Historical Context:  
The Timing of the Attacks

They started not employing the Gypsies. In driving! This time, they started beating the drivers. That was what it started with. In essence, it was a drivers’ war. A drivers’ war that turned into a Gypsy war!1

Although in the Bayramiç case, there were periods during which Gypsyness was unimportant, there were also moments when it gained a “master status” and those labeled as such became more Gypsy. In these contexts, the stigma became more functional. Our case displays not only how the stigma can be used to control power relations in a society, but also when and why it gained that function.

This is why in this chapter I will try to reconstruct what was happening in the town in the late 1960s that turned the relations upside down, and which made certain people “more Gypsy” than ever and thus a target for violent attacks by townspeople. Sketching the background of the town at that time is important, as it will help us understand the dynamics of the attacks. While it changed according to individual choices and experiences, the general atmosphere in the town before the attacks was not at all hostile toward the Gypsies. The question therefore is, what changed this atmosphere? How did certain people become a threat and how did the idea of a “Gypsy threat” emerge? Who were those people? Why did they become a target?

The change was part of a more general transformation in the relationship between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in the town following wider developments and trends in the country. It was not a change in Gypsyness in itself, but a transition in power relations in the society altogether, in which Turkishness was used to improve one’s social position and status. That was why some parts of the town society became “more Gypsy” than
before. The effects of rapid urbanization in the country and the related socioeconomic politics characterized this period. I contend in this chapter that especially the development of highway transportation and increased mobility and trade between urban and rural areas are crucial to understand the attacks. And it is therefore no coincidence that the leading perpetrators were drivers themselves. As we will see in detail in Chapter 5, the conflict over a joint partnership of a truck between the leading perpetrator and his former friend from the muhacir “Gypsies” triggered the attack. That is why in this chapter we will concentrate on the developments in the transport sector.

The Socioeconomic Structure of Bayramiç

It is not possible to find elaborate data or research on Bayramiç, as towns generally do not attract scholars’ or state authorities’ attention especially if they have not industrialized. Scholars who work on the rural world mainly focus on villages and the ones who are interested in urban sites restrict their works to cities. The first published sociological study on a provincial Turkish town was Mübeccel Kiray’s work on Ereğli in 1964.3 Towns that could be considered as “in-between” and did not fit the rural–urban dichotomy did not attract much attention of researchers.

Apart from a few peripheral documents on the transportation and forestry sector in the town, the annual reports of 1968 and 1973, and the statement of the town’s attorney in the newspapers of 1970, no state documentation is available.4 Still, some information on the population, highway construction, vehicles in use, and forestry business from the 1960s are available in annual reports and academic research, socioeconomic statistics of the State Statistics Institute, and village inventory reports. Along with some local newspapers, they enrich our understanding of the socioeconomic context of the town. However, oral narratives were the main sources for several aspects of socioeconomic life in the town.

Bayramiç officially became a municipality in 1882, and 20 years later (in 1902), it became the center of the district. The provincial town from the Ottoman period was a market place for the surrounding villages as well as an intermediate center between village communities and larger cities.5 The political, economic, and cultural institutions of the town were controlled by the town’s notables (kasaba eşrafi) and the structure was neither rural nor urban. The social stratification consisted of four main social groups: large landowners (ağa), craftsmen (esnaf), merchants (tüccar), and peasants (çiftçi).

Bayramiç has never become an important socioeconomic center, but it has been a hub for the surrounding villages. The current population