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in South-East Europe

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# Turkish Jews and their Diasporas

Entanglements and Separations

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We convened the initial symposium thanks to a generous conference grant from the State of Styria, along with contributions from FWF Austrian Research Fund and the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University. Florian Bieber, director of the Centre of Southeast European Studies and Karl Kaser, chair of Southeast European History and Anthropology at the University of Graz supported our venture intellectually and logistically. The symposium served as the meeting place, where the core ideas discussed in this collection were first conceived. Not all participants who contributed to those initial debates are present in this book, but their ideas are. We would like to thank Julia Philips Cohen (Vanderbilt University) and Marcy Brink-Danan (Hebrew University) for their inspiring scholarship, which shaped the larger research agenda of this book. Aylin Kuryel (University of Amsterdam) and her presentation of the dictionary of Jewish experiences in Turkey<sup>1</sup> set the frame for a debate with representatives of Jewish community life in Turkey, including Betsi Penso

<sup>1</sup> Raşel Meseri and Aylin Kuryel, *Türkiye’de Yahudi Olmak: Bir Deneyim Sözlüğü*, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2017).

of the website Avlaremoz and Mois Gabay of the *Şalom* Newspaper. Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak (Tel Aviv University, Moshe Dayan Center) introduced a geostrategic perspective on Turkish-Jewish relations and Turkish Jewish life in Israel. Their contributions allowed us to extend our sight beyond the confines of academic debate into civil society.

We felt particularly honored to be able to count on the support of Aron Rodrigue, Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford University and Rifat Bali of the Centre Alberto Benveniste, Paris and Libra Books, Istanbul, who framed the debate at the symposium with their scholarly work and do so again in this volume with the preface (Chap. 1) and the epilogue (Chap. 11).

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## Praise for *Turkish Jews and their Diasporas*

“Laying bare the twin myths of Ottoman tolerance and Turkish-Jewish friendship upon which so much of Turkish-Jewish history writing was founded, this volume demonstrates how a dwindling Jewish community and growing antisemitism in Turkey are now unraveling these myths before our very eyes. Full of sobering and incisive reflections on Ottoman and Turkish Jewish lives past and present, this book has much to offer not only to specialists but also to anyone interested in the processes of minoritization, displacement and diaspora in the modern era.”

—Julia Phillips Cohen, *Vanderbilt University, USA*

“An engaging and erudite exploration of identity politics in the late Ottoman era and modern Turkey. The story of Turkish Jews and their diaspora reflects the twists and turns, paradoxes, entanglements, and struggles shaping the country from the late 19th century till our day. The authors behind this volume have done a tremendous service to all scholars of modern Turkey.”

—Dimitar Bechev, *University of Oxford, UK*



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*Secular Turks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); *At Meydam'nda Ölüm: 17. Yüzyıl İstanbul'unda Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Hoşgörü ve İhtida* (Death on the Hippodrome: Gender, Tolerance, and Conversion in 17th century Istanbul) (Istanbul: Koç Yayınları, 2016, in Turkish); *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020); *German, Jewish, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); and *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesars, and Caliphs* (New York: Basic Books, 2021 and London: John Murray, 2021).

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## Prologue: The Long Twilight

*Aron Rodrigue*

Reflecting upon the history of the Jews of Turkey in the century following the establishment of the Republic in 1923 until our own day is not a joyous enterprise. The dwindling demographic presence of the Jews in the country already speaks volumes. The Jewish population of around 80,000 at the beginning of the Republic out of a total population of over 13 million, has now been reduced to 10–15,000, a tiny number in a country of over 83 million inhabitants. The millennia-long Jewish presence in Asia Minor and Eastern Anatolia, dating back to Byzantine and much earlier times, has ended. Relics of the Jewish past, decaying ancient cemeteries and dilapidated remnants of synagogues, are all that remain here and there in these parts of the country. The Jews of Turkey are now overwhelmingly concentrated in the city of Istanbul, with a small group residing in Izmir.

The processes that have led to the current situation have long roots. The transition from Empire to nation-state in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries dealt death blows to the multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies that had been the hallmark of centuries of Ottoman life. Ethnic cleansing marked the period. Most of the Muslims of the Balkans

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had to leave and migrated to the areas that became Turkey. The genocide of the Armenians during World War I and the compulsory Muslim-Greek Orthodox population exchange of 1923 left behind only small remnants of Christian populations. Together with the Jews, these non-Muslim populations became the officially recognized “minorities” of the republic which utilized this modern terminology to designate the descendants of old Ottoman *millet*s while negating the formal existence of distinctive Muslim groups such as the Kurds.

The non-Muslim groups became the “others” of the new Turkish nation now coming into existence through social engineering by the Kemalist elite. As such, they were systemically put into a vulnerable and perilous marginal position which could rapidly deteriorate as circumstances changed. Greeks and Armenians were associated in the official discourse with separatism that had destroyed the Empire. The suspicion of these groups as allies of foreign powers bent on the destruction of the Turkish nation persisted. The “Sèvres syndrome” which sees an ever-present danger of a conspiracy to dismember Turkey that had once been attempted by the aborted Sèvres treaty of 1920 has been a constant feature of Turkish nationalism and enflames paranoid distrust of the “minorities.” While Jews were not associated with separatism that led to nationalist aspirations among Christian groups in the Ottoman Empire and were not initially perceived as a threat, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 changed the picture. Now Jews could also be charged with dual loyalty by elements hostile to them, and Zionism was added, especially in Islamic circles, to the ranks of those engaged in nefarious plots to destroy Turkey. Hence all non-Muslims have remained under a cloud of suspicion. This situation could remain dormant but could erupt into active hostility at times of crisis. This distrust, when added to the strong association of Turkishness with Sunni Islam, reinforced the view that the non-Muslim could be a Turkish citizen but could never be a “Turk.”

It is important to note here that strictly anti-Jewish action in modern Turkey has been an exception rather than the rule. One can find only one major instance, the Thrace pogroms of 1934. These were the results of collusion between elements in the state apparatus and local groups bent on economic gain through getting rid of the last non-Muslim group remaining in this border area, all encouraged by some antisemitic writers and journalists. Otherwise, Jews and other non-Muslims frequently became the object of discrimination and attack as part of a larger assault on the place of non-Muslims in society.

Jews together with non-Muslims were dismissed from positions in the civil service at the beginning of the Republic. Together with other non-Muslims they were made to quickly lose their citizenship if they were abroad and did not return to the country in a set period of time or registered themselves at Turkish consulates. In the case of Turkish Jews who had emigrated to various countries, this had dire consequences years later, during the Holocaust, when they were left stateless and could be easily deported by Nazi Germany to death camps. Jews and others were subject to the same campaigns of Turkification in the late 1920s and 1930 which strongly discouraged the use of languages other than Turkish. They, together with other non-Muslims, were conscripted into special labor battalions while they were doing their military service during the period of World War II. The infamous *Varlık* discriminatory wealth tax of 1942 affected all non-Muslim, not only the Jews. The Istanbul pogrom of 1955 started as an attack on Greek businesses and individuals that almost immediately made targets of other non-Muslims. All these incidents were part of the larger context of Turkification in its various manifestations driven by the larger drive to erase distinctive identities in the move to create a unitary nation. The fact that this brought with it a ferocious and frequently bloody suppression of the Kurds should not be forgotten here. Violence was a specter that was never far away.

Like elsewhere in Muslim-majority lands, it is the rise of the state of Israel in 1948 that changed the picture for the Jews. As mentioned above, they could now be associated with a foreign entity. This has become particularly significant during the last two decades, under an Islamically oriented government friendly to the Arab world and to the Palestinian cause. Antisemitism that had been a present but restrained and controlled force under the Kemalist regimes that maintained somewhat friendly relations with Israel could now be unleashed fully and openly. The conflation of Jew and Israeli is now commonplace. Antisemitism is now arguably more widespread than any other time in the history of the Turkish Republic.

How did Turkish Jews react in the face of these trends? The most common course of action has been that of exit. The numbers cited above speak for themselves. Turkish Jews have voted with their feet and have left the country in several waves of emigration, starting with the 1920s and then in large numbers in the years following the creation of the state of Israel, and then in the late 1960s, late 70s and in the last decade. The search for better economic opportunities is certainly an important factor here, as is

the case in most migratory movements everywhere. But the various episodes identified above, and the atmosphere of distrust encountered by the Jews have also constituted potent push forces. The recent acquisition of foreign citizenship by large segments of Turkish Jewry, especially of Spanish and Portuguese citizenship that became possible in the last few years, is the result of the pursuit to ensure the possibility of exit even among those who do not plan to emigrate. These citizenships are insurance policies in the face of deep insecurity and doubts about the future.

For those who remained, the easiest and most prudent way to maneuver has been to adopt a policy of low profile, of silence. This marked and continues to mark the official leadership of the community but also of large elements of the Jewish population. It is famously rendered by the Ladino word *kayades* as a recommendation to everyone to keep quiet. Not drawing attention to oneself, not responding openly to attacks, not involving oneself in politics, not participating in the civic life of the country, not having an active voice has appeared as the most cautious ways to lead one's life in Turkey. This stance, in spite of criticism by a few younger members of the community, is not likely to change soon.

One sentiment lies behind *kayades*, fear. Turkish Jews are well aware of the fate of other minorities that dared move in ways that were perceived as hostile. One can already observe this phenomenon as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, when a free press emerged after the 1908 revolution and Zionism became a hotly debated topic in Ladino newspapers. Those Ottoman Jews who attacked Zionism were explicit in voicing their concern that it would create another separatist cause in the Empire. The fear was that this would create doubts about the loyalty of the Jews and come to harm them. It is not hard to see that what was already happening to the Armenians in the 1890s provided the immediate backdrop for this argument. All that has transpired in the twentieth century when it comes to minorities in Turkey has only added to this fear. Keeping a low profile has been a logical reaction.

It would be a mistake to consider *kayades* as a behavior unique to the Jews of Turkey. In fact, when put in long term historical and comparative perspective it is quite clear that this has been a common strategy in all pre-modern diasporic Jewish societies. In a situation before equal rights became normative for citizenship in modern states beginning with the French Revolution, Jews could never claim a political voice and preferred to appear as a harmless population that did not pose problems. Jewish survival depended upon the goodwill and protection offered by the ruler.

The situation changed with the legal emancipation of the Jews in European societies when they could enter liberal civic society. In spite of the persistence of antisemitism, Jews in these societies could at least have the potential to develop a voice in the public sphere on the basis of equality, even if many still preferred to keep a low profile.

One can observe the functioning of the *kayades* paradigm also in the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Jews and other non-Muslims had to know their place in a polity where their second-class status operated within an Islamic legal framework that accepted the existence of the non-Muslims (*zimmi*s) only on the basis of social and political inequality. The much vaunted “tolerance” of the Ottomans was never based on acceptance on the basis of equality. It recognized non-Muslims on the basis of “difference” that could never become the “same” except through conversion. “Tolerance” in this setting just tolerated, and regulated, often in an antagonistic manner, a political and social hierarchy that ascribed inferior status to the non-Muslim. Plural Ottoman society was not pluralistic, in spite of widely disseminated myths. While much was shared among the different communities in the social and cultural spheres which saw porous boundaries, the situation was very different in the political realm, in matters that concerned power. There, overstepping boundaries and aspirations for more could and did entail dire consequences.

While the situation began to change grudgingly with the onset of reforms in the nineteenth century, the underlying assumptions about the second-class status of non-Muslims persisted until the end of the Empire, in spite of the granting in 1856 of equal rights for all male citizens of the Empire regardless of religious affiliation. These persisted in a Republic that offered non-Muslims legal equality on paper but implemented it only in piecemeal ways, with de facto barriers in many areas of life such as the military and civil service. More importantly still, modern Turkey never developed a robust liberal inclusive public sphere which could countenance the emergence of independent voices among non-Muslims. *Kayades* therefore has remained the safest path for the majority of the community.

Turkish Jews adopted another classic survival tactic common to Jewish diasporic communities with roots deep into pre-modern times, that of praising rulers. They found ever imaginative ways to deepen their ties with the state by proclaiming their loyalty and most importantly, their gratitude by creating a usable past extolling Ottoman benevolence. Here the arrival of Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula beginning with the end of the fifteenth century provided an important element in the construction

of a trope that has had far-reaching consequences into the present. A supposedly compassionate Sultan (Beyazid II) allowing the Jewish masses fleeing persecution in Spain in 1492 to settle in Ottoman lands became a cause of public celebration during the 400th anniversary of the expulsion in 1892 by Ottoman Jews, contributing to the construction of the image of tolerance that was now depicted as an ever-present feature of the Empire.

The genealogy of this trope of tolerant Ottoman rulers who were good to the Jews goes back to sixteenth century Jewish authors who portrayed the Ottomans, frequently in messianic terms, as saviors from dark Christian forces that had been persecuting the Jews in Europe. The writings of these authors were adopted and adapted by nineteenth century European Jewish scholars who used them as tool to chastise Christian antisemitism in their own time, contrasting it with an idealized Muslim tolerance. A newly emergent Ottoman Jewish intelligentsia in the late nineteenth century then adopted this European Jewish construct and popularized it in their works and in the Ladino press of the time. The trope then entered popular Jewish and then later modern Turkish discourse. The good record of “toleration” as exemplified by relations with Jews has been heavily instrumentalized by the state in public relations for the country in the international arena, especially during the 500th anniversary of ‘their “arrival”’: The communal leadership was coopted into this effort.

This widely disseminated construct created by Jews has had some very unwelcome consequences. It has occulted the long Jewish existence of Jews in what became Ottoman lands long before 1492. Byzantine Greek-speaking Romaniot Jews as well as Jews in eastern Anatolia speaking a variety of languages such as Arabic, neo-Aramaic and Kurdish in areas that are now within the borders of the Turkish republic predated by more than a millenium the arrival of Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula as of the fifteenth century. The latter became the demographic majority and culturally absorbed other Jewish groups. But this was a long process. For example, it is only at the end of the seventeenth century that Sephardim became the majority in Istanbul which had been dominated by Romaniot Jews. This process did not take place further east where Sephardi Jews did not settle in any significant numbers. Still, Sephardim became the hegemonic voice. Most Turkish Jews have forgotten the heterogeneous origins of the community and emphasize the arrival of Sephardim in 1492 as the beginning of the Jewish presence in the country. This is also the accepted version by Turkish society at large.

The unwitting results of the celebrations by Ottoman and later Turkish Jews of the arrival of Sephardim in 1492 have hence had the unwitting result of creating the impression, now shared very widely, that the Jews were latecomers to the area that was to become Turkey. While no serious claim, even by the most hostile, can be made denying the long existence of Greeks and Armenians in the area that predated the Ottomans, the Jews are the only non-Muslim minority that can be seen through this new-comer foundational myth. As such, anti-Jewish discourse can treat them as “guests,” in spite of the absurdity of such a category when applied to a group that putatively arrived 500 years ago.

These long-term Jewish “guests” are therefore constantly asked to show their gratitude. The expectation for non-Muslims “to know their place” inherited from Ottoman times becomes even more problematic for “guests” who should always maintain the best behavior. After all, a misbehaving guest can always be asked or indeed be made to leave. Even when non-threatening, the “guest” paradigm casts doubt on the rootedness of the Jews in the country. In contradistinction to Ottoman times when the Jews were a natural and integral part of the Ottoman social fabric, the move towards a nation-state trying to manufacture a nation has for many rendered the Turkish Jew with this story a permanent guest, indeed a “native foreigner.” A community that used to be deeply embedded in society and thought of for centuries as a natural part of the population has been now de-naturalized and can be depicted as somewhat foreign by elements hostile to it. This is compounded by the fact that except for a very small segment of the Istanbul and Izmir populations, the vast majority of inhabitants of Turkey have not or will never meet a Jew. Only a small liberal-minded minority can remember the Jews as part of a vanished exotic cosmopolitan old Istanbul. For most, Jews are only imaginary constructs created by the media. Presence has given place to absence.

It is salutary to situate the history of the Jews of Turkey during the late Ottoman and republican periods in a global context. A few important points can be made here. While the end of the community is not, barring a catastrophe, imminent, there is a demographic tipping point after which communities cannot renew themselves. Deaths outnumber births and the young leave in search of lives elsewhere. This trend is already present in Turkey. Turkish Jewry is therefore already a demographically endangered group, joining the list of many such populations in various parts of the world. The category of endangered minority is a significant one that

merits further elaboration when it comes to understand the path of this community in the last century.

When looked at from the *longue durée* perspective and shifting to the comparative perspective, the trajectory of Turkish Jewry can be seen to increasingly mirror the history of Jews in Muslim-majority lands in the modern era. The rise of the state of Israel in the middle of the twentieth century and the conflicts that ensued, as well as the process of decolonization have led to the end of Jewish existence in these countries, severing centuries' old Jewish-Muslim ties. Many of the Jewish communities in these lands did not depart as a result of expulsions after 1948. Rather, as seen for example in the Maghreb, they left because of fears about their security in the face of their perceived association with Israel and Zionism. This trend is now very visible in the case of Turkish Jewry as well. There are only a handful of very small remnant Jewish communities left here and there in Muslim-majority countries. But for all intents and purposes, lived-together Muslim-Jewish existence that had started with the rise of Islam ended in the twentieth century in the Middle East and North Africa. The history of the Jews in Turkey is part of this major historical trend of radical separation.

Another long-term context is that of the dissolution of the Sephardic world of the Ottoman Balkans and Asia Minor. The Jewish community in the Turkish Republic is one of several communities that found themselves in Ottoman successor states such as Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. The largely Sephardic Ottoman Jewish community that had formed one cultural unit in the Ottoman Balkans and Asia Minor and that had come into being as a distinctive Ottoman entity fragmented in the last two centuries with the rise of nation-states. New borders had important consequences. Nationalizing policies adopted by the new states created new orientations in politics, culture and society. New political identities affiliating with the local states began to develop among former post-Ottoman Jews. But the period of the Holocaust in the middle of the twentieth century cut short this development. Not only were entire communities destroyed, but successive waves of emigrations after the Holocaust left tiny remnant communities behind in the aftermath of World War II. The Jewish community of Turkey was the largest such community. Its diminishing numbers now bring it into alignment with the trajectory of the other communities in post-Ottoman states.

There was another major consequence of these trends in the realm of culture. Ladino that had been the language of Ottoman Sephardim disappeared in most of the remnant communities. It has survived today in

Turkey only among the older generations. The Turkification policies of the state were in the end successful. Turkish is the spoken language of the Jews in the country and the culture of the Jews is mostly the same as that of the larger Turkish urban secular middle and upper middle class. Paradoxically for a community whose place in the country has been destabilized over the decades, the Jews of Turkey have never been more culturally Turkish as now. This has come at the cost of Ladino which, in spite of valiant attempts at revival among some in Turkey and in the Turkish Jewry diaspora, is now a highly endangered language. Its fate is another result of the end of the Ottoman Sephardi world.

Disentanglement, displacement and exit to diaspora characterize the arc of the history of the Jews in the Turkish Republic. It is not yet quite the time to write an obituary. But it becomes increasingly difficult to write this history without striking a note of elegy.



# Introduction: Turkish-Jewish Entanglements from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic

*İpek K. Yosmaoğlu and Kerem Öktem*

Mr. Nissim de Toledo was the subject of repeated inquiries advanced to the French Consulate in Edirne from the city's governor between 1926 and 1933: What were the names, dates, and places of birth of his parents and siblings? Were his siblings married? Did they have children? If so, how many? Did Mr. de Toledo have French or Spanish subjecthood? If so, on what basis had he obtained it?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Nantes, France. Vilayet d'Edirne to Consulate, December 31, 1927; Consul to Edirne Governor, January 7, 1928; Vilayet to Consulate,

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The few details of Mr. de Toledo's life pieced together from the records of the French Foreign Ministry and the Ottoman Bank archives suggest that he was a man of modest means who had spent most of his life working as a bank clerk in Edirne, where his family tree went back at least two generations. Like many educated, "Europeanized" Jews, he had attended the Alliance School in Edirne, followed by the *école commerciale français* in Karaağaç.<sup>2</sup> "He is of good morals," indicated a note on his personnel file, and "he leads an orderly life."<sup>3</sup> What had this unremarkable family man done that deserved investigation by the governor, prompted by no less an authority than the Turkish Ministry of the Interior? Nothing, it seems, other than the fact that Mr. de Toledo, being a French *protégé* of Spanish nationality, was a ghost from the *ancien régime* as far as the Turkish Republic was concerned. And the Republic had little tolerance for such slippery notions of subjecthood reminiscent of the decadent cosmopolitanism of the Ottoman Empire. His second passport could be grounds for dismissal from work, or even denaturalization.

The Lausanne Treaty, signed between representatives of what would soon become the Republic of Turkey and the Allied Powers in July 1923, was a diplomatic victory for the Kemalists who had successfully challenged the terms imposed on the Ottoman Empire following their defeat in World War I. According to the terms of Lausanne, Jews in Turkey would be officially recognized as distinct minorities, along with other non-Muslims, namely Greeks and Armenians, now numbering only a fraction of what they did less than a decade ago, having been killed, deported, or otherwise expelled in the intervening years. As "protected minorities," they would have communal autonomy over family law, primary education, and charitable trusts, and be free to use their language and practice their religion without interference. However, the protection accorded to non-Muslim minorities of Turkey did not mean these groups could now enjoy their rights as fully enfranchised citizens. If anything, the process of "minoritization by treaty" made them even more vulnerable targets of national homogenization and consolidation campaigns, institutionalizing their

March 19, 1932; Governor to Consul, February 14, 1933; Consul to Governor, February 20, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Ottoman Bank Archives, Istanbul, Turkey. Personnel Files, PP225.11.

subordination rather than enfranchisement.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, Lausanne abrogated access to *protégé* status for Turkish nationals, ending a much-maligned practice of the capitulatory regime that accorded extra-territoriality to individuals registered as protected subjects of the European powers. The lives of people like Mr. de Toledo were transformed through contact with a nation-state in the process of establishing its ideal citizenry. Mobility across borders and among identities, which had become increasingly difficult under the passport regime of the late nineteenth century, was now impossible.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, minority rights continued to be a thorn in the side of the nationalist government, and proof of loyalty to the nation became a perpetual burden on the shoulders of minorities, even as the Turkish state made it a moving target. Painted as the “model minority” by certain members of the community as well as by the state, Jews were the recipients of such policies almost immediately after Lausanne came into effect. In one such show of loyalty, the Jewish community announced in September 1925 that it would rescind its collective rights over Family Law guaranteed under article 42 of the Lausanne treaty, forcing the Greek and Armenian communities to follow suit.<sup>6</sup> However, they would find out in short order that the gesture accomplished little by way of assuaging the suspicions of the Turkish nation-state, as the Turkification policies initiated by the Committee of Union and Progress that defined the final years of the Ottoman Empire would continue into the Republican period, as vehement in its objectives as ever, though with attenuated violence.

If anything, minority policies of the republican regime compared unfavorably with those of the Ottoman Empire when Jews could be employed in the civil service, assume public office, and, in general, were not subject to the kind of collective violence regularly visited upon Christians. Laws

<sup>4</sup>For a brilliant analysis of Lausanne’s minority clauses, see Lerna Ekmekçiöğlü, “Republic of Paradox: The League of Nations Minority Protection Regime and the New Turkey’s Step-Citizens,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014), 657–679. Ekmekçiöğlü notes that Jews were not “as closely identified with territorial separatism and collaboration with the West [as Greeks and Armenians]” (ibid., 659), but this did not mean that they were treated as equal citizens, as several chapters in this volume demonstrate.

<sup>5</sup>Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup>They would eventually rescind Article 41 and 44 as well. Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923–1945* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999), 54–76; 88.

banning non-Muslims from certain professions were among the first indication of the direction nationalist homogenization policies would take in the republican period. A massive transfer of capital from non-Muslims to Muslims had already occurred under the regime of the Committee of Union and Progress through means ranging from legislation to genocide. Now, earning a living through labor or salaried work also required navigating a complicated maze of bureaucratic obstacles for non-Muslim minorities whose “Turkishness” was under suspicion. Sanctions such as a travel ban within the country and laws limiting the number of professions open to “non-Turks” meant that venues for economic survival were few and far between. The language of such laws made a distinction between citizens and foreigners, presumably including minorities in the former category. But from the beginning, the laws’ implementation suggested that the “true” citizens were understood to be ethnic Turks.<sup>7</sup> It so happens that Mr. de Toledo, the model employee who had attained the rank of “chief” at the Kırklareli branch of the Ottoman Bank, was fired from his position in August 1927, following accusations of “impropriety and dishonesty.”<sup>8</sup> The notes did not indicate whether these accusations were substantiated or not, but it certainly would not have helped that Mr. Toledo was a member of an untrustworthy community often depicted in the early Republican Turkish press, and even in Parliament, as parasites getting rich at the expense of “real” Turks.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to the anti-Semitic tropes depicting Jews as members of a wealthy comprador-bourgeois class, the socioeconomic make-up of the

<sup>7</sup>For instance, the *Mubamat Kanunu* [Bar Association Law], adopted in April 1924, used the term “Türkiyeli” (from Turkey) rather than “Turkish” in its text. TBMM, Turkish Grand National Assembly: [https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR\\_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc00200460.pdf](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc002/kanuntbmmc00200460.pdf) accessed May 15, 2021. After the law came into effect, however, twenty-six out of sixty Jewish attorneys surveyed did not have their licenses renewed, a figure comparable to the percentage of Muslim lawyers, whereas Armenian and Greek lawyers were disbarred at larger rates. For Muslim lawyers, the overwhelming reason for disqualification was simultaneously serving in public office, whereas “morals” played a more important role for non-Muslims. See Samim Akgönül, *Türkiye Rumları: Ulus-Devlet Çağından Küreselleşme Çağına Bir Azınlığın Yok Oluş Süreci* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2007), 79–80. A summary list of similar laws can be found in Soner Çağaptay, “Citizenship Policies in Interwar Turkey,” *Nations and Nationalism* 9 (2003): 601–619.

<sup>8</sup>Ottoman Bank Archives, Istanbul, Turkey. Personnel Files, PP225.11.

<sup>9</sup>Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, 82–83. Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 154.

community included large numbers living in abject poverty who were reliant on charity, while others were scattered across social rungs: clerks like Nissim de Toledo as well as higher-paid white-collar workers such as physicians, pharmacists, and attorneys, but also industrial and agricultural laborers. This last group made up a significant segment of Jews in Thrace and were also among the first to emigrate to mandate Palestine.<sup>10</sup> Those who could afford it sailed away further, to the Americas, and in more limited numbers, to Europe. The first large wave of Jewish emigration, and specifically *aliyah* to Palestine, occurred in the aftermath of the 1934 Pogroms that virtually erased centuries of Jewish presence in Thrace, but the diasporization of Turkish Jews had started almost synchronously with the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

The process continued and continues to this day. Numbers of emigrants increase after each episode of violence, or threat of imminent violence, against Jewish property and persons. Today, around 15,000 Jews live in Turkey. Is this attrition a second diasporization for Turkish Jewry? Or even a third? How did/does this shared experience of being forced out of Turkey or the Ottoman Empire because of political, religious, or economic reasons (this last category almost never disconnected from the previous two) shape their sense of belonging, the way they constructed and reconstructed a collective memory, and attributed meaning to these concepts? It is impossible to engage with these questions, which we take up in this volume, without also engaging with notions of loss and endings implicit in every iteration of diasporization.

## DIASPORAS, DISCOURSES, AND MYTHS

The term diaspora is deeply rooted historically/biblically (and in the lexicon of the field of diaspora studies) in the narrative of the initial Jewish expulsion from the ancient lands of Israel. This notion has been politicized by Zionism and the Israeli state to reclassify Israel/Palestine as the Jewish homeland, and everywhere else as *galut* in reference to exile, and hence the locale of the Jewish Diaspora. In this volume, we follow a different direction and understand as Turkish-Jewish diasporas the countries and places to which Jews from Turkey have migrated and established communities that maintain connections with their country of origin. This includes Turkish Jews in Israel, who act and identify very much like a diaspora

<sup>10</sup> Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, 47.

(Kerem Öktem in this volume)—even though that assignation sits uncomfortably with the discourse of ‘return’ to the ‘homeland’.

While this book is most certainly about loss and endings, it does not only pertain to the often prophesied and lamented end of Turkish Jewry: it also takes into account the dissipation of persistent discursive traditions pertaining to the uniqueness of Turkish-Jewish relations and the notion that Jews in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic experienced a mostly benevolent reception from state and society. In this reading, Jews and Turks were seen as having a closer and more meaningful relationship than Jews in other lands were able to maintain with the majority societies among whom they resided, whether in the Muslim East or the Christian West. Many Turkish Jews, Western- and European-leaning Turks and parts of the Turkish state have embodied these discourses to varying degrees and employed them for different political and strategic purposes. As we will see, they all have participated in the construction of a discursive tradition whose fragmentation we are now witnessing.

The roots of this tradition go back to the distinct memory of a ‘Golden Age’ of Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, patterned after another “Golden Age” in Iberia when Jews flourished under Muslim rule. Its written record is replete with references to tolerance and harmony in Jewish-Muslim relations, juxtaposing it against Christian Europeans’ vindictive hatred of Jews.<sup>11</sup> The first well-known example, Rabbi Isaac Zarfati’s letter to Jews in Central Europe drafted soon after Mehmed II’s conquest of Constantinople, was the seed of a genre that would eventually bloom into full panegyrics for Ottoman rule and get entrenched in the Turkish Republic’s self-portrayal of its history as one unbroken arc of benevolence for the downtrodden.<sup>12</sup> The lat-

<sup>11</sup> Classic examples include but are not limited to: Stanford Shaw, *History of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic* (London: Macmillan, 1991); Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Avigdor Levy, ed. *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth Through the Twentieth Century* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); and perhaps most formatively, Avram Galanti [Abraham Galanté], *Türkler ve Yahudiler* (Istanbul: Tan Matbaası, 1947).

<sup>12</sup> Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th–20th Centuries* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2000 (first edition 1993)), 4–8. A complete genealogy of this discourse and the origins of its famous yet apocryphal tropes such as Bayezid II’s derision of Ferdinand as “impoverishing his country and enriching mine” referring to the expulsion of Jews, can be found in the first chapter of Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman*

est incarnation of this discourse of uniqueness and benevolence was the Quincentennial Foundation, established in 1989 to commemorate the arrival of Iberian Jews in the Ottoman Empire—the traumatic side of the event’s history obviously having been forgotten.<sup>13</sup> The foundation’s endeavors, the fruits of which were placed in permanent display at the building of the former Zulfaris synagogue in Istanbul in 2001,<sup>14</sup> conveniently dovetailed with Turkey’s strategic policies of the time, which included efforts to enlist Israel in the denial of the Armenian genocide and showcasing Jews as a proof for Turkey’s tolerance for non-Muslim minorities and as a beacon of its European destiny (chapters by Baer and Guttstadt in this volume).<sup>15</sup> And yet again, the “tolerance and benevolence” of the Ottoman state, the “golden age,” and the “uniqueness” of Turkish-Jewish relations occupied center stage in the celebrations. The ceaseless harping on themes of “tolerance and benevolence” ironically revealed that the Turkish Jews are not considered as fellow citizens but as guests who must reciprocate the “hospitality” of the Turkish state and with a constant display of loyalty. The irony was apparently lost on the Muslim Turkish elites patting themselves on the back at the sight of this emotional scene.

While these discourses of uniqueness and benevolence were rarely about lived experiences and historical realities, they pertained to the hopes and longings of ordinary Jewish subjects (later, citizens) as well as to political and economic elites’ strategic thinking about the future of the community in the empire and in the republic.<sup>16</sup> For instance, Ottoman Jews in the mid-nineteenth century fashioned a discourse of their commitment to the Ottoman state in which the “unique relationship” the Jews had with

*Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020).

<sup>13</sup>The Quincentennial Foundation’s sterilized version of Ottoman Jewish history was disseminated widely in the United States and was integrated into the curricula of Jewish day schools as a “corrective to the Ashkenazi-centric curricula of most Jewish American institutions.” Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in 21st Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 37–55.

<sup>14</sup>In 2015, the collection was re-curated to include formerly omitted traumatic events like the Wealth Tax, the September Pogroms of 1955, and the bomb attacks on the Neve Şalom Synagogue, where the museum is now housed.

<sup>15</sup>The Turkish state’s efforts to influence international public opinion and avoid possible sanctions by enlisting the help of the “Jewish lobby”—itself an anti-Semitic construct—has a long history, see Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks*.

<sup>16</sup>For a critique, see Rıfat Bali, *Devlet’in Yahudileri ve Öteki Yahudi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004).

the sultans and the “golden age” loomed large, while ambiguities and permeabilities regarding Jewishness and Muslimness served as its central discursive nodes (Mays in this volume).

For the Ottoman Jewish elites, patriotism was inseparable from modernization, and displays of patriotism signaled to the Ottoman, and even the global public, that “Oriental Jews” enjoyed the same rights as their “emancipated” co-religionists in western Europe. Not shying away from a little hyperbole and revisionism, one contributor to the Ladino periodical *El Tiempo* claimed that the Jews arriving from Spain were accorded “all the rights of citizens.”<sup>17</sup> And the Quincentennial Foundation had a quadricentennial precursor in the Ottoman Empire: the “1892 Celebrations,” an invented tradition *manquée*, brainchild of Aron de Yosef Hazan, editor of *La Buena Esperanza* of Izmir, among other intellectual ventures.<sup>18</sup>

Public celebrations of holidays by different ethno-religious communities with processions and commemorative arches had entered the urban culture of Ottoman cities in the *Tanzimat* period.<sup>19</sup> But the “1892 Celebrations” more likely took inspiration from French Jews’ emancipation celebrations that took place in 1891, when de Yosef Hazan proposed the idea in his editorial for the first time.<sup>20</sup> Unlike communal holiday processions, the 1892 celebrations were not originally planned to have any religious association; after all, they were meant to claim a notional as well as public space for Jews as visibly committed citizens of the Ottoman Empire with important stakes in its wellbeing and to dispel the notion that theirs was a backward, introvert community stuck within the customs of the religious calendar. Intentionally or not, it also consolidated a Sephardi-centric narrative of Ottoman Jewish history, erasing the existence of other Jewish communities, including Romaniotes who had been residents of the

<sup>17</sup>The anonymously authored article was published in August 1891, Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 49.

<sup>18</sup>Julia Phillips Cohen analyzes both the “1892 celebrations” and their transatlantic counterpart in the 1893 fair in Chicago in *Becoming Ottomans*. For more on Ottoman Jews’ self-presentation and tactical embrace of Orientalism, see by the same author, “Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style and Performance of Heritage,” *American Historical Review* 119, no. 2 (2014): 364–398.

<sup>19</sup>Sibel Zandi Sayek, *Ottoman Izmir: The Rise of a Cosmopolitan Port, 1840–1880* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup>Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans*, 48.

land long before 1492, and reinforcing the notion that Jews were there but for the benevolence of the Ottoman sultans.

In the event, the festivities did coincide with a religious holiday (Passover) and took place quietly inside synagogues rather than on the streets.<sup>21</sup> As it turns out, not all members of the Jewish community looked favorably on the project. More importantly, Abdülhamid II's aversion to public congregations—with the exception of those emphasizing the Islamic nature of the Ottoman state and his patrimonial power, such as his Friday *selamlık*, or visit to the Hamidiye (Yıldız) Mosque for Friday prayers, and the *sürre alayı* caravan carrying the sultan's gifts to the Holy Places for the *Hajj* season—stood in the way of celebrations Hazal had envisaged.<sup>22</sup> Undeterred, the modernist vanguard of the Jewish community found another venue to display their patriotic pride at the Columbian Exposition that took place in Chicago in 1893. Armed with the seal of approval of the sultan, Robert Levy of Elia Souhami Sadullah & Co based in Istanbul, secured a prime location for the “Ottoman village” in the European section and got to work preparing an impressive display complete with model replicas of the imperial capital's monuments, Orientalist scenes of shops crowded with carpets, water pipes and coffee pots served by attendants dressed in what was supposed to be “traditional Ottoman garb.”<sup>23</sup> Forced to temper their patriotism back home, Ottoman Jews could become as proudly and flamboyantly Ottoman as they desired even as this necessitated adopting and presenting an “Orientalist” image of their country in order to meet the expectations of the fair goers.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these energetic, sincere, and creative efforts of lay elites from intellectuals to industrialists to heads of civic organizations, the

<sup>21</sup>The timing and format change happened thanks to a tactical intervention by the grand rabbi Moshe Halevi, who, according to Julia Phillips Cohen, “managed to merge Ottoman Jewish patriotism with Judaism” with this move. *Becoming Ottomans*, 59.

<sup>22</sup>Selim Deringil, *The Well Protected Domains: Ideology and Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

<sup>23</sup>Julia Phillips Cohen notes that the bazaar of the village was designed to “recall those of the Yeni Camii” *Becoming Ottomans*, 66—a strange choice since the original had been built over the razed grounds of a major Jewish working-class neighborhood in the seventeenth century (Marc David Baer, “The Great Fire of 1660 and the Islamization of Christian and Jewish Space in Istanbul,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36, no. 2 (2004): 159–181.

<sup>24</sup>These included “typically” Turkish offerings such as baklava and Turkish delights. Rifat Bali, *From Anatolia to the New World: Life Stories of the First Turkish Immigrants to America*, trans. Michael McGaha (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık, 2013), 78.

integration of Ottoman Jews into “Ottomanness” ultimately remained a stunted process.<sup>25</sup> The majority of the empire’s Jews were apparently not receptive to the idea of replacing their religious identity with a concept that seemed as a compromise on their Judaism and offered little by way of advancement in the ethno-religious hierarchy. The community leaders’ efforts at best elicited a lukewarm reaction from the Ottoman state that failed to implement policies for stronger civic engagement with its population, and *Tanzimat* era promises of “equality for all” came to an end under the rule of Abdülhamid II, when the state became embodied in the figure of the sultan whose policies privileged Muslim elements at the expense of others. Ottoman Jews would find their hopes of equal citizenship dashed once again after the euphoric notes of Ottoman brotherhood following the 1908 revolution were drowned out by the Committee of Union and Progress’s oppressively nationalist regime that lasted until the Ottoman Empire’s defeat at the end of World War I.

### TURKINOS, TURKANOZ AND TERRIBLE TURKS

Nonetheless, it seems that Ottoman Jews embraced their “Ottomanness” even more after they crossed the Atlantic in gradually increasing numbers starting in the 1890s, settled in the United States, and became self-declared *Turkinos*. After the decision requiring non-Muslims to serve in the army in 1909, the pace of immigration quickened dramatically, although many among them left for economic opportunities in the new world rather than to escape the draft, and planned to return once they had saved some money.<sup>26</sup> A strong sense of belonging, and longing, for the Ottoman empire was a cornerstone of the *Turkino* diasporic identity, and even after the collapse of the empire, they held onto this attachment

<sup>25</sup> Aron Rodrigue, “From Millet to Minority: Turkish Jewry,” in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, eds Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 238–261.

<sup>26</sup> Devin E. Naar, “*Turkinos* Beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (2015), 174–205. While Naar makes a convincing argument that the major driving factor was money rather than draft dodging, and some immigrated *after* they served in the Ottoman army, the numbers suggest that the Committee of Union and Progress’ Turkification policies and the state of constant war, if not the compulsory military service alone, were contributing reasons. The American Jewish Yearbook for 1913 attributes the increase in numbers for that year to the Balkan War, but noted that the trend had been on the rise since 1905. American Jewish Yearbook, volume 15 (1913), 431.

longer than their Muslim compatriots did.<sup>27</sup> If this attachment can partly be explained by a mixture of nostalgia, patriotism, and the shock of finding what Esther Benbassa and Rodrigue have termed the Sephardi *Kulturbereich* was separated into nation-states with hard borders, the other part should be attributed to the reception Ottoman Jews received in the United States where they were not only identified with the “Terrible Turk,” but also shunned by the more established and much larger Ashkenazi community. The situation could not have been more different in Latin America, where they were considered “...in spite of being Jews...not of the same abysmal moral condition as those of the north of Europe.”<sup>28</sup> In post-revolutionary Mexico, Sephardi immigrants found a more welcoming environment thanks not only to their linguistic abilities, but also because they were thought to be “entirely equal to the Spanish” and hence a desirable element that could help “whiten” the population’s racial make-up.<sup>29</sup>

The *Turkinos* became *Turkanoz* in Israel. “We never knew who was home, in their homeland, and who was in foreign lands” comment Raşel Meseri and Aylin Kuryel in their recently published “dictionary” of the experience of being Jewish in Turkey, referring to the letters they exchanged between Israel and Turkey.<sup>30</sup> In Israel, Jews from the Ottoman Empire and Turkey did not fit easily into the dominant ethno-racial hierarchies divided between the hegemonic Ashkenazi core hailing from Europe and the marginalized Arabic-speaking Mizrahim, who arrived from the Arab world after 1948.<sup>31</sup> With their mostly Sephardi culture, their comparatively small numbers, and their relative success in establishing themselves in Israeli society, Turkish Jews remained what Walter Weiker termed the “unseen Israelis.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> D. E. Naar, “Turkinos Beyond the Empire,” 201.

<sup>28</sup> Argentinian Consul General in Constantinople to Scarlatt Tottu, Mexican honorary consul, April 1924, cited in Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passport*, 152.

<sup>29</sup> Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports*, chapter 4.

<sup>30</sup> Raşel Meseri and Aylin Kuryel, *Türkiye’de Yahudi Olmak: Bir Deneyim Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2017), 248.

<sup>31</sup> Bryan Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel’s Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948–1966* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015); and Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Walter F. Weiker, *The Unseen Israelis: The Jews from Turkey in Israel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America; Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs/Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1988).

In Turkey, on the other hand, Turkish Jews should be “unseen with Israelis.” If the endless rinse-and-repeat cycle of “benevolence-500 years-special relationship” is one cornerstone of the identity of the “desirable” Turkish Jew, distancing oneself from Israel and Zionism as far as possible is another, especially, but not only, under the current populist Islamist regime. What makes this stance completely consistent with the supposed lack of anti-Semitism in Turkey is the repetition of the mantra “not all Jews are Zionists” (where “Zionist” should be understood more as a slur than as the adherent of a specific ideology). And “our Jews” are most certainly not Zionists. In fact, “our Jews” are not even considered “Yahudi” (the Turkish word derived from the Arabic “Yahud” and the Hebrew “Yehud”) that in Turkey is now universally negatively connoted, but rather are “Musevi” (from “Moses,” i.e. Mosaic people). These distinctions in official discourse and everyday life are largely meaningless for many Jews, who are instilled with Zionist ideology and notions of loyalty for the State of Israel from early childhood and who know that, whether Yahudi or Musevi, one will always be seen as a Jew. However, these hairsplitting distinctions allow many Turks to uphold the fantasy that anti-Semitism is something that happens in Europe, not in Turkey.

This is such an important point that it can come up even under the most delicate circumstances, for instance, at a gathering for the commemoration of “Holocaust Remembrance Day.” Turkey is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and has officially commemorated the Holocaust Observance Day on January 27 since 2011. These ceremonies have taken on the characteristics of a farcical show, where Turkish officials deliver remarks on Turkey’s (largely mythical) rescue of Jews, accompanied by neo-Ottomanist references to the tolerant diversity of the empire, and the official leader of the Jewish community predictably responds by expressing their “gratitude.” If there is any hint of criticism, it is muted so that it will not be heard. It is clear, however, that the friendly atmosphere is rather tenuous and predicated upon the Jewish community’s consciousness of the limits to what is acceptable as a “model minority.” Therefore, it is not surprising that a minister would think the commemoration an appropriate moment to criticize Israel’s actions in Gaza, because “our Jewish citizens...have absolutely no connection to Israeli government’s politics.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Yağmur Karakaya & Alejandro Baer, “Such Hatred Has Never Flourished on Our Soil’: The Politics of Holocaust Memory in Turkey and Spain,” *Sociological Forum* 34, no. 3

All these discourses, whether those of domination employed by the Turkish state or those of meaning, belonging, and citizenship employed by Jewish communities, contributed to the discursive space in which Turkish Jewishness was lived. Even if they did not pertain to reality, they created this discursive space, albeit volatile and overdetermined by nationalizing state policies and geostrategic considerations, in which being Turkish and Jewish was possible and sometimes even desirable. During the the first years of the Justice and Development Party government in the early 2000s, when Turkey sought to attain full membership in the European Union, Turkey's Jewish community and the country's alleged traditional benevolence towards Jews were seen as assets for the country's European aspirations. Hence, Turkey's Jews came to symbolize a historical and communal bond with Europe that complemented Turkey's historical account of European-inspired modernization. An extension of this discourse is the cautiously curated cosmopolitanism granted toward selected 'others' that came into circulation among Istanbul's Turkish (Muslim) middle classes and cultural elites around the same time.<sup>34</sup> Expressed through nostalgic longings for the lost 'colors of our city' and suggestive photos of neighborhoods like Kuzguncuk or Ortaköy showing belltowers, minarets, and Synagogues in close proximity, this stunted cosmopolitanism nevertheless created a niche for Jewish visibilities in Istanbul's urban space.<sup>35</sup>

Under the current conditions of Turkey's geostrategic limbo—still part of European institutions and the North Atlantic Alliance, but acting as if it were a non-aligned, revisionist regional power—and its autocratization in the context of Islamist politics, this already narrow space has further contracted. There now appears to be no place for a narrative that gives any positive meaning to Jewishness in the Turkish context. Despite recent

(2019), 705–728. The Minister in question was Cemil Çiçek. Mois Gabay, in his column at *Şalom* on February 4, 2015 writes that everything went as planned despite the discomfort in the audience because, once again, *kayadez* prevailed. [https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-93989-kayadez\\_.html](https://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-93989-kayadez_.html).

<sup>34</sup> Amy Mills, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* (University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Leyla Neyzi, *İstanbul'da Hatırlamak ve Unutmak: Birey, Bellek, ve Aidiyet* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999); Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism, and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); İlay Romain Örs, *Diaspora of the City: Stories of Cosmopolitanism from Istanbul and Athens* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

indications of pushback from small numbers of (mostly) young people, such as the internet collective *avlařemos*, who want to be “out” as Turkish Jews instead of apologizing for it (Kaymak in this volume), the social status of Jews in Turkey remains one of eternal “guests,” probably more so now than at any other moment in history. And so, their right to remain in their homeland is questioned unless they actively denounce any association with Israel and shun visible markers of Jewishness. The narrative of uniqueness and benevolence, which carved out a space for Jews in Turkey and Turkish Jews elsewhere, seems to have run its course. In Turkey’s current anti-Semitic (in both secularist and Islamist iterations) environment, no discursive frame has emerged that could give meaning to and act as a stabilizing force for Turkish Jewish identity in Turkey.

## THE CHAPTERS

This book’s preface and the epilogue, written by two leading experts of the study of Turkish Jews, propose a paradigmatic summary of the history, present and future of Turkish-Jewish entanglements. It begins with Aron Rodrigue’s “The Long Twilight.” Rodrigue, Professor in Jewish Culture and History at Stanford University who essentially built an *école* of Sephardi historical studies in the United States, laments the less than “joyous enterprise” of reflection on the history of the Jews of Turkey in the Turkish Republic. Rodrigue sees Turkish Jews’ “arc of history” as defined by experiences of “disentanglement, displacement and exit to diaspora.” Rifat Bali, the foremost chronicler of Turkish Jews and publisher of *Judaica* in Turkey, and the first in the country to publicly expose and challenge the well-established myths of Turkish-Jewish relations, closes the book with a rhetorical question: “Aprontaremos las validjas? Shall we start packing the suitcases?” This question is exceedingly rhetorical, as indeed most of Turkey’s Jews packed their suitcases and left long ago. Even after a century of republican government, the promise of a polity based on equal citizenship for all its citizens has failed to materialize. Dominant discourses of benevolence and uniqueness have not only run their course, but are being replaced by the virulently anti-Semitic narratives of a “New Turkey” under Islamist leadership. The insurmountable conclusion in both accounts that the “twilight” was, after all, not an interim period leading to a new dawn, but rather a transition toward “dusk” and departure establishes the elegiac framework for the individual contributions to this book.

In the volume's first part, we engage with historical accounts of Jewish life and emigration in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. In the second, we shift the gaze to studies on contemporary Turkish Jewish lives in Turkey, Israel, and elsewhere, with a focus on the use and abuse of history, particularly by Turkish state actors, but also by members of the Jewish community and the representatives of the Israeli state. Jacob Daniels opens the first part with an account of the Jews of Edirne—an important center of Jewish settlement in Thrace until the pogroms of 1934—during the Balkan Wars of 1912–1914, arguing that the wars left the Jews “somewhere in the middle” between local Christians, who felt compelled to flee to nearby Bulgaria and Greece, and the local Muslims who, under threat of the region's potential annexation by Bulgaria or Greece, embraced an Ottoman nationalism expressed through Islamic symbols and heightened distrust toward Christian communities. Daniels shows that despite this symbolism and anti-Christian orientation, local Jews felt comfortable with Islamic discourse in the political realm, while they preserved their distinct ethno-religious identity and remained concerned about the regional Sephardi-Jewish networks in the Balkans.

Jewish emigration from Turkey is often equated with the large wave of emigration following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. In her contribution titled “Jewish Émigrés and Turkish Citizenship in the Early Republican Period,” Devi Mays emphasizes how the emigration of Jews predates the wave in 1948 by at least a century, and that it continued from the late Ottoman period through the early Turkish Republic. Jews left Turkey in large numbers in response to Turkification efforts that sought to both assimilate and marginalize Jews and others. Jews holding Turkish passports migrated throughout western Europe, the Americas, and further afield, and, in places like Mexico, became synonymous with governmental perceptions of who constituted a “Turk.” At the same time, many acquired additional citizenships while continuing to travel on Turkish passports in direct contravention of Turkish law. In doing so, they provoked Turkish officials to articulate the boundaries of Turkish citizenship and nationality in ways that at times overlapped and at times diverged from the ways in which “Turkishness” was mapped onto Jews still resident in Turkey.

In “The Story of a One-sided Love: The Turkish Jewish Diaspora in Europe and its Relations with the ‘Home Country,’” Corry Guttstadt further elucidates the issue of Jewish emigration from the Ottoman Empire to the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Between the end of

World War I and 1935, more than one third of Turkey's Jews left the country, constituting the first generation of "Turkish immigrants" in their new countries of residence, where they established Turkish-Jewish communities, charities, and religious and cultural organizations. Even though Turkey's nationalist policies were major reasons for Turkish Jews to leave, many of them continued to hold positive views of their home country and maintained close relationships with Turkish representatives: *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* (the journal of the Union Universelle des Communautés Séphardites), in which Jews from Turkey played an important role, repeatedly published articles praising the Turkish Republic and its founder Atatürk. Despite these cordial relations with Turkey and its representatives, official Turkish support for Turkish Jews in Europe during the Holocaust was muted at best, and, as a result, thousands were deported and perished in Nazi death camps.<sup>36</sup>

Many Turkish Jews had already left for Israel in the 1930s, but, after 1948, this movement took on the character of a mass emigration. Duygu Atlas examines "The Founding of the State of Israel and the Turkish Jews" between 1948 and 1955, focusing on Israel's approach to Turkish Jews and their immigration to Israel in the crucial decade after the founding of the Israeli state. She exposes the ambiguity in the Israeli state's approach to classifying and treating these Jews who did not fit neatly into the ethno-racial hierarchies prevalent at the time. This ambiguity was mirrored in the Israeli government's perspective on Turkish Jews who chose to remain in Turkey. Examining the reception of the anti-minority Riots of September 6–7, 1955 in Turkey, she argues that two major factors determined the nascent state's approach toward and perception of Turkish Jews, both inherited from its predecessor, the Yishuv. The value Israel placed on its relations with Turkey, and the hierarchical nature of the Israeli state, governed by a well-ensconced and tightly interlocked Ashkenazi establishment that displayed an Orientalist and discriminatory approach towards non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities.

The part on Jewish-Turkish entanglements in contemporary Turkey and Israel begins with Kerem Öktem's account of Turkish-Jewish spaces in Israel. Tracing these spaces on the internet, in friends' meetings in the northern suburbs of Tel Aviv, and in institutions like the Association for People from Turkey in Israel (Itahdut), he explores how Turkish Jews in Israel identify and negotiate the entangled sovereignties that Turkey and

<sup>36</sup> Sisman, Cengiz. *The Burden of Silence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Israel present in these spaces. He demonstrates how being a Turkish Jew in Israel, as well as being a Jew in Turkey, is overdetermined by the larger geopolitical framework of Middle Eastern politics and the insecure statehoods of both Turkey and Israel, and the extent to which Turkey and Israel—and hence, being associated with these countries—have come to be seen as mutually exclusive categories.

There are many cities in Turkey where Jews used to live but are now absent. How is the memory of Jews in such cities constructed? Louis Fishman examines the growing number of projects aimed at the reconstruction of synagogues by state agencies and municipalities and teases out the tension between the state-led discourses of tolerance inherent to the reconstruction projects and the absence of Jewish subjects from them, save for the symbolically laden inauguration events. Some *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, designated or created by municipalities and individuals, however, suggest alternative ways of working with memory: reconstruction of Jewish sites as well as virtual sites of memory are rooted in notions of good neighborliness and friendship and are not dependent on state-led reiterations of a myth of five-hundred years of Turkish “benevolence.”

One version of the discourse of benevolence claims that the Turkish government of the time played a major role rescuing Jews from the Holocaust. In “Whitewashing the Armenian Genocide with Holocaust Heroism,” Marc Baer reminds the reader that Turkish diplomats in Europe systematically stripped Turkish Jews of their citizenship, or refused to recognize them as citizens. Contrary to the official narrative, Turkey did not take the opportunity to save tens of thousands of Jewish citizens in Europe from the Nazis and instead condemned them to certain death in the concentration camps. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with Jewish historians and representatives of the Turkish Jewish community promoted the narrative of Turkish rescue of Jews, with the explicit aim of denying the recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

The final chapter enquires into everyday experiences of anti-Semitism under the conditions of neo-Ottomanism and political Islam. Özgür Kaymak examines the 2013 Gezi Park Protests and the 2016 coup attempt as important historical junctures, with the first constituting a brief moment of promise of recognition and equal citizenship and the second as the very negation of that promise. Examining the main strategies and performative repertoires that Turkish Jews have adopted in response to this adversarial

social and political environment, she identifies a range of options, from the traditional notion of *kayadex* to the insistence, nevertheless, on equal citizenship in a Muslim-majority society that is increasingly shaped by anti-Semitism and anti-minority sentiment.

The contributions to this volume can only capture fragments of the complex history and the current experiences of Jewish-Turkish entanglements in Turkey, in Israel, and beyond. We have seen the extent to which myths and discourses—employed by Jewish communities, the Turkish state and the Israeli state for their respective interests, ranging from safeguarding the welfare of the community to achieving geostrategic rent—have governed earlier intellectual productions on Turkish-Jewish relations so that the discourse of Turkish benevolence and Jewish gratitude survived until recently, not only in the corridors of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also among the Turkish Jewish communities in Turkey and elsewhere. While these discourses were not based on historical realities, some of them did make it possible to create some sort of ‘official identity narrative’ upon which Turkish Jews were able to justify and claim their place in Turkey’s society. At the same time, they deflected from the complex and less than joyous experience of most Jews in republican Turkey. The end of the myths of Turkish benevolence and the uniqueness of the Jewish experience in the Ottoman Empire, the end of the promise of equal citizenship in republican Turkey, and the end of the discursive possibility of a recognized Turkish-Jewish group identity in Turkey under the Islamist authoritarianism of the Justice and Development Party may be lamentable. But these endings may also clear the horizon for a more historically accurate and honest engagement with the lived experience of Jewish-Turkish entanglements and their possible futures in Turkey and its many diasporas.

### THE SYMPOSIUM ON “TURKISH-JEWISH ENTANGLEMENTS”

This volume grew out of a symposium on “Turkish-Jewish Entanglements” we convened at the University of Graz in June 2018, where one of the editors of this book held the chair of Turkish Studies at the time, and the other had been a Lise Meitner Fellow at the same institution the year before. The idea for the symposium was first conceived during our conversations in 2017 in Graz and then in Istanbul, when we were both working on projects dealing with the relations between the Ottoman/Turkish state’s relations with its Jewish subjects/citizens. As we were drafting a

concept note, we had a rather bizarre experience that confirmed our conviction that anti-Semitism in Turkey is a shared trait across the political spectrum, from staunch secularists to various shades of Islamists, that it is routinely employed as a base for conspiracy theories explaining all sorts of societal ills: just after we had concluded a meeting with colleagues at Bilgi University's Unit for the Study of Jewish Communities and made our way from Karaköy to Moda (two Istanbul neighborhoods of historical importance for the city's Jewish community), we had two unsettling encounters within minutes of each other—in the time it takes to go from the ferry to the tram. The first involved a mother and daughter of a conservative-religious bent and attire, while the second was with another woman whose attire, hairstyle and choice of newspaper made her immediately recognizable as a middle-class Kemalist woman of distinction, a social and political background familiar to both of us who spent a lot of time in Moda while growing up. Verbal engagement was ill-advised in both instances, but one was worse than the other. The first incident was, in fact, less aggressive: comments from one of the women along the lines of “the peoples of this country (referring to Kurds and Laz as part of the Turkish nation) would get along perfectly but for the manipulations of Jews,” while the second bordered on the surreal: “Zionists send these dirty Syrians here to ruin Turkey.” The first one started on the ferry and continued on the docks; it was uncomfortable but not threatening, the mother who made comments about Jews pitting Kurds and Laz against each other was defensive: “we don't hate Jews...didn't we protect them when others burned them, destroyed them?” followed by the predictable: “...and there's a difference between Jews and Zionists.” Our second interlocutor on the tram, on the other hand, was more belligerent and the encounter quickly took a potentially risky turn as other people got involved in the “discussion” and we were clearly outnumbered. We made a fast exit as the shouting was still going on, ran into a *meyhane*, the last refuge of the cosmopolitan Turk, and ordered a bottle to settle our frayed nerves and shaking hands. If there was any doubt in our minds that this symposium was important and timely, it evaporated.

We also deliberated whether to include the “Dönme” or “Maaminin,” the crypto-Jewish followers of Sabbetai Zvi who converted to Islam in the seventeenth century but maintained strong attachments to Jewish rituals. Most of them left Salonika/Thessaloniki for Turkey during the Exchange of Populations stipulated by the Lausanne Treaty. It could well be argued that the notion of a Turkish-Jewish entanglement is nowhere more

accurate than in the case of this particular community of “old Jews,” whose members presented themselves as Muslims and Turks in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic while holding on to Jewish customs, Judeo-Spanish, and—if antinomian—beliefs rooted in the Jewish tradition.<sup>37</sup> Yet, anecdotal evidence, as well as the current literature, strongly suggests that the larger trends explored in this volume—the experience of anti-Semitism; the choice of complete assimilation; the inclination to apply for Spanish and Portuguese citizenships and eventual exit—apply simultaneously to the Dönme, save, maybe, for an even more pronounced preference for further assimilation into the Turkish mainstream.<sup>38</sup>

The symposium venue raised a number of questions that also happened to be relevant for the proceedings. As Austria’s second largest city and an important town on the train line to Austria-Hungary’s Italian and Slav possessions, Graz was home to a medium-sized and vibrant Jewish community until World War II. Only a few families survived the Holocaust and, as a result, today’s Jewish community of Graz is minuscule. As convenors, we quickly faced the challenges of an almost non-existent Jewish infrastructure, from the absence of kosher food to the availability of a synagogue close to the university. Jewish life may not have become impossible in Graz, but even arranging a conference dinner with non-pork options required dedicated planning.

In Austria’s largely xenophobic public sphere, Turks and Jews find themselves at diametrically opposed ends of a range of “otherness.” Turks are identified as the historical enemy of European culture, feared as the assailants of Vienna and reviled as uneducated Muslim guestworkers. Despite persistent anti-Semitism in Austrian society, Jews are publicly identified as fundamentally European, and hence welcomed, at least on

<sup>37</sup> Leyla Neyzi, “Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002), 137–158.

<sup>38</sup> Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010); idem, “An Enemy Old and New: The Dönme, Anti-Semitism, and Conspiracy Theories in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 103, no. 4 (2013), 523–555; Türcay Salim Nefes, “The Function of Secrecy in anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories: The Case of Dönmes in Turkey,” in *Conspiracy Theories in the United States and the Middle East: A Comparative Approach*, eds. Maurus Reinkowski and Michael Butter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 139–156; Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

the discursive level. In this discursive universe, the very combination of the words Turkish and Jewish is perceived as a contradiction in terms which elicits incomprehension and confusion, as it challenges the carefully maintained borders between these different categories. A concert of Sephardic songs, performed artfully by Graz-based musician Aron Saltiel, where the audience could hear songs in the Judeo-Spanish dialect, may have helped some overcome their anxieties, and the Europeanness of Turkish Jews could be established. As an Austrian colleague remarked with a sense of relief, and despite the “eastern” melodies of some of the songs, “these Jews are not really that Turkish after all.” Ironically, this thinking is replicated by (but is not limited to) Turkey’s Islamists, who imagine Turkishness as defined by Islam with Israel as the enemy thereof, and Jews, independent of their origin, as a fifth column of Israel. This discursive impossibility of Turkish Jewishness, both in Austria and in Turkey, emerged as a major insight during the proceedings in Graz, which also included discussions with members of Turkey’s Jewish civil society, the newspaper *Şalom*, and groups like Avlaremoz, who, against all odds and better judgement, insist on the possibility of being a Jew with equal rights in a democratic Turkey. We applaud their youthful courage and extend our thanks for their contributions.

In 1981, a major change came into effect to the Turkish Nationality Law, allowing Turkish citizens dual nationality. In other words, Turkish citizens could now hold more than one passport without fear of denaturalization. The “Law of Return” that passed in Spain and Portugal in 2015 granting citizenship to descendants of the Sephardic Jews presented an opportunity both for Turkish Jews to acquire a European Union passport and travel without visa restrictions, as well as to hedge against the possibility of conditions becoming untenable in Turkey. Many have taken advantage while very few have immigrated to these countries so far.<sup>39</sup> Now that the number of Jews in Turkey has fallen, if not yet to the level of Jews in Graz, but to the level of Vienna’s small if vibrant Jewish community the passport that got Nissim de Toledo into trouble with the Turkish state is today a nonissue. Whether, one day, the Jewish communities in Istanbul

<sup>39</sup> As of October 2019, when the window for applications for Spanish citizenship closed, 4313 applications had been filed by Israelis, while the number from Turkey was 1994. Data on how many of those immigrated to Spain is only anecdotal. *The Times of Israel*, “At Least 27% of Applicants under Spain’s ‘Sephardic Law of Return’ are not Jews,” November 6, 2019. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-least-27-of-applicants-under-spains-sephardic-law-of-return-are-not-jews/>.

and Izmir, or even in Çanakkale, Edirne, Adana, and Antakya will again thrive and flourish is contingent on a range of factors, from the future of Turkey's and Israel's insecure nation-states and their geopolitical alignments to the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Europe and beyond. The thaw in bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel in 2022 and an unexpectedly empathetic portrayal of Jewish lives in the 2021 Turkey-produced Netflix series 'The Club' (*Kulüp*), while noteworthy developments in their own right, are unlikely to reverse these larger trends. It seems however, that if such a 'return' from the 'diaspora' to Turkey would become possible, it would be in clear recognition that the Jewish-Turkish entanglement, despite its more joyous moments and some incontrovertible facts like the "migration of Sephardi Jews to the empire in 1492," was not an "unbroken arc of benevolence for the downtrodden" but, above all, a discursive construct shared by many that never attained its full realization.

PART I

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Jewish-Turkish Lives in the Late  
Ottoman Empire, the Turkish  
Republic, and Israel



## Solidarity and Survival in an Ottoman Borderland: The Jews of Edirne, 1912–1918

*Jacob Daniels*

“The 1912–1913 school year began most auspiciously,” wrote Moise Mitrani from his desk in the Ottoman city of Edirne during the summer of 1913. Mitrani directed the local Jewish boys school, the largest in an international network run by the Paris-based *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. Their building in Edirne had just been enlarged, renovated, and repainted, and the Ottoman authorities were about to designate it as a preparatory school for the state high schools in Edirne and Istanbul.<sup>1</sup> The Alliance girls school run by Mitrani’s colleague, Angèle Guéron, was also flourishing.<sup>2</sup> After a dip in the nineteenth century, by 1912 the city’s Jewish population had returned to its peak of about 20,000, making it the world’s fourth

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (henceforth AAIU), France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Aug. 6, 1913; *Bulletin de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Troisième Série, No. 37 (1912): 99–128.

<sup>2</sup> AAIU, Turquie VII. E., Guéron, Dec. 14, 1911, April 11, 1912.

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largest center of Ladino-speakers after Istanbul, Izmir, and Salonica. The community lived more or less peacefully alongside 55,000 Muslims and 36,000 Christians.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, it was adequately supported by its mercantile elite, a small group of men who shuttled between Istanbul, Edirne, and the villages of the Thracian plain, trading textiles and agricultural commodities.<sup>4</sup>

All of this changed when the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) inaugurated a six-year period of violence and ethnic cleansing that drastically altered the region’s physical and demographic landscape. By 1919, half of urban Edirne’s Jewish population had left the region.<sup>5</sup> Between Edirne and towns to the west, an interstate border had appeared, and many villages to the east no longer existed.<sup>6</sup> On the eve of the Balkan Wars, the province of Edirne (as opposed to the eponymous capital city) had been home to about 487,000 Ottoman Christians, with 96,000 in Western Thrace and 391,000 in Eastern Thrace. In the period between 1912 and 1918, the Ottomans permanently lost Western Thrace and the Christian population of Eastern Thrace was reduced to about 60,000.<sup>7</sup>

For the Jewish community of Edirne, which had existed for centuries, the Balkan Wars and World War I (1914–1918) marked the beginning of a decline. And yet this decline narrative contains surprises and ironies that help us understand two related processes at the core of the story: the development of what is today the northwestern border of Turkey, and the religious homogenization of an imperial borderland. In the period between

<sup>3</sup> Avigdor Levy, “The Siege of Edirne (1912–1913) as Seen by a Jewish Eyewitness: Social, Political, and Cultural Perspectives,” in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History, Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century*, ed. Levy (Syracuse, NY: 2002), 152–193.

<sup>4</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Aug. 15, 1908; AAIU, Turquie XI. E., Mitrani, March 4, 1909; *Annuaire Oriental* (Istanbul: 1913): 1797–1804; Aron Rodrigue, “Jewish Society and Schooling in a Thracian Town: The Alliance Israélite Universelle in Demotica, 1897–1924” in *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3/4 (Summer–Autumn 1983): 263–286.

<sup>5</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Jan. 1, 1920.

<sup>6</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 8, 1914

<sup>7</sup> Summary of Census of Ottoman Population, 1906/7, from Kemal Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, WI: 1985) 162–169; A.A. Pallis, “Racial Migrations in the Balkans during the Years 1912–1924” in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (Oct., 1925): 315–331; Roy Arakelian, *Edirne (Adrianupolis) ve Ermeni Toplumunu* (Istanbul: 2016), 68. Regarding Eastern Thrace: From Karpat I use the number of Greeks (292,000), Bulgarians (74,000), and Armenians (25,000) before the Balkan Wars; from Pallis I use the number of Bulgarians (1000) and Greeks (53,000) after 1915; from Arakelian I use the number of Armenians after 1918 (6000).

1912 and 1918, hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Christians who lived in southeastern Europe were displaced.<sup>8</sup> For them, this violence quickly solidified several interstate borders that were only recently established. At least with regard to the Ottoman-Bulgarian border, the experience of displacement gave new meaning to the boundary and turned this tangible site of coercion into something more: a symbol that helped refugees and migrants make sense of their plight.

But this was not the case for the Jews. The border failed to produce this symbolic effect on the Jews of Edirne because, unlike so many of their neighbors, they did not face violent deportation at this time. Far from reimagining the border as an essential, ethno-religious divide, many local Jews maintained and even strengthened their ties with their coreligionists in Bulgaria and with international Jewish organizations. In this, they demonstrated a growing sense of Sephardi Jewish solidarity and a refusal to interpret the border as anything more than a physical hindrance in an arbitrary place. In other words, borders were perceived and experienced differently by different groups of people.

For the Jews of Edirne, what changed during and after the Balkan Wars was not the meaning of the border but the meaning of the borderland. In 1878, when Edirne became an imperial frontier after Bulgaria broke off from the Ottoman Empire, the Jewish community hardly considered this change to be a threat to its existence, as the Ottoman borderland in Europe was not yet associated with intolerance of non-Muslims. The Balkan Wars and World War I changed that dynamic. As ethnic cleansing campaigns swept the region, leaders of Edirne's Jewish community anxiously observed this violence and sought survival strategies. Notably, they chose to abandon some of the civic ventures they had undertaken before the wars; to again separate their Sephardi cultural identity from their Ottoman political loyalty; and to strengthen bonds of solidarity and mutual support with Bulgarian Jewry in ways that are ignored by nationalist historiographies. Ironically, the Jews of Edirne adapted to life in the borderland by defying the logic of territorial nationalism that was transforming this very region.

<sup>8</sup> For a play-by-play, see Pallis.

## JEWISH LIFE IN NEW BULGARIA

Thanks to the work of Avigdor Levy and Rifat Bali, students of Ottoman-Jewish history may be familiar with the Bulgarian siege of Edirne that lasted from November 1912 to March 1913, with the Jewish woman (the above-mentioned Angèle Guéron) who documented the ordeal in her journal, with the volunteer work she did for the Ottoman Red Crescent Society, and with her twin struggles against Bulgarian bombardment and the Jewish communal patriarchy.<sup>9</sup> Lesser known, perhaps, is what happened to Edirne Jews under Bulgarian rule, which was established in the surrounding region as early as November 1912. Historians tend to overlook the Bulgarian occupation of Eastern Thrace, which lasted until July 1913, as it fits awkwardly into both Turkish and Bulgarian historiographies. Nonetheless, this is an important chapter in the history of this community, as it demonstrates how Jews were subject to the political contingencies of the borderlands, regardless of the patriotic sentiments they may have held.

In the first month of the Balkan Wars, the Bulgarian army conquered most of Edirne Province outside the city of Edirne.<sup>10</sup> In these regions, the Muslim population fled for Istanbul and Anatolia “almost to a man.”<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, several thousand Jews inhabited this zone, about half of whom stayed put.<sup>12</sup> Generally speaking, their experience of the occupation was decidedly negative. At the same time, local Jewish leaders strove, with some success, to adapt to the new reality, and their efforts were often aided by Jewish networks that extended into Bulgaria. While many Jews shared with their Muslim neighbors the hardships of persecution, dispossession, and displacement, the plight of the Jews was generally less extreme than that of the Muslims, and Jews faced fewer obstacles integrating their institutions into the Bulgarian system.

<sup>9</sup> Avigdor Levy, “The Siege of Edirne”; Rifat Bali, “Edirne Muharasası Sırasında Tutulmuş Bir Günlük—I ve II,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, 32/190–191 (Sept.–Nov. 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Also, the Bulgarians did not conquer the Gallipoli peninsula.

<sup>11</sup> The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C.: 1914): 126.

<sup>12</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 162–169; *Bulletin de l'Alliance*; Avraam Moshe Tadjer, *Notas Istorikas Sobre los Djudyos de Bulgaria i la Komunita de Sofya* (Sofia, 1932), 181. Text is in Amor Ayala, *Los Sefaradies de Bulgaria: Estudio y edición crítica de la obra «Notas Istorikas» de Avraam Moshe Tadjer* (Berlin: 2017), 301–465.

Two glimpses of Jewish life in “New Bulgaria,” as the region was called, come from Alliance educators in the *sancak* (district) of Tekirdağ. In the town of Çorlu, the director of the Alliance school claimed that after cheering the arrival of the Bulgarian army, residents soon grew disillusioned with their new masters. Bulgarian soldiers requisitioned property and turned a blind eye to looting, which emboldened some Greek-Orthodox and Armenian residents to steal furniture and livestock from the Muslims who had fled. The school director notes with embarrassment that, despite the admonishments by the local rabbi, some of his coreligionists had joined the looting. Meanwhile, the Bulgarians seized merchandise from Muslim as well as Jewish merchants who had left for Istanbul.<sup>13</sup> Regardless of religion, the propertied class had much to lose in such lawlessness.

In the nearby port of Tekirdağ, the local Alliance school director, David Levy, describes the Bulgarian occupation as far more violent, probably because the Bulgarians were anxious about the proximity of the Ottoman fleet. According to Levy, the “nouveaux Huns” who occupied the region wanted to “exterminate the Turks in order to seize their land,” and much of the Muslim population fled in response to “systematic massacres” perpetrated by the Bulgarians. Over half of the 1500 Jews who lived in Tekirdağ before the war had left by the winter of 1913, though not because of any specifically anti-Jewish measures. In fact, “no home left behind by Jewish emigrants was pillaged or destroyed.” Levy attributed this relatively mild treatment to “the presence of 5,000–6,000 Jewish men in the Bulgarian army and their desire to attach themselves to the Jewish population of the conquered country.”<sup>14</sup> We might add that, compared to Çorlu, the strategically sensitive location of Tekirdağ gave rise to especially brutal acts of violence that were almost always targeted toward Muslims.

Even more notable are some of the factors that facilitated the transition of Tekirdağ’s Jewish community back under Ottoman rule in July 1913. One such factor was the extraordinary web of connections enjoyed by Levy, who was born in Şumla (Shumen) in 1862, sixteen years before that city found itself in the new country of Bulgaria. During the Balkan Wars, he had a nephew in the Bulgarian army who guarded Ottoman prisoners of war in Yambol and protected prisoners of war from Tekirdağ against various abuses. This contributed to Levy’s popularity after the war.

<sup>13</sup>AAIU, Turquie II. C., Saul Cohen, Nov. 11, Nov. 23, Dec. 1, 1912.

<sup>14</sup>AAIU, Turquie II. C., David Levy, Feb. 20, May 2, May 9, July 22, 1913; *Bulletin de l’Alliance*.

Furthermore, at some point in the late-nineteenth century in Edirne, Levy had taught a young Mehmed Talat—the man who would become Talat Paşa, named the Interior Minister of the Ottoman Empire in 1913. This impressed the local Ottoman officials who had returned to power that summer. According to Levy, another conciliating factor was the kindness that Jews showed their Muslim neighbors during the occupation. Jews hid persecuted Muslims in their homes and occasionally gave them money. Levy himself admitted Muslim children to the Alliance school at no cost, and, with the approval of the Bulgarian authorities, he created two courses taught by Muslims. Many of these children remained in the school even after Tekirdağ returned to Ottoman rule.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, we can return to the city of Edirne. As recounted by Guéron and others, when the city capitulated in March 1913, there followed several days of looting and violence. Most of the perpetrators were Bulgarian soldiers and Greek-Orthodox civilians, while most of the victims were local Jews and Muslims.<sup>16</sup> But after a few days of lawlessness, Bulgarian administration in the city became relatively orderly, compared to the situation in other towns.<sup>17</sup> The municipal council (*belediye meclisi*), a religiously mixed institution that had existed since the 1860s, was allowed to retain its powers; three members were Bulgarian Christian, three were Greek Orthodox, three were Muslim, two were Jewish, and one was Armenian.<sup>18</sup> The day after Edirne capitulated, Guéron writes, a group of Bulgarian soldiers and local Greeks targeted Jewish homes in particular for looting and vandalism. However, twelve alleged culprits were promptly arrested and jailed.<sup>19</sup> The occupiers were apparently determined in their efforts to bring order to Edirne, whose population rivaled that of Bulgaria's capital Sofia at the time.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> AAIU, Turquie II C., David Levy, Aug. 6, 1913; AAIU online database: <http://www.archives-aiu.org/aiu/index.htm>.

<sup>16</sup> Avigdor Levy, "The Siege of Edirne"; FO 195/2454, No. 33, Samson, Aug. 12, 1913.

<sup>17</sup> An exception to this was the case of Ottoman prisoners of war in Edirne, who were treated terribly: *Report of the International Commission*, 111–113.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>19</sup> AAIU, Turquie, I. C. 3, Guéron: Entry dated March 27, 1913.

<sup>20</sup> Circa 1910, Sofia's population was 102,812 and "increasing rapidly," while the next largest city in Bulgaria was Plovdiv, with a population of 47,981: The Geographical Section of the Naval Intelligence Division, Naval Staff, Admiralty [UK], *A Handbook of Bulgaria*, (London: 1920), 493–509. The population of urban Edirne on the eve of the Balkan Wars was approximately 111,000: Avigdor Levy, "The Siege of Edirne."

That same day, a Jewish relief committee in Sofia obtained permission from the Bulgarian government to send aid workers to the conquered city. The team arrived by train and began delivering aid to Edirne denizens of all religions the following day.<sup>21</sup> Beginning in May, Bulgarian-Jewish committees assisted in “repatriating” some portion of the 3500 Jews who had fled Edirne Province for Istanbul during the First Balkan War. These committees coordinated with Jewish leaders in Istanbul to help the refugees board steamer ships to Bulgarian towns on the Black Sea coast. Once refugees arrived, “Jewish Reception Committees” guided them to trains that would take them to their hometowns, including Edirne, Kirklareli, and Mustafapaşa.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, Edirne’s capitulation allowed international Jewish organizations to resume their philanthropic role vis-à-vis the Jews of Eastern Thrace. The new, Brussels-based *Union des Associations Israélites* raised funds for all of Balkan Jewry. Working with the aforementioned Jewish relief committee in Sofia, the *Union* sent 75,500 francs to Edirne and the surrounding towns in May 1913.<sup>23</sup> Around this time, a senior Alliance functionary traveled from Sofia to Edirne in an effort to reorganize the region’s Jewish schools, which were to become vehicles for helping local Jews “fulfill their duties as Bulgarian citizens” and exercise their “facility for assimilation.” The Alliance, which promoted integration and was wary of Jewish nationalism, had been losing control of Jewish schools in Bulgaria to the Zionists. From the perspective of the Alliance, the Zionists had to be stopped, at any costs, from advancing onto “the Edirne turf.”<sup>24</sup> Mitrani, who had abandoned his post at the boys school when the Balkan Wars began, returned to Edirne from Istanbul in April 1913 and immediately hired two Bulgarian= language teachers.<sup>25</sup> Even Guéron lobbied to

<sup>21</sup> Tadjer, 181–182. The team consisted of six Bulgarian-Jewish men, one Bulgarian-Jewish woman, and two nuns from Berlin.

<sup>22</sup> “Por los Refugiados Djidios en Konstantinopla,” *El Tiempo*, April 18, 1913; “El Repatriamiento de los Refugiados Djudyos en Konstantinopla,” *El Tiempo*, May 14, 1913; “El Repatriamiento de los Refugiados Israelitas,” May 26, 1913.

<sup>23</sup> “Israélites d’Orient,” *Bulletin de l’Alliance*, 57–62; “The Repatriation of Jewish War Refugees,” *The Jewish Chronicle*, May 30, 1913, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Gabriel Arié, May 15, May 22, 1913, from *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe: The Autobiography and Journals of Gabriel Arié, 1863–1939*, ed. Benbassa and Rodrigue (Seattle: 1998), 230, 235. Arié estimated that 30,000–35,000 Jews had been added to Bulgaria’s existing Jewish population of 40,000.

<sup>25</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Aug. 6, 1913.

ensure that the badly damaged girls school would benefit from the reconstruction effort.<sup>26</sup>

Guéron embodied the notion that Ottoman patriotism coexisted with a level of political flexibility that was indispensable for the Jews of Edirne in the imperial borderlands. This comes into focus when we compare her journal in the Alliance archive with a lesser-known journal published under the pseudonym “Ben Israel” in Salonica 1914, two years after that city became Greek. The two journals are almost identical, though each contains a few unique entries that set them apart from one another. While the Alliance journal ends when Bulgarian troops entered the city of Edirne, the “Ben Israel” journal continues into the period of occupation. In an undated “Ben Israel” entry, the writer describes touring the city’s fortifications with a Bulgarian lieutenant and his sister. The officer had fought in the Battle of Edirne and wanted to visit the graves of his fallen comrades. Another “Ben Israel” entry, dated July 22, 1913, was written shortly after the Ottomans retook Edirne and expresses the writer’s thoughts on the departing Bulgarians:

During their short stay in the conquered city, our neighbors succeeded in giving it a frankly Bulgarian appearance, more so than the Ottomans [gave it an Ottoman appearance] after several centuries of possession. No more Turkish, no more Greek, no more French. Bulgarian everywhere, in the streets, in the government offices, on the storefronts. Not even the smallest object could be purchased without using the language of the Slavs. Everyone was willing to learn it. The Turks are more tolerant, and with regard to language, I believe they are wrong. Their citizens of foreign [i.e. non-Muslim] religion would be more attached to the Ottoman nation if they spoke the language of the Ottomans.<sup>27</sup>

Assuming that Guéron wrote these “Ben Israel” entries—which seems likely, though it is not certain—her attitude toward Bulgaria is striking for the way it mixes outrage with admiration. In this, Guéron was not unlike many Ottoman-Muslim writers who reflected on the empire’s defeat in

<sup>26</sup> AAIU, Turquie VII. E., Guéron, May 14, 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Ben Israel [sic], “Journal du siège d’Adrianople,” *Almanach national au profit de l’Hôpital de Hirsch* (Salonica: 1914), 199–200. I am grateful to Eyal Ginio for making me aware of this almanac. To my knowledge, I am the first person to posit that the author of this piece is Guéron.

the Balkan Wars.<sup>28</sup> It is not even so strange that these comments, very much in line with the brand of Turkish nationalism that would dominate after 1922, were written by a Jew whose mother-tongue was presumably Ladino. After all, one of the chief ideologues of Turkish nationalism was Guéron's Jewish contemporary Moïse Cohen, better known as Munis Tekinalp.

Guéron was constantly at odds with community leaders such as Haim Bejerano, chief rabbi of Edirne, and Joseph Barishac (Bar-Yitzhak), editor of *La Boz de la Verdad*, conflicts which point to an intersection of gender, religion, and politics.<sup>29</sup> Bejerano and Barishac sparred with her even during the siege of Edirne, and Barishac led a successful campaign to have her fired in 1915.<sup>30</sup> To what extent was this a clash of ideologies regarding the form that Jewish life should take in the Ottoman Empire? To what extent was this about a patriarchal community unable to tolerate an ambitious young woman who had transgressed the bounds of her traditional gender role? I suspect that both factors were present. In any event, Guéron and her family eventually moved from Edirne to Istanbul, like thousands of other Jews who left this Ottoman borderland in the years between 1912 and 1918.<sup>31</sup>

### THE EYE OF THE STORM

The expulsion of Christians from Edirne Province began during the Second Balkan War (June–July 1913) when the Ottoman army retook Eastern Thrace and destroyed Bulgarian-Christian villages in the process, compelling the inhabitants to flee to Bulgaria.<sup>32</sup> Officials from both countries soon acknowledged that 47,000 Christians had sought refuge in Bulgaria, and that a similar number of Muslims had crossed the border in

<sup>28</sup> Eyal Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and their Aftermath* (London: 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Bejerano would go on to become the first chief rabbi of the Republic of Turkey.

<sup>30</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Feb. 7, 1915, Jan, 9, 1915; AAIU, Turquie Guéron, May 16, 1913, March 3, 1915.

<sup>31</sup> AAIU, Turquie VII. E. 146, Guéron, Feb. 12, Feb. 22, 1919.

<sup>32</sup> For an in-depth discussion of ethnic cleansing in Eastern Thrace, see Ryan Gingeras, "A Last Toehold in Europe: The Making of Turkish Thrace, 1912–1923" in *War and Collapse: World War I and the Ottoman State*, ed. Yavuz and Ahmad (Salt Lake City, UT: 2016) 371–404.

the opposite direction.<sup>33</sup> But the migration to Bulgaria must have been larger, as Ottoman statistics show that between 1907 and 1914 Eastern Thrace's Bulgarian-Christian population fell from 74,000 to 2500, and Greek sources claim that by 1916 this number had fallen to 1000.<sup>34</sup>

The situation of the Greek-Orthodox population appeared stable until late 1913, when anti-Christian boycotts were organized in the city of Edirne. Soon, Greek-Orthodox Christians were facing violent attacks in the villages, often at the hands of Muslim refugees who had experienced similar forms of abuse in northern Greece, during and after the Balkan Wars.<sup>35</sup> By the spring of 1914, these haphazard efforts to expel local Greeks were beginning to look more organized, prompting Edirne's British consul to conclude that "the Government has recently adopted the policy of establishing in this Vilayet a population as far as possible purely Moslem."<sup>36</sup> The expulsions temporarily ceased when the Ottomans entered World War I in October 1914, only to resume in the period between 1915 and 1918, when thousands of local Greeks were deported to the Anatolian interior due to Ottoman fears that they would aid Entente forces in Gallipoli (Gelibolu).<sup>37</sup> About 53,000 Greeks remained in Edirne Province in 1916, a number that must have decreased further over the next two years.<sup>38</sup> Before 1913, Eastern Thrace had been home to about 292,000 Greek-Orthodox Christians.<sup>39</sup>

Contrary to the claims of some historians, the Armenian population of Edirne Province was largely deported during the Armenian Genocide, despite the fact that the Russian front in eastern Anatolia was a thousand miles away.<sup>40</sup> In October 1915, governor Hacı Adil Bey, a stalwart of the

<sup>33</sup> *Report of the International Commission*, 130–131; Stephen Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey* (New York: 1932) 15–20; C.A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (London: 1934), 430–435.

<sup>34</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 170–189; Pallis, 328. Pallis uses Greek statistics.

<sup>35</sup> Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de Ekonomi ve Toplum (1908–1950): Milli İktisat-Milli Burjuvazi* (Istanbul: 1995), 107–11; Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, *The Young Turks and the Boycott Movement: Nationalism, Protest and the Working Classes in the Formation of Modern Turkey* (London: 2014), 161.

<sup>36</sup> FO, 195/2456, No. 17, Samson, March 31, 1914. Also cited by Gingeras.

<sup>37</sup> Taner Akçam, *The Young Turks' Crime Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: 2012), 87–89, 113.

<sup>38</sup> Pallis, 328–329.

<sup>39</sup> Karpat, *Ottoman Population*; Ladas, 15–16.

<sup>40</sup> Strangely, Dündar claims that most Armenians in Edirne Province were not deported. See *Crime of numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question, 1878–1918* (New

Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), gave the order to expel Armenians throughout the vilayet, including the 4800 who inhabited the *sancak* of Edirne and the 13,600 in the *sancak* of Tekirdağ. A second round of deportations in February 1916 “emptied the city [of Edirne] of its last Armenians,” according to Raymond Kévorkian. It seems that most Armenians of Edirne Province were sent to the Syrian desert to die, while perhaps 6000 managed to stay put.<sup>41</sup> Of course, there was no Armenian state to which these people could be expelled, a fact which distinguishes their tragedy from that of their Greek- and Bulgarian-Orthodox neighbors.

By 1919, Edirne Province’s once thriving Christian population had been reduced to a small Greek-Orthodox community and an even smaller number of Bulgarian and Armenian Christians.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, about half of the Jewish population had left the province, largely for economic reason. The new Bulgarian border severed urban Edirne from its agricultural hinterland, from the port city of Dedeağaç (today Alexandroupoli, Greece), and from about 2000 Jews who inhabited Western Thrace, many of whom were business partners with their coreligionists in Edirne.<sup>43</sup> While Jews were not the targets of ethnic cleansing at this time, those who stayed in the province found their presence to be more conspicuous and less secure than it had been before the wars, when Edirne was a diverse and cosmopolitan city. From the eye of the storm, so to speak, some of them wondered what place they had in a late-imperial borderland, where religious diversity was now considered a geopolitical weakness. As we will see, their reaction to the Christian departures was characterized mainly by fear, and their overriding preoccupation was to safeguard their own existence in the province, a goal that called for certain political and discursive strategies.

Brunswick, NJ: 2010) 150–151, and *Modern Türkiye’nin Şifresi* (Istanbul: 2008) 307–311. Citing Dündar, Ronald Grigor Suny repeats the claim: “*They can live in the desert but nowhere else*”: *A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton, NJ: 2015), 323, 355.

<sup>41</sup> Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: 2011) 545–550; Arakelian, 65–69. The figures of 4800 and 13,600 are from Ottoman statistics published in 1919. See Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, 170–189.

<sup>42</sup> Scholars such as Dündar connect ethnic cleansing in Edirne to the anxieties of CUP leaders who saw the province’s diversity as the source of its vulnerability in the Balkan Wars. See *Modern Türkiye’nin Şifresi*, 184. An alternative interpretation emphasizes the wealth transfer that took place. See İlkey Öz, *Mülksüzleştirme ve Türkleştirme: Edirne Örneği* (Istanbul: 2020).

<sup>43</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Jan. 1, 1920; *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 4, July 9, 1914.

Little is known about Jewish responses to the expulsion of Bulgarians that occurred in the summer of 1913, nor about their responses to the deportation of Armenians carried out in 1915 and 1916.<sup>44</sup> However, in 1914, *La Boz de la Verdad* covered the “emigration” of local Greeks. It began by reprinting official Ottoman press releases, but in May, the newspaper suddenly assumed a more urgent tone. That month, about forty citizens of Greece who resided in Uzunköprü—an Ottoman border town 35 miles south of urban Edirne—were sent by train to Tekirdağ, from where they were put on boats destined for Greece. Among these Greek citizens was a Jew named Albert Alfassa, and this was cause for concern. According to *La Boz de la Verdad*, the chief rabbi of Edirne immediately approached the *vali* (governor) to vouch for this “honest merchant,” and Hacı Adil Bey agreed to let Alfassa remain in Tekirdağ. Meanwhile in Istanbul, Haim Nahum, chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire, made a similar appeal to Talat Paşa, requesting that Alfassa be given permission to return to Uzunköprü from Tekirdağ. Weeks later, the chief rabbi of Edirne was granted an audience with none other than Enver Paşa, Minister of War, who was “very much interested in the situation of the Jews of Edirne and gave assurances that better times were coming for that city.” Shortly thereafter, Talat Paşa notified the *vali* of Edirne that Alfassa should be allowed to return home.<sup>45</sup>

In 1915, as Ottoman authorities moved Greeks from Edirne Province to Anatolia, *La Boz de la Verdad* was silent on the matter. However, it chose to write about something similar that was happening in the Russian Empire. Under the headline “1.2 Million Jews Expelled,” it exaggeratedly reported that all Jews in the governorates of Grodno, Vilna, and Warsaw had been forced from the Pale of Settlement into the Russian interior.<sup>46</sup> Surely the Jews of Edirne wondered if they too could be moved

<sup>44</sup> But on November 6, 1915, the Bulgarian and Austrian consuls of Edirne wrote that the deportation of the Armenians “frightens not only the Jews and the other Christians living here, but also the overwhelming majority of the Muslim population.” Quoted in Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 547–548.

<sup>45</sup> “Albert Alfassa a la Frontyera,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, May 14, 1914; “El Konfliktio Turko-Grego,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, May 18, 1914; “La Kestyon Alfasa,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, May 21, 1914; “Los Gregos de Trasa,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, May 25, 1914; “El Gran Ravno Bejerano onde Enver Pasha,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 29, 1914; “Albert Alfassa,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, July 9, 1914; “Albert Alfassa,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, July 27, 1914.

<sup>46</sup> “1,200,000 Djudyos Ekspulsados,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, Aug. 4, 1915.

from the imperial borderland to the interior. In fact, this is exactly what happened to a small number of Jews from the villages of Vize and Saray in November 1915, when overzealous local officials acted without central government approval.<sup>47</sup>

There was only one group of exiles who earned the public attention of Jewish leaders in Edirne: the sixty Jewish families from the town of Mustafapaşa, (today Svilengrad, Bulgaria.) After changing hands several times during the Balkan Wars, this historically Ottoman town was definitively taken by Bulgaria, and the Jewish community wound up in and around the city of Edirne. In January 1914, Mitrani told the Alliance Central Committee in Paris that he had admitted to his school forty-eight children from Mustafapaşa, free of charge, and he requested money to buy heating fuel and clothing for these children.<sup>48</sup> That spring, *La Boz de la Verdad* reported that many of the families from Mustafapaşa were “dying of hunger” and living in unsanitary conditions, even as a cholera epidemic swept the city. While this displacement was drastically smaller than those discussed above, for the modest Jewish community of Edirne, it was a veritable refugee crisis. A delegation was sent to Sofia to seek help from the leaders of Bulgarian Jewry, and the communal council of that city donated 560 francs to the cause.<sup>49</sup> In June, the Edirne community was visited by Joseph Niego, an Edirne native and the Istanbul-based regional director of *B'nai B'rit*, a major international Jewish organization. Niego interviewed the refugees and catalogued the properties they had abandoned in Mustafapaşa, presumably in an effort to seek reimbursement from the Bulgarian government. However, it seems that this initiative was cut short by the outbreak of World War I.<sup>50</sup>

A portion of the Jewish community from Mustafapaşa had taken refuge in Uzunköprü, where the situation was especially dire. On June 28, 1914,

<sup>47</sup> Also, as part of an Ottoman effort to relocate citizens of Entente states, some Jews in Tekirdağ with Italian citizenship were moved to the Anatolian interior: Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, 386–388, 394. Dündar considers this part of a wider “expulsion and deportation of Jews” that occurred in the empire from 1914 through 1917, but this is an exaggeration.

<sup>48</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 8, Jan. 30, 1914.

<sup>49</sup> “Los Djudyos de Mustafa Pasha,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 30, 1914; “Las Familyas de Mustafa Pasha,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, April 6, 1914; “En Syudad: Rengrasyamyentos Publikos,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, April 20, 1914; “En Syudad,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, April 30, 1914.

<sup>50</sup> “Novidades Lokales,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 25, 1914. Similar arrangements were being made for displaced Muslims and Bulgarians: Ladas, 18–20.

those Jews were told by the local police that they had twenty-four hours to pack and move to an Ottoman town called “New Mustafapaşa,” which was little more than a barracks. *La Boz de la Verdad* found this order “very strange,” as the Muslims who had fled Mustafapaşa for Uzunköprü were not being disturbed. However, after the chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire intervened, the *kaymakam* (district governor) of Uzunköprü was dismissed and the Jewish refugees were allowed to stay.<sup>51</sup>

In covering the episode, *La Boz de le Verdad* blamed a few bad apples among the local authorities, insisting that the central government never failed to “rectify wrongs committed by a few [local] functionaries.” This may have been a reference to a similar episode that had occurred in the nearby district of Dimetoka (today Didymoteicho, Greece), where Jewish peddlers had been expelled from a number of villages in what was probably an effort to give the market to their Muslim competitors. Here, again, the chief rabbi of the Ottoman Empire sought redress from Talat Paşa, while the chief rabbi of Edirne Province spoke to the vali. Within weeks, the local *kaymakam* was helping the Jewish peddlers return to their villages.<sup>52</sup> From Uzunköprü to Dimetoka, whenever Jews were on the brink of being displaced, community leaders feared the setting of a dangerous precedent. If, in their expulsion programs, local officials failed to distinguish between Christians and Jews, community leaders successfully appealed to central authorities like the governor, or even Talat Paşa himself.

Before the Balkan Wars, Edirne had been filled with talk of solidarity between Ottoman citizens of all religions, and *La Boz de la Verdad* had criticized Jews for shirking their civic duty by mindlessly voting *en bloc* (for the CUP, in this case).<sup>53</sup> But by 1914, the editor Joseph Barishac and others were distancing the community from the Christians and doubling down on the old Jewish survival strategy of “royal alliance.” That is, they decided that the best way to protect Jews was to go directly to the highest authority in the land, even at the cost of resentment from non-Jewish

<sup>51</sup> “Ultima Ora,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 29, 1914; “Albert Alfassa,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, July 9, 1914.

<sup>52</sup> “En Demotika,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 12, 1914; “El Gran Ravno de Turkyia i la Komunidad de Demotika,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 16, 1914; “En Demotika,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 19, 1914; “En Demotika,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 30, 1914. For another interpretation of these events, see Ginio, *The Ottoman Culture of Defeat*, 220–223.

<sup>53</sup> FO, 195/2270, No. 65, Samson, Sept. 30, 1908; “Las Eleksyones i los Djudyos: Impresyones de Viaje en Bulgarya,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, Sept. 10, 1912.

neighbors and local authorities.<sup>54</sup> This was an understandable response to recent events: the coup d'état carried out by the CUP in January 1913 effectively spelled the end of multi-party politics in the empire, and the subsequent removal of most Christians from Edirne Province was the nail in the coffin of “civic” Ottomanism.<sup>55</sup> In this context, horizontal alliances and parliamentary politics made little sense. These successful Jewish appeals suggest that the nature of Jewish politics in Edirne was changing. They also suggest that Ottoman leaders such as Talat Paşa pursued a clear and focused policy of expelling Christians from the coast and borderland.

As Edirne Province became more demographically Muslim, a parallel development occurred in the realm of political discourse. Ottoman military defeat and the ingathering of Balkan Muslims fueled the rise of what Erik Zürcher calls “Ottoman Muslim nationalism.”<sup>56</sup> Also known as “Islamic Ottomanism,” this style of politics saw Islam and Islamic symbols as necessary components in building an Ottoman nation that could battle, figuratively and literally, with the self-described nations that had routed the empire in the First Balkan War. Eyal Ginio notes that this new discourse was especially prominent in Edirne, the former Ottoman capital whose annexation to Bulgaria had shocked the public and whose subsequent return had made it a symbol of hope and redemption.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the previous version of Ottomanism which called for a “union of the elements” (*ittihâd-ı anâsır*), this new style of Muslim nationalism seemed to exclude Jews from the imagined community of the Ottoman nation.<sup>58</sup> However, this theoretical premise rarely translated into anti-Jewish practices on a day-to-day level, and local Jews hardly seemed

<sup>54</sup> For more on the notion of “royal alliance,” see Lois C. Dubin, “Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, the Royal Alliance, and Jewish Political Theory,” in *Jewish History*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2014), 51–83.

<sup>55</sup> For more on the notion of “civic” Ottomanism, see Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

<sup>56</sup> Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: 2017), 116.

<sup>57</sup> Eyal Ginio, “Constructing a Symbol of Defeat and National Rejuvenation: Edirne (Adrianople) in Ottoman Propaganda and Writing during the Balkan Wars,” in *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War*, ed. Goebel and Keene (London: 2011), 83–99.

<sup>58</sup> Eyal Ginio, “Paving the Way for Ethnic Cleansing: Eastern Thrace during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and their Aftermath,” in *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman Borderlands*, ed. Omer Bartov and Eric D. Weitz (Bloomington, IN: 2013), 295.

uncomfortable with this discursive style. For example, when a ceremony was held on March 26, 1914 to mark the first anniversary of Edirne's fall to the Bulgarians, a reporter for *La Boz de la Verdad*—most likely Barishac—was at the scene. Also in attendance were the spiritual and temporal leaders of all the religious communities. The entire ceremony was tinged with Islamic rhetoric, from the speech given by Edirne's commanding officer to the mufti's closing prayer, which called for "the repose of the martyrs, the long life of his majesty the sultan, and the prosperity of Turkey."<sup>59</sup> But the proceedings raised no concerns for the Jewish reporter who, in his own commentary, used language resembling that of the mufti's quoted speech.

This should hardly be surprising: already during the reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), many Ottoman Jews showed a "willingness to work within a framework of politicized Islam," as Julia Phillips Cohen puts it. Claiming a special affinity with Muslims and even adorning Jewish ritual objects with the star-and-crescent motif were among "the different options Jews debated" in the late nineteenth century, during an earlier attempt by the state to combine Islam and politics.<sup>60</sup> The situation in Edirne after the Balkan Wars marked a return to some of these strategies. Ironically, the very resistance to merging cultural and political identity that had inhibited many Jews from fully embracing "civic Ottomanism" also made them relatively comfortable with Islamic political discourse, including the Ottoman Muslim nationalism that proliferated after 1912. At the same time, there is no doubt that the rise of this discourse caused some Edirne Jews to further separate their cultural identity from their civic life. While it was a very old element of Ottoman-Jewish history, this gap between culture and politics was not static.<sup>61</sup> Rather, it was liable to widen or narrow, depending on the historical forces at play. From 1914 to 1918, that gap was widening.

<sup>59</sup> "Seremonya Funebre a la Okazyon de la Aniversaryo de la Kayida de Edirne en Poder de los Bulgaros" *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 30, 1914.

<sup>60</sup> Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: 2014), 15–16.

<sup>61</sup> For a theoretical discussion of cultural and political community, see Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation," in *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring, 1996): 193–211.

## NEW ALLIANCES, OLD VILAYET

More than those of 1878, 1885, or 1908, the Ottoman-Bulgarian border developments of 1913 devastated Edirne's economy, to the extent that many Jewish merchants began to leave the province. But at the same time—particularly after 1914—the border was being traversed in ways that seemed to summon memories of the vilayet of Edirne as it had existed before 1878, when it covered *all* of Thrace—Western, Eastern, and Northern. As we will see, interstate Sephardi networks facilitated this process and grew stronger because of it.

This episode in the history of Edirne's Jewish community was characterized by some ostensible contradictions: the border disrupted economic life in Edirne more than ever, but Jews on both sides of the boundary became increasingly linked and found new opportunities to operate in a zone that resembled the pre-1878 vilayet; Jews faced new forms of discrimination during the rise of Ottoman Muslim and/or Turkish nationalism, but the form of interstate Jewish solidarity that emerged sometimes served the needs of the Ottoman Empire and its allies. If these claims sound counterintuitive, it is only because of our too-simplistic understanding of borders and nationalism. For people like Barishac, Jewish "nationalism" and Ottoman patriotism were fully compatible.<sup>62</sup> He, like many other Ladino publicists, would probably not share a modern understanding of nationalism as "a political principle," to cite Ernest Gellner, "which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent."<sup>63</sup>

Before the Balkan Wars, *La Boz de la Verdad* advocated a "nationalism" that encouraged Jewish individuals to be proud of their Sephardi culture and Jewish institutions to be unapologetic in their pursuit of communal interests.<sup>64</sup> However, its political stance shifted noticeably between 1912 and 1914. Before the Balkan Wars, the periodical wrote nothing about Edirne's short-lived Makabi branch, except to report on its closing, in a neutral tone. But in 1914, it praised this Zionist athletic organization for "bringing together the sons of bankers and fishmongers" in cities such as Istanbul, and it expressed hope that the Edirne branch would reopen. The newspaper also commemorated the tenth anniversary of Theodore Herzl's death, claiming that the man "belongs to all Jewry," not just to the

<sup>62</sup>"En la Kapitala: El Medjlis Djismani," *La Boz de la Verdad*, Sept. 11, 1911.

<sup>63</sup>Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: 1983), 1.

<sup>64</sup>"Notas de Viaje: Ksanti," *La Boz de la Verdad*, Sept. 7, 1911; "En la Kapitala: El Mejlis Jismani," Sept 11, 1911; "Dede Ach," *La Boz de la Verdad*, Nov. 30, 1911.

Zionists, and that he had led the way in creating a “more united” world Judaism.<sup>65</sup> However, at this point in his career, Barishac stopped short of championing a Jewish state or calling himself a Zionist, at least in print. Only during the Greek occupation of Edirne (1920–1922) would the issue of Zionism publicly divide the community.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to documenting a rise in rhetoric of interstate Jewish solidarity, *La Boz de la Verdad* also recorded parallel developments in the social sphere. Usually, such Jewish solidarity spanned Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. For example, the newspaper announced numerous marriages between members of the Edirne community and members of Jewish communities in Plovdiv, Burgas, Yambol, and Stara Zagora. These Ottoman-Bulgarian marriages became especially common after 1913, probably because the pool of Jewish brides and grooms was shrinking in Edirne. The paper also alerted residents of Edirne about Jewish job openings in Bulgaria, such as the Shumen community’s need for a cantor who could double as a *mohel* (circumciser).<sup>67</sup> Additionally, some Edirne Jews sent their daughters to work as domestics in the homes of their Bulgarian coreligionists.<sup>68</sup> In June 1915, a Jew from Pazardzhik “passed through” Edirne and made a small donation to a local society called *Halutzei Tzavah* (Military Pioneers), which assisted the families of Jewish men who had been called to serve in the Ottoman military.<sup>69</sup> Such charity from Bulgarian Jews is reminiscent of earlier cases and was probably not unusual.<sup>70</sup>

International Jewish organizations only strengthened these regional Jewish bonds. This was especially true for *B’nai B’rit*, which had an “Eastern District” consisting of twenty-one lodges, mostly in the Ottoman

<sup>65</sup> “Avizo de la Makabi,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, Nov. 6, 1911; “La Makabi en Konstantinopla i la Lengua Ebreyiko,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 16, 1914; “La Fiesta de la Makabi,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 11, 1914; “Teodor Herzl: Aniversario,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, July 16, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, July 17, Dec. 20, 1921.

<sup>67</sup> “En Syudad: Despozorios,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, March 5, 1914; “En Syudad: Kazamyentos,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, May 21, 1914; “Kazamyento,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 11, 1914; “Shumla: Anunsyo,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 25, 1914; “Kazamyento,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 29, 1914.

<sup>68</sup> However, the newspaper warned parents against this practice by telling the cautionary tale of a 14-year-old Jewish girl from Edirne who was raped by two Jewish men in Pazardzhik while working there as a domestic: “Una Ninya Djudyá Edirneliya de 14 Anyos Violada por Dos Mansevos en Tatar-Bazardjik,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, July 9, 1914.

<sup>69</sup> “Novedades Lokales,” *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 21, 1915.

<sup>70</sup> AAIU, Turquie XI. E., Mitrani, March 4, 1908.

Empire and Bulgaria. In June 1914, leaders from all of these branches converged on the district's mother lodge in Istanbul for a weeklong conference. The Edirne lodge sent five representatives.<sup>71</sup> In the words of a Jewish contemporary from Sofia, this landmark conference of Oriental Jewry facilitated "the organization of hundreds of Jewish communities separated [from each other] by different states and distant borders."<sup>72</sup> Laws enacted during World War I "suppressed all freedom of association" and forced Edirne's *B'nai B'rit* lodge to close its doors from October 1915 until January 1919, but communal welfare organizations continued to function thanks to donations from *B'nai B'rit* centers in Germany and the United States, distributed via district headquarters in Istanbul.<sup>73</sup>

After the Ottomans entered World War I on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary, life became harder for the Jews of Edirne. While hardships such as inflation and aerial bombardment affected everyone in the region, some fell on non-Muslims in particular.<sup>74</sup> "Almost without exception," Christian conscripts throughout the empire were placed into unarmed labor battalions where they were forced to repair roads and railways; carry supplies to the front; and do other forms of backbreaking work.<sup>75</sup> While many Edirne Jews fought (and died) in the Ottoman army during this war, at least 420 Jewish men from provincial towns had been placed into work gangs by August 1915. According to a satirical Ladino Haggadah published after the war, Jews were made to do demolition work on "the old streets of Edirne and Silivri."<sup>76</sup> On top of that, military authorities requisitioned Edirne's Alliance boys school in December 1915 and used it as a hospital, despite a recent ruling from Istanbul declaring Alliance schools to be communal, not French, institutions.<sup>77</sup> Finally,

<sup>71</sup> *Bulletin de la Grande Loge de district XI et de la Loge de Constantinople* N. 678, I.O.B.B (Février 1913-Décembre 1921) 40–43.

<sup>72</sup> Tadjer, 140–141

<sup>73</sup> *Bulletin de la Grande Loge*, 134–147, 233–238.

<sup>74</sup> "Southeastern Front," *Air Service Journal*, Sept. 13, 1917, 316; AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 9, 1919; AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, July 6, 1921.

<sup>75</sup> Zürcher, "The Ottoman Conscription System, 1844–1914" in *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Dec. 1998): 437–449.

<sup>76</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 9, 1919; *Bulletin de la Grande Loge*, 134–147; Devi Mays, "Recounting the Past, Shaping the Future: Ladino Literary Representations of World War I" in *World War I and the Jews: Conflict and Transformation in Europe, the Middle East, and America*, ed. Rozenblit and Karp (New York: 2017) 201–221.

<sup>77</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Jan. 1, 1920; Dündar, *Modern Türkiye'nin Şifresi*, 387–388; Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington, IN: 1990) 155.

foreshadowing the *Varlık Vergisi* (Wealth Tax) that would batter Ottoman Jews during World War II, in 1916 local authorities levied an emergency tax designed to be paid mostly by leaders of the Jewish and Greek-Orthodox communities of Edirne.<sup>78</sup> Little wonder that most of the Jewish community's merchant class departed.

But if World War I prompted the authorities to discriminate Jews from Muslims in new and unsettling ways, it also created opportunities for Edirne Jews to both serve the state and connect with their coreligionists across the border—simultaneously, in some cases. This was largely a result of Bulgaria's decision to join the Central Powers in October 1915. To secure Bulgaria's entry into the war, Ottoman leaders gave that country the sliver of land on the west bank of the Meriç (Maritsa) River and the railway that ran along it. This meant that Edirne Province lost the towns of Dimetoka and Karaağaç, but also that, for the first time since 1877, the larger region of Thrace was not divided between rival states. The Bulgarian-Ottoman border still existed, of course, but the wartime alliance between these two countries allowed certain people to operate in a zone that encompassed (Ottoman) Eastern Thrace, (Bulgarian) Western Thrace, and (Bulgarian) Northern Thrace. Sephardi Jews, it turned out, were especially useful intermediaries in this alliance, and many found themselves free to operate across an entity that almost mirrored Edirne Province as it had existed from 1826 to 1877 at its largest geographic expanse.

One way that Jews proved useful to the Ottoman-Bulgarian alliance was through their work in the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. During the war, Jews made donations to the local branch of the Red Crescent, and two daughters of the local chief rabbi worked as nurses in Edirne's military hospital. Just across the Meriç River, five young Jewish women worked as nurses for the Red Cross in Bulgarian Karaağaç.<sup>79</sup> Jews became even more useful to these organizations as the war progressed. In February 1918, the Ottomans established a Red Crescent branch in Sofia and staffed it with local "Turkish subjects, the vast majority of whom were Jews."<sup>80</sup> Our source for this information was a member of Sofia's Jewish community. His quote seems to reference the Ottoman government's ten-

<sup>78</sup>NA/RG59/867.00/786, No. 166, Charles E. Allen, March 5, 1916; AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 9, 1919.

<sup>79</sup>"Novedades Lokales," *La Boz de la Verdad*, June 21, 1915; *Bulletin de la Grande Loge*, 139.

<sup>80</sup>Tadger, 196–197; *Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Hilal-i Ahmer İcraat Raporları*, ed. Uluğtekin and Uluğtekin (Ankara: 2013), 62–63.

dency to recognize Sephardim in Bulgaria as Ottoman subjects well after 1878. In fact, many Bulgarian Jews continued using their old Ottoman passports up to 1923, even though they were full Bulgarian citizens.<sup>81</sup> The president of this new Red Crescent branch was a notable in Sofia's Jewish community. Although he worked closely with the Bulgarian Red Cross, officially he answered to the Ottoman sultan. Among other things, his team cared for wounded soldiers and brought in a full Ottoman orchestra for a fundraising concert.<sup>82</sup>

Another Jew who worked for the Ottoman-Bulgarian Alliance was Joseph Barishac. Shortly after Bulgaria acquired Karaağaç, he left the newspaper business to become dragoman (interpreter) in that town's new Ottoman consulate.<sup>83</sup> Barishac had diplomatic experience, having joined three Muslims and two Christians in an "unofficial deputation" that toured Europe in August 1913 to promote Edirne's return to Ottoman rule.<sup>84</sup> He also spoke Turkish and Bulgarian, along with French, Ladino, and Hebrew.<sup>85</sup> The first two years of his consular service seem to have passed without incident, but in the spring of 1918, Ottoman military officials told the foreign ministry in Istanbul that they suspected Barishac of participating in a Jewish spy ring with members in Hasköy (Haskovo, Bulgaria), Uzunköprü, and the Edirne branch of Deutsche Orientbank. According to their memorandum, Barishac was exploiting "the freedom to cross the border that accompanies his official position." Though he doubted the accusations, an official at the Ottoman consulate in Dedeağaç agreed to investigate the matter because, after all, it was "impossible to trust non-Muslims." After six weeks of surveillance, the official concluded that Barishac was "a trustworthy man [and] spying is not to be expected from him."<sup>86</sup> His name cleared, Barishac was sent on a mission to Sofia.<sup>87</sup> There was no reason to doubt that a self-styled champion of Jewish

<sup>81</sup> Kemal Karpat, "Jewish Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire, 1862–1914" in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Levy (Princeton, NJ: 1994) 403–404; Elias Canetti, *The Tongue Set Free* (London: 2011) 5, 104.

<sup>82</sup> Tadjer, 196–197.

<sup>83</sup> AAIU, France XVI. F. 27, Mitrani, Jan. 1, 1920.

<sup>84</sup> "Adrianople: Deputation in London," *Daily Telegraph*, Aug. 19, 1913, 9.

<sup>85</sup> AAIU, Bulgarie XXXV. E., Barishac (in Gumuldjina), April 14, 1904; For one of many instances in which Barishac summarized articles from Ottoman-Turkish newspapers, see "Los Djudyos," *La Boz de la Verdad*, Dec. 4, 1911.

<sup>86</sup> BOA. HR. SYS., 2267/87, April 12, 1918; BOA. HR. SYS., 2267/90, June 5, 1918.

<sup>87</sup> BOA. HR. SFR.(04), 925/22, Nov. 28, 1918.

“nationalism” with extensive connections in Bulgaria could be a loyal servant of the Ottoman state. In fact, these qualities probably made him a good fit for the job.

Naturally, the Ottoman-Bulgarian alliance also created opportunities for illicit business, and Jews were not above this type of work. In late 1915, couriers and guards (*kavass*) at the Bulgarian consulate in Edirne began smuggling gold from the Ottoman Empire into Bulgarian Karaağaç, where it fetched a higher price. In a “highly organized operation,” Jewish moneychangers (*sarraf*) in Edirne provided the Bulgarian smugglers with gold (in exchange for cash), much to the chagrin of Ottoman authorities who wanted to keep this precious metal in the empire. At least this is what the Ottoman Ambassador in Sofia communicated to the Ottoman Foreign Minister.<sup>88</sup> And while Barishac may not have been a spy, Mitrani accused him and his coworkers of running their own smuggling operation on the Bulgarian side of the river.<sup>89</sup> The tendency among Ladino-speakers to work and associate in networks that spanned southeastern Europe aligned with the interests of the Ottoman state in many cases, but not all. For the Jews of Edirne, this very old proclivity was deeper than Ottoman patriotism, which was a popular but relatively new concept.

Whether economic, familial, institutional, or diplomatic, the Jewish networks discussed in this section might be called “international.” However, it is unlikely that the Jews involved would have used this word, and historians can find more accurate adjectives. For starters, the Jews of Edirne must have perceived these networks as *Ottoman* more than “international.” Edirne Jews of Barishac’s generation could remember the days when their province had encompassed all of Thrace, and when Sofia in the adjacent Danube (*Tuna*) Province had been an Ottoman city.<sup>90</sup> Both psychologically and physically, Edirne Jews had never ceased inhabiting this space. After all, their friends, relatives, and business partners continued to live in regions to the north and west, long after those became Bulgarian territory. To describe these networks as “international” is to imply the transcending of “national” limits.<sup>91</sup> But between 1914 and 1918, Jews in

<sup>88</sup> BOA. HR. SFR.(04), 644/36. Reportedly, gold was also smuggled into Karaağaç by *kavasses* who worked in Edirne’s Austro-Hungarian consulate.

<sup>89</sup> AAIU, Turquie XII. E., Mitrani, Jan. 9, 1919.

<sup>90</sup> Barishac was born in 1867: AAIU, Bulgarie XXXV. E., Barishac (in Gumuldjina), April 14, 1904.

<sup>91</sup> Ironically, it also evokes the “international” nature of nationalist movements such as Zionism, another example of how nationalism and “internationalism” are often two aspects

Edirne—and Bulgaria, though that is another story—had yet to fully identify with the nation that the border was supposed to represent. In fact, for people like Barishac, the most significant “national” entity was the interstate network itself, in the sense that it embodied the *Jewish* “nation.” By employing Barishac’s older definition of the “nation” instead of the modern one that holds that nations and borders are inherently linked, we can better understand why the Ottoman-Bulgarian border failed to produce a symbolic, organizing effect on Ladino-speakers in southeastern Europe.

### CONCLUSION

“Borders are not the same for everybody,” writes Manlio Graziano.<sup>92</sup> While Graziano is referring here to the vastly different experiences that people have when trying to enter a given country, the statement can also be applied to the historical process by which borders are created. The Ottoman-Bulgarian border that emerged in 1913 was one such border that produced multiple meanings and experiences. More specifically, I argue, the border meant one thing to the Jews and another to almost everyone else. For local Muslims and Christians, a new conception of the border was forged by a series of violent expulsions and the rise of a discourse linking nations with territory. In contrast, the Jews of Edirne had not been affected by these processes to the same degree. Nonetheless, they witnessed the violence and lived with its consequences, namely the shrinking of the province and the early stages of its religious homogenization. These developments tended to reinforce networks and feelings of Jewish solidarity that extended beyond the border. What changed for the Jews of Edirne was not the meaning of the border but the experience of living in the borderland. That experience would become increasingly fraught over the next two decades.

of the same paradigm. Arguably, my own use of the term “international Jewish organizations” is anachronistic, but here I find it awkward to use “interstate.”

<sup>92</sup>Manlio Graziano, *What is a Border?* (Stanford, CA: 2018), 33.



## On the Outside Looking In: Jewish Émigrés and Turkish Citizenship in the Early Republican Period

*Devi Mays*

On the first of September 1935, the Turkish Legation in Mexico submitted an official written communication to Mexico's *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] regarding “many Jewish families, originated in Istanbul, Andrinople (Edirne), Kırklar-Eli, Izmir, the Dardanelles (Chanak-kale), Silivri, etc.” who had immigrated to Mexico since 1900, “with or without a Turkish passport.” The Legation, having become aware that a number of these immigrants had acquired Mexican citizenship without the permission of Turkish consular officials, asked the SRE for a list of “those Jews.” “As for the Jews who registered as Turkish citizens and conserve their citizenship until this date,” the communication continued, “they should direct themselves to the First Consul of Turkey in New York in order to complete their obligations as citizens,” and asked

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that Mexico prevent those individuals from traveling throughout the American continent or to Europe until they did so.<sup>1</sup>

The Turkish Legation's preoccupation with controlling the documentation, citizenship, and movements of Jewish émigrés stood at odds with the views that the Turkish ambassador to the United States expressed on his first official visit to Mexico less than a year earlier. In November 1934, Mehmet Münir Bey [Erteğün] traveled to Mexico City to meet with Mexican President Abelardo Rodríguez with the goal of securing trade—particularly of Mexican coffee and Turkish tobacco—between the two states. Relations between Mexico and Turkey had been strained since 1927 when Mexico issued a decree prohibiting the entrance of Turkish citizens, those from “Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, Palestine, and Arab countries,” as well as Indians, Chinese, and blacks under the pretext of protecting the economic interests of Mexican merchants.<sup>2</sup> Turkish officials issued a statement deploring this restriction, which went against the spirit of the treaty of friendship the two states had signed that very year, and decreed a suspension of Turkish visas to those bearing Mexican passports. During his official visit to the country, Ambassador Münir returned to the topic of Turks in Mexico.<sup>3</sup> Münir penned an official complaint to the Minister of Foreign Relations, noting that he:

could not discover the trace of any Turk who had gone to Mexico with the intention of exercising commerce or industry there, or with the view of establishing himself there definitively. The restrictive measure in question had been taken, it appears, against certain peoples and certain minorities [who were] subjects of the old Ottoman Empire and do not have any connection now with the government of the Turkish Republic.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Legation de la Republique Turque a Mexico, “Nota Verbal,” 1 September 1935, III-297-12, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (hereafter SRE), Mexico City, Mexico.

<sup>2</sup>“Diario Oficial, 7/15/1927,” quoted in Thersa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 102-103.

<sup>3</sup>On the Treaty of Friendship between Turkey and Mexico, see Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Yer Numarası: 157, Kutu Numarası: 26, Dosya Gömleği: 62, Sıra no: 17, Sayı: 5827, Cumhuriyet Arşivi, (hereafter BCA), Ankara, Turkey; *Tratado de Amistad, 1927*, III-183-2, SRE. For the Turkish letter of complaint, and the SRE response that this ministry also did not agree with including Turkish citizens in the restrictions on “oriental immigration,” see “Restricciones a la Inmigración de Turcos,” 21-26-51, SRE.

<sup>4</sup>Legación de Turquie to the Secretary of the Mexican Foreign Ministry, 10/18/1934, expediente III-297-12, SRE.

Erteğün's distinction between "Turks" and "certain minorities" was even more explicit in the internal report that he submitted: "I have never come across a Turk here in Mexico even until now, but rather, some Syrians, Arabs, Armenians, and Jews are found here under the name 'Turk' from portions of the old Ottoman Empire. And these [peoples] have no connections with Turkishness [bunların Türklükle hiç bir alâkalari olmadığını]..."<sup>5</sup>

Erteğün's reports and the official communication of the Turkish Legation in Mexico both concerned the presence of Jewish émigrés and others who had originated in lands that had once been part of the Ottoman Empire. But while the Turkish Legation viewed these individuals as Turkish citizens, subject to laws, obligations, and regulations enacted by the Turkish state as such, Erteğün distanced these same individuals from Turkishness and from the Turkish Republic itself. In categorizing these émigrés as formerly Ottoman subjects who were "from portions of the old Ottoman Empire," Erteğün seemingly absolved the Turkish state of responsibility or obligations toward these émigrés. He disregarded the reality of the sharp increase in Jewish immigration into Mexico in the years following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

The tension between these two views—of Jewish émigrés as Turkish citizens subject to oversight by Turkish authorities and other state powers at the behest of Turkey, and of Jewish émigrés as pertaining to the erstwhile Ottoman Empire with little connection to Turkey or Turkishness—points to emigration as an outer limit for exploring the ways in which Turkish Jews could and could not make claims on Turkishness in the early years of the Republic, as well as to when they were included, how, and by whom. Prominent Jewish figures and press organs within Turkey were vociferous in arguing for Jewish Turkification through names, language, and education, placing the onus alternatively on Turkish Jews themselves or on the Turkish state to facilitate Turkification and Jewish loyalty to the state.<sup>6</sup> "In the Republic of Turkey," expounded an article from February

<sup>5</sup> Mehmet Münir Erteğün, 11/29/1934, Dosya no: 400, Sıra no: 28, Dosya Gömleği: 802, Kutu Numarası: 267, Fon no: 30 10 0 0, BCA.

<sup>6</sup> Tekinalp, né Moiz Cohen, for example, developed a list of Ten Commandments [Evâmir-i Aşare] for Jewish Turkification. These included Turkifying names; speaking Turkish; praying in Turkish; Turkifying schools; sending children to public schools; getting involved in public affairs; maintaining close social relations with Turks; uprooting the spirit of a religious community; performing one's specific task in regard to the national economy; and knowing one's rights. *Tekinalp ve Türkleştirme*, transliterated by Yıldız Akpolat. (Erzurum: Femomen

1935 in *La Boz de Oriente*, the sole Ladino periodical published in Turkey at the time: “there are neither Muslims, nor Christians, nor Israelites, there are none other than Turks, and all who bear this name enjoy the same rights and have the same duties, above all to love the country and to contribute to its grandeur.”<sup>7</sup> And yet, this professed sense of the shared Turkishness regardless of religious ascription stood at odds with the views regarding Jewish émigrés that Ambassador Ertegün repeatedly expressed. Exploring the divergent ways in which Turkish officials sought to ensure the compliance of Jewish émigrés with governmental regulations of documentation and citizenship even as other officials disavowed any connection between Jewish and other émigrés with Turkishness and the Turkish Republic, emphasizes the multidirectional, ambivalent relationship between the nascent Turkish Republic and Turkish Jews. Using the lens of citizenship and documentation to explore these links also highlights the ways in which other states contributed to and caused additional complications for Jewish emigrants who sought to retain a connection with the Turkish state and comply with Turkish policies, as well as for the Turkish authorities who tried to enforce such policies.

Yayıncılık, 2005), esp. 59; *La Boz de Oriente*, a Ladino periodical predominantly published in Hebrew characters, published an article by Tekinalp that put forward a seven-point platform for Jewish Turkification. Here, he articulated, among other points, that “our mother tongue is Turkish; we should think in Turkish and speak Turkish; Our culture is Turkish culture,” and that because language is a mirror for spirit, Turkish Jews should speak Turkish because “the hearts of Turkish Jews are not bound to any other country’s language culture and ideals.” See Tekin Alp [sic], “Türk Kültür Birliğinin Düsturları,” *La Boz de Oriente*, 23 July 1934. 1. Several weeks after Tekinalp’s publishing of *Türkleştirme*, the Turkish Jewish historian Abraham Galanté also published a booklet that encouraged all minorities in Turkey to adopt the Turkish language. Galanté highlighted the steps Turkish Jews—Sephardi and Ashkenazi alike—had taken to learn Turkish. But he also asserted that the state could take a role in encouraging Turkification by opening public schools in places with large minority populations and by placing “competent” [muktedir] instructors in minority schools. With state support, minorities would embrace the Turkish language, as Jews had already done in Bulgaria and Serbia where the state had supported their efforts to abandon Judeo-Spanish.

Avram Galanti, *Vatandaş: Türkçe Konuş! Yabud Türkçe’nin Ta’mini Meselesi, Tarihi, İçtimâî Siyâsî Tedkik* (Istanbul: Hüsn-i Tabîat Matbaası, 1928), 37-39, 46-47.

<sup>7</sup>“La Turkia y los Judios,” *La Boz de Oriente*, 11 February, 1935, 2-3.

## A STEADY STREAM OF MIGRATION

Scholarly explorations of the emigration of those who might be classified as “Turkish Jews” have predominantly focused either on those who emigrated to the United States and Western Europe in the waning decades of the Ottoman Empire or on emigration to Israel following its establishment in 1948. Indeed, thousands of Ottoman Jews formed part of a much larger wave of emigration of Ottoman subjects from throughout the empire to the United States and elsewhere beginning in the final decades of the 1800s that continued until World War I stanchied emigration.<sup>8</sup> But the United States’ implementation of strict immigration quotas in 1921 and 1924 effectively ended the arrival of Jews and other erstwhile Ottoman subjects just as the Turkish Republic was born. And until recently, much scholarship on the emigration of Turkish, as opposed to Ottoman, Jews glossed over the intervening decades between World War I and the establishment of Israel in 1948, which drew thousands of Jewish émigrés from Turkey. This particular wave of emigration is often attributed both to Zionism and to Turkish economic policies targeting religious minorities, particularly the *Varlık Vergisi*, a wealth tax implemented in 1942 under the

<sup>8</sup>The emigration of individuals from the portions of the Ottoman Empire that later became Syria and Lebanon has been explored in the greatest depth. Among others, see Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (London: Hurst, 2014); Lily Pearl Balloffet, *Argentina in the Global Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020); Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a Post-Imperial World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Stacy D. Fahrenthold, *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). On the emigration of Ottoman Armenians, see David Gutman, *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885-1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); Camila Pastor, *The Mexican Mahjar: Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017). On Ottoman Jewish émigrés in the United States and elsewhere, see Aviva Ben-Ur, *Sephardic Jews in America: A Diasporic History* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); *Ibid.*, “Identity Imperative: Ottoman Jews in Wartime and Interwar Britain,” *Immigrants and Minorities* (2014): 1-31; Julia Phillips Cohen, “The East as a Career: Far Away Moses and Company in the Marketplace of Empires,” *Jewish Social Studies* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 35-77; Devin E. Naar, “Turkinos beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 174-205; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

guise of raising funds should the Turkish state need to defend itself against Axis or Soviet incursions. In practice, this tax, which was levied largely against Armenian and Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews, resulted in the financial ruin of many individuals, who sold off their businesses and assets in order to pay the tax within the mandated fifteen days lest they be sent to perform forced labor in eastern Anatolia. For Turkish Jews and others, these policies generated both economic instability and the development of a profound distrust in the state.<sup>9</sup>

Only recently have historians begun to explore in greater depth the relationships between the Turkish state and Jewish emigrants who carried Turkish, as opposed to Ottoman, papers. These studies emphasize that Mehmet Erteğün's attitude of distancing Jews and others from Turkishness translated into policy that resulted in the denaturalization of such individual, and had profound repercussions for Turkish Jewish expatriates during the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup>

Even as there is growing scholarly interest in Turkish Jews beyond the Republic's borders, scholarship has largely overlooked the waves of Jewish emigration in the interwar years, sometimes in direct reaction to policies

<sup>9</sup>For example, İçduygu et al. list Ottoman and Turkish censuses and statistical abstracts that note that the Jewish population of Turkey decreased from 128,000 to 82,000 between 1914 and 1927, and to 77,000 in 1945 (prior to the creation of the Jewish State), and from there to 38,000 by 1965; roughly 1/3 of the Jewish population left between 1914 and 1927, while the 1945 Jewish population was sixty percent of the pre-World War I numbers. Although close to half of the remaining Turkish Jewish population would leave following Israel's creation (not all of them to Israel), the authors disregarded the earlier emigration, noting that it was limited in comparison to that of Armenians and Greeks (not propelled by genocide or population exchanges), and that "as Israel's founding still lay in the future (1948), the emigration of Jewish masses awaited the following decade" and that "the main reason for the decline in Jewish population was the establishment of Israel." Ahmet İçduygu, Şule Toktaş, B. Ali Soner, "The Politics of Population in a Nation-Building Process: Emigration of Non-Muslims from Turkey," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008), 370, 375. Kemal Karpat asserts that "the source of emigration to the New World was Syria, and to a lesser extent, southeastern Anatolia," focusing on emigrants from Syria/Lebanon/Palestine, and the large outflow of Armenians from Anatolia, making no note of the presence of Jews (Sephardic or otherwise) among these emigrating populations. Kemal Karpat, "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7 (May 1985), 175.

<sup>10</sup>See Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Marc David Baer, "Turk and Jew in Berlin: The First Turkish Migration to Germany," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013): 330-355.

that disadvantaged Jews and other religious minorities in the early years of the Republic. For many Jews living in Turkey in the wake of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, their situation was not dissimilar from that of their Salonican counterparts in the wake of the Balkan Wars, for whom, as historian Devin Naar has argued, the choice was not between an “old world” and a new, but rather which “new world” they would prefer.<sup>11</sup> Their decisions to emigrate, and the sometimes-ambivalent relationship they had with the Turkish state and to cooperating with Turkish policies on citizenship and documentation, propelled Turkish authorities to attempt to regulate, register, and monitor émigrés who made claims on Turkish citizenship, and to denaturalize those who did not cooperate. However, these efforts were at times confounded by the acts of émigrés themselves, whose interest in maintaining documentation of multiple citizenships in order to facilitate continued mobility stood at odds with the aims of Turkish officials. Moreover, as the Turkish Legation in Mexico’s 1935 request indicates, Turkish officials needed the cooperation of the authorities of other states in order to monitor Turkish Jewish émigrés. However, such authorities did not always have an incentive to cooperate, nor did they have a shared understanding of what “Turkish” meant. Beyond the boundaries of Turkey, Turkish-Jewish entanglements involved a third party—the states in which Turkish Jews lived.

Immigrants hailing from Ottoman territory began arriving in the Americas in the late 1800s. While the greatest scholarly scrutiny has focused on those destined for the United States, immigrants settled throughout the hemisphere—sometimes permanently, sometimes with the intention of returning to their natal lands, and sometimes migrating elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> As with other migrant communities, Ottoman migrants were often drawn to areas where relatives, acquaintances, or others from their villages, towns, and cities could ease their economic, social, and cultural acclimation. Immigration was the most substantial among those who originated in what would later become Syria and Lebanon. Although large numbers of immigrants from Ottoman Palestine settled in Chile and Central America, Argentina, Brazil, and the United States became home

<sup>11</sup> Devin E. Naar, “Between ‘New Greece’ and the ‘New World’: Salonican Jews en route to New York,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 35, no. 2 (Fall, 2009): 76.

<sup>12</sup> In 1893, for example, Ottoman authorities sought to clear the way for Ottoman subjects wanting to travel for trade purposes to the United States, Mexico, and Cuba. See Gömlek: 30, dosya: 2031, DH.MKT, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (hereafter, BOA), Istanbul, Turkey.

to the largest resident-communities of Arabic-speakers from the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>13</sup> Large numbers of Ottoman Armenians emigrated as well, prompting Ottoman and American officials alike to caution returning émigrés who had acquired American citizenship in the intervening years about what repercussions they might face should Ottoman authorities discover that Armenian subjects had acquired new citizenship without permission.<sup>14</sup>

Tens of thousands of Ottoman Jewish subjects emigrated—Ladino-speakers from the Aegean littoral and the Balkans, Arabic-speakers from Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad. Some of those individuals who later arrived in the Americas had migrated first to France or England, forming the basis of Ottoman expatriate communities in Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Manchester.<sup>15</sup> Like their non-Jewish counterparts, Jews from Ottoman and formerly Ottoman lands settled throughout the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the United States and Argentina drew the largest numbers of migrants, not-insubstantial communities began to form in Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and elsewhere, eventually establishing first social clubs and cemeteries, then synagogues, mutual aid societies, and schools.<sup>16</sup> In many of these nascent nodes of the Ottoman Jewish diaspora, differences in language and Jewish customs undergirded the formation of distinct communities of Ottoman Jews with their own internal networks of patronage, mutual aid, and institutions. In certain places, Ottoman Jews who spoke the same language were further divided into communities based on city of origin. In Mexico

<sup>13</sup>Lily Pearl Balloffet, *Argentina in the Global Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 5.

<sup>14</sup>David Gutman, “Migrants, Revolutionaries, and Spies: Surveillance, Politics, and Ottoman Identity in the United States,” in Christine Isom-Verhaaren and Kent E. Schull, eds., *Living in the Ottoman Realm: Empire and Identity, 13<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Bloomington: 2016), 287-288, 292.

<sup>15</sup>Annie Benveniste, *Le Bosphore à la Roquette: la communauté judéo-espagnole à Paris (1914-1940)* (Paris: 1989); Annie Benveniste, “The Judeo-Spanish Community in Paris,” in *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardi History and Culture* (Leiden, 1999); on Manchester, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Family Papers: A Sephardic Journey through the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

<sup>16</sup>On Argentina, see Adriana Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish, Argentine: Community and National Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); on Cuba, Margalit Bejarano, “From All Their Habitations: Sephardic Jews in Cuba,” *Judaism* 51, no. 1 (Winter, 2002): 96-108; on Mexico, see Devi Mays, *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

City, for example, Jews from Aleppo and Jews from Damascus each established separate synagogues, schools, and patronage networks by the early 1920s, while in Seattle and New York, Ladino-speakers created distinct institutions and communities for those from Rhodes, Salonika, and other cities or regions.<sup>17</sup>

That Jews of disparate languages and origins within the Ottoman Empire formed distinct communities abroad mirrored the broader pattern among Ottoman émigrés, for whom, at times, a shared Ottoman identification or sense of camaraderie was subsumed within particularist networks. This tendency elicited consternation among Ottoman officials, as well as among some émigrés themselves.<sup>18</sup> Although Ottoman officials advocated for Ottoman émigrés to retain a shared sense of responsibility for others from the empire, and Mexican officials and the broader population might speak of a *colonia otomana*, an Ottoman colony, in terms of associational life, patronage networks, business partnerships, and marriage, Ottoman émigré communities were deeply fractured along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. They behaved more as distinct diasporic collectives that at times existed in the same spaces without coming into frequent contact with each other.

Ottoman officials, like their later Turkish counterparts, were concerned with regulating the documentation and movements of those within and outside the empire's borders. In an early attempt to regulate émigrés' documentation, an 1898 decree required all Ottomans who traveled abroad to pledge to retain their Ottoman citizenship and instituted a rule, not always enforced, that those who changed their nationality and received a passport would be prohibited from reentering Ottoman territory.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On Mexico, see Liz Hamui de Halabe, *Identidad colectiva: Rasgos culturales de los inmigrantes judeo-alepinos en México* (Mexico City: JGH Editores, 1997); Liz Hamui de Halabe, ed. *Los Judíos de Alepo en México* (Mexico City: Magúen David, 1989); on Seattle, see Albert Adatto, "Sephardim and the Seattle Sephardic Community," (M.A. Thesis, 1939); on New York, see Devin Naar.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Joseph Schemonti, *États des Ottomans au Mexique, Devoirs de l'Empire à leur Égard, Remèdes* (Constantinople, 1909). Gömlek: 11, dosya: 77, HR.SYS, BOA; "Les Livres," *Correspondence d'Orient*, 9/15/1909, 32; "Une visite de S.E. José Castellot: Les Ottomans au Mexique," *La Jeune Turquie*, 3/29/1911, 2; "Un interesante folleto del Doctor A. Shemonti: Pide que haya representantes de su país," *El Imparcial*, 4/15/1911, 8; Gömlek: 9, dosya: 77, HR.SYS, BOA.

<sup>19</sup> See Engin Deniz Akarlı, "Ottoman Attitudes Towards Lebanese Emigration, 1885-1910," in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, ed. A. Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: 1992), 110, 116.

Ottoman subjects were required to use a *mürur tezkiresi* [internal passport] valid for internal travel to a specified final destination, and a separate passport for travel beyond the empire's borders. In practice, however, many emigrants circumvented these external passport requirements by using a *mürur tezkiresi* to clear Ottoman port authorities on the pretense of traveling to another Ottoman port city, only to transfer to a ship leaving the empire.<sup>20</sup> In the early years of the Turkish Republic, migrants would sometimes use a similar strategy with their *nüfus cüzdamı* [identity card] in place of a passport to enter countries like Mexico that required only proof of identity, but did not yet require passports for entrance. When Haim Rovero entered Mexico in 1924, for example, the document he traveled on was his *hüviyet cüzdamı* rather than a passport.<sup>21</sup> This document was sufficient for him to enter Mexico and later to apply successfully for Mexican naturalization in 1932, which then allowed for him to petition successfully for the migration of his relatives to join him from Turkey via Marseille in 1935.<sup>22</sup> To complicate matters even further, some, like Menahem Balli from Silivri, who naturalized as a Mexican in 1931, entered Mexico in September 1921 on a passport that the British High Commission of the Interallied Occupying forces issued him in Istanbul on May 3, 1920, with Cuba specified as the final destination.<sup>23</sup> In a period where passports were becoming increasingly—though not yet completely—ubiquitous as necessary for international movement, and when both borders and authorities who issued such documentation were in flux, Jewish migrants and others travelled on an array of documentation that Turkish officials would later declare invalid for those who sought to retain Turkish citizenship.

In language later mirrored by Turkish Jews like Tekinalp and Galanté, Article 88 of the Turkish Constitution of 1924 states that “The People of Turkey, regardless of religion and race, are Turks as regards citizenship.”<sup>24</sup> But parliamentary debates led to the assertion that not all Turkish citizens were members of the Turkish nation, thereby institutionalizing a gap

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.; Karpat “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914,” 187.

<sup>21</sup> Haim Vitale Rovero Abuaf, naturalization, Dir. Gral. de Gob., Sria. de Relaciones Exteriores, Turquía, 2/361.10732, caja 111, exp. 32, Archivo General de la Nación (hereafter AGN), Mexico City, Mexico.

<sup>22</sup> Pasaportos, Consulado de Marsella, 1935, IV-717-3, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, SRE.

<sup>23</sup> Menahem Balli, Passport, VII(N)-195-6, Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada, SRE.

<sup>24</sup> Soner Çağaptay, “Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 3 (May 2004): 87.

between Turkish citizenship and Turkish nationality, which would make way for Mehmet Erteğün's later assertion that those "certain minorities" from portions of the Ottoman Empire had no relationship with Turkishness and the Turkish state.<sup>25</sup> Conceptualizing Turkish citizenship was intertwined with fabricating a new Turkish identity that hinged upon acceptance of a monolithic culture and rejection of ethnic or subcultural identities and foreign citizenships.<sup>26</sup> Such policies excluded both religious and ethnic minorities that became the target of increasingly fervent Turkification projects as the 1920s progressed.<sup>27</sup> Already in 1924, Jews and other religious minorities were banned from holding positions in governmental administration, railways, and tramways; from gaining admittance into commercial societies; and from engaging in occupations that Turks exercised, such as tanning and ironworking.<sup>28</sup> This enforced economic Turkification propelled a growing number of Jews to emigrate. In the words of the brother-in-law of a Jewish railway worker who lost his job due to Turkification policies and saw little economic opportunity for himself in Turkey, Mexico "was more or less good," enough of an endorsement for this unemployed railway worker to relocate with his wife and child. Particularly for those who had dedicated careers to aspects of public works, there remained few other options.<sup>29</sup>

By the late 1920s, the Turkish Parliament passed several laws that stipulated the conditions for the denaturalization of émigrés. Law 1041 declared that those who had not participated in the National Struggle and who had not returned since then could be denaturalized. Law 1312 authorized the denaturalization of those who had acquired other citizenship without special permission or who had served a foreign state in any

<sup>25</sup>Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism: Who is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 15; Ahmet İçduygu and Özlem Kaygusuz, "The Politics of Citizenship by Drawing Borders: Foreign Policy and the Construction of National Citizenship Identity in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (Nov. 2004), 40.

<sup>26</sup>Ahmet İçduygu, Yılmaz Çolak, and Nalan Soyark, "What is the Matter with Citizenship?: A Turkish Debate," *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (Oct. 1999), 195.

<sup>27</sup>During this same period, Muslims of non-ethnically Turkish origins were also targets of Turkification policies. Like those targeting religious minorities, the policies aimed at ethnic minorities hinged upon the adoption of Turkish language and culture and the elision of distinct ethnic identities.

<sup>28</sup>Letter from Tire to AIU headquarters, 2/7/1924, HM3/694, AIU Turquie XCVI E 1126.1, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>29</sup>Nathan Sissa, interview by Monika Unikel, 4/17/1989, Archivo de Amigos de la Universidad Hebrea de Jerusalén, Mexico City, Mexico.

capacity. Several years later, the 1933 Statute on Traveling prohibited the return of those who had left Turkey on foreign passports. Individuals like Haim Rovero, who traveled with a *hüviyet cüzdanı* rather than a passport, or Menahem Balli, who emigrated on a passport issued by the Interallied British High Commission, could therefore be subject to denaturalization and prohibited from returning to Turkey. Although those who left with an Ottoman passport, who left without any passport, or who had been abroad for more than five years without registering with a Turkish consulate could return upon successful petition, most such petitions were denied.<sup>30</sup>

With the passing of these laws on denaturalization, hundreds of people had their Turkish citizenship stripped—sometimes in decrees that covered well over one hundred individuals. Given the profiles of those who had emigrated from the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, the majority of those who stood to be denaturalized were of Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish backgrounds. Some, as in the case of Avram Mulho or Viktoria Kori, acquired new nationalities without permission.<sup>31</sup> Others knowingly relinquished Turkish citizenship, like Davit Halfun and his wife who gave up Turkish citizenship in exchange for Austrian citizenship in 1930.<sup>32</sup> Often, the names and new citizenships of those who were denaturalized as Turks were not recorded in the files currently available to researchers. Individuals could petition to have their Turkish citizenship reinstated. Fani Rebeka, the daughter of Avram, for example, who had been born in Galata, successfully had her Turkish citizenship reinstated in 1929 following the death of her Russian husband, Oşya Bortman. Fani, it seems, had never left Turkey, but, as was policy in most countries at the time, had acquired her husband's citizenship upon their marriage in 1900.<sup>33</sup> More often, these requests for regaining Turkish citizenship and

<sup>30</sup> Soner Çağaptay, "Citizenship Policies in Interwar Turkey," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 4 (2003), 605-608.

<sup>31</sup> The Cumhuriyet Arşivi holds many cases of denaturalization. Sometimes, over 200 people were denaturalized with a single decree. In such large instances, individuals' names are not recorded in the archival records available to researchers. It was also rare for the records to note the nationalities that emigrants acquired without permission. On Davit Kori kızı Viktoria, see October 8, 1930, Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Kutu Numarası: 14, Dosya Gömleği: 65, Sıra no: 6, Dosya no: 2-238, BCA. On Avram Mulho, see 5/2/1928, Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 1, Yer No: 28.27.4, Dosya: 2-136, sayı: 6529, BCA.

<sup>32</sup> Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Kutu Numarası: 11, Dosya Gömleği: 40, Sıra no: 14, BCA.

<sup>33</sup> Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Kutu Numarası: 7, Dosya Gömleği: 62, Sıra no: 20, Dosya no: 1-161, BCA.

returning to Turkey were not granted—when Leon, the son of Ilya, and several of his friends living in Germany in 1938 asked to reacquire Turkish citizenship in order to leave Germany, their requests were ultimately denied.<sup>34</sup> Such practices would have dire repercussions for Jews of Turkish origins living in areas of Europe that came under the control of Nazi and collaborationist forces during World War II. When their petitions for regaining Turkish citizenship were denied, these stateless individuals had no protection against deportation to death camps (See chapters by Corry Guttstadt and Marc David Baer in this volume).

Turkish policies regarding the citizenship and rights of those deemed minorities had roots in the post-World War I deliberations regarding minority protections. The “Minority Problem”—that is, what place religious, racial, and linguistic minorities would hold in the nationalizing states formed out of the wreckage of empires—loomed large over postwar deliberations and treaties dictating new borders and political structures. By the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, “minority” peoples were defined in ways that deliberately avoided the term “national” with its connotations of claims to self-determination.<sup>35</sup> The minority problem was deemed particularly salient within the ‘war-breeding zone’ of the dismembered Habsburg, Prussian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, and journalists, diplomats, and scholars fervently asserted that European peace and prosperity depended upon adequately settling this problem.<sup>36</sup> For Turkey and other post-Ottoman states and mandates, however, the guarantees of minority protection sought by the Great Powers during the Peace Conference seemed similar to the pretext used by many of the same Great Powers to intervene in Ottoman economic and politics under the guise of the Capitulations.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Turkish officials argued at Lausanne, if minorities were Turkish citizens, and all Turkish citizens had equal rights, what need was there for minority protection?<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 10 0 0, Kutu Numarası: 99, Dosya Gömleği: 640, Sıra no: 18, Dosya no:88, BCA.

<sup>35</sup> Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others; The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xvi.

<sup>36</sup> Tara Zahra, “The ‘Minority Problem’ and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands,” *Contemporary European History* 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 138.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 28-29.

<sup>38</sup> Lerna Ekmekçiöğlü, *Recovering Armenia: The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 94.

The topics covered in the Lausanne Treaty ranged from international borders and control over waterways to the designations of nationality and minority protections. While many other postwar treaties defined “minority” in terms of race, language, and religion, the Lausanne Treaty restricted the term to “non-Muslim nationals” living in Turkey.<sup>39</sup> Articles 37 through 45 of the Lausanne Treaty addressed these non-Muslim nationals specifically, assuring, among other things, that “the Turkish government undertakes to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion,” and that “non-Moslem minorities will enjoy full freedom of movement and of emigration.”<sup>40</sup>

The presence of émigrés abroad, whether those Ottoman subjects who had left prior to the Treaty of Lausanne or those who left after 1923 on Turkish papers, propelled Turkish efforts to fix the boundaries of Turkish citizenship beyond its borders. Article 34 of the Treaty of Lausanne noted that those who “are habitually resident abroad” had two years—later extended to three—to opt for the nationality of one of the Ottoman Empire’s successor states in the “territory of which they are natives, if they belong to the race of the majority of the population of that territory.”<sup>41</sup> Those who did not exercise the “nationality option” ostensibly defaulted to Turkish citizenship, an eventuality that the Turkish state did not always want, and which could leave those migrants unrecognized by any state in a legal limbo.<sup>42</sup>

Turkish officials sought to ascertain the number of individuals who might be able make claims on Turkish citizenship, or those who had acquired other nationalities.<sup>43</sup> In 1926, the Turkish Embassy in Rome requested that the Mexican *Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores* provide the

<sup>39</sup> Yeşim Bayar, “In Pursuit of Homogeneity: The Lausanne Conference, Minorities and the Turkish Nation,” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 1 (2014), 114.

<sup>40</sup> Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923, from *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II* (New York: 1924).

<sup>41</sup> Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923, from *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II* (New York: 1924).

<sup>42</sup> Chris Gratien and Emily K. Pope-Obeda, “Ottoman Migrants, U.S. Deportation Law and Statelessness during the Interwar Era,” *Mashriq and Mahjar* 5, no. 2 (2018): 124-158.

<sup>43</sup> For example, close to 900 people from Turkey acquired Italian nationality in the aftermath of the Treaty of Lausanne, but between 100-150 of these individuals did not complete their actions and could therefore potentially and fraudulently retain Turkish citizenship. See Başveکہâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Kutu Numarası: 8, Dosya Gömleđi: 6, Sıra no: 6, Dosya no:104-27, BCA.

names and number of Turkish citizens currently in Mexico, including those from provinces of the former Ottoman Empire “separated from Turkey since 1914” who had not opted for new nationalities.<sup>44</sup> This request for information was conveyed to the governors of Mexico’s states, who then transmitted it to the municipalities, some of which conducted investigations and reported their results back to Mexico City.

Mehmet Erteğün was not wrong in noting that many of those who Mexican officials would have labeled “*turcos*,” “Turks,” did not have the same understanding of what this term connoted as he did. Throughout Latin America, the appellation “turco” was applied to immigrants hailing from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states as far afield as Morocco. Prior to the economic downturn of the Great Depression, this term carried connotations of business acumen and social undesirability, becoming a pretext for exclusion as Latin American states shifted toward protecting the economic interests of their own nationals. “*Turco*” transcended religion, nationality, citizenship, native language, and ethnicity, resulting in the external and popular grouping of those whose own networks of sociability, economic activity, patronage, and institutional life were far more circumscribed.<sup>45</sup> Complicating matters further was the host states’ imprecision. For example, in a map listing the number of immigrant arrivals into the country between 1857 and 1913, Argentina outlined the borders of the Ottoman Empire to include only territory west and north of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, with the number “130,939” atop this area, even though Ottoman arrivals to Argentina in this period overwhelmingly hailed from the *vilâyets* of Syria, Beirut, and Aleppo, as well as the governorates of Mount Lebanon and Jerusalem.<sup>46</sup>

Mexican officials’ confusion over who precisely might have retained Turkish citizenship was apparent in municipalities’ responses to Turkey’s request for the number and names of such individuals. The municipality of San Pedro, in the state of Coahuila, explained that it had directed its query to several prominent members of the 250-person community of “persons

<sup>44</sup> Subsecretary of the SRE to the Secretary of Gobernación, Mexico City, 11/6/1926, DDG., SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>45</sup> Ignacio Klich and Jeffrey Lesser, “‘Turco’ Immigrants in Latin America,” *The Americas* 53, no 1 (Jul., 1996) 2-4, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Lily Pearl Balloffet, *Argentina in the Global Middle East* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 24.

of Turkish nationality.”<sup>47</sup> These communal leaders had clarified that “we, members of the Syrio-Lebanese community of this city, upon the separation of the provinces from which we originate from the Ottoman Empire, opt to adopt the new nationality that our independence concedes us.”<sup>48</sup> Similar responses came from Cárdenas in San Luís Potosí, and Irapuato, Guanajuato, where the local Syrio-Lebanese man queried explained that “he did not know of anyone who had not inscribed himself with the French Consulate” in Mexico City.<sup>49</sup> Already by 1919, Arabic-speaking Jews had appealed to the French Legation through the auspices of the Monte Sinaí Society in order to attain French protection, an option not available to Jews who originated in Turkey.<sup>50</sup> While reliance on local Syrio-Lebanese communities for information may have yielded accurate numbers, it may have resulted in the undercount of those, particularly Ladino-speaking Jews, who were not embedded into those community networks and were the most likely to retain Turkish nationality.

Indeed, those who originated in what had been Ottoman territories and who opted to retain Turkish citizenship rather than to register with the French Consulate in Mexico City for French protection were overwhelmingly Jewish. While not all municipalities, including those like Tacuba de Morelos in the Federal District, which boasted Mexico’s largest immigrant population, appended names to the archival file, the names of those appended who claimed Turkish nationality were recognizably Jewish.<sup>51</sup> In Saltillo, Coahuila, a city with a large population of formerly Ottoman subjects, the only six individuals who were listed as Turkish had clearly Jewish names.<sup>52</sup> In León, Guanajuato, there were two nuclear families of Jews whose names were provided, and two women of Turkish nationality married to foreigners—one to a Syrio-Lebanese man and one

<sup>47</sup> San Pedro, Coah., 1/5/1927, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>48</sup> San Pedro, Coah., 1/5/1927, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>49</sup> Governor of San Luís Potosí to the Secretary of Gobernación, San Luís Potosí, 12/6/1926, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN; Irapuato, Guanajuato, 12/11/1926, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>50</sup> Shelomo Meyuhas, “La Imigración de nuestros hermanos en México por Shelomo Mehuyas,” *La América*, 8/29/1919, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Tacuba de Morelos, D.F., 12/16/1926, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>52</sup> Secretary of Saltillo to the Secretary of Gobernación, Saltillo, Coahuila, 12/14/1926, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

to a Greek, both of whom were Jewish as well.<sup>53</sup> Of the ninety Turkish nationals living in Veracruz—the Caribbean port of arrival for most immigrants to Mexico originating in Europe and the Mediterranean, and which boasted the country’s largest Jewish population after Mexico City—all but three had recognizably Jewish names. Of these ninety individuals, all but eight had arrived in Mexico after 1921, and two-thirds after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.<sup>54</sup> Jewish emigration from Turkey neither ended with the demise of the Ottoman Empire, nor began with the establishment of Israel in 1948.<sup>55</sup>

While some Turkish Jews, like those whom the Turkish Legation to Mexico sought to track down in 1935, apparently overlooked or disregarded these Turkish laws mandating registration with consulates and against acquiring new citizenships without permission, others paid close attention to these changes in Turkish policy and what that would entail for Turkish Jewish émigrés. The 1930 edition of *Le Guide Sam*, a commercial guide to “the Orient” published in France between 1921 and 1930 by Sam Lévy, who was born in Salonica and left in the wake of the Balkan Wars, and former editor of the Ladino periodical *La Epoka* and the French journal *Journal de Salonique*, included a notice to “Turkish Oriental subjects.” Using the language of subjecthood rather than citizenship, all Turkish subjects who desired to establish themselves in a consular district, the guide notes, were required to present themselves at a Turkish consulate within six months of arrival. They would be inscribed in the registry and receive a certificate of nationality. At that time, their passport—necessary to travel—would be granted or refused. Moreover, the notification continued, “the consuls will refuse their protection to any Turkish subject who does not have their certificate of nationality.”<sup>56</sup>

But the lack of consular representation in Mexico prior to 1934 caused complications for Turkish Jewish citizens who wanted to follow Turkish requirements and sought Turkish protection against persecution. It was

<sup>53</sup> Leon, Guanajuato, 12/13/1926, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>54</sup> Censo General de los Subditos Turcos Residentes en el municipio de Veracruz, DDG, SRE, Turquía, 2/360(496)-1, caja: 14, exp. 12, AGN.

<sup>55</sup> Mexican records only preserve the date of arrival, not when individuals departed from their countries of origin. It is likely that some of those who arrived in Mexico after 1923 had departed from what would become Turkey when that territory was under Ottoman or Interallied authority.

<sup>56</sup> « Avis aux orientaux sujets turcs, » *Le Livre d’Or de l’Orient* (Paris, 1930), 138.

not until April 1934 that Turkey decreed that the US ambassador to Washington would also be responsible for Mexico, and that the Turkish consulate in New York City would be responsible for registering Turkish citizens in Mexico.<sup>57</sup> As the example below of Alberto Farji, a Turkish Jewish citizen living in Culiacán, Sinaloa demonstrates, even for Turkish émigrés who sought to follow Turkish law and attain Turkish consular protection, obstacles existed, compounded both by Turkish and Mexican officials.

Alberto Farji was a businessman of Turkish origins who lived in the Sinaloan capital, where he and a Mexican-born business partner, Ricardo Tena, owned a shop, “El Remate Azul,” which specialized in clothing, silks, and haberdashery. Like other immigrants, relatives of his also lived in Culiacán, where a cousin, A. R. Levy Farji, had a clothing company called the “Casa Azul.”<sup>58</sup> As Mexico experienced rising xenophobia over the course of the Great Depression and populist anti-immigrant groups arose that targeted individuals on religious and racial lines under the guise of economics, Farji complained repeatedly that he was being charged unfairly high taxes as a foreigner, despite having a Mexican business partner. The general treasurer of the state, Farji alleged, had been influenced by the vehemently anti-immigrant *Comité Pro-Raza*, and was, he believed, attempting to increase his taxes unconstitutionally as a means of getting him to leave voluntarily, since Farji had done nothing to warrant deportation. Farji threatened to contact the minister of Turkey in Washington, D.C. should the treasurer not behave legally. Ultimately, a year after Farji’s initial complaint, national officials agreed with him.<sup>59</sup>

This was not Farji’s first involvement with Mexican state authorities, nor attempt to contact representatives of Turkey. Several years earlier, in 1931, Farji had written Mexican officials to ask if the Republic of Turkey had a consulate in Mexico City, and requested its address should it exist. If there was no such consulate, he continued, would the Foreign Ministry “be so kind as to inform me who protects the interests of the Turkish Republic?”<sup>60</sup> He received a response ten days later that “the Republic of Turkey currently has no accredited consular representation in Mexico and

<sup>57</sup> Başvekâlet, Fon no: 30 18 1 2, Kutu Numarası: 43, Dosya Gömleği: 17, Sıra no: 11, Dosya no:107-77

<sup>58</sup> IV-305-57, SRE.

<sup>59</sup> Dir. Gral. de Gob., Sria. de Relaciones Exteriores, Turquía, 2/367(21)-1, caja 7, exp. 33, AGN; Dir. Gral. de Gob., 2/367(496)/10031, AGN.

<sup>60</sup> Alberto I. Farji to the Minister of Foreign Relations, 11/16/1931, IV-333-54, SRE.

its affairs are not under the charge of any friendly nation's diplomatic or consular mission."<sup>61</sup> A year later, Farji again reached out to get his Turkish birth certificate translated into Spanish and a certification that this translation was accurate, both necessary for certain activities within Mexico. A representative from the Mexican Foreign Ministry responded that there was no one in his office who could establish that the certificate that Farji sent in had been issued in accordance with Turkish law. Moreover, there were no official translators of the Turkish language. He suggested that Farji send his documents to the Turkish Embassy in Washington, D.C. to certify their legality and their translation. The signature of the Turkish ambassador should then be verified by the American government, to be sent to the Mexican Embassy in Washington, D.C., whereupon the signature of the American official could be legalized. Only then would Farji's Turkish birth certificate and its Spanish translation be considered legal within Mexico.<sup>62</sup> Turkish-Jewish interactions clearly involved many other parties.

## CONCLUSION

The emigration of Jews from the Ottoman Empire continued during the period of the armistice and throughout the first decades of the Turkish Republic. Turkish Jews who remained within Turkey during this period contended with increasing Turkification efforts that focused on cultural and linguistic assimilation. Others chose to emigrate to Europe and the Americas in response to policies that marginalized Jews and other religious minorities from certain economic realms. Although World War I is often seen as heralding the dawn of the Passport Age, passport usage was not yet ubiquitous, and the relationship between documentation and citizenship was still being worked out. Some émigrés had traveled on Ottoman passports, others on Turkish passports, still others with papers issued by Interallied officials, and yet others with other forms of identity documents. At the same time, many acquired additional citizenships while continuing to travel on Turkish passports. In doing so, these migrants provoked Turkish officials to articulate the boundaries of Turkish citizenship and nationality in ways that at times overlapped and at times diverged from the ways in which "Turkishness" was mapped onto Jews still resident in

<sup>61</sup> Eduardo Villaseñor to Alberto Farji, 11/26/1931, *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> IV-450-107, SRE.

Turkey. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Turkey passed a number of laws to denaturalize emigrants who did not register with Turkish consulates abroad; who acquired new nationalities; and who had not participated in the National Struggle. But ascertaining the citizenships and habits of émigrés, including those eligible for denaturalization, required the cooperation of the officials of other states whose understandings of who was a Turk did not correspond with those of Turkish officials. In speaking of Turkish-Jewish entanglements, the threads connecting Turkish-Jewish emigrants with Turkey created a complex web that, in effect, spanned the world and involved far more than Turkish Jews and Turkish officials. In untangling these threads, we learn not only about Turkish Jews abroad, and how they fit—or did not—within their new locales, but also about the Turkish government's attitudes towards emigrants, which casts light on their views of Jews still within the boundaries of the Turkish state, though not clearly part of the Turkish nation.

# “The Ties that Bind Us to Turkey”: The Turkish Jewish Diaspora in Europe and Its Relations with the “Home Country”

*Corry Guttstadt*

Between 25,000 and 30,000 Turkish Jews were living in Europe during the interwar period. In several European countries, Turkish Jews constituted the first generation of “Turkish immigrants.” They established Turkish-Jewish communities, charities, religious and cultural organizations, publications in their new countries of residence, and were present in the local economy and cultural life. Their history is an important chapter in the broader history of Turkey and Turkey’s Jews.

Although most of the Jews who left Turkey in the interwar years would never return, many emigrants continued to feel attached to their home country and maintained a positive image of Turkey. However, these sentiments often were not mirrored by the state, especially during World War II and the Holocaust. While facing Nazi persecution, Turkish Jews depended on the protection of their home country. Instead, many of them

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experienced rejection and abandonment. For the Turkish Jews, this was a profound disappointment. By drawing on contemporary publications, letters, testimonies, and memoirs by Turkish Jews in Europe, this chapter seeks to retrace the Turkish Jewish diaspora's relationship with and expectations for Turkey.

## EMIGRATION

For over four centuries, the Ottoman Empire was a destination for Jewish immigration from across Europe. Both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews fled persecution in Spain, Central Europe and Russia to Ottoman lands. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Italy's unification precipitated the economic decline of Livorno, where many Jews resided. As a result, many local Jews left for the Ottoman Empire. Anti-Jewish acts of violence, such as the Kishinev Pogroms (1903–1905), as well as ongoing Zionist immigration brought tens of thousands of Jews to the Ottoman Empire in its final decades.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Jews also began to emigrate out of the Ottoman Empire to various cities in Europe and the Americas. Though this first generation of emigrants, chiefly comprised of prosperous merchants, was small in number, they were to play an important role in founding Turkish-Jewish communities in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and some other countries in the first decades of the twentieth century. Among these pioneers were the Cori brothers from Smyrna, who settled in Hamburg; the Nathan brothers from Bursa, who would become famous with their luxury fashion store for women, *A la ville de Londres*, in Ostend; and Nissim Rozanes from Istanbul, who opened a jewelry store in Paris (see Fig. 5.1 here).

Several factors contributed to the increase in Jewish emigration from the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the twentieth century. Most significant among them were the advances in communication and transportation technologies; the dissemination of Western-style education among Jewish communities through the efforts of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and

<sup>1</sup>Karpat estimates that 120,000 Jews immigrated to the Ottoman Empire between 1862 and 1914. Although this figure may be too high, it gives us an idea of the dimensions of immigration during this period. Kemal H. Karpat, "Jewish Population Movements in the Ottoman Empire, 1862–1914", in *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Avigdor Levy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 411.

**Fig. 5.1** Advertisement for the Jewelry store of Nissim Rozanes, founder of the *Association culturelle orientale israélite de Paris* in Paris. (Le Guide Sam, 1926)



*Hilfsverein*<sup>2</sup> networks, as well as schools run by several Christian denominations. Another driving force was the poverty experienced by a majority of the Jews, mentioned time and again in accounts by Turkish Jews and documented in reports produced by teachers at the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU).

Another group of Ottoman Jews that arrived in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century were students who came to pursue their education at universities in Paris, Geneva, Berlin, among other major cities. Some of these student-émigrés had close contacts with other Ottoman intellectual and political elites who had escaped the authoritarian rule of Abdülhamid II (r.1876–1909) and began forming opposition groups in exile that would collectively be known as “the Young Turks.”

In July 1908, the Young Turk Revolution forced Abdülhamid II to restore the constitution. Throughout the empire, members of various religious or ethnic groups rejoiced at the promise of freedom, equality, and fraternity, including a majority of Ottoman Jews. However, the introduction of mandatory military service in 1909 prompted a wave of emigration

<sup>2</sup>By 1913, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), founded in Paris in 1860 by Jewish philanthropists, had established 115 schools in the Ottoman Empire. In 1901, German Jews founded the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden*, which opened its own schools. Quite a few Jewish children were also enrolled in European schools, which were confessional for the most part.

among young Jewish men.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, the Italo-Turkish War laid the foundation for eleven consecutive years of military conflict for the Ottoman Empire, largely destroying the Jewish communities in Western Anatolia and Thrace. Cities with significant Jewish communities such as Edirne changed hands up to four times during this period, while the devastation caused by the Balkan Wars led to mass emigration of young Jews.<sup>4</sup> Salonica, the only city in Europe where Jews comprised the majority of the population, fell to Greece in 1912, at the end of the first Balkan War.

During World War I, the Jews of the Ottoman Empire suffered as did the rest of the population. Not only did they die while serving in combat, but they also died of starvation as civilians, as described by Nissim Benezra.<sup>5</sup> In the subsequent Greco-Turkish War, Jews fell victim to both the atrocities committed by Greek troops and the Turkish acts of revenge that followed.<sup>6</sup> The communities in the Aegean region were decimated, and an overwhelming majority of Jews lost all of their property, becoming reliant on aid provided by Jewish charities.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, the main wave of Jewish emigration from Turkey occurred after the founding of the Turkish Republic and can be attributed to the Turkish Republic's anti-minority policies. Non-Muslim communities,

<sup>3</sup>In contrast to widespread claims by Turkish nationalists that non-Muslims generally avoided military service, it must be emphasized that draft evasion and desertion was common among all religious and ethnic groups.

Elke Hartmann, *Die Reichweite des Staates—Wehrpflicht und moderne Staatlichkeit im Osmanischen Reich 1869–1910* (Paderborn 2013), 150–198.

Indeed, Jews also did their military service and fought in all wars from 1911 onwards.

Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler* (Istanbul 1998), 40.

This is confirmed by memoirs of Turkish Jews, which mention their ancestors' war experiences and fallen family members.

Nissim Benezra, *Une enfance Juive à Istanbul* (Istanbul 1996), 11; Erol Haker, *Bir Zamanlar Kırklareli'de Yahudiler Yaşardı* (Istanbul, 2002) 314.

<sup>4</sup>Erol Haker quotes the June 1914 issue of *La Boz de Verdad*, according to which seventy-five percent of Jewish youth from Kırklareli emigrate to the US.

Haker, *Bir Zamanlar*, 299.

<sup>5</sup>Nissim Benezra dedicates his memoir “to the victims of the famine that raged in the Ottoman capital during World War I,” which includes his relatives. Benezra, *Une enfance Juive*.

<sup>6</sup>A vivid description can be found in the autobiography of the Aydın-born Maurice Lévy. Maurice Deunailles, *La Mare Aux Tortues—Souvenirs d'un Sepharade du Levant* (L'Harmattan, 2013), 33–57.

<sup>7</sup>Henri Nahum, *Juifs de Smyrne-XIXe-XXe Siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1997) 170f, 183f.; Bali, 1999, p. 35f).

whose status as protected minorities had been internationally mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, were subjected to many constraints, including restrictions on their freedom of movement and their right to form civic associations. They also faced legal hurdles to exercising autonomy in primary education and family law, rights they had previously enjoyed. Work restrictions against non-Muslims had particularly severe effects. A law on civil service (*memurin kanunu*) passed in 1926 led to the dismissal of non-Muslims working in the public sector. Subsequently, thousands of Jews left the country.<sup>8</sup> Non-Muslims were gradually ousted from liberal professions via other measures as well. For a number of professions (pharmacists, lawyers, stockbrokers, etc.), the accreditation requirements were revised or conditions were imposed that impeded or prevented non-Muslims from entering them.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the prevalence of an aggressive nationalist atmosphere was perceived as alarming by many Jews. Best known is the *Vatandaş Türkçe konuş!* (Citizen, speak Turkish!) campaign that served as a policy to promote discrimination against and intimidation of linguistic minorities. Myriad national public holidays contributed to a heated atmosphere defined by persistent nationalist tension and was viewed as a threat by many Jews.<sup>10</sup> In addition to these sociopolitical motives for emigration, devastation wrought by natural disasters like earthquakes and fires, as well as personal reasons like marriage or escape from an undesired arranged marriage pushed Jews to leave Turkey.

This mass migration represents a deep rupture in the history of Turkish Jews. In the first ten to fifteen years after the founding of the Turkish Republic, Jewish communities in many cities shrank to half—in some cases even to a third of their former size.<sup>11</sup> According to the 1914

<sup>8</sup>This law concerned civil service as a whole, including blue-collar jobs such as docker or tram driver. Many descendants of Turkish Jews in France or Italy relate in their accounts that their parents had lost such jobs and left Turkey because of this. For more on the exclusion of non-Muslims from civil service, see Rafat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (Istanbul 1999), 206–227.

<sup>9</sup>Ofiypresse (Office Israélite de Presse de Documentation), Brussels, No. 27 of November 1945 refers to the situation as a “*numerus clausus*” against members of minorities.

<sup>10</sup>Foreign diplomats took note of the fear among Jews that “their turn will come after the Turks have finished with the Greeks and Armenians.” Admiral M. L. Bristol, U.S. High Commissioner to Turkey, in a report of December 1, 1923, NARA, MD, M353, reel 48, document No. 867.4016/967.

<sup>11</sup>Because the timelines of wars, expulsions, and the de facto dissolution of the Ottoman Empire overlap during this period, it is practically impossible to determine how many people died and how many emigrated.

Ottoman population census, about 130,000 Jews lived in the territory of what was to become the Republic of Turkey. In the period immediately after World War I, Avner Levi estimates a total population of 150,000 to 200,000 Jews in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> In the first census conducted by the Turkish Republic in 1927, only 81,872 people were tallied as Jewish. Jewish emigration from Turkey would continue in the following years. By the next census in 1935, the number of Jews had once again fallen to 78,730, while the total population of Turkey had grown by about eighteen percent. The extent and significance of the Jewish exodus from Turkey is illustrated by the fact that people who had devoted their entire lives to the welfare of the Jewish community also left the country, along with all their financial and intellectual resources. Among them were individuals such as Nessim Bayraktar Levi from Izmir, a prosperous merchant and builder of the famous *Asansör*, an elevator that connects the coastal strip of Izmir's Karataş district with the hillside, where several synagogues and prayer rooms were located. The *Asansör* is still a landmark of Izmir. Levi was also an important financier of numerous religious and charitable Jewish institutions in the city. He emigrated as early as 1915 and later died in Lyon. Even more significantly, David Fresco, publisher and editor-in-chief of the Jewish newspaper *El Tiempo* from 1872 to 1930, who had always vehemently advocated for the assimilation of Jews into Turkish society, also left Turkey. He died in Nice in 1933.

### SETTLING IN EUROPE

Compared to the millions of people of Turkish origin, who today make up some part of the population of almost all western and central European countries, the 25,000–30,000 Turkish Jews who immigrated there is negligibly small. They were also significantly smaller in number than the Jewish migrants from eastern Europe. And yet, the majority of immigrants from Turkey in Europe at the time were Jews. Michel Roblin, who examines the structure of the Jewish population in France, estimates the percentage of Jews among the immigrants from Turkey in Paris for the period before the World War II at seventy-five percent. Maurice Moch estimates

<sup>12</sup> Avner Levi, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Yahudiler* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1998), 18.

this figure at around fifty percent.<sup>13</sup> In Germany, Jews also made up the majority of immigrants from Turkey until 1933.

At the same time, Europe was only one destination for migration. In the period between 1881 and 1924, between 30,000 and 50,000 Ottoman Jews emigrated from the Empire and its successor states to the United States and another 10,000 to Latin America.<sup>14</sup> The emigration of Ottoman or Turkish Jews occurred in parallel to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, there were many people that came to Europe as ‘Ottoman subjects,’ whose birthplaces would subsequently land within various successor states like Greece, Bulgaria, or Palestine. The exact number of Turkish Jewish immigrants in Europe is not clear, with estimates ranging from 25,000 to 50,000. Furthermore, figures in various publications and demographic statistics can barely be compared with one another, given that they rely on divergent criteria.<sup>15</sup> Due to France’s liberal naturalization policy in comparison to other countries at the time, many of the immigrants were able to obtain French citizenship, and children born in France were granted the right to French nationality at birth. On the other hand, in countries such as Germany and Austria, the children and even the grandchildren of immigrants remained “Turks.” In this article, however, we are not interested in formal citizenship, but rather in those Jewish migrants that were either born in Turkey or in the territories of the Ottoman Empire that would become part of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, or those who had deliberately opted for Turkish citizenship.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Roblin, *Les Juifs de Paris* (Paris: Editions A. et J. Picard, 1952) 87; Maurice Moch, ‘Les étrangers de religion juive en France’ (unpublished thesis, Lyon, 1942), 10 (University of Lyon).

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Papo puts the number of Ottoman-Jewish immigrants in the United States at 30,000. Naar estimates 60,000.

Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America* (San Jose: Pelé Yoetz Books, 1987), 43.

Devin E. Naar, ““Turkinos” beyond the Empire: Ottoman Jews in America, 1893 to 1924”, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 105, no. 2 (2015): 174.

For more on Ottoman Jewish migration to Mexico, see Devi Mays Forging Ties, *Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora*. Stanford, 2020, as well as her chapter in this volume.

<sup>15</sup> In France, for example, no information on religion was collected in censuses. Persons naturalized in their new home countries were of course no longer registered as “Turks” in state censuses. The estimates made by Sephardi publications as well as by research literature on Sephardi people usually refer to immigrants from the entire region of the Balkans and the Levant.

In Europe, France was by far the most important destination for Turkish Jewish immigration. Due to their education at the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (henceforth AIU) schools, a significant number of Ottoman Jews were heavily oriented both linguistically and culturally towards France.<sup>16</sup> “I did not feel like I was going abroad, but, on the contrary, I felt like I finally arrived to my cultural homeland,” said one of the immigrants of the time.<sup>17</sup> The AIU also offered its graduates the opportunity to undergo teacher training at its *École Normale Israélite Orientale* (henceforth ENIO) in Paris. Upon completion of the training, the participants were typically required to teach at an *Alliance* school in an “oriental” country (defined as The Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, the Levant, and the Maghreb). However, compliance with this obligation was not always strictly monitored. Thus, the *Alliance* offered an opportunity for young people from poorer backgrounds and young Jewish women to emigrate to France independent of their families. Furthermore, as early as the nineteenth century, many Jews in the Ottoman Empire had acquired French citizenship and, in smaller numbers, citizenships of other states such as Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, and Italy, or had been granted protégé status by one of the said countries.<sup>18</sup> With the outbreak of World War I, these individuals were classified as enemy aliens and expelled from the Ottoman Empire, with most of them leaving for France.<sup>19</sup>

After World War I, France encouraged immigration in order to compensate for the colossal population loss the country had suffered during the war. Some of the new arrivals in Marseille were recruited to work upon

<sup>16</sup>In the years before World War I, more than thirty-five percent of all Jewish school-age youth in the Ottoman Empire attended an AIU school. On the influence of the AIU, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>17</sup>Sarah L, one of the Turkish-Jewish immigrants in France (in an interview with the author, March 2004).

<sup>18</sup>Regarding the variety of citizenships held by Ottoman/Turkish Jews and its consequences, see Guttstadt 2019. “Protégés par les « pays d’origine » ?—La nationalité: atout ou fatalité”, in Muestras Dezaparesidos, *Mémorial des Judéo Espagnols déportés de France*. Paris, 2019, pp. 183–205, here pp. 187–190.

<sup>19</sup>On arrival, Ottoman citizens in Great Britain and France were detained. At the same time, France accorded Ottoman Jews a special status as “Israélites du Levant,” which spared them, along with Ottoman Christians, from deportation or internment.

Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams—European Citizenship, Sephardi Jews, and the Ottoman Twentieth Century* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2016) 73f.

disembarking from the ship, as Jo Amiel recalls: “My father was a big guy, very strong; as soon as he arrived to Marseille he was hired on the spot on the docks.”<sup>20</sup> The liberal immigration policy during the 1920s also made it relatively easy for poorer Turkish Jews to enter the country.

A further factor responsible for the increasing immigration numbers in France was the curtailment of immigration to the US in the mid-1920s. While the population of Ottoman Jews in France prior to World War I is estimated at 5000–6000.<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s, this number rose to 20,000–25,000.<sup>22</sup> The overwhelming majority lived in Paris, while Marseille and Lyon boasted several thousand each.<sup>23</sup> All in all, Jews from Turkey settled throughout France, from Lille in the northeast, to Biarritz in the southwest, and even in small localities. Another 5000 Turkish Jews were scattered across Italy, Belgium, Germany (with about 1000 per country), Switzerland and Austria (500 each), and the Netherlands (250).<sup>24</sup>

Not only were they geographically dispersed, but they were also spread across different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds: from bankers like the famous Camondo family, to the thousands of street vendors. Due to their cultural and linguistic traditions, poorer immigrants stood out more, making of them fascinating object of study for both sociological research and nostalgia.<sup>25</sup> However, thousands of those immigrants only stood out from their neighbors by attending a particular synagogue. In other respects, they had largely assimilated to their country of residence.

<sup>20</sup> Testimony of Jo (Joseph) Amiel, collected by Muestros Dezapresidos. Almost identical statements exist in other testimonies. Volunteers from the association *Muestros Dezapresidos* in France conducted about 90 interviews between 2008 and 2016 with surviving Sephardic Jews in France, most of whom were from Turkey. The testimonies of the interviewees were transcribed and can be consulted in the archives of the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris.

<sup>21</sup> Lize Tiano, ‘*L’immigration et l’installation en France des juifs grecs et des juifs turcs avant la second guerre mondiale*’ (master’s thesis, University of Paris X, 1981), 57); Ralph Schor, *Histoire de l’immigration en France de la fin du XIXe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: A. Colin, 1996), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Maurice Moch, ‘Les étrangers de religion’ (unpublished thesis, Lyon, 1942) 10.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the community of Marseille, see Xavier Rothéa, *Les Judéo-Espagnols à Marseille Dans La Première Moitié du XXe Siècle: De L’espoir à la Catastrophe* (Paris, Éditions Petra, 2019). For more on Lyon, see Sylvie Altar, *Entre Juif à Lyon et ses Alentours 1940–1944* (Paris: Éditions Tiresias 2019).

<sup>24</sup> Figures based on demographic statistics, population registers, and literature regarding individual countries. For more details, see Corry Guttstadt, *Die Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust* (Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2008), 109–156.

<sup>25</sup> Annie Benveniste, *Le Bosphore à la Roquette: la communauté judéo-espagnol à Paris (1914–1940)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989).

The advertisements and address lists in the *Guide Sam*, a yearbook for France's trade with the Levant published from 1922 to 1930, convey the range of professional and scientific activities exercised by the immigrants, many of whom also worked as lawyers, doctors or pursued other liberal professions.<sup>26</sup>

Especially in France, we encounter Jews from the Ottoman Empire or Turkey who were involved in the arts, such as the musicologist Alberto Hemsî; the painter and intellectual Fernando Gerassi; and the musician Ray Ventura, whose orchestra *Ray Ventura et ses collégiens* was one of the most popular at the time.

### BUILDING COMMUNITIES

In Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, and other cities with existing Portuguese Sephardic communities, the Ottoman/Turkish-Jewish newcomers integrated and took on various roles. For example, in Hamburg, Raphael Cori and David Benezra joined the community council. Elsewhere, they founded their own congregations. The *Israelitisch-Sephardischer Verein zu Berlin e.V.* in Berlin was established as early as 1905, with most of its founding members being carpet-dealers just like the 'first generation' of Turkish Jewish immigrants in Brussels, Milan, and Amsterdam. In Paris, the *Association culturelle orientale israélite de Paris* was founded in 1909 by the aforementioned Nissim Rozanes. In 1913, a rabbi was requested through the rabbinate in Turkey. While the more affluent Ottoman Jews, who had been residing in Paris for some time, frequented the Portuguese Sephardic synagogue on the Rue Buffault, the *Association culturelle orientale* was located on the Rue Popincourt in the working-class 11th arrondissement, where many of the less well-off newcomers had settled. The association saw itself explicitly as a point of call for Ottoman Jewish immigrants in Paris. In accordance with its bylaws, the association would cover the costs of repatriation, if necessary, and "provide young people of Ottoman nationality with grants to continue their education in Paris."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The address directory of the 1930 edition of *Le Guide Sam* just for France contains 133 pages with a total of more than 5000 entries of companies or self-employed persons. French, Armenian or Greek names comprise a small portion of these. About eighty percent—about 4000 entries—were Sephardic names. This sheds light on the large percentage of self-employed individuals among the Ottoman/Turkish immigrants.

<sup>27</sup> *Archives de l'Association consistoriale israélite de Paris*, B 85, 6/3/1909, quoted from Annie Benveniste, *Le Bosphore à la Roquette: la communauté judéo-espagnol à Paris (1914–1940)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989), 74.



**Fig. 5.2** In 1909 Jewish immigrants from the Ottoman Empire—among them Moïse Benjacar and Nissim Meyohass founded a solidarity association in Lyon, the *429e Société ottomane de secours mutuel* (1920s, courtesy of Jacques Elmalek)

In 1909 Nissim Meyohas, who had arrived to Lyon from Istanbul a few years earlier with his family, founded the *429e Société ottomane de secours mutuel* as a solidarity association for Ottoman-Jewish immigrants (see Fig. 5.2).<sup>28</sup> After World War I, the community grew considerably. In 1926, it appointed the Istanbul-born rabbi Léon Youda Moël.<sup>29</sup> In Brussels, the Ottoman Turkish immigrants started to hold their own Sephardic prayer

<sup>28</sup> For the community in Lyon, see Sylvie Altar, *Etre Juif à Lyon et ses Alentours 1940–1944* (Paris: Éditions Tiresias, 2019). Nissim Meyohas was deported in July 1944 on one of the last deportation trains that left France for Auschwitz. For a short biography of Meyohas see *Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France* (Paris: Muestros Dezaparesidos, 2019), 624.

<sup>29</sup> Léon Youda Moël was deported in March 1944 to Auschwitz and subsequently murdered. For a short biography, see *Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France* (Paris: Muestros Dezaparesidos, 2019), 609.

service by 1913.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, in Geneva, Marseille, and other cities, Ottoman Sephardi congregations and religious associations started to come into existence.

Prior to World War I, most of these associations were relatively small, but the wave of newcomers from Turkey (and other former parts of the Ottoman Empire) during the 1920s led to their significant growth. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkish-Jewish immigrant communities invited rabbis from Turkey, set up Talmud Torah schools to provide religious education for children, and founded cultural and charity organizations. In Berlin, Lyon and Paris, new buildings were acquired and repurposed as synagogues. In many other cities like Nice, Toulon, Toulouse, Nîmes, and others, new Sephardi communities emerged, with Jews from Turkey comprising their majorities. It is fair to say that in many European cities during the interwar period, the newly emerging Sephardi communities and associations were built by Jews from Turkey.

### BOND WITH TURKEY

Established in the eighteenth century, the *Türkisch-israelitische Gemeinde zu Wien* in Vienna, the sole congregation to contain the word “Turkish” in its name, had a much longer history than the other congregations mentioned above.<sup>31</sup> Due to its constituents’ position as Ottoman subjects, thus regulated by treaties between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, these “Turkish Jews” gained the right to reside in Vienna and practice their religion at a time when Jews in Austria were still subject to severe restrictions. Hence, the community’s close ties with the Ottoman Empire were part of its identity. This special connection found expression, for example, in a special annual celebration at the synagogue in honor of the sultan’s birthday and in a huge portrait of the sultan that hung in the synagogue’s hallway across from a portrait of the Austrian emperor. Although the community lost its importance when the regime in Turkey changed, it sustained its close ties with the state, shifting its bond from the Ottoman

<sup>30</sup>For more on the community in Brussels, see Rivka Cohen, *Mon Enfance Sépharade* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).

<sup>31</sup>For the history of the community, see Ruth Burnstyn, “Die Geschichte der Türkisch-Spaniolischen Juden im Habsburgerreich” in *Ist jetzt hier die wahre Heimat?: Ostjüdische Einwanderung nach Wien*, ed. Peter Bettelheim and Michael Ley (Vienna: Picus, 1993), 17–66.

sultans over to the new republic.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the first generation of Ottoman Jewish immigrants in other countries such as Germany or Italy, many of whom were merchants of oriental goods, such as carpets, tobacco, or other raw products, also maintained close ties with official Turkish representatives.

In Paris on August 4, 1908, just ten days after the Young Turk revolution, a group of Ottoman subjects held a public rally in support of the revolution and the new government in Istanbul. This demonstration was organized by Salih Gourджи, a young Jew from Istanbul, who had come to Paris to study law. Three weeks later, the first issue of *La Turquie Nouvelle* (August 1908 to September 1909) was published in Paris. In a subheading, the paper claimed to be a “mouthpiece for the defense of the Ottoman Empire’s general interests,” and so it is remarkable that most of its editors and authors were Ottoman Jews. Salih Gourджи was its publisher and editor-in-chief, and among its authors, we can count Victor Faraggi, a young lawyer and fellow student of Gourджи; Albert Fua, originally from Salonica, an early member of the Young Turk movement, and writer for their official paper *Meşveret*, to name a few.

*La Turquie Nouvelle* was clearly not a “Turkish Jewish newspaper.” Politically speaking, the paper was supportive of the liberal wing of the Young Turks, which advocated for an equitable coexistence of the various ethnic and religious groups in the Ottoman Empire. Initially, however, there were also close contacts with leading representatives of the nationalist wing, which had quickly taken charge of the Young Turks.<sup>33</sup> It was published for a mere fifteen months and was by no means the voice of the

<sup>32</sup>The suggestion of closer ties with Spain, advocated by some members, was met with strong protest within the community.

Ruth Burnstyn, “Die Geschichte der Türkisch-Spaniolischen Juden im Habsburgerreich” in *Ist jetzt hier die »wahre Heimat?: Ostjüdische Einwanderung nach Wien*, ed. Peter Bettelheim and Michael Ley (Vienna: Picus, 1993), 52.

<sup>33</sup>Dr. Nazim, one of the leading figures of the Young Turk Committee *İttihat ve Terakki*, was invited to Gourджи’s engagement party. For the political orientation of the journal, see Dumont, 1988. *Salih Gourджи returned to Istanbul in 1909, where he founded the Osmanlı Telgraf Ajansı*, until he fell out with the İttihad government over the state’s siding with the Germans in 1914 during World War I. His daughter became one of France’s most famous journalists under the name Françoise Giroud. Her sister, Djenane Gourджи, was involved in the resistance during the German occupation of France and was deported to the Ravensbrück concentration camp. Regarding the Gourджи family, see Corry Guttstadt, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verfolgung Migrationsgeschichten türkischer Juden im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Hamburg: Association A, 2021).

Ottoman Jewish immigrants in France. Nevertheless, the ideals espoused in its print, enthusiasm for the ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution as a paradigm for the developments in Turkey, and advocacy for friendship between Turkey and France were recurring themes in later publications by Europe-based Turkish, formerly Ottoman, Jews.

One example is the aforementioned *Le Guide Sam* yearbook, first published in 1923, which lobbied “for France’s economic expansion in the Levant,” according to its title. Aside from practical information, it also contained numerous substantive articles on developments in the individual countries of the Levant, with particular attention to Turkey. Since every volume contains hundreds of advertisements for businesses run by Turkish Jews in France and thousands of addresses of individuals in this community, it can be assumed that the *Guide Sam* was widely circulated among Turkish Jews in Europe. Sam Lévy, its publisher, was born and raised in Salonika, where he published the city’s most important newspapers, *La Epoca* and the *Journal de Salonique*, between 1898 and 1911, following in his father’s footsteps.<sup>34</sup> In a July 1908 issue of the *Journal de Salonique*, he enthusiastically applauded the Young Turk revolution with the headline “*Le plus beau rêve réalisé*” (The most beautiful dream that came true)<sup>35</sup> only to denounce the *İttihat ve Terakki* Committee’s “misdeeds” a few years later, which, according to Levy, had evolved into a dictatorship with leaders “comparable to the likes of Robespierre and Napoleon.”<sup>36</sup> As of its launch in 1923, *Le Guide Sam* provided in-depth and exceedingly positive coverage of the developments in the “new Turkey” every year. In a thorough article published in the 1924 edition, the author—Sam Lévy himself—emphasizes that it is not a question of a “renewed Turkey” that was merely patched up, but rather of an altogether “New Turkey.” Lévy even openly defends Turkish nationalism as follows:

Well, let’s talk a little, very freely, about nationalism. Yes, the Turks raise their heads (...) they even want to jealously protect their privileges. What is so extraordinary about that? Let the European people who claim to be less

<sup>34</sup> For more on Sam Lévy, see Guillon, 2010; and Abrevaya Stein 2019, pp. 37–46, 78–81, 218–226.

<sup>35</sup> Joëlle Dalègre “‘Le plus beau rêve réalisé’—Le Journal de Salonique et les Jeunes-Turcs, 1er Juillet 1908–30 Juin 1909 ” in *Cahiers Balkaniques* 40, (2012), accessed March 20, 2020, <https://journals.openedition.org/ceb/1062>.

<sup>36</sup> The subtitle of the book *Le déclin du Croissant* by Sam Lévy is “Les méfaits du Comité Union et Progrès” (The Misdeeds of the *İttihad ve Terakki* Committee).

particular in this regard throw the first stone. [...] The old Turkey is a thing of the past, while the new one only desires to live freely and honestly, without resentment towards anybody.<sup>37</sup>

Following issues also included admiring reports about the reforms in Turkey and about Mustafa Kemal as its leader. One issue goes as far as publishing an anthem to the newly founded Turkish aviation company.

In the 1929 edition, however, a long essay written by Sam Lévy in the form of a literary narrative addressed the issue of Jews' attachment to Turkey as its central theme: "The Jews of Turkey have always been deeply attached to their country and have rendered great services to it," only to deplore in ten clearly worded points the Jews' disappointment with the unrealized social equality, their exclusion from public office, and with the defamations targeting them in Turkey in the same essay. Nevertheless, the article concluded with a pledge of loyalty to Atatürk and to Turkey.<sup>38</sup> In the next edition, Albert Fua articulated a similar critique of the new Turkey's policy toward minorities, the denial of equality, and the polemics prevalent in Turkish public life that vilified non-Muslims as exploiting the Ottoman Empire throughout its history.<sup>39</sup> Fua, who had opted for and retained Turkish citizenship as a Salonician, also emphasized his attachment to Turkey and its people, "that [have] monopolized all of my affection and my patriotic love." Levy and Fua's bitter disappointment in Turkey's nationalist and anti-minority policies seemed to be rooted in their strong attachment to the country.

Another journal that helps us understand Turkish Jews' views on their country of origin is *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, appearing in Paris from 1932 to 1940 with a total of seventy-two issues and published by the *Union Universelle des Communautés Sépharadites*, which committed itself to the preservation and revival of Sephardic culture and heritage. Thus, the periodical was not a Turkish-Jewish journal. Rather, it claimed to deal with Sephardic issues universally. However, its editorial staff was predominantly composed of Turkish Jews: Ovadia Camly from Istanbul<sup>40</sup> was its editor-in-chief; Abraham Navon from Edirne and director of the *Alliance's* teacher school ENIO in Paris, was the arts and culture section editor.

<sup>37</sup> Sam Lévy, 'La Nouvelle Turquie,' *Le Guide Sam*, 1924, 9–23.

<sup>38</sup> Sam Lévy, 'Touraniens et Semites,' *Le Guide Sam*, 1929, 13–21.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Fua, 'Sur l'avenir de la Turquie,' *Le Guide Sam*, 1930, 759–763.

<sup>40</sup> He was born in (then Ottoman) Hebron to parents from Istanbul and later moved back to Istanbul for his rabbinical education.

Other regular contributors to the journal included Edirne-born Robert Mitrani, who had studied law in Istanbul; Nissim Ovadia, likewise from Edirne, who had been the chief rabbi of the Sephardic community of Paris since 1929; Nissim Benezra from Istanbul; and Elie Eskenazi, whose father had been a rabbi in Ortaköy.

The magazine covered topics pertaining to Jewish, particularly Sephardi Jewish, history, as well as reports on political developments in countries with large Sephardi communities. However, advertisements for and reports about regional events in separate Sephardi communities in France, up to and including graduation ceremonies and dance parties, suggest that the readership of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* was primarily comprised of Sephardim living in France, who, for the most part, immigrated from Turkey. Despite its readership demographics and the imposing number of writers originally from Turkey who worked for the journal, *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* contained relatively little coverage of developments in Turkey itself. However, whenever reports about Turkey appeared, they were very positive.

The only author who expressed his concerns about the situation of Jews in Turkey was Avram Navon, who, as the director of *ENIO*, had detailed information on developments in the country from the regular reports he received from the AIU teachers there. In the final installment of an article series published in 1933 under the title “Grandeur, décadence et renaissance du judaïsme sépharadi” (Greatness, Decadence and Revival of Sephardic Judaism) in which Navon traces the history of the Sephardim through the centuries, he wrote:

(...), a narrow nationalism holds the Jews responsible for some of the ills that burden a weakened and enfeebled Turkey. It removes them from public service, puts all kinds of obstacles in their way, overtaxes them, curtails education in their schools; in short, it does what it can to make it impossible for them to stay in the country that had so generously welcomed them four centuries earlier.<sup>41</sup>

Just one year later, the events in Thrace shocked Jews both in Turkey and abroad. In late June of 1934, threats, boycotts, and violent attacks forced the Jews of Turkish Thrace to leave their homes. Several thousand Jews

<sup>41</sup> Avram Navon, “Grandeur, Décadence et Renaissance du Judaïsme Sépharadi,” *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no. 12, August 1933, 169.

fled to Istanbul or left Turkey entirely, with the incident receiving broad coverage in the international Jewish press.<sup>42</sup> *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* also published an article on the events, based on information gathered from international reports. However, in its opening lines, the author cautions readers to remember that it was the Ottoman Empire that had once accepted the Sephardi Jews. The article ends on a similar sentiment, with the author appealing to readers not to forget Ottoman hospitality “*nor the ties that bind us to Turkey.*” This attempt to put the events in Thrace into perspective may be somewhat understandable, in light of the fact that the same issue of the journal also reported on the 1934 Constantine Pogrom in Algeria, which claimed significantly more victims. The death toll of Jews in Constantine was twenty-five, while in Thrace, no Jews were killed, the sole casualty being a Turkish gendarme. Nonetheless, for the Jews of Turkey, what occurred in Thrace represented the most significant caesura in their history up to that time. The vast majority of those who fled would never return. The Jewish community of Edirne—for centuries, one of the most important communities of the Ottoman Empire and which produced numerous Jewish scholars of the Balkans—lost its importance forever.

*Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* obviously at pains to paint a positive picture of Turkey, did not stop after the events in Thrace. Three issues published in 1934–1935 contain conciliatory articles by Elie Eskenazi, praising the Turks’ “humanitarian and hospitable nature.”<sup>43</sup>

In January 1939, the expulsion of a larger group of Austrian Jews that had been living in Istanbul for generations set off alarm in Jewish communities in Turkey and abroad. In response, *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* published a detailed, full-length statement by the Turkish journalist and MP Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın entitled *Il n'existe aucune question juive en Turquie*, (“There is no Jewish question in Turkey”) in which he repudiates the existence of hostility toward Jews in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> In April 1940, the journal

<sup>42</sup>For a comprehensive account of the events see Rifat N. Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2008) and Berna Pekesen, *Nationalismus, Türkisierung und das Ende der jüdischen Gemeinden in Thrakien: 1918–1942* (Oldenbourg: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012).

<sup>43</sup>Elie Eskenazi and his father Yacob Eskenazi were both deported from Nice to Drancy and from there to Auschwitz. For a short biography see Muestras Dezaparesidos 2019, 604.

<sup>44</sup>*Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no. 68, February 1939, 24–25. Yalçın’s statement—that he had worded upon assignment by the government—was first published in the Turkish *Yeni Sabah*

published an appeal for a humanitarian campaign for the victims of a disastrous earthquake in Turkey, that had taken place in December of 1939.

### TURKISH FLAGS AND LAPEL PINS

Many Turkish Jewish emigrants maintained close ties with Turkey. Some proudly called themselves “Turkish Jews.”<sup>45</sup> They decorated their shops with Turkish flags and wore lapel pins with the Turkish ensign or with images of Atatürk (see Fig. 5.3).

In Berlin, Turkish Jews were among the founding members of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce established in 1927 and located just a stone’s throw away from the synagogue of the *Israelitisch-Sephardischer Verein*. Several of the community’s founding members like Nissim Zacouto and Sinai Eskenazi befriended official Turkish representatives in Berlin.<sup>46</sup> In December 1922 in Geneva, during negotiations that would conclude with the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne the following year, local Turkish Jews organized a formal reception for the Turkish delegation led by İsmet Paşa, who would later become President İnönü.<sup>47</sup>

In 1939, a report on the Turkish-Jewish community in Geneva stated that it fostered “both Jewish and Turkish traditions.”<sup>48</sup> This applies especially to the first generation of immigrants, most of whom had left the Ottoman Empire prior to World War I and who were mainly prosperous merchants or intellectuals such as Sam Lévy and Albert Fua. The majority of Turkish-Jewish immigrants left Turkey because of its nationalist and anti-minority policies. Most of them belonged to the poorer classes. They were neither editors of the aforementioned journals, nor spokesmen of the Turkish-Jewish communities. In contrast to earlier immigrants, the accounts of later émigrés provide a far less positive picture of Turkey.

on January 24, 1939. It was meant for the international public and several Jewish newspapers abroad published it.

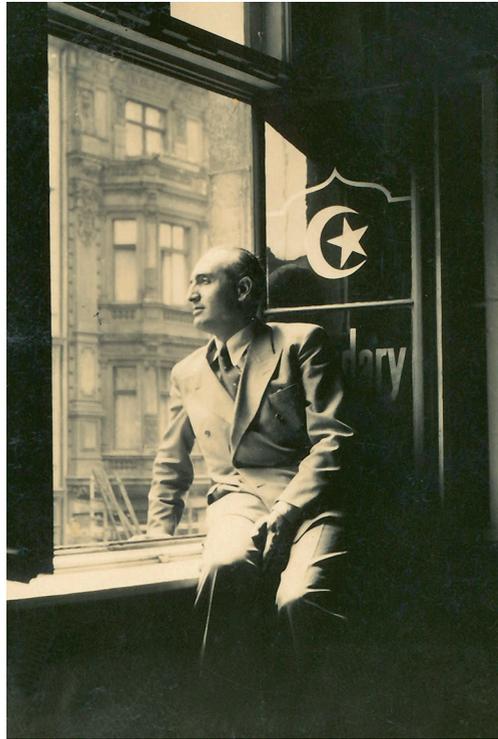
<sup>45</sup>When the Asriel brothers moved to Berlin, they registered in the trade register as “Turkish merchants”.

<sup>46</sup>Fred Zacouto in discussion with the author, November 2004; Christoph Kreutzmüller, *Nissim Zacouto: Jüdischer Wunderknabe und Türkischer Teppichgroßhändler* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2010). Regarding Sinai Eskenazi: Isaac Papo, *Viaje en el Ocaso de una Cultura Iberica—Recuerdos y Reflexiones de un Médico Sefardi* (Barcelona, 2006), 100.

<sup>47</sup>Rıfat N Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yabudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (Istanbul, İletişim, 1999), 39.

<sup>48</sup>*Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no. 68, February 1939, 23.

**Fig. 5.3** Albert Alfandary in the window of his carpet store in Berlin in 1930s. (Private collection of Corry Guttstadt)



Instead, their memories—mainly of France—testify above all to a great admiration for and attachment to that country.<sup>49</sup> Still, they expressed their love for the abandoned homeland in the names of their restaurants, such as *Le Bosphore* or *Istanbul*.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See for example Ode Lévy-Garber, *Passé sous silence: entretiens avec Jean-Paul Woodall* (Bruits du temps Self-published, 2015). [Maurice Deunailles, *La Mare Aux Tortues—Souvenirs d'un Sepharade du Levant* (L'Harmattan, 2013); testimonies of Jo Amiel, Marcel Colonel and many others in the collection of *Muestras Desaparecidos 2019*. However, most of these memoirs and testimonies come from people that were children during the period in question and focus on their parents' feelings.

<sup>50</sup> *Le Bosphore*, situated in the Rue Sedaine, right in the center of the Turkish-Jewish neighbourhood in the 11th arrondissement of Paris, was much more than a coffee bar; it was a meeting place for Turkish Jews in Paris. The owner, Isaac Curiel, from Bursa, was arrested and deported in March 1942. In May 1944, the Gestapo conducted a raid in *Le Bosphore*

It is also important to understand that the “bond with Turkey” was not an exclusive one. People have multiple overlapping social, linguistic, regional, cultural and political identities. Many of the immigrants in Paris initially organized according to their city (or region) of origin. While the *Association culturelle orientale* in the 11th arrondissement was mainly considered to be an association of “Istanbulians,” Jews from Salonica, Izmir and other localities founded their own associations and prayer rooms and insisted on mutual demarcation. Only at the end of the 1920s, during the development of a “Sephardi consciousness,” was this factionalism overcome and a “unified” Sephardi congregation established. Most of the representatives of the Turkish-Jewish communities and authors of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* were first and foremost “Sephardists.” They considered themselves the descendants of Maimonides and Spinoza and aimed to restore the prestigious position of Sephardi Jews within Judaism.<sup>51</sup> The variety of worldviews among Turkish Jews ranged from religious-conservative, to secular-liberal, to some—though few—communists, such as Jo Amiel’s father in Paris, or Alberto Assa who had joined the International Brigades in Spain to fight Franco.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the majority of publications and official spokespersons of Turkish Jews abroad never tired of reaffirming their attachment to Turkey.

### THE DEATH OF ATATÜRK: THE TURKISH NATIONAL ANTHEM IN THE SYNAGOGUE

These affirmations became especially visible after the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on November 10, 1938, the very day after the “Kristallnacht,” the November pogrom in Germany and the recently annexed Austria, during which around 400 Jews were murdered and hundreds of synagogues throughout Germany destroyed, among them the splendid temple of the Turkish-Jewish community in Vienna. While this unprecedented attack on the Jews in Germany led to worldwide protests against Nazi barbarism, the Sephardi communities in Paris and Geneva

and arrested thirty-five persons, mainly Jews from Turkey. See Muestras Dezaparesidos, *Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France*, 85, 159, 160, 546.

<sup>51</sup> “Appel aux Sépharadim”, editorial article by the executive committee of the Confédération Universelle des Juifs Sépharadim, *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no.1, 1932, 2–5.

<sup>52</sup> For more on Assa see Corry Guttstadt *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verfolgung. Migrationsgeschichten türkischer Juden im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Hamburg: Association A, 2021).

organized emotional memorial services mourning the death of Atatürk. The Sephardi synagogue on Rue St. Lazare in Paris was packed: three chief rabbis—Julien Weill of Paris, Isaac Alcalay of Yugoslavia, and Nissim Ovadia of the Paris Sephardi congregation—attended the ceremony.<sup>53</sup> The synagogue was decorated with Turkish flags and Atatürk’s portrait. After Ovadia’s speech, Robert Mitrani, secretary-general of the Sephardi community, delivered a eulogy to Atatürk in Turkish. After reciting two Jewish psalms, the chorus concluded the ceremony by singing the Turkish national anthem and the Marseillaise (see Fig. 5.4).<sup>54</sup>

The first page of the February 1939 issue of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* opened with a glowing obituary for Atatürk entitled *La Turquie en deuil* (“Turkey in mourning”). It read: “as a result of his enlightened advice and



**Fig. 5.4** Ceremony after the death of Atatürk in the Sephardic Synagogue of Paris. (*Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, No. 68, February 1939)

<sup>53</sup> Alcalay was on visit in Paris

<sup>54</sup> Issue number 68 of *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, February 1939, published the ceremony’s proceedings with the texts of all the speeches.

indisputable authority, a calm and happy life came upon Turkish Judaism, which was able to develop in perfect harmony with the new national institutions.” The rest of the issue was almost completely devoted to the memory of Atatürk and to praising Turkey.

### HOPES FOR FRANCE AND TURKEY

Bearing in mind that a significant proportion of Turkish Jews in France had left their homeland as a result of Atatürk’s nationalist policies, this veneration and glorification may seem surprising. To understand this, we ought to bear in mind the political situation at the end of 1938. In light of fascist movements and anti-Semitic politics spreading all over Europe, Jews of Turkish origin perceived the governments of France and Turkey as patrons of democracy. *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi* covered the fascist and anti-Semitic developments in Germany from the beginning. The issues published between the years 1938 and 1939 featured several in-depth analyses of the Jews’ ominous situation and devised a reorientation of the *Union Universelle*’s activities: “Given the current circumstances, rescuing thousands of human souls whose lives and possessions have been taken from them by anti-Semitic regimes is the prevailing matter at hand.” Against this backdrop, the sympathy for Turkey described here likely reflects a realistic assessment of the political situation, as expressed in the editorial *Hommage à la Turquie*, where Camhy compares Turkey to Germany: “When one sees a nation of 80 million [author’s note: the Germans] persecuting, torturing a handful of defenseless and unprotected people, it is certain that this nation, or the masters of this nation, have broken (...) with law and justice (...). Yet it is a manifest fact that the Jews of Turkey have never been abused, never been robbed, never been plundered, never been beaten, never been expelled.”<sup>55</sup>

In the summer of 1939, mere weeks before the outbreak of war, Turkey concluded a tripartite alliance with Britain and, subsequently, France. The pact was eagerly welcomed in *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, with Robert Mitrani paying particular attention to its ‘moral significance.’ “Jews in general and Sephardim in particular,” Mitrani wrote, “welcome the conclusion of this

<sup>55</sup> Ovadia Camhy, “Hommage à la Turquie” *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no. 68, February 1939, front page.

pact, the parties to which share common ideals of justice and humanity.”<sup>56</sup> The similarities between Turkey and France, two “democratic, wise and peace-loving powers,” had already been put into words by the speakers at Atatürk’s funeral service.

The alliance between Turkey and France enabled Turkish Jews in France to reconcile their attachment to ‘both homelands.’ The anticipated victory of the Allies—among whom Turkey was one by 1939 would lay the foundation for a new, humanitarian society. Hundreds of Jews from Turkey (and other successor states of the Ottoman Empire) registered as “*engagés volontaires*” in special units of the French army, among them the previously mentioned Nissim Benezra (see Fig. 5.5).

Sabi Soulam, whose father Yako (also from Istanbul) had also enlisted in the *Engagés Volontaires* (EV), compiled a list of the EV Judéo-Espagnols for the *Muestrros Dezaparesidos* memorial book which accounts for about 1000 names, more than seventy-five percent of whom originated from places in Turkey.<sup>57</sup> However, for many of them, enrollment as volunteers may have been influenced by their gratitude toward France, their adopted country, and the prospects of a simplified naturalization process.

The widespread hope of victory over Nazi Germany can be seen in Ray Ventura’s song *On ira pendre notre linge sur la ligne Siegfried* (We’re Going to hang the Washing on the Siegfried Line), which immediately became a hit throughout France in 1939, especially among soldiers.<sup>58</sup>

## SHATTERED HOPES AND ABANDONMENT

But these hopes for victory shattered after nine tense months of waiting, a period which is referred to as the ‘Phony War’ (*drôle de guerre*) during which German troops overran Holland, Belgium, and France within a few weeks. Nissim Benezra’s unit was taken into captivity by the Germans.<sup>59</sup> Most of the other *Engagés Volontaires* were sent home. The hasty military

<sup>56</sup> Robert Mitrani, “Signification morale de l’accord Franco-Turc”, *Le Judaïsme Sépharadi*, no.73, December, 1939:104.

<sup>57</sup> “Liste des Judéo-Espagnols Engagés Volontaires”, in *Muestrros Dezaparesidos*, *Mémoiral Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France* (Paris, 2019), 660–672.

<sup>58</sup> The original English version of this song was written by Ulster songwriter Jimmy Kennedy. Paul Misraki, born to a Jewish family in Istanbul and member of the orchestra of Ray Ventura, put the song into French.

<sup>59</sup> Corry Guttstadt, *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verfolgung Migrationsgeschichten türkischer Juden im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin/Hamburg: Association A, 2021).

**Fig. 5.5** Engagés  
Volontaires, among  
them Yako Soulam, Yaco  
Behar, (?) Soussi and (?)  
Léon, all of them born  
in Turkey. (Courtesy of  
Esther Benbassa)



collapse deeply traumatized both the French people and Jewish immigrants. In an exodus of unimaginable proportions, millions of people from Holland, Belgium, and Northern France, Turkish Jews among them, initially fled to the south of France. While Chief Rabbi Nissim Ovadia managed to escape to the United States, most of the fugitives had to return home a short time after. Many were later detained by the Germans or their French collaborators.

For Turkish and other foreign Jews who had held such high hopes for their new country France, the shock of defeat was followed by horror at the Vichy regime's collaboration, which, agreed with German forces of occupation to issue its own anti-Semitic regulations, interning foreign

Jews and carrying out raids and arrests on the Germans' behalf. Many of the Turkish Jews who had wanted to fight for France as *Engagés Volontaires* were arrested by Vichy police, handed over to the Germans, and deported, among them Yako Soulam.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the alliance between Turkey, France, and Great Britain that Turkish Jews in Paris had welcomed so enthusiastically now carried little validity. The government in Ankara always backed the winning horse. Thus, in June 1941, Turkey concluded a friendship pact with Nazi Germany and subsequently pursued a more pro-German policy.<sup>61</sup>

The Jews' situation in Turkey worsened with the introduction of the Wealth Tax decree (*Varlık Vergisi*) in 1942. The Wealth Tax was passed during a period of shortages caused by the war economy in order to skim from the exceptionally high profits and curb the black market. Since the taxes on non-Muslims were much higher, astronomically so, in comparison to what Muslims were liable to pay, in practice, this tax led to a large-scale expropriation of Jews and Christians and the transfer of their property to Muslim Turks.<sup>62</sup> Some families were virtually robbed of all their belongings—down to the bulbs in their houses, as İshak Alaton, later a well-known businessman and who was involved in several social foundations in Turkey, describes in his memoirs.<sup>63</sup> The introduction of this tax was accompanied by an anti-Semitic campaign in the Turkish press. 1870 people incapable of raising the massive sum were arrested and deported as forced laborers to Aşkale/Erzurum near the Russian border. Although the Jews living in Turkey were significantly smaller in number than the Christians, the majority of those deported to labor camps were Jewish.

In contrast, Turkey's favoring of Germany while remaining a neutral country proved to be an advantage—at least temporarily—for Turkish Jews in Europe. Until 1943, the Germans exempted Jewish citizens of

<sup>60</sup> *Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France*, ed. Muestros Dezaparesidos. (Paris: Muestros Dezaparesidos, 2019.), 272–273.

<sup>61</sup> Selim Deringil, “Hasta Adam'ın Dinç Evlatları,” in *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 121 (January 2004): 76–81; Corry Guttsstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2013), 29–46.

<sup>62</sup> For a comprehensive account on this special tax, see Rfât N. Bali, *The “Varlık Vergisi” affair: A Study of its Legacy: Sel. Documents* (Istanbul, 2005) and Ali Sait Çetinoğlu, *Varlık Vergisi 1942–1944: Ekonomik ve Kültürel Jenosit* (Istanbul: Belge, 2009). Both include chapters on the press campaign in which the whole spectrum of the Turkish press took part that prepared the introduction and accompanied the implementation of the *Varlık Vergisi*.

<sup>63</sup> Mehmet Gündem, Lüzuumlu Adam İshak Alaton: Hedefi Belli Olmayan Yelkenliye Hiçbir Rüzgâr Yardım Edemez (Istanbul : Alfa Yayincılık, 2012) 36–37.

neutral and pro-Axis countries from certain persecutory measures in light of foreign policy considerations. These Jews were exempt from wearing the yellow star and were excluded from arrest and deportation for a period of time. The importance of neutral Turkey for the war effort impelled Germany not to harm the relations between both countries.

This specific situation provided Turkey with a tremendous opportunity to protect its Jewish citizens in Europe. A number of Turkish diplomats in France, Italy, and Greece successfully took advantage of this situation to intervene on behalf of Turkish Jews, occasionally achieving the release of detainees. Interventions on behalf of about fifty Turkish Jews in France are documented for the years 1942 and 1943. In a few exceptional cases, former Turkish citizens and even non-Turkish Jews were saved as well. Selahattin Ülkümen, who was the Turkish consul of Rhodes during the war, and Albert Routier, honorary consul at Lyon, both saved Jews from deportation and were subsequently declared as *Righteous Among the Nations* for their deeds by the Israeli Holocaust memorial *Yad Vashem*.

Numerous Turkish Jews in German-controlled territories hoped for help from local Turkish consulates. Those arrested wrote letters to their relatives, imploring them to contact the Turkish consulate.<sup>64</sup> But these efforts were often in vain, as Elvire Ovadya-Profetta, who was living with her parents in Paris at the time, recounts:

My father went to the Turkish consulate. It has always been said that they saved people. But when my father went to the consulate, they said to him: ‘Oh, now it occurs to you to report to the consulate.’ They never thought of going there. Instead of getting help, they were given a certificate saying that they had been released from Turkish citizenship. My father also had a lapel pin with Atatürk on it, and they even took that away from him.<sup>65</sup>

From the detention camp in Drancy, Nissim Sabah wrote about his fear of being included in the next deportation train: “All of this because of the Consulate that does not want to acknowledge us [...] there are 60 Turks that have been stripped of their citizenship and are about to depart.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Examples can be found in the letters of Nissim Sabah (Sabah 2013, p. 54, 58) David Alfandari (Muestros Dezaparesidos 2019 p. 587) Joseph Escojido Muhar (Muestros Dezaparesidos 2019 p. 5p1) and many others.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Elvire Ovadya-Profetta, March 2004, in Istanbul.

<sup>66</sup> Nissim Lucien Sabah, *Drancy, Derniers Mots* (Paris: Lavoisier St Marti, 2012), 58.

For Turkish Jews in Europe, Turkey's deprivation of citizenship and refusals to confirm political status turned out to be fatal. According to Turkish laws, citizens abroad who had neglected to register with the consulate risked losing their citizenship. We can gather from Ovadya's account that this was the case for many Turkish Jews in France, since the French *carte d'étranger* met their needs as permanent residents and may have been the reason why they did not feel the need to renew their passports.

Nonetheless, thousands of Jews who had registered regularly and paid their fees also had their citizenship revoked, as confirmed by several testimonies.<sup>67</sup> In Berlin, several hundred Turkish Jews had already been deprived of their citizenship back in the 1930s, including members of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce who remained in close contact with the Turkish embassy. An entire set of laws and decrees enabled the Turkish state to revoke the citizenship of those belonging to undesired segments of the population. A detailed analysis of the expatriation lists in the Turkish state archive shows that the Turkish government repealed the citizenship of several thousand Turkish Jews that resided in German-controlled areas between 1940 and 1944, sometimes with absurd or arbitrary justifications such as for "non-participation in the War" in the case of women, even though there was no military service for women in place.<sup>68</sup>

Several documents show that the government in Ankara deliberately used this policy to prevent Jews from returning to Turkey.<sup>69</sup> According to the Turkish Law, citizenship revocation also entailed a lifelong ban from entering Turkey. Thus, Turkish Jews who had lost their citizenship were denied even temporary exile as refugees in Turkey.

In October 1942, a Turkish Jew in Paris, Mr. Yakar, wrote a desperate letter the president of Turkey, İsmet İnönü, asking for protection, but to no avail.<sup>70</sup> How Yakar's petition was received by the authorities in Turkey can be concluded from the entry with which his letter was recorded in the archives in Ankara: "Letter from a Jew by the name of Yakar informing

<sup>67</sup> Claire Venturero-Iglicki in discussion with the author, March 2004; Fred Zacouto in discussion with the author, November 2004; Isaak Behar. 'Versprich mir, dass du am Leben bleibst' (Munich: Ullstein, 2002, 74).

<sup>68</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Turkish citizenship policy, its consequences, and a comparison with that of other neutral states during the World War II, see Guttstadt 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 151, 154.

<sup>70</sup> Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (Ankara) Dosya, 94C52/ Yer No: 110.736.12; an English translation of the letter in Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 200–201.

that the Jews living in France found guilty of treason would like to return to Turkey.”

“...TO PREVENT A MASS IMMIGRATION OF JEWS TO TURKEY”

Despite these restrictions, Turkish Jews still enjoyed a certain level of protection until 1943, especially since the Germans (and the Vichy regime) did not initially realize that Turkey only recognized a handful of them as citizens.

But Turkish Jews' situation worsened in October 1942 when the Germans delivered an ultimatum to neutral and pro-Axis countries, demanding the repatriation of their Jewish nationals from all German-occupied territories. Should they not comply, these Jews would be “included in the general measures regarding Jews” equating to deportation and murder. At first, Turkey did not react to this ultimatum. However, in a list containing about 4000 names of Turkish Jews which the Germans had submitted to the Turkish consulate, only 112 Jews were repatriated by Turkey and thus saved from persecution as of March 1943.<sup>71</sup>

While some of the consuls in the field prepared to organize repatriations, Turkish Jews in Germany, Belgium, Austria, and other countries were not even informed by the respective consulates about the ultimatum and were left to German persecution. In Italy and later in Greece, the consuls Nebil Ertok (Milan) and İnyetullah C. Özkaya (Athens) organized repatriations on their own initiative. In contrast, Ambassador Behiç Erkin in Vichy transmitted Ankara's instructions to the consulates under his jurisdiction to refuse return to Turkey for larger groups of Jews. Only male Jews eligible for military service or people whose return was considered “of use to the nation” were granted repatriation.<sup>72</sup> In September 1943, after the Germans had extended the repatriation deadline several times, Ankara finally agreed to allow the return of those Jews, whose citizenship had been verified by a government agency in Ankara and under the condition “to prevent a mass immigration of Jews to Turkey”. Only in the spring of 1944 could another 414 Turkish Jews be repatriated from

<sup>71</sup> In the letters of various German authorities, the number of Turkish Jews affected by the ultimatum on repatriation varies between 3000 [exactly 3.046] and 5000.

<sup>72</sup> Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution 1933–45*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993) 142, 153f.; Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, 100–106.

France. Altogether, about 3000 Turkish Jews were deported by the Germans, and most of them murdered. Even compared to other neutral states (Portugal, Spain) or Germany's fascist ally Italy, Turkey did far less to protect its Jewish citizens.<sup>73</sup>

It must be stressed here that the Germans time and again ignored their own "rules of exemption" for Jews from neutral countries. Jews that were classified as "not yet deportable" (by the German bureaucracy of genocide) were nevertheless deported in order to fill up the transport; the nationality documents of Turkish Jews were ignored or taken away, and the Turkish consuls' petitions demanding the liberation of arrested Jews went unheeded in several cases.

The government in Ankara maintained its negative stance towards its Jewish citizens until the end of the war. On April 11, 1945, about 330 Turkish citizens arrived at the port of Istanbul as part of an exchange of civilians between Turkey and Germany. The group, which consisted mostly of members of the diplomatic corps and students, also included 137 Turkish Jews. These Jews had been liberated from the Bergen-Belsen and Ravensbrück concentration camps after sixteen months of detention.

Although the ship docked at about the same time the Bergen-Belsen camp was liberated and the Turkish press published detailed reports about the horrors that occurred at the camp, the Turkish government initially prevented most of the rescued Jews from entering the country. Only after tough negotiations with international Jewish representatives did the authorities allow people to leave the ship and be interned in Istanbul, with the Jewish Agency covering the costs.<sup>74</sup> "Can you imagine," Esther Sephiha writes "sixteen months in Ravensbrück to be interned again? My husband died during deportation. After what the Turks did to us, I no longer feel nostalgic about my country."<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup>For a comparative description of the neutral countries, see *Bystanders, Rescuers or Perpetrators? The Neutrals and the Shoah* in IHRA series, vol. 2 eds. Corry Gutttstadt, Thomas Lutz, Bernd Rother, and Yessica San Roman (Berlin, 2016) and Corry Gutttstadt, "Une Chance pour Quelques-uns: Le Rapatriement" in *Mémorial des Judéo Espagnols déportés de France* ed. by Muestros Dezaparesidos (Paris: Muestros Dezaparesidos, 2019), 207–228.

<sup>74</sup>Gutttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 299–308.

<sup>75</sup>Haïm Vidal Sephiha, *L'agonie des Judéo-Espagnols* (Paris: Entente, 1977), 114.

## DISAPPOINTMENT AT THE END OF A ONE-SIDED LOVE

Like Esther Séphiha, many Turkish Jews put into words their bitter disappointment with Turkey after the end of the war. “Had the consul here simply bothered to interfere, he would have saved 36 lives including my parents,” writes Nick Lévy on the last night of 1944 in a letter to Albert Routier, the former honorary consul that had saved him and many others.<sup>76</sup> Nick Lévy was the grandson of the aforementioned benefactor of the Izmir community, Nissim Bayraktar Lévy. Later in Nick’s letter, it becomes evident that his parents, Raphael and Lucy Lévy, had applied to the consulate for repatriation but received no reply. On July 31, 1944, they were deported to Auschwitz with Convoy 77, along with twenty-eight other Turkish Jews from Lyon.

In Brussels, Ezra Natan, nephew of the Natan brothers, expressed similar feelings. He had spent eighteen months in the Buchenwald concentration camp, where twelve of the thirty Turkish Jews from Belgium who arrived there on the same convoy with him lost their lives. After liberation, he wrote:

In many cases, the Turkish government could have prevented all this for many of its nationals. But despite all the demarches and petitions (...) the consular authorities did nothing, (...), no humanitarian aid measures were initiated to save the lives and property of human beings (or did the representatives perhaps do this out of hatred?).<sup>77</sup>

Sam Lévy, the famous Sephardic activist, intellectual and author, former publisher of the *Guide Sam*, compiled the names of all Sephardi Jews deported from France and published them in his new journal *Les Cahiers Séfardis* in several successive issues. Lévy, who had always advocated for good relations between Jews and Turkey, now characterized Turkey’s attitude as follows:

[They] were born in Istanbul, in Edirne, in Bursa, in Mersin, in Adana, in Ankara, in Manisa, in Çorlu, in Adapazarı, in Çanakkale, on the Dardanelles, and in a number of other places ... in Turkey. They grew up there

<sup>76</sup>Archives of the Centre d’Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation (CHRD) in Lyon, Fond Ar. 1681.

<sup>77</sup>Note by Ezra Natan (undated), from the private Natan collection. Parenthesis in the original.

*and settled in France, retaining their language, their habits and customs, the traditions and everything that constitutes the cult of the fatherland. (...). The Turkish consulates (...) rejected the people seeking help, who shed their tears in the consulate offices. Petitions, requests, and delegations were sent to Ankara and Istanbul. Nothing came of these. All steps were in vain.*<sup>78</sup>

In Turkey, too, the experiences of exclusion, dispossession and forced labor over the course of World War II led to bitterness and disappointment. Although the Wealth Tax had been abolished in 1944, property was never returned to those who had been expropriated. Nearly 35,000 Jews—almost half of the remaining Jewish population of Turkey—left for Palestine/Israel.<sup>79</sup>

To this day, Turkish officials have not taken any measures to find out the fate of their Jewish citizens who lived in Europe during the Holocaust. For some of the Turkish-Jewish victims in Europe, this meant that they could not receive compensation for their losses and suffering, as Turkey demanded reparations from Germany.<sup>80</sup> For more than forty-five years after the war, the fate of Turkish Jews was of little interest to anyone but their families.

This changed in the 1990s, when the Turkish state ‘discovered’ its Jewish citizens and presented a rescue myth, according to which Turkey had saved countless Jews from the Holocaust. This narrative was intended to polish Turkey’s image at a time when discussion about the Armenian Genocide was intensifying worldwide, and Turkey became the subject of constant criticism by international bodies for human rights violations.<sup>81</sup>

The blueprint for this version of history was provided by the American historian Stanford Shaw in 1993 with his work *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey’s Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution*. According to Shaw, Turkish diplomats throughout Europe had done their utmost to save Turkish Jews from persecution “often at risk to their own lives” (p. 60). Although Shaw’s publication was met with

<sup>78</sup> Sam Lévy, “L’attitude des Turcs,” *Les Cahiers Céfardis*, nos. 7/8/9 (1947): 277.

<sup>79</sup> Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü (1946–1949)* 2003.

<sup>80</sup> See the example of Joseph Lévy’s family in Guttstadt, *Zwischen Aufbruch*, 2021.

<sup>81</sup> For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon see chapter by Marc Baer in this volume; Corry Guttstadt, “Holokost Anması ve Türkiye’deki Inkar Politikası–Hatırlamak, Banalleştirme–İstismar” in *Birikim*, no. 299–300 (2014):14–22.

strong criticism by specialists in international Holocaust research (Wasserstein 1994),<sup>82</sup> his theses became an integral part of Turkey's foreign policy of self-promotion. Several state-funded works of fiction contributed to the dissemination of the 'rescue myth', such as Emir Kıvırcık's book *Büyükelçi* (The Ambassador) published in 2007, and the 2011 film *Turkish Passport*, to name a few.<sup>83</sup> Both contain downright grotesque errors. The numbers of 'rescued Jews' are inflated, which alone shows disrespect for the Turkish Jewish victims and survivors.

Kıvırcık states that his great uncle, Behiç Erkin, then Turkey's ambassador to France, saved 20,000 Turkish Jews from France by issuing them nationality certificates, even if they were former citizens.<sup>84</sup> The opposite is true: the only Turkish consul in France to have issued such documents to Turkish Jews without proper registration—or even to non-Turkish Jews—in order to save them from German persecution, was the Turkish Honorary Consul in Lyon, Albert Routier. Because of these acts, he was reprimanded by Erkin and threatened with deposition.<sup>85</sup> Kıvırcık, whose book consists in part of dream scenes, which he “creatively” contrived for his uncle Behiç Erkin, claims that the latter organized trains to bring the Jews to Turkey. The reality is that Erkin conveyed Ankara's order *not* to repatriate Turkish Jews “in large numbers” (see above). The Turkish authorities allowed a mere 500 Jews to return to Turkey, almost eight months after Kıvırcık had left his post as ambassador to France.<sup>86</sup>

In the film *Turkish Passport*, some of the Jews that did participate in these repatriations were interviewed. Their voices are supposed to give the

<sup>82</sup> Bernhard Wasserstein, “Their Own Fault - Attempts to Shift the Blame for the Holocaust”, *Times Literary Supplement*. January 7, 1994: 4–5. In addition to making numerous chronological and methodological errors, Shaw deliberately ignored documents he had seen (and later made available to the USHMM, where they can be viewed). Shaw was an ardent denier of the Armenian genocide. In the 1990s, when United States-led investigations aiming to locate the gold stolen from Jews by the Nazis looked into the involvement of the neutral countries and Turkey came under suspicion, it was Stanford Shaw who gave a testimony in Turkey's favor and achieved the closure of the investigation.

<sup>83</sup> Further examples are Öymen 2001, pp. 254f; Kulin 2002, and the Film *Desperate Hours* 2001.

<sup>84</sup> Such documents were regularly issued to Turkish citizens abroad, as they had to relinquish their passports to the consulates.

<sup>85</sup> In May 1944, Routier was dismissed from his post, thus depriving him of the protection his office had afforded him against the Germans.

<sup>86</sup> Another 100 to 130 Turkish Jews from Greece and Rhodes were rescued and admitted to Turkey.

film an authentic touch, but, in essence, the film consists of pseudo-documentary play scenes. For instance, the film portrays the alleged rescue of Jews from Marseille by the then vice-consul Necdet Kent, who supposedly boarded a deportation train himself! This claim by Kent is a central part of the Turkish rescue myth. In the film, this scene is elaborately “reenacted.” Yet Kent’s purported action is pure fiction; it did not take place.<sup>87</sup> Another telling example of the film’s frivolity is the depiction of Selahattin Ülkümen, Turkish consul to the island of Rhodes during World War II, who saved forty-two Jews by recognizing them as Turkish nationals. In the so-called “documentary” *Turkish Passport*, Ülkümen is, nonetheless, said to be the Turkish consul to the city of Lille in the North of France!<sup>88</sup> There was no Turkish consulate in Lille during the war and not a single Turkish Jew from Lille was saved by a Turkish consul.<sup>89</sup> Despite these errors, both Kivırcık and *Turkish Passport* were presented by Turkish diplomats at official events worldwide on behalf of Turkey.<sup>90</sup> The suffering of Turkish Jews was of no interest; their fate was misappropriated for foreign policy purposes, above all to deny the Armenian genocide.

The memoirs and testimonies of Turkish Jewish survivors in Europe draw an utterly different picture. These testimonies also show that the

<sup>87</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 219–221; Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks. Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), 193–196.

<sup>88</sup> Possibly, someone had told the authors, in French, that he had been the consul “de l’île,” meaning “of the island” [of Rhodes], for them to understand “Lille.” During the war, Lille was incorporated by the Germans into Belgium under the purview of the Military Administration in Belgium and Northern France.

<sup>89</sup> For more details on Kivırcık see: Ayşe Hür, “Türk Schindleri Efsaneleri” (The Myths of Turkish Schindlers) in *Taraf*, December 16, 2007; Corinna Guttstadt, “Hakkaten ‘inanılmaz bir öykü’—Emir Kivırcık in Behiç Erkin Hakkında Yazdığı ‘Büyükelçi’ Kitap Üzerine” in *Toplumsal Tarih*, no. 168 (2007), 56–65.

For more on *Turkish Passport*, see Ugur Ümit Üngör, “Manipulation, Mystification, and Misrepresentation: Review of the Documentary *The Turkish Passport*” Review of Burak Arliel, *The Turkish Passport. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews*, March, 2012. <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35380> (accessed 20.3.2020.) and Corry Guttstadt, “Film Review: Turkish Passport,” *Sephardic Horizons*, 2013, <https://www.sephardichorizons.org/Volume3/Issue1/guttstadt.html>.

For more on the fate of Turkish Jews in Lille and a biography of Joseph Lévy’s family, see Guttstadt, *Zwischen Aufbruch*, 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Kivırcık was introduced in 2008 by the Turkish President Abdullah Gül to Israel’s president Shimon Peres, and in the U.S. United States to American Jewish organizations to gain their support for the denial of the Armenian genocide. The film *Turkish Passport* was screened on countless occasions worldwide at the initiative or in the presence of Turkish diplomats.

majority of the Turkish Jews who survived the Shoah owe their escape to the support of their non-Jewish neighbors, resistance movements, Jewish and Christian aid organizations, and often to mere luck. They survived by hiding in monasteries and on farms; with forged papers; by paying bribes to officials or concierges; and by escaping into exile, far from Turkey.

Many of them express disappointment at the denial of assistance and rejection by Turkish authorities.<sup>91</sup> Yet, from a historian's perspective, such criticism of Turkish policy during World War II ought to be countered with the fact that it was the Germans who were responsible for the persecution and murder of the Jews—from the planners at their desks in Berlin and the unscrupulous diplomats to the executioners. The Holocaust was a German project. Obviously, it was the violation of the special bond they believed to share with the country they considered their homeland that caused the most disappointment for Turkish Jews in Europe. As it turned out, this bond was a one-sided love story, which concluded with a terrible disillusionment for those involved.

In the course of the last twenty years, more than thirty Jews of Turkish descent who had emigrated to Europe and experienced World War II and the Holocaust have published their memoirs.<sup>92</sup> Several institutions held interviews with Turkish-born Jews.<sup>93</sup> Of particular interest are the approximately eighty interviews that the volunteers of the *Muestros Dezaparesidos* organization conducted between 2009 and 2016 with Judéo-Espagnols living in France, most of whom or their families came from Turkey.<sup>94</sup> These reports not only deal with the era of persecution during the Shoah, but also provide a multi-faceted picture of the lost universe of Turkish Jews in interwar Europe.

<sup>91</sup> See, for example, the testimonies of Juliette Redlus-Nahoum; Kaurin Lakajen-Eskenazi; Victoria Nahmias; Sabi Soulam; Albert Rachi; Calire Venturero-Iglicki, collected by Muestros Dezaparesidos in the archives of the Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris I.

<sup>92</sup> A list of memoirs and biographies can be found in *Mémorial des Judéo-Espagnols déportés de France*, ed. Muestros Dezaparesidos (Paris: Muestros Dezaparesidos, 2019), 715–717.

<sup>93</sup> The visual archive of the *Shoah Foundation* contains more than thirty interviews with Turkish-born Jews. More interviews can be found in Yad Vashem Museum, in the Fortunoff Video Archive, and at other organizations.

<sup>94</sup> These interviews were transcribed and can be consulted in the archives of the Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris.

## The Founding of the State of Israel and the Turkish Jews: A View from Israel, 1948–1955

*Duygu Atlas*

May 31, 2010 marks the day when the infamous *Mavi Marmara* incident took place. A Turkish-led aid flotilla en route to the Gaza Strip in defiance of the blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt since 2007 was raided by the Israeli navy in the international waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Tensions had been running high between the two countries after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's "one minute" clash with then Israeli President Shimon Peres over Gaza at the annual Davos Summit in January 2009. But the *Mavi Marmara* incident, during which nine Turkish citizens were killed, brought relations between Turkey and Israel to a new low. During and after the crisis, Turkish Jews found themselves exposed to a surge of anti-Semitism, and their loyalties to Turkey were questioned on account of a perceived connection to Israel. The *Mavi Marmara* incident was just one of many episodes in which Turkish Jews found themselves at the epicenter of a bilateral rift between Turkey and Israel. But how did Israel as

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one member in this complex and multi-layered tripartite relationship view Turkish Jews? While many historians have studied Turkey's treatment of its minorities, and Israel's treatment of Jewish immigrants from Middle Eastern and North African countries, Israeli attitudes and policies toward Turkish Jews have appeared only in footnotes or otherwise ignored. This chapter hopes to fill this lacuna in the scholarly literature by scrutinizing Israeli attitudes toward Turkish Jews during two central events in their history. The first event is the mass immigration of Turkish Jews to the nascent state of Israel between 1949 and 1951. By concentrating on the underexplored question of how the first Israeli government saw the initial Turkish immigration to Israel and how the state treated these Jews, this chapter will place Turkish Jews within the wider context of Israeli domestic politics, characterized by its Euro-centricism and Ashkenazi dominance. The second event is the September 6–7, 1955 pogroms in Turkey that targeted the country's non-Muslim communities. Having studied Israeli attitudes toward Turkish Jews who had already immigrated to Israel, an analysis of the pogroms will shed light on the Israeli government's approach to Turkish Jews who chose to remain in Turkey. How did the Israeli government act when the safety of Jews in Turkey was compromised? Which factors affected its responses? Together, these two case studies will enable us to add the Israeli context and attitudes to the history of Turkish Jewry, which has largely concentrated on the Turkish perspective and overlooked the Israeli one. As the victimization of Turkish Jews during the *Mavi Marmara* incident clearly demonstrates, the Turkish Jewish experience cannot be understood in its entirety without paying equal attention to each element that bears on Turkish Jewish identity and experience.

### ISRAELI ATTITUDE TOWARD THE TURKISH JEWISH COMMUNITY AND ITS IMMIGRATION

The emergence of a sovereign Jewish state substantially transformed the position of diaspora Jews with respect to the larger populations in countries in which they lived. The state of Israel now offered not only a safe haven for the persecuted Jews of Europe, but also an alternative for diaspora Jewry as a whole. In this respect, its appeal for Turkish Jews was undeniably evident in immigration figures. Between 1948 and 1951, a total of 34,547 Turkish Jews, comprising nearly forty percent of the

community, emigrated to Israel.<sup>1</sup> Their mass departure provoked charges of “dual loyalty” against those who left, as well as those who remained in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> The assumption of a ‘natural’ link between Turkish Jews and Israel meant that blame for the perceived wrongdoings of Israel was to be visited upon Turkish Jews by virtue of their presumed association with Israel in the years to come. But how did Israel, whose mere existence continues to draw accusations against Turkish Jews, think of its new immigrants from Turkey back in its early days?

Two major factors determined the nascent state’s approach toward and perception of Turkish Jews, both of which were inherited from its predecessor the Yishuv, the pre-state Jewish political administration in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine. The first of these factors was the value Israel placed on its relations with Turkey; the second factor was the political, ideological and cultural East-West dichotomy within the Ashkenazi-dominated Israeli society and politics that colored its view of immigrant communities of various origins. Several articles published in the period immediately preceding the establishment of the State of Israel hold important clues as to the Israeli perception of Turkish Jews while they were still in Turkey. These pieces were highly critical of the Turkish Jewish community, most notably because of its silence, submissiveness, and continuing efforts to demonstrate commitment to the Turkish state despite ongoing discrimination.

For example, columnist Sh. Kushtai criticized Turkish Jews’ “enthusiastic” participation in the celebrations marking the twenty-fourth anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish republic, despite the fact that they did not have “much to show for it in terms of freedom.” “From a Jewish point of view,” Kushtai added, there was “surely no reason for such joy and celebrations.”<sup>3</sup> In another piece, Kushtai turned his criticism against Turkish Jews’ defense of the Turkish state and their objection to claims regarding any wrongdoing perpetrated against their community by the Turkish state. These “willing conversos,” in Kushtai’s words, “move heaven and earth, and object to anyone who dares say or write, God forbid, that they do not live in ‘a paradise on earth.’”<sup>4</sup> For Kushtai, the community’s reactions to charges of dual loyalty were excessive, and were just

<sup>1</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics. [http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton53/st04\\_04.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton53/st04_04.pdf) (accessed March 1, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Rifat N. Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü (1946–1949)* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 40.

<sup>3</sup> Sh. Kushtai, “Yehudei Turkiya u-memshalta,” *Hamashekif*, November 21, 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Sh. Kushtai, “‘Ha-Anusim’ be Turkiya,” *Hamashekif*, September 5, 1947.

another proof of how “afraid” they were “to voice things that may ‘anger,’ God forbid, their ‘masters.’”<sup>5</sup>

While compliance was one aspect of its portrayal in the Israeli press, the rupture that Turkification policies and discrimination had caused between the community and its Jewishness was another issue that was frequently mentioned. According to Kushtai, the new generations of Turkish Jews were being raised “without the Torah and Hebrew” in Turkish schools, which further “eroded” the Jewish character” of the community.<sup>6</sup> He argued that their Jewishness was expressed only during the holidays, when “Jewish rituals [were] performed and remembered,” and after which Jews “returned to work and life in general and forgot about Jewishness.”<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding the aforementioned criticism toward Turkish Jews in the Israeli press, one should not assume that Zionist fervor did not exist within the community.<sup>8</sup> In fact, some Turkish Jews’ commitment to the Zionist cause was not unknown to Zionist leadership in Israel. Letters and postcards sent by the *Hehalutz* (the Pioneer) movement, one of the secret Zionist organizations formed in Turkey during the Second World War, to then-prime minister of the newly established State of Israel, David Ben-Gurion attest to the fact that Zionists in Turkey wished to convince Israeli leadership of their firm dedication to Zionism. Moshe Levy, the secretary of the *Hehalutz* movement in Istanbul, wrote a letter to Ben-Gurion on behalf of his organization, in which he assured him of their commitment and hard work for the Zionist cause, and also demanded support for the work of the *Hehalutz* movement.<sup>9</sup> What this letter suggests is that Zionist leadership was not only aware of the Zionist work conducted in Turkey, but may even have known about the internal strife that existed within rival local Zionist organizations.<sup>10</sup>

It is not clear whether the *Hehalutz* Center in Istanbul (*Ha-Merkaz be-Halutz be-Kushta*) ever received the letter of support that it had hoped for from Ben-Gurion, since no response letter was registered in the archives. Ben-Gurion did respond, however, to a greeting card sent to him from the Izmir branch of the *Hehalutz* movement, written in Hebrew for

<sup>5</sup> Kushtai, “‘Ha-Anusim’”.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kushtai, “‘Ha-Anusim’”.

<sup>8</sup> Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü*, 97.

<sup>9</sup> ISA, Gimel 5560/11, Letter from Merkaz Hehalutz in Istanbul to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, dated September 14, 1949.

<sup>10</sup> See Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü*, 92–96.

Passover.<sup>11</sup> In the response, Ben-Gurion thanked the movement and expressed his “deep appreciation for [their] loyal wishes.”<sup>12</sup> These correspondences confirm the existence of a line of communication between Israel and the Zionist organizations in Turkey.

The question is whether and how much this Zionist affinity displayed by some in the Turkish Jewish community resonated in Israel. The following incident suggests that Israeli authorities, if not the general public, were well-aware of attitudes among Jews in Turkey. On July 24, 1951, Ben-Gurion met with a group of new immigrants who had settled in the coastal city of Jaffa. While speaking with those who had arrived from Turkey, he exclaimed: “I am a little Turkish,” referring to his time as a young law student at Istanbul University at the turn of the twentieth century. Ben-Gurion continued: “I am sure that we will bring all Turkish Jews who wish to make *aliyah* [immigration to Israel]. I would not have thought that they would become such great pioneers.”<sup>13</sup> At a first glance, Ben-Gurion’s astonishment at the pioneering instincts of the Turkish Jews seems to reflect the central place that Jewish labor and pioneerism occupied in the creation of a modern Hebrew society in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine. However, a closer reading of Ben-Gurion’s remarks reveals a tint of the Orientalism inherent in the Zionist political and cultural view of Jewish immigrants of non-European origin. As a political movement that emerged in Europe in response to the predicament of European Jewry, Zionism was in essence Euro-centric and Orientalist. In the 1930s and even more so in the 1940s, the Zionist preoccupation with the fate of European Jewry diverted the focus from the plight of other Jewish diaspora communities, which were rarely considered to have Zionist potential. It was only after the systematic annihilation of European Jewry, Zionism’s major resource for immigration, during the Second World War that the Zionist Organization, in search for an alternative, turned its attention to the Jews in Islamic countries.

It can be argued, therefore, that Turkish Jews were perceived simultaneously through an Orientalist and Euro-centric lens by the Zionist establishment. As a diaspora community situated in Turkey, they did not

<sup>11</sup> ISA, Gimel 5560/11, Letter from Merkaz Hehalutz in Istanbul to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> “Hamonei Yafu ha-Ivrit mafginim et haaratzatam le-David Ben-Gurion,” *Davar*, July 25, 1951.

constitute an ideal Zionist reservoir—their harshly criticized submissiveness in the face of continuing discrimination in Turkey serving as proof of their lack of Zionist potential. Ironically, however, their presumed submissiveness, which was how the Turkish Jewish community accommodated itself within Turkey’s oppressive political culture, was what improved their image in Israel. Turkish Jews’ silent acceptance of the hardships that they had experienced during their immigration and absorption in their new homeland was welcomed by the nascent Israeli state, which was grappling with the impact of mass *aliyah* that was stretching its resources thin.

Rachel Rina Benvenisti remembers that when she arrived with her family in Israel, they “had nothing.” After a few years, her father was finally able to buy a house left behind by Palestinians in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> Ester Adato, who was born in Edirne in 1937 and immigrated to Israel with her family at the age of eleven, had to find a job at twelve because her family’s income was insufficient. Her father had been a cheesemaker in Turkey, but could only find odd jobs once in Israel.<sup>15</sup> Roza Cohen remembers new immigrants in the town of Be’er Yaakov renting rooms and subletting them to other newcomers in order to make extra money. She also describes people who sold salvaged metal pieces from dilapidated buildings for the same reason.<sup>16</sup> The memories of another first-wave immigrant, Roza Sara, of her journey to Israel on the ship *Anna Maria* and her time at the refugee absorption camp (*ma’abara*), echo how these new immigrants accepted the difficulties they confronted without much complaint.<sup>17</sup>

As such, the absorption of Turkish Jews appears to have been less problematic than that of Jews from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. As Weiker notes:

The Jews from Turkey have presented Israel with few problems. For example, despite the fact that most are Sephardi, they have not joined other Sephardi (mainly North African) groups which have been politically active in protesting what many of the latter see as discrimination or denigration on the part of Ashkenazi Israelis. They have not joined “ethnic” political parties. The Jews from Turkey have also made few demands on public welfare

<sup>14</sup> ArkadasTV, “Rachel Rina Benvenisti.” [www.arkadas.org.il](http://www.arkadas.org.il) [Due to the discontinuation of the Arkadas Association’s website, the interview videos quoted here are no longer available.]

<sup>15</sup> ArkadasTV, “Ester Adato.”

<sup>16</sup> ArkadasTV, “Roza Cohen.”

<sup>17</sup> ArkadasTV, “Roza Sara.”

resources. Despite the fact that most maintain extensive contacts with their former countrymen in Israel (and sometimes in Turkey), they do not appear to fellow Israelis as anything less than intent on blending fully into their new surroundings. In all these ways they are “unseen.”<sup>18</sup>

A lecture given to newly arrived Turkish Jewish immigrants by an Israeli official in June 1949 shows the relatively positive view that the ruling Mapai party, the labor party headed by David Ben-Gurion, which was the most dominant political force in Israel pre- and post-independence, had of Turkish Jewish immigrants, as well as the country’s expectations from its new members. The setting of the meeting was a classroom in the village of Mikve Yisrael in central Israel. “Unusual students, forty adult men and a woman” were listening to a lecture delivered in “pure Hebrew” by the head of the Integration Department (*Mahleket ha-klita*) at Mapai headquarters. His speech was translated, for the newly arrived, non-Hebrew speaking Turkish Jewish immigrants, into what the reporter dubbed the Turkish Jews’ “own ‘Yiddish,’” namely Ladino.<sup>19</sup> “What kind of words should a senior Israeli official use when he sets out to speak to the new immigrant,” the journalist muses, “soft words like butter that melt after half an hour in the hot climate of Eretz Yisrael, or words as harsh as the climate and the difficulties of life as a new immigrant?” The journalist himself opted for tough love: “The new immigrant is not spoiled. He comes from Auschwitz, Eden, Kaunas and Casablanca. His stomach will digest the harshest of words.... All is said with the intention of helping and guiding them toward the right path.” He then supported his argument with a quote from the senior Mapai official:

No empty promises. As you know, there is no shelter in this land from all kinds of disasters (*pgaim*). Know that this is your contribution to the building of the Land. Also know that those who had come before you from Thrace suffered just like you. And if you listen to them and follow in their way, you will see that they live firmly among us, rooted in this homeland and proud of it.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Walter F. Weiker, *The Unseen Israelis* (University Press America, 1988): 1.

<sup>19</sup> “Nishveti le-vein ‘Turkim’,” *Davar*, June 14, 1949.

<sup>20</sup> “Nishveti le-vein ‘Turkim’,” *Davar*, June 14, 1949.

The crowd “gestured in agreement, and applauded him,” the reported noted, so that “it was obvious that he captured their hearts.” He then approached the senior Mapai official asking him what else he had told them:

- Everything. The founding of Israel, the annihilation of the diaspora, the difficulties that the country is faced with, the trials that stand before them.

- And they?

- Didn't you see? Between Shabtai Diner, one of the first [members] of *Neemanei Tzion* and his brothers [the new immigrants he had just addressed], many of whom have been in the country for only ten days, there was no difference.<sup>21</sup>

Shabtai Diner, who later became the head of the Turkish Desk at the Foreign Ministry, apparently embodied the ‘model Turkish Jew’ in the eyes of this Israeli official—Zionist, fully integrated, and laboring for the Israeli state and nation. The reporter himself was equally impressed with the Turkish Jews:

I felt good as a “hostage” among the Turks. I felt that they were good Jews and I am sure of them, because they are as good a human foundation as the rest of the Jews. There is something in these people that compels you to treat them with trust and sympathy. They did not come with huge complaints. They understand that times are hard, and one has to suffer. They came on a somewhat “minimum plan” (*tokbnit shel minimum*).<sup>22</sup>

Silent acceptance was not a uniquely Turkish Jewish response to the difficult conditions in Israel as was observed among other immigrant communities, at least in the early years of the state. The Mizrahi Jews, for instance, would begin their social protest movement in the early 1950s. It would reach its zenith in 1971 with demonstrations by second-generation, underprivileged Mizrahim who called themselves the Black Panthers. What fostered a slightly more positive view of Turkish Jews in the eyes of the Ashkenazi-dominated Zionist leadership was simply that they were not Arab Jews.<sup>23</sup> In comparison to Jews from Arab countries, Turkish Jews

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The term “Arab Jew” first emerged among Mizrahi critics of Zionism, who insisted on being identified as Arab Jews instead of other common designations such as Mizrahi (Eastern). In scholarly literature, Ella Shohat pioneered the usage of the term, fundamentally

seemed to have escaped the Orientalist stigma so blatantly attached to their Mizrahi counterparts by Zionist leadership. As sociologist Yehouda Shenhav argues, it is possible to trace the beginnings of the Jewish Orientalist perception of Arab Jews as primitive and backwards to the early 1940s, when the Zionist movement turned its attention to these communities in its search of an alternative reservoir for immigration.<sup>24</sup> Their arrival en masse in Israel after the founding of the state only exacerbated existing prejudices against these communities.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, Turkish Jews' difference from Arab Jewish immigrant communities did not mean that they were granted the same social, cultural and political status as the dominant Ashkenazi Jews. For all intents and purposes, they were part of the underrepresented and Orientalized 'others' discriminated against in Israeli society. As new Turkish Jewish immigrants transitioned into their new lives in Israel, they also grew aware of the divide between Ashkenazi and Sephardi-Mizrahi communities.

The discrimination against Sephardi communities was the main topic discussed at the reception organized by Eliyahu Elyashar, president of the Sephardi Jewish Committee in Jerusalem, and editor-in-chief of *Hed Hamizrah* newspaper. The event was organized to honor the envoys and teachers' delegations that had arrived from countries of the Middle East and North Africa to attend the World Zionist Congress. In his opening speech, Elyashar emphasized the factionalism within the Jewish nation: "Today, we are divided into tribes, and it is our hope that the day will come when we will unite as 'one tribe' (*shevet ehad*)."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, David Sitton, editor of *Hed Hamizrah*, pointed out the role of the political parties in creating and amplifying the divide between various Jewish

challenging the commonplace Zionist understanding of Arabs and Jews as two binary categories.

Ella Shohat, *On the Arab Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements: Selected Writings* (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

Another very important work on this topic is Yehouda Shenhav's *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Shenhav, *The Arab Jews*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> For a selection of statements by leading Israeli politicians illustrative of the racist view of Mizrahim, see Tom Segev, *The First Israelis 1949* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (London: Routledge, 2006), 59–61.

communities for the sake of political gain.<sup>26</sup> Among those listening to Sitton's speech in which he observed that Sephardi Jews did not have the same rights as their Western coreligionists was David Asseo, who represented the Turkish Jewish community at this meeting and who was to be elected Turkey's Chief Rabbi in 1961. It is possible, then, to assume that Turkish Jewish leadership was aware from early on of the intra-Jewish rift in Israel based on Jewish ethnicity/descent (*adatiyut*).

One reaction of the Sephardi and Mizrahi communities to Ashkenazi dominance in the Israeli political scene was to form voluntary organizations to tend to the needs of their respective communities.<sup>27</sup> In 1949, they also formed a political party, Sephardim and Oriental Communities (*Sefardim ve-Edot ha-Mizrah*), which was elected to both the first (1949–1951) and second (1951–1955) Knesset. The party ran in 1949 as the “National Unity List of Sephardim and Oriental Communities,” (*Reshimat ha-Ihud ha-Artzi shel ha-Sefaradim u-Vnei Edot ha-Mizrah*). The change of the party name to “The List of Sephardim and Oriental Communities, Old-Timers and Immigrants,” (*Reshimat Sefaradim ve-Edot ha-Mizrah, Vatikim ve-Olim*) before the 1951 Knesset elections mirrored the demographic changes taking place within the community under the impact of the recent mass immigration.<sup>28</sup>

And yet, the party was dominated by old-timers. All four of its members elected to the First Knesset—Moshe Ben-Ami, Eliyahu Elyashar, Avraham Elmalih and Bekhor-Shalom Shitrit—were born in Ottoman Palestine. Of its two candidates elected to the Second Knesset, one was Baghdad-born Benyamin Sasson, who immigrated to Eretz Yisrael/Palestine in 1937, and the other was old-timer Eliyahu Elyashar. In an editorial penned for *Hed Hamizrah* just before the elections for the Second Knesset, Elyashar explained that their decision to run in the elections with a communal list was a result of the “Ashkenazi hegemony” on the Israeli political scene that discriminated against and underrepresented the Sephardi Jews.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> “Mesiba li-khvod tzirei ha-Kongres ha-Ivri mi-artzot ha-Mizrah ve Tsafon Afrika,” *Hed Hamizrah*, August 18, 1950.

<sup>27</sup> See Walter P. Zenner, “Sephardic Communal Organizations in Israel,” *Middle East Journal* 21, no. 2 (1967): 173–186.

<sup>28</sup> “Sephardim ve-Edot ha-Mizrah,” *Knesset*, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/faction/heb/FactionPage.asp?PG=89> (accessed 1 August 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Eliyahu Elyashar, “Mahuta shel ha-Reshima S. Tz.,” *Hed Hamizrah*, July 20, 1951.

Although *Hed Hamizrah* was the newspaper of the Sephardi and Mizrahi political movement, it did not refrain from openly criticizing its own when they were seen falling short of their duty to properly represent their already disadvantaged community. Knesset member Avraham Elmalih, for instance, came under fire for his overly zealous praise and complements of the Mapai government and its members, and for not undertaking any initiative to advance agendas for his own community. Elmalih was also slammed for his performance as part of the diplomatic mission dispatched to Turkey to take part in the flag raising ceremony at the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul. The Sephardi and Mizrahi political movement considered Turkish Jews to have significant potential to generate further immigration.<sup>30</sup> One of the main issues that occupied the minds of Turkish Jewry, and about which they approached Elmalih during his short visit, was the economic regulations applied to the new immigrants in Israel.

Although the economic troubles of Israel predated its establishment, the tidal wave of immigration that followed put even greater strains on the economy.<sup>31</sup> On top of absorbing and integrating the new immigrants, who were desperate for food and housing, the country had to build infrastructure, education and healthcare systems for the entire population with no reserves of currency, food, or fuel. In order to avoid a possible collapse of the economy, the government imposed an austerity regime (*Tzena*) in 1949 that lasted until 1952. During the *Tzena*, vital goods and services were rationed by the government. The program of austerity also introduced strict governmental control on currency, exchange rates, and the price of raw materials.<sup>32</sup> The immigrants were not allowed to transfer their capital to Israel, since the state did not have enough currency reserves to exchange their capital into local currency. The meager foreign currency reserves that it had were used to import food that it desperately needed to feed the people, and raw materials to build housing and infrastructure.

It was on this matter—the government’s ban on transfer of foreign capital—that Turkish Jews in Turkey raised to Elmalih, and whose brief answer angered his counterparts in Israel. In his response, Elmalih told his inquirers that the government simply did not “have any choice” but to

<sup>30</sup> “Le-darko shel haver ha-Knesset A. Elmalih,” *Hed Hamizrah*, November 10, 1950.

<sup>31</sup> Dvora Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 95.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

impose such a ban, since Israel had to invest its foreign currency reserves in buying raw materials.<sup>33</sup> His failure to reassure the anxious crowd of potential immigrants would lead *Hed Mamizrah* to sarcastically describe Elmalih as having done “a great ‘service’ to Turkish Jews,” since his explanation only aggravated Turkish Jews’ concerns about immigrating to Israel rather than encouraging them to do so.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding his somewhat poor performance in Turkey, Elmalih was an important Sephardi leader who promoted Turkish Jewish immigration to Israel. In an article, which he chose to publish in the mainstream *Maariv* newspaper in order to bring the issue to broader public attention, Elmalih stated that “the only aspiration” of the remaining and more well-to-do Jews in Turkey was

to liquidate their businesses and establish themselves in their New-Old Homeland. The liquidation of their businesses and transfer of their assets to Israel will involve great losses, but they are ready to make all sacrifices necessary provided that the Israeli government eases the tax burden upon their arrival in Israel.<sup>35</sup>

At a gathering the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem (*Vaad ha-eda ha-Sfaradi be-Yerushalayim*) organized in honor of a visiting Turkish delegation, David Sitton expressed similar hopes. He stated that the Turkish delegation present in the event had an “important task—to investigate the situation of our brothers from Turkey, who have immigrated, and to discuss the ways to liquidate (*hisul*) the remainder of refugees who stayed in this *golah* [diaspora].”<sup>36</sup>

However, Elmalih and Sitton’s forecasts proved to be more wishful thinking than sound observation. Contrary to their hopes, the Turkish Jewish immigration began to decrease substantially from 1952 onwards. Difficult living conditions in Israel, the poor state of the Israeli economy, the discrimination against Sephardi and Mizrahi communities and the booming state of the Turkish economy at the time not only negatively affected future immigration from Turkey, but also led some Turkish Jews

<sup>33</sup> “Le-darko shel haver ha-Knesset A. Elmalih,” *Hed Hamizrah*, November 10, 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Avraham Elmalih, “Turkiya mitrokenet mi-Yehudeiha,” *Maariv*, March 29, 1950.

<sup>36</sup> “Mesiba li-khvod orhim me-hul,” *Hed Hamizrah*, May 12, 1950.

in Israel to return to Turkey.<sup>37</sup> For Michael Assaf, who served as an expert for Mapai on Arab affairs and was the editor of party-affiliated newspaper *Davar's* Arab section, these returnees were one of the causes for stalled immigration from Turkey, as they spread “negative stories about Israel to justify their return.”<sup>38</sup>

As a political movement representing the interests of the Sephardi and Mizrahi communities in Israel, it was only natural for the Sephardi-Mizrahi political movement and *Hed Hamizrah* to advocate for the immigration of Turkish Jews. The Israeli ruling establishment, however, had other considerations that shaped its judgment vis-à-vis Turkish Jewry.

One must mention first the changes in the Israeli immigration policy. In November 1951, Israel switched from non-selective to selective *aliyah*. The need for such a change was evident by 1950, when the decision was taken to restrict the absorption quota for 1951 to 150,000. The country's capacity to absorb new migrants was stretched to its limits by the enormity of the mass *aliyah* of previous years. After the completion of the airlifting of Iraqi Jews in late 1951, a new and more stringent set of criteria was adopted to manage future immigration.<sup>39</sup> Restrictions were placed on the immigration of families from North Africa and Asia with members suffering from illnesses.<sup>40</sup> In order to lessen the financial burden on the Jewish Agency, priority was instead given to people who owned enough capital to cover the cost of and arrange for their own immigration, or whose relatives in Israel could help them financially during their absorption process. Younger people under the age of thirty-five who committed themselves to agricultural or other forms of physical labor were also given precedence.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü*, 313–314. For the restrictions on Turkish Jews' return to Turkey, see *ibid.*, 339.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Assaf, “Yehudei Turkiya,” *Davar*, November 27, 1950.

<sup>39</sup> On Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, see Moshe Gat, *The Jewish Exodus from Iraq 1948–1951* (New York: Frank Cass, 1997), 165, 195; Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> On the immigration of North African Jews and the policies of Israel and the Jewish Agency toward their *aliyah* between 1951 and 1956, see Avi Picard, *Olim bi-mesorah: Mediniut Yisrael klapei aliyatam shel Yehudei Tsafon Afrika, 1951–1956* (Kiryat Sde Boker: Makhon Ben Gurion le-Heker Yisrael ve-ha-Tzionut, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Dalia Ofer, “Emigration and *Aliyah*: A Reassessment of Israeli and Jewish Policies,” in *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945* ed. Robert S. Wistrich (London: Routledge, 1995), 66–67.

Under these circumstances, the only desirable immigration from Turkey, with the exception of the youth *aliyah* (*aliyat ha-noar*, the immigration of children and youngsters and their placement in educational and vocational schools in Israel) was that of the well-off Turkish Jews. However, as a report prepared by the Israeli legation in Ankara revealed, getting them to immigrate was no easy task. “Affluent Turkish Jews (most of them very affluent) are attached to their personal comfort. Livelihood and good food are their utmost worries,” it was noted.<sup>42</sup> However, a comprehensive propaganda campaign, which targeted certain “psychological points,” could persuade them.<sup>43</sup> In other words, they had to be reassured that the transfer of their capital to Israel could be arranged within the framework of a trade agreement or similar arrangements that could be reached with Turkey. According to the report, however, future *aliyah* from Turkey ultimately depended, more than anything, on the successful absorption of existing Turkish Jewish immigrants in Israel. In this respect, the complaints by existing Turkish Jews in Israel about “intra-ethnic discrimination” (*haflaya adatit*) was a major setback.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, the idea of using Turkish Jews in Israel to influence their wealthier coreligionists in Turkey was still entertained. However, it was doubtful whether they could actually reach the capital-holding sectors of Turkish Jewry, in whose immigration Israel was “most interested.”<sup>45</sup>

The second influence that weighed on Israeli views of Turkish Jewry was that, from the Israeli point of view, Turkey seemed to be leaping toward a more democratic path with the Democrat Party’s (*Demokrat Parti*, DP) ascent to power in the 1950 general elections. Therefore, it had no reason to prioritize the immigration of the rest of Turkish Jewry, except those mentioned above. The general understanding of the Israeli government was that the situation of Turkish Jewry had improved under the DP rule, whose more tolerant approach towards religion and religious observance was thought to benefit the Jews.<sup>46</sup> The presence of anti-Semitism in Turkey did not alarm the Israeli government, as it considered it to be no different than what was experienced by Jews in other parts of

<sup>42</sup> ISA 2397/24 – Het-Tzadi, Letter from the Temporary Appointee to the Israeli Legation in Ankara to the First Deputy to the Chief Executive Officer in the Israeli Government Offices (Ha-Kiryah), dated May 13, 1953.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

the world.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it believed that the founding of the State of Israel, together with its immediate war victories, had generated “feelings of respect and sympathy for Jews” in Turkey.<sup>48</sup> The positive view of the DP government that prevailed among the ruling Zionist establishment was also reflected in the coverage of Turkey-related news in the Israeli press.<sup>49</sup>

The third factor was the relations between Israel and the Turkish state. There were calls in the Israeli press for the Israeli government to better explain the essence and political purposes of Zionism to the Turkish people in order to earn their sympathy and support for the Zionist cause. One columnist suggested taking advantage of the Turkish people’s “hatred toward the Arabs” in order to win them over.<sup>50</sup> The author also pointed to the historical similarities between Turkey and Israel, noting that both countries were invaded: Turkey by Greece and Israel by the Arab countries. Both nations were united in their historical quests for independence. Such similarities brought the two countries and their peoples together, he argued.<sup>51</sup> The importance of the economic aspect of the bilateral relations should also not be overlooked.<sup>52</sup>

Combined, these factors caused the Israeli government to gradually put Turkish Jews and their immigration on the back burner. What best exemplifies the Israeli government’s inattentive approach to Turkish Jewry are the attempts of Shlomo Zalman Shragai, then head of the Jewish Agency’s Immigration Department, to highlight the lack of Turkish Jewish immigration. Shragai sent two letters in a span of four months to the Office of the Prime Minister to no avail. In his first letter dated October 8, 1954 addressed to Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, Shragai reminded Sharett of their last meeting, in which he had raised the issue of the difficulties of Turkish Jews’ immigration to Israel.<sup>53</sup> When he received no answer, Shragai sent a second letter to Sharett on February 14, 1955

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “Ha-alayah le-Yisrael holela tmura gdola ba-kehilot ha-Yehudiyot be-Turkiya,” *Davar*, January 15, 1950.

<sup>49</sup> “Rosh memshala u-sar ha-hutz be Turkiya lo nivheru: Ha-opozitzia la-shilton,” *Al Hamishmar*, May 16, 1950; “Memshelet Turkiya tahzir le-Yehudim et ha-mas ‘Varlık,’” *Davar*, July 16, 1950.

<sup>50</sup> “Mifne pro-Yisraeli ba-itonut ha-Turkit,” *Herut*, June 24, 1949.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Amikam Nachmani, *Israel, Turkey and Greece: Uneasy Relations in the East Mediterranean* (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 64.

<sup>53</sup> ISA, 5557/3878 – Gimel, Letter from Sh. Z. Shragai to Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett, dated October 8, 1954.

expressing his wish to bring up the issue of Turkish Jewish immigration again. He reminded Sharett that the existing Turkish law required citizens to show proof that their travel expenses both ways were covered by relatives. Moreover, they were also required to prove that the individuals covering the travel expenses were close relatives. “Needless to say,” Shragai wrote, “there is no possibility under these circumstances to organize aliyah from Turkey, or even tourism.”<sup>54</sup> His advice to Sharett was to raise the issue with the Turkish government “at a convenient time” in order to find a solution to the problem.<sup>55</sup> The reply that Shragai was waiting for came not from Sharett, but from Amiel Najjar, the director of the Western Europe Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While acknowledging the validity of the points raised by Shragai, that there was “no doubt” about how the current situation in Turkey made immigration from Turkey difficult, Najjar stated that it did not seem like the “proper time” to discuss the issue with the Turkish government.<sup>56</sup> “The reasons for this must be well-known to you,” he then said to Shragai, adding that he hoped that they could discuss the issue in the future.<sup>57</sup> Shragai’s efforts to draw the attention to issues faced in the immigration of Turkish Jews were thus effectively shelved by the Israeli government.

But what would be the Israeli government’s reaction if the safety of Jews in Turkey were compromised? Which factors would influence its responses to such a situation? In the next section of this chapter, I seek an answer to this question by taking the September 6–7, 1955 pogrom in Turkey as a case study.

### SEPTEMBER 6–7, 1955 POGROM: A REMINDER OF TURKISH ATTITUDES TO MINORITIES

On the night of September 6, 1955, a violent pogrom erupted against non-Muslim communities in Istanbul and Izmir and anti-minority demonstrations were also reported in Ankara, Adana, and Eskişehir. The ostensible pretext for the catastrophe was the bombing of Mustafa Kemal

<sup>54</sup> ISA, 5557/3878 – Gimel, Letter from Sh. Z. Shragai to Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett, dated February 14, 1955.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> ISA, 5557/3878 – Gimel, Letter from A. Najjar to Sh. Z. Shragai, dated February 28, 1955.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Atatürk's birth house in Salonica on September 5, allegedly by Greeks. The bombing occurred at a time of heightened tensions between Turkey and Greece over the future status of Cyprus, then a British colony, and following the killing of several Turkish Cypriots by the Greek Cypriot nationalist militant group EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters). Although the primary target of the riots was the *Rum*, Istanbul's Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox community, Armenians and Jews were also affected. During the pogrom, non-Muslim properties, businesses, houses, schools, and holy places were looted and vandalized.<sup>58</sup> There were also numerous cases of rape and murder. While they lasted only two days, the riots produced cataclysmic psychological and material consequences for Turkey's non-Muslim minorities. Thousands of non-Muslims left Turkey following the pogrom, further stripping the country of its multicultural and ethnic components. A total of 3621 Turkish Jews immigrated to Israel in the two years after the September 6–7 riots (1710 in 1956 and 1911 in 1957) in contrast to the mere 339 Jews who had immigrated in 1955.<sup>59</sup> When compared with figures from previous years (433 in 1952, 325 in 1953 and 184 in 1954), the period of 1956–1957 represents the peak of Turkish Jewish immigration to Israel after the initial wave following the founding of the State of Israel.

#### IMMEDIATE RESPONSES FROM ISRAEL TO THE POGROM

The news of the pogrom reached Israel immediately, as the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul rushed to notify Tel Aviv, before the day's mail went out. The letter from September 7, written by Vice-Consul Memisrael Uriel Bassan, described the pogroms as "terrible, horrific events which took place yesterday evening in this city, the likes of which had never been encountered in the history of this country since the 1920s after the stabilization of Atatürk's regime."<sup>60</sup> (Bassan seems to have chosen to ignore the Thrace Pogroms of 1934, possibly an indication of how completely the evidence of such historical precedents had been buried by Israeli officials). He provided an hour-by-hour account of the events as they unfolded

<sup>58</sup> Dilek Güven, "Riots against the Non-Muslims in Turkey: 6/7 September 1955 in the Context of Demographic Engineering," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (2011): 4.

<sup>59</sup> Weiker, *The Unseen Israelis*, 22.

<sup>60</sup> ISA, 1916/17 – Pe, Letter from M. U. Bassan to Foreign Ministry's Western Europe Division, September 7, 1955.

from five o'clock in the evening of September 6 until midnight, when a state of emergency was declared in Istanbul and Izmir. After his detailed accounts of the riots, Bassan concluded his report by stating the following:

...[The Turkish government] is helpless to bring about an economic recovery of the country itself, and now this calamity, which it [the government] caused indirectly, has been added [to its troubles].

For the Jews, this has been a fatal blow. Will they finally learn their lesson?<sup>61</sup>

This last section of Bassan's letter speaks volumes. First, it acknowledges the Turkish government's responsibility, albeit "indirect," for the riots. Second, it represents a senior Israeli diplomat directly criticizing Turkish Jews by pointing to their reluctance to leave Turkey despite ongoing state discrimination against their community. What they were expected to do when and if they "learn their lesson," is not specified. However, it seems logical to conclude that Bassan meant that they should choose to immigrate to Israel as a legal and obvious choice.

Others, however, were skeptical about the charges that the riots might have been planned by Turkish authorities. Such allegations were brought to the world's attention by Bill Downs, the CBS correspondent covering the Mediterranean region, in a cable wired from Beirut to prominent American journalist Edward R. Murrow in New York. In his report, Downs mentioned the Turkish government's relaxation of the anti-demonstration ban ahead of the riots and the rumors which had been circulating in Istanbul as points that raised suspicion.<sup>62</sup> Downs's report came to the attention of Israeli diplomats in Athens as well, who dismissed the allegations in the report in a letter to the Israeli Foreign Ministry on the grounds that although "interesting," there was "no way of knowing the level of truth in [Downs's] assumptions."<sup>63</sup>

Varying views on the Turkish government's culpability in the riots aside, the extent of damages that the Jewish community sustained as a result of the riots was reported by the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul in great detail. According to the data provided by Bassan in a correspondence

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> "1955. The Aftermath of the Istanbul Pogrom," *billdownscbs.blogspot.com*, November 4, 2016. <https://billdownscbs.blogspot.com/2016/11/1955-aftermath-of-istanbul-pogrom.html> (accessed June 3, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> ISA, 1916/17 – Pe, Letter from the Israeli Representation in Athens to Foreign Ministry, October 6, 1955.

dated September 29, 1955, of the 4000 shops and warehouses pillaged during the pogrom in Istanbul's Pera, Galata, and Sirkeci neighborhoods, at least 500 belonged to Jews.<sup>64</sup> Other affected neighborhoods were identified as Şişli and Hasköy. Balat "for some reason," it was noted, remained unscathed. In his speech delivered at the Parliament, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes's failure to mention the Jews, alongside the Armenians, the Greeks and the Turks as among those harmed by the rioting was also noted in the report. The reason for this omission, which was later added in handwriting, was "probably to hide the events from American Jewry."<sup>65</sup>

For its part, the right wing of the Israeli political spectrum saw in the September 6–7 events further "proof of the curse of the eternal *galut*" (the uprooting of Jews from their homeland and the state of living in diaspora), the phenomenon it vehemently opposed.<sup>66</sup> From the perspective of *Herut*, a newspaper of the right-wing movement by the same name, although Turkey displayed an "always friendly" approach toward Jews, as evidenced by its welcoming of Sephardi Jews in the fifteenth century, the core issue, was not what kind of treatment Jews in the diaspora received in their respective countries, but the fact that a Jewish diaspora continued to exist. They believed that "until the *galut* itself [was] destroyed, the curse of diaspora [would] not be lifted."<sup>67</sup> As a secular nationalist movement, Zionism rejected the political passivity of ghetto Judaism and sought to create a 'new Jew' in a modern Hebrew society that was to be built in Eretz Yisrael/Palestine through Jewish labor and pioneerism, different from the traditional 'old Jew' in Europe, who had for centuries been considered weak and impoverished. Zionism rejected the Diaspora traits and held that Jewish life in the Diaspora was unfeasible, as it would ultimately lead to the destruction of the Jewish people as a whole, either by

<sup>64</sup> ISA, 2387/19 – Het-Tsadi, Letter from Vice-Consul Memisrael Uriel Bassan to Foreign Ministry's Western Europe Division, dated September 29, 1955.

<sup>65</sup> ISA, 2387/19 – Het-Tsadi, Letter from Vice-Consul Memisrael Uriel Bassan to Foreign Ministry's Western Europe Division, dated September 29, 1955.

<sup>66</sup> *Herut* was the daily newspaper of the right-wing Herut movement, which was the political successor of Etzel (*Ha-Irgun ha-Tzvai ha-Leumi*), the underground organization active during the pre-state period. Herut's political philosophy was shaped by its belief in the "inalienable rights of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael" and its rejection of the "possibility of normalizing Jewish life in the Diaspora." As such, Herut avidly advocated for Jewish immigration to Israel.

Yehuda Benari, "The Herut Movement: Israel's Right Wing," *Patterns of Prejudice* 7, no. 1 (January 1973): 1.

<sup>67</sup> "Meerat ha-galut," *Herut*, September 12, 1955.

discrimination or assimilation.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the concept of *shlilat ha-golah*, the negation of the Diaspora, emerged as a central tenet of the Zionist ideology, and, as Israeli scholar of modern Judaism Yitzhak Conforti observes, there was “a close relationship between the creation of the new Jew and the Zionist principle of negating the Diaspora.”<sup>69</sup>

Such implied criticism against Turkish Jews should be considered in light of the fact that the community’s maintenance of its Jewishness and the decreasing flow of immigration to Israel had raised some concern in Israel prior to the outbreak of the September 6–7 Pogrom. Writing in his column in Mapai-affiliated *Davar* only a few days before the events, Yaakov Nitzani, a Mapai politician who served as a member of Knesset from 1952 to 1959, repeated a warning call from Dr. Israel Goldstein, the head of the American Jewish Congress. Dr. Goldstein had returned from a two-month visit in Yugoslavia and Turkey (July–August 1955) and expressed his concerns about diminishing prospects of immigration by the local Jewish communities there.<sup>70</sup> Nitzani shared Goldstein’s fears, emphasizing the deleterious effect of the Turkification policies on the Jewish community. Beside abandoning their native Ladino for Turkish and the effects of the standardization of education on minority schools, the Turkification of the Jewish community manifested itself, according to Nitzani, in Turkish Jews’ lack of interest and participation in the affairs and the running of their own community.<sup>71</sup> Although Nitzani emphasized the large part that Turkish state policies played in the assimilation of Turkish Jews, he also acknowledged the responsibility that the Zionist movement bore in the matter through its neglect of the Turkish Jewish community. In order to repair the situation, Nitzani called on the Zionist organizations in Israel and worldwide to “wake up and help the Turkish

<sup>68</sup> For more on the varying views of the Diaspora in classical Zionist thinking, see Eliezer Schweid, “The Rejection of the Diaspora in Zionist Thought: Two Approaches,” in *Essential Papers on Zionism* eds. Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 133–160.

<sup>69</sup> Yitzhak Conforti, “‘The New Jew’ in the Zionist Movement: Ideology and Historiography,” *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 25 (2011): 87.

<sup>70</sup> Yaakov Nitzani, “Eda Yehudit mefoeret be-elbona,” *Davar*, September 1, 1955. *Davar* was founded in 1920 by Berl Katznelson, one of the founding fathers of Labor Zionism and the founder of many major Labor Zionist institutions, which became building blocks for institutions in the future State of Israel. As the official publication of the Yishuv leadership in Palestine and later that of Mapai, *Davar* served both as a platform for the party leaders to showcase their views, as well as a means for them to shape and influence public opinion.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

Jews and save them from national degeneration.” To this end, he suggested the formation of an “authorized body” that would assist “this magnificent branch of Sephardi Jewry.”<sup>72</sup>

Soon after the publication of Nitzani’s column and the September 6–7 Pogrom, an action committee was elected on September 9 at a Mapai party meeting. The committee’s task was to investigate how to boost immigration among Turkish Jews. The decision to arrange a youth *aliyah* was taken after Rafael Bash, the General Secretary of Mapai, and some of his colleagues shared their impressions of their visit to Turkey with other party members. It was also decided that this newly established committee should have representatives in both the Foreign Ministry and at the Jewish Agency, in order to work more effectively.<sup>73</sup>

The establishment of this committee was in response to the surge in the number of Turkish Jews wishing to immigrate in the immediate aftermath of the pogrom. As reported in the Israeli press at the time, many Jews turned to the Israeli Consulate in Istanbul to receive information about the possibility of immigrating and the process of absorption in Israel. Some of those affected by the pogrom travelled to Israel as tourists to see for themselves the conditions for establishing businesses and settling there.<sup>74</sup> What gave a further push to Turkish Jews’ readiness to leave Turkey once and for all were the anti-Semitic incidents that took place in places like Çanakkale and Istanbul only a month later in October 1955. In Çanakkale, the Jewish population of which had substantially dwindled as a result of the Thrace Pogroms of 1934, and where only approximately one hundred Jewish families remained, posters were hung on the streets threatening the city’s Jewish residents with massacre if they did not leave the city.<sup>75</sup> According to the Israeli press, the local Turkish press was silent on the resurgent anti-Semitism in Thrace. Concerned Jewish community leaders in Çanakkale met with the city’s mayor, who assured them of their safety and stationed police forces in the Jewish quarter for protection. Three suspects were also allegedly apprehended.<sup>76</sup> Other anti-Semitic incidents reported in the Israeli press during October included the hoisting of

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “Peula le-hagbarat ha-aliya me-Turkiya,” *Davar*, September 20, 1955.

<sup>74</sup> “Yehudei Turkiya mitanyenim ba-aliya ekev hapraot ve krazot anti-Shemiyot,” *Maariv*, October 17, 1955.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. See also “Turkiya timna me-hitpartzuyot neged Yehudim,” *Davar*, October 20, 1955.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

a Nazi flag in Istanbul's Yeniköy district and the marking of Jewish and Christian houses in Ankara with letters indicating their religion.<sup>77</sup>

### FACTORS AFFECTING THE ISRAELI RESPONSE TO THE POGROM

In its response to the September 6–7 Pogrom, the Israeli government considered, first and foremost, strategic interests embedded in its relations with Turkey. Throughout the 1950s, Turkish-Israeli relations had been steadily, albeit slowly, improving due to a convergence in strategic interests. Both were eager to be a part of the Western camp in order to join in an alliance against the forces of Arab nationalism and the Soviet Union, two enemies that these countries shared.

These geopolitical considerations influenced how Israel formulated its approach and attitudes toward various Jewish diaspora communities in the Middle East. It had been the case since the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but more markedly so after the establishment of the State of Israel, that the situation of some Jewish communities in Arab countries was highly precarious. Within a few years of its establishment, Israel helped many Jews from around the Middle East and North Africa, considered in their respective countries of origin as the enemy within, to immigrate to Israel in emergency evacuation operations. The Jews who remained were the first to be afflicted by continuing conflict between Israel and the Arab states, as was true in Egypt, when all Jews in the country were declared “enemies of the state” by Nasser’s regime in the immediate aftermath of the Suez Crisis of 1956. The gravity of the situation for these communities urgently demanded Israel’s direct involvement to rescue and relocate them, and eventually led Israel to abandon its selective immigration criteria in the late 1950s.

In non-Arab Muslim countries not directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as Iran and Turkey, the picture was inverted. The Jewish communities there were not considered to be under any imminent existential threat due to the nature of the regimes in these two countries, both of which recognized Israel soon after its establishment and established diplomatic relations. Moreover, all three countries shared geopolitical interests, including fears of Nasser’s Pan-Arabism and Soviet communism. It was these geopolitical interests that Israel took into consideration when

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

calculating its response to events that undermined the wellbeing of Jewish communities in these countries. In such cases, Israel's geopolitical interests took precedence over its commitment to safeguarding the Jewish diaspora communities. Similar to the unresponsiveness of the Yishuv to the 1942 Capital Tax, where Turkey's importance as a rescue route outweighed the necessity to respond to this calamity, Israel's reaction to the September 6–7 Pogrom of 1955—or more precisely, the lack thereof was dictated by its desire not to jeopardize relations with Turkey.

The dissonance between Israeli officials' extensive knowledge about the events on the one hand and their limited action on the other can therefore be best explained as an outcome of strategic thinking, where the need to prioritize between Israel's commitment to the Diaspora, as the nation-state of the Jewish people, and its need to forge and maintain diplomatic and strategic relations with countries like Turkey in a region where it found more enemies than friends. Therefore, the Israeli government refrained from taking any official steps against the Turkish government and no note of disapproval or reprimand was dispatched to Turkey. Appeals from several Greek municipalities, including those of Athens and the city of Xanthi (Ískeçe in Turkish) in Thrace, calling for Israel's participation in condemning Turkey over the riots, were similarly avoided.

The appeals of the Greek municipalities were addressed to the Municipality of Tel Aviv-Yafo. Unsure of how to proceed, the Municipality turned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for advice.<sup>78</sup> The responding official at the Foreign Ministry was Eitan Ruppin from the Western European Division. In a letter dated October 28, 1955, Ruppin stated that “silence” could also be construed as a response. He suggested that the Municipality confirm receipt of the letters to the Greek side, while expressing sorrow over the events and also adding the sentence, “the blood reached [the Jews], too.”<sup>79</sup> This, however, Ruppin explicitly stressed, must be done without becoming part of any protest against Turkey, so as not to jeopardize Israel's relations with Turkey.<sup>80</sup> It is likely that Israel did not want to leave the Greek side completely high and dry, and therefore decided to appease the Greeks by alluding to the common

<sup>78</sup> ISA, 1916/17 – Pe, Letter addressed to the Foreign Ministry by the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality Secretariat, dated October 9, 1955.

<sup>79</sup> ISA, 1916/17 – Pe, Letter from E. Ruppin to Municipal Secretary, dated October 28, 1955.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

fate shared by the Greeks and the Jews during and after the pogrom in a display of sympathy.

By the same token, Israel found it unnecessary to call for an international lawsuit against Turkey.<sup>81</sup> That the Turkish government immediately sent an official note expressing its sorrow must have strengthened Israel's reluctance to condemn Turkey. Instructed by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the Turkish diplomatic mission in Israel issued a formal letter, in which the Israeli government was assured that "there exist[ed] no intention or inclination in Turkey to harm, in any shape or form, the safety and rights of Turkish Jews."<sup>82</sup> The letter also referred the Israeli government to the Turkish government's recent announcement, in which it identified the so-called "true culprits" of the riots, namely the communists and "treacherous provocateurs."<sup>83</sup> Turkey's decision to reassure Israel of the safety of Turkish Jews can be attributed to its own set of political considerations. Besides sharing similar strategic concerns with Israel, Turkey respected the influence of the American Jewish lobby, which it deemed crucial for the promotion of Turkish interests in the United States.<sup>84</sup>

Israel's unresponsiveness to the September 6–7 Pogrom had other reasons besides the prioritization of its relations with Turkey.<sup>85</sup> In 1956, two new developments in the Jewish diaspora distracted Israeli attention from

<sup>81</sup> ISA 2387/19 – Het-Tzadi, Foreign Ministry memo on "Compensating Damages Caused to Israelis during the September 6 Riots in Turkey," dated October 12, 1955.

<sup>82</sup> ISA 2387/19 – Het-Tzadi, "Nosah hodaat dover Misrad ha-Hutz she-nimsera le-firsum be-18.9 ba-crev," dated September 19, 1955.

<sup>83</sup> Many prominent intellectual figures were among those detained such as writer and humorist Aziz Nesin, novelist Kemal Tahir, poet Hasan İzzettin Dinamo, and Mustafa Borklücke, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, TKP).

Güven, "Riots against the Non-Muslims of Turkey," 6.

<sup>84</sup> Dan Arbell, "The U.S.-Turkey-Israel Triangle," *Brookings Analysis Paper*, no. 34 (October 2014): 5. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/USTurkeyIsrael-TriangleFINAL.pdf>.

<sup>85</sup> The only article criticizing the Israeli government for its silence on the September 6–7 Riots (as far as I could find) was published in *Kol Haam*, the newspaper of the Communist movement in Israel known for its oppositional voice and harsh criticism of Mapai. The article slammed the government for "covering up" the damages sustained by Turkish Jews and not properly responding to the riots. According to the author of this article, the reason behind the Mapai government's silence was its desire to avoid "causing damage to the Turkish democracy or besmirching the [reputation of] its current leaders" so as to maintain the friendly state of its relations with Turkey. "Turkey has been called by leading policy-makers in Israel 'our great friend' and a 'fortress of democracy,'" it was sarcastically noted.

the situation in Turkey. The first was the worsening situation of the Jewish communities in the newly independent state of Morocco, and in Egypt. Eighteen thousand Jews were smuggled out of Morocco via France to Israel from the end of 1956 to mid-1961 in underground operations, following the ban on the Jewish Agency's local representative body that handled immigration to Israel.<sup>86</sup> The Suez Crisis had grave consequences for Egypt's Jewish population. Among the harsh measures taken against them by the Nasserist regime were detainment, sequestration of Jewish businesses, peremptory expulsions, and a presidential decree issued in November 1956 depriving "Zionists" of Egyptian citizenship (all Jews were considered Zionists). Within four months, from late November 1956 to mid-March 1957, 14,102 Jews left Egypt.<sup>87</sup>

The second issue of concern for the Israeli government was the fate of Jews in eastern Europe. After the death of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in 1953, anti-Stalinist uprisings enveloped Poland and Hungary. In October 1956, Wladyslaw Gomulka, the post-war leader of Poland until 1948, returned to power. Almost simultaneously, a nationwide uprising against Hungary's communist government resulted in the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November. This de-Stalinization process had serious ramifications for the Jewish populations in both countries. Gomulka's rule, characterized by reform and permission for free Jewish immigration, led to a renewed wave of Jewish immigration referred to as the "Gomulka Aliyah" during which some 45,000 Jews arrived in Israel.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, approximately 200,000 Hungarians fled their country in the political chaos that followed the Soviet invasion, including 15,000 Jews, around 8000 of whom made their way to Israel.<sup>89</sup>

The Jewish Agency was very pleased with the renewal of immigration from eastern Europe. In a letter to chairman of the Jewish Agency

"Ha-hugim ha-shalitim be-Yisrael ma'alimim et ha-pgiot ha-hamurot be-Yehudei Turkiya," *Kol Haam*, September 29, 1955.

<sup>86</sup>Michael Menachem Laskier and Eliezer Bashan, "Morocco," in *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times* ed. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 501.

<sup>87</sup>Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2005), 87.

<sup>88</sup>Rafael Medoff and Chaim I. Waxman, *Historical Dictionary of Zionism* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>89</sup>András Kovács, *Communism's Jewish Question: Jewish Issues in Communist Archives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 23.

Executive Zalman Shazar, Shlomo Zalman Shragai, the head of the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department, wrote how much immigration from eastern Europe was "missed," as opposed to from Islamic countries.<sup>90</sup> There was even talk within the Jewish Agency that priority should be given to immigration from Poland and Hungary, even if it meant restricting immigration from places such as Turkey and Iran.<sup>91</sup> Some Israeli officials feared that domestic uncertainty in Poland and Hungary or Arab pressure on these countries' governments would bring this immigration to a sudden halt. Therefore, the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency prioritized immigration from these eastern European countries, and the rescue of Jewish communities in hostile Arab countries.

### CONCLUSION

While the discriminatory policies of the Turkish state have received ample scholarly attention, the State of Israel's approach toward Turkish Jewish immigration and its plight, as exemplified here by the September 6–7, 1955 Pogrom, has been missing from the scholarly corpus. Although their immigration was deemed less problematic for the nascent Jewish state in comparison to that of Arab Jews, once in Israel, Turkish Jews found themselves within the discriminated camp of the intra-Jewish ethnic rift between Ashkenazi and Sephardi/Mizrahi populations. Compared to their Mizrahi counterparts, they fared only slightly better in terms of the Israeli state's approach to non-Ashkenazi Jewish communities. When the circumstances prevailing in the Arab-Israeli conflict necessitated the rescue of various Arab Jewish populations, Turkish Jews' importance fell below that of both Jews of European descent who represented the state's preferred human reservoir and of the persecuted Jews from Arab countries who had to be rescued. Israel's response to the Pogrom of September 6–7, 1955 in Turkey was also a reminder that Israel placed greater value on its relations with Turkey than on its commitment to support Turkish Jewry.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Hagai Tsoreff, ed., *Zalman Shazar ba-nasi ha-sblishi: Mivhar teudot mi-pirkei hayav (1889–1974)* (Yerushalayim: Ginzakh Ha-Medina, 5768), 411.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

PART II

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Jewish-Turkish Entanglements in  
Contemporary Turkey and Israel



## Entangled Sovereignties: Turkish Jewish Spaces in Israel

*Kerem Öktem*

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This title is inspired in parts by an article on the entangled sovereignties in the life of the Osage nation (Dennison 2017). I would like to thank my co-editor İpek K. Yosmaoğlu, Cenk Özbay (Sabancı University Istanbul), Stella Ovadya (Istanbul and Paris), Karel Bensusan (Istanbul), Anna Zadrožna (University of Oslo) and Hazal Özdemir (Northwestern University) for their intellectual stimulation, their insights, comments, and critique. Tsameret Levi (Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem) and Marcy Brink-Danan (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) supported me during my initial fieldwork in Israel. Orit Abuhav (Beit Berl College) generously opened a very significant door for me. Eldad Urfali Ron and his circle in Tel Aviv were wonderful friends during a challenging time, and so were Duygu Atlas, a contributor to this volume, and Ümit Kurt, a resident of the Van Leer Institute at the time of research. I am especially indebted to my research participants in Israel, who not only bared their souls during often several hour-long interview sessions, but whose feelings of loss and belonging, of warmth and anger, and of occasional sadness about the world's affairs I found intimately familiar.

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A growing body of literature, both academic and non-academic, deals with the ‘new wave’ of migration from Turkey, particularly of highly skilled migrants,<sup>1</sup> educated members the middle classes,<sup>2</sup> and ‘lifestyle migrants.’<sup>3</sup> These migratory movements have accelerated with the authoritarian turn of successive Justice and Development Party governments (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP)<sup>4</sup> and ‘Turkey’s exit from democracy.’<sup>5</sup> Migration of Turkish passport holders has been rising since the early 2010s. In the three years following the coup attempt of July 15, 2016, migration has peaked, with close to 400,000 citizens emigrating from mid-2016 to 2019,<sup>6</sup> most of them young people under the age of thirty-five.<sup>7</sup> Many of these migrants have moved to places with existing Turkey-related communities, created after earlier waves of migration, and thus face established diasporas.<sup>8</sup> Part of this debate on ‘new migration,’ particularly in the news

<sup>1</sup> Mehmet Oğuzhan Okumuş, “How Berlin Attracts the Turkish ‘New Wave’: Comparison of Economic and Socio-cultural Pull Factors for Highly Skilled Immigrants,” (working paper, no. 142/2020, Berlin Institute for International Political Economy (IPE), 2020), <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/217223>. Adem Yavuz Elveren and Gülay Toksöz, “Hidden Gender Dimensions of the Brain Drain: The Case of Turkey,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 60 (2019): 33–59.

<sup>2</sup> Nazlı Cabadağ and Gülden Ediger, “We Disperse to Berlin: Transnational Entanglements of LGBTI Movement(s) in Turkey,” in *Doing Tolerance: Urban Interventions and Forms of Participation*, ed. Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Barış Ülker, (Opladen; Berlin; Toronto: Verlag Barbara Budrich 2020), 194–210. Özlem Savaş, “Affective Digital Media of New Migration from Turkey: Feelings, Affinities, and Politics,” *International Journal of Communication* (2019): 5405–5426.

<sup>3</sup> Gül Üret, “Between Lifestyle Migration and Comfortable Exit Strategies: Turkish Golden Visa Investors in Greece,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021): 166–187. [muse.jhu.edu/article/812797](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/812797).

<sup>4</sup> Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey,” *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016), 1581–1606. Berk Esen and Sebnem Gumuscu, “The Perils of ‘Turkish Presidentialism,’” *Review of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018), 43–53.

<sup>5</sup> Kerem Öktem and Karabekir Akkoyunlu, *Exit from Democracy: Illiberal Governance in Turkey and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> According to TÜİK (2017, 2018 and 2019), the numbers of Turkish citizens emigrating were as follows: 69,326 in 2016; 113,026 in 2017; 136,740 in 2018; 84,863 in 2019.

<sup>7</sup> “Uluslararası Göç İstatistikleri, 2019,” TÜİK: Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu Haber Bülteni, <https://tuikweb.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=33709>.

<sup>8</sup> Nella Geurts, Tine Davids and Niels Spierings, “The Lived Experience of an Integration Paradox: Why High-Skilled Migrants from Turkey Experience Little National Belonging in the Netherlands,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1770062>. Gülay Türkmen, “‘But You Don’t Look Turkish!’: The Changing Face of Turkish Immigration to Germany,”

media in Turkey, Israel, and Europe also refers to a growing number of Jews from Turkey applying for Spanish and Portuguese passports<sup>9</sup> or leaving for a new life in Israel and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Until recently, Turkish migration literature focused above all on the major labor migration of the 1960s and 1970s to Germany and other western European countries, leading to the critique of ‘Eurocentrism.’<sup>11</sup> With few exceptions,<sup>12</sup> Jewish migration from Turkey to Israel was rarely seen as part of the country’s larger migratory trends, but as a specific and unique case with limited relevance for the larger debate on Turkish mobility.<sup>13</sup> The general assumption has been that once members of non-Muslim communities leave, their relationship with Turkey dissipates, eventually leading to a termination of ties with the country of origin. This compartmentalized thinking may have been further strengthened by Zionist notions of the uniqueness of migration to the state of Israel, framed as it

*Reset Dialogues on Civilizations*, May 27, 2019, <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/dont-look-turkish-changing-face-turkish-immigration-germany/>.

<sup>9</sup>Pinto Côte-Real, Gabriela Anouck and Isabel David, “Choosing Second Citizenship in Troubled Times: The Jewish Minority in Turkey,” in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 5 (2019): 781–796. Ceylan Yeginsu, “Sephardic Jews Feel Bigotry’s Sting in Turkey and a Pull Back to Spain,” *New York Times*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/27/world/europe/sephardic-jews-feel-bigotrys-sting-in-turkey-and-a-pull-back-to-spain.html>.

<sup>10</sup>Sibel Ekin, “More Turkish Jews Seek New Life in Israel,” *Abnal*, March 3, 2018, <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey/more-turkish-jews-seek-new-life-israel>. Sedat Ergin, “Yeni yıla beyin göçüyle girmek,” *Hürriyet*, Dec. 30, 2017. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/yeni-yila-beyin-gocuyule-girmek-40694667>. Ilan Ben Zion, “Young Turkish Jews Trickling Away from Shrinking Community,” *The Times of Israel*, June 6, 2015. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/young-turkish-jews-trickling-away-from-shrinking-community/>.

<sup>11</sup>Ibrahim Sirkeci and Jeffrey H. Cohen, “Cultures of Migration and Conflict in Contemporary Human Mobility in Turkey,” *European Review* 24, no. 3 (2016): 381–396.

<sup>12</sup>See Ahmet İçduygu, Şule Toktaş and B. Ali Soner, “The Politics of Population in a Nation-Building Process: Emigration of Non-Muslims from Turkey” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 358–389.

<sup>13</sup>One of the few exceptions is the Şule Toktaş’ work that covers both Turkish-Jewish migration, as well as issues of cultural belonging and identity. For more, see: Şule Toktaş, “Turkey’s Jews and Their Immigration to Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2006). Şule Toktaş, “Perceptions of anti-Semitism among Turkish Jews,” *Turkish Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006): 203–223. Sule Toktas, “The Conduct of Citizenship in the Case of Turkey’s Jewish Minority: Legal Status, Identity, and Civic Virtue Aspects,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, no. 1 (2006): 121–133. Şule Toktaş, “Cultural Identity, Minority Position and Immigration: Turkey’s Jewish Minority vs. Turkish-Jewish Immigrants in Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2008): 511–525.

is in the nationalist-religious idiom of ‘*aliyah*’ i.e. the ‘return’ of Jews from the diaspora to the ‘promised land.’ Even though Jews in Istanbul may refer to family in Israel every now and then, references to a Turkish-Jewish community in Israel in the Turkish media have been rare, limited to a few high-level political visits of Turkish politicians during the ‘golden age’ of Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1990s<sup>14</sup> and the ‘Antalya years’ in the 2000s, when almost every Israeli had visited the Mediterranean port city of Antalya at least once and Turkey ‘was being loved by everyone in Israel’.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish community in Turkey, for good reasons, has taken great care to underemphasize in public any association with Zionism and the state of Israel, thereby making references to a Turkish-Jewish community in Israel a thorny and even risky issue.

All these factors taken together may explain why there is only scattered work on the Turkish-Jewish community in Israel, even though it resembles other Turkey-related diaspora communities all over the world in many ways, with their community centres, houses of worship, restaurants, and shops with foods imported from Turkey. Initially, I had assumed that I could approach this community from the angle of liberal cosmopolitanism and transnationalism<sup>16</sup> and engage with the community in the context of a Turkish-Israeli political universe rather than in a space where different forms of sovereignty intersect. Not surprisingly, this proved impossible as even the foremost institution, the Itahdut Yotsey Turkiya Bel Israel (in short Itahdut, Association for people from Turkey in Israel, *Israil’deki Türkiyeliler Birliği*, התאחדות יוצאי תורכיה בישראל), which both Turkish Jews arriving in Israel, as well as researchers and journalists from Turkey visit, is a space where Turkish and Israeli symbols of sovereignty—Turkish flags, a bust of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Israeli flags, regalia of the Israeli Defence

<sup>14</sup>The ‘golden age’ was triggered *inter alia* by the Oslo Peace Process between Palestinians and Israel and led to a series of high-profile visits, including a visit by President Ezer Weizman to Ankara—the first ever President of Israel to officially visit Turkey—in 1994, and President Sileyman Demirel’s reciprocity visit to Israel in 1996. Ilker Hepkaner, “Picturing the Past: The Formation of Turkish Jewish Heritage in Turkey and Israel (1948–2018)” (doctoral thesis, New York University, 2020), 34.

<sup>15</sup>During my fieldwork, I came across many references to the ‘Antalya years,’ not only among Turkish Jews, but also members of the general public. As a recent immigrant from Turkey suggested: ‘Many people here still have a positive image of Turkey. They don’t like Erdoğan of course, but they respect him as politician. But for them, Turkey is still Antalya. They loved their holidays in Antalya.’

<sup>16</sup>Amy Mills, *Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance, and National Identity in Istanbul* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

Forces—stand next to each other in what appears to be an uneasy coexistence, at least to the external observer, considering the current geopolitical overdetermination of Turkish-Israeli relations.

In this chapter, I explore Turkish-Jewish spaces in Israel as ones of intersecting, entangled, and sometimes clashing sovereign projects of Turkey and Israel, where the borders between Turkey and Israel, between ‘domestic’ and ‘external’ become increasingly permeable, and Turkish state authority as palpable in Israel as Israeli sovereignty is present in Turkish Jewish spaces in Turkey. Turkish Jews and others negotiate and perform the ideological frames and political discourses that are embedded in the sovereign projects and their geopolitical narratives when moving in and between these spaces; and when travelling to Turkey. Arriving from Ben Gurion airport in Istanbul, the customs officer or taxi driver’s obligatory question regarding the place of departure requires a cautiously measured response that allows the speaker to disassociate themselves from what are seen as the atrocities of Zionism and Israel without giving too much insight into one’s own business there.<sup>17</sup> As I explore these intersections of Turkish and Israeli sovereignties in Israel, I also engage with different perspectives in the Turkish Jewish community in Israel and discuss how Jewish-Turkish lives in Israel interact with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

## ENTANGLED SOVEREIGNTIES

At the heart of this inquiry is the notion of sovereignty and its embeddedness in geopolitical imaginations. What John Agnew calls the ‘modern geopolitical imagination’<sup>18</sup> is characterised by geographical assumptions, which continue to inform both political elites and citizens, or, in more general terms, those who govern and those who are governed:

...first, that states have exclusive sovereign power over their territories; second, that ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ are separate and distinct realms; and third, that the boundaries of a state define the boundaries of ‘society.’<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>The subsequent questions, if Israel was mentioned, are manifold: Are you Jewish? Do you support the Israeli government? Were you there on business? Did you go to Jerusalem? Have you seen the Al Aqsa mosque? The anxiety of arriving in Istanbul and facing airport staff or cab drivers comes up regularly in online discussions.

<sup>18</sup>John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>19</sup>Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “De-Territorialised Threats and Global Dangers: Geopolitics and Risk Society,” *Geopolitics* 3, no. 1 (1998): 17.

In conventional political discourse, sovereignty is about a central state ‘in which an agent of a state can make commands that are voluntarily complied with by those over whom the state claims authority ... [e]xplicitly, therefore, sovereignty is seen as state-based and territorial.’<sup>20</sup>

Since the 1990s, particularly critical geographers and constructivist scholars of international relations have questioned the viability of this ‘modern’ model of sovereignty with the goal of understanding what Ó Tuathail has termed ‘postmodern geopolitics.’<sup>21</sup> Sovereignty and statehood in a postmodern context can be understood in less hierarchical and more interactional terms, and, importantly, as ‘performatively constituted’<sup>22</sup>:

sovereign nation-states are not pre-given subjects but subjects in process and ... all subjects in process (be they individual or collective) are the ontological effects of practices which are performatively enacted.<sup>23</sup>

Joe Painter emphasizes the ‘prosaics’ of the state and the ‘myriad ways in which everyday life is permeated by the social relations of stateness,’<sup>24</sup> where performances are ‘mundane practices’<sup>25</sup> ‘vital to state sovereignty.’<sup>26</sup> The performative constitution of sovereignty and the entanglement of such performances is indeed a core aspect in the everyday life of Turkish Jews in Israel.

Sovereignty as performed and ‘socially constructed practices of political authority’ are also exercised non-territorially ‘in scattered pockets connected by flows across space-spanning networks.’<sup>27</sup> Many nation-states exercise power beyond the confines of their national territories and engage in forms of sovereignty that can be described as ‘de-territorialised,’ while

<sup>20</sup> John Agnew, “Sovereignty Regimes: Territoriality and State Authority in Contemporary World Politics,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, no. 2 (2005), 438.

<sup>21</sup> Ó Tuathail, “De-Territorialised Threats,” 17.

<sup>22</sup> Cynthia Weber, “Performative States,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27, no. 1 (1998): 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Joe Painter, “Prosaic Geographies of Stateness,” *Political Geography* 25, no. 7 (2006): 752.

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Bryant, “Sovereignty in Drag: On Fakes, Foreclosure, and Unbecoming States,” *Cultural Anthropology* 36 (2021): 52–82.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Bobick, “Sovereignty and the Vicissitudes of Recognition: Peoplehood and Performance in a De Facto State,” *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 40, no. 1 (2017): 159.

<sup>27</sup> Agnew, “Sovereignty Regimes,” 441.

non-state actors such as financial institutions or humanitarian actors exercise sovereignty and compete with and even displace state authority. This is a global phenomenon particularly well-researched in the field of diaspora studies, as many nation-states use their diasporas to further political interests in what they see as their ‘domestic abroad’<sup>28</sup> and in the process extend their sovereign projects beyond their nation-state borders.

Both Turkey and Israel are countries whose political elites are fixated on conventional, ‘modern’ forms of sovereignty over their territories, while they simultaneously extend their governmentality beyond their national borders in order to project their hegemonic discourses, draw people into their sovereign space outside their territories and, at times, make use of their bodies in defence of their sovereign projects during wars or attacks by ‘terrorists’. This fixation is a function of the insecurities and anxieties built into both projects of nation-building, and hence, both projects of sovereignty. Ultimately, both projects—Zionist in the case of Israel, Kemalist-cum-Islamist-Nationalist in Turkey—are compromised, and hence ‘ontologically insecure’<sup>29</sup> not only vis-à-vis the ‘West’ but also internally.

The Turkish Republic was established as a Muslim Turkish state—if eventually with a secular constitution—in wars against the European powers and independence movements of Christian communities and against the backdrop of a series of ethnic cleansings and genocide.<sup>30</sup> In particular, the Armenian genocide constitutes the basis of robust challenges to Turkish sovereignty on a global scale by the Armenian diaspora. Another such source for challenge is the ongoing Kurdish struggle for autonomy and independence. The secular-Republican national project has recently been forcefully challenged internally by an Islamist-nationalist attempt to subvert the Kemalist project and establish an alternative form of statehood. Less fixated on existing borders and nation-states, the Islamist-nationalist project of sovereignty is based on a revisionist reading of history

<sup>28</sup> Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Ayşe Zarakol, “Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan,” *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2010), 3–23. Ayşe Zarakol, “States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 48–68.

<sup>30</sup> Kerem Öktem, “Ruling Ideologies in Modern Turkey” in *The Oxford Handbook of Turkish Politics* ed. Güneş Murat Tezcür. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190064891.013.1>.

(often confusingly labelled as Neo-Ottoman) which de-emphasises, and at times challenges, the territorial arrangements of the post-World War I order in the Middle East, and particularly in its neighbouring regions including Israel and Palestine. At times, Turkey's current President Tayyip Erdoğan engages in discourse that depicts Palestinians in Israel and Arabs in the Middle East as members of a larger political unit led by himself.<sup>31</sup> By necessity, therefore, Turkey's current project of sovereignty is predicated upon anti-Westernism, anti-Zionism, and ultimately anti-Semitism, leaving next to no space for Jewish Turks to maintain a meaningful relationship with the Turkish state.

Israel's statehood is rooted in the Zionist project of European Jewish political elites. It was realised after the Holocaust in a struggle against local Palestinians and, at least partly, against the British Mandate. Territorial integrity was established in a series of wars and episodes of ethnic cleansing and systematic landgrabs, resulting in a regime of ethnocentric spatial arrangements.<sup>32</sup> The main challenges to its sovereignty stem from these episodes of dispossession and became most salient during the wars with its Arab neighbours, many of which continue not to recognise the country.<sup>33</sup> Yet, Israel's sovereignty is also compromised by the right of all Jews outside Israel to claim Israeli citizenship and by the unclear status of the Palestinian

<sup>31</sup> The AKP's foreign policy vision is now indeed based on the vision of an Islamic umma headed by Turkey as a leader vested with caliphal powers. See Bilge Yabancı, "Work for the Nation, Obey the State, Praise the Ummah: Turkey's Government-Oriented Youth Organizations in Cultivating a New Nation," *Ethnopolitics* (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2019.1676536>. See Senem Aydın-Düzgit, "De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse" in *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 45–58. Yohanan Benhaïm and Kerem Öktem, "The Rise and Fall of Turkey's Soft Power Discourse: Discourse in Foreign Policy Under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan," *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 21 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.5275>. Ugur Cevdet Panayirci, and Emre Iseri, "A Content Analysis of the AKP's 'Honorable' Foreign Policy Discourse: The Nexus of Domestic–International Politics," *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 62–80. Burhanettin Duran, "Understanding the AK Party's Identity Politics: A Civilizational Discourse and its Limitations," *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 1 (2013): 91–109.

<sup>32</sup> Noga Kadman and Oren Yiftachel, *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948* (Bloomington, IN: Ebook Central, 2015). Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories* (London: Oneworld, 2017). Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (London; New York: Verso 2010). Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Whether the current establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and some Gulf Emirates will change this challenge to Israel's sovereignty remains to be seen.

territories, which according to international law, are occupied by the Israeli Defence forces, but which are under de-facto Israeli control. As in Turkey, the country's changing demographics and political landscape have resulted in domestic challenges from religious and extreme-right groups to what has been accepted in the West as a secular Zionist state with liberal institutions. Israel's current statehood, as well as its project of sovereignty and its discourses of power appear increasingly less liberal and progressively more anti-Palestinian. A two-state solution for Palestinians and Israelis, which for decades provided the basis of international peace-making attempts, appears to have become infeasible.

In both Turkey and Israel, then, sovereignty is compromised (or unsettled) by the history of nation-building, by the struggles of ethnic groups whose rights are denied, and by internal challenges due to a changing political landscape. Yet both countries also engage in political projects that extend sovereignty well beyond their already compromised nation-states, thereby generating further anxiety and insecurity not only in their diasporas, but also in the nation-states themselves. From the perspective of our analysis, it is crucial to emphasise that these two projects of sovereignty are now largely attached to two different geopolitical imaginations both of which are also in transformation and whose actors have little sympathy for each other: A western, neo-Atlanticist bloc with the European Union and the United States as leaders, and a Eurasianist bloc with Russia and China as main powers.

In addition, Turkey and Israel are also both states that can be defined as 'ethnocratic',<sup>34</sup> or regime types that 'enhance the expansion and control of a dominant ethno-nation in multi-ethnic territories.'<sup>35</sup> In the case of Turkey, the dominant ethno-national group has been described as Sunni Muslim Turks; in Israel, these are the Jewish citizens of Israel, but, in particular, those of Ashkenazi heritage.

In such regimes, ethnicity, rather than citizenship, forms the main criteria for distributing power and resources. As a result, they display high levels of uneven ethnic segregation, inequality, and exclusion.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy* (2006).

<sup>35</sup> Elya L. Milner and Haim Yacobi, "Spaces of Sovereignty: A Tale of an Unrecognized Palestinian Village in Israel," *Planning Theory* 17, no. 1 (2018): 117–133.

<sup>36</sup> Milner and Yacobi, "Spaces of Sovereignty," (2018).

These policies of domination and exclusion of the ethnic outgroups—Kurds and non-Muslims in Turkey, Palestinians in Israel—is written into the discourses of sovereignty and the practice of governmentality both within the boundaries of the nation-state and in the spaces where the two countries are able to project their sovereign projects.

These projects of sovereignty, their contents and practices become particularly palpable in spaces where these projects become entangled, i.e. in the case of this paper, in Turkish-Jewish spaces in Israel (as well as in Jewish spaces in Turkey). Borrowing from Dunn and Conns, I use the term ‘sensitive spaces’ to refer to these locales of intersecting sovereignties.<sup>37</sup> Dunn and Conns use the term to explore the insecurities and precarities in border zones and camps as spaces where more than one state or international body exercises authority and where ‘sovereign decisions’ overlap.<sup>38</sup> Border zones like the Israeli-Palestinian border or refugee camps of Syrians in Turkey are, of course, infinitely more precarious and the agency for individuals trapped within them is significantly more limited than in the spaces I discuss in this paper. Yet the notion of sensitive spaces can help us grasp how individuals negotiate intersecting or conflicting sovereignties even if they are based in what at first sight seem to be clearly defined normal nation-states. These spaces are notable

for the multiple forms of power that abound, compete and overlap there and the forms of anxiety that they provoke for both those who are governed and those who seek to govern.<sup>39</sup>

Facing these overlapping forms of sovereignty ‘people in sensitive spaces do not passively accept being disciplined by sovereign power most of the time.’<sup>40</sup> Instead, they ‘creatively reassemble some semblance of a regular existence.’<sup>41</sup> Individuals who frequent Turkish Jewish spaces in Israel, therefore, have to be aware of, negotiate and act within the overlapping sovereignties of Turkey and Israel and their coercive, as well as infrastructural regimes of power, which are currently largely defined against each other.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Jason Conns, “Aleatory Sovereignty and the Rule of Sensitive Spaces,” *Antipode* 46 (2014): 92–109.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>41</sup> Diana Tietjens Meyers, “Two Victim Paradigms and the Problem of ‘Impure’ Victims,” *Humanity* 2, no. 2 (2011): 268.

It should be noted that this mutual exclusivity of the two national projects is a relatively recent phenomenon. Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognise Israeli independence. As a strategic member of the Transatlantic security alliance after World War II and as an associate member of the European Union and its predecessors, Turkey has been and remains a part of the same geopolitical bloc as Israel. But Turkey's membership in Western institutions has now become progressively more fragile. Affinities between Kemalism and Zionism, both European-oriented, secular nationalist projects that share a disdain for the Middle East and the Arab world against which they sought to differentiate themselves, meant that neither the sovereign projects, nor their geopolitical outlooks conflicted structurally. Until recently, it was perfectly possible to hold ideological positions like Kemalism and Zionism at the same time. Many Turkish Jews did and continue to do so.<sup>42</sup> It is, however, structurally impossible to meaningfully combine Turkish Islamist-Nationalist and Zionist or religious Zionist views.

With Turkish Muslim communities in western Europe and beyond, the Turkish state's diaspora policies are geared toward a mixture of empowerment, control and instrumentalization, and above all, are an attempt to draw 'transnationally dispersed populations into "a web of rights and obligations"' of the Islamist-nationalist regime emerging under AKP leadership.<sup>43</sup> Yet, Turkey's 'transnational diasporic space,'<sup>44</sup> with its pro-regime civil society organisations like the Union of International Democrats (UID) cannot really extend beyond its clientele of conservative Sunni-Muslim Turks. Turkey's Jews seem to be excluded from this project by default. Hence this key aspect of Turkish diaspora policies, the 'drawing into' the universe of AKP or 'new Turkey' applies to the Turkish-Israeli case not at all or only in very limited ways.

<sup>42</sup>The Chair of the Association of Immigrants from Turkey, for instance, responds to criticism from some Turkish Jews who question why the Association flies the Turkish flag and hosts a bust of Atatürk: If they ask me today if I am Atatürkçü (i.e. a follower of Atatürk), then yes, I'd say of course I am Atatürkçü, because of his social reforms, because of his statesmanship. As for the flag, there sure will be the Turkish flag. All immigrant associations have it. Those who are coming from Columbia also have it.

<sup>43</sup>Jagdish Bhagwati, "Borders Beyond Control," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2003): 101.

<sup>44</sup>Yabancı, Bilge. "Home State Oriented Diaspora Organizations and the Making of Partisan Citizens Abroad: Motivations, Discursive Frames, and Actions Towards Co-Opting the Turkish Diaspora in Europe," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021): 139–165. [muse.jhu.edu/article/812796](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/812796).

Yet, while Turkish Jews in Israel cannot be drawn into the Islamist-nationalist universe of the current regime's diaspora policies, they are still subject to Turkish state authority. They are dependent on the cooperation of state agencies—above all, the consulate in Tel Aviv—if they hold Turkish passports and have family members in Turkey, which many do. At the same time, they are also expected to be good Zionist citizens and act as representatives of Israeli interests with respect to Turkey. This entails engagement in the public diplomacy of Israel, *Hasbara*, a term often translated as public relations or propaganda for the Israeli state.<sup>45,46</sup> The Hastürk website, active between 2010 and 2017, whose purpose was to give Turks an 'unbiased view' of Israel is a case in point.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Zalman Shoval, "Why Israel Lost the Hasbara War," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2007): 15.

Miriyam Aouragh, "Hasbara 2.0: Israel's Public Diplomacy in the Digital Age," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 3 (2016): 271–297.

<sup>46</sup> The expectation to support public diplomacy efforts to secure the interests of a nation-state is a familiar one for members of the Turkish Jewish elite in Turkey, too. From the 1980s and on, the Turkish-Jewish community was enlisted in the denial of the Armenian Genocide, while leading members of the community exerted pressure on Israel and the Israeli Lobby in the United States to prevent genocide recognition by Israel and the United States. Eldad Ben Aharon, "A Unique Denial: Israel's Foreign Policy and the Armenian Genocide," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 4 (2015): 638–654. cf. Louis Fishman and March Baer's chapter in this volume).

<sup>47</sup> The website had quite a following in Turkey in the 2010s, as its name, Hastürk ('Pure Turk') suggested a nationalist outlook and acted on the premise that the producers of the website were better Turks than the anti-Semitic AKP. One of the key contributors, Rafael Sadi, emphasized, however, that the word 'has' (pure) was used because of the first three letters of the term *Hasbara*. Sadi described the website as a non-governmental effort to explain Israel to the Turks in the Turkish language 'and to correct anti-Israel and anti-Jewish publications ... There was a great number of well-researched papers available there, including on the Mavi Marmara affair.' Sadi was particularly frustrated by what he called 'the lack of support from the state, from private people ... We had to pay for this from our pockets and at some point, we couldn't go on anymore. The community didn't even notice when we closed down' (Sadi 2018). The original website (<http://www.hasturktv.com>) is not accessible anymore, but pages can be retrieved through internet archives.

## ISRAEL'S TURKISH JEWISH COMMUNITY

Israel's Turkish Jews have been characterised as the 'Unseen Israelis' by Walter Weiker<sup>48</sup> due to their relative success in terms of social adaptation and economic integration, but also because they do not easily fit into the racial and class binaries of affluent (European) Ashkenazim versus 'underperforming' Arabic-speaking Mizrahim, which govern discourses of inclusion and exclusion in Israel.<sup>49</sup> Other factors that contribute to the invisibility thesis include the fact that, while there were several waves of migration from Turkey to Israel, they were small compared to the large and often traumatic arrival of the large number of Jews from Europe and the Arab world. While migration from Turkey saw its relative peak in the 1930s and again with the foundation of the state of Israel, it has not abated since. Every disruptive event in Turkey's contemporary history, of which there are many—the anti-Jewish pogroms in Thrace in the late 1930s, the Wealth Tax in the 1940s, the Istanbul pogroms against non-Muslim in 1955, the military coups of 1971 and 1980, the terrorist attacks on Istanbul's Neve Shalom Synagogue in 1986 and 2003—had its ripple effects. With the total population, including newly arrived migrants, currently up to 100,000,<sup>50</sup> small in comparison to other communities, Turkish Jews were neither a problem nor a presence that significantly altered Israel's political, cultural or economic course. In addition, both Weiker and, later, Marcy Brink Danan<sup>51</sup> suggested that part of this invisibility, or inaudibility, owed to the politics of 'kayadez' (keep silent, keep your head

<sup>48</sup>Walter F. Weiker, *The Unseen Israelis: The Jews from Turkey in Israel* (Lanham, MD: Jerusalem: University Press of America, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs/Center for Jewish Community Studies, 1988).

<sup>49</sup>Ella Shohat "The Narrative of the Nation and the Discourse of Modernization: The Case of the Mizrahim," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 6, no. 10 (1997): 3–18. Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 5–20.

<sup>50</sup>The number of around 100,000 Turkish Jews is used regularly within the community and the Itahdut, but this figure is probably more meaningful as an indicator of how community leaders would like to see the Turkish Jewish community's relative importance. It is impossible to know how many of these 100,000 would actively identify as Turkish Jews or Turkish immigrants. The chair of the Itahdut assumes that probably two-thirds would identify as 'Turkish Jews' (Gülerşen 2018).

<sup>51</sup>Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in 21st-century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012). Marcy Brink-Danan, "Dangerous Cosmopolitanism: Erasing Difference in Istanbul," *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2011): 439–473.

down), which Turkish Jews have resorted to in order to minimize interactions and potential conflict with the state and the non-Jewish majority society in Turkey.<sup>52</sup>

This notion of ‘invisibility’ and ‘inaudibility’ is, of course, not the only dimension of Turkish Jews’ lives in Israel. Particularly during the ‘golden years’ of Turkey and Israel’s relationship in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Turkey was a major tourist destination for Israelis and a pronounced interest in all matters Turkey existed in Israeli society as a whole. Many respondents referred to the ‘Antalya years,’ when most Israelis regularly went to the Turkish Mediterranean coast, with nostalgia and regret that those times were unlikely to return in the near future. The visibility of Turkish references in Israeli public space and the presence of dedicated spaces of memory—from the Atatürk Forest in Haifa, established by Turkish Jewish immigrants in 1953 to the Süleyman Demirel Park in Bat Yam, and the more recent Turkish Heritage cluster in Beer Sheeva<sup>53</sup>—also had an impact on Turkish Jews in Israel, who could benefit from their association with Turkey. As one respondent put it: “There was rent in being associated with Turkey. During the Antalya years, even people who did not speak a word of Turkish emphasized their Turkish connections.” This positive effect was lost with Turkey’s transformation from a friendly country and major ally of Israel to one of its most vocal opponents.

Talking about Israel’s Turkish community requires careful differentiation between age, the conditions of migration, the conditions of reception, the regions of origin in Turkey, and certainly also matters of class before and after migration. The earlier the migration (i.e. in the 1930s or 1940s), the less connection with Turkey can be expected in terms of family

<sup>52</sup>An elderly lady from Izmir and graduate of Ben Gurion University suggested in Ladino: “No mos karişeyamos a les meseles de hükümet”, i.e. “We do not interfere with the issues of government.” Işın Demirel, “No mos Karişiyamos En Los Meseles Del Hukümet,” *Avlaremos*, Jan. 23, 2017. <https://www.avlaremos.com/2017/01/23/no-mos-karisiyamos-en-los-meseles-del-hukemet-isil-demirel/>.

<sup>53</sup>Ilker Hepkaner’s work on Turkish memory spaces in Israel is noteworthy. He argues that these places have to be understood not only in the context of negotiations between Turkish and Israeli sovereignties, but also in the context of the dispossession of Palestinians, as, for example, the Atatürk forest was established on the land of former Palestinian villages, and every ceremony there attended by a Turkish representative becomes an affirmation of Israeli sovereignty over Palestinian rights. Ilker Hepkaner, “Jews from Turkey in Israel and Cultural Diplomacy (1996–2006)” in *A Transnational Account of Turkish Foreign Policy*, ed. H. Papuççular and D. Kuru (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). Hepkaner, *Picturing the Past*, 2019.

relations, political discourses and citizenship. Relatively easy conditions of migration and the relative absence of negative experiences during childhood and youth explains a more positive engagement with the country of origin, while economic or political misfortunes or experiences of anti-Semitism may account for a more distanced relationship. Language is also a major factor of differentiation. Early Zionist immigrants arriving in the 1930s and 40s spoke Ladino and French if they were educated, and many spoke little Turkish. Jewish communities from Turkey's Kurdish and Arabic-speaking regions, who were transferred to Israel en masse after its creation, were speakers of Judeo-Arabic, Kurdish or Judeo-Persian even if they came from Turkey.<sup>54</sup>

From the perspective of the researcher then, the epithet Turkish Jews most sensibly applies to those Turkish-speaking Jews who left Turkey after the establishment of Israel in 1948, mostly from western Turkey. This was also true for the forty Turkish Jews I interviewed during two one-month research stays in Israel in February and March 2018. Roughly half of them had migrated already in the 1960s and 70s, a few in the 1980s and 90s, while the other half had arrived throughout the 2010s. Three interlocutors had been living in Israel for less than a year. They had very different experiences with the Turkish state and views on Turkey, Turkey's recent politics, on being a 'Turkish Jew' and on Israel. Despite these major differences in experience and attitude, these conversations were unified in one respect: the interview language was Turkish.<sup>55</sup> In fact, all research participants, independently of the length of their stay in Israel and their age, mentioned that they mostly socialize in Turkish-Jewish circles and

<sup>54</sup> Süleyman Şanlı, "Recalling a Forgotten Community: Jews of Diyarbakır, *Folklor/ Edebiyat* 26 (2020): 103, 545–558. Süleyman Şanlı, 'An Overview of Historical Background of Unknown Eastern Jews of Turkey,' *Mukaddime* 8, no. 1 (2017), 67–82. Süleyman Şanlı, *Jews of Turkey: Migration, Culture and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> My interlocutors, without exception, appeared to experience great pleasure in speaking Turkish with me. I had expected that at least some would prefer English or French, or that, after thirty or fifty years in Israel, their Turkish would have become rusty. This, however, was not the case. An elderly lady from Istanbul, whom I met in the Elderly People's Home for Sephardi Jews from Greece and Turkey, the Beit Avod Leon Recanati in Petach Tikva, was delighted to speak Turkish with me. My interlocutor, who was passionate about a number of Turkish TV series emphasized how her peers in the home, some of whom had not spoken Turkish in decades, have reverted to speaking Turkish with each other. They now watch news and TV series like 'Payitaht Abdülhamit' regularly, despite their frequently anti-Semitic subtexts.

speak Turkish among one another. As a recent immigrant in his twenties confirmed:

Even though many people from Turkey have been here for decades, they stay among themselves, they move to neighbourhoods where they are close to each other, and they speak Turkish with each other, if not necessarily with their grandchildren. When we arrive, we reinvigorate the Turkish connection. I feel much more globally oriented, but even I ended up with the Turks here, and with other recent immigrants. If you don't do your military service here, you are not a full member of Israeli society.

I met the research participants through their families in Istanbul; through networks of friends and acquaintances; through the Itahdut; and in a few cases, by coincidence, when I mentioned my research interest to Israeli acquaintances who knew of people of Turkish origin or had a connection to Turkey themselves.<sup>56</sup> Even though there are some nodes of Turkish community life in Israel, particularly in Bat Yam, which used to host a visible Turkish community in the 1960s and 70s, Turkish Jewish life in Israel is dispersed throughout the northern suburbs of Tel Aviv, and in municipalities such as Herzliya, Ra'anana, and Ramat HaSharon. I also followed several Facebook groups which deal with Turkish-Jewish interests.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup>All research participants cited in this text are given a pseudonym. The only two exceptions are the Chair of the Itahdut, who conducted the first interview in his official function as the representative of the Association and Rafael Sadi, who is a journalist present in the Turkish public sphere. All citations were translated from Turkish by the author.

<sup>57</sup>There are several Facebook groups catering to Turkish-Jewish interests from different angles. The following are those with the largest memberships or the largest numbers of followers:

- İsrail Türkiye'de (Israel in Turkey), a group in Turkish maintained by the Israeli government with 30,000 followers [<https://www.facebook.com/IsraelinTurkey>].
- Türkiye (Turkia) İsrail'de (Turkey in Israel), A group dedicated to Turkish-Israeli relations and mostly frequented by Turkish Jews in Israel with a membership over 3000 members [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/381034845370605>].
- İsrail Türkiye Dostluk Köprüsü (Israel-Turkey Friendship Bridge), a group dedicated to Turkish-Israeli friendship which counts many non-Jewish Turks among its 2500 members [<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1618521731794780>].
- Itahdut Yotsey Turkia Beİsrail—İsrail'deki Türkiyeliler Birliği (Union of immigrants from Turkey in Israel), the Itahdut Facebook page with 4500 followers [<https://www.facebook.com/itahdut>].

Another group of ‘Turks’ in Israel is that of non-Jewish Turks and Kurds, who have come to Israel in the last two decades for economic, personal or professional reasons, and stayed on. According to several interlocutors, many of whom hire Turkish citizens for their businesses and housekeeping chores, their numbers are in the thousands.<sup>58</sup> Their experiences of the intersecting and clashing sovereignties of Turkey and Israel are at least as complex as those of the group here discussed.<sup>59</sup>

### THREE CONTEXTS OF INTERSECTING SOVEREIGNTY: ‘THE ITAHDUT, THE IDF, AND THE ‘MARTYRS’

The Itahdut, the Association for People from Turkey in Israel, is the oldest and most active association for immigrants from Turkey. It has been formally established in 1960 in Tel Aviv, succeeding an earlier association formed in 1937 under the name ‘Irgun Ole Turkiya’ (Organization of Immigrants from Turkey)<sup>60</sup> to create a support network for immigrants.<sup>61</sup> Like many other such immigrant and diaspora organisations, its aim is threefold: it supports incoming immigrants in their adaptation to and

<sup>58</sup>We can also mention the labourers of Turkish construction companies, who come to Israel for a couple of years to work on the companies’ projects. Many of them live in the Arab town Kafr Qasim at a distance of twenty kilometres from Tel Aviv. A significant majority of them eventually returns to Turkey, but some marry in Israel and remain. Many Turkish Jews refer to them as pro-AKP, pro-Palestinian, and anti-Israel.

<sup>59</sup>A case in point is the owner of a well-known Turkish fast food store specialising in kebabs, who came to Israel as a construction worker and married a local Jewish woman. In our initial meeting, he asked me indirectly if I was Jewish (‘Kimlerdensin?’, i.e. from whose (family) are you?). When I told him that I was from Turkey and not of Jewish origin, he responded: ‘I am not one of them, I am not Jewish. I am not an Israeli. My heart lies with Turkey and Erdoğan’. He spoke with great admiration for Erdoğan, but then, he also proudly referred to his two daughters: ‘They are both in very good positions in the army here. One of them is a fighter pilot’. When I asked him whether his family back home knows that his two daughters are in the IDF, he responded: ‘Of course they do. They know that you have to serve in the army. But the girls don’t go to Turkey that often anyway; they went twice. But they love Turkey, they really want to learn the language too. But you can’t push the young people too much’. He then went on to criticise Turkish Jews for leaving Turkey: ‘They had it well in Turkey; they came for nothing, and now they can’t even enter Jaffa at night, because they are scared of the Arabs’.

<sup>60</sup>‘İsraildeki Türkiyeliler Birliği: Kısa Tarihçe,’ Itahdut (2020): <https://www.turkisirael.org.il/single-post/2017/11/09/KISA-TARİHÇETürkçe>.

<sup>61</sup>Ovi Roditi Gülerşen, Chair of the Itahdut, February 20, 2018.

integration into Israeli society, it organises cultural activities—theatre plays and concerts in Turkish and Ladino; Turkish language classes for second generation immigrants; study grants for Turkish-origin students—and it creates a formal link with the Turkish Jewish institutions in Turkey, foremost with the Chief Rabbinate. It has a membership of around 2500 active members, who fund operations with their membership fees and with regular donations from businesspeople. Plays and concerts organised by the Itahdut often have an audience of more than 2000.<sup>62</sup>

Younger immigrants in particular see the Itahdut as an organization for earlier waves of migrants, but as the sole organization nevertheless. Cem, a twenty-year old immigrant who had just been in Tel Aviv a couple of months ago when we met, had his induction session as new immigrant at the Itahdut:

The Association is more for the older generations. For them, Turkishness [*Türklik*] is more important. They are in Bat Yam. I guess in my generation, Turkishness is not so central, we are more globally oriented. Even so, we hang out only with other Turks or other immigrants, not with the locals. The Itahdut was our first port of call when we arrived.

Importantly, the Itahdut has a quasi-official role in representing Turkish citizens in Israel at state functions. Representatives of the Itahdut are present at official commemorations at the Turkish War cemetery in Beer Sheva, and the war memorial in Ramle,<sup>63</sup> as well as during visits of Turkish politicians.

When I first visited the Itahdut in February 2018 to meet its chair, Ovi Gülerşen, the building struck me in its resemblance to Turkish immigrant associations in Germany. The Itahdut is located in a neighbourhood of Bat Yam, home to Turkish Jewish populations who came in the 1970s through the 1990s, on the second floor of a two-story building that also housed a kindergarten. On the day I arrived, a group of elderly ladies were meeting in the assembly hall for a Turkish-speaking circle. Upon entering the entry lounge, I faced a bust of Atatürk on a bookshelf, accompanied by Turkish and Israeli flags. The antechamber also holds a library, a plaque with donors, and a plaque with the past chairs of the association. This ‘reciprocity’ of insignia of statehood and sovereignty, Turkish and Israeli

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Hepkaner “Jews from Turkey in Israel,” 2020; Hepkaner *Picturing the Past*, 2019.

flags, official letters and documents from Turkey and Israel, continued inside the main assembly hall.

During these first set of visits, the pride of place of the Itahdut was not so much reserved for the insignia of the statehood of Turkey and Israel, but for a large glass cabinet with a collection of nostalgic models of urban and Jewish life in Istanbul, donated by a Turkish Jewish doctor. The walls were adorned with photographs of synagogues in Turkey, some of them in ruins.<sup>64</sup> Despite the Israeli flags, which were also there, the hall felt predominantly like a space in, or connected to, Turkey. The presence of Israeli symbols of sovereignty was less intrusive than those of the Turkish state. There was, for instance, no bust of the founder of the state of Israel, David Ben Gurion. For most Turkish observers, and probably for many Turkish Jewish Israelis, the presence of a bust of Atatürk is a clear sign not only of a strong Turkish connection but also of a working relationship with the Turkish state (Figs. 7.1 and 7.2).

At the time of my first visit, issues of sovereignty were on top of the agenda. Relations with Turkey had been going from bad to worse, a development which all interlocutors registered with trepidation and regret. Anti-Semitic discourse in Turkey had become so aggressive and normalized that the Turkish word for Israel ('Israil') was reduced to a term used in anti-Semitic hate speech. Indeed, in Turkey, 'Israil' has become almost a swearword in public debate, a term representing a benchmark of human rights abuses and political repression from which one would better distance oneself.

The debate, which took place in Facebook groups and in a conversation at the Itahdut, focused on the question of whether one should use the Turkish 'Israil' despite its now-degraded connotation, or 'Israel,' the pronunciation of the same word in Hebrew and English. More nationalist individuals, particularly in internet forums where language is often harsher than in face-to-face settings, opted for the usage of 'Israel,' despite the fact that its pronunciation does not agree with the rules of Turkish vowel harmony, a defining principle of the Turkish language. The word 'Israel' in spoken Turkish sounds like a foreign word. For one interlocutor, an academic, his recent decision to use only 'Israel' was about reasserting ownership:

<sup>64</sup> See also, Hepkaner, *Picturing the Past*.



**Fig. 7.1** Entry Foyer of the Itahdut with the library, the Atatürk bust and a plaque of the key donors (February 2018)

When they talk about ‘Israil’ in Turkey, they don’t talk about this country. They talk about the Palestinians; they talk about all the bad things that are supposedly taking place here. If I was in Turkey now, I would also have to say ‘Israil.’ But no, we are in Israel. Here, I am the landlord. You know, in Turkey, we never were the real owners of the house. You could always be pushed around or kicked out of it. But here, I am the landlord. The Palestinians are the tenants. It is they who have to follow the rules. It is my right to call this country Israel.

This respondent was only one of two in my entire sample who spoke in unequivocally right-wing Zionist terms. Interestingly, they also insisted on speaking Turkish to their baby son.<sup>65</sup> Yet the usage of ‘Israel’ indeed

<sup>65</sup> The other conversation, where harsh criticism of Turkey was expressed and Arabs were depicted as ‘full of hatred ... ready to kill Jews’ took place in a family home in Givatayim. The couple, in their early thirties, had arrived in Israel a few years before, were both working in



**Fig. 7.2** Glass cabinets with scenes from Istanbul and with plaques commemorating visits by Turkish representatives (February 2018)

increased on the relevant Facebook pages and on some pages of the Itahdut website. From a Turkish perspective, the usage of Israel simply sounded like a foreign word, hinting at the possible foreignness of the speaker. From a nationalist/Zionist perspective, using ‘Israel’ is an act of exiting from the anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli political climate in Turkey and of establishing full ‘sovereignty’ over the terms of the debate.

Another episode, in which sovereignty and statehood played a central role occurred shortly after, during Passover in March 2018. During my

highly paid jobs, and just had a baby. Both of them spoke to their baby boy exclusively in Turkish. The woman’s parents, who live in Istanbul, were visiting. When their daughter began to voice strongly critical views about Turkey and its anti-Semitic atmosphere, the father became nervous and addressed me directly: “You know, they are here in Israel; they can say what they like, nobody cares. For them, anti-Semitism is history, it doesn’t happen in their lives. But we have to return to Istanbul. We have to live there. Can you guarantee that what we say here won’t be used against us, that we won’t face any hardships in the future?”

visit, I encountered a significantly changed assembly hall. The photos of synagogues from Turkey had been taken down. The small Turkish and Israeli flags had been covered with Israeli flags and large photo panels depicting the arrival of ‘olim’ (immigrants) in Israel. The scenes depicted were both dramatic and generic. They did not show immigrants from Turkey, and, unlike the synagogues from Turkey and Greece, made no intimate connection to the Turkish Jewish community. Some of the new immigrants in the photo panels were shown kissing the ground after disembarking at Ben Gurion airport, others were giving salutes while draped in Israeli flags in front of an El Al airplane, Israel’s national air company. The tables were being rearranged for the Passover dinner. Booklets published by the Israeli Defence Forces explaining the ceremony and the lyrics to be sung were stacked next to the tables.<sup>66</sup>

The atmosphere in the assembly hall had changed palpably. With references to Turkey either draped over or displaced, the room had become a space of blue and white. Symbols of Israeli sovereignty and Zionist cosmology heavily outweighed the reminders of Turkish statehood, save for the glass cabinet with scenes from Istanbul’s streets. When I had first entered the hall after a couple of days in Israel, I had been surprised by the near-official presence of Turkish statehood. This time, I was startled by the distinctly Zionist framing of the space, and the presence of very formidable symbols of Israeli sovereignty.

When I asked Ovi Bey, he seemed uneasy and explained that the change in scenery was arranged for the associations’ first ever Passover Seder dinner for new Turkish immigrants. The photo panels and booklets had been provided by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration. Despite the explanation, both Ovi Bey and I felt uncomfortable. During my first visits, he had taken great care to emphasize the community’s strong Turkish cultural connections and its positive relations with Turkey, despite the political conflict. He appeared aware that, with the current visual framing, the space must have felt distinctly alien to a non-Israeli or to someone without Zionist inclinations. After a moment of hesitation, however, he invited me to join the Seder dinner (Figs. 7.3 and 7.4).

The second context raising issues of sovereignty is the commemoration for Turkey’s military martyrs in the Gallipoli Campaign, which Ovi Bey emphasized as an indicator for the relatively good relations with Turkey.

<sup>66</sup>This booklet was in English and Hebrew, and richly illustrated with drawings depicting men and women in uniform performing the seder ritual.



**Fig. 7.3** Assembly hall of the Itahdut, adorned with Israeli flags (March 2018)

Every year, Turkey commemorates the March 18 anniversary; with a second event in Israel and Turkish War cemeteries abroad on April 25. In Israel, the War Memorial in Ramle is the main venue for these commemorations.<sup>67</sup> Turkish officials consider the war memorial as a space of Turkish sovereignty. The Turkish Embassy in Tel Aviv gives great importance to this exercise, which includes key rituals of Turkish statehood: the raising of the Turkish flag; the singing of the national anthem; a speech by the ambassador or consul, sometimes including speeches by representatives of Australia and New Zealand; and the dissemination of photos of the event via Twitter and Facebook.

The commemoration of Ottoman/Turkish War martyrs is a fraught and contested issue due to its centrality in ongoing efforts to replace

<sup>67</sup> There is a total of six war cemeteries (Şehitlik) of Ottoman soldiers in Israel and Palestine (Ramle, Beer Sheva, Jerusalem, Eria, Tulkarem and Gaza. Cengiz Dönmez, “1. Dünya Savaşıyla İlgili Yurt dışındaki Türk Şehitlikleri,” *Gazi Akademik Bakış* 7, no. 14 (2014): 137–162.



Fig. 7.4 Posters celebrating Aliyah in the assembly hall (March 2018)

Turkey's secular nationalist ideological framework with an Islamist narrative of Turkish nationhood. Additionally, attempts to displace the commemorations of the Armenian Genocide on April 24 with commemorations of the Gallipoli Campaign on April 25 create further tension. The Islamist branding of the Gallipoli campaign reframes this battle as one between the infidel "West" and the united armies of Islam. Consequently, it excises all references to non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire who also fought in this war, including the sultan's Jewish subjects. In an address in 2017, the Turkish ambassador deviated from the official script when he mentioned the effort of the empire's Jewish soldiers in the campaign, which was welcomed by members of the community.<sup>68</sup>

The chair of the Itahdut also participates in this commemoration, representing the Turkish Jewish citizens residing in Israel, many of whom

<sup>68</sup> Rafael Sadi, 'Çanakkale Şehitleri İsrail'de anıldı,' *ODATV* March 18, 2018. <https://odatv4.com/canakkale-schitleri-yurt-disinda-anildi-1803171200.html>.

hold dual citizenships. As a representative of the Turkish Jews, he stands up for the flag raising, joins in the singing of the anthem, and listens to the speeches, thereby becoming a subject to the rituals of Turkish statehood without leaving the country or even entering a Turkish embassy. On the real effects of this performance of sovereignty we can only speculate. To an uninitiated bystander, this may seem like a pathetic nationalist ritual, to others it may appear like an official function that has to be attended to establish or maintain relations with members of the embassy. From the embassy's point of view, however, this event serves as a reminder for Turkish Jews in Israel and their representatives of the power of the Turkish state. This point was not lost on one research participant who has lived in Israel for more than thirty years but maintains close business relations with Turkey, travelling there regularly:

The [Turkish] state is of course everywhere, here and in Turkey, you can't escape. While in Turkey, I was a member of BETAR,<sup>69</sup> and, of course, this was completely secret, or so I thought. I had some business with the police, and it came out that they knew everything about my political involvement. The state follows everybody's moves, all the time, particularly if you are Jewish. They don't have to interact, but they know, and they assume you know, too. This is different here. When you are past the army, the state leaves you alone. But if you do business in Turkey, if you have a Turkish passport, if you need to check your records, if you have family or friends in Turkey, and we all do, you cannot simply forget about the state. You have to find a way to muddle through (*bir yolunu bulman lazım*).

'To find a way' is what all people who move in Israel's Turkish spaces and in Turkey's Jewish spaces need to do. This negotiation of the overlapping sovereignties of two nation-states, which have both been characterized as 'ontologically insecure' as well as exclusivist 'ethnocratic regimes' seems to be one of the core dynamics that Turkish Jews in Israel have to negotiate carefully.

The Itahdut is a space where these sovereign projects, their discourses, and their symbols overlap and intersect most visibly, as well as where the

<sup>69</sup> BETAR is a Zionist youth organisation that was influential among Turkish Jews in the 1960s and 70s. In Turkey, BETAR never acquired legal status. Rifat Bali suggests that the lack of legal recognition limited its space for activities, with most of its members leaving for Israel in the 1970s. Rifat Bali, *Betar Türkiye. Bir Siyonist Gençlik Hareketinin Hikayesi. 1933–1971* (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2020).

performative character of sovereignty is most accentuated. For an outside observer, performances of Turkish and Israeli statehood appear mutually exclusive, defined by mutual antagonism and geopolitical disagreement. For a member of the association, or of the Turkish Jewish community, they become performative repertoires with which one either has to engage, is proud to be associated, or has to endure—to ‘muddle through’, whether this involves the Turkish flag, the Israeli flag, or both. The performance of Turkish Jewishness among the elderly members of the Itahdut, the Turkish-speaking circles and language courses, and the theatre performances and discussion evenings all take place in the same space, in between and beyond the Turkish and Israeli performances of statehood and sovereignty.

### CONCLUSION

The Itahdut is a ‘sensitive’ space where Turkish and Israeli sovereignties and their inherent logics of inclusion/exclusion intersect and the performances of these sovereignties become entangled. Not all Turkish-Jewish spaces in Israel and in Turkey are ‘sensitive,’ though. Rather, they may be called spaces of ‘cultural intimacy.’<sup>70</sup> There are synagogues of Turkish immigrant communities and tightly knit circles of friends who meet regularly and stay in touch via WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages. In these more intimate settings, a Turkish-Jewish notion of belonging is performed in less restrained ways, beyond the immediate control of the Turkish and Israeli nation-states. Yet the coercive infrastructures of the sovereign projects are never too far away. When I attended an ad-hoc meeting with a group of several friends in a villa in the northern Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Ha Sharon, my very presence turned what is usually an intimate space into a sensitive one, at least temporarily. It was only after a period of trust-building that my hosts left a mode that required engaging in ‘hasbara’—telling me emphatically how they had happy childhoods in Turkey, how they never encountered anti-Semitism, and how they miss Istanbul or Izmir—to a more straightforward appraisal of their frustrations with

<sup>70</sup>Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics and the Real Life of States, Societies, and Institutions* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Turkey, but also their disillusion with everyday life in Israel and their critique of ‘enmity towards Arabs.’<sup>71</sup>

At border controls, airport taxis, in the Itahdut, in the Turkish and Israeli consulates, and even at Bat Yam’s Turkish restaurant, the tension between the entangled sovereignties of Turkey and Israel are palpable. Yet even in seemingly more intimate settings like family homes, during gatherings of friends, and even in Facebook groups, individuals moving within Turkish-Jewish spaces negotiate their positions with respect to the requirements of conflicting sovereignties. This includes engaging in *hasbara* when it appears advisable, in expressing commitment to Turkish or Israeli state agencies, in distancing oneself from Israel’s policies in the occupied territories, in seeking to contribute to better relations between the two countries, in staying in touch with relatives and the community back in Turkey. Turkey’s current geopolitical realignment in a Eurasian context and Israel’s realignment with parts of the Arab world coupled with continued commitment to the Western bloc forces Turkish Jews in Israel to continuously position themselves in a geopolitically overdetermined political setting where the maintenance of Turkish-Jewish belonging in Israel or Jewish-Turkish belonging in Turkey is becoming an uphill struggle with limited rewards.

<sup>71</sup> A middle-aged woman from Izmir relayed an experience from high school when her teacher in a class on national security (at the time often active or retired military personnel) arrived in class, found it to be messy, and scolded students for having turned the class into ‘a synagogue’ (‘burasını havraya çevirmişsiniz’). She talked back to the retired colonel: ‘Have you ever seen a synagogue from inside?’ After a series of such incidents, her parents decided to send her to Israel to keep her out of trouble. Following this account, another guest responded matter-of-factly: ‘And we do the same things to the Arabs here. We are racist. Here and in Turkey. We say Hair of an Arab.’ The latter (*Arap saçı*) is a term for messy situations and is used widely in everyday parlance, where, until recently, ‘Arap’ was used to designate both Arabs and black people, as well as dogs with a dark skin.



## Creating [Jewish] Sites of Memory in Turkey Where Jews No Longer Exist: From Physical Sites to Virtual Ones

*Louis Fishman*

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This article was presented in two different formats. First, in 2018, at the Symposium, “Jewish Turkish Entanglements: Resilience, Migration and New Diasporas” at the University of Graz, where I presented the talk: “Remembering Jews in Places They No Longer Exist.” In 2019, I presented the talk: “How do Turkish Muslims Remember Jews Today?: From Physical Sites to Virtual Ones,” in the conference: *New Directions: Sephardi-Mizrachi Migrations in Global Contexts*, Bar Ilan/Beer Sheva Universities. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the panel organizers and members who took part in my panel, and the participants who during these conferences help me develop my thoughts. I would also like to thank Rifat Bali for the many conversations we have had over the years on this and other related topics. He has always provided me with much feedback and helpful criticism. Lastly, I extend my thanks to Onur Sadak for the research he completed with me on Turkish and Hebrew online sources.

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Over the last two decades, the Jewish community in Turkey has dwindled to between 10,000 and 15,000 people, mostly located in Istanbul in a few middle- and upper-class neighborhoods on both the European and Asian sides. In these Istanbul neighborhoods, such as the ones located in the districts of *Şişli and Kadıköy*, Jews participate in Istanbul's daily life, which includes interacting both with other marginalized non-Muslim communities—such as Armenians and Greeks—as well as the dominant Turkish (mostly secular) Muslim population. Such interactions range from forming bonds and friendships, entering one another's home daily, and even marrying into other communities. In short, Jews are an integral part of the neighborhoods in which they live, work, and study. Outside these neighborhoods, however, and putting aside the even much smaller Jewish community in Izmir, Turkey is a country where, for the most part, Jews no longer exist, where the memory of them is buried within destroyed and crumbling buildings throughout the country.

As the Jewish community makes up an extremely small minority, it is safe to say that the great majority of Turkish Muslims will never meet a Jewish person during their lifetime. If they do, they likely will not know the individual is Jewish unless the topic is raised.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, for many Turkish citizens, this nearly absent minority conjures boogeyman-like images due to widespread anti-Semitism in Turkey, which at times has been propagated by the Justice and Development Party (hereafter: the AKP) government and is quite visible in its pro-government press during the former's almost two-decade rule. At times, this hate has also been voiced within factions of the main opposition party: while the mostly secular Republican People's Party (hereafter the CHP) likely receives most of the Jewish vote, it also has a history of discriminating against Jews.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Turkey serves as a good example of how anti-Semitism exists even in

<sup>1</sup> Some Jews are more identifiable as non-Muslims due to personal and family names; however, this is not always the case, with some Jews having more typical Turkish names than others.

<sup>2</sup> In the early years of the AKP, some religious minorities were optimistic towards the party. However, over the last decade, anti-Semitic rhetoric and conspiracy theories have become more much evident, and, at times, are even sanctioned by Erdogan and the AKP party. See: Louis Fishman, "When the State Sanctions Turkey's Ugly anti-Semitism," *Haaretz*, July 23, 2014; Louis Fishman, "As Coronavirus Cases Spike in Turkey, So Does anti-Semitism," *Haaretz*, March 19, 2020.

the absence of Jewish citizens.<sup>3</sup> Thus, anti-Semitism is different from other types of xenophobia, racism, and hate exhibited toward other marginalized groups in Turkey due to the fact that Jews are perceived by some parts of Turkish society to be an invisible enemy.

This paper explores how, even within an environment with rampant anti-Semitism and despite the decline in Turkey's Jewish population—which is almost completely non-existent outside of Istanbul and Izmir—there is a clear trend to historicize and memorialize synagogues and Jewish community buildings in places where Jewish communities no longer exist through the construction of *sites of memory*. These sites include not only the reconstruction of some physical buildings, but also the creation of new “Jewish spaces” in the virtual realm, such as on websites and social media. As we will see, the creation of these spaces—both physical and virtual—can be attributed to government policies, actions taken by local authorities, and Turkish Muslim individuals who seek to highlight the historical past of the “non-Muslim” other. What is remarkable is that these new spaces are key to bringing the Jewish community back into the public sphere, thus creating not merely *sites of memory*, but places where the Jews' individual and communal memories intersect with the construction of local and national historical narratives surrounding these sites.

This chapter begins by briefly discussing the dynamics by which memory plays out in Istanbul's small yet active Jewish community, both within traditional spaces like synagogues, and within other settings, such as cafes and restaurants that are frequented by the community or are situated in certain neighborhoods. Following this introduction, the chapter proceeds to its central focus: exploring geographic regions within Thrace and Anatolia where Jews no longer exist and where the memory of them lies in neglected buildings and abandoned graveyards. Finally, we will see how, once these *sites of memory* are restored, the Jewish community plays a role in utilizing these new spaces. For Turkish Jews, the restoration of these synagogues in places without Jewish communities serves to preserve the memories of both the first years of the Turkish Republic, when Jewish

<sup>3</sup>The roots of Turkish anti-Semitism and conspiracy theories of Jewish dominance go back to the late Ottoman period. It was during this period that we first see the claim of a Jewish-Freemason coalition aimed at undermining the Ottoman State, a claim that persists throughout the Republican years. See: Louis Fishman, “The Emergence of a ‘Jewish’ Question in Istanbul 1908–1914: Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism,” in *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule*, ed. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 103–123.

communities existed in more than thirty cities spread throughout the country, and those Jewish communities to which they once belonged.<sup>4</sup>

### THE TRANSFORMATION FROM A TURKISH-JEWISH COMMUNITY TO AN ISTANBUL-JEWISH COMMUNITY

Since the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic in 1923, the population of the Jewish community has consistently decreased. In fact, the transformation from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic can be seen as a moment in history where Jews stopped migrating to Ottoman territories in Thrace, Istanbul, and Anatolia, turning them from places to seek refuge to places from which to emigrate—an emigration that continues today. In the aftermath of World War I, just a few years before the founding of the Turkish Republic, Jews began to leave the Ottoman heartland for “France, Italy, Greece, the USA, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, Uruguay, or Palestine” due to “economic, social, and political factors.” (See chapter by Mays in this volume)<sup>5</sup> This migration of Turkish Jews would steadily continue, dropping from a total of 81,400 in 1927,<sup>6</sup> to today’s unofficial count of about 10,000–15,000.

What caused so many Jews to leave the Turkish Republic? In the post-1923 era, the Jewish community was greatly affected by the Turkish government’s ethno-nationalist agenda, which exchanged the cultural autonomy they had possessed under the Ottoman Empire for a rigid form of Turkish nationalism that involved forced cultural assimilation of non-Muslims (and others) into a homogenizing nation-state through many Turkification policies.<sup>7</sup> During these years, Ladino and languages of other minorities, such as Greek, became taboo as political campaigns to speak only Turkish in the public sphere were enforced. Even if Jews overall supported the Republican agenda and Jewish community leaders encouraged

<sup>4</sup>Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 286–287.

<sup>5</sup>Şule Toktaş, “Turkey’s Jews and Their Immigration to Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2006): 505.

<sup>6</sup>Toktaş, “Turkey’s Jews,” 506.

<sup>7</sup>For more on Turkification and the Jewish community, see: Rifat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (Turkish Jews under the Turkish Republic: An Episode of Turkification (1923–1945) (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999); Rifat Bali, *Model Citizens of the State: The Jews of Turkey during the Multi-Party Period* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 22–27.

the use of the Turkish language, Turkification policies had a toll on the community.<sup>8</sup>

The Jewish community was not subjected to massacres and genocide during World War I as were the Armenians and Greeks. They were not forced to be part of a population exchange like the remaining Greek Orthodox population of Turkey, approximately one million of whom were uprooted from their homeland and deported to Greece in exchange for around half a million Muslims from Greece—(excluding Greek Orthodox communities in Istanbul and the northern Aegean islands and Muslims in western Thrace who were kept exempt from the “population exchange” between Greece and Turkey).<sup>9</sup> However, Jews did face discriminatory acts that included acts of violence. Therefore, Jewish migration should not be considered voluntary, especially migration that occurred from 1934 to 1955. During the 1934 “Thrace Incidents,”<sup>10</sup> Jewish communities in Edirne, Çorlu, Çanakkale, Tekirdağ, and other cities in the region of Thrace suffered a night of attacks which forced the relocation of these communities to Istanbul, with some then proceeding to emigrate from Turkey entirely. In 1942, the government passed a “Wealth Tax,” which targeted mostly non-Muslims, with Jews bearing the brunt of this capital tax. The exorbitant sums at which the government taxed non-Muslim businessowners led many families to lose everything. Those who could not pay the tax were sent to a work camp at Aşkale in eastern Turkey, “where they were forced to build roads in subzero temperatures,” an experience that, according to Rifat Bali, became “an indelible traumatic memory for those who suffered it and their families.”<sup>11</sup> Both the Thrace Incidents and the 1942 Wealth Tax happened in tandem with a wave of anti-Semitism in the Turkish press during the 1930 and 1940s. Following this, there was the pogrom of September 6–7, 1955, during which Greek citizens of

<sup>8</sup> Senem Aslan, ““Citizen, speak Turkish!”: A Nation in the Making,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 245–272.

<sup>9</sup> Ayhan Aktar, “Homogenizing the Nation, Turkifying the Economy: The Turkish Experience of the Population Exchange Reconsidered,” in *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, ed. Renée Hirschon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003). For a detailed study of the population exchange, see: Onur Yıldırım, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turco-Greek Exchange of Populations, 1922–1934* (Routledge, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Banu Eligür, “The 1934 Anti-Jewish Thrace Riots: The Jewish Exodus of Thrace through the Lens of Nationalism and Collective Violence,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 1 (2017): 88–109.

<sup>11</sup> Bali, *Model Citizens*, 31–32.

Istanbul suffered a city-wide attack on their lives and properties.<sup>12</sup> While Jews were not the main target of the attacks, some Jewish (and Armenian) properties were destroyed in the two days of destruction and looting that forever changed Istanbul.<sup>13</sup> In short, if we look at World War I alongside the era immediately preceding the establishment of the Turkish Republic and through the 1950s, it is not hard to see how Turkey transformed into a country whose population of non-Muslims is today less than two percent.

During these difficult years, Jews left in great numbers. In the period between 1923 and 1948, over 7000 Jews immigrated to Palestine, with 4000 leaving in 1943 and 1944 alone as a direct result of the Wealth Tax. In the three years following the establishment of the State of Israel, almost 35,000 Jews, around forty percent of the community, left for Israel.<sup>14</sup> Jews had already started to leave smaller and more rural communities following the establishment of the Turkish Republic, but the largest depletion of Jews in Thrace and Anatolia followed the establishment of Israel. Smaller Jewish communities would slowly die out as Jews packed up and left small cities in different regions. This included the aforementioned Jewish-populated cities in Thrace, as well as the cities of Manisa, Aydin, Tire, and Milas in western Anatolia; cities such as Tokat in central Anatolia; and, in the southeast, mostly the cities of Diyarbakir and Van.<sup>15</sup> In addition to those who left Turkey for a new life, Turkish Jews began to coalesce into the three largest urban areas: Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara.

Certainly, the abandonment of these cities did not happen all at once. It was a long process involving various stages, often first entailing a migration to the main cities, and from there, in many cases migration to Israel and other places in Europe, such as to France, which was the most popular destination, Austria, and to the United States. From the 1960s to the early 2000s, Jewish migration continued and was especially high during times of political unrest or economic difficulty.

During the first decade of AKP rule, there was a lull in Jewish migration, as Turkey's economy strengthened and many in Turkey's middle class shared in the widespread optimism about the country's future and hoped for new freedoms. However, in the early 2010s, as a result of

<sup>12</sup> Ali Tuna Kuyucu, "Ethno-religious 'Unmixing' of Turkey," *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2005): 361–380.

<sup>13</sup> Şule Toktaş, "Perceptions of Anti-Semitism among Turkish Jews," *Turkish Studies* 7, no. 2 (2006): 207.

<sup>14</sup> Toktaş, *Perceptions of Anti-Semitism*, 508.

<sup>15</sup> Shaw, *History of the Jews of the Ottoman Empire*, 286–287.

growing political instability, the failing Turkish economy, and strengthening anti-Semitic sentiment expressed by the government and pro-government press, this trend began to reverse. It is important to note that even if anti-Semitism is certainly a factor leading to migration, during the last two decades (and arguably since the 1970s), it is often just one among many, with Jewish migration reflecting Turkish middle-class migration patterns overall.

### CREATING NEW SPACES WHERE JEWS DO NOT EXIST

Already in the early 2000s, during Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's first years as Prime Minister, a process I call "*museumification*" of Turkey's non-Muslim past had begun through the restoration of non-Muslim religious holy sites and transformation of the (re)constructed buildings into *sites of memory* designed for domestic and international consumption. According to the historian Pierre Nora, a *lieu de mémoire* is "any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community..."<sup>16</sup> The process of transforming holy sites into museums and cultural centers, empty of a living community, highlight how a multiplicity of narratives emerges surrounding these *site of memories*. For the state, which sets out to create a multicultural present through the reconstruction (or invention) of a cosmopolitan past, these sites can serve as an integral part of its "national heritage." However, for the communities that once housed these holy sites, the narrative which emerges can be a painful one of a lost past, or a narrative linked to memories of genocide, destruction, or oppression.

The refurbishing of churches (and later, synagogues) in the early 2000s was a key part of the AKP's political agenda in which they sought to correct both the injustices that occurred during the Kemalist regime and military interference in domestic politics. In fact, during the first decade of AKP rule, there were serious attempts at reconciling various internal conflicts, and freer public discussion of controversial historical events.<sup>17</sup> This, of course, went hand-in-hand with other domestic issues, such as the gov-

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Nora and L.D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Melson, "Recent Developments in the Study of the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 2 (2013): 313–314.

ernment's attempt at finding a solution to the decades-old Kurdish question.<sup>18</sup> According to Marc Baer, during these years, "Erdoğan and his party promoted the open expression of religious and ethnic identities long suppressed in secular Turkey" which stood in contradiction to the policies of the secular establishment that had "long oppressed Islamists and Kurds." It was during these years that "Turkish society came as close as it had ever come to acknowledging the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire and the persecution of Kurds in the Turkish Republic."<sup>19</sup> At first, the openness exhibited during the first decade of the Erdoğan-led governments (2003–2013) was interpreted as a turn toward reconciling with Turkey's dark moments in history. In retrospect, however it seems to have been more about winning a political struggle with the Kemalists rather than an attempt to write a new history of Turkey, which would require tackling the injustices of the past.

It was during these years that the Jewish community also experienced an important transformation in its relationship with the state. During the 1990s, the leadership of the Jewish community had forged strong ties with the Turkish state and became a key part of its foreign policy, a weapon Turkey could use against claims it had committed genocide in World War I and through which to exercise soft power vis-à-vis ongoing internal conflict with Kurds that enflamed the southeastern part of the country. Also during this period, Turkey began to forge close military ties with Israel, which fostered even better ties with its own Jewish community. The strong relations between the Turkish state and Turkey's Jewish community was sealed in the 1992 Quincentennial celebrations marking 500 years of Turkish-Jewish brotherhood, from the first days of Sephardic Jews immigrating to the Ottoman Empire; to the modern Turkish republic. According to Marcy Brink-Danan, "quincentennial fever engendered a role reversal in which Jews could be called upon to perform publicly the very differences (languages, accents, rituals, beliefs, musical traditions, and so on) they had endeavored to keep private for so long," which emerged in a narrative that cleansed Turkey not only of crimes committed against Armenians and Greeks, but also those against the Jewish community

<sup>18</sup> For more on the Turkish government's embarking on the Kurdish Initiative, see Michael M. Gunter, "The Turkish-Kurdish Peace Process," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2013): 101–111.

<sup>19</sup> Marc David Baer, *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 293 (see also his chapter in this volume).

itself.<sup>20</sup> In 1997, when the Turkish military forced the resignation of Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the “post-modern coup” was linked to preserving Turkey’s ties with Israel. With the election of the AKP in 2002, the leadership of the Jewish community found itself on the wrong end of the stick. Now, a government had come to power that was supported not only by Islamists but also by a vocal group of liberals who wanted to openly discuss everything the Quincentennial Foundation had wished to gloss over.

Despite his long history of supporting the Palestinian cause and general hostility to the Jewish state, during his first years in power, Erdoğan tried to maintain Turkey’s relations with Israel.<sup>21</sup> Importantly, in Turkey, it is not just his Islamist base that holds anti-Israel sentiments, but also factions on the left that championed the Palestinian revolutionary movement in the 1970s. In other words, a pro-Palestine approach has been able to unite parts of the Turkish society that otherwise could not be politically further apart. Even when pro-Palestinian sentiments do not devolve into blatant anti-Semitism, as it has historically, due to the two countries’ proximity; Israel-Palestine’s Ottoman heritage; and the fact that so many Turkish Jews have family in Israel, the Turkish Jewish community feels close to Israel beyond the general identification with a Jewish state that many Jews worldwide possess. Subsequently, it has often found itself under verbal attack by large parts of Turkish society.

Despite the breakdown in Turkish-Israeli diplomatic relations that began in 2009 and a spike in anti-Semitism that, once again, led some Jews to decide to leave the country, over the last few years, Erdoğan’s AKP government has started to mend its relations with the Jewish community. As we will see, in some ways, the Turkish government has come full circle, using its relations with the Jewish community as did previous, secular

<sup>20</sup> Marcy Brink-Danan, *Jewish Life in Twenty-First Century Turkey: The Other Side of Tolerance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), preface IX–X. The skewed view of history, however, found its greatest challenger from within the community itself, with Rifat Bali’s three-part book that retold the history of Jews and sparked a whole new corpus of literature that looks at issues of Turkification, the 1934 Thrace Incidents, the Wealth Tax, and issues of emigration to Israel and beyond. The website about the museum that was originally opened to celebrate the Quincentennial celebrations is here: “500.Yil Vafki Türk Musevileri Müzezi,” [http://muze500.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=120&lang=en](http://muze500.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=120&lang=en).

<sup>21</sup> Louis Fishman, “Turkish-Israeli Relations in a Post-Arab Spring: A Historical Perspective,” *Ortadoğu Analiz* 5.50 (2013): 33–40.

governments in the 1990s to improve its image in the international realm, including taking part in Holocaust memorials, attending religious ceremonies in synagogues and, most recently, attending public performances of Hanukkah candle lightings.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, this new strategy is happening even as anti-Semitic rhetoric is spread by the pro-government press.

### REMEMBERING JEWS (AND NON-MUSLIMS) WHERE THEY EXIST

Today's Jewish community in Istanbul is made up of people with different ethnic backgrounds, such as Sephardic, Italian, Ashkenazi, and Georgian Jews, some of which emerged from the Jewish migration out of the cities previously mentioned, while others immigrated to Turkey with later Ashkenazi migrations. Each individual within the Jewish community has a life of their own and is a part of their larger social class. Borders between Muslims and Jews often become blurred, mirroring what Rifat Bali has remarked as their "relatively successful assimilation into [the] Turkish society."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, architecture in Istanbul reflects how the city once housed a large population of Jews, Greeks, and Armenians. Istanbul's neighborhoods, whether Beyoğlu, Şişli, Kuzguncuk, Üsküdar, Fener, Kadıköy, Tünel, Ortaköy, or others, are dotted with synagogues, churches, and hospitals built by these minorities, as well as with houses and apartment buildings displaying religious symbols or family names that announce the family's religious origins.<sup>24</sup>

Many institutions, such as the Jewish school and numerous synagogues, remain under constant threat from attack, with the 2003 Istanbul bombings of the Neve Şalom and Bet Israel synagogues serving as a reminder of

<sup>22</sup> Karel Valansi, "Turkey's Jews are Coming Out of the Shadows," *Haaretz*, June 12, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Bali, *Model Citizens*, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> Much of this section was first presented in a paper in 2010 titled "Memories of the Past/Present: Jews, Armenians, and Greeks, as Historical/Living Artifacts," at the Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop, Sabanci University. It should be pointed out that Turkey is not unique in the sense. Most countries in the Middle East, including Israel—which is set on erasing the Palestinian past—create dominant nationalist narratives that represent the hegemonic reality of the state, while silencing marginalized groups within them. In fact, Turkey and Israel both contain a large ethnic minority among their citizens and are, at times, more similar than different. See the website for the Schneider Tempel Sanat Merkezi, <http://www.schneidertempel.org/>, for an example of a synagogue as a "site of memory."

this fact.<sup>25</sup> Ironically, the need for security measures at these sites demonstrates the existence of the active, ongoing cultural and religious life occurring within, such as in the greater than ten Istanbul synagogues frequented for prayer and communal events. These sites enclose communal groups in one space and serve as a reminder that they are not what Benedict Anderson would describe as an *imagined community*, but a *tangible* community connected by familial, professional, and neighborly ties.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, buildings no longer in use serve as a harsh reminder to both the Christian and Jew. While their *collective memory* provides an explanation for why these buildings are abandoned, closed, and repurposed, they also serve as a testimony that these communities' lives run parallel to these architectural structures; in essence, they are *remnants of the past* living in the *present*. This reality is much more vivid in cemeteries where many more deceased non-Muslims reside than do living citizens in Istanbul, providing ample evidence that these dwindling minorities are the *past* living in the *present*.

### REMEMBERING JEWS AND NON-MUSLIMS WHERE THEY DON'T EXIST

The AKP's openness toward non-Muslim communities, especially Armenians and Greeks, its lifting the ban on Kurdish language, and its strengthening of civil organizations during its first decade in power (2002–2013) found both moral and financial support from the United States, European Union, and many international organizations. This point cannot be divorced from the restoration of historical and religious sites that belong to the country's once-vibrant non-Muslim population. According to Christine Luke, "while cultural heritage may not be the feature that makes national headlines, it constitutes part of the long-term foreign policies."<sup>27</sup>

The convergence of domestic and international politics on this topic manifested in the preservation of such places as the medieval Armenian

<sup>25</sup> One could argue that this general feeling of insecurity dates to the 1986 terror attack on Neve Şalom, when twenty-two worshippers were killed by an attack attributed to the Palestinian Abu-Nidal organization.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Christine Luke, "Cultural Sovereignty in the Balkans and Turkey: The Politics of Preservation and Rehabilitation," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 13, no. 3 (2013): 359.

city of Ani, located just across the Armenian border in Turkey's province of Kars. Even if the original restoration of Ani began in the mid-1990s, during the first years of the AKP, it received greater attention, as the country was set on a path to joining the European Union and to reconciling with Armenia. In fact, in 2004, the European Union recommended that Turkey focus on the preservation of cultural heritage sites as a benchmark towards accession and made note of Ani (and other sites).<sup>28</sup> In 2010, the United States Ambassadors Fund was awarded 625,000 dollars, which was allotted to the preservation of one of the churches on site there. Then-United States ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone stated that Ani "should offer hope and inspiration that modern Turkey and Armenia together will revive their ancient historical brotherhood and build a new future upon it in peace."<sup>29</sup> The great efforts by Turkish and international organizations to preserve the ancient Armenian city did not go unnoticed and, in 2015, it was declared as a UNESCO Heritage Site.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to excavations in the ancient city, the 2005–2007 restoration of the 1100-year-old Surp Khach [Church of the Holy Cross] cathedral on the island of Akhtamar in Lake Van was also prioritized. As with Ani, this project was motivated by the push for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation, while Turkey "showcases these projects as evidence of in-country tolerance and pluralism."<sup>31</sup> No less important was the potential profit from a surge in faith/heritage tourism, with new sites not only attracting domestic tourism, but, more importantly, also appealing to an international audience (including Armenians) that began coming to Turkey to discover their ancestors' homeland and rekindle their connection to the

<sup>28</sup> Camiel Eurlings, "On the 2004 Regular Report and the Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession" (Session Document, 2004), <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A6-2004-0063&language=EN>.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Odessey, Lauren Monsen, Mary-Katherine Ream, and Mark Trainer, *Priceless: The U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation* (U.S. Bureau of International Information Programs, Department of State, 2013), 43–45. For more on Ani and the ongoing site, see Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, "Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 4 (2014): 528–555.

<sup>30</sup> "Archaeological Site of Ani," United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization," <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1518/>.

<sup>31</sup> Luke, "Cultural Sovereignty in the Balkans and Turkey," 360.

land itself, all while learning about life before the genocide.<sup>32</sup> Alaettin Çarıkcı's dissertation on "The Arts of Memory" offers a valuable analysis of how Surp Khach serves as a *site of memory*. However, unlike the examples Nora uses to define a *lieu de mémoire*, Çarıkcı adds that "the restored church-turned-into-a-museum, carries a different symbolic meaning for the Armenians, the Kurds and the Turkish government,"<sup>33</sup> highlighting the fact "that one site might embody more than one memory with conflicting narratives."<sup>34</sup> This is especially evident in that the church was officially opened as a *museum* rather than as a *church*, with no cross displayed and prayer services permitted only once a year.

It is in this context that the restoration and preservation of Jewish sites of memory in Anatolia and Thrace took place. As the Surp Khach cathedral illustrates, we must ask if these sites of memory belong to Armenians and Jews, or if they are essentially Turkish sites of memory with access granted to non-Muslim communities. In other words, enshrining these buildings within a national project writes them into a hegemonic national narrative that often contradicts the memory of those who claim the structures as part of their communal heritage.

## TWO SYNAGOGUES: BERGAMA'S YABETS SYNAGOGUE AND EDİRNE'S GRAND SYNAGOGUE

Over the past decade, four synagogues have been restored in areas where Jews no longer exist: Bergama (2014), Edirne (2015), Gaziantep (2019), and most recently, Kilis (2020). These restorations provide both a window into the social and political dynamics surrounding the museumification of these Jewish houses of prayer as well as a model of how Jewish spaces are constructed within urban areas where Jews once existed.

The Yabets synagogue in Bergama was the first synagogue to be restored, with work beginning in 2010 and its doors opening in 2014.

<sup>32</sup>A. Çarıkcı "The Arts of Memory: The Remembrance of the Armenians in Turkey" (doctoral thesis, University of Leiden, 2016), 97. According to the author, this can also be called "trauma tourism" and "dark tourism," conveying the pain and trauma experienced by those coming to visit the sites. For more on Armenians coming to Turkey to reconnect with the past/present, see Zeynep Turan and Anny Bakalian, "Diaspora Tourish and Identity: Subversion and Consolation in Armenian Pilgrimages to Eastern Turkey," *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing Community* (2015): 173–211.

<sup>33</sup> Çarıkcı, "The Arts of Memory," 102.

<sup>34</sup> Çarıkcı, "The Arts of Memory," 132.

The renovations happened within the city's greater plan of seeking recognition as a UNESCO Heritage site, as Bergama borders the ancient city of Pergamon.<sup>35</sup> The city of Bergama was home to almost 500 Jews at the turn of the twentieth century and is representative of many Aegean Jewish communities in terms of its Jewish migration pattern and the deterioration of its synagogue, which was built in 1875. The community that once filled the Yabets synagogue quickly dwindled after World War I. In 1927, it was home to a congregation of about 173; in 1940, twenty families remained, and in 1960, only six families.<sup>36</sup> Multiple sources state that most of Bergama's Jewish population left in 1948 for Israel. The synagogue was used as a house of prayer until 1950 when it was abandoned by the community. It then became a government building,<sup>37</sup> and was later used for storage. In 2000, the structure was ruined in a fire.

The opening of the restored Yabets Synagogue was a festive event, with both Istanbul's and Izmir's Jewish communities present, along with representatives of the Israeli embassy and officials from the Bergama local municipality.<sup>38</sup> As part of the event, the mayor of Bergama, Mehmet Gönenc, declared: "Here, exactly 139 years later, [the synagogue] is being brought back to life," and went on to say, "now there are no Jewish citizens living in Bergama, but their memories are alive. The municipality of Bergama did this work to honor the Jewish community that lived in the city, drank from its water, and breathed its air. We invite all of our Jewish

<sup>35</sup> "Bergama, kültürel mirasini koruyor," *Hürriyet*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bergama-kulturel-mirasini-koruyor-40749071>; It should be stated that even if the synagogue was part of the larger plan to be accepted by UNESCO, the synagogue's restoration is not mentioned neither on the UNESCO website nor on the Turkish website documenting the UNESCO sites in Turkey. See "Turkey in the World Heritage List," International Council on Monuments and Sites, <http://www.icomos.org.tr/?Sayfa=Dunya-mirasilistesindeturkiye&dil=en>.

<sup>36</sup> "139 yıl sonra yeniden: Bergama Sinagogu Kapilarini Açtı," *Şalom*, May 14, 2014, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139\\_yil\\_sonra\\_yeniden\\_bergama\\_sInagogu\\_kapilarini\\_acti.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139_yil_sonra_yeniden_bergama_sInagogu_kapilarini_acti.html).

<sup>37</sup> "Bergama Belediyesi'nin Olağanüstü Restorasyon Başarısı: BERGAMA YABETS SİNAGOGU," *Şalom*, April 25, 2012, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-83824-bergama\\_belediyesinin\\_olaganustu\\_restorasyon\\_basarisi\\_bergama\\_yabets\\_sInagogu.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-83824-bergama_belediyesinin_olaganustu_restorasyon_basarisi_bergama_yabets_sInagogu.html); "Bergama Yahudilerinin Sosyal, Ekonomik ve Kültürel Yapısı," *Şalom*, September 20, 2018, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-108031-bergama\\_yahudilerinin\\_sosyal\\_ekonomik\\_ve\\_kulturel\\_yapisi.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-108031-bergama_yahudilerinin_sosyal_ekonomik_ve_kulturel_yapisi.html).

<sup>38</sup> Itamar Eichner, "Expelled Israeli Envoy Inaugurates Synagogue in Turkey," *YNet News*, May 23, 2014, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4522897,00.html>.

brethren to Bergama.”<sup>39</sup> Among those at the ceremony was former Israeli ambassador to Turkey; Gabbay Levy who was later expelled in 2011 following one of the many falling outs between the two countries. In fact, Levy himself played a role in the restoration. He was born in Turkey, and decades before its restoration, he had traveled with his father to Bergama on a family “roots” trip.<sup>40</sup> Levy relates: “during my visit to the synagogue [in 2008] I was horrified to see that the structure was completely destroyed. I immediately went to the Mayor and asked that the synagogue be renovated.” For Levy, renovating the synagogue was not just about diplomacy, but about something much more personal: his family’s roots.<sup>41</sup>

The city’s municipality organized much of the logistics for the Yabets Synagogue restoration, which was a joint program with Izmir’s provincial governorate, the Turkish Ministry of Tourism, and the European Union.<sup>42</sup> As we will see, this local ownership of the project differentiates the restoration of the Yabets synagogue from most other restorations of non-Muslim holy sites, including the reopening of the Edirne Grand Synagogue in 2015 and the more recent opening of the Gaziantep Synagogue in late 2019. In these cases, the Turkish Directorate General of Foundations, an official office of the Republic, led the restorations, making each an official project of the Turkish state at the national level, with other government departments participating as well.

A little less than a year following the reopening of the Bergama Synagogue, Edirne’s Grand Synagogue, also known by its Hebrew name, *Kal Kadosh ha-Gadol*, reopened to the public with its first prayer service in forty-six years after its restoration in March 2015. Originally opened in 1909, the restoration and reopening of this synagogue received much more press coverage than the Bergama synagogue, due not only to its proximity to Istanbul, but also to the fact that the project’s main sponsor was the Turkish government which had invested two and a half million

<sup>39</sup> “139 Yıl Sonra Yeniden: Bergama Sinagogu Kapılarını Açtı,” *Şalom*, May 14, 2014, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139\\_yil\\_sonra\\_yeniden\\_bergama\\_sInagogu\\_kapilarini\\_acti.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139_yil_sonra_yeniden_bergama_sInagogu_kapilarini_acti.html).

<sup>40</sup> “139 Yıl Sonra Yeniden: Bergama Sinagogu Kapılarını Açtı,” *Şalom*, May 14, 2014, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139\\_yil\\_sonra\\_yeniden\\_bergama\\_sInagogu\\_kapilarini\\_acti.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139_yil_sonra_yeniden_bergama_sInagogu_kapilarini_acti.html).

<sup>41</sup> “139 Yıl Sonra Yeniden: Bergama Sinagogu Kapılarını Açtı,” *Şalom*, May 14, 2014, [http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139\\_yil\\_sonra\\_yeniden\\_bergama\\_sInagogu\\_kapilarini\\_acti.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/arsiv/haber-91047-139_yil_sonra_yeniden_bergama_sInagogu_kapilarini_acti.html).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

dollars in it. This synagogue was the largest in the Balkans and was a copy of the Grand Synagogue in Vienna, destroyed in World War II. The Edirne Grand Synagogue was originally built following the 1906 Edirne fire and could accommodate 1200 worshipers, replacing thirteen communal synagogues that had been ravaged in the fire. Following the 1934 Thrace Incidents, the Jewish community dwindled as Edirne was one of the cities most affected by the violence. The 1942 Wealth Tax caused the exodus of even more of Edirne's Jews. By the 1970s, the Jewish community in Edirne was almost completely gone. In 1983, the Grand Synagogue finally closed its doors, and, in 1997, its roof collapsed.<sup>43</sup>

In contrast with the Bergama synagogue, the restoration of the Edirne Grand Synagogue was sponsored by the Directorate General of Foundations,<sup>44</sup> in response to new attention placed on transforming the second Ottoman capital of Edirne into a major tourist site that promoted an Ottoman "cosmopolitan past."<sup>45</sup> While the restorations of both synagogues promote faith tourism, mosques and churches are also part of each city's revitalized religious landscape. For example, Edirne houses some of the most famous mosques, including the largest historical one in Turkey, the Selimiye Mosque. After years of being abandoned, Edirne's Saint Constantine-Helena Church was also restored in 2008, a project funded in large part by the Bulgarian government. In 2004, the smaller Saint Georgi church was reopened to parishioners.<sup>46</sup> As an effort to create a new sense of historical cosmopolitanism, the irony is that these projects "are pursued under the rhetoric of 'tolerance', despite years of oppression and political engineering that have led to the demographic decline of the respective communities"<sup>47</sup>

The official reopening of Bergama's synagogue would serve as a model for the reopening of the Grand Synagogue of Edirne. It brought together Turkish officials with Israeli and European ones, and Istanbul's Chief

<sup>43</sup> "Great Synagogue in Edirne, Turkey Reopens after Restoration," *Jewish Heritage Europe*, March 26, 2015, <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2015/03/26/great-synagogue-in-erdine-turkey-reopens-after-restoration/>.

<sup>44</sup> "CEMAAT (Community) Foundations," *T.R. Directorate General of Foundations*, <https://www.vgm.gov.tr/foundations-in-turkey/foundations-in-turkey/cemaat-community-foundations>.

<sup>45</sup> Luke, "Cultural Sovereignty in the Balkans and Turkey," 361.

<sup>46</sup> Arif Misirli and Esen Benian, *Humanities and Social Sciences Review* 3, no. 2 (2014): 309–325. CD-ROM. ISSN: 2165-6258.

<sup>47</sup> Luke, "Cultural Sovereignty in the Balkans and Turkey," 366.

Rabbi performed a prayer, with Istanbul and Izmir's (smaller) Jewish communities filling the seats. At the 2019 reopening of the Gaziantep synagogue near Turkey's southern border with Syria, another religious service was performed: a Hanukkah Celebration.<sup>48</sup>

What is fascinating about the ceremonial openings, which bring people from different backgrounds, personal sentiments, and political agendas into the same room, is the large presence of Jews. Here, Jews—young, middle-aged, and elderly, women and men alike—are placed among Turkish and international officials, creating an optical illusion of sorts by evoking the days when Jews had a large presence in the cities where the openings are commemorated.<sup>49</sup> If the restored synagogues are now displayed as cultural centers—a type of museum—then the Jews who are present essentially could be described as an artifact come alive. The refurbishing of non-Muslim sites in Edirne may have initiated among some Turkish Muslim residents a suspicion that, one day, the city's non-Muslim former residents might choose to return. According to Christine Luke, when asked about the possibility of non-Muslim residents returning to live there, people were quick to respond that “they [the people] are gone; they don't live here anymore.”<sup>50</sup> Thus, one could argue that, for many in cities where we find the restoration of synagogues (and churches), non-Muslim people in these structures serve as an anomaly, an anachronism of sorts, as if we are seeing the *imagined past* in the *virtual present*.

One difference between the restoration of churches and of synagogues as sites of memory is that religious prayer has been banned or limited to specific days in some Armenian and Greek churches that have been designated as museums. Synagogues, however, are declared “cultural centers,” and prayer is permitted at the community's discretion. Essentially, however, both Surp Khach in Akhtamar and the Grand Synagogue of Edirne serve a similar purpose as do the restored churches in that they host cultural events. This bureaucratic dichotomy creates a dynamic by which the spiritual connection of Jews is recognized, while that of Armenians is controlled. According to Çarıkcı, “The absence of church chairs, prayer

<sup>48</sup> “Gaziantep sinagogu kırk yıl sonra açıldı, Hanuka bayramı kutlandı,” *Diken*, December 27, 2019, <http://www.diken.com.tr/gaziantep-sinagogu-kirk-yil-sonra-acildi-hanuka-bayrami-kutlandi/>.

<sup>49</sup> This is based on my review of videos, social media posts, and articles about different synagogue openings, where we can clearly see a pattern emerging of what I have described here.

<sup>50</sup> Luke, “Cultural Sovereignty in the Balkans and Turkey,” 361.

candles in front of the icon, entrance tickets, souvenir shops or cafés to cater for the visitors and the presence of security guards all indicate the current status of the church as a museum.”<sup>51</sup>

With relations between Turkey and Israel hitting new lows from 2009 to 2014, beginning with the 2009 Davos Conference incident and followed by numerous tit-for-tat diplomatic scandals, and leading to the 2014 attack on the Israeli consulate in Istanbul (which occurred following outbreaks of violence between Israelis and Palestinians), the synagogue openings have allowed Israeli diplomats to come together with Turkish government officials, a pattern seen also in the use of church openings as diplomatic overtures by Turkey to Armenia, Bulgaria, and Greece. It seems Israel’s participation in these events represents a growing trend; where the strong ties between the State of Israel and the Turkish-Jewish community is no longer half-hidden, but rather is openly displayed.

Even if Turkish Jews are not Israeli citizens, they are occasionally blamed for the Israeli state’s actions. This was evident when a Turkish government official threatened to ban the Jewish community in Turkey from praying at the Edirne Synagogue just months before the opening. The governor of Edirne, Ali Şahin, outraged at Israel policies concerning the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem stated that “as those bandit-dressed people perform war drills, create an ambiance of war, and kill Muslims at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, we are here restoring their synagogues. I say this with great spite.”<sup>52</sup> He then commented that, like the Akhtamar church, Edirne’s synagogue would open as a museum and that Jews would not be allowed to pray there. However, the AKP government quickly forced Şahin to issue an apology. This case provides an interesting opportunity to understand how the AKP tolerates anti-Semitism within the pro-government press on one hand but will draw clear lines when dealing with the Turkish Jewish community with the other. In this case, it can be argued that Şahin confused public rhetoric with policy and subsequently had to retract his words.

<sup>51</sup> Çarıkçı, “The Arts of Memory,” 117.

<sup>52</sup> Kenan Cruz Çilli, “Tolerating Tolerance: Between Equal Citizenship and Minority Subjecthood—Understanding Turkish Jewish Identity Through the Edirne Grand Synagogue” (bachelor’s thesis, University of Leiden, 2019), 23.

## CREATING VIRTUAL JEWISH SPACES: THE CASE OF TWO MUNICIPALITIES

Virtual platforms, such as websites and social media have also introduced new spaces which highlight the Jewish histories of cities in which Jews no longer live. Just as importantly, these sites have allowed the small Jewish community in Istanbul and Izmir to communicate and interact with a Turkish (Muslim) public that has mostly never had the chance to meet members of the Jewish community. In so doing, they have created new interest in Turkey's Jews and the potential for more spaces of interaction to be created.

Like the reopening of Bergama's synagogue, some municipalities are opening new spaces to imagine the Jewish past on their official websites. It is important to note that the preservation of memory in this online realm is due to the work of individuals, regardless of party affiliation. The first site I discuss is that of Sultanbeyli, part of Istanbul's metropolitan municipality. Sultanbeyli is distant from the center of Istanbul, situated not far from Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen airport on the Asian side. It is a religiously conservative district and an AKP stronghold. It used to be home to a small farming community of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants that arrived in the Ottoman Empire during the first part of the twentieth century. Today, there are no physical remnants left of this long forgotten Jewish community. Nonetheless, at the top of its webpage dedicated to the city's history, the municipality's website proudly presents an image of an official Ottoman stamp of the community, which was named, *Mesila Hadasha*. By featuring the stamp, which is in Ottoman Turkish, French, and Hebrew, visitors to the site can imagine a world that no longer exists, an Ottoman Jewish past within a suburban Turkish city, today populated primarily by people who migrated from Anatolia. Moreover, if one were to read the Hebrew on the stamp, they may confuse it for one of the Jewish farming communities established in Ottoman Palestine.<sup>53</sup> Like the settlements in Ottoman Palestine during the same period, *Mesila Hadasha* opted to create a Hebrew-speaking environment within a self-sustaining modern farming community. Though there is little information provided about the Jewish community on the webpage, the municipality produced a book on the city's history, and its historical survey of the Jewish settlement is one of the most extensive studies that exist today, incorporating

<sup>53</sup> "İlçe Tarihi," Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, <https://www.sultanbeyli.bel.tr/ilce-tarihi/>.

archival material from Israel as well.<sup>54</sup> Even more surprising is that the decision to historicize the memory of this municipality's Jewish past seems to have been made solely for the sake of history. Unlike the synagogue restorations, there is no diplomatic benefit in studying the Mesila Hadasha community, and no motive to attract faith tourists. This is perhaps what makes this effort so unique and reflects the differences between municipality-based programs and national ones.

The Aegean city of Milas also hosted for an extended period a municipal website that created a virtual space for the memory of its past non-Muslim residents. The municipality's work in this arena created a similar dynamic to that of the synagogue restorations in that it gave the current residents a chance to come in contact with the city's past while also providing them information on where these people migrated and providing stories about their new lives. There were six webpages dedicated to the memory of Jews who now live in Israel and the United States. One of the pages was in English, apparently so that people who no longer live in Turkey can read about the past. According to the historical section: "there were eighty Jewish families remaining in Milas in the year 1927. Their population decreased after 1932. The real migration of Jews from Milas took place in 1948 when the state of Israel was established. Firstly, the young ones went to Israel for military service. Later, the elderly and the women migrated to Israel through Izmir."<sup>55</sup> The names of more than twenty famous Jews born in Milas were also shared, and their professional achievements within Turkey, Israel, and the United States are documented. Importantly, the site pointed out that the city protected its Jewish compatriots from the Wealth Tax in 1942, essentially recognizing the injustice done to the Jewish community. Reading these pages, one feels general solidarity between Milas and the Jewish community, as well as a sense of pride in having a mutual homeland, a unique sentiment in the Turkish context.

<sup>54</sup> Vahdettin Engin, Erhannet Afyoncu, Cemalettin Sahin, and Mehmet Mazak, *Sultanbeyli Tarihi*. (Sultanbeyli: İstanbul Sultanbeyli Belediyesi, 2013), 51–64. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mehmet Mazak of the municipality who hosted me in December 2019 and presented me with this book.

<sup>55</sup> "Milas'in Musevileri," Milas Tarihin ve Kültürlerin Harman Oldugu Kent, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200716040107/http://www.milas.org.tr/milas-musevileri.htm>; The municipality has a new website and unfortunately this section is no longer available except on the Web Archive. We can only hope that the new website will bring this information back and open it again to the public.

## PRESERVING JEWISH MEMORY WHERE JEWS DO NOT EXIST: THE CASE OF OR YEHUDA

We have focused on Turkish local- and state-sponsored acts of preserving Jewish memory, with synagogues transformed into sites of memory and two municipalities creating new spaces on their webpages for remembering the Jews that once lived within their boundaries. The creation of these realms of memory of Jews where they no longer exist is an ongoing process and is often the initiative of Turkish individuals acting independent of institutions and organizations who embark on projects dedicated to preserving remnants or memories connected to Jewish and other non-Muslim sites, both in the physical realm and the virtual world. In fact, with the emergence of social media, we see that the dynamics of memory are quickly changing, bringing the local news to the mainstream, and providing platforms where memories of the *past* are constructed in the *present*.<sup>56</sup> This is also happening on Instagram and Facebook, where buildings and artifacts of these nonexistent communities come to life. These emerging trends offer new meaning to Nora's *sites of memory*, revealing the close connection between the physical and virtual.<sup>57</sup>

About an hour's drive from Izmir lies the city of Akhisar. What many people do not remember is that it once housed a modern Jewish farming society named Or Yehuda, founded in 1899 by the Jewish Colonization Association and the Alliance Universelle Jewish schooling network.<sup>58</sup> This

<sup>56</sup>There is a proliferation of local newspapers in towns where Jews no longer exist that write about the Jewish community and discuss relics and remnants of these communities. While this has not been included within the framework of this article, it is an area that needs to be furthered explored. With Twitter and Facebook, small-town newspapers about these Jewish sites can receive readership, interact with the Jewish community, and open doors to new preservation projects.

<sup>57</sup>A work on memorials highlights how we need to rethink Nora's *lieu de mémoire* extending it to the virtual spaces such as the internet. See Annie G erin, "The Virtual Memorial: Temporality, Interactivity, and the Internet," *RACAR: Revue D'art Canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 31, no. 1/2 (2006): 42–54.

<sup>58</sup>This settlement is often confused with the modern city of Or Yehuda in Israel today, which was established in 1955. According to the municipality's history booklet, it might have received its name from the Akhisar Or Yehuda, writing that it was "agricultural community near Izmir, Turkey, where they learned Hebrew and Zionism," and noting that some of the people who originally lived in Or Yehuda were later residents of the new Or Yehuda in Israel. Ironically, the present Or Yehuda is built on top of a former Palestinian village, showing the layers of memory and process of "forgetting" within the Israeli society that mirrors Turkey's erasure its non-Muslim past to a great extent. "Hoveret Or Yehuda," Or Yehuda

settlement served two purposes: To establish a self-sufficient farming community of Russian Jewish immigrants; and to house an agricultural school where potential Jewish farmers from other Near Eastern settlements could be trained in farming (even if mainly Jewish, it did have students from all backgrounds).<sup>59</sup> The community's buildings included a preschool, school, a cheese mill, wine cellar, dormitory, and shops for ironworking and carpentry.<sup>60</sup> The Jewish settlement, which maintained close relations with Izmir's Jewish community, experienced difficult days during World War I, and in the early 1920's the school was shut down. It was privately purchased in 1924 and donated to the Turkish government in 1944, after which it was turned into a grade-school that operated until 1995 and was later abandoned; in 2000, it was registered as an official national heritage site.<sup>61</sup> This structure serves as a unique example, since it is not a religious building but rather a secular—yet Jewish—space. During the last two decades, the Jewish cemetery has also been cleaned and restored.<sup>62</sup> Though the school's main building has yet to be restored, Engin Aktürk, a Turkish architect, highlighted the building's architectural importance and provided recommendations for its conservation as the central topic of his master's thesis.

Aktürk was not just interested in the building's architectural uniqueness but sought to highlight its Jewish heritage. In a website dedicated to keeping the memory of Or Yehuda alive, he explains the importance of preserving this site: "The old school building, which today is in ruins, is a part of Anatolia's rich cultural past."<sup>63</sup> Aktürk's website features

Municipality, [https://web.archive.org/web/20140821204541/http://oryehuda.muni.il/\\_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/HOVERET\\_OR\\_YEHUDA.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20140821204541/http://oryehuda.muni.il/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/HOVERET_OR_YEHUDA.pdf).

<sup>59</sup>Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: A History of the Jewish Colonization Association* (Andesite Press, 2015), 106–107.

<sup>60</sup>Sarah Michelle Zaides, "Tevye's Ottoman Daughter: The Making of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in the Shatterzones of Empire, 1882–1923" (doctoral thesis, University of Washington, 2017), 178.

<sup>61</sup>Engin Aktürk and Büşra Aktürk, "Structural and Material Analysis of Old Jewish School Buildings and Developing Conservation Recommendations: A Case Study on Akhisar Or Yehuda Agricultural School," *International Civil Engineering & Architecture Symposium for Academicians*, 2014.

<sup>62</sup>Mehmet İlhan, "A Deserted Jewish Cemetery of Akhisar, Çekmece," *İZU Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 8–9 (2016): 131–182.

<sup>63</sup>Engin Aktürk, "Akhisar 'Da Bir Musevi: Or Yehuda Yahu Tarım Okulu-Kayalioglu İlkokulu," September 5, 2019, <https://mimeakturk.wixsite.com/hypedia/post/akhisar-da-bir-musevi-or-yehuda-yahudi-tarim-okulu-kayalioglu-ilkokulu>.

photographs of the school and remnants of Hebrew, all placed within the context of the building's history. The Or Yehuda complex was also the site of photography art project in 2011 titled *The Ghosts of Or Yehuda*, where two Turkish artists recreated lives within the empty, deteriorating edifice, creating a sense of a lost community of Jews, no longer present in the building and the region.<sup>64</sup> More recently, Or Yehuda and its history was featured in an official Turkish government magazine on agriculture and a personal travel blog, which promotes places off the beaten track.<sup>65</sup>

Lastly, Akhisar is now preserved as a “site of memory” by an English-language online project called *Diarna* (Our Home, in Judeo-Arabic). *Diarna* describes itself as a “Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life, working to digitally preserve the physical remnants of Jewish history throughout the region.”<sup>66</sup> According to its website, *Diarna* believes that “digital preservation of sites and memories may be the only way to ensure untrammelled access to endangered Jewish sites...”<sup>67</sup> Remarkably, the case for preserving Akhisar made by individuals like Aktürk has converged with this Jewish organization's mission, which has now earmarked Akhisar as a place of memory where Jews no longer exist. When looked at in unison, Aktürk's thesis, the art project, and *Diarna's* work present a strong argument for the need to apply Nora's *site of memories* into the virtual world that transcends the physical. One can only hope that such individual initiatives will lead to what Aktürk envisions in his thesis that Or Yehuda's school be saved from its current state of ruin and restored to its original beauty. What is remarkable about this case is that its memory has been maintained by Turkish Muslims both secular and religious, which presents a completely different experience than the Turkish

<sup>64</sup> Ezgi Tekerek and Mert Çakir, “The Ghosts of Or Yehuda,” December 18, 2011, <https://karanlikkutu.wordpress.com/2011/12/18/mert-cakir-ve-ezgi-tekerek-oryehudanın-hayaletleri-aralik-2011-sayisi-december-2011-issue-fotoritim/>; Mertowskhi, “Or Yehuda'nın Hayaletleri,” Vimeo, <https://vimeo.com/36079469>.

<sup>65</sup> Hasan Soydan, “Osmanlı'nın son dönemlerine Oryehuda Çiftliği,” July 11, 2019, <http://www.turktarim.gov.tr/Haber/310/osmanlinin-son-donemlerinde-oryehuda-ciftligi>; “Unutulmuş Bir Cemaat Manisa Yahudileri—Oyrehouda Tarım Okulu—Akhisar Musevi Mezarlığı-Manisa'da Yahudi İzleri,” August 25, 2017, <https://sinirlarolmadan.blogspot.com/2017/08/unutulmus-bir-cemaat-manisa-yahudileri.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Michelle Abramian, “Kayalioglu (Or Yehuda Farm), Turkey,” *Diarna*, 2018. <http://archive.diarna.org/site/detail/public/1166/>; “Our Homes,” *Diarna*, <https://diarna.org/about/intro/>.

<sup>67</sup> “Contribute,” *Diarna*, <https://diarna.org/contribute/>.

government's restoration of synagogues and the municipalities' historicization of Jewish communities. Such virtual *sites of memory* can be seen in newer projects, such as the Instagram site "Turkey Heritage Watch," which documents non-Muslim sites throughout Turkey, as well as the registration of Jewish and other non-Muslim sites on Google Maps.<sup>68</sup>

Almost a century after Jews began leaving Thrace and Anatolia primarily for Palestine, and later, Israel, as well as for destinations all over the world, the Jewish sites they left, many now abandoned and in ruins, are slowly being transformed into sites of memory. The creation of these sites involves not only turning them back into Jewish sites, but also into locations commemorated by the Turkish state. In other words, the restored synagogues embody multiple historical narratives: not just communal Jewish ones, but also Turkish national ones. In this initial study, we see that the preservation of these buildings and the creation of new spaces within the virtual world are the result of both national projects and local initiatives. Where the national projects to restore synagogues often convey a political message, both domestically and internationally, the works done by municipalities and individuals are characterized by a quest to uncover the past and to preserve and rewrite the memory of its previous Jewish citizens and the world in which they lived.

For the Turkish Jewish community that remains in Turkey, these sites of memory, whether in physical or virtual forms, are part of a collective memory, one that is constantly changing. For the Turkish government, and for some Turkish Muslims, these sites of memory construct a multicultural past, one that, at times, ignores the pain and suffering experienced by the buildings' former inhabitants. It is this very fact that shows the different dynamics at play in the more rural regions where Jews no longer exist as compared to those in an urban arena where Jews are physically connected to the buildings and maintain a monopoly over both the buildings themselves and their memory, even if, at times, the Jewish community has been used by the state to portray a false sense of multiculturalism.

<sup>68</sup>The Turkey Heritage Watch is the work of Kenan Cruz Çilli, currently a student at Oxford studying in its Master of Science in Modern Middle Eastern Studies. He wrote his bachelor's thesis on Edirne's synagogue and has been actively documenting the remnants of non-Muslim sites, both urban and rural, throughout Turkey. The Instagram site is focused on "highlighting the rich and cosmopolitan history and cultural heritage of Anatolia." Kenan Cruz Çilli, (Turkey Heritage Watch), Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/turkeyheritagewatch/>. He is also part of a growing trend to introduce synagogues and similar sites onto Google Maps.

Certainly, these Jewish sites of memory where Jews no longer exist leave an important physical mark of the memory of the once-vibrant life of Jews in Thrace and Anatolia. These sites of memory in their present state also allow us to understand the multitude of contested historical narratives in Turkey today and that continue to shape how we understand the past.



## Whitewashing the Armenian Genocide with Holocaust Heroism

*Marc David Baer*

In 1993, Stanford Shaw collaborated with Turkish career foreign service personnel and Turkish Jewish leaders committed to denying the Armenian genocide in the promotion of a polished image of Turkey for an international audience. Two years after publishing *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, Shaw published *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey's Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945*, a book that brought together Armenian genocide denial and an updated version of the centuries-old theme of utopian

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Modernity, Memory and Identity in South-East Europe,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87798-9\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87798-9_9)

relations between Muslims and Jews in the face of the Christian enemy.<sup>1</sup> In *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, Shaw had repeated the old saw that “Muslim Turks themselves never at any point showed any anti-Semitism” whereas Christians, especially Armenians, “persisted in their anti-Semitic attitudes and activities” in Turkey during World War II.<sup>2</sup> It was a short step to take—hand in hand with the document cullers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—to add to this the myth that Turkey rescued its Jews from the Nazis. All Shaw needed was evidence. And so he was handed the unverified testimonies of Turkish ambassadors who claimed to have saved Jews.

With the staking of this new claim, a new layer was added to the old myth: Turkish Jewish loyalty across more than five hundred years of friendship was in the long run repaid by Turkish benevolence during the Nazi regime; Turkish universities opened their gates to German Jews seeking refuge; Turkish ambassadors in Europe saved Turkish Jews from their Nazi oppressors.<sup>3</sup>

*Turkey and the Holocaust* introduced the myth of the Turks as the rescuers of Turkish Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> Such a claim—introduced in the early 1990s as Turkey sought to join the newly established European Union—corresponds well to postwar US and European worldviews, which judge the tolerance level of a state and a people in reference to their moral standing during the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> Notably, Shaw had not mentioned Turkey’s alleged role saving Turkish Jews living in Europe from Nazi persecution in his previous study.<sup>6</sup> There, he had argued instead that, according to Zionist agents based in Istanbul during the war, it was “their [Zionist] activities alone, done with the full knowledge and silent support of the Turkish government, that provided European Jews” deliverance from the Nazis.<sup>7</sup> He did not mention Turkish Jews living in Nazi-occupied Europe. In his earlier account, he claimed that the Turkish government played a secondary role, offering the Zionists “passive approval” for their

<sup>1</sup>Stanford J. Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey’s Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup>Stanford J. Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 254–256.

<sup>3</sup>Laurent-Olivier Mallet, *La Turquie, les Turcs et les Juifs* (Istanbul: Éditions Isis, 2008), 249–252.

<sup>4</sup>İ. İzzet Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews* (London: Routledge, 2015), 260.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>6</sup>Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, 244–271.

<sup>7</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 257–258.

efforts to rescue European Jews from “Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia ... Estonia, the Ukraine and Russia.”<sup>8</sup> Shaw’s list did not include France. While he credited Turkish diplomats in Europe with “at times helping and even arranging for Jews to flee to Turkey,” these actions were depicted as part of “Zionist rescue activities,” not Turkish government policy. In other words, prior to the publication of his 1993 book, Shaw did not treat these events as examples of Turkish humanitarianism or good relations with Jews, nor as the heroic deeds of individual Turkish ambassadors and diplomats.

Two years later, however, Shaw argued that Turkish diplomats—in particular, those in France where most European Turkish Jews lived—acting on orders from Ankara, whose policy he claimed was to rescue Jews, regularly intervened to save the lives of European and Turkish Jews, those with Turkish citizenship and those without, at risk to their own lives.<sup>9</sup> What had changed in the intervening two years? Why did Shaw suddenly present Turkey as the main agent of Jewish rescue from the Nazis and why had he not mentioned Turkish Jews in Europe before? How is it that over the course of “thirty-five years of research” in “the libraries and archives of Turkey, Great Britain, the United States and France,” he had failed to uncover such material?<sup>10</sup> If such evidence had long existed, why had Abraham Galanté not exploited it in place of judging Turkey as a beneficiary of German Jewish immigration? If Turkey’s heroism was an established fact, why had Joseph Néhama not documented it in his comprehensive account, published shortly after the war, of the annihilation of Sephardic Jewry by the Nazis?<sup>11</sup> What sense can we derive from this puzzling state of historiographic affairs?

The picture comes sharply into focus the moment that Shaw relates in the preface to *Turkey and the Holocaust* that the thesis and documentation supporting “Turkey’s role in rescuing thousands of Jews from the Holocaust” were both introduced to him by Turkish diplomats in a meeting facilitated by Turkish Jewish community leaders, all of whom were on

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 60.

<sup>10</sup> Shaw, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic*, ix.

<sup>11</sup> Néhama argues that during the war there were 60,000 Sephardim in France (of Salonican, Turkish, and Balkan origin) of whom 15,000 became victims of the Nazis in the camps in Poland and Germany, or in France itself. He makes no mention of Turkey making any effort to save or protect any of these Jews, or even of Ülkümen having saved several dozen Jews on Rhodes.

Communauté Israélite de Thessalonique, *In Memoriam: Hommage aux Victimes Juives des Nazis en Grèce*, Tome II, ed. Joseph Néhama (Salonique: 1949), 235–236.

the directorial board of the Quincentennial Foundation. During “a visit to the offices of Jak V. Kamhi, head of the Quincentennial Foundation, retired ambassadors [and foundation vice president] Tevfik Saraçoğlu and [foundation general secretary] Behçet Türemen, historian [and foundation vice president] Naim Güleriyüz, and the foundation’s administrative director Nedim Yahya showed me copies of a number of letters exchanged between Jewish Turks resident in wartime France, the Turkish consulate in Paris, and German diplomats, Gestapo officers, and concentration camp commanders as well as French officials involved in persecution of Jews at that time.”<sup>12</sup> Despite being a historian who prides himself on archival research based on the reading of original historical documents, he was pleased to see these “copies.” He then thanks the Turkish foreign minister, the director of its research department, and other ambassadors and retired ambassadors. These include two long involved in Armenian genocide denial—Kâmuran Gürün and, notably, Bilâl Şimşir, “also an active member of the Turkish Historical Society, who as a young Turkish Foreign Service officer catalogued the embassy archives in Paris, London, and elsewhere in Europe.”<sup>13</sup> The documents that appear in Şimşir’s published work have not been made available to independent researchers.

### THE INCREDIBLE TALE OF TURKISH CONSUL NECDET KENT

The most preposterous counterevidence of the Turkish rescue effort is the manufactured story of Necdet Kent (1911–2002), consul at Marseilles, who allegedly jumped into a cattle car full of Jews destined for a concentration camp, forcing the Germans to release the Turkish Jews with the consul. Kent’s claims appeared for the first time in the form of a statement, included as an appendix in Shaw’s 1993 book on the Holocaust, published by courtesy of the foundation, after having been narrated to Jak Kamhi, head of the foundation, six years earlier.

Kent, a Turkish Muslim, narrates how “one evening, a Turkish Jew from Izmir named Sidi Iscan, who worked at the Consulate as a clerk and translator,” came to his house and told him “that the Germans had gathered up about eighty Jews and had taken them to the railroad station with the intention of loading them onto cattle wagons for shipment to

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, ix. On Foundation office holders, see Jak Kamhi, *Gördüklerim yaşadıklarım* (Istanbul: Remzi, 2013), 395.

<sup>13</sup> Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, ix–x.

Germany.”<sup>14</sup> Iscan “could hardly hold back his tears. Without stopping to express my grief, I immediately tried to calm him and then took the fastest vehicle available to the Saint Charles railroad station in Marseilles.” Reference to the Turkish Jewish rescuer would later be dropped in cinematic and novelistic retellings of the narratives, for his inclusion confuses the ethnoreligious boundary between rescuer and rescued so necessary to the tale of Turkish Holocaust heroism.

Claims at the beginning of Kent’s statement have given historians pause. The train in question left at ten o’clock in the morning, not in the evening.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, “It is impossible to confuse the magnificent building of St. Charles station with the pitiful environment” of the Arenc freight train station from which the train actually departed.<sup>16</sup>

Kent’s description of the arrested Jews is credible, but then his narrative falters on another detail. He relates how “the scene there was unbelievable. I came to cattle wagons which were filled with sobbing and groaning people. Sorrow and anger drove everything else from my mind. The most striking memory I have of that night is the sign I saw on one of the wagons, a phrase which I cannot erase from my mind: This wagon can be loaded with twenty head of large cattle and five hundred kilograms of hay.”<sup>17</sup> Reviewing photographic evidence, one scholar realized that the sign on the cattle car would have actually read either “*Hommes* (People) 60—*Chevaux* (Horses) 8” or “*Hommes* (People) 40—*Chevaux* (Horses) 8.”<sup>18</sup> The small inconsistencies in the story begins to add up. But no matter, the consul reaches the point in the narrative where he can boast of his heroism. When the Gestapo officer asked him why he was there, “I told him that these people were Turkish citizens, that their arrest had been a

<sup>14</sup> “Testimony of Retired Ambassador Necdet Kent Regarding His Rescue of Jewish Turks at Marseilles during World War II,” Appendix 4, translated by Stanford Shaw, in Shaw, *Turkey and the Holocaust*, 341–344, here 342.

<sup>15</sup> Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Corry Guttstadt, *Die Türkei, die Juden und der Holocaust* (Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2009), was translated into Turkish as Corry Guttstadt, *Türkiye, Yahudiler ve Holokost* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2012), and into English as Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, translated from German by Kathleen M. Dell’Orto, Sabine Bartel, and Michelle Miles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 220.

<sup>17</sup> “Testimony of Retired Ambassador Necdet Kent Regarding His Rescue of Jewish Turks at Marseilles during World War II,” 343.

<sup>18</sup> Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, 190.

mistake, and that it should be remedied at once by their release.”<sup>19</sup> When the Gestapo officer replied that these were not Turks but Jews, Kent narrates his response: “Seeing that I would get nowhere by making threats which could not be carried out if they were fulfilled, I returned to Sidi Iscan and said, ‘Come on, let’s board the train ourselves’ and pushing aside the German soldier who tried to block my way, I boarded one of the wagons with Sidi Iscan beside me.” The Gestapo officer begged them to alight, but the train began to move. The dramatic scene would be replayed in several Turkish novels and films.

But here the author admits that his memory falters. He cannot remember all of the details. “Since it was a long time ago, I cannot remember too well, but I remember that the train came to a stop when we came to either Arles or Nimes. A number of German officers climbed onto the car and immediately came to my side.”<sup>20</sup> The officers “told me that there had been a mistake, the train had left after I had boarded, the persons responsible would be punished, as soon as I left the train I could return to Marseilles on a car that would be assigned to me.” He told them “it was not a mistake, that more than eighty Turkish citizens had been loaded onto this cattle wagon because they were Jews, that as a citizen of a nation as well as the representative of a government which felt that religious beliefs should not be the reason for such treatment, there could be no question of my leaving them alone, and that was why I was there.” The officers asked him to ascertain whether “all those in the wagon were Turkish citizens.”

The consul depicts himself as having the ability to make life or death decisions. He will depict himself as having saved them all. The Jews unabashedly show their gratitude, as Turks expect them to do. “All of the people around me, women, men, and children, stood petrified while they watched this game played for their lives. Most likely because of my refusal to compromise, as well as an order received by the Nazi officers, we all descended from the train together.”<sup>21</sup> He “will never forget what followed. The people who had been saved threw their arms around our necks and shook our hands, with expressions of gratitude in their eyes. I have

<sup>19</sup> “Testimony of Retired Ambassador Necdet Kent Regarding His Rescue of Jewish Turks at Marseilles during World War II,” 343.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Testimony of Retired Ambassador Necdet Kent Regarding His Rescue of Jewish Turks at Marseilles during World War II,” 343.

rarely experienced in my life the internal peace which I felt as I entered my bed towards morning of that day.”<sup>22</sup>

The statement’s mawkish closing scenario poses the most questions about its veracity, for in it, Kent claims to have been sent letters of gratitude by many of those he saved. “I have received letters from time to time over the years from many of my fellow travelers on the short train ride of that day. Today who knows how many of them are still in good health and how many have left us. I remember them all affectionately, even those who may no longer remember me.”<sup>23</sup> As it turns out, none have remembered him. This is because, as Holocaust scholars have pointed out, this tale, as moving as it is, is “hardly credible.”<sup>24</sup> It is fiction. During the actual January 24, 1943 raid in Marseille, seventy Turkish Jews were arrested; nine were released.<sup>25</sup> One scholar asks why Turkish diplomats would later “demand the release of people who apparently had already been rescued by Kent?”<sup>26</sup> Kent’s own communications to the Turkish embassy the following day, January 25, about events he claims to have taken place that day, reveal that the train in question *had already departed* for the camps the morning before.<sup>27</sup> One Turkish Jewish woman narrates escaping from the deportation train *that Kent allegedly boarded*.<sup>28</sup> Why would she remember having to escape and not remember embracing Kent who saved her life?

Most significant is the lack of eyewitness and documentation to support Kent’s claims. For this reason, no international Holocaust organization, not even the Israeli Holocaust Memorial and Museum Yad Vashem, has acknowledged Kent’s self-declared rescue of Turkish Jews. Kent was never able to name a single survivor or produce any of the letters he claimed to have received over the years. In point of fact, no Turkish Jew has remembered him. Just as Kent could not name a single Jew on that train, not a single Jew could be found to provide testimony of Kent having saved her life.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 343–344.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>24</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 220.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 218, 220–221.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 220–221.

<sup>27</sup> Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, 190.

<sup>28</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 221.

## FROM THE HISTORICAL FRYING PAN INTO FICTION

Despite being little more than baseless fiction, Kent's claims do make for a great story, and on the surface his seemingly heroic actions have proven irresistible to those wishing to present Turkey in a positive light. The story has been repeated ad nauseum. It was dramatized first nearly verbatim in the film *Desperate Hours* (2000), a film produced with the support of the Quincentennial Foundation and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and promoted by Jewish American congressmen well-known for their work defeating resolutions recognizing the Armenian genocide.<sup>29</sup> The filmmaker Victoria Barrett admitted that the idea to make the film came to her after Turkey's ambassador in Washington, DC had explained to her how Turkish diplomats had rescued Jews.<sup>30</sup> The story then appeared in Ayşe Kulin's best-selling novel, *Nefes nefese* (Out of breath, 2002), which became an international bestseller as *The Last Train to Istanbul*.<sup>31</sup> In both Barrett's film and Kulin's novel, we see a good example of how genocide denial and Holocaust heroism go hand in hand; both present Turkish (or Ottoman) Muslims in the best possible light. On the one hand, referring to the fate of the Armenians, Kulin can state during a television interview, "I love the Armenians very much, but that was a deportation [as opposed to being a genocide]. It happened in the midst of war. It is difficult to label something that happens in the midst of war as a genocide. We did not begin to slaughter them for no good reason, like what happened to the Jews."<sup>32</sup> Kulin's argument is not too different from what Shaw's mentor Bernard Lewis had claimed some twelve years earlier: "To make this a parallel to the Holocaust in Germany, you would have to assume that the Jews of Germany had been engaged in an armed rebellion against the German state, collaborating with the Allies against Germany."<sup>33</sup> Or, as Justin McCarthy put this "blame the victim" perspective rather bluntly in his congressional testimony six years before Lewis, "Our remembrance of

<sup>29</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Model Citizens of the State: The Jews of Turkey during the Multi-Party Period*, translated by Paul Bessemer (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 398.

<sup>30</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Türkiye'de Holokost tüketimi, 1989-2017* (Istanbul: Libra, 2017), 209-210.

<sup>31</sup> Amazon lists it as the #4 best-seller in Middle Eastern literature on its website (accessed June 2016).

<sup>32</sup> "Biz, Ermenileri Yahudiler gibi durup dururken kesmeye başlamadık." CNNTürk, "Aykırı Sorular," February 3, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Bernard Lewis speaking at the National Press Club, Washington, DC, broadcast on C-Span, March 25, 2002.

the evils of Nazi Germany has unfortunately caused us to see other events of history through the glass of the Holocaust. In the Holocaust, an innocent people was persecuted and annihilated. There was no Jewish threat to the German State. Yet the full force of a modern state was mobilized to slaughter the innocent.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast, McCarthy averred, in Anatolia in 1915, “both sides were armed, both sides fought, and both sides were victims.” In other words, finding the Armenians guilty of having threatened the empire, McCarthy, Lewis, Shaw, and Kulin hesitate neither to label the fate of Armenians undeserving of the term genocide, nor to label the fate of the Jews a genocide, despite it having happened “in the midst of war.”

Like Shaw, Kulin thanks Naim Güleriyüz, official historian of the chief rabbinate in Istanbul, and the foundation for providing documentation—the “various booklets, documents, and newspaper clippings provided by the 500 Year Trust”—which are nowhere referenced.<sup>35</sup> The contents of official documents are presented throughout the novel in italics, without attribution, and the reader is led to believe that they refer to the documents allegedly provided Kulin by the foundation. The novel repeats the old historiographic myths that Ottoman and Turkish Jews have long told and which the foundation promotes: that Sultan Bayezid II “invited” the “250,000” (!) Jews expelled from Spain to his realm; that “the Turks were the only nation that came to their aid”; that Bayezid stated, “You call Ferdinand [of Spain] a wise king; he, who, by expelling the Jews, has impoverished his country and enriched mine.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, she has a character claim that the Jews were the Ottomans’ “most loyal and hardworking subjects, who unlike the other minorities, did not stab the state in the back as the empire was crumbling.”<sup>37</sup> Kulin adds that, by taking advantage of the freedom they had been granted, “the Jews became wealthy” in their new land. She includes among her reference material the works of long-time Armenian genocide denier Kâmuran Gürün and credits the foundation’s “Turkish Jewish Museum” for having provided the list of the nineteen “Turkish diplomats who saved the lives of Jews” during World

<sup>34</sup> “Armenian Allegations: Myth and Reality,” testimony delivered by Professor Justin McCarthy before the House Committee on International Relations on May 15, 1996.

<sup>35</sup> Ayşe Kulin, *The Last Train to Istanbul*, translated by John Baker (Istanbul: Everest, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Ayşe Kulin, *Nefes Nefese* (Istanbul: Remzi, 2002), 110–111.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

War II. In return, the foundation honored Kulin for her novel, which by 2017 had been translated into twenty-five languages.<sup>38</sup>

Kulin's acknowledgments show just how blurred the line between fact and fiction is when it comes to narrating Muslim-Jewish relations in Turkey. As with historians like Shaw, one suspects that for the novel's author, the difference between the two does not really matter. As Kulin states in her acknowledgments, "*Last Train to Istanbul* is not the biography of an actual person. The novel is based on the experiences of a number of Turkish diplomats who were posted to Europe during the Second World War who succeeded in saving many Turkish and non-Turkish Jews from Hitler's grasp."<sup>39</sup> She thanks two diplomats "who devoted so much of their precious time to narrating their memories of that era, which enabled me to write this novel": Kent and Namık Kemal Yolga, vice-consul at the Paris consulate general during World War II. Subsequent research has proven that, rather than "protecting" Jews as he had claimed in an account published as an appendix in Shaw's study of the Holocaust, Yolga was actually instrumental in *stripping* Jews of protection, in particular, the France-born *children* of Turkish citizens.<sup>40</sup> The novelist inadvertently disturbs the boundary demarcating where fact and fantasy diverge.

Kulin's claim that "the book is not based on the lives of real characters" becomes disconcerting when the reader finds Necdet Kent thinly disguised as "Nâzım Kender" in the novel. When Kent/Kender jumps on the train in the novel the episode adheres almost verbatim to Kent's testimony published in Shaw's book, following the same sequence of events with virtually all the same details.<sup>41</sup> The text that appears as an independently unverified primary document in a historical study (*Turkey and the Holocaust*) becomes a fictional account in a novel (*Last Train to Istanbul*). The author darkens the atmosphere and heightens the drama by making the train journey longer, adding a man suffering from an apparent heart attack and the smell of urine. Otherwise there is little difference between the "fictional" account in the novel and the alleged "non-fictional" account in the history book.

<sup>38</sup> Bali, *Türkiye'de Holokost tüketimi*, 213–214. Ayşe Kulin's latest bestselling novel, *Kanadı kırık kuşlar* [Birds with Broken Wings] (Istanbul: Everest, 2016), which has already sold over 150,000 copies, concerns German Jewish academics who took refuge in Turkey during World War II.

<sup>39</sup> Kulin, *Nefes Nefese*, vii.

<sup>40</sup> Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews*, 184–185.

<sup>41</sup> Kulin, *Nefes Nefese*, 185–196; Kulin, *The Last Train to Istanbul*, 190.

The author ends the scene with Kent's depiction of how he must have wanted to have been treated had he actually carried out the actions he claims to have; the way Jews are expected to treat Muslims in Turkey: with gratitude. "Eighty people wanted to kiss Nâzım Kender one by one; all tried to hug him. Those who could not reach him stretched out their arms and hands, like people trying to touch a sacred object. 'Don't lift me up on your shoulders' the Consul pleaded. But there was no way he could control the torrent of love rising around him. There were no words to describe the gratitude felt by these people."<sup>42</sup>

The flood of love continued in Turkey. A postage stamp was issued in Kent's honor in 2008 as part of the Turkish Postal Service's "Precedent for Humanity" series. The stamp features a dour-looking Kent with a flock of doves flying above a speeding train. The other stamp in the series, dedicated to Selahattin Ülkümen, the only Turkish diplomat mentioned by Galanté, recognized by Yad Vashem for saving forty-two Jews, appears to show the same flock of birds flying out of a concentration camp.

Politicians and journalists often repeat the claim that Turkey saved Jews during the Holocaust, and they invariably cite Kent. A typical example appeared in the English-language *Turkish Daily News* the same year the postage stamp was issued. In "Turks Saved Jews from Nazi Holocaust," which cites Shaw's book as a reference, Eyüp Erdoğan begins by discussing Kent's heroics. "Some took the risk of forcibly getting on Nazi 'death trains' as they were to set off for death camps, prying Jews on them from the hands of the SS officers."<sup>43</sup> Although the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation (IRWF) posts this article on its website, it appends a note stating that although it has conducted "a thorough and worldwide research into the role played by Turkish diplomats in France and in other countries" during World War II, it has uncovered "no evidence as to the role played by the said diplomats vis-à-vis Turkish Jews" and "to date, it was not possible to receive any independent, objective third party corroboration to the self-testimony of Mr. Necdet Kent, regarding his having boarded a Nazi deportation train and released a number of Turkish Jews from deportation or death. No single survivor or survivor's descendent,

<sup>42</sup> Kulin, *Nefes Nefese*, 197; Kulin, *The Last Train to Istanbul*, 200.

<sup>43</sup> Eyüp Erdoğan, "Turks Saved Jews from Nazi Holocaust," *Turkish Daily News*, October 25, 2008.

has ever come forward verifying this account. All the IRWF attempts to get access to the official Turkish Archives, utilized by Shaw, have been ignored.”<sup>44</sup>

### TURKISH PASSPORT, “THE ONLY HOLOCAUST FILM WITH A HAPPY ENDING”

Kent’s tale was most recently dramatized in *Türk Pasaportu* (*Turkish Passport*, 2011), a film largely produced by Turkish Jews.<sup>45</sup> *Turkish Passport*’s project director was Yael Habif; its producer, Bahadır Arliel; its director, Burak Arliel; its historical advisor, Naim Güleriyüz; it was also supported by the chief rabbinate, the foundation, and community leader Bensiyon Pinto; additional financial support came from the Turkish Foreign Ministry and Turkish Ministry of Tourism and Culture.<sup>46</sup> One of the most dramatic scenes in the film, shown at the Cannes Film Festival, depicts Kent and his aide jumping into the train destined for a concentration camp in order to force the Germans to release the Turkish Jews. The aide’s Jewishness, part of Kent’s original statement, has been edited out of the film, for it would confuse the boundary between Turkish savior and grateful Jew indebted to the Turk for his beyond the call of duty tolerance.

The film begins with a harrowing scene. A dark-haired boy with a yellow Jewish star pinned to his jacket is running through darkened streets from a Nazi soldier. Clutching at the star as he tries to remove, he runs in and out of doorways, in and out of shadows, until finally coming face to face with the soldier. Crumpling to the ground and putting his hands over his head, he awaits his death, as the audience holds its collective breath. But then the scene shifts, and the same boy, without a Jewish star, awakens from what the audience understands to have been just a nightmare; he is warm and safe sitting in a Turkish train car with his family, traveling away from the danger of Nazi Europe toward safety in the Turkish Republic. It was all just a dream. It was a fiction.

Or was it? The ninety-minute film, which the director calls a documentary, mainly features Turkish Jews speaking in French narrating their

<sup>44</sup><http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/highlights/turks-saved-jews-nazi/>. For further examples of the propagation of the myth of Turkish rescue by such Consuls as Kent in Turkey and abroad, see Mallet, *La Turquie, les Turcs et les Juifs*, 478–484.

<sup>45</sup>Burak Arliel, director, *The Turkish Passport* (Imaj, Interfilm Istanbul, Turkey, 2011).

<sup>46</sup>Bali, *Türkiye’de Holokost tüketimi*, 225, 231–233.

rescue by Turkish diplomats in wartime France as actors pantomime the actions the interviewees describe. An early scene in the film shows a girl wearing a yellow Jewish star being denied entry to a café, where the owner has put up a “No Jews Allowed” sign. But as the audience is watching this scene, the narrator, a Turkish Jewish woman who survived Nazi-occupied France, tells the audience that Turkish Jews did not have to wear the yellow star because they were citizens of a neutral country. If Turkish Jews did not have to wear the star in Nazi-occupied France because of their status as Turkish citizens, why did the filmmaker add this detail? And if the Turkish Republic did not discriminate between citizens on the basis of race or religion, then how could the repatriation of Jewish citizens of Turkey be considered an act of rescue above and beyond the call, rather than a mere discharge of diplomatic duty?<sup>47</sup> Here, yet again, the “rescued” Turkish Jew is expected to express her gratefulness to her “saviors” in perpetuity. Less an equal citizen than a guest offered safe harbor, such an outsider’s repaid gratitude is a given. For while a citizen has the right to expect its government to act impartially on her behalf, an outsider is expected to repay such a feat with gratitude; she would find it natural for a foreign government to congratulate itself on having bestowed the heroics of rescue upon her. The viewer wonders what happened to these Jews after the war and why they speak French today. Did they not remain in Turkey, the welcoming heroic land where Muslim-Jewish relations are so amicable?

As an annotation to the film’s main claim that Turkish diplomats risked their lives to save many Jews, the final image is a listing of the names and posts of nineteen Turkish diplomats in Europe beneath the Turkish foreign minister at the time, Hüseyin Numan Menemenciğlu. At an autumn 2014 cocktail reception and film screening I attended in London hosted by the Turkish ambassador to the UK, the crowd of mostly Turkish Muslims gave the film—or more specifically, Turkish diplomats—a standing ovation. When Turkish Muslims congratulate themselves for being a part of a great Turkish nation devoted since time immemorial to humanitarianism, Turkish Jews step up to play their part in lending credence to the claim. One representative of the Turkish Jewish community spoke before the screening of the film, expressing his gratitude to the Turks for having received the Spanish refugees in 1492 and for having allowed them

<sup>47</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, Review of Burak Arnel, *The Turkish Passport*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. March, 2012. URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35380>.

to flourish thereafter in their midst. He mentioned Turkey's Ülkümen, conspicuously absent in the film, as having been recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations," noting that the Turkish Jewish community had recently founded a primary school in his name in Van following a recent earthquake. Bringing the story more vibrantly into the room, he projected a photo of the chief rabbi in ceremonial dress surrounded by school-uniform wearing (Kurdish) children in front of the modest Ülkümen school. Why Van, a southeastern Anatolian city closely associated with the Armenian genocide? Why not a Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul?

According to its website, *Turkish Passport* is a true story, a documentary "based on the testimonies of witnesses who travelled to Istanbul to find safety."<sup>48</sup> It also presents written historical documents and archive footage "to tell this story of rescue and bring to light the events of the time." As professor of international relations Umut Uzer—a Turkish scholar who condemns Turkish anti-Semitism and promotes Holocaust education, but denies the Armenian genocide—stated to the audience before the screening of the film in London, "We know this story is true, we have Stanford Shaw's study proving the case."<sup>49</sup>

Just before the final image naming the twenty Turkish diplomats featured in the film, one after another, a succession of Turkish Jews—passengers on what the film calls the "Rescue Train"; not the train Kent is supposed to have boarded, but a train that carried them from Nazi-occupied France all the way through war-torn Europe to Turkey—express their thanks to Turkey. "The Turkish government saved our lives ..." "The debt I owe Turkey ..." "It is a miracle I am still alive ..." "Thank you ..." "The Turks saved our lives ..." "I am grateful ..." "We owe our being here today to the Turkish government ..." "Thank you very much ..." A reviewer of the film expresses bewilderment as to why "in the documentary, some of the most categorically pro-Turkish arguments are made by Turkish Jews. Having ethnic or religious minorities advocate Turkish

<sup>48</sup> The website is no longer online, but one can still find it on the Internet Archive: [https://web.archive.org/web/20120425034845/http://www.theturkishpassport.com/holocaust\\_story.asp](https://web.archive.org/web/20120425034845/http://www.theturkishpassport.com/holocaust_story.asp).

<sup>49</sup> For examples of Uzer's explicit denial of the Armenian genocide, see Umut Uzer, "The Fallacies of the Armenian Nationalist Narrative," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 27, 2015, idem, "Ermeni meselesine farklı bir bakış," *Şalom*, May 27, 2015, and idem, "Hayal ve gerçek arasında Balakian'ın kara köpeği," *Şalom*, April 27, 2016, cited in Bali, *Türkiye'de Holokost tüketimi*, 205. Also see M. Hakan Yavuz ve Umut Uzer, "Ermeni meselesi, devlet ve aydınlar," *Zaman*, Yorum, February 23, 2013.

nationalist arguments is a time-tested strategy of the Kemalist establishment.”<sup>50</sup> But rather than having anything to do with Kemalism, such Jewish myth-making takes us back to 1892 and the Jewish commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the ingathering of Spanish Jewry.

As the myth of Turkey as rescuer of Turkish Jews was being created throughout the 1980, 1990s and 2000s, scholars in genocide studies realized that what is unique to Turkey is “the determination to deny the Armenian genocide by acknowledging the Holocaust.”<sup>51</sup> Yet in point of fact, the problem is more deep-seated: *Turkish Passport* and efforts like it are actually a form of Holocaust denial. By promoting the film as “the only Holocaust film with a happy ending,” the story silences the many measures Turkey took to prevent Turkish Jewish return. Because Turkish Jews were not considered “members of the Turkish race,”<sup>52</sup> Turkey denaturalized approximately 3000 to 5000 Turkish Jews during the war. The film also silences the Nazis deportation of between 2200 and 2500 Turkish Jews to death camps (Auschwitz and Sobibór) and another three to four hundred to concentration camps (Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, Mauthausen, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen), where many succumbed.<sup>53</sup> Others died in detention in the Drancy and Westerbork camps, or were murdered by the Gestapo. Contrary to the film’s claim that “Turkey was the only country to take a stand against” Nazi persecution of Jews, Turkey was in reality the only neutral country to implement restrictions on its own Jews, which is to say that even fascist Spain made more efforts to save its Jews.<sup>54</sup>

Shaw had argued that Turkey had been a lifesaver for 100,000 persecuted Jews transiting through Turkey en route to Palestine. In fact, “the legal escape route to Palestine was enormously limited.”<sup>55</sup> Because of this,

<sup>50</sup> Üngör, Review of Burak Arliel.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Smith, Eric Markusen, and Robert Jay Lifton, “Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 11.

<sup>52</sup> Rifat Bali, *Bir Türkleştirme serüveni (1923–1945): Cumhuriyet yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999), 340–341.

<sup>53</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 309.

<sup>54</sup> For a comparison of how the neutral nations Argentina, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey responded to Jewish refugees and the needs of their own Jewish citizens in Nazi Europe during the Holocaust see the collection of essays, *Bystanders, Rescuers or Perpetrators? The Neutral Countries and the Shoah*, ed. Corry Guttstadt, Thomas Lutz, Bernd Rother, and Yessica San Román, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance series, volume 2 (Berlin: Metropol, 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 112.

Jewish organizations chose to brave the much more dangerous illegal sea route. Turkey generally did not allow the ships to put in at its ports; at the time, Turkish satirical journals and the press mocked the refugees with anti-Semitic depictions. Most tragic was the sinking of the refugee ship *Struma* with 769 aboard in the winter of 1942. Referring to the dead, the then Turkish prime minister, Refik Saydam (in office 1939–1942)—who had already stated in 1939 after the war had broken out that Turkey “would not accept masses of Jews, nor individual Jews who were oppressed in other countries”—asserted that Turkey bore no responsibility for the disaster, it had only adhered to its principle that “Turkey will not become the home of people who are not wanted by anyone else.”<sup>56</sup>

When Nazi Germany offered Turkey the opportunity to repatriate its Jews, Turkey explicitly instructed its diplomats “not to send Jews back ‘in large numbers.’”<sup>57</sup> In September 1943, the secretary of the Turkish embassy in Berlin informed the Nazi authorities that “*a mass immigration of Jews into Turkey was to be prevented, especially by Jews who had correct Turkish papers but had not had any contact with Turkey for decades.*”<sup>58</sup> Germany did not send those Turkish Jews arrested in Germany to the death camps, preferring to send them to concentration camps in case Turkey demanded their repatriation later. Turkey never did so. When compared with the frequent interventions by other countries in response to attacks against their citizens, “scarcely any records of Turkish interventions on behalf of Turkish Jewish citizens can be found.”<sup>59</sup>

Again, historical facts contradict the assertions made by Shaw; consular officials did not extend protection to Turkish Jews living in France whose Turkish citizenship had expired or was “unascertained.” In the one case where an honorary Turkish consular official either gave or sold identity papers to Jews, the Turkish ambassador in Vichy, Behiç Erkin (1876–1961), reported the “improper behavior” to Ankara, launching an investigation into the official’s actions. Realizing that the honorary consul “*had acted for purely humanitarian reasons,*” Erkin warned him to cease violating policy.<sup>60</sup> In February 1943, the Turkish consul general in Paris went so far as to strip a majority of these Jews of their citizenship rights; in keeping

<sup>56</sup> Bali, *Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)*, 341, 361; Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 116.

<sup>57</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>60</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 199. Emphasis added.

with its policy to hinder the mass return of Turkish Jews to Turkey, Turkey recognized the citizenship of only 631 of the 3000–5000 Jews in the French northern zone which Nazi authorities asked them to verify. The consul general told German authorities that no steps would be taken for the rest, even though he referred to these Jews as people “who had up to now been Turkish citizens.”<sup>61</sup>

Between February and May 1944, Turkey repatriated less than ten percent, a total of 314, of the 3900 Turkish Jews living in the northern zone of France. While films have been made about the trains carrying these 314 Jews, with the addition of 100 from the southern zone of France, to safety in Turkey, during the same months 700 Turkish Jews were deported to death camps.

Neutral Turkey had “tremendous opportunities” to save its Jews.<sup>62</sup> Some Turkish consular officials, contrary to orders from Ankara and working under their own initiative, did save small numbers of Jews by either recognizing them as Turkish citizens, or by obtaining their release from detention and thus deportation. While some may have been driven by humanitarian zeal, compassion was not always the motivating factor; some officials demanded bribes and other favors from their fellow Jewish citizens in exchange for documentation that was their right.<sup>63</sup> Issuing laws and secret decrees, Ankara went out of its way to prevent the repatriation of large number of Turkish Jews. When Nazi authorities demanded in 1942 that Turkey repatriate its Jews living in Europe, Ankara stripped them of their citizenship and instructed its consulates not to pursue mass repatriation. The cost of the repatriations were paid for not by the Turkish state, but by Jewish organizations. Many of the repatriated did not want to return to Turkey, which, as they learned from relatives, had subjected Jews to forced labor and taxes, reducing many to poverty. Having nowhere else to go, most sojourned in Turkey temporarily and then left once the war was over. The majority of Jews who survived did not do so thanks to Turkish officials; only once did Turkey intervene at the ambassadorial level to save Jews who had been deported. Contrary to Shaw’s history and the history presented in *Turkish Passport*, Turkey “made relatively little effort” to save Turkish Jewry from the Holocaust.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 313.

*Turkish Passport*, which does not acknowledge any of these historical facts, focusing instead on the four hundred and fourteen Jews repatriated to Turkey between February and May 1944, is not without references to the Armenian genocide. For no apparent reason, the only historian to appear in the film is a man long-associated with Armenian genocide denial, Heath Lowry, the then holder of the Atatürk Chair in Turkish History at Princeton University.<sup>65</sup> He is the author of *The Story Behind Henry Morgenthau's Story*, which presents genocide testimony of the Jewish American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire as “lies motivated by anti-Turkish sentiments.”<sup>66</sup> An exposé subsequently revealed that at the time Lowry was writing that study, he was in frequent contact with the Ankara government regarding global denialist efforts and was paid to ghostwrite denialist letters on behalf of the Turkish ambassador to the United States.<sup>67</sup> Calling out these kinds of subversions of scholarship, the authors argue after Terrence Des Pres that in these narratives “‘knowledge’ is what serves the interest of the powerful (particularly the state), the goal of knowledge is seen as control rather than freedom, and ‘truth’ is whatever officials (and their adjuncts) say it is.”<sup>68</sup> Or, as another scholar has put it quite succinctly, “denial aims to reshape history in order to rehabilitate the perpetrators.”<sup>69</sup>

With just such a rehabilitation in mind, the film presents Behiç Erkin, Turkey’s ambassador to Paris and Vichy from 1939 to 1943, as a rescuer of Jews. Erkin had been involved in “the dismissal, persecution, removal, and deportation of Armenian railway staff” in 1915.<sup>70</sup> The *Turkish Passport* “attempts to whitewash a perpetrator of the Armenian genocide by painting him as a rescuer in the Holocaust.” The same year that *Turkish Passport* appeared, the English translation of another hagiography of Erkin was

<sup>65</sup> Üngör, Review of Burak Arliel.

<sup>66</sup> Heath Lowry, *The Story Behind Henry Morgenthau's Story* (Istanbul: Isis, 1990).

<sup>67</sup> Smith, Markusen, and Lifton, “Professional Ethics and the Denial of Armenian Genocide.”

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: The Free Press, 1993), 217, cited in *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Üngör cites Ziya Gürel, “Kurtuluş Savaşında Demiryolculuk,” *Belleten* 44, no. 175 (July 1980): 539–573; Behiç Erkin, *Hâvrat 1876–1958* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2011); and Arnold Reisman, *An Ambassador and a Mensch: The Story of a Turkish Diplomat in Vichy France* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010).

published, this one by his grandson, Emir Kıvırcık.<sup>71</sup> The original Turkish version was first published in 2007 by a publishing house founded by Turkish Jews.<sup>72</sup> Entitled *The Ambassador*, the book's first Turkish printing was published with a long and unsubtle subtitle: *The story of a Turkish hero of the War of Independence who saved 20,000 people from the Nazi genocide and changed the fate of his honorable nation*. The author's acknowledgments mention Shaw, Paris ambassador Osman Korutürk, and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which opened their archive to him. The polemics of the book are explicit: "This work provides a lesson to humanity, authored by the Turkish nation during Hitler's genocide, the only genocide recognized by the United Nations [i.e., the Armenian genocide is not a genocide]. In an atmosphere where our nation and people are subjected to slander, this work provides a lesson to humanity that anyone who lives abroad, is in contact with foreigners, and is proud of being a Turk must read and know."<sup>73</sup> In other words, this book will be useful for Turks in countering Armenian genocide recognition. Kıvırcık claims that during World War II, while employed at the Turkish embassy in Paris, his grandfather, Behiç Erkin, "showed courage in opposing Hitler as he implemented his terrible genocide; as millions of people were being murdered, he showed the courage to save the lives of close to 20,000 Jews by offering them certificates stating that they were Turkish citizens."<sup>74</sup> In blatant disregard of the actual historical record, Kıvırcık claims that by the time he left France in August 1943, Erkin had provided 10,000 Jews who had not managed to maintain their Turkish citizenship and 10,000 more who had—in other words, 20,000 in total, every single Turkish Jew in France—with certificates of citizenship, thereby ensuring that they were able to return to Turkey.<sup>75</sup> "Perhaps he was given this duty by God."<sup>76</sup> In his own autobiography, however, Erkin "only briefly mentions the subject twice," once referring to a repatriation of 121 Jews having been organized

<sup>71</sup> Emir Kıvırcık, *The Turkish Ambassador* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Emir Kıvırcık, *Büyükelçi: Yirmi bin insanı Nazi soykırımından kurtaran, Kurtuluş Savaşı kabramanı bir Türk'ün ve şerefli ulusunun tarihi değiştiren öyküsü!* (Istanbul: GOA, 2007). By its third printing in 2010 with a larger press, it had sold 100,000 copies. Bali, *Türkiye'de Holokost tüketimi*, 217.

<sup>73</sup> Kıvırcık, *Büyükelçi*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Kıvırcık, *Büyükelçi*, 191.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

on the personal initiative of the Paris consul general, not Erkin himself, and again noting that he had received orders from Ankara not to repatriate “Jews by the trainload.”<sup>77</sup> Additional historical evidence suggests that Erkin, dutifully carrying out orders from Ankara, played his part in preventing the vast majority of Turkish Jews in Nazi Europe to find safety, by explicitly rejecting suggestions to send convoys to Turkey.<sup>78</sup>

Contrary historical evidence has not stopped some scholars of Ottoman Jewish history, particularly those who have published works since Shaw and who have insisted on contrasting Jewish loyalty to the Ottoman regime during World War I with the disloyalty of the Armenians and Greeks during that time from repeating the myth of Turkey being a safe haven for many Jews fleeing the Nazis as Turkish diplomats across Europe allegedly stood up to the racial laws.<sup>79</sup> Their scholarly efforts echo those of the Turkish Jewish community leaders who use Turkey’s alleged savior role in the Holocaust to deny the Armenian genocide.

#### THE IF/THEN PROPOSITION OF TOLERANCE AND GENOCIDE

In 2007, Kamhi wrote a letter to a major American Jewish organization that had recently recognized the genocide, countering that rather than “acceptance of the much-disputed claim that the historical events in question constituted a ‘genocide,’” Turks “deserve your praise for their centuries-long tradition of compassion and their culture of humanity and cohabitation that remains an example to the world.”<sup>80</sup> According to this view, genocide is an if/then proposition: if one accepts the fantasy that Turks and Jews have lived in harmony for five hundred years, then Turks could not possibly have perpetrated a genocide against the Armenians.

This trope was repeated in 2011 when the Turkish Jewish community was given permission to commemorate the Holocaust for the first time, an

<sup>77</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 150, 211–212; *Erkin: Hatirât*.

<sup>78</sup> Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust*, 212.

<sup>79</sup> Avigdor Levy, “Introduction,” *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: A Shared History* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1992), xvii–xxx.

<sup>80</sup> Jak Kamhi, “Letter to Abraham H. Foxman,” August 22, 2007 (available on the website of the Turkish Coalition of America, <http://www.tc-america.org/issues-information/armenian-issue/letter-to-abraham-386.htm>). See also “Turkish Jews Disavow ‘Genocide’ Move,” *Today’s Zaman*, August 23, 2007.

event that was to become a yearly tradition.<sup>81</sup> At that commemoration, the president of the Turkish Chief Rabbinate Holocaust Commission, Süzet Sidi, repeated the standard narrative of Turkish Jewry's leadership, using the provocation thesis that Armenians had been disloyal and rebellious to negate comparisons between the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. She argued that the Holocaust is unique in that Jews were annihilated despite not being at war with Germans. Unlike the Armenians, loyal Jews had not rebelled or tried to establish a state within a state.<sup>82</sup>

Sidi's logic is similar to how Jak Kamhi had argued against the "so-called Armenian genocide" by claiming that "it was the Jewish community that remained most loyal to the Ottoman state." Only by ignoring and repudiating the Zionist movement in Ottoman Palestine could they make the argument that Turkish Jews "had never rebelled, demanding sovereignty or territory," nor "had they ever received any weapons or support from anyone, even for self-defense."<sup>83</sup> Kamhi's summary of the horrors that occurred in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 was that "the Armenians' uprising paved the way for the deaths of so many innocent people."<sup>84</sup> In support of blaming the victim, Kamhi notes that "objective academicians and historians," such as Bernard Lewis, "have examined what occurred in 1915 and determined that it is best to term them uprisings."<sup>85</sup> Rebellion, uprising, provocation; these are the behaviors that transform victims into perpetrators.

In 2012, at a Holocaust commemoration at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Turkish officials commemorated the Turkish dead without accepting the role the Turkish government in Ankara had played in their deaths. The Turkish Jewish spokesperson attending the commemoration praised the Turks for having always offered Jews a safe refuge, be it for Iberian Jews in the fifteenth century or Turkish Jews during World War II. He remained apparently oblivious to the irony of praising a country whose diplomats had been unable to save the very ones they were

<sup>81</sup> In 2008, Turkey became an observer member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, founded in 1998 "to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust." <https://holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Bali, *Türkiye'de Holokost Tüketimi*, 121.

<sup>83</sup> Kamhi, *Gördüklerim Yaşadıklarım*, 340.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 352.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

commemorating and who lay at their feet.<sup>86</sup> Beginning in 2014, Turkish Jewish community leaders have been joined in their annual Holocaust commemoration by high-ranking Turkish officials who have used the occasion each year to promote the image of Turks as rescuers of Jews, from 1492 through to World War II. Playing the part of Jewish savior against the tide of genocide, the Turkish government can vaunt its pride and claim never to have engaged in such historical crimes, thereby denying, sometimes obliquely, sometimes explicitly, the annihilation of the Ottoman Armenians. Turkish Jews stand at their side, contributing to the historical whitewash.

Representatives of the Turkish Jewish community have told me they feel obliged to participate in state-sponsored Holocaust commemorations abroad.<sup>87</sup> They want to honor their dead, but acknowledge these ceremonies are hijacked by the state for its own ends, where officials deny and falsify history. But they fear what would happen if the state invited Jewish representatives, and they refused to come. The state needs Jews for the ceremonies, just as Jews, who have no allies in Turkey but the state, feel they need the state. They cannot, or will not, say no to the state. They agree to collaborate, so as to remember their dead, but internally disagree with the official approach.

A young advisor to the chief rabbi of Turkey told me about their conflicted feelings regarding Turkish state memorialization of the Holocaust. Participating as a member of an official Turkish state delegation to a concentration camp in Europe, they noted the irony of flag-waving Turkish officials remembering the murder of “Turkish citizens.” Had these Jews been recognized as citizens they probably would not have been killed. No matter how uncomfortable they are misrepresenting the actions of Turkey during wartime, however, they continue to take part, believing it is better to have any public commemoration than none at all.

## CONCLUSION

Armenian genocide denialists operate like tobacco industry lobbyists and global warming skeptics. They “labor to construct denialism as a legitimate intellectual position within a historical debate”; fund biased research while supposedly striving for objectivity; work with public relations firms

<sup>86</sup> Cited in Bali, *Türkiye’de Holokost Tüketimi*, 102–103.

<sup>87</sup> Conversations with the author, June 2018, Graz, Austria.

to sow doubt, create a new reality, and erect a “permanent smokescreen of controversy.”<sup>88</sup> They engage in tactics of denial, distraction, and distortion: denial that the genocide occurred; distraction from the perpetration of one genocide through boasts about heroics in another; distortion of historical events surrounding both events. Turks as saviors of Jews is their new reality. These denialist methods are utilized in the scholarship on Ottoman Jewish and Turkish Jewish history promoted by the foundation, most notably in Stanford Shaw’s, *Turkey and the Holocaust: Turkey’s Role in Rescuing Turkish and European Jewry from Nazi Persecution, 1933–1945*. Promoting the foundation’s myth of the Turk as the eternal redeemer of Jews persecuted by Christians both at home and abroad, the book introduced the anti-historical claim that Turkey’s wartime policy was to rescue Jews persecuted by the Nazis. This historical distortion has been repeated ad infinitum in history books, novels, and films, including the widely distributed propaganda film, *Turkish Passport*. The film’s logo, a Turkish star and crescent rising above a locomotive, was designed to evoke the image of the Turk as steadfast rescuer of Jews. In defiance of the well-established Holocaust image of the cattle car, icon of Jews as passive victims traveling on death trains to the gas chambers, these Jews, the image proclaims, have been diverted to safety in Turkey where they can breathe free in a land without anti-Semitism.

<sup>88</sup>Mamigonian, Marc, “Academic Denial of the Armenian Genocide in American Scholarship: Denialism as Manufactured Controversy,” *Genocide Studies International*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2015): 61–82.



## Turkish Jews in an Unwelcoming Public Space

*Özgür Kaymak*

From the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 to this day, Turkish Jews have negotiated a political space shaped by the largely unfulfilled promise of equal citizenship and the everyday experience of being members of an unwelcome minority.<sup>1</sup> When the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power in 2002, it expressed a

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<sup>1</sup>In common Turkish parlance, the term minority refers only to Jews, Greeks, and Armenians as they are mentioned in the Treaty of Lausanne. It leaves out all Muslim minorities, as well as the Syriac Christians.

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strong commitment to international human rights norms and passed several reform packages regarding non-Muslim minority communities. These policies of early AKP governments, along with a language that centred on fraternity and diversity, raised expectations that it would be more accommodating to Turkey's non-Muslim communities than its predecessors. Yet, these hopes for equal citizenship were soon betrayed.

Turkey's authoritarian drift under the AKP intensified after the Gezi Park Protests in 2013.<sup>2</sup> Police brutality against protestors in the summer of 2013; the coup attempt in July 2016 and the government's subsequent crackdown on the Gülen movement;<sup>3</sup> the imprisonment of journalists and academics on charges of terrorism; the criminalization of dissenting opinions; the failure to prosecute corruption allegations; and the end of the peace process with the PKK [Workers' Party of Kurdistan] have resulted in the deterioration of basic rights and have led to massive violations of fundamental human rights. The country's reputation as a 'democratizing regime' has been shattered.<sup>4</sup> As part of imposing an idealized notion of Turkish citizenship, the regime embarked on creating 'a pious generation' that would serve its ideological goals. The Turkish education system has become critical in using Islam to promote ethno-religious nationalism,<sup>5</sup> as

<sup>2</sup>In fact, the deterioration of basic rights in Turkey did not occur in an abrupt shift around 2013. The European Union Commission's 2006 Progress Report contains a powerful critique on Turkey's failure to live up to standards of democratic governance and human rights. See EU Commission, *Turkey 2006 Progress Report*. [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key\\_documents/2006/nov/tr\\_sec\\_1390\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2006/nov/tr_sec_1390_en.pdf). For further reading, see Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, "Existential Insecurity and the Making of a Weak Authoritarian Regime in Turkey" in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no.4 (2016): 505–527.

<sup>3</sup>Founded by Fetullah Gülen, an Islamic preacher from eastern Turkey after the 1980 military coup, the movement, often referred to as Hizmet (service), has established a network of schools, businesses, civil society organizations, and media outlets in Turkey and globally. The Hizmet movement was particularly influential in the judiciary and the military.

<sup>4</sup>Onur Bakiner, "How Did We Get Here? Turkey's Slow Shift to Authoritarianism," in *Authoritarian Politics in Turkey*, eds. Bahar Başer, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (London & New York: I.B. Taurus: 2017), 22. M. Hakan Yavuz and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Turkish Secularism and Islam under the Reign of Erdoğan" in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 19, no. 1 (2019): 1–9.

<sup>5</sup>Demet Lüküslü, "Creating a Pious Generation: Youth and Education Policies of the AKP in Turkey" in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 637–649.

Saraçoğlu and Demirkol argue.<sup>6</sup> In the AKP period “Sunni-Muslim values ... have become the core element defining what the ‘nation’ is.”<sup>7</sup>

Within this sociopolitical context, the future of the Jewish community in Turkey seems in question. Today, the Jewish community in Turkey numbers around 14,000,<sup>8</sup> with over eighty percent living in Istanbul. Throughout the history of the Republic, assimilationist and discriminatory pressures in state and society have been rife, even as the Jewish community has been shrinking dramatically. The largest wave of Turkish Jewish emigration took place in 1948 after the establishment of Israel. It seems that the 2020s may see another surge. Community leaders expect the Jewish community to contract to half its size within the next decade.<sup>9</sup> Decreasing birthrates, aging demographics, and mixed marriages<sup>10</sup> account for some part of the decline in population. But most concerning for the community is emigration to other parts of the world, primarily to Israel. Is the Jewish community in Turkey simply withering away or are there any signs of resilience despite these challenges? This chapter addresses such questions by focusing on how the citizenship experiences and daily life practices of Jewish individuals have changed in the last decade. I argue that Turkish Jews’ feelings of insecurity have significantly intensified during the turn to religious conservatism in everyday life that has occurred under AKP governments. This situation has only worsened after the 2013 Gezi Park Protests and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt which gave way to democratic backsliding and deepening authoritarianism.

The Turkish Jews I have interviewed for this study are affected by the larger problems of the country in the same ways as the Turkish Muslim majority. They are part of the political, social, economic, and cultural

<sup>6</sup>Cenk Saraçoğlu and Özhan Demirkol, “Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity” in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 3 (2015): 301–319.

<sup>7</sup>For a fruitful further reading see Umut Uzer, “Conservative Narrative: Contemporary Neo-Ottomanist Approaches in Turkish Politics” in *Middle East Critique* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2020.1770444>. Uzer also tackles Necip Fazıl Kısakürek’s anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in his article.

<sup>8</sup>This information was obtained from Chief Rabbinate of Turkey in May 2020. I am withholding the name of the interviewee due to privacy.

<sup>9</sup>Information obtained from one of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community in December 2019. I am withholding the name of the interviewer due to privacy.

<sup>10</sup>Özgür Kaymak and Anna Maria Beylunioglu, *İstanbul’un Rum, Yahudi ve Ermeni Toplumlarında Karma Evlilikler (Mixed Marriages in Rum, Jewish and Armenian Communities of Istanbul)* (Istanbul: Istos, 2020).

habitus of the country when it comes to issues ranging from education policy, environmental issues, gender, and LGBTIQ+ rights. They react to the rising religious conservatism of society largely in the same way as do secular Turkish Muslim citizens.<sup>11</sup> As individuals who lead urban, secular lifestyles in Turkey's fraught political and social atmosphere, they define themselves as "a cultural minority" independently of their ethno-religious identity.<sup>12</sup> They emphasize their commonality with those in the wider society who share their sociocultural habitus: "We are in the same boat now; as a matter of fact; you are more of a 'minority' than we are," as one interviewee told me jokingly. In this chapter, I argue that Turkey's authoritarian environment after 2013 has led younger Jews especially to question their future in the country.

Beyond their status as Turkish citizens, Turkish Jews face different challenges than Turkish Muslims due to their minority status.<sup>13</sup> Like other

<sup>11</sup>The government has taken several actions and initiated public debates regarding the place of religion in the country, particularly in the cultural, economic, and educational spheres. Since 2002, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), an office that reports to the prime minister and has a budget larger than many ministries, plays an increasingly significant role in both state and the society. Furthermore, the number of Qur'an courses has risen dramatically. Religious lessons remain compulsory in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. The importance of high schools with a religious curriculum (Imam-Hatip) has also grown. See: Emrah Çelik, "Power and Islam in Turkey: The Relationship Between the AKP and Sunni Islamic Groups, 2002–16" in *Authoritarian Politics in Turkey*, eds. Bahar Başer, Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (London & New York: I.B. Taurus: 2017): 113.

Dr. Toprak argues that rising social conservatism in Turkey is creating an environment of discrimination against secular and liberal Turks, particularly women. According to Toprak, it is not religiosity that is ascendant in Turkey, but rather social conservatism. See (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/political-power-and-social-conservatism-in-turkey>).

<sup>12</sup>A major part of the Istanbul Jewish community maintains a secular lifestyle. In a meeting with a representative of the Turkish Jewish community in December 2019, it was stated that the Jews who live according to religious requirements in Turkey—observing Shabbat, abiding by rules of *kashrut*, regularly attending synagogue on Saturdays—constitute no more than five percent of the total population.

<sup>13</sup>The term "non-Muslim communities/minorities" refers to the Rum, Jewish, and Armenian communities. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) established the legal basis of religious minority rights in Turkey and is still technically valid today. With the founding of the Republic, despite the ostensible aims of a secular state, minorities were defined according to their religious identity and, accordingly, felt excluded from the national identity. They remained second-class citizens as was the case in the Ottoman *Millet* system. Under the *Millet* system, people of different religions coexisted and were tolerated under the superiority of Islam. This definition of tolerance is limited to the acceptance of Sunni Muslims' suprem-

non-Muslim minorities, Jews have been excluded from the definition of the “Turkish nation” and have been treated as foreigners in their own country throughout history.<sup>14</sup> While anti-Semitism has been prevalent for decades, it has been routinely trivialized and denied by Turkey’s political elites and public intellectuals. Although there has been an increase in academic studies on anti-Semitism in Turkey in recent years, considering the prevalence of the phenomenon, the field is in its infancy.<sup>15</sup>

acy under the banner of the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish nation. In the end, toleration in the Ottoman context, as in other imperial settings, refers to the “absence of persecution of people but not their acceptance in the society as full and welcomed members of community.” Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 110.

<sup>14</sup>In the early years of the Republic the reflection of the state-centric modernization project was imposed on non-Muslim communities within Turkey, through various cultural, economic, and political practices. The impetus behind these policies was to create a homogeneous society in which Sunni-Muslimness was defined as main marker of ‘being Turkish.’ Apart from such Turkification/anti-minority politics in the 1970s and 80s, non-Muslims experienced many extrajudicial practices which limited their civil and religious freedoms. For socio-historical background studies of Jewish, Rum, and Armenian communities, see Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları* [The Capital Tax and Turkification Policies], 11th ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2012); Anna Maria Aslanoğlu, Foti Benlisoy, Rigas Haris, *İstanbul Rumları Bugün ve Yarın* [Rums of Istanbul, Today and Tomorrow] (Istanbul: İstos, 2012); Rıfat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* [Turkish Jews in the Republican Period: An Adventure of Turkification] 7th ed. (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005). Marcy Brink-Danan, *Yirmi Birinci Yüzyılda Türkiye’de Yahudiler, Hoşgörünün Öteki Yüzü* [Jews in Turkey in the Twenty-First Century, the Other Face of Tolerance], trans. Barış Cezar (Istanbul: Koç University Publications, 2014). Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia, The Limits of Belonging in Post-Genocide Turkey* (California: Stanford University Press, 2016).

Özgür Kaymak, *İstanbul’da Az(ınlık) Olmak: Gündelik Hayatta Rumlar, Yahudiler, Ermeniler* [Being a Minority in Istanbul: Rums, Jews and Armenians in Daily Life] (Istanbul: Libra, 2017).

Özgür Kaymak and Anna Maria Beylunioglu, “An Analysis of National and Minority Identity Relationality: The Case of Antiochian Eastern Orthodox Community in Istanbul” in *Poligrafi, İslam and Democracy* 85–86, no.22 (2017): pp. 65–87.

Nazan Maksudyân, “Üç kuşak üç katliam: 1894’den 1915’e Ermeni çocuklar ve yetimler” [Three Generations, three massacres: Armenian children and orphans from 1894 till 1915] in *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 132 (2015).

Rasel Meseri and Aysin Kuryel, *Türkiye’de Yahudi Olmak Bir Deneyim Sözlüğü* [Being a Jew in Turkey: A Dictionary of Experience] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2017).

Leyla Neyzi, “Ben Kimim?” *Türkiye’de Sözlü Tarih, Kimlik ve Öznellik* [“Who am I?” Oral History, Identity and Subjectivity in Turkey] 5.th ed, (Istanbul: İletişim, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>For recent works on the subject of anti-Semitism in Turkey see: Rıfat N. Bali, *Komplot Teorileri Cehaletin ve Antisemitizmin Resm-i Geçidi* [Conspiracy Theories and Parade of

How do members of the Jewish community respond to this adversarial social and political environment? This chapter identifies three main strategies and performative repertoires that Turkish Jews have adopted. The first strategy is to keep a low profile regarding Jewish identity in public life, remaining silent toward discriminatory practices, and socializing primarily within the Jewish community (referred to in Judeo-Spanish as “*kayades*”). The second is to leave Turkey and migrate to Israel, Europe, or the United States. These two strategies have long been within the repertoire of actions adopted by Turkish Jews. The latest strategy, however, constitutes a departure. It is most commonly employed by younger members of the community, who criticize “*kayades*,” the historically established patterns of silence and invisibility within the Turkish Jewish community. *Avlaremöz*, a website and internet platform, demonstrates this shift among young Jews of Turkey. Their activism confronts anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination in different public domains with the goal of creating conditions for equal citizenship for everyone in Turkey.

The findings presented in this chapter are based on a large-scale field study I conducted in Istanbul between 2013 and 2017 for my doctoral dissertation research, and that I continued through 2019 after the completion of my thesis. The principal ethnographic component of my field

Antisemitism] (Istanbul: Libra, 2016); Rifat N. Bali, *Toplu Makaleler-2 Türkiye’de Antisemitizm ve Komplö Kültürü* [Collected Articles-2 Antisemitism in Turkey and Conspiracy Theories] (Istanbul: Libra, 2013).

Rifat N. Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Istanbul: ISIS, 2008).

Rifat N. Bali, “*Aliya*” *Türk Yahudilerinin İsrail’e Göç Hikayeleri* [“*Aliya*”: The Stories of Turkish Jews Migration to Israel] (Istanbul: Libra, 2008).

Kerem Karaosmanoğlu, *Komplö Teorileri Disiplinlerarası Bir Giriş* [Conspiracy Theories, An Interdisciplinary Introduction] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2019).

Türkey Salim Nefes, “Understanding the anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey through the Sevres Syndrome” in *Turkish Studies* 16, no. 4 (2015): 572–587.

Türkey Salim Nefes, “Scrutinizing Impacts of Conspiracy Theories on Readers’ Political Views: A Rational Choice Perspective on anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey” in *British Journal of Sociology* 66, no. 3 (2015): 557–575.

Türkey Salim Nefes, “Political Parties’ Perceptions and Uses of anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey” in *The Sociological Review*, no. 61 (2013): 247–264.

Türkey Salim Nefes, “Conspiracy Theory Culture in Turkey and the “*Crypto-Jews*”: *Dönmes*”, Moshe Dayan Center, Turkeyscope, April 2019, <https://dayan.org/content/conspiracy-theory-culture-turkey-and-crypto-jews-donmes>.

Marc David Baer, *The Dönme Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (California: Stanford University Press, 2010).

work was constituted by the use of a snowball sampling technique to conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews with fifty-five members of the Jewish community. Respondents include thirty women and twenty-five men from a wide range of professions of ages between twenty-four and seventy-five. Most of the respondents have university degrees, and a few hold PhDs. The interviewees hold a variety of professions ranging from academics to bloggers, jewelry designers, and gallery owners to elementary school teachers and psychologists. Most describe themselves as middle class, while some belong to upper-middle or upper-class families. Of interviewees over age forty, most are married. Most of the men over sixty-five are retired, and almost all women over sixty-five are housewives.<sup>16</sup> Given the relatively small sample size, my findings should not be considered representative of the Turkish Jewish community, which is internally diverse. Nonetheless, I believe the sample represents a panorama of experiences, citizenship practices, and responses to anti-Semitism in Turkey's Jewish community. Based on my analysis of these narratives, I argue that the 2013 Gezi protests and the 2016 coup attempt were turning points in the history of Turkish Jews' civic and political engagement.

### THE GEZI PARK PROTESTS

The Gezi protests from May to August 2013<sup>17</sup> started after the government's decision to build a shopping center inside a planned reconstruction of Ottoman army barracks in Gezi Park, one of the few remaining green spaces in central Istanbul. Protests ended with eleven casualties, hundreds of arrests, and thousands of injuries.<sup>18</sup> The protests grew from a wide range of grievances, including anxieties regarding the AKP's increasing autocracy and its interference in people's lives.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that under the conditions of "authoritarianization", the space for civil disobe-

<sup>16</sup>Due to the sensitivity of the topic at hand, instead of using the names of individuals, I use a coding method commonly found in similar qualitative studies (Age, W: Woman, M: Men). Because of the confidentiality principle, I have personally transcribed the conversations that I recorded.

<sup>17</sup>"Timeline of Gezi Protests", in *Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey* (London: Amnesty International, 2013), 54–58.

<sup>18</sup>For more information on the Gezi protests see: Mehmet Baris Kuymulu, "Reclaiming the Right to the City: Reflections on the Urban Uprising in Turkey" in *City 17*, no. 3 (2013), 247–248.

<sup>19</sup>Çelik, "Power and Islam in Turkey," 113.

dience is limited for any citizen. Non-Muslim communities in Turkey have generally abstained from challenging the state in the first place. For the most part, Jews prefer to be politically inactive and invisible. As one research participant put it: “The police will treat Sara different from Ayşe.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, staying away from mass protests is a sensible choice, as Jews know—or at least believe—that they will face unequal treatment because of their religious identity. Politics constitute the red line for non-Muslims, especially for the large segment of the older adults. The Gezi Protests constitute an important departure in this sense, as many younger members of the Jewish community came out in support of the protests. As a thirty-year-old female interviewee stated:

There were many Jews at Gezi. The Chief Rabbi had called and talked to the youth. Because we have this, “Oh my child, do not go.” My mom said “don’t go” repeatedly during that period. We have that fear all the time. But I do not care.

The main reasons for young Jews’ support were similar to those of otherwise politically inactive Muslim-Turkish citizens who participated in the protests. The respondents stated that they joined the protests initially to protect the trees, but, in response to police violence, they turned against the government’s oppressive rule. Women interviewees in particular emphasized that they participated to show their reaction against AKP politicians’ misogynistic statements on “the number of children women should have” and on “how pregnant women should stay away from the streets,” and, hence, to defend their freedoms and secular lifestyles.<sup>21</sup> However, elderly Jewish respondents criticized the support for the Gezi protests among younger Jews. What is striking here is the contrast between the attitudes and behavior of community leaders and parents on one side, and of respondents who participated in the Gezi Protests on the other, as one forty-three year-old male respondent suggested:

Seven hundred Jews participated in the Gezi Park events. All the kids got a scolding from their father big-time. “What do you care, is it your fight?” They said “Yes, because we do not want Turkey to change; we do not want

<sup>20</sup>These are common Jewish and Turkish women’s names.

<sup>21</sup> “Erdogan neden üç çocuk istediğini açıkladı” [Erdogan explains why he wants three children], *Milliyet*, January 2, 2013, accessed: 21 June 2020: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/erdogan-neden-3-cocuk-istedigini-acikladi-1650260>.

anyone to meddle with us.” They have this self-confidence. Our high school students [from the Jewish High-school] went. Parents could not keep the guys at home. So, the kid says “either my dad or the police will beat me.” This generation is breaking away politically [from their parents’ generation].

Furthermore, younger Jews who went to Gezi Park felt a “part of society” for the first time. They were occupying public space without the need to conceal their Jewish identity, as one thirty-six year-old male respondent expressed: “For the first time in my life, I saw myself as a part of the people in Turkey.” After the violent suppression of the protests, respondents experienced a deep sense of anxiety, which was further aggravated after the 2016 coup attempt that, destroyed the immediate prospects for a democratic and free country.

### THE COUP ATTEMPT AND ITS AFTERMATH

On July 15, 2016, a coup attempt under the leadership of followers of the United States-based cleric Fethullah Gülen (whose group is also referred to as Gülenist Terrorist Organization, *Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü* FETÖ) led to the death of over 200 people. The government declared a state of emergency a week later and used it to dismantle Gülen networks within the state. But the declaration rapidly deteriorated into a general purge of individuals perceived as in opposition to the government, from military officers to legal professionals and public sector employees. More than 28,000 teachers were suspended.<sup>22,23</sup> Hundreds of civil society associations, newspapers, radio stations, and television channels were closed, among them several leftist and feminist publications.<sup>24</sup>

In interviews, respondents emphasized that the idea of “leaving” was always in the back of their minds. Their experience of discrimination as

<sup>22</sup> Bakiner, “How Did We Get Here?” 42.

<sup>23</sup> After July 2016, the new school curriculum introduced ‘15 July victory of democracy’ as a new subject for various grades.

<sup>24</sup> The Governorate of Istanbul banned the 2016 International Women Day Parade on March 8 and the LGBT Pride held in June, due to security reasons. Despite the ban and the police blockade in Taksim Square, women were again on the streets this year for their rights.

“8 Mart Feminist Gece Yürüyüşü: Kadınlar yasağa rağmen yürüdü” (March 8 Feminist Night March: Women marched despite the bans), *Evrensel*, March 8, 2020, accessed: June 24, 2020: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/398977/8-mart-feminist-gece-yuruyusu-kadinlar-yasaga-ragmen-yurudu>.

members of an ethno-religious minority community always made this option salient for them. Yet, the thought of leaving Turkey grew stronger with the AKP's increasingly articulated intention of creating a religiously conservative society. Following the July 15 coup attempt, the AKP was emboldened in pursuing this objective. The mood in Ankara and in parts of the public turned aggressively anti-Semitic, as one respondent notes:

Everyone is talking about leaving. Dissatisfaction with the general state of affairs was already high. July 15 was like rubbing salt in the wound. There was always the idea of leaving, and now it's only getting stronger. If you want to establish a connection between July 15 and Jewish identity, yes you can establish it in this way: There was always the idea of leaving, July 15 strengthened it. (33, W)

As a result of this sentiment, the number of Turkish Jews who made *Aliyah*, the immigration of Jews in the Diaspora to Israel, increased considerably. Following the economic crisis in the country during the early 2000s many Turkish Jews left for Israel in search of better economic prospects.<sup>25</sup> Between 2011 and 2016, around one hundred people left for Israel every year. After the coup attempt, this number rose to 378 people in July 2017.<sup>26</sup> Emigrants in this current wave of migration to Israel are mostly young to middle aged—aged twenty-five to forty years, are graduates of Istanbul's leading universities, and are middle or high-level managers in international firms. In other words, younger Jews with significant sociocultural capital and skills are leaving in large numbers.

### RISING ANTI-SEMITISM IN SOCIETY

The respondents in this study experience anti-Semitism daily, as do Turkish Jews in general. According to the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) world ranking of the most anti-Semitic countries in 2014, Turkey ranked first, with an index score of sixty-nine percent, while Iran came second with fifty-six percent in the Middle East.<sup>27</sup> In 2015, Turkey's score increased to

<sup>25</sup> Bali, "Aliya" *Türk Yahudülerinin İsrail'e Göç Hikayeleri*.

Kaymak and Beylunioglu, "An Analysis of National and Minority Identity."

<sup>26</sup> Bali, "Aliya" *Türk Yahudülerinin İsrail'e Göç Hikayeleri*.

<sup>27</sup> "Turkey," Anti-Defamation League, January 14, 2016: <https://global100.adl.org/country/turkey/2014>. The Index Score represents the percentage of adults in this country who answered "probably true" to a majority of the anti-Semitic stereotypes tested.

seventy-four percent. ADL's anti-Semitism index of eleven Jewish stereotypes includes the statement "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to [this country/to the countries they live in]." <sup>28</sup>

A Pew Research Center survey of Turkish public opinion conducted in 2008 found that seventy-six percent of Turks viewed Jews negatively while only seven percent expressed favorable opinions. <sup>29</sup> According to the Survey on Social and Political Trends in Turkey conducted by Kadir Has University, thirty-seven percent of respondents stated they did not want to have a Jewish neighbor. <sup>30</sup> Moreover, according to the Istanbul-based Hrant Dink Foundation's 2018 Media Watch Report on Hate Speech, Jews were the group most targeted by hate speech, followed by Armenians. <sup>31</sup> According to the report, Jews were strongly identified with violence in news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather than using phrases such as "the state of Israel", "Israel" or "Israeli Defense Forces", these institutions were referred to by their Jewish affiliation, and

<sup>28</sup> Karel Valansi, "İra Forman: "Yükselen Antisemitizmden" [İra Forman: We are worried about rising anti-Semitism], *Şalom*, June 11, 2014: [http://www.salom.com.tr/haber-91384-ira\\_forman\\_yukselen\\_antisemitizmden\\_endiseliyiz\\_.html](http://www.salom.com.tr/haber-91384-ira_forman_yukselen_antisemitizmden_endiseliyiz_.html).

ADL's "Global Anti-Semitism: Select Incidents 2019" report mention two anti-Semitic incidents from Turkey. First, in Istanbul, a Turkish Islamist newspaper published an anti-Semitic report claiming that Jews living in the Beykoz district have taken control of the neighborhood, training dogs to bite Muslim inhabitants. Jewish commentators said that the rhetoric has contributed to anti-Semitism. Second, in Izmir, an unidentified attacker threw a firebomb at the Beth Israel Synagogue. He told police that he attacked the synagogue to protest Israel.

"Global Anti-Semitism: Select Incidents in 2019," Anti-Defamation League, accessed April 7, 2020: <https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/global-anti-semitism-select-incidents-in-2019>.

<sup>29</sup> *Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Increase in Europe* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Eli Haligua, "Toplumun 31,7%'si Musevi komşu istemiyor" [31.7% of the society do not want a Jewish neighbor], *Avlaremoz*, February 2, 2018, accessed: June 10, 2018: <http://www.avlaremoz.com/2018/02/02/toplumun-17si-musevi-komsu-istemiyor-2/>.

<sup>31</sup> The Foundation was established after the assassination of Armenian intellectual, public figure Hrant Dink in 2007. Hrant Dink Foundation has been conducting the project titled "Media Watch on Hate Speech" since 2009. See: <https://hrantdink.org/tr/asulis/faaliyetler/projeler/medyada-nefret-soylemi/2134-medyada-nefret-soylemi-mayis-agustos-2019-raporu-yayimlandi>, accessed: 7 April 2020; and "Medyada Nefret Söylemi İzleme Raporu, Ocak-Nisan 2018" [The Hate Speech Monitoring Report in the Media, January-April 2018], accessed: 3 June 2018: <https://hrantdink.org/attachments/article/1356/Medyada%20Nefret%20Söylemi%20İzleme%20Raporu%20Ocak-Nisan%202018.pdf>.

thus Jewish identity designated as the target. Jews were also widely seen as the hidden power behind conspiracies.

After the *Mavi Marmara* incident in 2010,<sup>32</sup> Israel-Turkey relations came to a near standstill, which increased insecurity and anxiety among Turkish Jews. Respondents mentioned several incidents: anti-Israel and anti-Jewish rhetoric used by political leaders;<sup>33</sup> headlines containing hate speech appearing in the right-wing media,<sup>34</sup> equating Turkish Jews with Israel; the claim that a “Jewish interest rate lobby” was behind the Gezi Park Protests;<sup>35</sup> as well as allegations of Jewish connections with Fethullah Gülen following the July 15 coup attempt.<sup>36</sup>

Almost all respondents pointed to rising anti-Semitism in recent years as a key driver of emigration to Israel. Many emphasized that they expect

<sup>32</sup> On May 31, 2010, Israeli forces boarded the Turkish ship, the *Mavi Marmara*, which was part of a flotilla carrying supplies to Gaza. Nine people on the ship were killed in the ensuing violence.

<sup>33</sup> In July 2014 people gathered in order to protest the Israeli bombardment on the sidewalk right across the Ortaköy Etz Ahayim Synagogue while the protestors shouted “baby murderer Israel” and threw eggs at its wall.

<sup>34</sup> In a historical fiction television series named “Payitaht” on a Turkish state television channel, Jews were portrayed attempting to assassinate the thirty-fourth sultan, Abdul Hamid II, and Zionist leader Theodor Herzl was depicted as tricking the Sultan into founding the State of Israel.

<sup>35</sup> Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told a meeting of local elected officials that “the famous Hungarian Jew Soros” was behind an individual who “financed terrorists” during the nationwide anti-government protests of 2013. In Turkish Islamist thinking, interest rates are a tool employed by Jews to control world events, as stated by Erdogan’s political mentor, former Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan.

Aykan Erdemir and John A. Lechner, “Erdogan’s Anti-Semitism will sink Turkey’s Economy” *Foreign Policy*, December 24, 2018, accessed: 7 April 2020: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/24/erdogans-anti-semitism-will-sink-turkeys-economy>.

<sup>36</sup> Many conspiracy theories with anti-Semitic comments that Fethullah Gülen is Jewish appeared especially in the right-wing, conservative, and Islamist-leaning press.

“Karay Yahudisi Fettullah Gülen” [A Karay Jew Fettullah Gülen], *Sabah*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/bolgeler/ramoglu/2016/12/28/karay-yahudisi-fetullah-gulen>; “Yeni Şafak yazarı: Yahudiler Fethullah Gülen’e “Mesihimizsin” demiş, annesinin gerçek adı Rabin” [The Jews told Fethullah Gülen, “You are our Messiah.” His mother’s real name is Rabin], August 23, 2016: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/yeni-safak-yazar-yahudiler-fetullah-gulene-mesihimizsin-demis-annesinin-gercek-adi-rabin,356437>; “Kadir Mısıroğlu: Gülen babadan ermeni anneden yahudidir” [Gülen’s father is Armenian and his mother is Jewish], February 3, 2019, <https://www.internethaber.com/kadir-misiroglu-gulen-babadan-ermeni-anadan-yahudidir-video-galerisi-1578386.htm>.

For a recent analysis about anti-Semitism in Turkey, see Efrat Aviv, “Antisemitism Worldwide General Analysis, 2018” (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Kantor Center, 2018).

to be scapegoated in political, social, and economic crises. Even as they convey an emotional commitment to Istanbul and continue to see it as “home,” respondents live with the fear of being forced to leave one day, as expressed by a sixty-five year-old female respondent:

The young Jews will leave at first opportunity. The main reason is rising anti-Semitism. In these last years, I have seen things that I never experienced before. On TV, for example, I heard the words “you drink our blood” ... these talks are very hurtful. Even the Gezi Park Protests were blamed on us. We’ve always been a target; we have always suffered. We are waiting... Our worries are for you and the young people, but in the end, you feel sorry, because this is a beautiful country, and it would be a shame if we had to leave.

Younger Jewish respondents expressed their dismay at the rise of anti-Semitism in social media, in the mainstream right-wing media, as well as in the rhetoric of state officials, all of which worsened palpably after the *Mavi Marmara* incident. They lamented that they are being labelled as “foreign” and “Israeli” at work, in school, and even within their social circles.<sup>37</sup> The exclusionary discourse can come up both in secure social environments and when least expected. A young female respondent’s account illustrates this point: “On the morning of the *Mavi Marmara* incident, a close friend of my mine from the office told me to my face, ‘but yours [Israel] have killed as well.’ It is very hurtful... You are immediately linked to Israel.”

Some of the respondents’ friends had emigrated already or had decided to do so after the *Mavi Marmara* incident. Yet the breaking point for many was the July 15 coup attempt. Many younger Jews referred to the incident with sorrow and emphasized that, following it, they felt increasingly isolated. They repeated their unwillingness to move to Israel due to the cultural differences between the two countries, the ongoing conflict there, and the difference in climate.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> According to a recent survey commissioned by Kadir Has University, after the United States, Israel ranks second among the countries perceived as posing a threat to Turkey.

“Turkish foreign policy public perceptions survey 2020”, Kadir Has Üniversitesi, <https://www.khas.edu.tr/en/node/6098>.

<sup>38</sup> For a dramatic interview regarding being a young Jew in Turkey see.

“Istanbul is My Home, but it is Over,” +90. June 12, 2020. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qJeiWIsxtA>, 12 June 2020.

I feel I belong here. But lately, I have thought about leaving. Among my circle of friends, there are some who left. The reason for their departure is not loyalty to Israel, but Recep Tayyip Erdogan's politics, the trend of the country; there is terrible anti-Semitism; we have never experienced this until today. In the last two to three years, I cannot believe it... We talked to a lot of people from our age group; we talked a lot during the Gaza events about leaving. My parents cannot leave; where will they go at this age..." (37, M)

### ALTERNATIVE VOICES: AVLAREMOZ AND JEWISH ACTIVISTS

Despite this dire outlook of exclusion, isolation and anti-Semitism, we can also witness alternative voices flourishing within the community. In the past few years, human rights activists, non-governmental organizations, young non-Muslims, and several media outlets have used broadcasts, panels, and interviews to attract attention to issues of anti-Semitism and to make it a topic of public debate. Many also try to break the alleged "invisibility/low-profile attitude" of the Jewish community. Among these new spaces of negotiation, is Avlaremoz, an online platform that demonstrates the shift in rhetoric of young non-Muslims in Turkey. Avlaremoz, which means 'Let's speak' in Ladino, came online in early 2016 in order to counter the philosophy of silence or *kayadez*.

A young female member of Avlaremoz explains this behavior embodied in the community in the following way:

It is the first time that something has emerged that is not under the roof of the community, but speaks for it. I think it is important. In the community, most people prefer silence, prefer not to fight against anti-Semitism in public [because they have fear. They generally hold themselves back.

In the first years of its online presence, Avlaremoz was mostly run by younger Jews. More recently, however, individuals from non-Jewish, non-Muslim communities, as well as secular Turkish Muslims, have joined in its publication efforts. Apart from anti-Semitism, Avlaremoz writers touch on other taboo subjects in the Jewish community, such as LGBTQ+ issues. A founder of the website emphasizes that the site's primary objective is to work in conjunction with other marginalized social groups to create conditions for equal citizenship for all people in Turkey.

Anti-Semitism disturbed me, of course, and, as a matter of fact, it disturbed me so much that we established Avlaremoz. What else should we do ... But

the Jewish community's silence against anti-Semitism was very frustrating, so we had to establish Avlaremöz. Perhaps it would not have been necessary if the community's cadres offered more serious support or if the society was fighting more actively.... (37, M)

## CONCLUSION

Following the hopeful moments of the 2013 Gezi Protests and the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, doubts about their future in their city and country intensified among the Jews of Istanbul. While some continue to live silently within the confines of the community, others respond to this insecurity by emigrating to Israel and elsewhere. Others choose to struggle for equal citizenship and recognition as full members of society.<sup>39</sup> Anti-Semitism, often trivialized, has intensified under successive AKP governments. While cases of physical assault were rare, instances of vandalism and online anti-Semitism have increased significantly. The semantic equivalence of "Jew" and "Zionist" in public discourse, coupled with an anti-Israel language, advances an anti-Semitic narrative that portrays Jews as cruel and as killers. Despite this climate, most respondents emphasized that they do not intend to migrate, even if they continue to hold this possibility as a fallback option. Finally, new fields of negotiation began to arise in the late 2000s, creating a new dynamic in the political and social spheres of the Jewish community wherein individuals began reconsidering the tradition of remaining silent on issues related to politics and the state. Despite their decreasing numbers, young Jews experienced hopeful moments and were empowered through their collective action after gathering with other marginalized groups during the 2013 Gezi Park Protests.

<sup>39</sup> The Iberian "right to return" topic was not mentioned exclusively by the respondents within the scope of this fieldwork. According to another study done by the author, most Turkish Jews applied for or received passports from Spain and Portugal. While the common cause is fear regarding their future in the country, practical reasons such as European residence permits and visa-free travel in Europe afforded by Spanish or Portuguese citizenship have also been influential in this choice. See Kaymak, "Turkish Jews' Perspectives on Israel."



Epilogue:  
“Aprontaremos Las Validjas”  
Shall We Start Packing the Suitcases?

*Rıfat N. Bali*

Turkey is a regular news feature in the world media. And within this interest, one of the subjects that most engages the Western press is the current gradual process wherein the control of a self-proclaimed secular republic, long-protected and preserved by a military that viewed itself as the guardian of its secular character along with the rest of Atatürk’s legacy has democratically passed to the Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkish) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The party, which claims *not* to be Islamist, has nevertheless unwaveringly imposed its socially conservative vision on Turkish society, in the process severely weakening the Republic’s traditional principle of uncompromising secularism, as well as the influence of the Turkish military, its traditional guardian. It is therefore unsurprising that the developments of the past one-and-a-half decades have been a subject of fascination and frequent reporting for the western press.

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K. Öktem, İ. K. Yosmaoğlu (eds.), *Turkish Jews and their Diasporas*,  
Modernity, Memory and Identity in South-East Europe,  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87798-9\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87798-9_11)

Within this coverage—and especially in the past few years, there have been an increasing number of reports regarding the emigration of Turkey’s dwindling Jewish population and the attribution of this phenomenon to anti-Semitism within Turkish society and politics.<sup>1</sup> In these reports the Turkish Jews who are interviewed usually refrain from giving their names (or at least from allowing them to be printed) due to reasons of “safety” and express their fears and concerns about living in Turkey and the anti-Semitism that they find increasingly intolerable. When reading these reports, I am occasionally reminded of the Ladino phrase that comes to mind at times of crisis and danger: “Aprontaremos las validjas,” or “Let’s start packing [our] bags.” Depending on the intonation used, it can either be intended as a question (“Is it time for us to start packing?”) or as a decision arrived at (“We had better start packing”). And it is this ambiguity which well-reflects the dilemma that Turkish Jewry has experienced over the years.

Indeed, this is the fundamental question for Turkey’s Jews today: Is it still possible for Turkish Jews to live out their entire lives in the country of their birth and be buried there? If so, under what conditions? If not, then why remain there any longer? Is anti-Semitism truly a threat for Turkish Jewry? If not, why do Turkish Jews, when interviewed, insist on not allowing themselves to be identified? Here, I will attempt to address these questions and try to provide answers on the basis of my decades of observation and reading on this topic.

Let us begin by stating unambiguously: Yes, anti-Semitism is indeed widespread in Turkey. Nor is it a new phenomenon. It was always there,

<sup>1</sup>“Young Turkish Jews Emigrating Due to Anti-Semitism, Tensions with Israel”, October 23, 2013, *Haaretz*, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/turkish-jewish-youth-emigrating-1.5278275>.

Ilan Ben-Zion, “Young Turkish Jews trickling away from shrinking community”, June 6, 2015, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/young-turkish-jews-trickling-away-from-shrinking-community/>; Josefin Dolsten, “Turkish Jews proudly Defend Last Sephardic Homeland-Even as Some Flee”, May 28, 2016, <https://forward.com/news/world/340921/turkish-jews-proudly-defend-last-sephardic-homeland-even-as-some-flee/>; Cnaan Liphshiz, “In Post-Coup Turkey, Jews Plan their Future Abroad”, November 19, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-post-coup-turkey-jews-plan-their-future-abroad/>; “Number of Turkish Jews immigrating to Israel more than doubles”, November 11, 2017, <https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/237938>.

Mark Lowen, “Turkey Brain Drain: Crackdown Pushes Intellectuals Out”, December 28, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42433668>; Soner Yalçın, “Burası vatanın nereye gidiyorsun”, *Sözcü*, January 3, 2018.

but in the digital age it has become much more visible. It manifests itself in different ways in various places, but it is widespread in almost every part of the society—especially among the conservative, Islamist and nationalist right.<sup>2</sup> Even so, the frequently anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli discourse employed by Turkish politicians never refers to “our Jews”, meaning Turkish Jewry but to a “Jew” who is a Zionist. But if “our Jews” were to reject the current state of affairs and to publicly refute the antisemitic speeches and writings surrounding discussions of Israel and Zionism in Turkey and to speak the truth, if it were to speak out in favor of Israel or engage in pro-Israel *hasbara* (public diplomacy) it would disrupt the present uneasy and tenuous relationship between the Jewish community and the country’s social and political establishment. From the moment that such things are uttered, the “Turkish Jew” would be seen as a “Zionist Jew”—an object of scorn and hatred within every part in Turkish society. In the process, it would be highly likely to present an existential threat to Turkey’s Jews and to continued Jewish life in Turkey.

For the rightist/nationalist/Islamist ideology “Zionism” is not only represented by the state of Israel and its founding fathers but also by international Jewish non-governmental organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, Women’s International Zionist Organization, B’nai B’rith, Betar, et cetera. Because of this perception, all such international Jewish organizations which have been active in Turkey for decades do not operate under their legal names, but under other, neutral ones! And Turkish Jews are members of them.

Turkey’s Law on Non-Governmental Associations does not prevent these institutions from operating in Turkey under their actual legal names,<sup>3</sup> but common sense would in any case dictate that it is preferable for these organizations to operate either informally or under different names instead of under their true names. Yet, this condition of dual identity—one legal, one illegal—has produced a condition of concern and/or “sense of guilt” among its members.

Another painful reality of Turkey concerns Turkish Jews’ consciousness of their Jewishness. If you are raised in a family imbued with Jewishness

<sup>2</sup>For sources on this subject in English, see: Rifat N. Bali, *Antisemitism and Conspiracy Theories in Turkey*, (Istanbul: Libra Kitap, 2013); Efrat Aviv, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Turkey: From Ottoman Rule to AKP*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Permission was given to foreign organizations to operate on Turkish soil by the Fifth Paragraph of the Law on Associations, No. 5253 and dated November 4, 2004 “by permission of the Interior Ministry and in consideration of the views of the Foreign Ministry.”

and Zionism, if you desire to learn more about such subjects, and if you wish to live out your Jewishness fully, in other words, if you wish to freely express your positive ideas—and negative ones, too!—that you have harbored regarding the state of Israel, if you would like to go out in public wearing a Jewish skull cap (kippa) or a t-shirt bearing the image of Theodor Herzl, this may be *theoretically* possible in Turkey, but it is wholly impractical. Turkey is simply the wrong country for someone who has grown up with a strong view of Judaism and Zionism. Emigration is not only a natural response, it's practically necessary.

Although Turkish Jews frequently complain that they are not accepted as “Turks” but rather as somehow “guests,” “foreigners,” or simply “Jews,” this is not and should not be seen as anti-Semitism and/or discrimination, rather, the problem is one that derives from the core cultural values of Turkish society. Nor is this a recent phenomenon. Even during the uncompromisingly secular years of the Kemalist regime, while Jews (and other non-Muslim minorities) may have been accepted as Turkish *citizens*, they were never truly seen as “Turks.” For a person who cannot accept such a second-class status, Turkey is not the ideal place.

Likewise, if the Turkish Jew is an idealist and desires to serve his country by being a public servant, hoping to eventually rise to a high position in the bureaucracy or politics, he is in the wrong country for such ambitions. Turkey's core cultural values, both then and now, do not easily permit a Jew to serve as a high level advisor, minister or prime minister. Evidence of this fact is that, during the years that İsmail Cem (İpekçi) was active in politics and even a candidate for the Republic Presidency, he came under intensive criticism and attacks over having come from a Dönme family.<sup>4</sup>

There is only a slight chance of Istanbul Jews coming face-to-face with the sort of anti-Semites and anti-Semitism that targets individuals, since they, like the rest of Turkey's so-called “White Turks,” the upper-middle classes of educated, professional elites, generally live in gated communities or districts where a cosmopolitan culture predominates and the more conservative and Islamist parts of the population are rarely seen.

The average Turkish Jew, younger generation included, does not assume a politically oppositional stance—indeed, they tend to be apolitical; exceptions aside they are self-employed, or in well-paying, white-collar

<sup>4</sup> Rifat N. Bali, *A Scapegoat For All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey*, (İstanbul: Isis Press, 2008), 48.

professions, such as doctor, lawyer, engineer or in the corporate world. Thus in our day, the Turkish Jew has not experienced personal calamities at the hands of the state due to his or her political views, such as the restriction of their personal freedoms, ejection from civil service jobs, or expulsion from the university, which are nowadays very frequent.

In that case, why *do* Jews emigrate from Turkey? And which ones are leaving?

The Jews who emigrate are largely young people who have received a Zionist education and who wish to live out their Jewishness without restriction or restraint. I do not know what is their percentage in the overall migration figures.

Another group of emigrants are leaving for economic reasons, of which there are two main ones. The first of these is simply affordability. To send their children to private school (including the private Jewish school in Ulus) is very expensive and often out of reach for young couples with two children.<sup>5</sup> These families prefer to immigrate to Israel than to send their children to Turkish state schools where a conservative Islamist climate now prevails and dominates the curriculum.

The second economic reason affects wealthy families. Spurred by the United States' passing of The Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) in 2010 the members of Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) signed the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters on November 3, 2011.<sup>6</sup> Following suit, Turkey signed the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement on Automatic Exchange of Information (*Mali Hesaplar ile ilgili Bilgilerin Otomatik Olarak Değişimine İlişkin Çok Taraflı Yetkili Otorite Antlaşması*) between OECD member states.<sup>7</sup> This meant that the assets that Turkish citizens held in foreign banks and had not declared to the Turkish Finance Ministry would, beginning in 2019, now be automatically reported to the ministry. Until now Turkish businessmen—Jewish

<sup>5</sup>The annual tuition for the private Jewish schools in Ulus is about TL 45,000, or around USD 10,000 (at May 28, 2018 exchange rates). For a couple with two children, the cost is close to \$20,000 annually! Other private schools have also more or less the same fees.

<sup>6</sup>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters," [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/treaty/submit/session183/pdfs/agree-10\\_01.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/treaty/submit/session183/pdfs/agree-10_01.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Önemli Duyuru, "Türkiye Mali Hesaplara İlişkin Uluslararası Otomatik Bilgi Değişimi Anlaşmasını İmzaladı," Centrum Danışmanlık, <http://vergiport.com/duyuru/Turkiye-Mali-Hesaplara-İlişkin-Uluslararası-Otomatik-Bilgi-Değişimi-Anlaşmasını-İmzaladı.pdf>.

ones included—have often illegally held their unregistered wealth in foreign banks.<sup>8</sup> Due to privacy laws and “bankers’ secrecy”<sup>9</sup> this information would not have been able to be shared with the Turkish Finance Ministry (or others) without a specific court order. But the era of banking secrecy is now coming to an end, as this information will now be delivered automatically without request. Three times in the recent past (2013,<sup>10</sup> 2017 and 2018<sup>11</sup>) the Turkish Finance Ministry has offered a tax amnesty of sorts regarding assets held abroad. The first time, citizens had to declare previously undeclared assets abroad and to pay only two percent tax on them; the second time, such persons were allowed to declare and legitimize their foreign-held assets without this time incurring any tax.

There is a simple explanation for all of this. The assets of a significant portion of Turkish Jewish families are still held in secret bank accounts abroad, despite the offered tax amnesties, because they do not trust the Turkish Republic to honor such promises once these assets are declared. Rather, they prefer to adopt Israeli citizenship before the automatic reporting laws go into effect and avoid being slapped with a high tax bill. In this situation, they have simply closed the bank accounts that they opened as

<sup>8</sup> Various studies put the percentage of the “shadow economy” in Turkey to around thirty percent. See, for example, Friedrich Schneider-Robert Klinglmaier, “Shadow Economies around the World: What do We Know?” IZA DP, no. 1043 Institute for the Study of Labour, Bonn, March 2004, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp1043.pdf>; Ceyhun Elgin-Oğuz Öztunalı, “Shadow Economies Around the World: Model Based Estimates,” [http://www.econ.boun.edu.tr/public\\_html/RePEc/pdf/201205.pdf](http://www.econ.boun.edu.tr/public_html/RePEc/pdf/201205.pdf); Friedrich Schneider, “Size and Progression of the Shadow Economies of Turkey and other OECD Countries from 2003 to 2013: Some New Facts,” in *Ekonomi-tek* 2, no. 2 (2013): 83–116, [http://ekonomitek.org/pdf/2013/2013\\_10\\_friedrich\\_schneider.pdf](http://ekonomitek.org/pdf/2013/2013_10_friedrich_schneider.pdf).

Şebnem Turhan, “Turkey worst in OECD for unregistered economy: Study,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 18, 2016.

Özlem Yıldız, “Black Economy in Turkey,” PhD thesis, Cardiff Business School, 2013; There is also an official “action plan” of the Turkish Ministry of Finance to reduce the percentage of the shadow economy. See Gelir İdaresi Başkanlığı, “Kayıtlı Ekonomi Güçlü Gelecek Kamu Spotu,” Youtube, November 12, 2017, <http://www.kayitliekonomiyegecis.gov.tr/>.

<sup>9</sup> Banks and bank employees are not allowed to share their customers’ private information with third parties.

<sup>10</sup> “Vergi Sirküleri, No: 2013/70,” Deloitte, May 29, 2013, <http://www.verginet.net/Sirkuler/2013yili70.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> “Yurk İçi ve Yurk Disi Varlıkların: Milli Ekonomiye Kazandırılması,” Gelir İdaresi Başkanlığı, <http://www.gib.gov.tr/sites/default/files/fileadmin/yayinlar/6736varlikbarisi.pdf>.

*Turkish* citizens and opened *new* accounts as *Israeli* citizens. They then, take advantage of the ten-year tax exemption that the Israeli Finance Ministry affords new immigrants on income from assets held abroad.<sup>12</sup> Since they neither see Turkey as a tax haven nor trust the Turkish regime, the only choice for Jewish families who do not take advantage of the country's tax amnesty is to immigrate to Israel.

Another type of story that occasionally appears in the international press is that of Turkish Jews taking advantage of recent Spanish<sup>13</sup> and Portuguese<sup>14</sup> laws (2015) allowing citizenship for the descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled five centuries before. For Turkish Jews, such citizenship is attractive for the visa-free travel and residency opportunities within the EU and for the expanded employment opportunities for young professionals, rather than deriving from a desire to “return” to or live in either country.<sup>15</sup>

When Turkish Jews—like many others—imagine immigration abroad they are not often dreaming of Israel. They generally prefer other developed countries such as the United States or Canada. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to use the term “immigrate” for those who go to either of these places. Just like other Turks of their class, young Jews go abroad for university studies. Whether or not they end up permanently settling in these countries only becomes clear five or ten years after they have left Turkey.

But let us return to the initial questions I asked at the beginning of this discussion and see if we can answer them. For a Turkish Jew, anti-Semitism or being a potential victim of terror are not perils exclusive to Turkey. These days, they are both international phenomena. However much Turkish synagogues may be targets for attacks, they are just as vulnerable to attack throughout the western world. I do not think that most Turkish Jews—regardless of their age—possess either strong political convictions

<sup>12</sup> Israel Tax Authority, <https://taxes.gov.il/english/incometax/documents/taxbreak-packagefornewimmigrantsandreturningresidents.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Doğan Akman, “Spain’s Correction of Her ‘Historical Mistake and Injustice’: Spanish Citizenship for the ‘Sefardies’: An Assessment,” *Sephardic Horizons* 6, no. 3–4 (2016), <http://www.sephardichorizons.org/Volume6/Issue3-4/Akman.html>.

<sup>14</sup> “Portuguese Nationality for Sephardic Descendants,” Comunidade Israelita do Porto, March 1, 2018, [http://www.comunidade-israelita-porto.org/resources/pdfs/Portuguese\\_Nationality\\_for\\_Sephardic\\_Descendants\\_English.pdf](http://www.comunidade-israelita-porto.org/resources/pdfs/Portuguese_Nationality_for_Sephardic_Descendants_English.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Baruch, “Soner Yalçın’a cevabımdır”, January 6, 2018, [https://ankarali-2001.blogspot.com.tr/2018/01/soner-yalcina-cevabimdir\\_6.html](https://ankarali-2001.blogspot.com.tr/2018/01/soner-yalcina-cevabimdir_6.html).

or a deeply-held sense of Jewishness. The state of apolitical Turkish patriotism has worked its way into the genes of the community. Whether or not this Turkish patriotism is genuine is another matter for discussions. If complaints and anti-regime sentiment have occasionally been voiced in recent years, either by the community leadership or the newspaper *Şalom* it has been done in very soft tones. For instance, Mois Gabay in his articles complaining about antisemitism both in his column in the Turkish Jewish daily *Şalom* and in the website “Avlaremoz,”<sup>16</sup> never fails to adopt a patriotic tone, referring to Turkey as “canım ülkem,” “my beloved country.”<sup>17</sup>

Since Turkish Jews tend to have the perception of being surrounded by enemies, they have traditionally opted for a strategy of an apolitical or even “invisible” profile in the public sphere, and this has manifested itself as an ideology—a doctrine, even—summed up by the Ladino terms of “kayadez,”<sup>18</sup> and “no moz karişayamos en los eços del hukümet,” or the English term “low profile.”<sup>19</sup> One group of young Turkish Jews has in recent years come out in opposition to this attitude, replacing the term “kayadez” with “avlaremoz” (“let’s speak”), but the oppositional stance and eagerness to speak openly that they claim to espouse do not come off as either credible or authentic, since most of the writers for this platform feel the need to use pen-names.<sup>20</sup>

To summarize, the average Turkish Jew, regardless of age and with few exceptions, has continued to this day to adopt the traditional community position of maintaining a low profile. The famous Armenian art dealer of Istanbul, Raffi Portakal remarked in his memoirs that “as long as I can remember, the Armenian community doesn’t like to speak out; as for the Jewish community, you’ll never hear a peep from them. You’ll never see a madman like Hrant Dink or Sevan Nişanyan emerge from their midst”<sup>21</sup>—

<sup>16</sup> Avlaremoz, [www.avlaremoz.com](http://www.avlaremoz.com).

<sup>17</sup> Mois Gabay, “Keşke”lerle dolu Türk Yahudileri,” *Şalom*, December 27, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> A Ladino term meaning to “remain silent.” In practice, it refers to the concept of not complaining publicly.

<sup>19</sup> A Ladino phrase meaning “we don’t meddle in political affairs.”

<sup>20</sup> The writers for Avlaremoz.com use the pen names “Rika Kuriel,” “Hayri Çavuş,” “Ortaköylü Mişon.”

<sup>21</sup> Raffi Portakal and Enis Batur, *Portakal’ın Yüzyılı*, (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2015), 53. Hrant Dink (1954–2007) was an Armenian activist and editor-in-chief of the Armenian newspaper *Ağos*. He was murdered on January 19, 2007. Sevan Nişanyan (1956–) is a public intellectual and etimologist. During the time he was an entrepreneur in the field of tourism he was condemned to eleven years in prison for illegal constructions. He escaped from prison in July 2017 and currently lives in Greece.

a frank description of this reality. Indeed, no “madman” has emerged from the Turkish Jewish fold, nor, at this rate, is one likely to in the foreseeable future, since any such action is likely to open up the community to attack, verbal or otherwise, from the “enemies” that surround them. Thus, in conversations with the media, the average Turkish Jew will continue to refrain from giving their name, affixing a mezuzah to the doorpost of their home, offering a single analysis or opinion about Turkey or the Turkish government—much less a critical one, or even uttering such opinions over the phone out of fear that “they’re listening.” The activities of Jewish associations in Istanbul are not even published in its only newspaper *Şalom* out of fear for their members’ safety. The leaders of Turkey’s Jewish community never fail, when making public or official announcements, to use a patriotic tone, and are mindful not to utter a single sentence that could be construed as critical of either Turkey or its government.

The community’s long-held strategy of “invisibility,” of remaining out of the public eye of is no longer a viable strategy in the digital age, since a Turkish Jew, whether living in Turkey or abroad, can, in a moment’s notice, broadcast to the world their thoughts and feelings through web posts, blogs, and other social media. For the community leadership, which aims to maintain this public stance through control of the community’s paper *Şalom*, the challenge is daunting, since every opinion offered and every argument that breaks out on social media between Turkish Jews and anti-Israel or anti-Jewish posters is liable to sharpen and intensify and to elide into anti-Semitism without much prompting. This situation concerns the Jews who live in Turkey and may be otherwise oblivious to the widespread antisemitism within the country, and it may actually plant the idea in their minds of emigrating.

One radical solution to the “stay or go” dilemma in which Turkish Jewry finds itself is mass emigration. This opportunity first arose between the years 1948–1950, after the establishment of the state of Israel. During that period, half of the community’s members opted for this alternative.<sup>22</sup> In our day, the Jews who remain in Turkey are largely descendants of those who decided otherwise during those years. The continued existence in Turkey of this dwindling community is both possible and impossible. If we detach Jewish life from any connection with Israel and Zionism, and instead focus on traditional worship, Jewish customs, religious festivals,

<sup>22</sup> Rıfat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri – Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), 432.

Sephardic music and culinary culture, and see the Ladino language of our ancestors as simply a an element of folklore, then we must recognize such an existence as completely viable, since the “Sephardic kitchen,” Mario Levi and its novels, the “lite criticism” of “avlaremoz,” and the documentary movies about the dying out of the Ladino language,<sup>23</sup> along with exhibitions of Jewish life in Turkey, cultural walking tours of Istanbul’s “Jewish neighborhoods,”<sup>24</sup> and the Quincentennial Foundation’s Museum of Turkish Jewry,<sup>25</sup> always draw the sympathetic interest of the Turkish media and the Turkish society and stand as perennial symbols of the city’s “multi-culturalism.” If you don’t have a problem with having to say “I’m a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ association” instead of “I belong to the Istanbul B’nai Brith Lodge,” then you can live in Turkey. If you can give your children a Jewish education that includes Zionism, Theodor Herzl, the history of the Yishuv and state of Israel but then add the proviso that they should be careful to never defend Israel online, if you see nothing abnormal or inviable about this, then you can indeed continue your existence in Turkey.

If you are a Turkish Jew living in Turkey and critical of Israel than Turkey is still the ideal place to live since in no time you can become a celebrity, a public figure.

If, however, you cannot separate the Zionist and Israeli components from your Jewishness, if you cannot endure the endless stream of hostility and calumny directed at these components with equanimity, if you wish to serve your country in the public sphere and you nurture ambitions to rise up in the Turkish public service, then you will find no fulfillment in Turkey. Indeed, the only realistic option for you will be emigration.

In comparison with the other “local” non-Muslim minorities in Turkey—Greeks, Armenians, and Syriac Christians—the emigration of

<sup>23</sup> *Las Ultimas Palabras*, directed by Rita Ender-Yorgos Demir (2015, Jewish Museum Berlin).

*Kaybolan Bir Dil Kaybolan Bir Mutfak / A Fading Language A Fading Cuisine*, directed by Deniz Alphan (2017).

<sup>24</sup> These neighborhoods are: Galata, Şişhane, Balat, and Hasköy. The previously mentioned *Şalom* writer and professional tour guide Mois Gabay organizes these tours.

<sup>25</sup> According to the museum director, it sees some 10,000 visitors per annum, among whom seventy percent are local. Larry Luxner, “As Israel-Turkey Tension Rises, so Does Foot Traffic to Istanbul’s Jewish Museum,” *Times of Israel*, January 18, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/as-israel-turkey-tensions-rise-so-does-foot-traffic-to-istanbuls-jewish-museum/>.

Turkish Jews reinforces the latter's negative image among the Turkish population, who already view them as a "foreign element," having "immigrated from Spain in 1492." Additionally, this immigration—especially to Israel—directly refutes the community's frequent insistence that they are "Turkish" and "not Zionist," proving to the already skeptical Turkish public that at least part of the community is indeed supportive of the Zionist state, and thereby reinforcing their already negative image.<sup>26</sup>

As for those who chose not to leave, they continue to live—in accordance with their level of wealth—in the various areas of greater Istanbul that have some level of Jewish habitation, such as Maçka-Teşvikiye-Nişantaşı, Ulus, Levent, Zekeriya köy, Göktürk, along the Bosphorous shores, Ortaköy, Osmanbey, Şişli, Mecidiyeköy, or Gayrettepe. They will continue to celebrate Jewish rites of passage and observe Jewish holidays. Seeing the lighting of the Hanukkah candelabra in Ortaköy as an extraordinary event,<sup>27</sup> they will feel sorrow when the same event is cancelled for the third straight year.<sup>28</sup> They will commiserate and share their concerns with their fellow Jews, bohème-bourgeois and Kemalist Turkish friends at the cafes and fancy restaurants they attend. And life will go on....

<sup>26</sup>For this reason, the editor-in-chief of *Şalom* would publish an editorial that attempted to trivialize the emigration of Turkish Jews.

İvo Molinas, "O güzel insanlar o güzel atlara binip gitmesinler," *Şalom*, January 4, 2018.

<sup>27</sup>Hanukkah was publicly celebrated in Ortaköy Square for the first time during the Republican period on December 14, 2015. The following year it was celebrated for the second time at Ortaköy's Esmâ Sultan Yalı. Both of these observances were organized by the mayor's office of the Beşiktaş municipality.

<sup>28</sup>The 2017 celebration, which the Beşiktaş municipality had also planned to be held in Ortaköy, was cancelled in the wake of anti-American and anti-Israeli demonstrations that broke out in the wake of President Donald Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital on December 6 of that year.

**Immigration by land of origin—Turkey**

	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>June</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sept</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>	<i>Total</i>
2017 <sup>a</sup>	189	25	30	24	22	48	40						
2016 <sup>b</sup>	13	8	7	5	10	14	16	32	48	22	28	45	248
2015	4	5	3	6	6	0	20	32	8	9	3	9	105
2014	5	4	3	1	2	5	19	10	8	0	4	0	61
2013	7	3	5	3	0	11	14	4	9	9	5	0	70
2012	10	7	4	7	2	15	12	3	6	4	1	2	73
2011	5	7	6	8	8	7	30	12	4	7	6	11	111
2010	1	15	8	13	7	10	18	26	18	17	9	11	155
2009	3	4	21	5	16	23	30	11	15	3	7	12	150
2008	9	3	14	2	10	6	11	14	14	5	16	3	97
2007	7	8	5	7	8	7	20	6	21	12	6	10	117
2006	1	4	5	10	10	18	3	2	5	13	6	4	81
2005	7	6	5	1	0	2	9	4	9	6	7	4	60

<sup>a</sup>The statistics are only there through July 2017

<sup>b</sup>There is no entry for Turkey for the year 2016. That said, the place where Turkey usually appears (at the beginning of the “Other” list) is left blank, so I have added the numbers for this “mystery country”. They seem a little high for Turkey, but who knows? There *is* a trend toward increased immigration from Turkey at this time...

**Immigration by land of origin & family type—Turkey**

	<i>Total families</i>	<i>Single parents</i>	<i>Regular – Single</i>	<i>Elderly – Single</i>	<i>Regular – Couple</i>	<i>Elderly – Couple</i>	<i>3–5 persons</i>	<i>6 or more</i>	<i>Other</i>
2017	110	3	39	15	13	27	12	0	1
2016	137	2	44	16	20	35	20	0	0
2015	61	1	31	7	6	6	10	0	0
2014	33	0	19	3	1	3	7	0	0
2013	46	0	22	9	4	5	6	0	0
2012	49	3	28	8	1	4	5	0	0
2011	81	4	53	9	6	1	7	0	1
2010	103	0	61	12	8	11	11	0	0
2009	93	3	50	9	6	10	13	0	2
2008	110	3	39	15	13	27	12	0	1
2007	73	1	40	8	5	8	11	0	0
2006	53	2	28	7	3	5	8	0	0
2005	43	1	25	5	1	8	2	0	1

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