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Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s

SONER CAGAPTAY

Turkish nationalism in the 1930s is an important episode in Turkish history, whose legacy seems to have imprinted itself on modern Turkey. During that decade, which witnessed the rise of nationalism in the European continent, but especially in Eastern Europe,¹ the idea that the Turks were a glorious nation rose to prominence in Turkey. ‘Turkish History Thesis’ and ‘Sun Language Theory’ emerged in a series of official conferences and publications, emphasizing the role of race in defining the nation. While there are many excellent earlier studies of Turkish nationalism,² works on nationalism in the 1930s are few and only recent.³ This article aims to contribute to our knowledge of the 1930s by analysing the interaction between Turkish nationalism and race in this decade. It examines the extent to which race shaped nationalism throughout the period.

As late as the 1920s, Turkishness had been mostly defined independently of race. At that time Turkey was busy trying to recover from the devastating destruction of a decade of wars, spanning the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 and the Turco-Greek War of 1920–22. At that time, millions of Turkish and non-Turkish Muslim immigrants, expelled to Anatolia and Thrace from Europe and the Black Sea basin since the eighteenth century, banded with the Anatolian Turks and Muslims. These defended Turkey, a land that they saw as their home.⁴ In 1922, Turkey was liberated, and in 1923, a republic was established. An important demographic change at the time had been the death and emigration of most Anatolian Christians over the previous decade. (As late as 1912, Christians made up 20 per cent of Turkey’s population; in 1927, they were merely over 2 per cent).⁵ Yet, even then, Turkey still had a heterogeneous population. This included Turks, Jews and Christians, but also diverse non-Turkish Muslim groups such as Kurds, Arabs, Lazes, Muslim Georgians, Greek-speaking Muslims, Albanians, Macedonian Muslims, Pomaks, Serb Muslims, Bosnians, Tartars, Circassians, Abkhazes, and

Daghestanis, among others.⁶ The 1924 Constitution of the republic aimed to address this diversity: ‘The People of Turkey, regardless of religion and race, are Turks as regards citizenship.’⁷ Ankara wished to consolidate as many of the country’s minorities as possible into the Turkish nation.⁸ The government expected that non-Turkish Muslims would be assimilated. For instance, it treated Kurdish resistance with considerable force.⁹ As for the Jews, Ankara hoped for their assimilation, too.¹⁰ Yet, the attitude was much different towards Greek and Armenian Christians. Ankara shared the legacy of a decade of hostility with them. Once these communities renounced their age-old privileges in 1925, the government resorted to various methods to alienate them. It used legal measures to make their life difficult.¹¹ On the other hand, when Christians left the country, as in the case of the Armenian exodus of 1929–30, Ankara looked the other way.¹²

Thus, in the 1930s, the rise of the notion of race ushered in questions: how would this phenomenon affect the practices of the state vis-à-vis the minorities. Would Ankara create a two-tier society, comprised of ethnic Turks and others? Moreover, would the desire to assimilate the Jews and the non-Turkish Muslims vanish? In answering these questions, I will first examine the ascent of the notion of race under Turkish nationalism in the 1930s. Then I will scrutinize the affairs between Ankara and the Jews (and Muslim minorities) in this era, to study the role of race therein. Here, I will take one aspect of this relationship, the ‘Citizen Speak Turkish’ campaign. Inasmuch as race became a primary marker of Turkishness in the 1930s, this did not prevent Ankara from attempting to assimilate various minorities. With this, I will conclude that, far from using race to alienate the Jews and the non-Turkish Muslims, Ankara employed it as a vehicle to co-opt them and, unexpectedly even the Christians, into the Turkish nation.

The ‘Turkish History Thesis’, which marked the ascent of race under Turkish nationalism, emerged in 1930–31. Initially, the Turkish Hearths’ Committee for the Study of Turkish History (Türk Ocakları Türk Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti – TOTTTTH) had nurtured the thesis. The committee, established on 28 April 1930, had been instructed by Atatürk to produce works on Turkish history. Its first major study, a 606-page book titled, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (General Themes of Turkish History), was published in 1930.¹³ This was a survey of Turkish history by Turkish scholars.

In 1931, the TOTTTTH was reorganized as the Society for the Study of Turkish History (Türk Tarihini Tetkik Cemiyeti – TTTC). Atatürk dictated a programme for the new organization to Afet (İnan) (1908–85), a prominent member of the organization, and his adopted daughter. The Society was responsible for disseminating Turkish national history ‘to its real owners, the

Turkish people'.¹⁴ It would accomplish this 'under the supervision and responsibility of the government authorities and the municipal governments'.¹⁵ Then, the programme gave the TTTC a number of other responsibilities. The organization would establish a committee, the Society for the Study of the Turkish Language (Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti – TDTC), which would conduct historical research on Turkish. Atatürk was convinced that Turkish and the Indo-European languages were related and that Turkish was the root of these languages. The TDTC would launch a comparative study of these languages to show that 'the Turkish language was the most influential factor in the development and progress of all the world languages'.¹⁶

A second responsibility of the TTTC was to 'synthesize and build' the study on, *The Main Themes of Turkish History*.¹⁷ Then the organization produced a revised version of this work titled, *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlarına Methal* (Introduction to the General Themes of Turkish History).¹⁸ Next, it called for a conference in Ankara for 2–11 July 1932. At this congress, the delegates discussed 'the history of Turkish civilization, anthropological characteristics of the Turkish race, and Turkish language and literature'.¹⁹ They also conferred on the 'Turkish History Thesis', which contended that the Turks were a great and ancient race.²⁰ Afet İnan detailed this further: the Turks were a bracycephalic people,²¹ whose roots went back to Central Asia, where they had lived thousands of years ago. In Central Asia, they had created a bright civilization around an inner sea. When this inner sea dried up due to climatic changes, they left their original home and moved in all directions to civilize the rest of the world. They went to China in the east; to India in the south; to Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Anatolia, and Greece, and Italy in the west.²²

This narrative had four implications. First, the Turks were the ancestors of all the bracycephalic peoples including the Indo-Europeans, whose origins went back to central Asia.²³ Secondly, the Turkish race had created civilizations in all the lands, to which the Turks had migrated. Consequently, the contemporary Turks were the inheritors of the glories of ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, and Greeks, among others. In addition, they were the owners of the earliest Hittite civilization in Anatolia, then the Turkish homeland, since the Turks were its original, autochthonous inhabitants.²⁴ Finally, and most importantly, the thesis added that all Anatolia's inhabitants were Turks. In this regard, Dr Reşit Galip (1897–1934), Minister of Education, produced perhaps the most radical interpretation of Anatolian history. During 1932, Minister Galip, who was described as a 'revolutionary intellectual enthusiastic for change',²⁵ had a meeting with Agop Martayan (Dilaçar) (1895–1979), professor at the Istanbul Darülfünun (University). Martayan, an Ottoman Armenian, and a Bulgarian citizen, had recently come to Turkey to write a book on the 'common origins of the Turks and the

Armenians'.²⁶ At this meeting, the two were joined by a representative of the Istanbul Armenian daily, *Jamanak* (Time). Dr Galip told his Armenian counterparts that 'anthropological comparisons and ancient historical data leave no room to doubt. . .that the Armenians have the same ethnical origins as the Turks'.²⁷ Then he added: 'In expressing my conviction on this point I believe I have sufficiently indicated the logical line of conduct which the Armenians in Turkey should follow with regard to the performance of their duties as Turkish citizens.' The Minister's persuasion about the common origins of the Turks and the Armenians was rooted in the 'History Thesis'. In this view, Turkish race and ethnicity united all the inhabitants of the country.

This accent on race is striking. In this matter, the historians in the TTTC, as well as İnan and Atatürk, who did much of the actual work behind the Thesis,²⁸ seem to have been inspired by various West European scholars. For instance, İnan had personal connections with Eugène Pittard (1867–1962), the Swiss expert on racial studies. In the 1930s, he became his doctoral adviser in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Geneva, where he wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the Turkish race.²⁹ On the other hand, Atatürk is known to have read a number of seminal works on race, including Pittard's *Les Races et l'histoire: Introduction Ethnologique à l'histoire*, as well as Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's *Essai sur l'Inégalité des races humaines*, and Alfred Cort Haddon's *Les Races humaines*,³⁰ among others.³¹

The First Turkish History Congress ended with the affirmation of the *History Thesis*. Although, since their emigration from Central Asia, the Turks had 'crossed with other races', the Turkish language had preserved their memories, cultural characteristics, and everything else that made them a nation, including their most cherished possession, the Turkish intellect.³² Since Turkish had conserved the characteristics of the nation, only those, who spoke it, could claim Turkish racial descent. Only, they would be eligible for membership to the nation. Atatürk had pointed this out even before the congress:

One of the significant characteristics of the nation is language. One, who regards himself as a member of the Turkish nation, should first of all and in every case, speak Turkish. If, someone, who does not speak Turkish, claims membership to Turkish culture and community, it would not be right to believe in this.³³

Such emphasis made language-through-ethnicity and race the main markers of Turkishness. According to Atatürk and İnan, other foundations of Turkishness were 'unity in political existence and homeland, as well as historical and ethical affinity'.³⁴ Consequently, there was now no mention of Islam as a component of Turkishness. This was because during the 1920s, staunch

Kemalism had pushed Islam to the margins of society. Secularism aimed to strip the Turkish Muslims of their predominant collective identity, Islam. Ahmet Yıldız argues that Muslims, who constituted 97.5 per cent of the population at this time, needed a new collective self. At this point, Kemalist secularism offered them ethnic Turkishness as an alternative identity.³⁵

Following the History Congress, on 26 September 1932, Kemalism took another important ideological step with the convening of the first Turkish Language Congress in Istanbul. In many respects, this was an extension of the History Congress. A US diplomatic correspondent noted:

Both the History and Language congresses tended to prove the potency and historical significance in ancient times, the decline under the influence of foreign influence of foreign factors and elements and, finally the renaissance under the Republican regime of the Turkish people and language respectively.³⁶

The conference discussions confirmed these observations. First, the participants emphasized the need to compare Turkish with other languages.³⁷ They used phonetic similarities to assert affinity between Turkish and other languages. Such arguments ranged from declaring that Turkish was an Indo-European language³⁸ to claiming connections between Turkish, Sumerian, and the Indo-European languages.³⁹ Just as the History Congress had asserted that most major nations descended from the Turks, the Language Congress argued that most major languages were of Turkish origin.

Next, the participants focused on language purification. For instance, MP Mehmet Şeref (Aykut) (1874–1939) (Edirne) emphasized the need to revive Turkish to its splendour. While ‘throughout the recent centuries’, Turkish had ‘died out as a written language’, it had flourished in the spoken, lay language.⁴⁰ Now, a gap existed between written and spoken Turkish. Dr Reşit Galip added that due to this gap, ‘the language being taught at present’ could hardly be called Turkish ‘since it is intelligible only to one-tenth of the entire population of the country’.⁴¹ To alleviate this, Turkish had to be reformed based on the spoken language. This could be done, first by bridging the chasm between spoken and written Turkish, and then, by purifying the language.

In view of this, the Language Congress unleashed an interest in language purification. The first signal of this came on 12 July 1932, when the TDTC purified its name. The words, *tetkik*, (study, investigation, research) and *cemiyet* (society), both of Arabic origin, were dropped from the name of the organization, in favour of pure Turkish words, *araştırma*, (research or investigation) and *kurum* (society). Accordingly, the TDTC became the

Society for Research on the Turkish Language (Türk Dili Araştırma Kurumu – TDAK). This example revealed the purification strategy: Arabic and Persian words would be replaced with pure Turkish ones. The latter would be gathered first, by collecting substitutes from the spoken language and second, by coining new words. Consequently, during 1932–34, the TDAK gathered and coined thousands of new words with the help of the government.⁴²

With nationalistic fervour running high, and the purification movement at its zenith, the TDAK organized the Second Turkish Language Congress, during 18–23 August 1934. This was a final forum for discussing the purification efforts. Consequently, in May 1935, the organization published a dictionary, *Osmanlıca-Türkçe Cep Kılavuzu* (Ottoman-Turkish Pocket Guide), which listed replacements for a wide range of Arabic and Persian words. This was the epitome of a linguistic break between Turkish on the one hand and Arabic and Persian on the other. Words, some of which had existed in Turkish for a millennium, were purged. Among examples were *sulh* (peace), *harb* (war), and *milli* (national) from Arabic. These respectively, became *barış*, *savaş*, and *ulusal*. On the other hand, *germ* (hot) and *efsun* (magic) from Persian were replaced with *sıcak* and *büyük* from pure Turkish.

By late 1935, the purification movement faced a practical problem: the campaign had been carried out with such haste that many words had been purged from Turkish, without a publicly accepted replacement in place. Most people were unable to understand pure Turkish.⁴³ Almost in acceptance of the hasty nature of the purification efforts, the TDAK declared that not all words needed to be replaced right away. Furthermore, words, which had earlier been regarded as borrowings from other languages, were, in fact, originally Turkish. Thus, there was no reason to get rid of them.⁴⁴ This heralded the next significant thesis of 1930s Kemalism, the ‘Sun Language Theory’, which was publicized at the Third Turkish Language Congress, held in Istanbul, 24–31 August 1936.

The ‘Language Theory’ mirrored the ‘History Thesis’. Based on a complex set of assertions and etymological arguments, which had been developed by Atatürk,⁴⁵ it declared that all major world languages descended from Turkish. According to İbrahim Necmi Dilmen (1889–1945), Secretary General of the TDAK, ‘the multitude of words in every etymological dictionary, the origin of which remained unknown’ had led to consideration among Turkish linguists. ‘While comparing ancient Turkish words with the vocabulary of other languages’, they had been puzzled by ‘a series of analogies encountered’, such as that between ancient Turkish word *sily* (sun) and the French word *soleil* (sun), among others. In answering this dilemma, the Turkish linguists contended that the earliest Turks, who were ‘the oldest race in the world’, had been sun worshippers. They had ‘derived their conceptions of life from the idea of the sun’,⁴⁶ and had developed a language based on

it.⁴⁷ Consequently, the original ‘Turkish “Sun Language” was the parent of all other tongues’.⁴⁸

One of the main proponents of the ‘theory’ was Professor Agop Martayan (Dilaçar). (Following a 1934 law, which had stipulated that all citizens adopt Turkish last names, Atatürk had given Professor Martayan a pure Turkish last name, Dilaçar, in lieu of his Armenian name. Indicative of his role in the purification movement, Professor Martayan’s new last name meant, ‘tongue/language opener’ in Turkish). In a newspaper article, which he wrote during the congress, Professor Dilaçar elaborated on the implications of the ‘theory’:

The question of searching for the race and the predominant culture of this land, which has been a cradle, has been studied, and it has been established. . .that the material home of those who are the dominant race in this country – as regards culture and language – was Central Asia, which was inhabited by Alpine bracycephals – the Turks. Central Asia to which scholars have attempted to connect the Sumerian race and language and the *mohenjodaro*es has, in addition to the Ural-Altai group, brought forth subsequently the Arab, Davidian [*sic*], Greek, Kludian, German, Armenian, Indo-European, Hittite, Etruscan, Hasik, Bantu, Egyptian – that is all the languages in the world.⁴⁹

What is striking in Dilaçar’s arguments, in addition to the Kemalist claim to trace all major cultures in the world to the Turks, was his insistence to link the Armenians and Hittites to a common origin with the Turks. Dilaçar’s interest in doing this for the Armenians is understandable from his perspective, given his aforementioned 1932 encounter with Galip. Meanwhile, his proclivity to connect the Hittites to the Turks became explicable during 1937, in the Second History Congress.

The Second Turkish History Congress was organized in Istanbul, on 20–25 September 1937 by the TTTC, now renamed Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu – TTK). The paper read by İnan at this meeting was ground-breaking. In her exposé titled, ‘Türk Tarih Kurumunun Arkeolojik Faaliyeti’ (The Archaeological Activity of the Turkish History Association), she pointed out TTK’s and Atatürk’s new ideological inclinations. At this time, studies on race had become popular in Turkey. On 6 August 1935, for instance, a team of TTK scholars had excavated the grave of the famous Ottoman architect Sinan, to carry out ‘scientific research’ on his skeleton in order to investigate his ‘morphological and scientific personality’.⁵⁰ Now, in her presentation, İnan emphasized Turkey’s historical riches, which had been recently recovered in various archaeological excavations. Anthropometrical

research on bones at these excavations proved the lineage between contemporary Turks and the earliest inhabitants of Anatolia. Excavations showed that the Turkish race had been in Anatolia from very early historical times. In conclusion, İnönü hailed Anatolia as the land, 'whose racial characteristics have always preserved the Turkish core'.⁵¹

Eugène Pittard added that while Anatolia had been invaded and inhabited by many different waves of settlers throughout the centuries, 'it is best to accept that these generations of invaders spoke different languages and carried different names'. However, at least a large part of these people, who had invaded Anatolia over the centuries, definitely belonged to the same original Turkish race. Hence, the 'Kurds, Armenians, Lazes and the others, who are, largely, brachycephalic', all derived their origins from 'the same original, primitive mass'.⁵² The History Congress concluded that Anatolia had been embedded with the Turkish race since the ancient times. All of its past inhabitants, including the Hittites, were members of this race. Moreover, Anatolia's current populations, such as the Armenians, were also Turks by the virtue of race, whether or not they spoke Turkish.

In the 1930s, the ideologues of Kemalism established a specific definition of the Turkish nation. They claimed that all Turkey's past and present inhabitants were ethnically and racially Turkish. However, Turkey was by no means an ethnically homogenous state. The 1935 census gives detailed data on this. In that year, the country had 16,157,450 people, of whom 15,838,673 were Muslims. The rest of the population included 125,046 Greek Orthodox, 78,730 Jews, 44,526 Gregorian Armenians, 32,155 Catholics, 8,486 Protestants, 4,725 classified as Christians, and 12,965 others.⁵³ On the other hand, while Turkish was the first language in the country, spoken by 13,899,073 people, Kurdish was the second, spoken by 1,480,246 people. In addition, there were 153,687 Arabic, 108,725 Greek, 91,972 Circassian, 63,253 Laze, 57,599 Armenian, 57,325 Georgian, 42,607 Judeo-Spanish, 32,661 Pomak, 29,065 Bosnian (of whom 4,452 spoke the Serbian and Croatian variants), 22,754 Albanian, 18,245 Bulgarian, 15,615 (Crimean) Tatar, 12,424 Spanish, 10,099 Abkhaz speakers, 7,855 Romani speakers, and 5,381 French speakers.⁵⁴ Given such diversity, the question was how Turkish nationalism of the 1930s would accommodate this. A test case for this is the 'Citizen Speak Turkish' campaign.

At the climax of the euphoria over the 'History Thesis' and language purification, the 'Citizen Speak Turkish' campaign, which had originally started in January 1928, but waned later on, gained momentum.⁵⁵ In 1931–32, the campaign rose with a push from the Jews of Izmir, Turkey's second largest city. After the departure of Greeks and Armenians, Jews had become

Izmir's most significant non-Muslim community. They made up more than ten per cent of the city's population. Besides, they were Izmir's largest non-Turkish speaking community, with a good share in its economic life. Then, in 1930, when the opposition Free Republican Party (Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası–SCF) had emerged to be massively popular in Izmir, the Jews had thrown their support behind it.⁵⁶ All this had built a nationalist bitterness against them. At this time, most Turkish Jews spoke Judeo-Spanish,⁵⁷ and/or French, which they had picked up at the Alliance Israélite schools.⁵⁸ Now, the 'Speak Turkish' campaign was their strategy to alleviate antipathy against them. In December 1932, George W. Perry, the American Consul in Izmir, had a meeting with Emanuel Sidi, the head of the city's Jewish community to discuss the 'Speak Turkish' movement. The Consul was told:

The movement was quietly started more than a year ago by a group of young Jewish intellectuals, first in Milas and later in Izmir, and that it is now national in extent. The unique aim is to open up greater opportunities in public life for Jewish leaders: perhaps reminiscent of the time when, after the decay of the Byzantine Empire, Jewish business capacity obtained a recognition in the then new Turkey that proved markedly beneficial to the race. 'Failing this' he declared 'we shall have to emigrate'.⁵⁹

The chief editor of the influential Istanbul daily *Vakit*, Mehmet Asım supported Mr Sidi's arguments. The Jews needed to assimilate into the 'Turkish language, culture, and ideals'. Unlike the Greeks and the Armenians, they had not been disloyal to the country. They had, however, remained as a minority in Turkey. In as much as the religious legacy of the old Ottoman regime seemed to set them apart from the Turks, there was no ground for such separation in the secular republic. Asım concluded, 'The Israelites will not be an ethnic minority among the Turks.'⁶⁰

The Kemalist regime, too, reacted positively to the Jews' desire to assimilate. One of the staunchest proponents of the 'Speak Turkish' campaign was Atatürk's Executive Secretary, journalist Ruşen Eşref (Ünaydın) (1892–1959. In a speech to the Turkish Parliament on 7 June 1934, Ünaydın said, 'As if it was not enough that they [the Jews] did not speak Turkish, they have, also, adopted a language that did not belong to them.' Atatürk had taught them that they are genuine Turks. The Jews 'will one day learn that they are Turks, and when they join to the Turkish nation, to us, they will understand that they are happy and that they will not be able to find that pride in their previous self'. MP Mehmet Şeref (Aykut) (1874–1939) (Edirne) continued and asked that the Jews, 'who were highly talented in commerce to merge with the Turks, in accordance with our Civil Law'. These

could assimilate into Turkishness: ‘while the pride they would get from Turkishness is infinite, the advantages they will derive from the Turks are many. There is no other way for their representation.’⁶¹

Turkish Jews gradually reacted to such expectations. First, the provincial elements gave in. In February 1933, Moise Efendi, the rabbi of Kırklareli, a small town in Turkish Thrace, told his congregation at the end of services: ‘I beg you from today to speak the beloved language of the noble Turkish race and civilized proprietors of the great country in which we live.’⁶² Bursa Jews followed: ‘Uhuvet’ (Fraternity), the organization of the city’s Jews, decided to impose a fine on members, who spoke ‘a language other than Turkish within the precincts of the club’.⁶³ Ankara Jews came in next and declared that they adopted Turkish.⁶⁴ At the end of the year, İlyas Efendi, the rabbi of Diyarbakır, made a tour of the Eastern provinces ‘calling upon the Jews to be baptized into the new Kemalist faith’. Finally, the Jews of Istanbul rallied. On 23 November 1933, they joined the Greeks and the Armenians in the city to further the dissemination of the Turkish language.⁶⁵

Inasmuch as the community leaders swiftly adopted Turkish, there was resentment among the masses over this. For instance, a Jewish schoolteacher, who endorsed the Turkification movement in Milas, in Southwestern Turkey, was beaten up by some of his coreligionists.⁶⁶ Yet, at this time, Munis Tekinalp (1883–1961), a Turkish Jewish intellectual, who had earlier adopted a Turkish name, claiming that it was possible for Jews to become Turkish through assimilation, rallied to this cause. In 1934, together with some prominent members of the Jewish community, Tekinalp founded the Turkish Culture Association (Türk Kültür Cemiyeti) to promote the use of Turkish in public.⁶⁷

In addition to Jews, the impact of the ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign was also felt among Muslims, who did not speak Turkish. British diplomatic correspondence from 1934 noted that Arabs, Circassians, Cretan Muslims, and Kurds in the country were being targeted for not speaking Turkish.⁶⁸ In Mersin, for instance, ‘Kurds, Cretans, Arabs and Syrians’ were being fined for speaking languages other than Turkish. Reportedly, many ‘hundreds of persons’ were arrested ‘for speaking languages other than Turkish’.⁶⁹ The ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign was especially fierce in Mersin,⁷⁰ a town with a large community of Muslim and Christian Arabs and a sizable population of Greek-speaking Cretan Muslim immigrants. In January 1933, the American Embassy in Istanbul reported that ‘the inhabitants of a village near Mersina [*sic*] have decided to give up speaking Arabic and to speak Turkish – undoubtedly pure Turkish - instead’.⁷¹ The antipathy against those who did not speak Turkish was so strong in this town that, in July 1934, some young vigilantes demanded that non-Turkish speakers be ‘beaten up and forced to speak Turkish only’.⁷²

In 1935, the ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign gained new momentum with a fiery speech given by Prime Minister İnönü at the ruling Republican People’s Party’s (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – CHP) Fourth Congress.⁷³ The Prime Minister emphasized the need for everybody in Turkey to speak Turkish: ‘From now on, we will not keep quiet. All citizens, who live with us, will speak Turkish.’⁷⁴ Following this, the National Union of Turkish Students (Milli Türk Talebe Birliği – TMTB) initiated a drive to invite the public to speak Turkish only. This unofficial campaign aimed to make Turkish the sole language heard in the country. Those who did not speak Turkish were openly harassed. Signs were posted in public places to ask everybody to speak Turkish. At this time, a series of nationalist articles appeared in various papers in support of the campaign.⁷⁵ For instance, the nationalist daily *La République* published a piece on ‘Turks unable to speak Turkish’. The paper noted alarmingly that failure to learn Turkish ‘may trouble the harmony of social coexistence’.⁷⁶

Christian minorities responded to this new wave by further promoting the use of Turkish. For example, Monsignor Roncalli (1881–1963) (the papal nuncio in Istanbul and the future Pope Jean XXIII) gave a sermon in Turkish.⁷⁷ In 1935, a small number of Greeks and Armenians, who were well connected to the CHP, set up the Turkish Association of Secular Christians (Türk Laik Hristiyanlar Birliği) in an attempt to promote assimilation.⁷⁸ Yet, the pressure of this new wave, too, was mainly on the Jews. In 1936, the municipal governments of Edirne and Tekirdağ, towns with Jewish communities, passed decrees to fine those who spoke languages other than Turkish in public. On 26 February 1936, Bursa and Lüleburgaz, two other towns with Jewish communities, banned the use of languages other than Turkish in public. In reaction to increasing pressure, during Yom Kippur services in September, Jewish community leaders in Istanbul recommended the community members to speak Turkish.⁷⁹ Nationalist articles, targeting the Jews for not speaking Turkish, appeared in the press in 1937. According to Rifat N. Bali, because of the vigilance of the campaign, from 1937 onwards, the number of Jews and others, who spoke languages other than Turkish, started to decrease.⁸⁰ The ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign survived after Atatürk’s death well into the 1940s.⁸¹

Ayhan Aktar, Rifat Bali, and Taha Parla argue that in its view of Turkishness, Kemalism broke away from Ziya Gökalp’s (1876–1924) thinking. While Gökalp had mostly emphasized religion, ethics, aesthetics, and socialization as the denominators of the nation, the Kemalists turned to ethnicity as the underlying factor of Turkishness.⁸² Yet, as the ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign demonstrates, although Kemalism increasingly favoured ethnicity as a

marker of Turkishness in the 1930s, it never closed the gates to voluntary Turkification. This refutes Erik Zürcher's argument that, Kemalism's idea of 'organic culture' that is culture, language, and ideals by birth and not through voluntary selection or socialization represented a break with Gökalp's idea of voluntary Turkification.⁸³ Inasmuch as Kemalist ideology focused on the Turkish race, in practice, Ankara kept the avenues of assimilation open to those who were not ethnically Turkish, especially the Jews and non-Turkish Muslims. True, assimilation was enforced; yet it was inclusive. In this regard, the desire to integrate the Jews was especially significant. This points out that not racism, but nationalism shaped Turkey's attitude towards the Jews in the 1930s. Ankara regretted the fact that the Jews did not speak Turkish and had not been assimilated. It expected them to integrate by adopting the Turkish language. Subsequently, unlike in many other European countries, where race divided the Jews from the Gentiles in the interwar era, racial anti-semitism seemed impossible in Turkey even at the brink of the Second World War.

On the other hand, at least in theory, Kemalism's vision of the Turkish nation in the 1930s included even the Christians. The aforementioned exchange between Minister Galip and Professor Martayan, as well as the proceedings of the Second History Congress demonstrated this desire vis-à-vis the Armenians. In another example along this line, in 1938, Nadir Nadi (Abaloğlu) (1908–1991), a staunchly pro-Kemalist and nationalist journalist, argued it was scientifically proven that Armenians and Turks had the same racial origins.⁸⁴ Thus, it appears that under the rubric of Turkish race, Kemalism was willing to accept not only the Anatolian Muslims and Jews, but, thinking wishfully, even the Armenians into the body of the Turkish nation.

The merits, limits to, and possibilities of this attitude ought to be discussed in another study. Yet the way Ankara co-opted the notion of race suggests that, 1930s' Kemalism favoured the conventional, nineteenth century usage of this term, when race had been synonymous with nation.⁸⁵ In the early twentieth century, Naziism and other racist ideologies transformed the term race, with modifiers such as biology, genetics, bloodline, and physical attributes. At first glance, this is also the view of race one sees in the 'Turkish History Thesis' and the 'Sun Language Theory', wherein biological race is the basis of the national community. Yet, this definition does not seem to have been central to Ankara's practices. If the 'Speak Turkish' campaign were taken into account, it would appear that what the Kemalists saw in 'race' was closer to the word's nineteenth century connotations than to its twentieth century meaning. Race referred not to a biological community, but to a national one. True, in the mind of the Kemalists, this was an immutable concept. However, it was defined through language and not genetic factors. Consequently as the example of the 'Speak Turkish' campaign reveals,

ethnicity-through-language emerged as one of the primary planks of Turkishness in the 1930s. This created certain dilemmas for the minorities that did not wish to assimilate by adopting Turkish. The definition of the nation-through-language and the country's demographic diversity seemed bound to clash in the future.

NOTES

1. For more on nationalism in Turkey's European neighbourhood in the 1930s, consult Ivo Banac and Katherine Verdery (ed.), *National Character and National Ideology in Interwar Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1995); and Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictators: The History of Eastern Europe Since 1918* (London: Routledge, 1975), pp.1–62, 77–94, 127–56.
2. For some recent examples of these works, which examine Turkish nationalism before the 1930s, see in particular: Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and the Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabs, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995); and Masami Arai, *Turkish Nationalism in the Young Turk Era* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).
3. For a few notable examples of these works, consult: Rıfat N. Bali, *Musa'nın Evlatları Cumhuriyet'in Yurttaşları* [The children of Moses, citizens of the republic] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001); Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Türkleştirme' Politikaları* [The wealth tax and the 'Turkification' policies] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2000); Rıfat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* [Turkish Jews under the Turkish republic: an episode of Turkification (1923–45)] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999); and Taha Parla, *Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi ve CHP'nin Altı Ok'u* [The single party ideology of Kemalism and the Six Arrow of the CHP] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1995).
4. For more on the destruction and expulsion of the Ottoman Muslims from Central Europe in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, see Alexandre Popović, *L'Islam Balkanique* (Berlin: in Kommission bei Otto Harassowitz–Wiesbaden, 1986), pp.183–7, 257–60; and Mustafa Imamović, *Historija Bošnjaka* [History of the Bosniaks] (Sarajevo: Bošnjaka Zajednica Kulture Sarajevo, 1997), pp.280–99. For the persecution of the Balkan Muslims during and after the establishment of Greek, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Bulgarian states in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries and the Balkan Wars, consult Popović, *L'Islam Balkanique*, pp.108–12, 113–34, 302–11; 260–4, 265–7; 207–8, 294–6, 135–47; and 66–73, 73–8, 74–7. For general works on the persecution of the Ottoman Muslims in Europe and the Black Sea basin, see Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of the Ottoman Muslims, 1821–1922* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995); and Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les Migrations des Musulmanes Balkaniques en Anatolie (1876–1913)* (Istanbul: Isis, 1995).
5. Çağlar Keyder, 'Consequences of the Exchange of Populations for Turkey', unpublished article. *İstatistik Yıllığı: İkinci Cilt 1929* [Statistics yearbook: Vol.2 1929] TC Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müd. (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1929), p.45; *İstatistik Yıllığı: 1934–5 Cilt 7* [Statistics yearbook: 1934–5, Vol.7] (Ankara: Başbakanlık İstatistik G.D, 1934–5), p.159.
6. For a breakdown of the country's population according to linguistic groups in the 1930s, revealing the diversity of Muslim communities, see *İstatistik Yıllığı Cilt 10* (Statistics yearbook, Vol.10) Başbakanlık İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, (Ankara: Hüsnütabiat, 1938–9), pp.64–5. For more on various Muslim communities in Anatolia, see Peter Alford Andrews and Rüdiger Benninghaus (ed. and comp.), *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1989).
7. *Turkey. Constitution*. 'Translation into English of the Turkish Constitution of 1924, embodying such amendments to the text as have been made to date', typescript, (S.1: s.n., 1937?), p.9.

8. Ayhan Aktar, 'Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Uygulanan Türkleştirme Politikaları', [Turkification policies during the early years of the republic] *Tarih ve Toplum*, No.156 (Dec. 1996); also consult Soner Cagaptay, 'Population Resettlement and Immigration Policies of Interwar Turkey: A Study of Turkish Nationalism', *Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol.26, No.2 (Fall 2002); and 'Reconfiguring the Turkish Nation in the 1930s', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.8, No.2 (Summer 2002).
9. For more on the Kurds in the 1920s, see M. Hakan Yavuz, 'Five Stages of the Construction of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol.7, No.3 (2001), pp.1–24; and Martin van Bruinessen *Origins and Development of Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey*, typescript, (Berlin: Berliner Institut für vergleichende Sozialforschung, 1981).
10. For more on this, see Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında*, pp.1–242.
11. For the story of the Greeks in the 1920s, see Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918–1974* (Athens: Center for Asia Minor Studies, 1983), pp.144–73. For Armenians in this period, consult Soner Cagaptay, 'Race, Religion, and Ethnicity under High Kemalism' (Ph.D. Dissertation in progress, Yale University).
12. See Soner Cagaptay, 'Anatolian Armenians in the 1920s: Religion, Identity and Security in Early Republican Turkey', unpublished paper.
13. Afet [İnan], et. al., *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* (General Themes of Turkish History) (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1930).
14. Uluğ İğdemir, 'Atatürk'ün Emriyle Hazırlanan Programme' (A programme prepared on Atatürk's orders) in *Belleten*, Vol.27 (1963), p.644.
15. *Ibid.*, p.644.
16. *Ibid.*, p.647.
17. *Ibid.*, p.644.
18. Members of the Society for the Study of Turkish History (eds.), *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlarına Methal* [Introduction to the General Themes of Turkish History] (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1930).
19. Mustafa Ergün, *Atatürk Devri Türk Eğitimi* (Turkish Education under Atatürk) (Ankara: DTCF, 1982), p.126.
20. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlarına*, pp.26–30.
21. Afet [İnan], 'Tarihten Evvel ve Tarih Fecrinde' [In Prehistoric Times and at the Dawn of History] *Birinci Türk Tarih Kongresi* [First Turkish History Congress] (Ankara: T.C. Maarif Vekaleti, 1933), p.31.
22. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlarına*, pp.50–8.
23. [İnan], *Tarihten Evvel ve Tarih Fecrinde*, p.34.
24. *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatlarına*, p.8.
25. Great Britain. Foreign Office: Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906. Turkey. FO 371/16983.528. Embassy to the Foreign Office (London), 27 Jan. 1933. *Annual Report for 1932* (hereafter Foreign Office).
26. Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Turkey 1930–1944. SD 867.4016 ARMENIANS/8. Sherill (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 8 Nov. 1932 (hereafter State Department).
27. State Department. 867.9111/383. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 16 Nov. 1932. Digest of Turkish News, 30 October–12 November 1932.
28. For Atatürk's role in the creation of the *Turkish History Thesis*, see Ergün, *Atatürk Devri Türk Eğitimi*, pp.125–132; and İğdemir, 'Atatürk'ün Emriyle Hazırlanan Program', pp.105–8.
29. *Türkiye Halkının Antropolojik Karakteri ve Türkiye Tarihi: Türk Irkının Vatanı Anadolu 64,000 kişi üzerinde Anket* [The Anthropological Character of the People of Turkey and Turkish history: Anatolia, the Homeland of the Turkish Race and a Survey conducted on 64,000 people] (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1947).
30. For available copies of some of these works, see Eugène Pittard, *Les Races et l'Histoire Introduction Ethnologique à l'Histoire* (Paris: Le Renaissance du Livre, 1924); Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races*, with preface by George L. Mosse, (New York: H. Fertig, 1999); and Alfred Cort Haddon, *The Races of Man and Their Distribution* (New York: Gordon Press, 1981).

31. Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene* [Happy is he, who can say he is a Turk] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp.165–6; and Artun Ünsal, ‘La Bibliothèque Politique Française d’Atatürk’, in Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont (eds.), *La Turquie et la France a L’Époque d’Atatürk*, Collection Turcica 1, (Paris: Association pour le Développement d’Études Turques, 1981), p.42.
32. Afet İnan, *Medeni Bilgiler ve Atatürk’ün El Yazıları* [Civics and Atatürk’s Manuscripts] (Ankara: TTK, 1969), p.38; *Tarih I Tarihten-evvelki Zamanlar ve Eski Zamanlar* [History I Prehistoric and Ancient Ages] (Istanbul; Devlet Matbaası, 1931), p.20.
33. İsmail Arar, ‘Atatürk’ün Günümüz Olaylarına Işık Tutan Bazı Konuşmaları’ [Some Homilies by Atatürk that Shed Light on our Era], *Belleten*, Vol.45–6, No.177 (1981), pp.23–4.
34. İnan, *Medeni Bilgiler*, p.371. Afet İnan, *Vatandaşlık İçin Medeni Bilgiler* [Civic Guidelines for Citizenship] (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1931), p.13.
35. Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm*, p.159.
36. State Department, 867.402/48. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 17 Oct. 1932. Memorandum.
37. *Birinci Türk Dil Kurultayı* (First Turkish Language Congress) (Istanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1933), pp.393–5.
38. *Ibid.*, pp.71–80.
39. *Ibid.*, pp.94–104.
40. *Birinci Türk Dil Kurultayı*, pp.249–50.
41. State Department, 867.402/48, From the Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 17 Oct. 1932.
42. Uriel Heyd, *Language Reform in Turkey* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1954), pp.26–9. For a good review of the language purification movement, see Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
43. State Department, 867.9111/353. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 16 Nov. 1932. Digest of Turkish Press 30 Oct.–12 Nov. 1932.
44. Heyd, *Language Reform*, p.33.
45. State Department, 867.402/74. Shaw (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 9 Sept. 1936.
46. Foreign Office. FO 371/20094/E5890. Morgan (Istanbul) to Eden (London), 18 Sept. 1936.
47. In formulating the ‘Sun Language Theory’, the Turkish scholars had been inspired by Austrian linguist Dr Hermann F. Kvergić of Vienna, who had argued that, ‘Man first realized his own identity when he conceived the idea of establishing what the external objects surrounding him were.’ Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p.57. For a Kemalist-era work that summarizes the *Sun Language Theory* succinctly, see Güneş Dil Teorisi ve Üçüncü Dil Kurultayı: Gaziantep Sayıtları Ömer Besim Aksoy Tarafından 26 Eylül 1936 Dil Bayramında Verilen Konferans [The Sun Language Theory and the third Turkish Language Congress: a conference given by MP Ömer Besim Aksoy (Gaziantep) on the occasion of the language day on 26 Sept. 1936], (Gaziantep: C.H. Partisi Basımevi, 1937).
48. Foreign Office, FO 371/20094/E5890. Morgan (Istanbul) to Eden (London), 18 Sept. 1936.
49. State Department, 867.402/74. Shaw (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 9 Sept. 1936. Translation of article from *La République*, 29 Aug. 1936.
50. *Cumhuriyet*, 6 Aug. 1935.
51. *İkinci Türk Tarih Kongresi*, pp.8–15.
52. *Ibid.*, p.77.
53. *İstatistik Yıllığı*, Cilt 10, pp.64–5.
54. *Ibid.*, pp.64–5.
55. Heyd, *Language Reform*, p.30.
56. State Department, 867.00/2048. Bursky (Izmir) to the State Department (Washington), 1 Nov. 1930. News of Izmir – 1930, No. 2.
57. Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, is the language of the Sephardic Jews, who fled from Spain and Portugal during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and settled in various parts of the Ottoman Empire. This language is essentially medieval Spanish (and to a much lesser extent Portuguese) with a Hebrew influence in its vocabulary. Over the centuries, it has also been laden with words from Turkish, Greek, Italian, French, Bulgarian, and Arabic.

58. For a work from the 1920s, which explains the historical reasons as to why the Turkish Jews spoke Judeo-Spanish and French, see Avram Galanti, *Vatandaş Türkçe Konuş* [Citizen Speak Turkish] (Istanbul: Hüsn-i Tabiat Matbaası, 1928). On the other hand, for more on the Alliance schools, consult Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and The Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
59. State Department, 867.4016 JEWS/3. George (Izmir) to the State Department (Washington), 13 Dec. 1932.
60. Germany: Auswärtiges Amt. Records of the German Foreign Office received by the Department of State, 1920–1945. T–1204900. AA T–1204900. Rosenberg (Ankara) to German Foreign Ministry (Berlin), 20 Dec. 1933.
61. TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, session IV, Vol.23, p.70.
62. State Department, 867.9111/391. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 21 Feb. 1933. Digest of Turkish Press 5 Feb.–18 Feb. 1933.
63. State Department, 867.9111/392. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 8 March 1933. Digest of Turkish Press 19 Feb.–4 March 1933.
64. State Department, 867.9111/405. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), Aug. 1933. Digest of Turkish Press 16 July–11 Aug. 1933. State Department, 867.9111/390. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), Feb. 1933. Digest of Turkish Press 22 Jan.–4 Feb. 1933.
65. State Department, 867.9111/410. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 11 Dec. 1933. Digest of Turkish Press 5 Nov.–2 Dec. 1933.
66. Ibid.
67. Jacob. M. Landau, *Tekinalp: Bir Türk Yurtseveri (1883–1961)* [Tekinalp: a Turkish patriot (1883–1961)] (Istanbul: İletişim, 1996), p.20.
68. Foreign Office, FO 371/17958/ E4912. Loraine (Angora) to the Foreign Office (London), 7 July 1934; and Foreign Office. FO 371/17958/E6178. Catton (Mersina) to Morgan (Angora), 17 Sept. 1934.
69. Foreign Office, FO 371/16985/E2053. Embassy (Constantinople) to the Foreign Office (London), 6 April 1933.
70. Foreign Office, FO 371/16985/E2053. Embassy (Angora) to the Foreign Office (London), 6 April 1934.
71. State Department, 867.9111/ Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 11 Jan. 1933. Digest of Turkish Press.
72. Foreign Office, FO 371/17958/E4912. Loraine (Angora) to the Foreign Office (London), 27 July 1934. Copy of letter, Catton (Mersina) to Loraine (Angora), 7 July 1934.
73. Foreign Office, FO 371/17969/E5028. Davis (Smyrna) to Loraine (Angora), 19 July 1934. FO 371/17969/E5028. Davis (Smyrna) to Loraine (Angora), 2 Aug. 1934.
74. *CHP Dördüncü Büyük Kurultayı Görüşmeleri Tutulgası* [Records of the sessions of CHP's Fourth General Congress] (Ankara: 9–16 May 1935), p.149.
75. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında*, pp.269–72.
76. State Department, 867.9111/422. Embassy (Istanbul) to the State Department (Washington), 3 Oct. 1934. Digest of Turkish Press, 12 Aug.–22 Sept. 1934.
77. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında*, p.273.
78. Landau, *Tekinalp*, p.21.
79. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında*, pp.275–6.
80. Ibid., pp.281–7.
81. Ibid., pp.377–9.
82. Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve 'Türkleştirme'*, pp.60–6, 103–8; Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında*, pp.502–3; and Parla, *Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi*, pp.176–221.
83. Erik Jan Zürcher, 'Young Turks, Ottoman Muslims and Turkish Nationalists', in Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Modern Turkey and Ottoman Past* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p.179.
84. Foreign Office, FO 371/21915/E4624. Loraine (Ankara) to the Foreign Office (London), 8 Aug. 1938.
85. For the fluctuating meanings of the term 'nation' over the last few centuries, see *American Heritage Dictionary*, (1975), p.874.