

# THE POWER OF RUMOURS IN THE MAKING OF HISTORY: THE CASE OF THE ADANA INCIDENT OF 1909 IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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## Introduction

The Adana events started in April 1909 in the city of Adana and immediately spread to all surrounding districts. According to official records, during the events, which lasted approximately for one month, around 7000 people lost their lives, of whom 5500 were Armenians. The events which occurred in Adana, a town that was peaceful even during the Armeno-Muslim conflicts that took place between 1895-1896 in the Eastern Vilayets of the Ottoman Empire, still puzzles the historians.

In the Turkish and Armenian historiography, conflicting opinions are put forward regarding the reasons, development and results of the Adana events. The majority of the Armenian historians generally claim that the events broke out on grounds of economic and political reasons. Especially a large majority of the Armenian historians bring forward that Muslim Turkish people could not tolerate the economic power of the Armenians, as a result of which they tried to suppress their rich neighbours through massacres. Turkish historians, on the other hand, accuse the Armenians of attacking the Turks by revolting in order to establish an independent kingdom.<sup>1</sup> The following can be derived if the opposing views of both sides are examined in detail:

According to Turkish historians, the Adana events broke out due to Armenian rebellions which aimed to gain independence and found a Cilician Armenian State. Esat Uras<sup>2</sup>, who is one of the most competent historians in Armenian history, suggested that these events were a rehearsal of uprisings of the Armenians desiring to revive the Armenian

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<sup>1</sup> Bayram Kodaman, Mehmet Ali Ünal (haz.), *Son Vak'anüvis Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi Tarihi, II. Meşrutiyet Olayları (1908-1909)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara, 1996, pp. 67-129.

<sup>2</sup> Esat Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler ve Ermeni Meselesi*, İstanbul, Türkiye Matbaacılık ve Gazetecilik A.O., Ankara, 1950, p. 71. (Hereafter cited as Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*.)

Kingdom of Cilicia in the long term<sup>3</sup>. Uras asserted that Armenians made arrangements since the Berlin Treaty, increased their dominance and population in Cilicia, and “regarded as a sacred duty and a national ideal the resuscitation of the *Rupenian Kingdom of Cilicia* and the creation there of the state of *Lesser Armenia*.”<sup>4</sup> Thus they rebelled taking advantage of political turmoil caused by the 31 March Incident<sup>5</sup>. According to Armenian plans, “*Armenians would persist, the European powers would finally be forced to intervene, foreign warships would arrive in Mersin, troops would be disembarked, and Cilicia would be seized from the Turks and handed over to the Armenians.*”<sup>6</sup> Again Uras stated that the city of Adana was chosen for the uprisings since it was close to the sea coast, situated on the Baghdad railway and open to foreign governments’ intervention due to its location.<sup>7</sup> What encouraged the Armenians in this period were “Austria, Bulgaria, Serbia and Crete, and the various local uprisings<sup>8</sup>” and the support of European Great Powers to these uprisings.

The Muslim population of Adana was also aware of Armenians’ intentions and following the occurrences with deep concern. In his memoirs, Ahmet Remzi Yüreğir, an eyewitness to the Adana events, states that “*The Armenians in Adana and its vicinity, upon the provocations of the European Governments, desired to establish an Armenian Principality in Cilicia and began preparation surreptitiously in order to achieve this goal.*”<sup>9</sup> Considering the fact that a considerab-

<sup>3</sup> There are American some historians like Edward J. Erickson who agreed in most part with Esat Uras, see Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 2001, pp. 95–104.

<sup>4</sup> Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, ed. Tülây Duran, translation Süheyla Artemel English translation of the rev. and expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Documentary Publications, İstanbul, 1988 p. 810. Note that when quotations have been made reference is to the English edition. (Hereafter cited as *The Armenians in History*)

<sup>5</sup> The 31 March Incident (in Turkish: *31 Mart Vakası* or *31 Mart Olayı*) was a 1909 rebellion of reactionaries in İstanbul against the restoration of constitutional monarchy that had taken place in 1908.

<sup>6</sup> Uras, *The Armenians in History*, p.811. The view that Armenians rebelled in order to found an Armenian state in Cilicia has been accepted unquestioned in Turkish historiography. İsmail Hami Danişmend, *İzahlı Osmanlı Tarihi Kronolojisi IV*, Türkiye Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1971, p. 373. (Hereafter cited as Danişmend, *İzahlı*). Doubtlessly, the fact that events were explained by the same arguments lies behind this view. For more examples see: Ahmet Ergün, Salih Kahrıman, Recep Karacakaya, Ümmihani Ünemlioğlu, (haz.), *Osmanlı Belgelerinde 1909 Adana Olayları I-II*, Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı Yayın No: 112, Ankara, 2010, C. II, pp. 30-32; 74-76; 105. (Hereafter cited as *1909 Adana Olayları*)

<sup>7</sup> Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, p. 551.

<sup>8</sup> Uras, *The Armenians in History*, p.811. For similar views see: Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi IX*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 1996, p. 94. (Hereafter cited as Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi*)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.yeniadana.net/web/OzelDosyaDetay.aspx?id=81>. Retrieved on 22 March 2009.

le number of European battle ships were swarming offshore Mersin during that period, it could be stated that Muslims' conviction in rumours was not only a psychological effect. Moreover, the archival documents pertaining to the period show that European States gave their battleships permission to come ashore for the purpose of protecting its diplomats, agencies and citizens/protegés when needed.<sup>10</sup>

Vahakn N. Dadrian, a prominent Armenian historian, on the other hand, describes the Adana events as "a rehearsal for the Genocide"<sup>11</sup>. Most of the Armenian historians have recognized his description without questioning. According to Armenian historians, economic welfare of the Armenians<sup>12</sup>, the extension of their freedom and legal rights and also their representation once more in the Ottoman Parliament with the proclamation of 1908 Constitution could not be tolerated by their Muslim neighbours. The reactionary local governors of Adana, who were against constitutionalism, provoked the Muslim population against the Armenians and aimed at the liquidation of them.<sup>13</sup> According to Bedros Der Matossian, who prepared an important dissertation regarding the Adana events, the proponents of the old regime, in other words the opponents of the constitutional regime, easily cajoled the masses who we-

<sup>10</sup> For example the French navy took order in this manner. See: BB4 1725-118, *Service Historique de la Marine (Vincennes) Archives*. The dispatched order dated 22 April 1909 from the fleet command to Jules-Ferry, the Admiral of the Fleet, no: 1053. Source: <http://www.imprescriptible.fr/rhac/tome3/p1d4b>. Similar orders were given to the British navy, see: FO371-770-14183. Confidential telegraphic no: 241. April 15, 1909. From Sir Edward Grey to Sir G. Lowther: "In view of the reports of disorders in Asia Minor, reported in your telegram No: 116 of the 15th February, a request has been sent to the Admiralty for ships to be held in readiness to proceed to any port where it is anticipated that the disturbances will probably take place."

<sup>11</sup> V. Dadrian, "The Circumstances Surrounding the 1909 Adana Holocaust", in *Armenian Review* 41, no. 4/164 (Winter, 1988): 1-16. V. Dadrian, *History of the Armenian Genocide: Ethnic Conflict From the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Berghan Books, Providence/Oxford, 2005, p. 181. A similar approach can also be seen in Raymond Kévorkian's work: *Le Génocide des Arméniens*, Jacob, Paris, 2006. Michael Mann, an American sociologist states that Dadrian did not provide evidence to support his claims and notes that the Adana events were ethnic/religious conflicts among the Muslims and Armenians and economic stimulus was determinative in these conflicts. Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy, Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 127-28.

<sup>12</sup> The fact that Armenians living in Adana and its surrounding districts were in good economic conditions and that they almost monopolized both internal and foreign trade and also the works of tradesman and craftsmanship have been recounted in many sources unanimously. See: Damar Arıkoğlu, *Hatıralarım*, Tan Gazetesi ve Matbaası, İstanbul, 1961, p. 42.

<sup>13</sup> Bedross Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Arabs, and Jews during the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1909)*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Columbia University, 2008. (Hereafter cited as Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*).

re troubled with the consolidation of the minorities and encouraged ethnic/religious polarization. The inter-communal conflicts in Adana took place within this atmosphere and the complex ethnic composition of the population also prepared the suitable ground for the conflicts.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, it should be noted that Bernard Lewis, as well as many Turkish and Armenian historians describe the Adana events as reactionary uprisings in connection with "31 March Incident".<sup>15</sup> E. Z. Karal, an eminent Turkish historian, however, defined these events as "a violent fight, a civil war between the Armenians and the Muslims".<sup>16</sup>

### The Pretexts of the Events, Rumours and Social Domain

After summarizing the historiographical approach towards the events generally, it would be appropriate to refer to the impact of the rumours on the outbreak of the events. For Muslims of Adana, the Armenians, especially the members of Armenian Hinchakian Party took provocative actions against the Muslims.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting that insults against counter religious parties comprised most part of the subjects of rumours. Again in reference to word of mouth, Bishop Mushegh who came from Russia played a part in the emergence and spread of these rumours. That is to say, freedom offered by the establishment of the constitutional regime provided Bishop Mushegh the opportunity for carrying out his secret plans. Mushegh was a Russian agent. Russia considering that the way to reach the Mediterranean was to establish an Armenian Kingdom which would be dependent on it, provoked the Armenians to rebel against the Ottoman Empire by using Mushegh.<sup>18</sup> Bishop Mushegh in his sermons and in his conversations with Armenians spoke of the importance of independence, the Armenian Kingdom's glorious past and heroic figures of revolts. He called on the Armenian

<sup>14</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, pp. 446-447. Ferriman, Z. Duckett, *The Young Turks and the truth about the holocaust at Adana in Asia Minor, during April, 1909*. Written and compiled in April, 1911.

<sup>15</sup> Bernard Lewis, *Modern Türkiye'nin Doğuşu*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 9. Baskı, Ankara, 2004, p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> Karal, *Osmanlı Tarihi IX*, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, pp. 559-60. These accusations took place also in the court decision regarding Mushegh's conviction, *1909 Adana Olayları II*, p. 29, 75. For the document see: BE-O, 3621/271525; DH.MKT, 2902/98. BEO is abbreviation for Bab-ı Ali Evrak Odası, a special classification category in the archive.

<sup>18</sup> Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, p. 559.

youth to fight for their independence by organizing voluntary units.<sup>19</sup> According to the stories recounted among the public, Mushegh asserted that the Turks and the Armenians could no longer live together and called on the Armenians to take revenge of the massacres carried out against their ancestors in the past, even though, there were no massacres in the recent past of Adana.<sup>20</sup> Still he apparently was able to excite Armenian youth and have impact on them. Thus the activities of Mushegh, which took place in official intelligence reports, aroused suspicion among the public and caused lack of confidence towards their Armenian neighbours.

It was in this mental state when Armenians staged a play at Mersin, a town very close to Adana. In this play named "Ruin of Sivas by Tamerlane", the national identity of the Armenians was emphasized. Moreover, it was told that the Muslims continuously exploited the Armenians and that the time to get rid of the Muslim yoke had come. In fact, the Armenian crowd influenced by the play clamoured all together by saying "Long Live Armenia!" and they sang independence songs.<sup>21</sup> Naturally in these conditions, the number of people, especially the number of Muslims watching this play was too few. However, the reaction of the play spread in waves from Mersin to Adana and people were convinced in Armenians' demand of independence. It is generally agreed by psychoanalysts that religious fanaticism pave the necessary way for spreading gossips. In fact, according to the narratives quoted by the Muslims, Armenians started to insult the Muslim population by asserting that the Constitution provided them independence and equality. It was also told that the Armenians made fun of the scarfs of the Muslim women in the bazaar. It was also often recounted that the Armenian tradesman annoyed Muslim women who were clothed in *çarşaf*.<sup>22</sup>

It would probably be safe to assume that other events may have contributed to the rumours to muster up support among the Muslim community. After the proclamation of 1876 Constitution, the Armeni-

<sup>19</sup> BEO, 3621/271525. In the document, which was signed by the War Minister Salih Hulusi and in which Mushegh was accused, these words are noteworthy: "*ıfşad ve isyanı evelden tasavvur ve esbab-ı ikaiyesini ihzar ile Ermenileri İslam aleyhine tahrik ve teslik*".

<sup>20</sup> Kamuran Gürün, *The Armenian File, The Myth of Innocence Exposed*, Rüstem, Nicosia, 2001, p. 167.

<sup>21</sup> Uras, *Tarihte Ermeniler*, p. 561. Kodaman, *Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi*, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> Çalyan Karabet, *Adana Vak'ası ve Mesulleri*, Dersaadet, 1325, p.17.

ans began to arm themselves in accordance with their economic conditions. As generally accepted in Turkish historiography, the Armenians continuously armed in this period through the provocation and recommendation of Bishop Mushegh, who himself traded in weapons.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the Armenians armed to the teeth began to be recounted among the Muslims. The Muslims, naturally, began to buy more weapons against this threat. However, according to the tales among the Muslim community, the Armenians bought more effective and modern guns as they were richer than the Muslims. The second important development that caused the rumours was that the Armenians who were preparing a rebellion immigrated from other provinces, especially from the East and settled them in the city of Adana. Actually this was not a rumour but a fact. Actually, tens of thousands of Armenians came as workers to Adana at the beginning of 1909 spring and were settled in the vicinity of the city. However, according to the historians' opinion, this was a usual migration happening every year. The poor people of the East migrated every year in increasing numbers as agricultural workers to Adana which was an agricultural centre and a city of farming industry. The number of Muslim workers was more than the Armenians. This, however, was only a statistical fact and meant nothing in the political atmosphere of those days, because Armenians being richer than the Muslims possessed big agricultural estates. In addition, they were dominating domestic and foreign trade in Adana. This is also true. However, there is also another fact that these Armenians preferred their cognates as workers and labors. This preference got the reaction of the Muslims and fostered hatred against rich Armenians. Furthermore, these Armenians started a gang of 500 people under the leadership of Garabet Gogderelian. Additionally the number of members of this gang was recounted to be from 500 to 5000 among the Muslim community. As a matter of fact, the Mutasarrif of Dörtyol, Mehmet Asaf Bey says in his memoirs exaggeratively that only in Dörtyol "there were 50.000 armed Armenians"<sup>24</sup>. This was an incredible number. As can be seen this medium formed suitable basis for ethnic/religious conflicts.

<sup>23</sup> FO 424/220/s. 69-74. From Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, dated 8.08.1909 and numbered 48. Source: www.Armenocide.de.

<sup>24</sup> Mehmed Asaf, *1909 Adana Ermeni Olayları ve Anılarım*, edited by İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, 3. Edition, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara, 2002, p. 14. (Hereafter cited as Mehmed Asaf, *1909 Adana Ermeni Olayları*)

On the other hand, the Armenians claim that the reasons of Adana events were economical. Because the economic conditions of the Armenians of Adana and its vicinity were far better than the Muslim community even when compared to other Anatolian cities.<sup>25</sup> The fact that in addition to the economic dynamics of the region, that the new legal rights and laws brought by the Constitution improved and increased the Armenians' level of welfare made the Muslims jealous. Therefore, some Muslims aiming to seize Armenian properties and dispossess their lands stirred up the events.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the population of Armenians increased and prosperity improved beginning with 1900 in Adana and its vicinity. Especially, it became usual that Armenians, who became rich, bought or acquired by other means the lands of Muslims. The Armenian Church took the title deed of some big farms registered in the name of the Muslims, by claiming that those lands had been their property formerly. On top of all, the Armenians reclaimed the lands, where the old regime had settled the Balkan and Caucasian refugees, on account to the fact that those lands belonged to them or to church endowments. However, people who were expelled from Balkans and Caucasus solely for being Muslim could not accept this situation.<sup>27</sup> For instance, a farm land measuring about 500.000 square metres and belonging to the Catholicos of Sis became a problem between two communities.<sup>28</sup> This property known as "Tailan" Farm was given back to the church on ground of being church foundation in the past, and a large number of Armenian migrants from eastern Turkey were settled there. On the other part, the Muslims expelled from this farm land reacted to the constitutional regime.<sup>29</sup> Some Muslims appeared to have conceived this ac-

<sup>25</sup> Kévorkian, *Le Génocide des Arméniens*, p. 141.

<sup>26</sup> Among the sources of these views see: Çalyan Karabet, *Adana Vak'ası ve Mesulleri*, Dersaadet, 1325, p. 2. For comparison see: *Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi*, p. 74. According to Der Matossian, Florence Billings touched upon the role of economic factors in the Adana events. Florence Billings, *The Causes of the Outbreak in Cilicia, Asia Minor, April, 1909*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1927; cited in: Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 437.

<sup>27</sup> For the demand of land retails which took place in the proclamation published by the Dashnaks in August 20<sup>th</sup> 1908 see: Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 174. The former governor of Adana, Abidin Pasha, took the Telan property or domain from the Catholicosate of Sis and settled migrants in these lands. Mehmed Asaf, *1909 Adana Ermeni Olayları*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> *Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi*, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> See article regarding the fact that a large number of migrants had been settled in Adana before 1907: Hilmi Bayraktar, "Kırım ve Kafkasya'dan Adana Vilayeti'ne Yapılan Göç ve İskânlar (1869-1907)", *Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* (2007), pp. 405-434.

tivity of the Armenians as steps of an independent Armenian kingdom planned to be established.

To wrap up, even this limited information is enough to show the lack of confidence between the Armenians and Muslims in Adana. In addition, it can be said that especially Turkish historians' evaluation of 1909 Adana events as an act of rebellion is debatable.<sup>30</sup> Most important of all, if there were to be an Armenian uprising, then the clashes would have occurred between the Armenians and the security forces. Whereas, in Adana events of 1909, we know for sure that conflicts occurred not among the people and the security forces but among civil Muslims and Armenians due to lack of security, and these led to the loss of large numbers of people. Researchers who are analyzing social events describe these kinds of incidents as "ethnic violence". Although it is not appropriate to use this description for the events realized at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is known that after suppressing the uprising, the government severely punished the guilty people even though the Adana events were not considered to be an uprising against the government. Therefore, it is more convenient to state that Adana incidents can be defined as an inter-communal conflict. Moreover, an inter-communal distrust seems to have played a key role in these incidents; and rumours also did play an important role in the aggravation and spread of the conflicts from the very beginning.<sup>31</sup> Sociologists and psychologists argue that religious/ethnic difference of identity is a factor triggering social conflicts and also it is the most suitable setting fostering rumours.

<sup>30</sup> See following sources as examples of works which are basing Adana events on political reasons and avoiding from comparison: Yusuf Ziya Bildirici, *Adana'da Ermenilerin Yaptığı Katliamlar ve Fransız-Ermeni İlişkileri*, T.C. Adana Valiliği, Adana, 2008, pp. 43-67. Kemal Çelik, *Milli Mücadele'de Adana ve Havalisi 1918-1922*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1999, p. 17-19. Cezmi Yurtsever, *Ermeni Terör Merkezi Kilikya Kilisesi*, Çukurova Tarihi Araştırmalar Serisi 2, İstanbul 1983, pp. 258-275. In his August 1909 report on the massacre, Charles Doughty-Wylie asserts that "The theory of an armed revolution on the part of the Armenians is now generally discredited with the more intelligent people". Doughty-Wylie explained that an uprising could not be said to be taking place without some concentration of forces, or without any effort to make use of the various available strongholds, and in any case the number of Armenians would be "an easy match for the regular Turkish army". "They would not have left their sons and brothers scattered widely through the province for harvest without arms, without any hope of escape." See: FO 424/220/s. 69-74. From Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, dated 8 August 1909 and numbered 48. Source: [www.armenocide.de/](http://www.armenocide.de/)

<sup>31</sup> Although it has not been examined how rumours triggered the events, these rumours had a great role in our opinion. As an example of how many groundless events affected the masses see: Arıkoğlu, *Hatıralarım*, p. 47.



Similarly, analyzers of the Adana events have noted that from the very beginning, many unrealized events circulated among the public as if they had happened, but they ignored the role of these rumours in incidents.<sup>32</sup> However, rumour has been recognized as one of the most important contributing factors to violence, prejudice and discrimination. That is why we will address how rumours triggered the Adana events and what kind of role they played in the course of events. I am of the opinion that it was the rumours that provoked the Adana events.

### Rumours and Adana Events

It is unthinkable that a rumour could solely trigger inter-communal conflict regardless of how unpleasant it is.<sup>33</sup> However, the Adana events started the day after the attempted coup d'état of 31 March, when the opponents of the regime attempted to stage a coup. The 31 March Incident undoubtedly created an authority gap throughout the country.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, students of psychoanalysis and politics have asserted that the environment of uncertainty or government corruption creates a suitable ground to both spreading of rumours and emergence of social conflicts.<sup>35</sup> Thus, according to both Armenian and Turkish historians, the reason for the events to start was the environment of uncertainty caused by the coup attempt. The separation point of these theses is that the Armenians believed Muslims took advantage of the authority gap and attacked the Armenians.<sup>36</sup> According to this point of view, the reactionary forces (anti-constitutionalists) hearing the events in Istanbul and thinking that the proponents of Sultan Abdulhamid II would succeed, took action against the Armenians in Adana. Chalian Garabed, an Armenian of Adana and the author of a pamphlet about the events, was among the people who were strongly advocating this point of view

<sup>32</sup> Gary Alan Fine, "Rumor Matters: An Introductory Essay". In: *Rumor Mills*, eds. Gary Alan Fine et al., Adline Transactions, New Brunswick (U.P.A) and London (U.K), 2005, p. 2. For general information see: Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumors, Race and Riots*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> W. A. Peterson and N. P. Gist, "Rumor and Public Opinion", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 57, 1951, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> Uras, *ibid.*, 558.

<sup>35</sup> Gary Alan Fine, "Rumor Matters", p. 5. For conditions that have been linked to rumor see: Ralph L. Rosnow, "Inside Rumor: A Personal Journey", *American Psychologist* 46 (1991), pp. 484-496.

<sup>36</sup> For the assessment of the Armenian Church regarding the Adana events see: *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I., pp. 60-68, BEO, 3543/265707-2.

and who were claiming that the men of Abdulhamid II were behind these events.<sup>37</sup> Chalian Garabed has advocated similar opinions and stated that “the ones who were rising against the liberty and constitution” stirred up these events.<sup>38</sup> According to the report of Babiguian, a member of the government-established commission to investigate the incidents, people who did not embrace the rights provided to the Armenians and to other Christian races by the Constitution took advantage of 31 March Incident and planned to exterminate the Armenians.<sup>39</sup> However, the government-led investigation showed that, Sultan Abdulhamid II had not a hand in the events and the news that the Sultan sent a telegram to the city was only a groundless rumour circulated around the city.<sup>40</sup>

Again according to the Armenian historians, İhsan Fikri, the author and the editor of the local Adana newspaper of *İtidal* also provoked the public against the Armenians and played a role in the spread of rumours.<sup>41</sup> Britain’s Adana Vice-Consul Major Charles Doughty-Wylie, in his reports, also frequently denoted that the Muslims were against the order and the reforms introduced by the new regime and got annoyed by the acquisitions of the Christians.

On the other hand according to the Turkish historians, the political turmoil played an important role in the outbreak of events. However, as it was the Armenians who started the events and rebelled, the point of view towards the weakness of government is totally different. For instance, according to Esat Uras, whose views are shared by most

<sup>37</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914*, Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Çalyan Karabet, *Adana Vakası ve Mesulleri*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Hagop Babiguian, “Rapport sur les massacres arméniens d’Adana (7 Juin 1909)”, In: *La Cilicie (1909-1921) : des massacres d’Adana au mandat Français*, préparé par Raymond H. Kevorkian, Paris : Bibliothèque Nubar de l’Ugab, 1999pp. 169-70.

<sup>40</sup> See: Ayfer Özçelik, *Sahibini Arayan Meşrutiyet*, Tez Yayınları, İstanbul, 2005, p. 271. Kaligian notes that attention was drawn to the unemployed spies of the Sultan in the documents of the Dashnak Archives. Dikran Mesrob Kaligian, *Armenian Organization and Ideology Under Ottoman Rule, 1908-14*, Transaction Publishers, 2011, p. 34. Der Matossian, who did studies on the basis of all existing sources about the Adana events, also argues that the Adana events were actions of anti-constitutionalists. *Der Matossian, Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 433. For comparison see: Çalyan Karabet, *Adana Vak’ası ve Mesulleri*, p. 2-11.

<sup>41</sup> Dadrian, “1909 Adana”, p. 6. In regard to the fact that complaint about İhsan Fikri was put in process see: BOA.DH.MKT, 2812/14. Considering that İhsan Fikri was sentenced, it should be admitted that he made provocations in some of his publications.

of the Turkish historians, Bishop Mushegh intervened in government affairs by "*drawing advantage from the inability and weakness of Adana administration*"<sup>42</sup> and called on the people not to pay taxes. Both Tashnaks and Hnchakists acted together owing to the threats of Mushegh. Thus, according to the Turkish historians, Mushegh was the initiator, leader and planner of the events. He was a central figure in the so-called Armenian rebellion. Indeed, Bishop Mushegh encouraged the purchase of guns; he raised awareness of the Armenians regarding their identities; he called on the foreign powers to aid the Armenians and provoked them to rebel from the day that he came to Adana. On the other hand, it is an urban legend that he was the person who initiated, extended and conducted the incidents. Since, he went or escaped to Egypt approximately one month before the outbreak of the events and although he wanted to return back as soon as he heard about the events, the Turkish authorities prevented his return. I am therefore of the opinion that it is not logical to place Mushegh at the center of the rebellion when he was not even present in the scene.

### Sparks That Triggered the Adana Events

Evaluations above show quite clearly that the historians tried to understand the political, social and economic reasons of the events after their occurrences. However, when the arguments of both sides accusing each other are taken into consideration, it is hard to understand why and how these events broke out in the aftermath of 31 March Incident. Because, the fact that, the role of the rumours rather than the real events spread with the rumours were the leading factors in the outbreak of the events, has been ignored. However, the fact that rumours triggered the Adana events can be clearly seen in the newly published archival documents. Now, it will be convenient to consider these rumours and their special role in the outbreak of events in details.

First, it should be expressed that after the coup attempt of March 1909, distrust and suspicions among the Armenian and Muslim communities increased visibly. For instance, according to a telegram dated March 9<sup>th</sup> 1909 (February 24<sup>th</sup> 1324), "the rumour of Armenians at-

<sup>42</sup> Uras, *Tarihçe Ermeniler*, p. 560. The fact that Tevfik Hoca Efendi, nicknamed "Hürriyet İmamı" also decided many appointments during the Constitutional period and that even he exiled Governor Bahri Pasha is an interesting situation in parallel with the narratives about Mushegh. See: Arkoğlu, *Hatıralarım*, p. 44.

tempting to attack and seize the arsenal on Monday night and the government dispatching soldiers against them spread among the Muslim community".<sup>43</sup> This rumour caused anxiety between the two communities. However, after the investigation, it was understood that such kind of event had not occurred and the rumours of soldier dispatch was groundless. On the other hand, it was claimed that an event confirming this rumour occurred in Dörtöyl. Some people including the Mutasarîf of Dörtöyl reported that Armenians attacked a military post in Dörtöyl, seized the weapons and that around 500 armed Armenians dressed in military uniforms attacked Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, in the report it is stated that "while firing at Muslims, Armenians used provocative and insulting words as "Long Live Armenia" and "Call for your Mohammed" that humiliated Muslim religion. As a result, the Muslim community armed and protected themselves against these gangs who said to have killed numerous Muslims. Because the security forces of the government were insufficient in interfering everybody armed themselves".<sup>45</sup> First of all, it should be indicated that this rumour which contained some truths in it had an effect on the Muslims living in Adana and its vicinity and prompted everybody to act in order to "protect the religion". However, it should not be forgotten that the rumour as "Islam is in mortal danger. Be prepared" occurs in the same way throughout the world and is a characteristic phenomenon in all religious conflicts.<sup>46</sup>

In this respect, how great the impact of rumour on people is, should not be ignored in an environment dominated by political uncertainties. According to social psychologists, "rumours thrive in conditions of uncertainty... Uncertainty undermines a person's ability to deal with the environment, leads to feelings of lack of control and anxiety, and motivates actions to reduce uncertainty (for example, information seeking)".<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it could be understood from the document that Muslims began to worry as soon as they heard the event; took up arms on account to defend themselves and pulled guns on one another due to the lack of reliable information. In addition, specialists working on religious and sectarian tensions have introduced that speculations regar-

<sup>43</sup> DH. MKT.PRK, 2761/101. In: *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> DH. MKT.PRK, 2829/124. In: *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I, p. 47-53.

<sup>45</sup> DH. MKT.PRK, 2829/124. In: *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I, p. 48.

<sup>46</sup> Sudhir Kakar, "Rumors and Religious Riots", In: *Rumor Mills*, p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Prashant Bordia – Nicholas DiFonzo, "Psychological Motivations in Rumor Spread", In: *Rumor Mills*, pp. 87-101, here at 89.

ding one group arming more than the other group is one of the most important reasons which ignite a spark.<sup>48</sup>

After these events, political sphere considerably got worse in the country and authority gap was perceived explicitly. It is a fact that in such circumstances rumour spread was nearly twice as great. Moreover, rumour provided a ready-made explanation for the uncertain event and was widely shared. Indeed, the incident that ignited the fuse of the Adana events had occurred in the political turmoil period just before the attempted coup of March 1909 in Istanbul. According to sources, in early April, Armenians shot two Muslim young men in the middle of the street, which resulted in one of the men getting killed and the other getting seriously injured.<sup>49</sup> The perpetrators of this incident escaped and took refuge in the Armenian quarter; the Armenians did not hand the criminals over to security forces. They asserted that the Muslims who had raped Armenian women were released.<sup>50</sup> Armenians who witnessed the incident as Chalian Garabet and Hagob Terzian wrote in their memoirs that this incident was only a vulgar honour killing and the Armenians were not responsible for the escape of the murder suspects.<sup>51</sup> In other words, they felt that the governments' search for the murderer in the Armenian quarter was a political attitude towards them. And as a reaction to this attitude, they showed a political stance against the government on the pretext of a despicable murder case. This situation increased the tension between the two communities and events aggravated with the murder of three influential Armenian local leaders, namely Dođramacı Lütfiğ, Urfaliyan David and Şadarevyan Efendi. Using as a pretext these murders, Armenians did not open their shops either due to their fear or to protest against the attitude of the Muslims and of the government. This protest was interpreted among the Muslim community as that the Armenian attack on the Muslims quarters as imminent.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Sudhir Kakar, "Rumors and Religious Riots", In: *Rumor Mills*, p. 53-59, here at 54.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.yeniadana.net/web/OzelDosyaDetay.aspx?id=81>. Retrieved on 22 March 2009. On the other hand, Arıkođlu, who was another witness to the events, describes this event as a "rumour" and notes that two youths were shot during the target practice of Armenians. However, differently from Yüređir, he states that those Muslim youth were killed and thrown in to the well. See: Arıkođlu, *Hatıralarım*, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> BEO, 3543/265707-2. *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I. p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 465.

<sup>52</sup> BEO, 3543/265707-2. *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I. pp. 63-64.

In the meantime there were rumours circulating among the Muslims that similar murders were committed by Armenians around the city.<sup>53</sup> For example, as recounted by the Ottoman historian Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi, the news that several Muslims were killed including a woman who was raped in the vineyards in the last day of March spread among the society. Rumours of slaughter and rape in distant districts like Dörtyol and Payas were appropriated to form narratives bearing an emotive political force. As a matter of fact such a rumour seems to have tensed the relations between the Muslims and the Armenians in Adana, albeit news of murder was declared to be unfounded.<sup>54</sup> According to sociologists, the story of rape of a woman connected with a religion by a member of another religion is one of the most common motifs used in ethnic/religious conflicts. These stories, most of which are unfounded, play an essential role in the clash of people from different religions.<sup>55</sup> Sudhir Kakar argues that sexually explicit attacks are the most important factors which stir up the rage of rumours and motivates the masses to participate in violence; and he makes the following analysis: "Rumours of sexual violence during a riot, and the mixture of horror and relish with which they are recounted, also release the more shameful excitement that bespeaks instinctual desire in its rawer form".<sup>56</sup> It is obvious that the Adana event is a typical example of this situation.

The conspiracy theories are also considered among the leading factors causing ethnic/religious conflicts.<sup>57</sup> According to a rumour, though may have had a good deal of truth in it, Garabed Gogderelian, an Armenian who was the chief of *fedayees*, would attack and plunder Adana with 500-600 *fedayees* that he gathered.<sup>58</sup> This rumour in particular se-

<sup>53</sup> Doughty-Wylie wrote in his report that Mr. Chambers, the director of the American School, conferred with the Governor due to the demonstrations in the funeral and said that some events may occur in the aforementioned quarter. Moreover, it was noted that the Governor did not take any notice and he said that nothing would happen. See: FO 424/220/p. 69-74. The enclosure of the report dated 8 August 1909 and numbered as 48 from Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey. Source: www.armenocide.de

<sup>54</sup> Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi, p. 82. Kaligian, *Armenian Organization*, p. 32. Dadrian, *1909 Adana*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> Sudhir Kakar, "Rumors and Religious Riots", In: *Rumor Mills*, pp. 53-59, here at 56.

<sup>56</sup> Sudhir Kakar, "Rumors and Religious Riots", In: *Rumor Mills*, p. 56.

<sup>57</sup> Véronique Campion-Vincent, "From Evil Others to Evil Elites: A Dominant Pattern in Conspiracy Theories Today", in: *Rumor Mills*, pp. 103-122, here at 104.

<sup>58</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 461. It was also recounted among the Muslim population that Gogderelian would come with 1500-3000 riders for incursion. See: Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi, p. 102. Doughty Wylie also quoted the rumour by changing the number as 500 fedayees. See: FO 424/220, p. 69-74.

ems to have had a great impact in the outbreak of Adana events, as we today understand from the official documents of the investigation committee.<sup>59</sup> It is obvious that Gogderelian's threat aimed at the Muslims brought many government officials and Muslim into acting towards the Armenians over-cautiously; because Gogderelian was a famous band leader, his threat to the Muslims was taken seriously by everyone.

Thus, Muslims vowed to fight with this "infidel" as a religious duty. In such conspiracy theories, getting prepared against threats, being on the alert and pushing out potential threat factors (here the Armenians) are generally regarded as a right. The authority gap puts their acts in a legitimate ground. Because people who believe into conspiracy theories, as Véronique Campion-Vincent puts it, "*are in a state of crisis in which the established value system of a group or society seems at stake, it is easier to cope with anxiety if it becomes fear of someone who can be held responsible. This enemy is camouflaged and masqueraded into a normal and inoffensive character. Those who have discovered the conspiracy must fight*".<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in Adana, many Muslims convinced that the enemy became organized and was in the preparation of a rebellion. Because it was a common rumour that Gogderelian and his men were often making target practicing and they killed or injured some Muslims during these practices. It was a sacred duty to have the enemy's and its collaborators' hide.<sup>61</sup> This thinking legitimizes the arming of the Muslims and being alert against the rebels.

Again, another rumour which was effective among Muslims was that the Armenians left human faeces at the door of the Great Mosque and that some Armenians were arrested. In religion based conflicts, insult to the religion of the other is a very influential story. This terrible rumour circulated around the country, poisoning the life of the nation. Like every mean rumour, it maintained itself in an atmosphere of hatred. It provoked Muslims against their Christian neighbours. In this regard, coinciding with this story in the Adana events should not be a surprise. It can be understood from the official records that the incident of Armenians leaving human faeces at the door of the Great Mosque was

<sup>59</sup> BEO, 3621/271523 in *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. II. pp. 8-28.

<sup>60</sup> Véronique Campion-Vincent, "From Evil Others to Evil Elites", p. 105.

<sup>61</sup> For detailed information about politics of conspiracy theories, see Carl F. Grauman, "Conspiracy: History and Social Psychology – A Synopsis", In: *Changing Conceptions of Conspiracy*, Springer Series in Social Psychology, edited by C. F. Graumann and P. Moscovici, New York: Springer Verlag, 1987, pp. 245-51.

irrelevant to reality. However, some Armenian authors as Terzian and Mushegh claimed that the incident was true but it was the Muslims wanting to blame the Armenians who left the faeces. Moreover, they indicated that some Muslims were arrested as the perpetrators of the incident and the Governors had the dirty door of the mosque changed.<sup>62</sup> Of course, there was not any record of such an arrest in the official documents. However, the more important is the spread of rumours in both parties at full steam and its use to embody the polarization. The way of using of an event, which was not officially confirmed and did not appear in memoirs of the Muslims, by the Armenians is very interesting. How such events would contribute to tense relations between communities is obvious. However, in early April, this time among the Armenians, some rumours as the Muslims being armed would attack the Armenians in the Easter Holiday time began to circulate.<sup>63</sup> Damar Arıkoğlu, one of the witnesses, describes how these rumours disturbed the community as follows:

“The shops, magazines and workplaces in the bazaar were semi-closed and people kept an ear to the ground. In relation to the same rumours, putting up the shutters of the shops together completely irritated the people. Armenians were fleeing to their own quarters and the Turks to their homes. After one or two hours, the shutters of the shops were opened out as there was not any incident. While shopping was starting, the peddlers’ loudly selling guns was far going<sup>64</sup>”

In this environment, where the tension increased constantly, new rumours circulated around the society; according to an official document, “a rumour had different effects on people depending on the sensitivity of the parties”.<sup>65</sup> For instance, there were rumours that Armenians armed with sophisticated guns such as martin type and attacked the Muslims in certain places in the Kozan district of Adana. This news worsened the relations that were already tense between the Armenians and Muslims.<sup>66</sup> Constantly, new rumours spread before the impact of

<sup>62</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 462.

<sup>63</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 462.

<sup>64</sup> Arıkoğlu, *Hatıralarım*, p. 47.

<sup>65</sup> BEO, 3537/265233, *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I., p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> BEO, 3537/265233, *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I., p. 25. British sources also confirms that the Armenians were armed and ready. FO371-770. From Sir G. Lowther to Sir Edward Grey, Confidential telegraphic April 15, 1909, numbered 116.



previous ones went down.<sup>67</sup> For example, according to a rumour arose in Payas, a sub-district of Adana province that a Christian and a Muslim quarrelled and supposedly the following conversation took place between them: The Muslim allegedly said to the Christian "you will see what we will do to you" and he was taken into custody due to his words. After hearing his release two days after, a group of Christians from Nacarlı village went to Payas in order to protest against and probably to punish the young man. The delusiveness of the event was understood after the investigation. In the same area again, another rumour circulated. According to this rumour, Muslims opened fire on Ocaklı Christian Mill and caused the death of a child. As a result of the investigation, however, no bullet mark could be found and it was understood that the child had been sick for a month and died of natural causes. Again according to a rumour recounted by the British Consul, a person coming from Konya clamoured in the city that Armenians attacked the Muslim villages on the way between Konya and Adana, and killed many Muslim villagers. No record of such an event could be found in the archives. However, after hearing this rumour, both Muslims and Armenians began gradually to be armed with even heavier and sophisticated guns, barricaded their homes and villages, and made preparations for any incoming attacks.

Owing to these rumours, Muslims were almost convinced that Armenians would start a rebellion. Some unfounded news which signaled that the British troops were about to come to the city to support Armenians was also spreading throughout the city.<sup>68</sup> These and other similar news were intensifying distrust between the parties. Thus, a group of Muslims from Adana in the petition which they submitted to the Governors's office said that "*Although we do not bear hostility against the Christian Armenians, Armenians are suddenly seized with doubt and anxiety and give the impression of getting prepared for attacking the Muslims; thus we are making preparations in order to defend our villages and our families*".<sup>69</sup> Thus, soon after, the fact that some Muslims were found dead in the famous "Tailan" Farm, which was the centre

<sup>67</sup> For the spread of rumour, see: W. A. Peterson and N. P. Gist, "Rumor and Public Opinion", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 57, 1951, p. 165. P. Schachter and H. Burdick, "A Field Experiment in Rumor Transmission and Distortion", *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 50, 1955, p. 370.

<sup>68</sup> FO 424/219/P. 195-200. Report No. 138 from Sir Lowther to Sir Edward Grey dated 15 June 1909. Source: [www.armenocide.de](http://www.armenocide.de).

<sup>69</sup> DH.MKT.PRK, 2829/124. *1909 Adana Olayları*, C. I., p. 48-49.

of economic conflicts of interest, would result in the arrest of some Armenians as murder suspects, the resignation of *Catholicos* of Sis under protest, and Armenians' organizing a protest against the governor's office.<sup>70</sup> These protests caused quite a stir and finally conflicts having begun on the bridge in Adana turned into mass massacres. The Muslims by the rumours claiming that "Islam was to be lost" and the Armenians by the rumours claiming that "Muslims again started to massacre Armenians" began to slaughter each other. The fact that Armenian rebellions in the 1890s and the Ottoman suppression of them was at the back of Armenians' collective memory became the main factor in accepting the rumours as true and in the spreading of rumours like wildfire. Rumours circulate only when they resonate, with deep fears and suspicion of the people.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to put forward the great importance of rumours in the outbreak of the Adana events. We have tried to show that some social, economic and political reasons could lie behind the events, but it was the rumours that triggered the incidents. In other words, we have attempted to remark that rumours do make a difference. We have emphasized that people have political reasons to believe in rumours. Armenians believed in rumours because of the memories of 1890's. On the other hand, Muslims believed in rumours due to the fact that many Balkan immigrants witnessed a similar atmosphere in the Balkans and they were obliged to leave their lands. Moreover, we have determined that collective memories of the parties caused the rumours to be effective. We have observed that feeling of distrust amongst the peoples connected to counter religion played a big part in the Adana events. We have indicated that Muslims considered the additional rights granted to the Armenians after the Constitutional period as a threat to their own rights and especially to Islam. Therefore, people believed their religion was in danger due to the various social reforms initiated by the *Meşrutiyet* regime. However, it is important to point out that the new regime of the Ottoman Empire can not be hold responsible for the events. In the state of chaos, sufficient security forces could not be provided to suppress the events though the perpetrators were punished after the events. Muslims were punished so much more than the

<sup>70</sup> Der Matossian, *Ethnic Politics in Post-Revolutionary Ottoman Empire*, p. 463.

Armenians. This demonstrates that it was the Armenians who suffered more. However, the events neither broke out as a result of the plans of the proponents of old regime who wanted to eliminate the Armenians nor were initiated by the Union and Progress Party as claimed by the Armenian historians. In sum, irrespective of ideological discrepancies, rumours and their affinities to communal violence played essential roles in the events that unfolded in Adana in April 1909.

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