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The 1934 Thrace Incidents and the Attitude of the Turkish Press in the Framework of the Project for the Creation of a Turkish Nation-State

Bir Türk Ulus-Devleti Yaratma Projesi Çerçevesinde 1934 Trakya Olayları ve Türk Basınının Tutumu

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ÖZ

Türkiye Yahudileri 1934'te, Türkiye'nin Trakya bölgesinde bir dizi saldırının hedefi olmuşlardır. 'Trakya Olayları' olarak bilinen bu saldırıların gerçekleşmesinde ülkenin güvenliğini sağlama gerekçesiyle ilan edilen 1934 İskân Kanunu önemli bir etken olmuşsa da, olaylar, etnik olarak homojen bir ulus-devlet yaratma amacı çerçevesinde Yahudilerin 'ötekileştirilmesi' bağlamında gerçekleşmiştir. Bu bağlamda makale, olayların Türk basını tarafından nasıl bir çerçeve içerisinde ele alındığını incelemektedir. Her ne kadar basının geneli homojen bir ulus-devlet yaratma amacı çerçevesinde Yahudi cemaatinin ötekileştirilmesinde dikkat çekici bir rol oynamışsa da, ana akım basın radikal yayın organları tarafından kullanılan anti-Semitik ifadelerden kaçınımıştır. İki savaş arası dönemde Türkiye'de anti-Semitizm'in kapsamlı bir araştırması yapılmamakta birlikte, Türk milliyetçiliğinin ve medyanın o yıllarda Cumhuriyet'in Yahudi yurttaşlarını nasıl değerlendirdiğini anlayabilmek amacıyla çalışma, 9 ana akım gazete ile 2 radikal dergiye nitel olarak incelemiştir.

ABSTRACT

In 1934, the Jews of Turkey were targeted in a series of attacks in the Thrace region of Turkey. While a crucial factor behind the incidents that came to be known as the 'Thrace Incidents' was the 1934 Turkish Resettlement Law which was adopted on the ground of ensuring the security of the country, the incidents took place within a much broader context of 'othering' of the Jews to forge an ethnically homogenous nation-state. This article probes into the Thrace incidents by scrutinizing the ways in which the incidents were framed by the Turkish press. It concludes that while media outlets in general played an important role in the othering of Turkey's Jewish community in line with the dominant ideology of the state towards creating a nation-state, the mainstream press did nonetheless diverge from the anti-Semitic articulations disseminated by the more radical outlets. While not doing a comprehensive account of anti-Semitism in interwar Turkey, the research draws on a qualitative analysis of 9 mainstream newspapers and 2 radical outlets, to assist in a more nuanced understanding of Turkish nationalism and the media framing of the Jewish citizens of the Republic in that period.

1. Introduction

The incidents that took place against the Jewish citizens of the Turkish Republic out of Thrace in 1934 remains one of the most dramatic events in the history of Turkish-Jewish relations. The incidents which are also referred to as '1934

pogroms', or 'Thrace events' (known as Trakya Olayları in Turkish), started in June 1934 in the district of Çanakkale and rapidly spread northwards. Intimidation in the form of menacing letters were followed by the boycotting of the shops owned by the members of the Jewish community that

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later culminated in physical violence. In the small town of Kırklareli, the homes of Jewish inhabitants were raided and their properties were looted.

The incidents received relatively little attention until 1990s when they became a more robust academic field of inquiry, and a wide range of theories were offered to explain its various dynamics. Some authors have more or less followed the line taken by the Turkish government in 1934. Other researchers have adopted a more critical attitude. Levi (1996:12), for example, strongly emphasized the influence of German Nazism, whose most prominent Turkish follower, Cevat Rifat Atilhan, was editor of the anti-Semitic journal *Milli İnkılap*.¹ Levi therefore interpreted the incidents as primarily a consequence of the dissemination throughout Europe of German Nazism. In a similar vein, Güven and Yılmazata (2014) noted that anti-Semitism reached Turkey through foreign publications and the anti-Semitic press played a pivotal role in the violent incidents, inspired by Nazi Germany. From a more critical perspective Karabatak (1996) draws attention to the 1934 Turkish Resettlement Law suggesting that the Turkish government itself might have been behind the anti-Semitic attacks. For Eligür (2017), anti-Semitism was not popular, but the Turkish state establishment's security concerns vis-à-vis the perceived Italian and Bulgarian threat that resulted in the violent incidents. While it is not possible to assert with any certainty the precise cause of the events that led to the incidents and the subsequent violence, it is evident from the previous research that it was most likely a combination of organized and planned action that mobilized the rioters who acted on a nationalist but also anti-Semitic impulse.

This article follows a similar line of inquiry by assessing the Turkish press' stance at the center of the incidents through a critical exploration of how the Jewish community in Turkey were conceived within narratives on security and national identity. Its departing point however is that while a systematic 'othering' of the Jews took place in the media narratives of the radical Turkish press, the mainstream press did nonetheless diverge from the anti-Semitic articulations disseminated by those more radical outlets in the course of the incidents. In other words, the analysis identifies two discursive trends in the Turkish press in the representation of the Thracian incidents. Both trends conceived the Jews as threatening others in Turkish nationalist imaginary. An important divergence can be discerned however, in relation to the degree, purpose and style/genre of othering. The first trend represented by the mainstream press conceived the other as undesirable by means of its distinctness, prescribing its economic, political, and cultural transformation towards integration. The other trend represented by the radical outlets prescribed a policy akin to a 'Final Solution' (Lewis, 1986) in getting rid of the other that rested on a strong belief about the impossibility of its transformation.

Conceptually, the article draws from an eclectic body of work on nation-building and minority representations in the media to examine the ways in which the Jewish citizens of

the Republic were conceived by the Turkish press. This is a conscious stance in order to complement, engage, and selectively utilize theoretical constructs embedded in different research traditions. In this regard, the othering role of the media that has been extensively covered by critical sociological inquiries, is pegged to the notion of 'ideological state apparatus', elaborated in Marxist readings on culture and ideology, in order to better conceptualize the ways in which the Turkish press was implicated in the state-driven process of nation-building through the othering of the Jewish citizens. Data analysis relies on a qualitative analysis of the 9 mainstream newspapers (*Hakimiyeti Milliye*, *Son Posta*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Vakit*, *Zaman*, *Haber*, *Akşam*, *Milliyet*, *Işık*) and 2 radical periodical publications (*Milli İnkılap* and *Orhun*). News reports and articles were collected regarding the period March-July 1934. The extensive archive located at the Near East University Library, in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was used to access the material and build a corpus about the incidents. It was stipulated that the articles had to include at least one of the following terms: "Thrace", "Jews", "incident". The corpus was formed manually by identifying the articles which contained the most references to each group and according to their relevance. Relational analysis and close qualitative reading were then used as primary methods of analysis which allowed the researchers to focus on the text to unpack the relations between discursive elements, and to interpret the meanings and relationships of relevant words, themes, or concepts.

The article is organized as follows. The first part reviews the conceptual debates on the role of the media in othering national minorities. The second part then situates the Turkish press within the 1934 Thrace incidents and analyses various newspaper narratives regarding the violent events. The third part then explores the similarities as well as key divergences among the newspaper representations of the events tied to the violent attacks. The article concludes by highlighting the implications of its empirical findings for future research into media representations of minorities in nation-building contexts.

2. Role of the Media in Othering National Minorities

The concept of the 'other' has been popular in nationalism literature for some time with a wide range of studies focusing on the role of 'other' in the formation, consolidation but also transformation of national identities (Smith, 1998:13). As Edward Said (Said, 1995: 332) has put it: 'Each age and society recreate its others'. Triandafyllidou (1998) has further argued that the presence of 'significant others' influence the development of national identity by means of their 'threatening presence' for example, during nation-formation or during periods of instability which may put the identity of the nation into question. In nationalism, individuals are interpellated through a complex ideological mechanism in which they come to believe that they are truly liberated and autonomous if they identify with a particular

national subjectivity. The nationalist ideology works to convince individuals of the presence and reality of a unique national identity and then calls on (interpellates) individuals to demonstrate and possibly even act voluntarily in the name of this identity (Zake, 2002).

Media is an important avenue for such discursive construction of 'self' and 'other-ness' and several studies have documented various aspects of minority othering in the media, including the connection between the populist political parties and the media in othering minorities (Frelak, 2009), othering through traditionalization and genderization of minorities (Elsrud, 2008), production and reproduction of anti-minority rhetoric and hate speech Slavíčková, and Zvagulis (2014), othering through racialization (Bailey and Harindranath, 2005) othering through acculturation (Giorgi, 2012), portrayal of the otherness in press photography (Batziou, 2011), through key events (Brosius and Eps, 1995), sociopolitical and economic dynamics of change in editorial policies of the press, and its journalistic othering practices of the minorities (Avraham et al., 2000).

These critical inquiries into the role of media have to a large extent been inspired by the work of Louis Althusser and his seminal 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation' first published in 1969 (Althusser, 1971). Althusser further develops the Marxist notion of state apparatus by refocusing it on how ideological conditions are produced to organize social life so that the dominant ideology can create subjects who then reproduce the social order. 'Ideological State Apparatuses' such as the Church, political parties, embedded unions, schools, and media achieve this goal by constructing subjective consciousness through socialization and interpellation. Subjective consciousness therefore is both a product and a guarantee of the power structure (Zake, 2002). Otherness is also used by the state as an instrument for creating or maintaining a social and political (as well as economic) order. As the state strives to exert control, it does not hesitate to target any segment of society which it considers 'alien' to those values. Once a minority group does not conform to normative practices, cultural values, socio-economic and political ideals affiliated with the dominant group in the society, the media may then be used as the ideological apparatus of the state to render it the 'other'. The concept of 'ideological state apparatus' is thus introduced here as a useful analytical tool that is relevant to describing the role of Turkish press, and that of the mainstream press in particular, on the spread of nationalism and with the othering of minorities. An important caveat, which is elaborated further below however, is that the ideological state apparatus is conceived here to entail a strong degree of control in its dissemination of the state ideology. In this regard, an important distinction that distinguished mainstream press from the more radical outlets was that the latter challenged the established limits of the hegemonic state ideology and was thus ultimately outlawed.

A further departure point for this article is also in relation to

terminology. As is well known, conceptualization of the collective acts of violence that took place in Thrace in 1934 tend to reflect certain political, ideological and theoretical standpoints of the researchers. In fact, while the more critical standpoints to the role of state in these actions associated these acts of violence with the concept of 'pogrom' (Bayraktar, 2006; Pekesen, 2019), more nuanced inquiries have used the concepts of 'riots' (Eligür, 2017), attacks (Daniels, 2017: 364), and 'events/incidents' (Bali, 2012; Güven and Yılmazata, 2014; Karabatak, 1996; Levi, 1996).

At the heart of this distinction is the fact that the concept of 'pogrom' usually refers to a certain historical, geopolitical context in Jewish historiography, connoting a continuous and systematic policy of violence through the support or even the active involvement of state authorities. The concept of 'events', or 'riots' on the other hand refers to random, unsystematic and one-time nature of the acts of violence and does not automatically assume an a priori state responsibility. In this regard, the article introduces the concept of 'semi-systematic anti-Semitic collective acts of violence' to define the events that took place in 1934. This is done for mainly for two reasons. First, the concept of pogrom which reflects certain political, normative and conceptual standpoints carries the potential to overshadow the findings in relation to the role of national and radical press in presentation of these acts by assuming a priori role for the state. Second reason relates to the authors wish to transcend the established boundaries of the dominant narratives on the subject, in order to contribute to the ongoing debate through new ways of questioning the context based on rich empirical data.

The concept of 'semi-systematic anti-Semitic collective acts of violence' is thus utilized here to underline the anti-Semitic, collective and violent nature of the events which took place in 1934 in Thrace while rejecting an a priori involvement of the state in terms of coordinating, implementing, manipulating or even masterminding the incidents. It further asserts the need for further research and fact-finding in relation to the attacks' perpetrators and their perpetuity.²

3. Situating the Turkish Press within the 1934 Thrace 'Semi-systematic anti-Semitic Attacks'

The representation of the 1934 semi-systematic anti-Semitic collective acts of violence is a good example of the state-press relationship in the discursive creation of the 'controlled' otherness during the nation-building process in Turkey. The period during and after the War of Liberation was an important time for the transition from a multinational empire to a relatively homogeneous national setting, at least in terms of the religious make-up. Given that the Anatolian Greeks and Armenians pursued separatist or nationalist ambitions during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire and allied with the occupying powers during the War of Liberation, the Turkish state elite regarded them with suspicion and even as potential enemies of the state

(Alexandris, 1992; Bali, 1998). Ideological concerns too enforced the exclusion of non-Muslim minorities from the new Turkish nation. Following the War of Liberation, the Kemalist leadership pursued a policy of homogenizing the Turkish nation based on a secular Turkish Muslim identity (Bali, 2001; Oran, 2018). Moreover, the leadership regarded all Muslims as Turks regardless of their ethnicity and language, while viewing non-Muslims as non-Turks (Bora, 1995: 35; Keyman and İcduygu, 1998)). This was the case even for the Jews, who earned the title of 'loyal millet' given their alliance first with the Ottoman army during World War I, and then with the Kemalist forces in their fight against the Greeks during the War of Liberation.

The exclusionary definition of Turkish nationalism, which regarded all non-Muslims as foreign elements and even potential enemies of the country was also disseminated extensively by the Turkish press under the control of the state. Indeed, in the early years of the Republic, under the single party rule, full press freedom did not exist in practice (Odyakmaz, 2003: 122). It was only after the new Press Law enacted in 1931 that oppositional views became more or less tolerated by the single party rule. Yet even after then, the outcome was not a flourishing of liberal ideas. In fact, this period saw the newspapers split into two major camps: one promoting the ideas of Kemalist 'modernization' and the other defending traditional conservatism. The mainstream press was politically and economically embedded to the state and operated as an ideological apparatus of the leadership within a state-controlled semi-capitalist structure. As such, mainstream newspapers served as means of strengthening the economic, political and cultural hegemony of the new dominant groups in the framework of the nation-building process in Turkey.

In economic terms, dependence of the mainstream press on state-controlled socio-economic structure through the state's economic subventions or subsidies tied them to the state in the production and dissemination of the news. There was thus a monopoly on news production, distribution and exchange. In addition, since the ownership of press was strictly regulated by the state, there was no legal way of challenging the dominant ideology and value system within the media sphere. In political terms too, the state did not tolerate any deviation from the parameters of the official ideology. The Press Law of 1931 provided the state with the necessary legal basis to sustain its absolute control over the press. This first Press Law of Turkey armed the state with decisive legal apparatuses in overriding the publication and distribution of newspapers and magazines (Alemdar, 2001; 35). The enactment of Article 50 relating to the "temporary suspension of a newspaper or magazine" and Article 51 on regulating the "entering and distribution of all printed work published abroad", secured harsh punishment of discursive deviations from the state's dominant ideology by providing authorities with the right and legal power to collect and to terminate the publications on the grounds of public security.

In cultural terms, the news framework was embedded in the

dominant value system of Turkey, which was mainly determined and guided by the cultural policies of the state. The state did not tolerate any major non-conformity with the dominant Turkish culture as designed and promoted in the state's policies. In this regard, the state's dominant view about the culture, as stated in the 1934 Resettlement Law, was to 'create a country speaking one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment' (Kökdemir, 1952: 237). Turkishness and Turkish culture was also associated with being Muslim. Such an approach placed all the non-Muslim communities, together with the non-Turkish-speaking Muslims, outside the official boundaries of the Turkish nation both in imaginary and in material terms. Indeed, a circular issued by the General Directorate of Settlement on 14 June 1934 to govern the application of Law 2510 specified who were eligible for entering and living in the country: 'the foreign Kurds, Arabs, Albanians; other Muslims who speak languages other than Turkish, and all foreign Christians and Jews could not be given nationality declaration documents [...] all will be treated as foreigners' (Ülker, 2008). In this respect, the othering of the Jews was not only embedded into the dominant political, economic, and cultural discourse, it was also consolidated by the legal framework. Under the abovementioned conditions, it was not surprising that the Turkish mainstream newspapers and publications followed the government's line in representing both the occurrence and the consequences of the 1934 semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks.

3.1. Mainstream Press

According to the mainstream press, there were four main reasons triggering the incidents: i) rise of anti-Semitism in the world and its effects in Turkey; ii) presence of claims that some Jews were acting as spies and that some of them had supported the allied forces during the Balkan Wars (1912-13), and in the period leading up to the Turkish War of Liberation; iii) economic status; iv) refusal of the Jews to learn/speak Turkish and to adopt the Turkish culture and their supposed insistence on leading an enclosed life. So, the mainstream press did blame the Jews and their supposed intransigence not to integrate into the Turkish nation. The press thus consolidated the dominant ideology of the Turkish state in not tolerating any form of distinctness that was seen harmful to the homogeneity of the nation in economic, cultural and political terms.

In economic terms, the mainstream press emphasized the otherness of the Jewish minority with reference to stereotypes and canards about their economic status. The narrative frequently utilized by the mainstream media construed a clash between the Jewish 'haves' and Turkish 'have-nots'. Zaman newspaper, for instance, framed the Jewish citizens as a group, who accrued riches in Turkish lands, leaving no room for the Turkish entrepreneurs and businesspeople to enter the economy. For Zaman, the Jewish minority who became economically powerful in Turkey as in 'many other countries' did not serve the economic interests and wishes of 'the real children of these lands' and

showed no interest in getting along well with the Turks (1934a: 1 and 7). For *Vakit* too (1934b: 1-2), as claimed in the editorial columns of Mehmet Asım, national markets could not be sacrificed for the interests of the Jews. *Vakit* presented this approach in a more radical vein by drawing attention to the ‘grasping traders’ of Çanakkale and calling for the rescue of the peasants from the hands of the Jewish merchants (1934a: 6).

Some mainstream outlets, on the other hand, claimed that the Jews emigrated from Thrace for economic reasons rather than local pressures. *Milliyet* (1934b: 5) and *Zaman* (1934b: 1) utilized this narrative by stating that the Jewish exodus took place as a result of their search for economically more profitable places after facing the decrease in their businesses due to the economic crisis. Two weeks after the attacks, *Zaman*, for example, called on the Jewish minority ‘to demonstrate their loyalty to the Turkish nation’ by taking part in certain nationalist activities, such as supporting the campaign to buy warplanes for the Turkish army (1934c: 3). *Işık*’s columnist Ruscuklu Fahri³ also responded to charges of ‘grasping traders’ and argued that not only Jewish traders but also local Turkish traders could be described as such. Fahri asserted that it would be wrong to target the Jewish community as a whole for the actions of a few (*Işık*, 1934: 1). Moreover, the mainstream press on the whole subscribed to the view that the only ‘solution’ to such occurrences as that of the 1934 events was the integration of the Jewish minority into the Turkish society in economic terms, thus their economic Turkification.

In political terms, there is an observable peak in the mainstream outlets narrative following Prime Minister İnönü’s speech made on July 5, 1934, lambasting the racist movements. In this respect, the mainstream press, which had remained muted on the political aspect of the violent attacks displayed a unified stance against anti-Semitism and argued that there was no possibility for the development of anti-Semitic sentiments within the borders of the new Republic. Following this discourse, *Hakimiyeti Milliye* argued that while anti-Semitic currents ‘find some response in our country from time to time [...]’, the government’s intention was to ‘[...] stop such interactions between the people of the country and these currents’. In this respect, the newspaper announced its conviction that the Turkish government would ‘not allow the foreigners to manipulate citizens by using these negligible events for their shady agendas’ (1934: 1).

In a similar vein, high-ranking representatives of the Jewish community, including Professor Mişon Ventura⁴ and Chief Rabbi Hayim Izak Shaki (*Cumhuriyet*, 1934b: 5)⁵ were quoted extensively by the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper to emphasize that there were no links between the events and systematic anti-Semitism. For *Akşam* too, events could not be considered as part of a wider anti-Semitic campaign because they did not take place in other Jewish-populated cities or towns in Turkey: ‘if it was a [sign of] anti-Semitism, then it would have made itself felt everywhere [in Turkey]’

(1934b: 1-2). In this respect, the newspaper argued that the absence of incidents of the same kind in other parts of Turkey indicated that they were localized and limited in extent. On the whole, dominant discourse within the mainstream press seemed to meticulously separate between the Jews as the ‘political other’, the main cause of the rise of Anti-Semitism due to latter’s failure to fully integrate, and the politically ‘desirable’ Jews who would not leave any room for the rise of Anti-Semitism thanks to their full loyalty to the country.

In cultural terms, the national press mainly put emphasis on the cultural otherness and the insistence of Jewish minority on maintaining their distinctness, as a cause of the reaction from the Turks, which was materialized in the 1934 events. In this respect main concerns of the national press discourse (like state discourse) was the cultural otherness and isolation of the Jewish community and the necessity of increased efforts towards further cultural integration especially in the field of language.

In this regard, language status, was often a focal point of discussion in the mainstream press with relation to Jewish minority just as the Turkish state’s ‘Citizen, speak Turkish campaign’ was gathering pace (Aslan, 2007). *Vâ-Nû* for instance, an influential columnist writing at the time for *Akşam*, lamented that even though they had lived in this country for ages; the Jewish citizens of the Republic had not learned to speak Turkish with a few exceptions. According to *Vâ-Nû* most of the immigrants of the 1934 semi-systematic anti-Semitic collective acts of violence in İstanbul whom he met, spoke Spanish or incomprehensible French. For *Vâ-Nû*, this insistence of the Jewish minority to not integrate into Turkish culture - not learning Turkish being a key indicator, for *Vâ-Nû* and others of such insistence - could well be considered one of the reasons behind the reaction they had faced. *Vâ-Nû* further argued that as primarily a religious community, the Jewish minority did not show any effort to get rid of their ‘old habits’ and did not try to ‘Turkify themselves while living among the Turkish society’. *Vâ-Nû* advised the Jewish citizens to do considerably more to ‘deserve this status’ by getting rid of their ‘community habits’ and through Turkification (*Haber Akşam Postası*, 1934: 8). *Akşam*’s editorial policy supported *Vâ-Nû*’s approach about the necessity for the Turkification of the Jewish citizens in cultural terms. This point was consolidated by the quoted advice of Jewish opinion-leaders in this direction. In this regard, Tekin Alp [*Moiz Kohen*]⁶, a prominent intellectual of Jewish-background and the chairman of the Union of Turkish Culture, was quoted to claim that the only way forward for the Jewish minority was cultural Turkification (*Akşam*, 1934a: 2).

For the *Son Posta* newspaper, the roots of the otherness could be traced back to the close links between the Jewish people living in different parts of the world. These well-established intra-communal links all over the world, the newspaper argued, marked the broad consciousness of the

Jews about their ethnical and cultural belonging and identity. Drawing from these arguments, in an article published on 8 July, *Son Posta* quoted 'a Jewish friend' that 'anti-Semitism was not rooted in the Turkish nation'. The same 'Jewish friend' nonetheless was quoted as claiming that 'unless they [the Jews] did not learn Turkish and unless [the Turks] would teach this language there would not be mutual understanding and integration among them, despite the fact that they really liked one another' (1934: 3).

A similar sentiment was also expressed in the pages of the *Cumhuriyet* and *Milliyet* newspapers. Writing on the semi-systematic anti-semitic violent attacks, Yunus Nadi, owner and columnist of *Cumhuriyet*, criticized the undeveloped language skills of the Jewish citizens also as one of the reasons behind the problematic communication between the merchant Jews and the Turkish peasants (1934: 1-2). He argued that this communicative problem had been open to the manipulation of the anti-Semitic elements in the country thus emphasizing the necessity of learning Turkish properly and of integrating into the Turkish culture for the Jewish citizens in order to avoid such manipulations. Following a similar line of thought, *Milliyet* quoted well-known Jewish merchants of İstanbul (like Nisim Taranto) and Jewish intellectuals (such as Professor Mişon Ventura), who consolidated the dominant discourse and advised the immigrated Jews to adopt themselves with the requirements of living in the Turkish society in different ways (1934a: 1). Thus, *Milliyet* also tied Thracian semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks indirectly to the issue of Turkification through the words of Jewish intellectuals.

Vakit also reserved a considerable place for the debates on the necessity for the Turkification of the Jews. It first published an interview conducted with Tekin Alp, who stated that the Jews would be Turkified as other Jewish minorities did, such as Italy and England, becoming culturally inseparable from the members of those societies (1934c: 1 and 9). These arguments were further consolidated in an interview conducted with Mişon Ventura, who claimed that the Jews should consolidate their ties of citizenship through completely immersing in the Turkish culture (*Vakit*, 1934d: 11). In other columns of *Vakit*, the semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks were linked to a certain panic which emerged, the newspaper claimed, as a result of language barriers and the Jewish citizens were criticized for not learning the Turkish language and culture.

As it can be seen from the presentation of the attacks by the mainstream press, the cultural otherness was seen and presented as the main cause for the 1934 incidents by the mainstream press. Thus, the Jewish minority's perceived isolation from the cultural sphere of the society and their perceived reluctance to integrate was presented as one of the reasons of reaction that was translated into violent events in 1934. In this respect, Jewish minority was criticized for not showing enough effort to integrate with rest of the society in cultural terms. Consequently, they were suggested to accelerate their efforts for further cultural integration

especially in the area of language acquisition.

Overall, the discursive line of the mainstream press did not shift from the government's policy and discourse in suggesting that the problems were tied to the full integration of the Jews into the new Turkish society in linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic terms. By extension, the mainstream newspapers also claimed that the non-integration of the Jewish minority (a fault of their own, they claimed) would only cause the further rise of anti-Semitism and that a politically integrated Jewish community would not leave any room since they would have already demonstrated their loyalty to the country by doing so. In this sense, the mainstream press functioned within an othering framework prescribed by the state.

3.2. The Radical Press

With the introduction of the new Press Law in 1931 and a somewhat more permissible environment, new outlets begun to appear on the Turkish press landscape. While largely conservative in outlook, a small number of them also displayed ultranationalist tendencies. Inspired and encouraged by the fascist ideas flowing from Italy and Germany, two such newspapers; the *Milli İnkılâp* and *Orhun* took their privileged and leading places among the other publications of the same kind, such as *Çığır*, to become pivotal in disseminating Anti-Semitic propaganda and invoking, among others, the Thracian semi-systematic anti-semitic violent attacks.

Milli İnkılâp emerged as the Turkish reproduction of a German anti-Semitic magazine named *Der Stürmer*. Its owner and editor was Cevat Rifat Atilhan, a self-claimed anti-Semite who had published several anti-Semitic publications prior to the *Milli İnkılâp*. Most of the cartoons and the texts were translated from German into Turkish by only replacing the German Jewish names with the Turkish-Jewish ones (such as Salomon, Mishon, Morhehay, etc.) (Levi, 1996). The journal used historical references in order to indicate the unreliable nature of the Jews against the Ottomans and the Turks. Furthermore, referring to the statements made by the opinion-leaders of the Kemalist regime, such as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, *Milli İnkılâp* tried to indicate its loyalty to (and links with) the existing regime (1934b: 2). In fact, it distorted the meanings of these statements and used them in the anti-Semitic contexts outside of the contexts in which they were stated by these leaders of the regime.

A discursive analysis of the *Milli İnkılâp* before and after the 1934 events clearly indicates an anti-Semitic perspective in its articles, editorials and cartoons espousing the replacement of Jewish socio-economic institutions (or the 'Jewish establishment') with the Turkish ones.⁷ In this respect direct references were given to the 'privileged economic status' of the Jewish people all over Turkey and the Thracian region in particular. In this sense, the *Milli İnkılâp* strictly copied *Der Stürmer* in its economic anti-Semitism. It represented the Jews as 'blood suckers' who

flawed the economic independence of Turkey by capturing pivotal positions in the economic structure (1934c: 2). A month before the events, *Milli İnkılâp* referred to the so-called ‘maltreatment’ and ‘exploitation’ of the Turkish peasants by the Jewish merchants and the ‘grasping traders’ in Çanakkale. Quoting from the *Vakit*’s article dated May 6, 1934, which maintained the need for ‘saving the peasant from the grasping traders’, *Milli İnkılâp* claimed the legitimacy of its so-called struggle against the ‘Jewish elements’ (1934b: 2). The outlet claimed that all the villages in Thrace were placed under the control of the Jews since the crop-fields were owned by Jewish merchants. In another article published on the same date, the outlet also underlined the need to ‘save the peasant from his existing predicament’. In contrasting the relatively prosperous peasants of Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania; and after emphasizing the need to improve the living standards of the Turkish peasants; *Milli İnkılâp*’s article pointed at ‘the Jew’ as the responsible for the harms inflicted on the ‘pure’ Turkish firms (1934b: 2).

Apart from these two articles, the Thrace semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks did not feature exclusively in the pages of the *Milli İnkılâp*. This can be explained by the fact that the outlet aimed at the ‘purification’ of the whole country from the Jews and it chose to retain its focus on the spread the anti-Semitic ideology over the whole country rather than in a specific region. To that end, *Milli İnkılâp* represented the Jews as the untrustworthy ‘fifth column’ in the Turkish society. In this context, Cevat Rifat Atilhan, a prolific columnist of the outlet, incited distrust and hostility towards the Jewish minority by citing various intelligence activities carried out by the Jewish agents against the Ottomans -including during the Sina Battle (1934a: 4), during the siege of Edirne in the Balkan Wars ((1934b: 2) and during the War of Liberation (1934a: 5). According to Atilhan, the Jews were unreliable, and espoused a dual homeland and nation. He claimed that they did not hesitate to manipulate the Turkish society to achieve their socio-political objectives (cited in: Bokurt, 2011: 180). This was much in line with the cartoons and other comments adopted from *Der Stürmer*, published by *Milli İnkılâp* to portray the Jews as power-greedy, deceptive and conspiratorial communities that sought control over the world economy (Güven and Yılmazata, 2014). The journal also put emphasis on the political agenda of the Jews by referring to the Zionist objectives of the ‘eternal Jew’ to establish a state for the Jews in Palestine.

For the outlet, attempts at integration were also futile and the Jewish minority was framed as resistant to conversion and integration. According to Reşat Vedat, a prominent columnist of the *Milli İnkılâp* the failure of Germany in Germanizing the Jews was an indicative example of this resistance (*İnkılâp*, 1933: 7). For Vedat and others, the Jews could not be Turkified even if they themselves intended to do so. Thus, *Milli İnkılâp* criticized the efforts towards cultural Turkification of the Jews. The articles published in *Milli İnkılâp* disapproved the adoption and use of sacred and

value-laden Turkish names by the Jewish intellectuals (i.e. Oğuzhan, Kayihan, Tekinalp, Cengiz and Bozkurt). They also claimed that the distorted use of the Turkish language by the Jews was a ‘cultural assault’ on the Turkish language and its pronunciation (1934d: 6). According to *Milli İnkılâp* a Jew could not become a Turk ‘simply by changing his name or religion’; Turkishness was ‘a matter of blood and character’ (1934a: 5).

Orhun, which was another anti-Semitic outlet published by Nihal Atsız⁸, included more Turkist undertones. It was not committed exclusively to the ideal of anti-Semitism as *Milli İnkılâp* was but moved by racist sentiments, it nonetheless argued the impossibility of complete Turkification of the Jewish minority due to their racial features. In an editorial titled, ‘The communist, the Jew and the toady’, the outlet argued that efforts towards self-Turkification among the Jews were undertaken as a disguise, in order to hide their real agendas. In that article, the Jews are framed as hypocrites and grasping traders, ‘who would not hesitate to sell their host country [Turkey]’ (1934a: 4-5). According to *Orhun*, the Jew was a grasping trader. Money was the God of the Jew. He could sell even the flag of the country to which he was supposed to be bound with loyalty. It is also important to note nevertheless that the outlet did not prescribe any anti-Semitic policies toward the Jewish minority and no hierarchical discrimination is discernible, since for *Orhun* it was not only the Jews who harmed the Turkist ideal but also the Communists. In fact, for the outlet, the Jewish minority were among the other ‘*Türkümsü*’ groups⁹ such as the Turkified Albanians, Cherkeshians, Arabs, Armenians, Cretans, etc (1934c: 157-158). In other words, *Orhun* was against the Jews as part of its nationalist discourse which saw all non-Turkish but ‘so-called Turkified’ elements living in the Turkish society as threatening others. Its anti-Semitism was thus subordinate to its Turkism

Nevertheless, subscription to these two ideological stances were by no means exclusive. On the contrary, due to their racist sentiments it was easy for both narratives to accommodate each other. Thus, in its general Turkist approach, *Orhun* can at times, be seen to have a anti-Semitic rhetoric. In an article, titled, ‘Let the noble children of Moses know’ published on 25 May 1934, the outlet criticizes the economic and moral standing of the Jewish minority and their so-called ‘hypocritical’ efforts towards Turkifying. Article’s author Atsız, after referring to the prejudices and historical stories of Jewish betrayal of the Turks, further warns that the Jews ‘should know their limits’ and ‘remain as noble Turkish subjects’. Perhaps more remarkably the article concludes with the following warning: ‘[...] If we get angry we would not be content with exterminating them as the Germans did, but we will go further. We will frighten them. As the proverb goes, it is better to frighten the Jew rather than to kill him’ (1934b: 139-140).

4. The 'Jewish Other' in the Turkish Press: A Tale of Two Stories

The analysis of the press material from the 1934 events sheds light onto two distinct journalistic trajectories in representing the 1934 events, pursued by the mainstream press and radical press respectively. Representation of the 1934 semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks by the mainstream press can be considered as an example of embedded and guided journalistic practices of othering. In this regard, discourses of the mainstream newspapers did not differ significantly from each other. They distanced the government from any possible responsibility of the events and placed the blame squarely on the Jewish community framed as resisting socio-economic and cultural integration into the Turkish nation. What differentiated the narratives of individual mainstream newspapers from each other was their emphasis on different aspects of the events, and the different sources they used in presenting the semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks. In this sense, these outlets investigated and published different aspects of the 1934 events following closely the main arguments and statements of the state. Moreover, their emphasis on integration and 'Turkification' consisted of cultural elements such as language, and not race. It is possible to suggest therefore that the mainstream press was not openly influenced by the ideologies of anti-Semitism and racism since this did not reflect official policy.

The radical press, on the other hand, provided its audience with a visibly racist and anti-Semitic representation of the Jewish minority during the 1934 events displaying a discernible contrast to the narratives utilized by the mainstream press. The latter was embedded in the state and were thus instigated through official policies of Turkification serving as the ideological apparatus of the state and the dominant group. They functioned as important tools of controlled othering of certain segments of the society within the context of a socio-economic, cultural and political system of control pursued by the state. The radical racist press such as *Orhun* and anti-Semitic press such as *Milli İnkılâp*, on the other hand, openly demonized the Jews within the context of the 1934 events. According to these periodicals, the Jews were natural 'others' to be expelled from the country if not assimilated within it. They used stereotypes, hate speech and other canards to present the Jews as 'natural born outsiders'.

While maintaining a tight control of the press, the Turkish state allowed these publications so long as they served the official policy of Turkification. However, when *Milli İnkılâp* and *Orhun* breached the limits of the official state ideology aimed at othering in a more controlled fashion, through assimilation (i.e. Turkification) and became vocal anti-Semitic outlets, official tolerance was retracted upon fears that anti-Semitism would directly challenge the state's discourse, public order and objectives of the nation-building project through non-violent means.

This study's findings are also suggestive of a broader trend toward using popular memory in the othering strategies of the Turkish press toward the Jews in constructing Turkishness. From the analysis, it is clear that both the mainstream and the radical press referred to unofficial memory and mobilized selective individual memories regarding the Jews in the Thrace region of the country. In this sense, they represent a bottom-up basis to the dominant memory formation processes and discourses in the course of nation-(re)building. Following conceptualization of memory as a discursive practice, one may argue that different stories and representations of the Jewish minority were reflected in the different discursive formations. In fact, within this framework, the press became an important domain between official and radical narratives where a discursive struggle and negotiation took place over 'popular memory' as 'symbolic boundaries' to construct notions of 'us' the Turks and 'them', Turkey's Jewish minority. Further academic inquiry into how the media rearticulates memory in constructing symbolic boundaries would significantly contribute to an understanding of how we conceptualize others in multiethnic societies in Turkey and beyond.

5. Conclusion

Though not limited or peculiar to the late Ottoman or early Republican eras, processes of ethno-cultural and socio-economic homogenization, what came to be known as Turkification, were an important backdrop to the 1934 Thrace semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks. The Turkish nation-building project was mainly based on homogenizing the socio-economic and cultural groups under the unified notion of Turkishness and ideology of Turkish nationalism notwithstanding the cultural and socioeconomic diversity of the society. To that end, the Turkish state followed a systematic policy of controlled 'othering' ethno-national and religious minorities, which were hesitant towards integration and/or assimilation into the dominant Turkish nationalist vision. It also aimed to contain the potential non-Turkish and non-Muslim challenges to the dominant ideology.

In this context, the Turkish press generally served as an ideological apparatus of the Turkish state. Most of the mainstream newspapers in the course of the nation-rebuilding process during the 1930s followed the dominant discursive line of the state in their framing of the minorities. They implicitly and explicitly engaged in the 'controlled' othering of the minority groups to circumvent what the state thought could be a challenge to the dominant ideological discourse which sought cultural and socio-economic homogeneity. Yet, it is important to draw a distinction between the othering practices of the Turkish press as part of the assimilationist policies of the Turkish state and the ideology of anti-Semitism. While there were distinctively anti-Semitic outlets that are likely to have played an important role in provoking the local population against the local Jews, the mainstream press as the ideological

apparatus of the Turkish state did not go as far in its othering rhetoric and did not stray from official discourses. In this context, statements by government officials that Jews could return to their homes and those responsible for the incidents would be prosecuted were widely covered in mainstream newspapers. Beyond the discussion that continues on the causes of the semi-systematic anti-Semitic violent attacks of 1934, this finding complements more nuanced inquiries into the dynamic processes of production of ‘others’ and the ideologically contingent contents of such categories in the framing of minorities in nation-building contexts.

Note

¹ Atilhan came from an elite family of soldiers, writers and statesmen. He began publishing the *İnkılap* (predecessor of *Milli İnkılap*) and concurrently started to cultivate close relations with the leading figures of the Hitler regime, in particular Julius Streicher, the Nazi propagandist and publisher of *Der Stürmer* whom he visited in 1933. Some months after his return, Atilhan started publishing *Milli İnkılap*, an even more violent anti-Semitic journal than *İnkılap*. In 1935, he published his seminal anti-Semitic book “Suzy Liberman, Jewish Spy”, of which the Turkish Army bought 40’000 copies and distributed them amongst its officers. Following the Second World War, Atilhan pursued a career in politics, through the founding of the anti-Semitic National Development Party (*Milli Kalkınma Partisi*) and later, the Islamic Democratic Party (*İslam Demokrat Partisi*) while he continued to publish prolifically in nationalist, conservative, and Islamist periodicals.

² For analytical clarity, the term ‘events’ and ‘incidents’ are nonetheless retained in certain sections as short-hand to refer to the semi-systematic anti-Semitic collective acts of violence.

³ There is scant information on the life and works of Rusçuklu Fahri, or Fahri Diker. From publicly available information, it is understood that he was a one time local councillor for İzmir and published the anti-Semitic outlet *Işık* from 1932 until 1936 on a fortnightly basis.

⁴ After arguing that there was no link between the attacks and anti-Semitism and mentioning the historical friendly relations between the Turks and Jews, Mişon Ventura praised the stance of the Turkish government towards the events (*Cumhuriyet*, 1934a: 1).

⁵ Here, *Cumhuriyet* referred to the Rabbi’s advice to displaced families, on respecting the law and following government advice to return to their homes.

⁶ Moiz Cohen was one of the most prominent advocates of Turkish nationalism and an ideologue of Pan-Turkism. In that vein, he promoted the Turkification of the minorities within the Turkish Republic and published his ideas in an influential pamphlet in 1928 titled *Türkleştirme* [Turkification]. He also wrote for the newspapers *Cumhuriyet*, *Vatan*, *Akşam*, *Hürriyet*, and *Son Posta*.

⁷ From this perspective, being Turkish excludes being Jewish; in other words, for the authors of *Milli İnkılap*, if you are a Jew you cannot be a Turk at the same time so Turkification of a Jew is not possible (See also, Orhun, 1934a: 4-5).

⁸ Atsız was a prolific ultranationalist writer, novelist, poet, historian and philosopher. He self-identified as racist, Pan-Turkist and Turanist. He published several pan-Turkist magazines throughout his career including *Atsız Mecmua*, *Orhun*, *Orkun* and

Ötüken. *Orhun* was published from 1933 to 1934, and again from 1943 to 1944. For more details on Atsız’ life and works, see <https://huseyinhalatsiz.com/>.

⁹ *Türkümsü* (Turky): For Orhun, these were the groups who had excellent language skills, making it very difficult to be distinguished from the ‘pure Turks’, but ‘their blood and race’ was different than those of the Turks.

Appendix. Supplementary Materials

Supplementary Materials with this article can be found in online version at journal website (click to download; [Appendix1](#), [Appendix2](#), [Appendix3](#) and [Appendix4](#)).

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