Towards an encompassing perspective on nationalisms: the case of Jews in Turkey during the Second World War, 1939–45

ŞAKİR DİNÇŞAHİN AND STEPHEN R. GOODWIN

Yeditepe University, Istanbul, Turkey

ABSTRACT. This article focuses on the plight of the Jews in Turkey during the Second World War, with the intention of analysing specific historical events through the lenses of leading theories of nationalism. First we review recent developments in historiography that contribute the framework for understanding both the hermeneutical possibilities and limitations when addressing historical texts. Then we employ three theories of nationalism – the ethno-symbolist, instrumentalist and social constructivist – as a means of analysing and interpreting the historical events of the Jewish predicament vis-à-vis the Republic of Turkey. We conclude by suggesting what impact our findings may have on the narratives from this time period, and the way in which we can understand narratives today.

KEYWORDS: Kemalism, nationalism theories, Second World War, Turkish foreign policy, Turkish Jews, wealth tax.

Introduction

The Republic of Turkey was founded on the ruins of an empire whose legacy makes it exceedingly difficult to define the people by a common denominator. At first Islam was adopted as 'the glue' to bind together the peoples of Turkey, but ethnic and religious differences were so pronounced that Islam alone could not overcome the divisions. Although the Lausanne Treaty (1923) granted non-Muslim citizens certain liberties and rights with minority status in the Republic, subsequent Turkish governments pursued contravening policies, especially during the War years of 1939–45. This article focuses specifically on the plight of the Jews in Turkey during the Second World War with the intention of analysing specific historical events through the lenses of leading theories of nationalism. First we review recent developments in historiography that contribute the framework for understanding both the hermeneutical possibilities and limitations when addressing historical texts. With

this framework in place, we then employ three theories of nationalism – the ethno-symbolist, instrumentalist and social constructivist – as a means of analysing and interpreting the historical events of the Jewish predicament vis-à-vis the Republic of Turkey. We conclude by suggesting what impact our findings may have on the narratives from this time period, and the way in which we can understand narratives today.

Framework and method

Recent works surveying the literature of nationalism studies indicate that the classical debate among scholars of nationalism both benefit from and are limited by other fields of study – especially by the mid-twentieth-century developments in history and the philosophy of science. Carr (1961) had already noted this dependency of historians in his seminal work *What Is History?*; more recent works on nationalism studies indicate a similar trend, especially in Smith's *Nationalism and Modernism* (1998) and Özkırımlı's *Theories of Nationalism* (Özkırımlı 2000). Özkırımlı laments the 'Eurocentric nature of the mainstream literature on nationalism' (Özkırımlı 2000: 7) and proceeds to identify other contexts that have contributed to the maturation of the discourse, including ethnicity, gender studies, sexuality, class and life cycles (*ibid.*: 190ff.). The diversity of these approaches indicates that no single theory of nationalism can comprehensively describe and explain nationalist movements. Past attempts in the classical debate attempt to contain the discourse to a definitive perspective or school, thereby risking essentialisation that simultaneously pushed the field into ideological camps while becoming less insightful in analysis.

Because no one theory of nationalism can adequately reflect all the facets of a given nationalist movement in its historical situation, this article aims to demonstrate how employing multiple theories allows for better analysis of a single, multifaceted historical event. In so doing we consciously draw upon precedent established in the field of history, which has undergone a longer period of change than nationalism studies. National identity is the by-product of historians and myth-makers who consciously shape national narratives. Subsequent nationalism theorists examine these narratives through their own preferred hermeneutical schema, of which only a few dominate the discourse. This 'either – or' oligarchy is now being challenged by more inclusive 'both – and' possibilities, to the enrichment of the field.

A plea for historians to seek broader means of interpretation beyond the positivist/empiricist trajectory comes from John Lewis Gaddis in his book *Landscapes of History* (2002). Gaddis argues that it is necessary for historians to gain a wider view of the past in order to better practise their craft. And to do so means a conscious shift away from the hegemonic empirical methods that have so dominated the social sciences in recent years. Because it is not possible to duplicate historical events (Gaddis 2002: 41ff.), the historian must

rely on the perceptions of those on the scene who created the record. However, this 'reliance' can only be partial because the record is limited in both degree and kind. That is, the record is merely a fragment of actual events and, intended or not, is a subjective reduction of events reflecting the author's perspective. Thus, the textual critic must exercise some caution when 'reading' an account so as not to confuse the narrative with a comprehensive record of the actual events. The work of history, or, more accurately, the historiographic process, is not unlike that of a cartographer who surveys the landscape (hence the title of Gaddis's work) and provides a facsimile as a guide for others through 'packaging of vicarious space' (Gaddis 2002: 32–3). The interpreter of history is thus confronted with the arduous task of drawing a circle with a straight edge. The instrument is by itself wholly inadequate, yet by employing this tool at a series of tangential angles, a circle may be approximated. So too a more comprehensive understanding of a historical event may be achieved by multiple use of singular narratives, however inferior they are on their own.

Gaddis claims that one of the purposes of history in its act of representations is to provide a sense of identity (Gaddis 2002: 5), which is not different from many nationalist objectives. Moreover, detachment from the direct experience of the historical event is preferred, says Gaddis, because in the moment of the historical event one's field of vision is limited to one's own senses, whereas the reflection afforded to the historian takes advantage of an expanded horizon (*ibid*.: 14).

In a similar way, a limited horizon is expanded not only by the reflection process, but by the multiple viewpoints brought to bear on the discovery process, which clarifies especially the interpretive task. These processes are complex and nuanced, neither obvious nor simple. There is, then, a kind of self-limitation in attempting to analyse what Gadamer refers to as 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). While each of the narratives is in itself 'complete' – that is, sharing a common meaning with the reader/interpreter so that cogency and coherence are possible – the narratives are not comprehensive, and remain anecdotal in nature (Gadamer 1990: 292). Thus we analyse a historical event by making use of lenses crafted by three different and competing nationalism schools, with the anticipation that by doing so, we afford greater understanding of those historic events. Of the myriad of theoretical perspectives that vie for attention, we have chosen to employ the ethno-symbolist, instrumentalist and constructivist lenses, because these schools bring the greatest clarity to the historical event.

Scholars of the ethno-symbolist position focus attention on ethnic and communal expressions that pre-date the modern period and have developed over a long period of time (*la longue durée*). At the same time, ethno-symbolists agree with modernists that nationalisms are constructed and reflect the verities of the modern age. Most modernists treat ethno-symbolism as a 'less radical version of "primordialism"' (Özkırımlı 2000: 168, citing Breuilly 1996: 150), but the ethno-symbolist position should be considered as a *via media* between

the primordialists and modernists (cf. Smith 1999: 3–27). A. D. Smith, today's most notable proponent of the ethno-symbolist position, seeks to define a 'nation' as a set of processes, not as 'an essence or fixed state that is either present or absent, or that one possesses or lacks' (Smith 2004: 205). Thus, he defines the ethno-symbolist view of national identity as 'the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identification of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements' (Smith 2001, cited in Smith 2004: 209). The ethno-symbolist position views the development of national formation largely as a natural cultural manifestation. Here it may be supplemented by the conscious intentionality that both instrumentalists and modernists identify.

The instrumentalist approach takes ethnicity as 'a tool used by individuals, groups or elites to obtain some larger, typically material end' (Lake and Rothschild 1996: 5). Ethnic groups composed of utility-maximising members are rational entities, and therefore act in ways to maximise the group benefit in competition with other ethnic groups in a society (Hechter 1996: 90–1). In this approach, 'ethnic groups are formed to solve instrumental problems such as access to political and economic resources' (McKay 1982: 402), and represent a symbolic tie that is used for political advantage (Lake and Rothschild 1996: 6). Therefore, ethnic conflict is not really different from other political, economic and ideological confrontations. The instrumentalist approach goes a long way to describe the intentional motives of nationalist leaders for achieving specific purposes, especially in historically conflictual situations. However, its focus is largely fixed on material gains and losses, while passing over the social aspects of nationalism. For this reason, the constructivist approach may offer a reasonable counter-balance.

One definition of constructivism views ethnicity as a 'socially constructed, variable definition of self or other, whose existence and meaning is continuously negotiated, revised and revitalised' (Eller and Coughlan 1996: 46). Because ethnicity is dynamic, driven and cannot be taken for granted, new ethnic identities and groups can be created. Therefore, ethnicity can be invented not only through (re) activations of cultural resources, but also through the installation of new cultural resources that did not exist previously, and that appear to be ancient or primordial (Eller and Coughlan 1996: 47). For example, Anderson (1991) claims that nations are 'political communities' that are 'imagined' as 'inherently limited', and 'sovereign'. Among the cultural resources that facilitated the invention of nations, he enumerates 'religious community, dynastic realm and conception of temporality', each of which indicates a search for a new way of linking together 'fraternity, power, and time'. The expansion of the book market and print technology played a significant role in fostering associated relationships. This, supported by the rise of capitalism and the spread of national languages, made it possible to 'imagine communities'. Additionally, Lake and Rothschild (1996) emphasise the social origins and nature of ethnicity that 'is not an

individual attribute but a social phenomenon' (*ibid.*: 6). In this social process ethnic change takes place, which can be pathological and lead to conflicts (*ibid.*: 7). Hence, it is important to analyse both the newly-invented ethnicity and the process by which it was constructed.

The importance of the theoretical framework outlined here is to grant the reader a landscape vista of the specific historical events, illuminating them in such a way as to avoid reducing the understanding of these events to a single interpretation. In this way, the complexity of the issues and decisions of that time are maintained by a conscious acknowledgment that the plurality of diversely motivated actors is part of the hermeneutical matrix. With this foundation, we now turn to the case study of Jews in Turkey during the Second World War.

The case of Jews in Turkey, 1939–45

In modern times, the period from the eruption of the Second World War until the establishment of the state of Israel is the most vexing period in the history of the Jewish people. Life for unwelcome minorities became increasingly Hobbesian as fascist states chased the vision of expansionist ideologies. During the Second World War, various other governments carried out controversial policies against the Jews. This included Turkey, a country with a documented history of tolerance towards Jews.[1] We will focus here on four such policies undertaken by the Turkish government, namely the migration of Jewish refugees through Turkey to Palestine, the conscription of minorities, the wealth tax and the policy of language reform in Turkey.

Jewish migration to and through Turkey

Jews escaping fascism set a course for Palestine as part of the late nineteenth-century Zionist plan to return to the Promised Land. The most direct overland route passed through Turkey, which maintained strict regulations for Jews transiting through the Republic. Only a few of the *aliyah* (Hebrew: Jews emigrating to Palestine) possessed the required legal documentation stipulating approval to leave their state of origin; the vast majority was thus treated as illegal aliens. While many had left conditions of extreme duress, the journey itself would prove impossible for many.

For many Jews the journey to Palestine was more than an escape from fascist Europe or a religious pilgrimage. It was a return to the homeland and a journey of epic proportions with certain political expectations for nation-building, as described by the ethno-symbolist Smith in his 'basic' level of analysis, drawing upon the 'sacred foundations' of the nation. These are the foundational elements of the belief system of 'nationalism in general', i.e. 'elements of the heritage of memories, myths, symbols, values, and traditions of the community that are regarded as sacred' (Smith 2003: 31). These

elements are expressed in community, territory, history and destiny. For the Jewish community, the heritage of memories, myths, symbols, values and traditions were in the process of reinvigoration. This had its expression especially in territory, and in the revival of the Hebrew language. For both religious and secular Jews, the ethno-symbolist interpretation adequately describes and defines this nation, but does not fully express the Turkish government's calculated response to transiting Jews during the Second World War years.

Thus the instrumentalist approach can be utilised to derive explanations for the attitude of the Turkish government. It may be argued that the Turkish government pursued an instrumentalist policy in admitting to the country only those Jewish experts and professors that would benefit the Republic. In fact, the period of disenfranchisement leading to *Kristallnacht* in Germany coincided with Atatürk's education reforms, which led to the closure of the old School of Sciences (*Darülfünûn*) and the founding of Istanbul University. To meet the immediate demand for distinguished professors from the West, the government offered teaching posts to fifty-eight Jewish professors who had lost their jobs in Germany. In addition, four Austrian-Jewish engineers were invited to assist in the construction of the new building for the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) (cf. Bali 2005a; Levi 1998; Reismann 2006; Widmann 1999).

The instrumentalist perspective illuminates the reasons why the Turkish government granted the right of asylum to this elite cadre of experts, but withheld that right from the rest of the Jews fleeing Nazi oppression. The GNAT formalised this discriminatory policy in June 1938 by enacting the Passport Law (1938), which restricted the entrance of Jews to Turkey. Prime minister Refik Saydam released a press statement clarifying this policy as follows:

Recently, another issue on the agenda is the Jewish question. The Jews among our subject are treated as citizens. This principle will never change ... Concerning the foreign Jews, the Jews who are under pressure from other states will not be accepted [in Turkey], either individually or in large groups. Nevertheless, there are Jews among the experts that we invited for our national and administrative purposes. In case their sisters or families are abroad and desire to come to Turkey we shall accept their requests unless they demand jobs from us; this is to make sure that these [Jewish] experts fulfill their responsibilities with peace of mind. (Saydam 1939)

Once the Second World War began, the Council of Ministers took stronger measures to prevent Jewish immigration to Turkey. The decree ordered that 'whatever their present religion is, the Jews, whose right to life and travel is being constrained by their State of origin, are not allowed to enter and reside in Turkey ...' (Decree 1941a). This decree also regulated the transit of Jews through Turkey to other countries, especially to Palestine. As a result, migrants wishing to pass through Turkish territory had to comply with both the Passport Law (1938) and the Council of Ministers' Decree (1941a), which required a legal permit for the entrance or residence of non-citizen

Jews. Thus, to transit Turkish territory a non-citizen Jew had to: (i) have a visa of the country of destination and at least the visa of the first country he or she would arrive in after Turkey (article 4, 1938 and article 5, 1941a), and (ii) possess the tickets for transportation vessels that would move them beyond Turkish borders (article 5, 1941a), and (iii) possess sufficient funds for access to the transportation vessels (article 4, 1938).

This effectively shifted the fate of the *aliyah* to the British administration in Palestine. However, the British needed to defuse the escalating unrest caused by the Arab majority in Palestine that opposed Jewish immigration and thus refused to issue the Jewish migrants the visas, causing turmoil for both the voyaging Jews and the Turkish government.

The most unfortunate incident of this Turkish policy was the *Struma* tragedy of 25 May 1942. On its way to Palestine with a failing engine, the passenger ship *Struma* could no longer navigate and was forced to make an emergency port of call in Sarayburnu, Istanbul. Despite the diplomatic wrangling between the Turkish authorities, the British Department of Colonial Affairs and the British Colonial Administration in Palestine (Gökay 1993), the British authorities ultimately declined to issue visas for the passengers. Inexplicably, the British Administration issued visas only for children, although Turkey required visas for all 778 Romanian Jewish passengers. In accordance with the 1941 decree of the Council of Ministers, the Turkish authorities could not allow the passengers to enter Turkish territory and proceed by train to their destination, and required instead that the ship leave the port immediately. Assisted by the Turkish maritime police, the *Struma* was towed out of Turkish territorial waters to the Black Sea where it exploded, likely from a torpedo from a submarine of unknown origin. All the passengers perished except a pregnant woman who had been allowed to stay in a hospital, a businessman and his family who had received the necessary permits through the efforts of a Turkish businessman Vehbi Koç, and a passenger who survived both the explosion and the sea's chilling waters (cf. Aytul and Çapın 1985; Bali 2004: 263–72; Bali 2005a: 346–62; Gökay 1993; Yetkin 2002).

Turkey could have assisted the Jewish migrants under the auspices of humanitarian aid, or at least goodwill, citing the Geneva Conventions regarding non-combatants in distress during the time of war. However, Turkey acted instrumentally when it acceded to the wishes of the British, who were more concerned with mollifying the restless Arab population in Palestine than with assisting the refugees fleeing fascist Europe. In this way the Turkish government acted as utility-maximising agents and pursued instrumentalist immigration policies that would minimise the burden and increase the welfare of the Turkish nation.

This instrumentalist nature of the Turkish governments can also be found in the domestic and foreign policy of Turkey during the Second World War years. Ankara pursued a foreign policy of staying out of the War at any cost, leading Turkey to build complex alliances with all of the involved parties. In

the first stage of the War, the Turkish government was unnerved by the possibility of an Italian attack while ultimately expecting a Franco-British victory. Hedging this bet, Turkey signed an accord with Britain and France on 19 October 1939. When Germany gained the upper hand on the battlefield, Turkey immediately adapted its foreign policy accordingly by signing a non-aggression pact and trade agreement with Germany on 18 June 1941. From that point forward, the Turkish government began pursuing a pro-Nazi policy in both foreign and domestic affairs. Following the Soviet victory over Germany in Stalingrad on 31 January 1943, the Turkish government shifted allegiance once again to the Allied powers. '[W]hen the Red Army was fifty kilometers away from Berlin and when Allied powers were in Cologne' (Ersel et al. 2002: 68), Turkey declared war against the Axis powers on 23 February 1945. With this symbolic declaration of war, the government assured Turkey a seat on the correct side of the table at the United Nations Conference convened in San Francisco on 6 March 1945. These shifting alliances illustrate how the Turkish government adopted an instrumentalist approach to foreign policy throughout the War.

Another explanation of the Turkish government's attitude towards the Jews can be derived from a constructivist interpretation. The Republic faced many challenges in constructing a new nation and identity in Turkey. From the early days, the Republic's founding father, Atatürk, sought a meaningful way to define the diverse people living within the territory of the new nation-state. His idea, reflected in the 1924 Constitution, referred to all peoples as 'Turkish' without reference to religion or race, and intended that the multitude of peoples in Turkey should speak the same language and share a common culture. The language campaigns, the activities of public bodies and other cultural enterprises of the single party sought to homogenise the disparate peoples by creating a sense of shared national identity. However, it was recognised that if foreign Jews were allowed to enter and reside in Turkey, then it would be very difficult to integrate them, and the nation-building efforts of the Republic would be seriously damaged.[2] Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, a member of parliament and a journalist, argued this point in January 1939:

Turkey, if necessary, may again ask the men of science and technology for their help without any concern of race. However, opening the Turkish borders to all Jews who have been and will be expelled from some countries is something totally different. The social and economic situation of Turkey stands as a serious barrier for large Jewish groups to reside within the country. Thus, although we sympathise with the Jews who are badly treated in Europe, [this sympathy] does not lead to acceptance of Jewish migrants to our country. (Yalçın 1939).

Further, general distrust towards the non-Muslim minorities in Turkish society deterred the decision-makers from pursuing any policy that would increase the number of non-Muslims, because an increase in this population would be detrimental to the existence of a Turkish nation. Thus, to avoid damage to the nation-building process, the Turkish authorities implemented strict regulations for the Jews who wanted to enter or reside in

Turkey during the Second World War. The journalist Yaşar Nabi expressed this view in 1939:

There is no danger from minorities in Turkey. In our country the total amount of minority groups from three different nations residing in Istanbul is not large enough to prevent the Turkish population from constituting the majority in this city. Despite that, the Turkish nation, which suffered a lot from minorities of foreign blood, cannot tolerate entrance of people from other races into her land again. (Nabi 1939: 37–8)

With this documentation of the historical events, we now realise that the government's policies on Jewish migration to Turkey, and to Palestine through Turkey, are best understood through the interpretive schema of instrumentalism. However, the explanation offered by instrumentalists is confined only to the logic of the government's policy. But the events are seen with greater clarity when the ethno-symbolist and constructivist frameworks are also taken into account. An ethno-symbolic interpretation reveals the sacred foundations of the Jewish nation, and a constructivist schema underlines the role of the nation-building efforts in the formation of Turkey's migration policies. Thus, employing multiple perspectives on history provides us with a more encompassing frame of analysis.

The conscription of minorities to the army

German occupation of Greece and large portions of the Western Balkans made Turkey wary of a potential Nazi invasion, and the government advised those living in Eastern Thrace and Istanbul to move to Anatolia. At the same time the government deported babysitters and household help in order to thwart any intelligence-gathering from private homes. Then, on 22 April 1941, the government called up the reserve soldiers (yirmi kur'a ihtiyatları). This conscription was peculiar because it was directed only at 12,000 non-Muslim males between the ages of twenty-eight (born in 1312 Julian) and forty-seven (born in 1329 Julian) living in Istanbul (Decree 1941b). Nearly a year later on 18 March 1942, the government conscripted non-Muslims living outside Istanbul (Decree 1942). As a result, the entire non-Muslim young male population of Turkey had to serve in the army until they were discharged on 27 July 1942.

   The conscriptions have become some of the most controversial policies in the history of the Republic towards minorities. Following government orders, security forces rounded up non-Muslim men from their homes, workplaces and even on the streets without prior notice. Some had already served in the army, but this played no role in the conscription. Strangely, non-Muslims with mental health problems who were resident in hospitals were among the conscriptees (Gobelyan 2000: 41). Usually they spent a few chilly nights together in city squares (such as Sultanahmet Square in Istanbul), and were then herded into cattle train cars and transported to construction sites throughout Anatolia. If they survived this arduous journey, they were then handed neither proper soldiers' uniforms nor pistols, but picks and shovels to work on the construction of roads, bridges, tunnels, dams and cultural

centres. The physical conditions for these public works soldiers (*nafia askerleri*) were extreme, and some suffered from malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases. Others died while 'serving' their country. This became a defining memory for those who survived the ordeal.

Relatives back home fretted over the fate of their male family members, and the Jewish community feared that their end would come in a similar manner to that of fellow Jews living in Europe (Pinto 2008). Concerns escalated among the community when Turkey and Germany signed a non-aggression pact on 18 June 1941, shortly after the conscriptions. Some suspected a plot to deliver Jews and other non-Muslims into Nazi hands (Bali 2005a: 421). Others speculated that the İnönü-Saydam government was planning to exterminate the Jews within Turkey's borders. These rumours demonstrate the Jews' level of distrust towards the government, and deepened their fear of potential extermination through the adoption of Nazi sympathies and methods. Others more trusting of the government imagined an opposite scenario in which Fevzi Çakmak, chief of the general staff, was attempting to save Jews from imminent genocide by providing them with Turkish army uniforms, which had always been a source of immunity in Turkey (Bali 2005a: 419). Even today, the Turkish Jewish community remembers Fevzi Çakmak with much respect and gratitude.

Although such speculation is valuable to demonstrate the impact of conscription on minorities, it does not provide us with explanations because it is part of the narrative. Focus on the three theories of nationalism supply the interpretive framework required to analyse the reasons for the conscription. Smith's second, or popular, level of ethno-symbolism shifts the level of analysis from institutional issues to more 'popular' expressions of national and religious sentiment (Smith 2003: 29). Here, focus is placed on 'the religious beliefs and practices of the "people" or "folk"' (*ibid.*) and their 'untutored sense' of national and religious self-understanding. This traditional identity is derived from a period that predates the Republic and exhibits 'the persistence of Islam among the Turkish peasantry in Anatolia despite the relative success of secular Kemalism in the cities' (*ibid.*).[3] At this 'popular' level, little trust is extended to the 'other' in times of turmoil, as evidenced by the monitoring and control of minorities through conscription. This sentiment also extended beyond the Turkish peasantry or lower middle classes. Higher-ranking First World War veterans now serving in the GNAT were especially suspicious of potential espionage from within the new Republic, and military conscription became a vehicle to monitor and control the activities of non-Muslims. General Kazım Karabekir, a hero of national liberation and a veteran of the First World War, stated the following in the assembly:

Friends, you should know that non-Turkish places are all nests of spies. This applies to the clubs that our enlightened friends are subscribed to. For instance, Anadolu Club in Büyükada is a place full of Jews. What would two intellectuals, who are members of our party, talk about in this club? Naturally, they would talk about politics and the current situation [in our country]. They will be monitored either by ears or by installations and allow those [Jews] to perform their spy activity as they wish. (Özerergin 1994: 224–5)

This idea was also expressed by several other statesmen and journalists of the period. Ahmed Emin Yalman, a liberal journalist from Istanbul, warned non-Muslims in his daily *Vatan* and requested them to be aware of espionage activities in which they could be used without knowing how (Yalman 1941). Rifat N. Bali, whose work on the history of Jews in Turkey is voluminous, came to the conclusion that one of the main reasons behind the conscriptions was the suspected collaboration between the Turkish Armenians and the Nazis (Bali 2008: 75–6). These examples, which are expressive of the ethno-symbolist position, indicate that this policy was implemented to preclude any collusion between non-Muslim minorities and their European national powers and co-religionists against (Muslim) Turks. Thus, the most plausible reason for the government's revocation of the civil liberties of the minority peoples is ethnic and religious bias that aggravated an already-present distrust of non-Turks, despite the official line that all living in the Turkish Republic are 'Turks' and therefore equal.

However, the fear – even paranoia – of other ethnic groups revealed by the ethno-symbolist position does not go far enough to explain the conscription of those with mental health problems because they would not engage in any sort of espionage. We thus need to turn to a complementary theory. When we analyse the incidents through the lenses of instrumentalism, we can see that the non-Muslim minorities were needed for their manpower for public works because the Muslim male population had already been conscripted. For this reason, non-Muslims with mental health problems could also be exploited for their brawn. Another instrumentalist element, although likely unintended, was the increase in trade and prices around the construction sites where non-Muslim public works soldiers were deployed. Many of these non-Muslim conscriptees were tradesmen from Istanbul, and were financially better off than the villagers of Anatolia. The soldiers and families who came to visit contributed markedly to the economies of the regions. For example, the economy of Yozgat, one of the least densely populated provinces of central Anatolia, saw an economic boom owing to the thousands of non-Muslim soldiers deployed in the region (Sayar 2007: 57–61).

A third perspective can be drawn from constructivism. While the conscriptions added little to Turkish national-identity formation, the impact through indoctrination, training and lectures during the so-called military service may have had a significant impact on the non-Muslims. At the very least, the non-Muslims who had not been to rural parts of Anatolia had the opportunity to have first-hand experience of village life in the region. In some memoirs, the conscriptees' personal notes record empathy for the villagers and their lives, and appreciation of the help of the Muslim Turks that depart widely from the treatment they received from government offices (Kohen 1999). At least some non-Muslim soldiers realised that they were now experiencing the cruelty of the state apparatus, a phenomenon with which the Anatolian masses were long familiar. There is, then, a sense in which identity formation shifted and was reconstructed. However, an unintended impact of the conscriptions was

the persistent deconstruction of the mythological 'Turkish' identity as imagined and projected by Kemalist nationalists. Many non-Muslims could not understand the reasons for the conscriptions because they already considered themselves to be true citizens of the Republic, even 'Turkish' – only non-Muslim. Some of them even converted to Islam, which, when thrown together with non-Muslims in harsh conditions, made their identity and circumstances all the more precarious vis-à-vis the Republic and non-Muslims (Çerkezyan 2003: 123). When the War was over, the non-Muslim communities were forced to deliberate their choice between 'exit' and 'loyalty'. Unsurprisingly, some of them decided to 'exit' and emigrate to Greece or the newly established state of Israel.

These three theories of nationalism offer different explanations for the conscriptions. The ethno-symbolist interpretation points to an ethnic bias – even racism – leading to xenophobia against the minority communities. The Turkish government could be blamed for the adoption of a racist policy against the Jewish minority if we were to focus only on the ethno-symbolic interpretation. However, this would be quite misleading. The instrumentalist interpretation reveals the economic implications of the conscriptions, yet even this does not reveal the landscape fully. A constructivist analysis shows us the harmful effects that the conscriptions had on the nascent Turkish national identity as originally envisioned by Kemalist nationalists.

Wealth tax

The wealth tax, which was adopted by the GNAT on 11 November 1942, engendered enormous trauma among the minorities of the Republic because of its discriminatory and arbitrary nature (GNAT 1942: 26–35). Although the government first introduced the wealth tax with the intention of imposing it on those who profited unfairly from wartime conditions, the tax targeted only the minority groups of Turkey, especially the Jewish minority. Once the tax commissions determined who was subject to the tax, which was announced on 17 December 1942, the minority communities had only one month to pay it. On 21 January 1943, the properties of those who could not pay were confiscated and began to be sold (*Tan* 1943). For many individuals, even this measure was insufficient to pay the whole amount. The government then forced them to do heavy labour constructing roads in Aşkale to pay off their debt (*Official Gazette* 1943a: 4258–9). On 27 January 1943, the first group of non-Muslim 'tax delinquents' was sent to labour camps in Eastern Anatolia on a train from Istanbul's Haydarpaşa Station (*Cumhuriyet* 1943). They were interned there until the end of 1943 (Decree 1943). When the labour camps were closed following the defeat of the Nazi forces by the Soviets in February 1943. Eventually, the wealth tax was abolished for good on 15 March 1944 (GNAT 1944: 46) following President İnönü's meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill in Cairo on 4–7 December 1943.

There are various perspectives on the reasons for the tax. An official interpretation would typically point to the wartime economic conditions (Saraçoğlu 1942: 14–22; Kayra 2011). In fact, shortages during the War led to 'the sharp decline in imports and the diversion of large resources for the maintenance of an army of more than one million' (Owen and Pamuk 1998: 24). In order to overcome the effects of the shortage in the economy, the government passed the National Protection Law (*Milli Korunma Kanunu*), which fixed prices and instituted rationing. Predictably, city merchants and traders responded by hoarding goods. This in turn advantaged the merchants, who were mostly from the non-Muslim communities and became war profiteers (Kafaoğlu 2002).

Additionally, the government met its growing expenditure by printing more money. The economy thus suffered from increased government spending, spiralling inflation and a burgeoning black market. In trying to resolve the problems of market supply, the minister of trade, Behçet Uz, lifted some articles of the National Protection Law, but this created inflationary prices and led to social unrest among the merchant class who suffered acute losses. The government then levied the wealth tax on merchants in an attempt to restore order. This revenue was used for government expenditure to bridge the supply gap and pull demand down, addressing at once all three artificially created problems (Levi 1998: 140–4).

This action might have been legitimate if it had been imposed on all war profiteers without respect to ethnicity. However, non-Muslims in general and the Jewish community in particular suffered disproportionately at the hands of the independent commissioners tasked with assessing wealth among the non-Muslims. The Jewish community was widely perceived to be wealthier than non-Jews, who claimed that Jewish affluence came through fraudulent means. Throughout the War, the commentary by journalists and political cartoonists in the non-Jewish communities constructed a negative image of the Jews, portraying them as selfish, mean and wealthy merchants living in the most beautiful and expensive districts of Istanbul. Speaking a strange language, Jews were portrayed as a people unattached and indifferent to the country and who, in return for material benefit, could easily betray the Republic. This anti-Semitic portrayal of the Jews created by the press spread widely among the people and the decision-makers in Turkey, and was to play a significant role in the nationalisation of the controversial policies against the Jews. Consequently, the government levied higher taxes on the Jews, resulting in a greater number of Jews who were forced to sell their possessions and perform heavy labour in Aşkale (cf. Akar 2000; Aktar 1999; Bali 2005b; Çetinoğlu 2009; Ökte 1951).

It has also been claimed that the wealth tax turned into a campaign to shift the assets of non-Muslims to the state treasury and into the hands of the newly emerging Muslim bourgeoisie. Determining the amount of tax to be paid by each citizen, tax commissions referred to four ethnic categories: Muslim, non-Muslim, foreigner and *dönme* (a derogatory term for Turkish citizens who

converted from Judaism to Islam in the seventeenth century). Among them, non-Muslims and *dönmes* were forced to pay taxes disproportionate to their incomes. Thus, the Turkish government's wealth tax plan proceeded along instrumentalist lines. While implementing the tax, the government officials referred to ethnic and religious ties to serve the interest of their own ethnicity (McKay 1982: 402; Lake and Rothschild 1996: 6). In other words, the government instrumentalised ethnic identity to the economic advantage of Turkish Muslim groups. As a reflection of this instrumentalist interpretation, prime minister Şükrü Saraçoğlu was quoted saying, 'This law is also a law of revolution. We now face an opportunity which can win us our economic independence. We will in this way eliminate the foreigners [non-Muslims] who control our market and give the Turkish market to Turks' (as cited in Koçak 1996: 508).

Another official argument to defend the discriminatory nature of the wealth tax was based on the idea that 'non-Muslim minorities did not shed their blood for the country but were only traders and became wealthy ... [N]ow they have to pay the price of the blood shed by Muslims for the country in which they had been living safe and sound'. For example, Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, who was a high-ranked official in the Ministry of Trade in those days, replied to the (re) calculation requests of Behor Gomel and Avram Galanti, two well-known representatives of the Jewish elite in Turkey, with the blood tax argument: 'Turks have shed their blood for centuries, Jews on the other hand grew in numbers, made commerce, and accumulated wealth; what if they give some money?' (Aydemir 1976: 235–6). This argument, which was surprisingly accepted by Gomel and Galanti, reflects the primordial element of the ethno-symbolist perspective on the wealth tax issue. In line with this argument, the taxpayers were not enlisted with respect to their income, or what they could do to benefit the Republic, but with respect to their blood that had not yet been shed for the country.

Here again, each of the three nationalism theories may be seen in the events surrounding the wealth tax. Although the official line of thought prefers to underline the wartime economic conditions that propelled the adoption of the wealth tax law, the way in which it was implemented seriously damaged the ethnically blind nation-building project of Kemal Atatürk. On the contrary, this law led to the erosion of minorities' confidence in the state. A constructivist approach offers an explanation for the discriminatory characteristic of the law. During the War the media constructed in the minds of the people and decision-makers a new Jewish identity that ran parallel to the anti-Semitic image of Jews in Europe. It seems that this anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews coincided with the government's long-term project of creating a Muslim, 'national' bourgeoisie. Therefore, an instrumentalist analysis yields the view that the government used this law opportunistically to transfer wealth and assets of 'disloyal' non-Muslims to 'trustworthy' Muslims. Here, an ethno-symbolic analysis completes the picture with reference to the primordialist aspect of the law, which refers to blood, race and religion as the basis for the discrimination rather than a misperception, prejudice or economic policy.

Language reform

Language reform of the Kemalist nationalists in general, and the language policy of the government during the Second World War in particular, is another contested issue. From a constructivist interpretation, the early Republic adopted cultural reforms to shape a synthetic identity of Turkishness in order to create a nation that shared a common culture and language. Kemalists believed that encouraging monolinguality across the fledgling country would expedite the nation-building process, and therefore became one of the chief ambitions for national unity. The single, pro-Kemalist party and its organs launched language campaigns under the banner 'Citizen, Speak Turkish!'. This campaign focused mostly on non-Muslim minorities and some Muslim groups such as Kurds and Arabs. In his autobiography, Altan Öymen refers to this aspect of language campaigns as follows:

Kurds, Arabs, and citizens from other ethnic origins who were previously the subjects of the Ottoman [empire] and currently citizens of [Republican] Turkey shall now say 'I am Turk', speak Turkish, or learn to speak Turkish if they cannot. Greeks, Armenians, and Jews who now mostly live in Istanbul shall act similarly. They shall preserve their religion. But at least they shall speak Turkish. (Öymen 2004: 282)

The process of identity construction was still in progress during the War. For the Jews, this constructivist project encompassed the idea of building a Turkish community whose religion was Jewish but who otherwise spoke Turkish and enjoyed Turkish culture. The elite of the Jewish community in Turkey published articles advising the Jewish community to speak Turkish, at least in public places (Bali 2005a: 382). Among them Munis Tekinalp [Mois Kohen] and Avram Galanti encouraged the Jewish community to speak Turkish (Tekinalp 1928) and communicated the idea that Jews in Turkey have no issue with speaking Turkish (Galanti 1928). In this way a new identity of Turkish Jewry would be constructed that would also contribute to the nation-building project of the Republic.

Turkification spearheaded by the government and the Jewish elite is also a clear example of instrumentalist nationalism. The project to transform the Jewish identity into a Turkish one with a symbolic tie to religion was broadly acclaimed by the Jewish elite who may have thought that, when elsewhere their existence was threatened, their political and economic goals could best be realised through a Judeo-Turkish identity. Moreover, the success of this identity became a matter of security for the Turkish Jews. Behind the policy of speaking only Turkish, the Jewish elite could conceal the real goal of securing a more peaceful and stable existence in Turkey. As such, both the Jewish elite and the Turkish government achieved a symbiotic relationship by supporting the Republican idea of Judeo-Turkish identity.

A significant publication of the Jewish community was the biweekly magazine *La Boz de Türkiye*, first published in August 1939 in Turkish, French and Ladino by Albert Kohen, an ardent member of the Turkish Cultural Union. Under Kohen's editorship, the magazine aimed to provide a

more secure environment for Jews in Turkey. On the occasion when Rosh Hashana and the Language Day of the Republic coincided (26 September 1940), the Balat Turkish Cultural Union publicly urged Jews to speak Turkish. During the Rosh Hashana ceremony in the Balat Synagogue, leaders urged their community to swear to speak only Turkish from that point forward (cf. Artam 1940).

The Office of Chief Rabbi also felt the need to declare its stand on the language issue. On 8 October 1940 – the same day on which the Jews in Turkey were supposed to swear to speak only Turkish – the Rabbi Rafael Saban announced his position on the radio and in the synagogues throughout Turkey: '[W]e see that some of our citizens continue to speak languages other than Turkish on the ferries and other places. Naturally, true citizens get angry and resent this situation; therefore it has become necessary to warn you and the people around you, and to invite you all to speak slowly and only the Turkish language' (as cited in Bali 2005a: 393–4). So both the Kemalist and Jewish elite found that the single-language policy benefited their interests and had no issue with this kind of instrumentalisation.

An ethno-symbolic interpretation offers yet another perspective. In the first – or 'official' – level examined by Smith, the 'elite-sponsored designations both of nations and nationalism, and of religion' can alter identity constitutively. Here the interpretation is similar to that of modernists who formulate definitions by focusing on projections of the elite class. 'National identity' is shaped in the public domain and through religion as expressed in official doctrines and rites (Smith 2003: 28) and taught by the community's sanctioned leaders. For Jews and Turks during the Second World War, we find that sufficient commonality existed between the elites of both communities that sharing the same living space was not impossible. Both preferred the modernising vision to religious tradition, found a common bond in secular state-building and sought a common language to this end. Hence, the Jewish elite was essentially co-opted for Kemalist state-building, and no significant objections were raised to the notion of 'Turkish Jewry'.

Receptivity was not so univocal outside the elite classes, however. For example, the state-orchestrated language campaign encountered mixed responses within the Jewish community. Younger Jews improved their communication skills to near that of native speakers. This encouraged them to exchange their Hebrew names for Turkish ones, thereby gaining a new identity as Turks who practised Judaism. However, the campaign failed among the older people, who continued to speak Ladino and French. They also resisted speaking Turkish because their accent revealed their non-Turkish identity and exposed them to ridicule. The leader of the Jewish community in Nice, Eli Eskenazi, criticised the attitude of Jews who refused to speak Turkish (Eskenazi 1940). With the exception of this critique, it seemed that the debate had come to an end, even though the older generation continued to speak French and Ladino.

Resentment to the language policy was also voiced by the ultra-nationalist, Turanist-racist ideological current, which emerged presumably as a result of Nazi influence in Turkey (cf. Göksu-Özdoğan 2001). This particular group perceived the 'melting pot' project of the Republic and Kemalist Jewish elite as a useless effort because to them it was pointless to expect the Jews and other non-Muslims to become sincere citizens of Turkey. They were insistent that Jews should be allowed to speak Ladino and French and to have Hebrew names; otherwise, distinguishing Jews from 'real Turks' would become very difficult. Nihal Atsız, an ardent representative of this ideological current, once argued that:

> They should stop trying to fool us by establishing associations of Turkification; instead they should remain loyal Turkish subjects ... because we neither expect them to become Turkish nor desire such an incident. Mud cannot become iron in an oven, no matter how long you dry it. Similarly, a Jew cannot become a Turk, no matter how hard he tries. Turkishness is a privilege granted by God [only for some] mortal human beings, and especially not for Jews. (Atsız 1997: 530–1)

The three schools of nationalism shed light on different angles of the language policy of the Republic. From a constructivist point of view, the government attempted to better integrate or even assimilate Jews into mainline Turkish culture. The Jewish intelligentsia welcomed this nationalist project because a Judeo-Turkish identity would provide a secure environment for them at home in Turkey in the context of the Holocaust abroad. This makes the Turkification language project a clear example of instrumentalist nationalism that benefited the ambitions of both the Turkish government and the elite of the Jewish community. Resentment to this instrumentalist approach came from non-elite sectors of Turkish society whose attitudes necessitate an ethno-symbolic analysis. From an ethno-symbolic point of view, ultra-nationalist groups resisted the construction of a Judeo-Turkish identity based on the supposition that religion and race, not language, were the true determinants of nationality.

Conclusions

Recognising that no single narrative can adequately describe a historical event, we maintain that a variety of interpretations are both possible and necessary in order to explain the plight of the Jews in Turkey during the Second World War. Beyond this, our article supports the proposition put forward by Gaddis that a distanced examination of historical events allows for greater insight. The ability to survey the landscape of history opens the hermeneutical horizon and counters the possibility of any single voice dominating the discussion, allowing for a democratisation of the discourse.

That being the case, a framework for interpretation is still necessary, and our choice of three competing nationalism theories serves this purpose well. Through these three lenses we may not only get a better view of the actions of

selected actors, but also ascertain their motives and purposes. With this insight we are then able to feel the plight of the Jews against the backdrop of the government's pro-German stance that determined their policies.

But it is our hope that the effort here goes beyond providing a better explanation of the historical events involving Jews in Turkey during the Second World War years. It affords, we think, greater insight into the nation-building project of the Republic of Turkey as a whole; it offers a peek behind the curtain, as it were, to reveal the actors, power structures, motives, fears and anxieties of a government wanting on the one hand to remain true to the modernising vision of Kemal Atatürk, and on the other to avoid the incumbent hazards of finishing the Second World War aligned with the losing team, as was the case after the First World War. This article demonstrates that the Turkish government was successful in the latter initiative, i.e. maintaining the power and integrity of the state while winning a place with the victors at the formation of the UN. But the government achieved this success only by severely compromising the intentions of the Republic's founder, who imagined the new Turkish nation as a community of various ethnic groups that necessarily included both Muslims and non-Muslims.[4] Envisioned as a place for all peoples to live with equality and justice, minorities – and especially the Jews during the Second World War – fell victim to the unequal and unjust policies of the government that favoured Muslims/Turks over others. Thus, by using multiple theories of nationalism as tools of interpretation, explaining (*Erklaren*) the multifaceted aspects of these historical events is simplified; this in turn affords greater understanding (*Verstehen*) of the motives and means of those governmental actors driving Turkey's nation-building project during the Second World War years.

Notes

1 The story of the Jews who escaped persecution in Spain to settle in the Ottoman Empire under Bayezid II in the late fifteenth century is the most outstanding example of friendship and tolerance of Turks towards Jews, and is regularly repeated in the Republic period.

2 The efforts of some Turkish diplomats to rescue Jews from the Nazi regime should also be mentioned (cf. Shaw 1993). Selahattin Ülkümen (the Turkish consul in Rhodes) and Necdet Kent (the Turkish Consul in Marseilles) interpreted the Turkish Law on Citizenship quite broadly and granted citizenship to Jews, thereby saving lives. However, this was exceptional to the general policy of the Turkish government that restricted the migration of non-citizen Jews to Turkey to a handful of experts and professors who could contribute to the development of the Republic.

3 Although this reference is to the contemporary situation, it is not unlike the Second World War period and is not entirely anachronistic.

4 On various occasions, Kemal Atatürk made it clear that Turkish nationality disregards racial differences. Prior to the establishment of the Republic, he clearly underlined multiethnic Islamic nationalism in Turkey. For example, on 1 May 1920 he said that 'what is intended here . . . is not only Turks, not only Circassians, not only Kurds, not only Lazes, but the Islamic ethnic elements of all of these, a sincere community . . . The nation, the preservation and defense of which we have undertaken, is not only composed of one ethnic element. It is composed of various Islamic elements' (as cited in Dankwart 1973: 106). After the promulgation of the Republic, Kemal

Atatürk went a step further by redefining Turkish nationality without any reference to religion – that is, Islam. In line with this approach, the new Constitution of 1924 included the following definition of Turkishness: 'The people of Turkey, who are bound to the Republic of Turkey through citizenship, are considered to be Turk irrespective of their religion or race' (1924 Constitution, article 88). In fact, Atatürk appointed several high-ranking bureaucrats among the non-Muslims of Turkey in the early years of the Republic. He also placed several Christians and Jews on the candidate list, resulting in their election to the TGNA. However, we should also bear in mind the exceptional circumstances resulting in the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1924, and also the Thrace events against the Jews in 1934.

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