

**THE ORIGINS OF THE
PECULIARITY OF AGRARIAN
STRUCTURES IN SOUTHEASTERN
ANATOLIA: AN ASSESSMENT
ON OTTOMAN HERITAGE**

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Abstract: In spite of the prevailing hegemony of petty commodity production over the structure of Turkish agriculture, Southeastern Anatolia Region of the country had been characterized by relatively high share of large scale agricultural estates usually cultivated by small tenants on a sharecropping basis until late 20th century. The peculiarity of the region was at the heart of the debates around agrarian question of Turkey and it was interpreted in the context of feudalism or semi-feudalism from 1960s onwards. This study aims to evaluate the theoretical premises of this debate through a critical approach by focusing on the economic, social and political aspects of Ottoman rule in the region from 16th century onwards to the early 20th century.

Keywords: *Ottoman Empire, Southeastern Anatolia, agriculture, feudalism.*

**GÜNEYDOĞU ANADOLU'DA
TARIMSAL YAPILARIN
ÖZGÜNLÜĞÜNÜN KÖKENLERİ:
OSMANLI MİRASI ÜZERİNE
BİR DEĞERLENDİRME**

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Öz: Türkiye tarımında süregelen küçük meta üretiminin egemenliğine karşın Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi 20. Yüzyıl sonlarına kadar genellikle ortakçılık temelinde işlenen, görel olarak büyük toprak mülkiyetinin hakim olduğu bir tarımsal yapıya sahiptir. Bölgedeki tarımsal yapıların farklılığı Türkiye'deki tarım ve köylülük tartışmalarının önemli bir başlığını oluşturmuş ve bu farklılık 1960'lı yıllardan itibaren feodalizm-yarı feodalizm tartışmaları bağlamında ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışma 16. Yüzyıldan 20. Yüzyıl başlarına uzanan süreçte Osmanlı egemenliği altındaki bölgenin ekonomik, sosyal ve politik yapısına odaklanarak söz konusu tartışmanın teorik öncüllerini eleştirel bir gözle değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Güneydoğu Anadolu, tarım, feodalizm.*

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural sector of Turkey is still characterized by the hegemony of petty commodity production. The lasting character of petty commodity production under capitalist mode of production does not only result from internal dynamics of agricultural sector but also from underdeveloped capitalism. The complex interrelations between underdeveloped capitalism and petty commodity production in agrarian sector have been largely discussed among scholars for at least a half century. In these debates, agrarian problem in Turkey has been questioned by considering the effects of the relations between state and social classes alongside with the dynamics of underdevelopment issue.¹ On the other hand, the peculiarity of Southeastern Anatolia has been another controversial issue. This region diverges from general land use pattern of the other regions of Turkey. Historically, large landownership and sharecropping system has constituted a relatively large share of land use in this region. This different pattern of land use in this region has existed during the modern capitalist period. Indeed, despite the rapid decline of its share in land use, sharecropping system still constitutes a considerable relation of production in this region².

The peculiarity of the region sparked an enduring debate among leftist political and academic circles in the 1960s and 70s as a part of general debate about what is the dominant mode of production in Turkey³ In this study, we intend to clarify the nature of the relations of production and distribution in this region and trace the historical background of that structure by considering these debates.

The region was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. From then on, the region remained as an exception in terms of political and economic structure within the Empire. The Ottoman Empire granted extensive privileges and autonomy concerning self governance. Therefore, the classical Ottoman surplus extraction mechanism of *timar* and *iltizam* systems did not operate here in a traditional way. Surplus extraction mechanisms in that region varied according to power relations between Kurdish tribes and the Ottoman Empire through the long period under Ottoman rule. In this sense, the existing peculiar structure of Southeastern Region is related to the heritage of the Ottoman Empire.

In the first chapter of this study, in order to illuminate peculiarity of the region we tried to put forward a theoretical discussion focusing on the coexistence of different relations of production under a specific mode of production. This discussion touches upon the basic tenets of Ottoman socio-economic formation. The following chapter consists of the information regarding geographical and physical features of the region, which determines the structure of agricultural production and basic properties of social and economic structure of the region at the beginning of 20th century. The third chapter

explores the establishment and evolution of specific surplus extraction mechanism since 16th century. In the fourth section, the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire and its role in consolidation of big landownership in the region is being discussed.

1. SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA AND 'OTTOMAN FEUDALISM'

The debate on the character of the mode of production in the Ottoman Empire and that of modern Turkey was one of the most important titles in the agenda of Turkish intellectuals during the 1960s and 70s. Like other similar debates about Latin America and India, the main motive of this debate was political. And various approaches to the question used to reflect political differences between all sides of the debate. The essence of the debate was on what criteria must be adopted to define a mode of production or a socio-economic formation. In this respect, it has similar theoretical framework with the well-known debate on transition from feudalism to capitalism (Hilton, 1976). Turkish version of this classical debate, though it was not systematically carried out, provided not only an explanation of the character of Ottoman socio-economic structure, but also some original theoretical contributions to the mode of production debate.

First of all, Turkish debate on the character of mode of production in the Ottoman Empire has challenged the traditional Ottoman-Turkish historiography which perceived classical Ottoman surplus mechanism, *timar*, as a *sui generis* fact. For instance one of the prominent Turkish historians; Ömer Lütfü Barkan strictly rejects the argument of feudalism concerning the Ottoman Empire. Barkan's approach represents the common belief on the uniqueness of Ottoman social and economic system among some Turkish academic historians. This approach neglects the needs of theory in history and represents an empiricist stand ignoring varieties of economic and social structures within the Ottoman Empire in different times and places.⁴ In our opinion, in order to understand the economic basis of the Ottoman rule it is very important to explore whether this system consists of a common surplus extraction mechanism that may be observed in many pre-capitalist social organisations.

The Ottoman Empire tried to build a stable and centralized surplus extraction mechanism from the beginning. Strengthening absolute power against centrifugal forces, it was based on the taxation of small peasantry. Since small peasantry was at the core of the treasury, Ottoman rulers always preserved small peasantry under the *çift hane*⁵ system. During the classical age covering the period from the 14th to the 16th century, Ottoman surplus extraction system was organised under the *timar* system. In legal terms, the *timar* system was based on the authority of the Sultan and his *sipahi* (cavalryman) who possessed tenure of state land (*miri*) in perpetuity. In other words, the *sipahi* held a *timar* in return for military services in wartime and collecting taxes on behalf of the Ottoman state. Under this system, land was leased out to and cultivated by dependent

peasantry (*reaya*), for which they were obliged to pay the sipahi rent in kind, in cash and – in some cases – labour service (*corvée*). In this framework, *timar* can be considered as *fief* granted to *sipahis*. Timar system also included some punitive sanctions against *sipahis* to preserve peasantry from excess taxation. The Ottoman Empire did not share its authority on judgement and some administrative functions with *sipahis* and tried to prevent the *timar* to have a hereditary character. By doing so, it aimed to strengthen central power and prevented centrifugal forces from having autonomous power.

Here, the surplus extraction mechanism may be considered as a ‘centralized feudal rent’⁶ because of the existence of extra-economic compulsions carried out by the intermediaries of the central authority. Since the basic source of the treasury was the agricultural taxes, the Ottoman Empire tried to build a stable surplus extraction system and guarantee the provision of the army and the capital (Istanbul) dwellers. In accordance with these two aims, center strove both to protect and enhance peasant usufruct rights and to contain and prevent the emergence of solidified or long term claims by the intermediaries (Arıcanlı and Thomas, 1994: 25-48). Besides, Ottomans organized settlement policies to preserve and support small peasantry. As a matter of fact, *reaya* family was always the main production unit and the implicit tenants of the land. The *reaya* who cultivates the land with their own means of production, was only responsible to the state if and only if he accepts to pay a tax (*çift resmi*) to the *sipahi* according to the customs and productivity of the land (Barkan, 1980: 128).

By supporting and preserving small peasantry, the Ottoman Empire could provide a stable surplus extraction mechanism and impede possible diversification among peasantry in the long run. The small peasantry could sustain itself during the centuries. In this respect, Ottoman experience resembles *Ancient Régime France* in which small producers were under the protection of absolute monarchy in spite of a prolonged exploitation mechanism over them.

Turkish debate on so-called Ottoman mode of production consists of three main theoretical positions. One of them asserts that Ottoman socio-economic formation was Asiatic because of the lack of centrifugal autonomous forces on land. According to this approach, since there was no private property on land and all lands are belonged to the state, it can not be argued that the Ottoman Empire was feudal. Similarly, for the advocates of this approach, since there was no aristocracy who had hereditary and juridical rights on land, feudalism argument is meaningless (Divitçioğlu, 2003: 45-52). Following this argument, Keyder (1987: 7) strongly asserts that:

The Ottoman Empire was not feudal: the nature of the state, its role in the determination of the class structure, in social reproduction and in that class structure

itself was fundamentally different from the pre-capitalist order we have come to know as European feudalism. Historically, the Ottoman was constructed upon the Byzantine and the Eastern Roman precedent. In contrast to Western Europe, in the eastern half of the Roman Empire, the small peasantry had remained intact and had not been replaced by a rival labour system such as slavery and serfdom.

As a matter of fact, advocates of the Asiatic mode of production approach agree with traditional Ottoman–Turkish historiography about the non-existence of feudalism in the Ottoman Empire. Actually, these two approaches seem to focus on Western European experience instead of a universal approach.⁷ Interestingly, both two approaches implicitly adopt juridical definition of the term *feudalism*. For instance, Barkan identifies feudalism with labour services and defines the term in juridical way. As he writes:

...it is not true to explain Turkish timar system as creating feudal institutions by a state that invaded and occupied other countries for brutal exploitation. There might have been existed some rules which reflect old feudal relations for a limited period. But these rules existed as lacking of their real meanings and contents. In the regions where the (Ottoman) Empire could successfully establish its own peculiar social order, the non existence of noble class with special privileges and customs and internal organizations that could have not appeared as autonomous and independent entity is an evidence of this reality (Barkan, 1980: 890).

According to Barkan, The Ottoman Empire could never be seen as feudal because of the uniqueness of its structure. A third theoretical position, however, focuses on the role of *sipahis* in *timar* system and finds some similarities between *sipahis* and western type of feudal aristocracy.⁸ However, all these theoretical positions and the arguments laying behind them are not backed by complicated surplus extraction mechanism in different time periods and localities. In our view, the type of political organisation (i.e. being centralized or decentralized) of ruling class who appropriates surplus product, is not a decisive element to identify a mode of production. As Marx (1970: 20-21) underlines in his famous *Preface*:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life (Marx, 1970: 20-21).

In this respect, the mode of production can be described as a specific combination of forces of production and relations of production. As E. Laclau (1977) pointed out in Latin American debate, the Marxist mode of production concept must focus on social relations in production sphere. In other words, in identifying a specific mode of production, the starting point is the statute of direct producer. As Maurice Dobb (1946: 35) asserted:

To avoid undue prolixity it must suffice without further parade of argument, to postulate the definition of feudalism which in the sequel it is proposed to adopt. The emphasis of definition will lie not in the juridical relation between vassal and sovereign, nor in the relation between production and the destination of the product, but in the relation between direct producer (whether he be artisan in some workshop or peasant cultivator on the land) and his immediate superior or overlord and in the social economic content of the obligation which connects them.

Following this framework, it can be argued that the definition of mode of production includes two elements. The first one is the legal aspect of the relations between direct producer and means of production; that is to say, property relations. From this point of view, direct producers have possession of means of production if they have permanent right over the means of production, even if legal property rights in modern sense were not established. As Arıcanlı and Thomas (1994: 37) pointed out, the concept of property had a different function in the Ottoman social formation:

In the Ottoman social formation there is a division between appropriative and distributive practices. The site of distribution is the state. Property is not a social relation that entitles a person to 'something' as in capitalism. Rather, property here is a concept that prevents the coalescence of appropriative and distributive processes in the sphere of production. In other words, property rights maintain a separation of sites so that practice of appropriation takes place in the production site, whereas distributive practice occurs in the context of the state. 'Property' in this case organizes flow or distribution of surplus product - not its extraction.

Second element of the definition of the mode of production is related to the mode of surplus extraction. Namely, the question is whether the surplus extraction is carried out by market relations or by extra-economic compulsion. In this respect, we claim that, the Ottoman Empire was feudal, despite certain regional and historical differences.⁹ However, as mentioned above, feudalism thesis was derived from political and juridical superstructure without considering mode of production. Therefore, it fails to explain different relations of production and social relations in transition within the Empire. For instance some big *çiftlik*s (farm) emerged in the Balkans and Western Anatolia in the 17th century were seen by some authors as capitalist enterprises by

emphasizing their market-oriented structure despite these *çiftlik*s were using dependent labour (Haldon, 1993: 161). Similarly, the Kurdistan province, the subject of this study, was seen as feudal since Ottoman central authority shares its political authority with the Kurdish *agas* and *beys* because of specific historical, geographical and strategic reasons. However, feudal structure of this region was different from western regions of the Empire and the region had a relatively close economy until the end of 19th century. This is because of the severe geographic conditions in addition to the feudal production relations which could have reproduced it self by the local power relations arising from kinship. In the following section, we are defining geographical, administrative and agricultural structure of the region, which is conditioned by the lasting feudal relations.

2. THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

Broadly speaking, theoretical approaches to the history or historical periodizations are grounded on common patterns which can be identified in the evolution of societies. However, historical development is neither one sided phenomena nor a linear process. It is affected by some peculiar natural, geographic and climatic conditions (Divitçioğlu, 2003: 172). In evaluating the peculiar structure of Southeastern Anatolia within the Ottoman Empire, these factors have to be closely taken into account.

Table 1. Some Indicators for Ottoman Agriculture at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Regions	Population (Million)	Cultivated Area thousand km)	Enterprises< 10 acres (%)	10-15 acres (%)	Enterprises> 50 acres (%)	Average (acres)
Macedonia	16.3	4.6	30	52	18	19
Thrace	1.15	4.4	55	28	17	24
Western Anatolia and Marmara	5.20	14.9	31	46	23	35
East Black Sea	1.34	3.7	43	42	15	18
Adana	0.50	4.7	17	36	47	77
Middle Anatolia	4.70	19.6	23	52	25	35
East Anatolia						
Middle Threshold	1.15	5.2	41	41	18	21
South Threshold	0.81	6.5	23	23	40	58

Source: Pamuk, (1987: 96).

The first reliable statistics reflecting production relations in Southeastern Anatolia is only about the last period of the 19th century. The land use patterns in different agricultural regions gathered from the Ottoman Agricultural Statistics for the 1900s is shown in the Table 1 (Pamuk, 1987: 96).¹⁰

Although the data in the table does not give direct information about the land use pattern, distribution of the enterprises size proves the existence of different structure in the south threshold of East Anatolia, which is under the control of feudal powers. As a matter of fact, the average land size in this region is 58 acres, and 40% of the agricultural enterprises consist of the enterprises over 50 acres and more. Comparing with the other regions within the Empire, one can easily mention the concentration of landed property in this region. This is because the enterprises over 50 acres is not more than 25% of total enterprises in all of the other Ottoman Regions and the lands are generally cultivated by the enterprises that own lands smaller than 10 acres. In spite of the inadequate information, the average land size points out to a dominance of small commodity production in these regions. The only exception of land concentration could be observed in Adana Region. In this region, the large agricultural enterprises started to specialize in cotton production in the late 19th century alongside with the construction of railways and new ports.

The structural peculiarity of Southeastern Anatolia continued after the establishment of Turkish Republic in 1923. Although the small agricultural units are the dominant production units in all of the agricultural regions, the semi-feudal agricultural structures continued to exist as dominant agricultural production units in the region.

Ebul Fida, a Muslim geographer of the 14th century, made the first description of the region. Ebul Fida defined the region as “*Bilad-ı Cebel*” and the region consisted of the provinces, Erbil, Şehr-i Zor, Kasr-ı Şirin, Dinever, Nihavend, Hemedan, Keşan, Rey and Isfahat (Baykara, 1988: 99-115).¹¹ The west frontier of the region was roughly upper Fırat-Karasu Rivers and the east border extended to The Van Lake and Kurdish massive. The region was divided with a prolongation of Toros Mountains that lays parallel to the Murad River in the east of Van Lake and 50 km of Amed (Diyarbakır). The region was irrigated by several rivers and streams together with Euphrates and Tigris. The high and rugged Armenian plateaus over 1500-2000 meter from sea level at the north of Anti-Toros decked with river valleys that provide good summer pastures for livestock production. However, the topography of Diyar-ı Mudar, Diyarbakır and Diyar-ı Rabia in the south was in the form of a relatively flat plateau rather softly flows to 1000 meter deeper than sea level at Amid, which was in the south of Rakka over Euphrates river. This semi-arid step region, appropriate for pastures provides a warm shelter in spite of the hard winters in Eastern Armenia (Woods, 1993: 19-20). The geographic conditions provide a nomadic livestock production in high plateaus in summer and in Diyarbakır-Mardin-Urfa triangle in winter rather crop production. In his study of “*Şerefname*”, Şerefhân Bitlisi makes a parallel description with Ebul Fida and notes that the frontiers of the region starts from Hürmüz Sea (Persian Gulf) to Malatya and Maraş and the north area consists of Iran, Persian Iraq, Azerbaijan and Armenia (Han, 1971: 20).

Some travellers such as Simeon, Evliya Çelebi, Poulet and Tavernier, who travelled the region during the period from 16th to 19th century, also depicted the region in their travel books as highly specialized in some trades such as wood processing, jewellers, carpet weaving especially in Diyarbakır, Bitlis and Aleppo. These books also note that there were iron and lead processing carried out by some craftsmen in illegal ways. There were also small amount of export of some goods such as tobacco, oak and purpurin, wool, leather and silk. According to these travel books, during the centuries the region had more than one million sheep and goats and this potential was crucial for the provision of Istanbul. As a corollary, it can further be argued that economy of the region was predominantly based on activities related to nomadic life (Burkay, 1992: 282-288).

3. THE EVOLUTION OF FEUDAL RELATIONS IN SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

From the 14th century onwards the political structure of the region depended on the confederated tribal organisation. This structure determined the political basis of Akkoyunlu and Karakoyunlu states. As a matter of fact, this confederation consisted of fifty Turkish and Kurdish tribes, which were organized to be the main military power of Akkoyunlu state. In spite of certain differences, the social structure of Karakoyunlu state depended on the similar tribal confederation (Woods, 1993: 19-20). Unlike Turkoman tribes, the Kurds were not joining the nomadic confederations and Kurdish tribes were living as autonomous units that have their own tribal hierarchy, special territory and capital city.

According to Evliya Çelebi's accounts about Bitlis Emirate, there was an important social stratification within the tribal and non-tribal groups in the region. If the stratification is indicated with a pyramid, the emirate, his family and other tribal leaders and notables were at the top of the pyramid. The next level below the top was the non-tribal elite consisting of religious dignitaries and high ranking bureaucrats paid by the *Bey*. The *reaya*, which included peasants and settled people of both Kurdish and Christian origin, made up the bottom of the social pyramid (Çelebi, 1986: 483-490) (Özoğlu, 2004: 64).

Every tribe had an economic treaty with the other tribes to assure its regeneration. For instance, Turkomans were usually recognized the independency of Kurdish Beys¹² in expense of having security for theirs caravans and pasturage rights (Woods, 1993: 169). But there were ethnic differences in addition to sectarian and cultural differences among the tribes as they migrated into the region. The tribes generally pursued a close relationship with central authority in order to obtain economic privileges and autonomous statute during the 14th century.

Before Ottoman conquest, many tribes were ally of rival states to strengthen themselves against other tribes. Politically divided structure made easier for the Ottoman Empire to assure control over the region. During the reign of Mehmet II in 15th century and his grandson Selim I in 16th century, the Ottoman Empire benefited from political conflict among Kurdish tribes in order to strengthen its political domination. Especially Selim I could have accomplished a military alliance of Sunni Kurdish feudal powers against the Shia Safevi's, the eastern central power of the region, in Çaldıran Battle in 1514. This battle provided the control of Ottomans over the region. A treaty signed with İdris-i Bitlisi, one of the powerful *beys* of the region and Selim I granted some *berats* (title of privileges) to the Kurdish Beys to recognize their autonomy (Aladağ, 1976: 140-141). Consequently, the Ottoman Empire carried out a peculiar economic and administrative policy for the region instead of centralisation. It can be asserted that, by the help of this policy, Ottomans created a military tampon against the threat of Shia Safevi's in the east and also tried to provide a potential tax source (Özoğlu, 2004: 48-49) (Lindner, 2000). Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire established some administrative units in the region named *yurtluk* and *hükümet sanjaks*. These administrative units differ from classical Ottoman ones in terms of liabilities and autonomy. As the *yurtluk* and *hükümet sanjaks* consist of some hereditary rights, the Ottoman Empire recognized permanent property rights for the region. In addition, the Ottoman Empire did not make tax registration (*tahrir*) for *hükümet sanjaks*, so that there was neither *zeamet* nor *timar* in these administrative units (Yılmazçelik, 2003: 144-155). By establishing *yurtluk* and *hükümet sanjaks*, the Ottoman Empire left administrative and juridical control to local powers in order to build an alliance with Turkoman and Kurdish Beys. This can be best illustrated by an imperial decree (*ferman*) issued by Süleyman I who regulated Ottoman policy in the Kurdish territories. Defining the privileges granted to the Kurdish rulers, this decree represents overall Ottoman governing strategy in Kurdistan in the 16th century:

“Kanuni Sultan Süleyman (Süleyman I) gives to the Kurdish beys who, in his father Yavuz Sultan Selim's times, opposed the Kızılbaz (*Alevis*) and who are currently serving the State with faith, and who joined specifically in the Serasker Sultan İbrahim Pasha's Iran expedition with courage- both as reward for their loyalty and courage, and their application and requests being taken into consideration- the provinces and fortresses that have been controlled by each of them as their *yurtluk* and *ocaklık* since past times along with the places that were given them with separate imperial licences (*berat*) and their provinces, fortresses, cities, villages, and arable fields (*mezraa*) with all their harvest, under the condition of inheritance from father to son, are also given to them as their estate (*temlik*). There should never be any external aggression and conflict among them. This glorious order (*emr-i celile*) shall be obeyed; under no condition shall it be changed. In case of a *bey*'s death, his province shall be given, as a whole, to his son, if there is only one. If there is more than one son, they

(the sons) shall divide the province contingent upon mutual agreement among themselves. If they cannot reach any compromise, then, whoever the Kurdistan beys decide to be the best choice shall succeed and through private ownership (*mülkiyet*) shall be the holder (*mutasarrıf*) of the land forever. If the *bey* has no heir or relative, then his province shall not be given anybody from outside. As a result of consultation with Kurdistan beys, the region shall be given to either *bey* or *beyzades* (someone else from the beys family) suggested by the Kurdistan beys...” (Özoğlu, 2004: 53-54).

Consequently, on these types of granted lands, property owner could either extract the agricultural surplus as a whole in the form of crop (predominantly cereals) or livestock production especially during the periods when the central authority was weak (Sakaoğlu, 1998: 5). In addition to the establishment of *yurtluk* and *hükümet sanjaks*, the Ottoman Empire also granted *timar* rights to some tribal leaders and members of ruling families of tribes on newly conquered territories. For example Evliya Çelebi writes that 13 *zeamet* and 124 *timars* were granted to Bitlis *Emirlik* and many influential military like *alaybeyi*, *çeribaşı* and *yüzbaşı*.

As mentioned above, *timar* was the land granted to *sipahis* in response to military service during the wartime by the central authority. In classical *timar* system carried out in the other regions of the Ottoman Empire, tax revenues of the *timar* was being enjoyed by *sipahis* alongside with some other regular or extraordinary taxes collected by *sipahis* on behalf of central authority. Here, the tax regime was characterized by several features deriving from the region’s tribal structure.

As for the relations between the Ottoman *beys* and tribal leaders, it could be analysed by using a pendulum analogy. During the centuries under Ottoman rule, pendulum swung between powerful autonomy and direct central control. The central power could have an opportunity to recruit soldiers and collect taxes¹³ during the relatively powerful economic and administrative periods. The beys and tribal leaders enjoyed a certain measure of prestige and power deriving both from their ancestry and from administrative titles granted by the Sultan, but their positions were by no means guaranteed. Constant intrigue, fighting, and displays of quick temper were necessary to hold their enemies at bay and retain the loyalty of the tribes and peasantry (Gould, 1976: 485-506). On the contrary, during the relatively weak periods, the direction of the pendulum changed and the feudal powers were cutting off paying taxes and evading their other responsibilities. If the weakness was temporary, the feudal powers were expected to again adhere to the central authority (Bruinessen, 1992: 135-136).

However the Ottoman Empire attempted to build direct control over the region by granting some titles such as “*sancakbeyliği*”, “*kaymakamlık*” and “*mütesellimlik*”, which created some winners and losers among tribe leaders. This policy provided the

Ottoman Empire to impede potential collaboration between feudal powers (Barkey, 1996: 12). In addition to this “divide and rule” policy, the Ottoman Empire benefited from the hostility between some tribes stemming from blood feud and competition.

Considering the production relations on land, the *beys* and tribal leaders should be seen as the “appropriator of the surplus” rather than an “intermediate agent”. The alliance in surplus extraction performed by a new administrative model provided mutual benefit for both local powers and the high public officials in the region. An implicit treaty between the feudal powers and public officials almost became a tradition during the period when central power weakened and decentralized especially during the 18th century (Meeker, 2002: 147-148). While feudal powers were supporting the officials in the collection of the regular taxes and the maintenance of security, the feudal powers were benefiting from state officials in the assurance of *iltizam* right and rental of some lands (Gürbüz, 2008: 59). This alliance in surplus extraction in favour of *beys* and tribal leaders increased the dependency of peasantry and impoverished them. Many peasants were obliged to leave their lands as a result of an increase in the burden of tax. There were only two options for these peasants; either continue their rural lives under the patronage of feudal power or join the army of local officials that was called *kapı halkı* (Household Cavalry). Joining *kapı halkı* and becoming a *levend* (warrior) was providing to this people a kind of tax exemption and employment (Barkey, 2008: 208-211; Cezar, 1965: 331).

The transformation of peasantry continued in the course of time, and having military force (*kapı halkı*) became an indicator of power and prestige. For instance, having more soldiers provided the *iltizam* owner to control waste lands and to appropriate higher percentage of agricultural surplus. As Inalcık pointed out, local powers frequently tended to appropriate more surpluses by using illegal methods depending on their military power (Inalcık, 1977: 27-57). In addition to the control of local lands, *beys* and tribe leaders used their military power as a bargaining power with the central authority (Barkey, 1996: 169-170). The Ottoman Empire needed *levends* in the long and difficult battles because of low technological level of the army. This is why it forced to bargain with the local powers for *levends*. In spite of the possibility to lose control over the region, the appointment of many rebellious tribal leaders as a state official used to be a regular application in the course of time (Inalcık, 1977: 28).¹⁴ Some of the rebellious tribal leaders tended to banditry for their livelihood.¹⁵

Beginning with the reign of Mahmud II in 1808 and particularly by the period of the *Tanzimat* (Imperial Edict of Reorganization in 1839), the Ottoman Empire reversed its provincial administrative policies and switched to a more centralized mode. The Empire strived to cope with the Western economic and military superiority and to counter Russian and Iranian threats and went through a process of restructuring

throughout the Empire, including Kurdistan. Aiming to establish direct Ottoman authority in Kurdistan, the central administration established a special province and called it *Eyalet-i Kurdistan*. The state also relied more on the centrally appointed administrators, not only at the level of *vali* but also even at the level of lower-rank administrators (Özoğlu, 2004: 65). Related with this new administrative approach, it tried to centralize the agricultural surplus in the region and increase tax incomes with the collection of taxes by the appointed officials (*muhassıl*).

But this attempt encountered with a strong resistance in the region because of the established coalition of interest between the officials and local powers. The officials, who noticed a decline in their illegal incomes, started to rebel against the centre and in doing so they gained the support of local powers.¹⁶ Although the centre could have reduced the resistance in the region by using military power, appointed governors did not maintain the control in rural areas because of the lack of finance and hard geographic conditions. The centralisation attempt might have been decreased the power of *sheikhs* who had religious authority on the tribes. Hence, the Ottoman Empire attempted to use their influence on tribes and the *sheiks* were used as an intermediate agent between the centre and tribal leaders. For this aim, the Ottoman Empire allocated large *waqf* lands to the *sheiks* to gain their alliance and this policy consolidated feudal relations in the region (Sunar, 1999: 30).

4. CONSOLIDATION OF BIG LANDOWNERSHIP IN SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA AFTER THE LAND CODE OF 1858

In designing The Land Code of 1858, the main aim of the Ottoman Empire was to increase its basic income source by the small landownership. According to article 8 of the Code, “*The whole of the lands of a town or village are not granted to the whole of the inhabitants... the parcels of lands are given to each inhabitant, and title-deeds (Tapu senedi) showing their possession are delivered to them ...*” This article definitely reveals the tendency of the Ottoman Empire in favour of small landownership. In spite of this tendency, Land Code of 1858 led to concentration of landed property instead of strengthening small landownership.¹⁷ Because 1858 Land Code handled all of the production categories on land (small peasants, feudal producers, capitalists) isolating from social relations and included some provisions for arranging relations between state and individuals rather than relations among different social formations (Aytekin, 2009: 935-951). Consequently the tribal leaders registered the common lands as their own private property by using their influence on public officials.¹⁸ In addition, the *sheiks*, which increased their economic power on *waqf* lands, used the donations of their disciples in purchasing new lands.¹⁹ Alongside this, wealthy city dwellers and Sultan Abdulhamid II himself also became the owners of large estates after Land Code of 1858 (Sluglett and Sluglett, 1984: 409-421).

This transformation in property relations on land led to changes in production and distribution relations. The communal property of tribes declined and economic individualism gradually emerged in the region. For this reason, a social stratification inevitably emerged within tribal social structure. It can be easily claimed that class differentiation in today's Southeastern Anatolia Region dates back to this period. In other words, Ottoman policy of pacification and sedentarization of tribal groups contributed to class-formation in the region. As a result of this policy, Ottomans dispossessed some parts of tribal lands. As Quataert (1994: 873-874) pointed out, from c.1850 peasant revolts and central authority helped to block the notables and preserve small peasantry's claims.

During the third quarter of 19th century when the prices increased dispossession usually involved nomadic tribes who had lost their customary rights on land. Nevertheless, because of the security problems, tribal holdings had not been cultivated regularly. This is why these lands were often considered as waste (*mevat*) lands by central authority. During the second half of the century, especially after the Land Code of 1858, however, tribal pacification brought improved security as domestic and foreign demand for agricultural commodities mounted. Under these suitable circumstances, some entrepreneurs started to cultivate these waste lands in safety to develop agricultural production in the region. However, since they were unable to implement *corvée* system they instead obtained some surplus peasant labour through wage and sharecropping arrangements. Thus some smallholders had the opportunity to earn additional income and preserved their own holdings during the Great Depression of 1873-1896 which revealed itself as persistent price depression.²⁰ During the second half of the 19th century the notables also used the labour of newly settled tribesmen. And probably, they established greater social and economic control over them. As corollary, the later estate formation took place in newly opened lands and used mainly tribal labour and was not based on the exploitation of existing peasantry. Consequently, some members who formerly had an equivalent statute within the tribe started to cultivation as a tenant or sharecropper in tribe leader's or *bey*'s land (Bruniessen, 1992: 184). An official report in 1893 describes such transformation process in property relations for Dersim as follows:

“There exists some Persian tradesman from Iran who was selling wheat, barley, cotton prints and linen vs in this period. They were selling these goods on credit for six months in exchange for high interest rate. Consequently the debtors were obliged to sell their lands to pay these debts. Some of them were making a deposit of their lands and immigrating to other places in order to make money for interest payments. Eventually, most of them lost their lands and became shepherd or servant. The rest kept on agriculture as a sharecropper” (Yılmazçelik, 1995: 135).

During the 19th century some of the tribe members became waged labour but they were minority (Bruniessen, 1992: 184). Instead of capitalist farming on large lands which is based on waged labour, sharecropping was the most common form of land-use. In practice, throughout the region, sharecropping used to include some obligations akin to labour-service as it was in Russia after the abolition of serfdom.²¹ Moreover, monetisation of economy even within the border of feudal relations was very limited. Until the 20th century the region was closed to world markets due to rough territory and hard transportation conditions (Pamuk, 1987: 95). For similar reasons, agricultural structure of the region was based on cereals and livestock production. In other words, economic structure was self sufficient and market connections were not beyond local fairs.

In evaluating relations of production in the region, Ottoman's practice of settlement of some tribes realized for military and economic reasons must be underlined. The Ottoman Empire established a commission to settle down the nomadic tribes of the region to maintain the security of trade route between Syria and West Anatolia. By this policy, Ottomans aimed to increase land tax income after Land Code of 1858. In this respect, new settlement places established with the consolidation of sub districts like İzziye, Islahiye, Osmaniye. In realising this policy, the Empire established a new army in 1863 (*Fırka-ı İslahiye*) composed of the soldiers out of the region and therefore did not rely on the current military powers in the region (Orhonlu, 1987:115-116). During the period between 1865 and 1876 when the reign of Abdulhamid II begins, the Ottoman Empire carried out a military policy in order to control the tribes and to overcome resistance of tribes against settlement policies. Actually, during this period, the Ottoman Empire strived to establish an agrarian structure based on small peasant property in the region in order to consolidate the power of monarchy. But this policy could not be achieved since the peasants were either ignorant about the land registration or had a fear from government taxation. Moreover they could not have purchased land because of rapidly rising land prices. Thus, they became sharecroppers and tenants on their lands and tribal *sheiks* or rich townsmen, who personally registered communally owned lands, became the real owners. Those newly settled nomads became either sharecroppers of large estates or seasonal agricultural workers (Şahin, 1996: 39-40). In brief, large landowners were welcomed by The Ottoman Empire as long as the land is cultivated continuously by permanent tax payers with their sharecroppers.

Actually, this new military policy was not successful to overcome the resistance of local powers. According to official records, one of the tribal leader, Sheikh Ubeydullah had a military power consisted of 10 or 20 thousand armed forces and this army was bigger than central army in the region at the end of 1870. The main reason for the weakness of central authority in the region was loyalty of local people to local powers instead of central authority. The inherent alienation of central authority from

local powers and the reaction against radical centralization policy that mentioned above can be regarded as the reasons for lack of confidence to the centre (Gürbüz, 2008: 57-58). Another reason behind the question of political authority is lack of social basis for the Ottoman rule other than military force (Gould, 1973: 41).

During the reign of Abdulhamit II, the Ottoman Empire implemented a different alliance strategy with local powers of the region because of the rising Armenian nationalism and Russian attacks to Eastern borders of the country. In this respect, special troops (*Hamidiye Alayları*)²² were established by organising Sunni Kurdish tribes against Armenian armed groups depending on Treaty of Berlin in 1878. The Ottoman Empire also strived to lessen the English impact on the region by implementing Pan-Islamic policies (Ergül, 1997: 45-47). Abdulhamid II granted some titles to Sunni feudal powers and appointed them for some missions. This policy led to strengthen autonomy of local notables and consolidated feudal relations of production throughout the region (Gürbüz, 2008: 64-65).

In the course of time, these troops started to make banditry and attacked Armenian villages. The Ottoman authorities encouraged the enrichment of the Kurdish feudal powers, since they received valuable presents from them. "Thanks to this", remarked Termen (Russian vice-consul in Van), "the whole village passes into hands of Kurds; the Armenians starting as mirible i.e, they crop--end up by losing their land and become simple labourers, i.e serfs of the Kurds". The *selef*²³ was a source of huge income for the Kurdish Beys. For example, Haseki, an Armenian village in the valley of Muş, lost through *selef* 208 fields, 24 houses, and 6 mills, all of which passed into hands of Kurdish *selefdars* (*the lender*). In the formerly prosperous village of Arench, in the *kaza* (sub district) of Adilcevaz, out of 115 houses only 70 remained in the hand of local inhabitants; of these however, only 55 were held in ownership, the others being *miri*. In the village of Marmuss in Van the Kurdish *Beys* seized all the lands of the Armenian community (Issawi, 1980). However, this policy played an important role to consolidate Ottoman rule over the region (Barkey, 2008: 288). As a matter of fact, the policy depending on "divide and rule" approach²⁴ caused to strengthen Sunni feudal powers in the region²⁵. For instance the allocation of *miri* lands to Sunni tribe leaders who joined the Hamidiye Troops exempted from livestock tax (*resm-i agnam*) (Burkay, 1992: 404). These privileges created a new balance of power in favour of Sunni Kurds (Sunar, 1999: 49). Moreover The Hamidiye Troops were used to change the power relations between Sunni Kurd tribes as well, in favour of those who loyal to Ottoman Rule.²⁶

The social and political aspect of Abdulhamit's Pan Islamist policy can be seen in an educational practice called *Aşiret Mektebi*. By the order of Abdulhamit II a new school opened in Istanbul in 1892 to provide an Ottoman education for the sons of leading tribal notables. The *Aşiret Mekteb-i Hümayun* (Imperial School for Tribes), was

a five-year boarding school that admitted boys between twelve and sixteen years old. The school has been rightly interpreted as part of a broader policy pursued by Abdulhamit II for integrating the Arab provinces more closely to the Imperial center. However, the school, which reached beyond the Arab provinces to recruit eastern Anatolian Kurds, was essentially an experiment in social engineering which sought to foster an allegiance to the Ottoman state with the Kurdish tribes. On the precedent of urban notables whose sons were educated in Istanbul, obtained government offices, and became Ottoman loyalists, Abdulhamit II and his advisers aimed to create a similar body of intermediaries between the state and its tribes. The experiment ran for fifteen years before the Aşiret Mektebi was closed in 1907; yet in time the school sent waves of graduates on to higher education in special sections of the civil and military academies and thence to government office in the provinces (Rogan, 1996: 83). In the end, non-Sunni local powers that were considered unreliable by central authority weakened in the region.

CONCLUSION

The Ottoman Empire, after consolidating empire power in 16th century, achieved to realize a centralist surplus extraction mechanism. However, Southeastern Anatolia, as a part of Ottoman social formation had a peculiar structure throughout the centuries. In this region, the Ottoman Empire implemented a decentralized surplus extraction mechanism which was based on sharing surplus product with local notables for military and political reasons. In this respect, the Ottoman Empire used very flexible policies to provide a political authority in the region. Based on the dependent peasantry, this structure adapted itself to changing conditions and thus it could have been reproduced. By the period of Tanzimat, the Ottoman Empire tried to build a central control over the region as it did in the other regions of the Empire. To this end, it constituted a central organization to collect taxes directly. But this policy could not have been achieved because of the resistance of local notables and interest coalition between tribal leaders and officials. The political and economic structure of the region did not change after the Land Code of 1858 because of the existing class relations. Moreover these changes contributed the consolidation tribal leaders’ power. At the end of the 19th century, Ottoman policy of using Sunni-Kurd tribes to overcome national uprisings of Armenians, consolidated feudal relations of production and political fragmentation. Modern Turkish nation state inherited this complicated structure which had an ethnic-national dimensions as well.

NOTES

¹ For the historical evolution of agrarian structures in Turkey see Boratav (2004), Pamuk and Toprak (1988).

² Although semi-feudal relations declined rapidly after the implementation of Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), the rate of holdings leased out a sharecropping basis in the region (Adiyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Şırnak) is two times higher than the average of Turkey. (Calculated by the authors by using Agricultural Census of 2001 of Turkish Statistical Institute, TUIK).

³ For a summary and evaluation of these debates see Seddon and Margulies (1984) and Aydın (1989). In Turkish debates some authors like M. Erdost used the term semi-feudalism in order to identify the mode of production instead of relation of productions in some regions of Turkey. As it was discussed by several authors, semi-feudalism is a relation of production which emerged and shaped under dominant mode of production. See Erdost (1989).

⁴ About this geographical and historical differences in the context of raw cotton production in the 19th century in Egypt and Western Anatolia, see Teoman and Kaymak (2008).

⁵ *çift-hane*: agricultural unit based on peasant family in the Ottoman Empire. *Çift* means a yoke of oxen while *hane* denotes labour of peasant family.

⁶ We borrowed the term from B. Porshnev. Porshnev (1977) uses the term to define incorporation of landowning class to the absolute monarchy by a kind of tax-farming system during the reign of Louis XIV.

⁷ For a detailed discussion of this “ideal type” approach for feudalism see Haldon (1993). In this point although he accepted that “no wholly consistent or systematic accounts of the Asiatic mode of production can be derived from (Marx’s and Engels’s) writings, Anderson (1974) does not consider Ottoman Empire as feudal by focusing on different juridical and political superstructure by which surplus extraction take place.

⁸ For this approach see Erdost (1989).

⁹ For a discussion on the peasantry in different modes of production see Ennew and Tribe (1977).

¹⁰ For landownership and tenancy relations in Syria and Lebanon see Issawi (1966).

¹¹ The description of Ebul Fida constituted the Kurdish provinces formally declared by the central authority after *Tanzimat* (1839). The region were covering the six *beylerbeylik* representing the provinces of today’s South East of Turkey, Irak and Syria. These *beylerbeyliks* were Erzurum, Diyarbakır, Van, Rakka, Dulkadir/Maraş and Halep.

¹² The statute of *beys* (Ekrad *Beys*) was similar to the vassals of the western feudalism. These *beys* were usually in the river basins of Murat and Karasu. Gülşenzadeler, Şehsüvaroğulları, Sağırzadeler, Gençosmanlılar and Rışvanzadeler were some examples of these notables.

¹³ The center were collecting some taxes such as *resm-i çift*, *resm-i ırgaddiye*, *resm-i agnam* from the sedentary units in the form of cash besides immigrant units were obliged to pay lump sum taxes. Göyünç (1973) proves the collection of lump sum taxes in the form of sheep, butter, cheese with the tax base data in the 16th century South Eastern Anatolia.

¹⁴ For example 500 levends of tribal leader, Mahmud *Bey* was called for Bagdat expedition in the command of his brother, Çakır Ahmed *Bey* in 1776. See Cezar (1965).

¹⁵ There are some registrations denoting that the Kılıçlı Tribe, refused to settle in Mencib Region grabbed the cereals, animals and grapes in Gaziantep region and caused to 36.000 gurus detriment. See Muhsin (2005).

¹⁶ Bedirhan *Bey*, the leading power of Hakkari Region rebelled against the application of tax incomes by muhassıl's. The timar owners and notables of Van Region, the officers of Erzurum Region and Muş district supported his rebellion. The rebellion surpassed by the Ottoman army at 1847. See Sunar (1999).

¹⁷ For detailed accounts of the debates around the logic of the Land Code of 1858, see Gerber (1987).

¹⁸ There was an ambiguity of legal status of large estates in different regions of the Empire. The Land Code of 1858 recognized some of them as private property but their legal status remained uncertain. The state preferred local, limited and temporary solutions. See Aytekin (2009).

¹⁹ The English general consulate General Abbot at Iran reports in his letter (1880) that the *sheikh* Sayyid Ubeydullah from *Nakşibendi* order purchased important amount of land in north west Iran and Hakkari Region Özoğlu (2004). In addition there are some registrations about the sheiks possessed big sizes of land in Süleymaniye and Şemdinli provinces by purchases. See Sunar (1999).

²⁰ For detailed account about this issue see Pamuk (1984).

²¹ For detailed account for Russian experience see Lenin (1964). Lenin defines labour services as embracing "whole cycle of jobs in rural life. According to some reports quoted by him, it includes "all operations relating to field-cultivation and grain and hay harvesting". Moreover, "...firewood is stocked and loads are carted", "...roofs and chimneys are repaired, ...and the delivery-of poultry and eggs is undertaken by peasants. We do not have detailed accounts of labour service obligations throughout the region. But it can be asserted that, despite some differences, similar obligations existed.

²² While the salaries, equipment and weapons of the troops were provided by the state, horses were provided by the tribes. The armed men of the troops were separated into three groups according to their ages. These were *efrad-ı ibtidaiye* (17-20 ages), *efrad-ı nizamiye* (20-32 ages) and *efrad-ı redife* (30-42). All of the groups trained for certain periods. See Ergül (1997). The members of the tribes were ambitious to recruit Hamidiye Troops because the people who do not join these troops were obliged to join central army. See Kodaman (1987).

²³ *selef*: a loan in the form of cash or grain, on advantegous terms, repayable in kind at harvest time.

²⁴ K.P.İvanov, Consul General of Russia in Basra narrates Ottoman policy of creating hostility between tribes by supporting one tribe against the others. See Burkay (1992).

²⁵ The conflict between Cibran Tribe in Karlova and Alevi Tribe in Varto during 1891-1908 may be given as an example of privilege conflict. The rejection of Yezidi and Alevi tribes in recruiting Hamidiye Troops is an important evidence for this discrimination policy. See Ergül (1997).

²⁶ For the increasing power of the Miran and Milan tribes by this strategy see Bruinessen (1992).

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