intervention.

The Armenian question, including the issue of Kurdish and Armenian relations, was one of the subjects most frequently reported on by British diplomats in the Ottoman Empire. The existence of abundant British diplomatic correspondence shows the importance of the region and the Armenian question to the British Government in this period. In addition to the protection of British interests, religious feeling was another factor which drew the attention of the British to the situation of eastern Anatolia. For many British citizens the protection of “our fellow Christians” was a moral duty for Britain towards the Ottoman Christians.

British policy towards the Armenian question was based on reality and awareness of the circumstances in the region. Although some opinions in Britain were supportive of the Armenians’ efforts to obtain further national rights, the official attitude to the region and its peoples were based on the collection of facts and data rather than emotions. For instance, British policy concerning the Armenian demands for autonomy was pragmatic. The opinions of statesmen and officials such as Lord Salisbury and Layard were more practical than those of pro-Armenians such as James

Bryce who urged the necessity of self-government for the Armenians. However, The Armenian question remained unresolved during the period of this study and the Armenian reforms had no perceptible results. It was not easy to apply reforms in favour of the Armenians in a place like eastern Anatolia with its diversity of ethnicities, religions and denominations. The reforms faced strong opposition from both the Ottoman Government and the Kurds alike. The Ottoman Government had its own reason to oppose the reforms, as did the Kurds. As chapter one on the Armenian Reforms showed, the Kurds believed that the reforms would raise the prestige of the Christians at their expense and would lead to the establishment of an Armenian state in “Kurdistan”. As for the Turks, who were not in favour of any scheme supported by foreign powers, they considered the Armenian Reforms as a preface to further foreign intervention that would cost their Empire more loss and trouble. Not long after 1878, doubts were growing gradually between Britain and the Sultan who thought the reforms might lead to the end of his control over eastern Anatolia. Therefore, the Ottoman Government intended to strongly oppose the idea of the reforms.

For the reasons above, the reader can understand why the relationship between Britain and the Ottoman Empire was strained during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II, and why he wanted to impede the reform project. The reader can also grasp the reason for the good relationship between the Kurds and the Sultan, as they were both averse to the reforms, believing that they might threaten their interests in the near future. The attempt of European powers to force the Ottoman Government to implement reforms in its eastern provinces pushed the Sultan to approach the Kurds with the hope of utilising them as a tool against the Armenian issue. The rise of the position of the Kurdish beys in the 1880s, their take-over of Armenian lands and the establishment of the Hamidiye and their harassment of the Armenians in the 1890s was a part of the Ottoman Government policy to counter the pressures of the Great Powers especially Britain. That rapprochement between both sides had negative impacts on the Kurdish image in the eyes of the British, officially and popularly, at the time when distaste for the Sultan and his regime was increasing. So long as the Kurdish harassment continued against the Armenians, it is not surprising to notice that British disapproval of the Kurdish position in the Armenian question continued and even increased through the period of the study.

The Hamidiye regiments have been studied mostly in the context of Kurdish history by a number of historians such as Martin Van Bruinessen, Robert Olson and especially Janet Klein, but British perspectives on this organisation have not been studied in detail yet. Therefore, this research has mainly focused on British opinions of the Hamidiye and its attitude towards the Armenians, asserting that the British were concerned about the militarization of the Kurds, which could pose a threat to Christians. They did not want the Kurds to obtain more power at the expense of the Armenians who were less numerous and less powerful than the Kurds backed by the government. From this point, it can be understood why British officials and the public opposed Kurdish supremacy in the region and disapproved of the existence of the Hamidiye regiments. They believed that the Hamidiye was a tool which could be used by the Ottoman authorities against the Armenians at any time. The Kurds' treatment of the Armenians was frequently discussed in British official correspondence, in which the Kurds were mostly shown as offenders against the Christians. However, as chapter three showed, a number of British observers correctly emphasised that the responsibility for Kurdish harassment of the Armenians should not be applied to all Kurds and that the Hamidiye were not formed entirely against Christians. The Hamidiye harassment was against most of the population of eastern Anatolia regardless of ethnicity and religion as pointed out by many British consuls, travellers and other observers such as Major Noel who asserted that the Hamidiye harmed Muslims and Christians alike.

A number of secondary sources, mostly journal articles, have studied Britain and the Armenian question but covered specific periods especially 1894-96 and in a narrative style, focusing on details of the events rather than deep analysis of British attitudes to the Armenian question.⁴ A key study in this regard is *British Diplomacy and the Armenian Question from the 1830s to 1914* by Arman Kirakossian who studied British official attitudes towards the Armenian cause in its different stages. However, these references did not focus on the Kurds especially their position in the context of the party-political discussion in Britain. In contrast, this thesis has proved that overall the Conservatives and Liberals were generally in agreement about the main issues of the

⁴ For instance, see Robert F. Zeidner, 'Britain and the Launching of the Armenian Question' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 7, Issue 4, (1976); Jeremy Salt, 'Britain, the Armenian Question and the Cause of Ottoman Reform 1894-96', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26, No. 3 (July 1990).

Armenian question including the Kurdish position. For instance, as has been discussed in chapter one, both the Conservative and Liberal Parties opposed Armenian demands for autonomy and the Kurdish revolt of 1880. Britain was not in favour of political changes in eastern Anatolia at the time because any separatist movement there would oppose the British agenda in this region which was based on supporting the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the application of the reforms. Although the Liberals were sympathetic toward minorities in the Ottoman Empire and were concerned about their fate, the Liberal Government (1880-85) disapproved of the Armenian demand for autonomy and the Kurdish national activities as the Conservative Government did during 1878-80. The Conservative and Liberal Parties were in agreement that the Armenians should be supported in the face of pressure from the Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman officials. This reflected wider British public opinion as well. On the other hand, the Liberals and Conservatives disagreed about some aspects of the Armenian question. The Liberals led by Gladstone were greatly sympathetic to minorities in the Ottoman Empire, particularly Christian minorities such as Bulgarians, as well as the Armenians. However, the Conservatives led by Salisbury had less concern for Christian nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire. While the Liberals focused on the Kurdish role and condemned them strongly, the Conservatives had different opinions regarding how to deal with the Armenian question including the impact that the Kurds could have made in that question. This phenomenon can be seen constantly throughout the period of this study.

The differences between Liberals and Conservatives concerning the Armenian question were reflected in the British general elections as can be seen clearly in 1880 and 1895. Although the Armenian question was an important element in the British Liberals' moral conviction, it seems that they had a political agenda in this question as well. In the same way that they made political gains to win the General Election of 1880 by criticising the relatively weak stance of the Conservatives towards the Bulgarian problem in the 1870s, the Liberals criticised Conservative attitudes towards the Armenian question in the 1890s. However, the Liberals were not able to exert a strong influence over the British electorate in the General Election of 1895 for a number of reasons which were discussed in chapter five. This was particularly due to the weak leadership of the Liberal Party at that time and the differences between the situation of

the Armenians as a minority in western Anatolia and that of the Bulgarians in the Balkans.

Because there is a lack of serious study of the party-political discussion in Britain about the Armenian question, the coverage of the British main newspapers that generally lined up with either the Liberal or Conservative Parties, has not been fully studied yet. As has been shown during the discussion of the British perspective on the Kurdish Beys and the Armenian adversities during 1894-96, regardless of their political leanings, British newspapers generally shared sympathy towards the Armenians and expressed disapproval of the Kurdish conduct. However, they followed their party affiliations and diverged in a number of aspects. While the *Daily News* was leading Liberal newspapers in supporting the Liberals' view, *The Times* and others mainly reflected the Conservative perspective on the Armenian question. The view of Liberal newspapers on the Armenian question differed from those of Conservative newspapers in several aspects. The focus of the Liberal newspapers was mainly on the Armenian sufferings and they tended to publish pro-Armenian opinions. However, in Conservative newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Standard* there was more space for different opinions regarding the Armenian question. They published articles on a number of occasions that directly criticised the Armenians, especially their revolutionaries, while it is hard to find different opinions in the *Daily News* about the Kurds and Armenians.

Compared to other internal and external subjects, the Kurds were not a matter of great interest to the British public and the coverage of the Kurds in British newspapers was therefore intermittent. When they did feature, they were mostly portrayed as wrongdoers and persecutors of the Armenians. Most of the coverage relating to the Kurds and Armenians can be found in newspapers during late 1889 and 1890, because of increasing harassment by the Kurdish Beys against the Armenian residents, and during the Armenian adversities of 1894-96. A similar pattern can be identified in the coverage of the Kurds and Armenians in the periodical press. The majority of journal articles criticising the Kurds throughout the period of the study, were those that were written during 1894-96 and to a lesser extent during 1889-90. *The Spectator*, for example, mocked the Kurds' "love of violence and revenge". It accused a number of Kurdish Beys of suppressing the Armenians, and of burning and murdering in Mush and

Alashgird.⁵ Many politicians published articles in periodicals condemning the Kurdish side in the Armenian question, such as F. S. Stevenson who condemned “the habitual ravages of the Kurds and the prevailing misgovernment”.⁶ By contrast, the amount of writings regarding the Kurds and Armenians produced from 1897 to 1908 was at a lower level as the Armenian question saw a relatively quiet period in that time.

Details about the Armenian question, including the role of the Kurds, in a number of British newspapers were sometimes inaccurate and exaggerated compared to the British consular reports. Many times, British diplomats refuted news circulated by either British newspapers or British politicians about the Armenian question. For instance, British consuls on the spot rejected the news about the armament of the Kurds with British weapons “Martini-Henry rifles” which circulated in a number of British newspapers and were discussed in Parliament several times in 1890. Because of its liberal orientation and its inclination to support the issue of minorities in the Ottoman Empire, the *Daily News* followed the conduct of the Kurdish beys towards the Armenians widely. British diplomats criticized the *Daily News* for publishing unfounded information and tried to highlight its inaccuracy respecting the Armenian question on many occasions. However, the narrative of the British newspapers was more effective than other channels, especially the British consular reports, in shaping the image of the Kurds in Britain. While British newspapers were the main channel of information to the public, the consular documents regarding the Armenians and Kurds were usually not available to them, given the decision of the British Government to refrain from publishing the consular papers relating to the Armenian question in the early 1890s.

The style of writing and language used regarding the subject also differed between British sources. Accusations against the Kurds in the British official documents were not as serious as that of some British newspapers and writers. While a writer such as Malcolm MacColl used expressions like “infernal Government”,⁷ the official correspondence was void of this type of language. The nature of the official

⁵ ‘A Vanishing Treaty’, *The Spectator*, No.3241, 9 Aug 1890, pp.172-73.

⁶ Stevenson, ‘Armenia’, p.202.

⁷ MacColl, *England's Responsibility towards Armenia*, pp.24-25.

correspondence was more formal and accurate than the narratives of writers and press articles that usually aimed to influence their readers.

The reliability of the British sources regarding the subject is variable. Overall, the accounts of the diplomats and consuls were more accurate and professional than the exaggerations of a number of newspapers or the emotionalism displayed by some writers. However, it does not mean that reports of the diplomats were unquestionable facts. The authenticity and accuracy of their accounts cannot be generalised, but depended on many facts and circumstance, such as prior experience and knowledge about the region and their relationship with the inhabitants, as well as their political and cultural backgrounds, and their sources of information. Some British diplomats were very successful in their diplomatic tasks but some of them were criticised for being inaccurate by many contemporaries and by historians as well. For instance, in Van, George Pollard Devey, the British Vice-Consul (between around 1889 and 1894), was very active and had a critical mind, denying the authenticity of many reports of the British newspapers especially the *Daily News*. In contrast, his successor, Cecil M. Hallward, was less successful. Not only did he lack experience regarding the nature of the Armenian question, but he was also incorrect in many details regarding the events that took place in the region during 1894-95. Unlike his predecessor, Hallward did not doubt the exaggerated accounts of some newspapers during his tenure when they covered the Sasun trouble in late 1894. However, his exaggerated reports about the death toll of the Armenians in this incident and their sufferings were used by many British newspapers and a number of British and American missionaries and writers such as William James Wintle and therefore gained a much wider currency.

This study shows that much information in the British newspapers and some details in the reports of the three British consuls who reported about the Sasun Armenian uprising of 1894 were inaccurate and exaggerated. This inaccuracy was mostly about the level of the Kurdish participation in the incident, the role of the Hamidiye, the numbers of the Armenian victims and the nature of the crimes allegedly committed against the Armenians. News of the British newspapers and accounts of British consuls were the main sources of information in Britain about the Sasun incident. Hammond Smith Shipley, the British representative in the Commission of

Inquiry for the Sasun uprising, rejected many of the details that had been provided in consular reports and which had been reported in the British press about the revolt. His investigation, as chapter four showed, was much more fully informed and reliable. However, it exercised little influence over the way in which the incident was discussed in Britain where coverage mostly relied on reports from missionaries and Armenian patriots.

In Britain the pro-Armenian meetings and the press during 1894-96 generated widespread feelings of rage against the Ottoman state and the Kurds. Many British figures especially Liberals greatly supported pro-Armenian activities in Britain which emerged with the appearance of the Armenian question and gradually grew during the period of the study. Pro-Armenian activities affected the image of the Kurds in Britain and showed them as guilty and offenders. The Kurds had attracted a large amount of anger as they were considered part of the corrupt Ottoman system.

The Liberal nationalist ideology had a clear influence on British representations of the Kurds and Armenians. In the nineteenth century, the Liberal Party was driven by romantic nationalism. As has been shown in chapter four, the Liberal Party had a strong sympathy to the Armenians and raised awareness to the situation of the Ottoman Christians. Because of the Armenian question and the way in which it was seen in domestic perspective and in particular how it was interpreted through the idea of Liberal romantic nationalism, the Armenians were seen as a Christian people oppressed by the Ottoman authorities and Kurds alike. The Kurds were seen as a crucial non-Christian element in that repression. This issue had a negative influence on the British representation of the Kurds who were accused of oppressing the Armenians who became prioritised in the West and were showed as a nation who wanted to be free. Therefore, the Kurds were seen as evil in their actions against the struggling Armenian Christian nation, and the bad reputation of the Kurds became a stereotype of the Kurds in Britain in the early twentieth century. This negative stereotype of the Kurds was mostly a result of what had been written about the Kurds because of the Armenian crisis and was a part of a process of the condemnation of the Ottoman regime which culminated during the First World War as can be seen in the ideas of some writers at the time such as Arnold Toynbee.

As discussed in the introduction, in Victorian Britain the press and public opinion had a great influence on the official policy of the country. British policy largely matched the British press and public opinion concerning the Kurdish position in the Armenian question. While a number of historians such as Robert Taylor have pointed out the change of British policy towards the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, the Kurdish factor in the context of this shift has not been studied.⁸ This thesis makes a clear contribution and suggests that the existence of abundant writings in Britain especially in the newspapers of the period of this study on the negative role of the Kurds greatly affected both British public opinion and British policy to adopt more critical opinions towards the Kurds and the Ottoman Empire as well. These writings increased dislike of the Kurds among the British public who wanted their government to take more radical steps towards the Ottoman Empire. The Kurdish factor in the Armenian question strengthened the dislike of the British people for Ottoman rule. In turn this aversion expedited the British policy change towards the Ottoman Empire. The majority of writings in Britain especially articles in the press that called upon the Government to revise its policy towards the Ottoman Empire because of the Armenian question, simultaneously pointed to the Kurdish wrongdoings against the Armenians. They regarded the Kurdish position as proof of the backwardness of the Empire and its incurable decadence. In other words, accusations against the Kurds and the Ottoman authorities regarding the Armenians were generally combined.

In general, Kurds, as a part of the Orient, were represented as a violent and uncontrollable people and a backward community in British literature. Kurds were portrayed as the principal tool of the Ottoman authorities against the aspirations of the Armenians for independence. Although Kurds were represented through both themes, the image of Kurds was mainly formed through their conduct towards the Armenians. In other words, British impressions of the Kurds were mostly conceived through their condemned position in the Armenian question. By searching the British documents and data relating to the Kurds from 1878 to 1908, it has been shown that the majority of

⁸ Robert Taylor, *Lord Salisbury*. (London: Allen Lane, 1975), pp.168-69; Michael Heymann, 'British policy and public opinion on the Turkish question 1908-14' PhD thesis (King's College, 1957), pp.1-3; Ömer Kürkçüoğlu, 'An Evaluation of the Ottoman Empire's Entry into the World War', *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 38 (1983), pp.228-29; Nassibian, *Britain and the Armenian Question 1915-1923*, p.25.

British information focused on the Kurds through their position in the Armenian question not the Kurds themselves. This was because the British material mostly covered Kurdish affairs in the margin of the Armenian question, not as an independent matter. Even when they dealt with some Kurdish affairs such as the Kurdish revolt of 1880, they mainly looked at it from the angle of the Armenian question and how it might impact the Christians in the region and how it might affect the balance of power and British interests.

The Armenian question was the main way that the Kurdish reputation was damaged in Britain during a crucial time for the Kurds when the Ottoman Empire was coming to an end and its peoples were seeking to gain international support for their national aims. Politically, the Kurdish role in the period of the study minimized British sympathy for them, when Britain was the main Great Power in the Middle East after the First World War and was in control of a large part of Kurdistan (Southern Kurdistan). Many of the British politicians were not convinced that the Kurds were on a level of progress to have their own sovereignty. That fact can be noticed from the ideas of a number of British policymakers who shaped the political future of the area, especially Gertrude Bell, who was very dominant in British imperial policy-making in the Middle East and played a major role in founding the modern state of Iraq. The conversion of cultural, historical and ethnic awareness into political intelligence was a remarkable feature of Bell's opinion about peoples of the region especially the residents of present-day Iraq and it contributed to her ideas regarding the ethnic and religious groups especially the "ungovernable" and unreliable nature of the Kurds.⁹ Her opinions, which she mostly shared with other British officials, had a direct and decisive impact on the Kurdish people for decades to come as they were incorporated into Iraq rather than gaining independence.

Lastly, the large volume of material produced in Britain concerning the Armenian cause during the period of the study is a clear indication of the great multi-faceted interest of the British in the Armenian question and clear evidence of the importance of this matter for the British. For instance, the repeated emphasis in

⁹ Paul Collins and Charles Tripp, *Gertrude Bell and Iraq: A Life and Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p.11.

diplomatic reports about specific matters such as the Hamidiye indicates British interest in this military organization and its effect in the region and particularly the cause of the Armenians. Although the Armenian question was an important issue in the context of British interests, the existence of so much information about the Armenian question in Britain at the time indicates awareness of humanitarian crises in foreign lands among the British rather than it simply being a matter of political concern. The writer of the article “Armenia and England” believed that there was nobody in the UK who failed to sympathise with the Armenian question.¹⁰

¹⁰ ‘Armenia and England’, *The Speaker*, 14, 24 Oct 1896, p.429.

Appendices

Appendix No. 1: Names of the most famous notables who participated in or sent letters to the public meeting of St. Martin's Town Hall in London, organised by the Anglo-Armenian Association on 17 December 1894 for supporting the Armenians:¹

Names of the attendees:

F. S. Stevenson, MP. President of the Association took the chair. Among those present were Albert Spicer, MP. Cyril Dodd, MP. the Rev. Dr. Raitt, Mr. Adam Gielgud, Sir S. Lakeman, the Rev. Prof Agar Beet, Mr. D. Naoroji, MP. the Rev R. R. Bromage, Mr. P. W. Clayden, the Rev. Canon Gore, the Rev. Prebendary Kitto, the Rev. Newman Hall, Lady Stevenson, Madame de Novikoff, Mrs. Albert Spicer, the Rev. Dr. Clifford, Mr Carvell Williams, MP. the Rev. Dr. Koello, Dr. Calantarionts, the Rev Dr. Horton, G. B M. Coore, the Rev. Canon MacColl, Mr. Schwann, MP. Mr. Channing, MP. Mr E. Morton, MP. the Rev. S. Singer. The Rev G. Thoumaian, the Rev. Sukins Baronian, D. D. Prof M. Tcheraz, Mr. G. Hapopian, and the following delegates from the Armenian colony in Paris; M. Iskender², M. Chenork, and M. Minassiantz.³

Names of who sent supportive letters to the meeting:

The Duke of Westminster, the Duke of Argyll, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of London, the Bishop of Manchester, Archdeacon Sinclair, Sir J. Kennaway, MP. Sir J. W. Pease, MP. Walter Hazell, MP. S. Smith, MP. S. Storey, MP. H. W. Paul, MP. J. H. Dalziel, MP. Mr. Crosfield, MP. W. O. Clough, MP. MeHugh, MP. the Rev. Dr. Barrett, (Chairman of the Congregational Union), the Rev. Dr. Booth (Secretary of the Baptist Union), the Rev. H. F. Toyer (Oxford), the Rev. Joseph Parker, the Rev. J. Gutness Rogers, and the Dean of Hereford had also written expressing

¹ 'Great indignation meeting in London' *Daily News*, 18 Dec 1894.

² M. Iskender was the President of the Armenian Committee in Paris; 'Multiple News Items', *The Morning Post*, 18 Dec 1894.

³ *The Times* gave full names of those three Armenian delegates from the Armenian community in Paris and in slightly different from their names in the *Daily News*; J. J. Iskender, Y. Chenorhk, and E. M. Minassiantz. *The Times* also mentioned J. M. Paulton, MP, as an attendee in the meeting, while he was not mentioned in the *Daily News*. See 'The Armenian Question', *The Times*, 18 Dec 1894.

sympathy with the object of the meeting. In addition to, Sir James Stansfeld, Cardinal Vaughan, and many others.

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