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Projections of Xenophobia: The Capitulations, Employment, and Anglo-Turkish Relations in the 1920s

Orçun Can Okan

Abstract

Some tensions remained painfully unresolved between Turkey and the Allies at the end of World War I, even after the peace treaty that was signed in 1923 at Lausanne. This article aims to unpack these tensions by examining descriptions and manifestations of xenophobia in post-Lausanne Turkey. It focuses on Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment in Istanbul in 1926, within a timeframe that extends from the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 to Turkey's entrance into the League of Nations in 1932. The article traces the politics of employment in light of the traumatic impacts of the capitulations, encounters involving specific institutions, as well as broader geopolitical dynamics. It approaches Anglo-Turkish relations in the 1920s as a particularly revealing window onto postwar international politics and stresses the link that was "internationally" drawn in this decade between peoples' "ability" and sovereignty. Through this emphasis, the article argues that competing projections about Muslim Turks' ability "to stand by themselves" were central to descriptions and manifestations of xenophobia in post-Lausanne Turkey.

Keywords: xenophobia, sovereignty, early republican Turkey, Britain, League of Nations

**Yabancı Düşmanlığı Yansı(t)maları:
Kapitülasyonlar, İstihdam ve 1920'lerde Türk-İngiliz İlişkileri**

Özet

I. Dünya Savaşı'nın sonunda Türkiye ile İtilaf Devletleri arasındaki gerilimlerin bazıları 1923'te Lozan'da imzalanan barış antlaşmasından sonra dahi sıkıntılı bir çözümsüzlük içinde kaldı. Bu makale bu gerilimleri yabancı düşmanlığı tasvir ve tezahürlerine odaklanarak irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. 1926 yılında İstanbul'da istihdam meseleleri özelinde cereyan eden Türk-İngiliz gerginliklerini, 1908 Jön Türk İnkılabı'ndan Türkiye'nin 1932'de Milletler Cemiyeti'ne üye olmasına uzanan bir zamansal çerçeve içerisinde ele almaktadır. Kimin nerede ne iş yapacağına dair siyaseti şekillendiren etkenleri birbirine bağlı birkaç düzlemde tartışmaktadır: kapitülasyonların travmatik etkileri, spesifik kurumlar özelinde yaşanan gerginlikler ve daha kapsamlı jeopolitik dinamikler. Makale, 1920'lerde Türk-İngiliz ilişkilerinin savaş-sonrası uluslararası siyasi bağlama dair hassaten açıklayıcı nitelikler taşıdığını öne sürer. Bu tarihsel bağlamda halkların "kabiliyetleri/muktedirlikleri" ile egemenlikleri arasında "uluslararası" şekilde kurulan bir bağa vurgu yapar. Lozan-sonrası Türkiye'de yabancı düşmanlığı tasvir ve tezahürlerinin merkezinde şu meseleye dair birbiriyle çekişen projeksiyonların yer aldığını savunur: Müslüman Türklerin "kendi ayakları üzerinde durmaya" ne kadar kabiliyetli ve muktedir oldukları.

Anahtar kelimeler: yabancı düşmanlığı, egemenlik, erken cumhuriyet dönemi Türkiye'si, Britanya, Milletler Cemiyeti

In October 1926, a series of articles in the Paris daily *Le Journal* caused great resentment in Ankara, the capital of the republic established in Turkey three years earlier. In addition to raising scathing criticism of Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk) and the republican regime as a whole, the French publicist Edouard Helsey pointed to a certain "Kemalist xenophobia" in Turkey. Writing in the wake of a new and widely publicized encounter between Turkey and

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46 France—the *Lotus-Bozkurt* case (discussed in more depth below)—Helsey urged his readers to avoid the illusion that Turks’ attitude would be more favorable if their encounter involved not the French but others. “The ‘regenerated’ Turks include all foreigners in the same readily rowdy hostility,” he wrote, associating this with “lack of restraint,” “arrogant carelessness,” and “profound xenophobia.”¹ Helsey told his readers about the street celebrations on the anniversary of “the day when the Allies left Constantinople, following the Treaty of Lausanne,” and quoted a Turkish newspaper he described as officially inspired, where the Allied troops were portrayed as “disgusting savages, the infamous bunch from 72 nations who were swept away so brilliantly by the soldiers of Ghazi [Mustafa Kemal].” He saw these as signs of the prevalent mood in the country, and of the all-encompassing nature of “the kindnesses” in question: “Kemalist xenophobia does not languish in distinctions. Seventy-two nations (which ones?) in the same bag, that’s a record!”²

Such tongue-in-cheek descriptions of Kemalist xenophobia are striking and rather puzzling at first. Was it nationalist xenophobes who pursued one of the most radical projects of westernization in the twentieth century, heartily adopting a series of European laws, proudly wearing European hats, swiftly discarding the Perso-Arabic script for the Latin script? Striking though they may be in retrospect, Helsey’s criticisms did not shock everyone in 1926. A leading British diplomat in Turkey considered it “refreshing *at last* to find a French publicist talking straight to the Turks.”³ As the discussion below illustrates, 1926 was a year of particularly intense encounters between Turkish and British statesmen over attitudes the latter described with the term xenophobia. In addition to being one of the main signatories of Turkey’s peace treaty with the Allies, signed at Lausanne in July 1923, Britain still had a territorial dispute to settle with Turkey over Mosul, in present-day Iraq. Moreover, in 1926, British diplomats in Turkey were deeply frustrated with what they saw as violations of the Treaty of Lausanne in the treatment of foreigners and non-Muslims in the country. Among the causes of this frustration, contestations over employment were prominent. Employment in various kinds of institutions, ranging from schools to banks, were charged with great significance in diplomatic talks, as well as in public duels that received keen press attention. Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment in 1926 are particularly revealing, therefore, regarding the tensions embedded in the use and significance of the term xenophobia in this post-Lausanne context in the 1920s. Unpacking these tensions sheds new light on the construction of a republic in Turkey, and on the wider international contexts in which that new republic sought to establish sovereignty.

Following this introductory section which outlines the premises and contributions of the article, the discussion below consists of three main parts. The first part highlights a key component of xenophobia-related tensions in early republican Turkey. It draws attention to traumas of “the capitulations,” which can be broadly defined as extraterritorial legal (and thus, economic, social, and political) privileges granted by the Ottoman state to foreign (mostly European) states and their subjects.⁴ The second part delves into employment-related disputes involving two specific institutions in Istanbul in 1926: the English High

1 Edouard Helsey, “Angora n’est pas encore la Turquie,” *Le Journal*, October 20, 1926, 1. Published between October 16 and 20, Helsey’s articles were announced as part of inquiries the newspaper’s “eminent collaborator” pursued around the world, investigating in this case the “convulsive transformations” taking place in “Kemalist Turkey.” See *Le Journal*, October 15, 1926, 1.

2 Helsey, “Angora,” 1. Following the publication of Helsey’s articles, the prominent Turkish journalist Yunus Nadi (Abaloğlu) believed that the portrayals Helsey mentioned here were perhaps those published in his *Cumhuriyet* earlier that month. See Yunus Nadi, “Yine Edouard Helsey’e Dair,” *Cumhuriyet*, October 27, 1926, 1. As illustrated below, Yunus Nadi was among the multiple leading Turkish journalists of the time who believed Helsey’s descriptions were essentially accusations by a malevolent man writing with bias and insufficient knowledge about new Turkey.

3 Emphasis added; see Reginald Hoare reporting to London from Istanbul on November 3, 1926, with copies of Helsey’s articles enclosed, in The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FO 371/11528/E_6194.

4 On the capitulations, see Feroz Ahmad, “Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations, 1800–1914,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2000): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/11.1.1>; Maurits H. van den Boogert, *Capitulations and the Ottoman Legal System: Qadis, Consuls, and Beraths in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Edhem Eldem, “Capitulations and Western Trade,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. 3, *The Later Ottoman Empire 1603–1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 283–335; Kate Dannies and Stefan Hock, “A Prolonged Abrogation? The Capitulations, the 1917 Law of Family Rights, and the Ottoman Quest for Sovereignty during World War 1,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (2020): 245–260, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074382000001X>; Laura Robson, “Capitulations Redux: The Imperial Genealogy of the Post-World War I ‘Minority’ Regimes,” *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 3 (2021): 978–1000, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhab358>.

School for Girls in Pera and the Ionian Bank. In March 1926, these institutions were mentioned in *The Times* to point out “Turkish Violation of Treaty Rights” with reference to “many Turkish attempts to foist Moslem Turks, at salaries fixed by the Turkish authorities, regardless of their incompetence, upon foreign institutions.”⁵ After analyzing the motives and stakes involved in specific encounters such as these, the third part attends to wider contexts of geopolitics. This last part highlights exigencies of international politics to explain how key tensions in Anglo-Turkish relations were considerably abated by the end of 1926, and a path was set for Turkey’s eventual membership in the League of Nations in 1932. The core argument in this three-tiered discussion is that competing projections about Muslim Turks’ “ability” were pivotal in descriptions and manifestations of xenophobia in post-Lausanne Turkey. As explained below, this is an argument that accounts for competition and discrimination as well as insecurity and aspiration.

In the world of the 1920s, a link was explicitly and internationally drawn between the ability of peoples “to stand by themselves” and their sovereignty “under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.”⁶ The notion that some states and societies were not yet sufficiently civilized sat at the core of the League of Nations’ vision for the mandates and minority protection.⁷ In this wider context, it was vital to demonstrate (and/or rapidly acquire) the abilities expected from civilized peoples who could “stand by themselves.” Especially in places where the supervisory gaze of “the world” was omnipresent, employment was a critical field of contestation that offered precious opportunities to convince others about civilized ability, even if gradually.⁸ In post-Lausanne Turkey, the desire to prove “ability” was a key reason for the push to empower Muslim Turks through employment at the expense of a wide range of “others” including non-Muslims as well as foreigners. After endless encounters with a civilized world experienced as exploitative and predatory, this push to empower Muslim Turks—far from compatible with equality of citizens before law—accompanied the systematic dislocation and dispossession of those excluded from the envisioned Turkish nation.⁹ A focus on Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment helps illustrate the stakes of employment with due attention to these wider “international” contexts of the 1920s. Furthermore, this approach helps situate practices of inclusion and exclusion within an analytical framework that extends beyond processes of ethnoreligious homogenization in a single country. Employing this broad analytical perspective contributes, moreover, to developing historical approaches to two frequently used and debated terms of our twenty-first century: xenophobia and sovereignty.

Xenophobia can be broadly defined as “discrimination against and hatred of foreigners, targeting outsiders and strangers or more often those who are in effect part of one’s own society but are perceived as incommensurably different from the majority population.”¹⁰

5 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1540, clipping from *The Times* dated March 5, 1926.

6 Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant described the mandates system as “a sacred trust of civilisation,” entrusting “advanced nations” with “the tutelage” of peoples “not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 408, app. 1.

7 As pointed out by Eric Weitz: “In conception, mandates and minority protection were closely linked. Both presumed states and societies that were not quite civilized enough; hence the need for a supervisory power.” Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1338, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.113.5.1313>. More recently, Laura Robson stressed that “the concepts of internationally guaranteed minority rights and mandatory trusteeship for emerging nation-states were constructed together: not to make sovereignty eventually accessible to the globe but to permanently restrict it on the basis of race.” Robson, “Minorities Treaties and Mandatory Regimes: The Racialization of Sovereignty after 1919,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 41, no. 3 (2021): 333, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-9407845>.

8 This is a point elaborated below in the specific context that this article examines, but there is a truly vast and thus striking array of contexts in which leading Ottoman Turkish statesmen sought to demonstrate competence and ability to European “civilized nations” in the early twentieth century. Consider in this connection, for example, the discussion in Gizem Tongo, “‘Civilisation and Competence’: Displaying Ottoman War Paintings to Their Allies,” in *The Great War in the Middle East: Clash of Empires*, ed. Robert Johnson and James E. Kitchen (London: Routledge, 2019), 275–307.

9 There is an expanding historical literature on this process. An ideally longer list of scholars would include Ridvan Akar, Taner Akçam, Ayhan Aktar, Rifat Bali, Yaşar Tolga Cora, Lerna Ekmekcioglu, Semih Gökatalay, Murat Koraltürk, Ümit Kurt, Nazan Maksudyan, Ellinor Morack, Nevzat Onaran, Baskın Oran, İlçay Öz, Ayşe Özil, Mehmet Polatlı, Zafer Toprak, and Uğur Ümit Üngör, among many others.

10 Nergis Canefe, “Xenophobia,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. William A. Darity, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2008), 9:158–161.

48 Examining this complex phenomenon in specific historical contexts is essential for producing nuanced interpretations. The recent work by George Makari, for example, convincingly demonstrates how the use of the term xenophobia underwent significant change over time. As Makari points out, it was around the 1880s when this term began to appear frequently in British and French political press, becoming—especially after the Boxer Uprising in China and the Paris Exposition in 1900—a term for Western readers that “no longer applied to some rare medical illness or a broad rivalry between Western nations” but one that “now served as an explanation of the fearsome trouble Western globalists might encounter in the East, where an irrational, violent hatred of all outsiders might take hold as exemplified by the spirit-worshipping, rampaging Boxers.”¹¹ The use of the term xenophobia by British statesmen in the cases examined below closely resembles this turn-of-the-century use to describe behaviors of non-Western peoples seen as rebellious, irrational, and ultimately inferior.¹² In the 1920s, an unyielding attitude could go a long way in convincing European statesmen that they were encountering fear and hatred against all outsiders. The central position European statesmen imagined for themselves in the world at the time was critical in shaping this particular use of the term xenophobia.

A focus on Anglo-Turkish encounters in 1926 is especially useful for historicizing xenophobia, because Turkey too claimed an exceptional position for itself in the postwar context of the 1920s. Although defeated in World War I, Turkey could still claim victorious status when signing a peace treaty with the Allies in July 1923, as it succeeded in revising the initial postwar settlement through warfare. Republican Turkey was a successor to the Ottoman Empire, but one that did not come under a League of Nations mandate despite the severe disrepute of Ottoman rule that helped justify mandates in other former Ottoman lands. When compared with former Ottoman statesmen in the mandates, early republican Turkish leaders could exercise an enviable degree of power in terms of who to employ where and in what capacity. Approaching Turkey within a wider context of postwar international politics is at the heart of this article’s contribution to studies that engage with questions of xenophobia in early republican Turkey.¹³

Particularities of early republican Turkey produced highly significant contexts of interaction with Britain given British particularities in even wider contexts of international politics. Britain represented the “standard of civilization” in the “brazenly racialized characterizations of international legal personality” that built on nineteenth-century divisions of humanity according to levels of civilization.¹⁴ Many leading statesmen in post-Lausanne Turkey perceived Britain as the power most representative of the world symbolized by the League of Nations—a perception shaped in long encounters with the British Empire as well as by observations of British influence over the decisions taken (and left untaken) at institutions such as the League.¹⁵ Anglo-Turkish relations are particularly illuminating, therefore,

11 For these and a number of other key insights into this historical context, see George Makari, *Of Fear and Strangers: A History of Xenophobia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 39–62.

12 In Britain, there were also more particular historical roots for stereotypes such as “the Terrible Turk” in Romantic and Victorian discourses about the Ottoman Empire. See Patrick Brantlinger, “Terrible Turks: Victorian Xenophobia and the Ottoman Empire,” in *Fear, Loathing and Victorian Xenophobia*, ed. Marlene Tromp, Maria Bachman, and Heidi Kaufman (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2013), 208–230.

13 See, especially, Ethem Eldem, “Reshuffling Nationality and Ethnicity: The Ottoman Bank Staff from Empire to Republic,” in *European Banking Overseas, 19th–20th Century*, ed. Ton de Graaf, Joost Jonker, and Jaap-Jan Mobron (Amsterdam: ABN AMRO Historical Archives, 2002), 179–211; Rifat Bali, *Xenophobia and Protectionism: A Study of the 1932 Law Reserving Majority of Occupations in Turkey to Turkish Nationals* (Istanbul: Libra Kitapçılık ve Yayıncılık, 2013). In wider frameworks of relevance, see also Doğan Çetinkaya, “Illustrated Atrocity: The Stigmatisation of Non-Muslims through Images in the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 4 (2014): 460–78, https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944_2014_4_460; Hakan Karateke, Erdem Çıpa, and Helga Anetshofer, eds., *Disliking Others: Loathing, Hostility, and Distrust in Pre-modern Ottoman Lands* (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2018); and Daniela Luigia Caglioti, *War and Citizenship: Enemy Aliens and National Belonging from the French Revolution to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

14 Umut Özsü, “From the ‘Semi-civilized State’ to the ‘Emerging Market’: Remarks on the International Legal History of the Semi-periphery,” in *Research Handbook on Political Economy and Law*, ed. Ugo Mattei and John Haskell (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 247–249.

15 For insights into how British statesmen approached (and worked in) Turkey before, during, and after the 1920s, see Gerald Protheroe, *Searching for Security in a New Europe: The Diplomatic Career of Sir George Russell Clerk* (London: Routledge, 2006); Ebru Boyar, “Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde Prestij Faktörü (1923–1938),” *Belleter* 78, no. 283 (2014): 1157–1194,

regarding “international” contexts of assertions vis-à-vis “the world” in the 1920s, including assertions as fundamental as those about sovereignty.

Far from confined to claims about territory and borders vis-à-vis the world “outside,” Turkey’s sovereignty claims were tested in the 1920s by interstate rivalries as well as by notions prevalent in international relations of the time. When compared with the main successors of other recently collapsed empires, such as post-Habsburg Austria, for example, the envisioned nation in post-Ottoman Turkey was somewhat more vulnerable to perceptions of failure in living up to standards of civilization and ability, and thus sovereignty.¹⁶ Inhabited mostly by Muslim Turks, and with now only a tiny portion of land in Europe, Turkey was on the very margins (if not outside) of “the civilized world.” As successors to a “backward” empire in “the Orient,” Turkish statesmen’s arguments for a new Turkey had to take hold in a world where some peoples needed to try especially hard to achieve and maintain sovereignty.¹⁷

Before concluding this introductory section, a couple of final points on the article’s contribution to the literature on the “Turkification” of economy in Turkey: First, a focus on employment in tandem with questions of xenophobia and sovereignty facilitates moving beyond a common bifocal approach in this highly useful literature, where the focus tends to be on the Turkification of capital on the one hand, and of labor force and professions, on the other.¹⁸ Employment practices were situated at the intersections of multiple strands of “Turkification” rather than in any single strand. This becomes more evident through this article’s emphasis on competing contextualizations of employment by historical actors who ascribed significance to it within wider political frameworks. By the early republican period, employment had become a source of tension across multiple levels of social interaction in Turkey, in a vast range of workplaces including various types of shops, companies, factories, and ports.¹⁹ Analyzing the significance ascribed to employment together with questions of xenophobia and sovereignty contributes to explaining the larger stakes and pervasive nature of pushes for Muslim Turks’ employment, in contexts shaped by radical changes as well as remarkable continuities.

Moreover, the discussion below underscores that “Turkification” involved power relations that extended far beyond intercommunal dynamics within Turkey. Pushes for the employment of Muslim Turks as widely and dominantly as possible were closely linked

<https://doi.org/10.37879/belleten.2014.1157>; Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal, *Britain’s Levantine Empire, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Justin McCarthy, *The British and the Turks: A History of Animosity, 1893–1923* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022). Consider in this connection the origins and workings of the League as discussed in, for instance, Sakiko Kaiga, *Britain and the Intellectual Origins of The League of Nations, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); David Macfadyen et al., *Eric Drummond and His Legacies: The League of Nations and the Beginnings of Global Governance* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Pedersen, *The Guardians*.

¹⁶ In other post-imperial polities as well, employment was critical to constructing new regimes in multiple ways. See, for instance, Therese Garstenauer, “Unravelling Multinational Legacies: National Affiliations of Government Employees in Post-Habsburg Austria,” in *Narrated Empires: Perceptions of Late Habsburg and Ottoman Multinationalism*, ed. Johanna Chovanec and Olof Heilo (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 213–236.

¹⁷ This emphasis on the particularity of historical context contributes to a growing body of historical studies on sovereignty and the late Ottoman Empire, such as Aimee Genell and Lâle Can, “On Empire and Exception: Genealogies of Sovereignty in the Ottoman World,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 3 (2020): 468–473, <https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-8747423>; Lâle Can et al., eds., *The Subjects of Ottoman International Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); and Mostafa Minawi, “International Law and the Precarity of Ottoman Sovereignty in Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” *The International History Review* 43, no. 5 (2021): 1098–1121, <https://doi.org/10.1080/070775332.2020.1765837>. For analyses of sovereignty with reference to contexts comparable to Turkey in the early twentieth century, critical engagement with extraterritoriality seems to be a particularly promising direction. Consider in this regard, for instance, Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Daniel S. Margolies et al., eds., *The Extraterritoriality of Law: History, Theory, Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁸ See, for instance, Murat Koraltürk, *Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Ekonominin Türkleştirilmesi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011). Works by other leading scholars in this field are also cited below. For a critical engagement with the term “Turkification” in broader context, see also Erol Ülker, “Contextualising ‘Turkification’: Nation-Building in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918,” *Nations and Nationalism* 11, no. 4 (2005): 613–636, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2005.00222.x>.

¹⁹ I am thankful for the anonymous reviewer comments in this regard. For a useful analysis on a particularly relevant context, see Erol Ülker, “Turkish National Movement, Mass Mobilization, and Demographic Change in Istanbul, 1922–1923,” in *Contemporary Turkey at a Glance*, ed. Esra Özyürek and Meltem Ersoy (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017), 2:177–192. For key insights into the motives of a figure who played critical roles in the processes in question see Murat Koraltürk, ed., *Ahmet Hamdi Başar’ın Hatıraları: “Gazi Bana Çok Kızmış!..”* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007).

with claims to national independence and sovereignty vis-à-vis European powers like Britain.²⁰ As this article stresses, however, the concerns shaping early republican assertions about sovereignty were not limited to those regarding European powers, foreigners, and non-Muslims in Turkey. Concerns about the population majority itself were key to Turkish nationalist desires for “Turkification” in order to forge a reliable and “able” support basis for the republic. There was doubt about whether Muslim Turks could enter through the doors of foreign institutions in Turkey if their state did not help them. These doors would be pushed open, if necessary, as employment offered emancipatory breakthroughs for constructing a Turkish society that consisted of more than just peasants and state officials. The survival chances of that type of archaic society would be slim, as pointed out by nationalists such as Yusuf Akçura, since the final years of the defeated Ottoman Empire.²¹

There were, however, difficult questions surrounding a push to empower Muslim Turks through employment. Once the doors were pushed open for them at the expense of “others,” would Turkey be able to survive the ensuing loss of skills, intermediaries, and connections? Wouldn’t this loss culminate in a weak economy and thus also in failure to defend the country militarily? If “foisting” Muslim Turks upon foreign institutions were to cause the plight of foreign capital—skill as well as precious political support—would the republic then be “able” to resist foreign military encroachment? The tensions underlying these questions were central to Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment in 1926. To interpret them critically, we must first consider the meanings ascribed to relying on “others” in the context of a country like post-Lausanne Turkey. A particularly promising beginning point for this endeavor is to examine the significance ascribed to the capitulations and their abrogation(s).

Having the Doors Open(ed): The Lasting Trials and Tribulations of the Capitulations

Attention to traumatic impacts of the capitulations is essential for insights into Anglo-Turkish tensions over xenophobia. At the very outset of the republican period, in January 1924, these impacts were already recognized and assessed by figures such as Nevile Henderson, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul at the time, who saw “rampant xenophobia” as an important obstacle to Turkey’s postwar economic revival. According to Henderson, in addition to “the rapid development of a strong national consciousness” and the “foreign political and economic influence [that] Turkey has been in the past peculiarly subject to,” there were factors that “accentuated” xenophobia in Turkey: “Notably the suspicion with which foreign [p]owers and foreign capitalists are still regarded, their identification in the Turkish mind with an aggressive Christianity, and the recent memory of the privileged status enjoyed by foreigners under the capitulations.”²² A profound frustration with the capitulations had already built up in the late Ottoman Empire by the time they were first abrogated in 1914.²³ This abrogation was confirmed with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, but Turkish statesmen continued to be haunted by the specter of the capitulations afterwards. This was not only because of an enduring resentment of the exploitation and domination associated with them but also because, by the twentieth century, justifications for the capitulations suggested an insufficient degree of civilization in Turkey. They implied an inability on the part of Turkish authorities to act rationally, and thus a necessity to protect the civilized from arbitrary decisions by the not-so-civilized. Similar to the positions of leading Young Turks of the late Ottoman period, the Ankara government was not categorically against opening the country’s “doors” to civilized “others”—especially since foreign capital remained essential to modernizing the country’s economy. However, the republic continued to assert authority

20 In a highly useful recent study, Boyar and Fleet similarly stressed Turkish aspirations to economic independence as a key factor in tense Anglo-Turkish negotiations over trade agreements. See Ebru Boyar and Kate Fleet, “Great Britain and ‘a Small and Poor Peasant State’: Turkey, Britain and the 1930 Anglo-Turkish Treaty of Commerce and Navigation,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 6 (2021): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2021.1898386>.

21 Feroz Ahmad, “War and Society under the Young Turks, 1908–1918,” in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, ed. Albert Hourani, Philip Khoury, and Mary Wilson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 125–143. This is pointed out by Ahmad with reference to earlier works by Niyazi Berkes and François Georgeon as well.

22 TNA, FO 371/10171/E_633, confidential dispatch from Henderson to Curzon dated January 15, 1924.

23 See Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat, 1908–1918* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2019; first published 1982 by Yurt Yayınları (Ankara)); Ahmad, “Ottoman Perceptions of the Capitulations, 1800–1914”; and Mehmet Emin Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar* (Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2005).

over those doors, again like the Young Turks, with profound insecurities about the projected degree of civilization and ability among Muslim Turks.²⁴

Already in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, the leading figures of economic policy in Turkey were finding themselves in positions to address what they believed were unfair accusations of animosity towards foreigners. The capitulations and their abrogation at the outset of World War I had pivotal significance in this context.²⁵ Particularly revealing in this regard are the remarks made in 1917 by none other than Mehmed Cavid, the Ottoman minister of finance at the time, as he rejected categorical “animosity towards foreigners (*ecnebi husumeti*).”²⁶ As Mehmed Cavid spoke about the budget for the year in early March 1917, he acknowledged those who were indeed fearfully hesitant about the arrival of foreign capital in the country but stressed that this fear made sense only in the period *before* the capitulations were abrogated in 1914:

Because at that time, due to the capitulations which had placed Turkey under a network of despotism, those who brought in their wealth and capital used to bring with them the sovereignty of their states. The distribution of justice used to be done by their own judges. Every appeal of theirs would be met by their ambassadors. It was almost as if they were the sovereign ones in charge and we were nothing but guests in our own country. But today, thanks to the abrogation of the capitulations, I am not among those who see harm in opening our doors widely to those coming to our country... [And in fact] it is how I believe the country’s economic policy should be administered if we want to save the country.²⁷

Opening the country’s doors to foreigners was seen as a necessity and one that was not categorically harmful. What caused frustration were exploitative frameworks of interaction with “the foreign(er),” such as those identified in the capitulations. From the perspective of Young Turks like Mehmed Cavid, people became guests in their own country not with the arrival of foreign capital and skill, but when those necessities came with legal and political impositions that deprived a state of its sovereignty. A key question here was whether those interested in making deals in or with a country like late Ottoman Turkey would be willing to walk through the country’s doors without the capitulations. Most Young Turks might have wished for an immediate positive answer to this question. However, for “the civilized world,” this was a complex question that involved laws, methods, as well as characteristics and abilities identified in peoples.

This is, in part, why many Young Turks strived to bring about a change in the prevalent notions about Muslim Turks’ characteristic traits and abilities. The decade from 1908 to 1918 witnessed systematic efforts to construct a national economy in which Muslim Turks were hoped (and encouraged) to become energetic and assertive rather than docile and slavish.²⁸ These efforts were fueled with a desire to establish contrasts with the toppled regime of Abdülhamid II as well as with European stereotypes about Muslim Turks. Opposition to exploitative impositions from “the civilized world” were intertwined with projections about desired characteristics of the envisioned nation. It was the attempted change in the traits and abilities of Muslim Turks that Tekin Alp—another leading figure of Young Turk economic thought at the time—highlighted, for instance, as the main reason behind the European “fuss” (*yaygara*) about xenophobia in wartime Turkey. He believed that this fuss was essentially due to the contrast between the traits Europeans were used to seeing in Turks

24 The “Young Turks” is an umbrella term that signifies a diverse and multifactional group of individuals (mainly Muslim Turks) who constituted, especially after 1908, the leading cadres of political power in the late Ottoman Empire and early republican Turkey. For a particularly influential perspective on the question of “who were the Young Turks?,” see Erik Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk’s Turkey* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 95–109.

25 On the abrogation in 1914 by the then in power Committee of Union and Progress (hereafter CUP), see Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, 60–166.

26 See this speech cited and quoted in length in Turkish, via the newspaper *Tasvir-i Efkar*, in Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat*, 145–147. All translations in English are mine unless stated otherwise.

27 Quoted in Turkish in Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat*, 145–147.

28 The wide range of initiatives in this direction in the late Ottoman period, including administrative as well as educational steps, were key predecessors to similar measures in the early republican period. See Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat*, 16, 141–144, 156–157.

and the traits they began seeing after the abrogation of the capitulations in 1914. Rather than “a sluggish, servile, tactless, dull Turkish nation,” according to Tekin Alp, Europeans now saw “a nation in complete awareness of its rights and interests, placing its honor and dignity above everything else.”²⁹ It was because Europeans failed to understand this rapid change, Tekin Alp believed, that they identified national bigotry (*taassup*) and xenophobia (*ecanibgürizlik*) in Turkey’s progress-oriented steps.³⁰ Rather than a categorical opposition to opening the country’s doors to “others,” what Tekin Alp asserted was dominant agency over those doors. In how those assertions were made, the projected traits and abilities of the envisioned nation thus featured prominently.

In the period between 1918 and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923, claims about the capitulations and the envisioned Turkish nation remained intertwined. The Treaty of Lausanne confirmed the capitulations as abrogated, but only after a fight against Allied desires to reintroduce them.³¹ Even after the Ankara government’s military victories by late 1922, the French Chamber of Commerce in Istanbul, for example, considered the capitulations necessary if “honorable Europeans” were to continue living in Turkey—due to Turks’ methods, legislation, as well as “character.”³² The Ankara government had to assuage European fears while raising claims about Turkey’s political future *and* about its people. For example, in the Economic Congress held in Izmir in February 1923—a critical moment when the battles were over but a peace treaty was yet to be signed—Mustafa Kemal rejected animosity towards foreigners in Turkey and affirmed that the Ankara government was “always ready to give the necessary assurances to foreign capital on the condition that they abide by our laws.”³³ While pointing out that Turkey could no longer be “a country of prisoners” where the state fails to ensure benefits for the country from foreign capital, he also characterized Turkey as a “land of hardworking people” where foreign capital was needed for the modernization of economy after “centuries of negligence and deep apathy.”³⁴ Similar to earlier Young Turk assertions, the Ankara government’s rejection of the capitulations was imbued with assertions about the envisioned Turkish nation. In addition to expression of frustration with Western failures to understand and recognize, by 1923 these assertions would include contrasts with not only a particular period in Ottoman history but with centuries of Ottoman rule.

However, the year 1923 brought about neither a complete rupture with centuries of Ottoman rule nor a sea change in Turkey’s relations with the world “outside.” In the abovementioned report he wrote in Istanbul in January 1924, the British High Commissioner Henderson observed two key ways in which “the memory of the capitulations operate[d]” in republican Turkey.³⁵ The first was that many Turks still had difficulty “believing that [capitulations] are really dead,” tending to “scent a wish to revive the capitulations” on every occasion a foreign mission tried to defend the interests of its nationals.³⁶ In addition to Turkish fears about the possibility of a revival of the capitulations, Henderson raised a crucial point about abilities and capacities. He believed that there was a tendency in Turkey to “too easily attribute [foreign nationals’] prosperity to privilege alone, giving none of the credit to superior knowledge and business capacity”:

29 Tekin Alp wrote these in the journal *İktisadiyyat Mecmuası*, backed by the CUP. See, especially, Tekin Alp, “Ecnebi Sermayesine Karşı Siyaset-i İktisadiyyemiz,” *İktisadiyyat Mecmuası* 53 (April 26, 1917): 1–3. For more on his views in this regard see also Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat*, 171–172. Born to a Jewish family, Tekin Alp (or Moiz Cohen) (1883–1961) was a prominent ideologue of Turkish nationalism across multiple eras, including the early republican period. For insights into the continuities and changes that shaped his views by the second half of the 1920s, see Tekin Alp, *Türkleşirme* (Istanbul: Resimli Ay Matbaası, 1928).

30 See, especially, Alp, “Ecnebi,” 1. For an earlier instance when the author similarly refuted European accusations of national bigotry in Turkey, see also Tekin Alp, “Yeni Gümrük Tarifesi,” *İktisadiyyat Mecmuası* 28 (September 15, 1916): 1–2. These articles by Alp are also cited in Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat*, 171–172.

31 See Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, 166–202.

32 See Lucius Ellsworth Thayer, “The Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire and the Question of Their Abrogation as It Affects the United States,” *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 2 (1923): 232–233, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2188106>. This source is also cited in Elmacı, *İttihat-Terakki ve Kapitülasyonlar*, 184. Writing in 1923, Thayer also considered “a permanent reform of the judiciary” essential “if life for Americans in the interior of Turkey is to continue to be possible.” Thayer, “The Capitulations of the Ottoman Empire,” 233.

33 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1997), 2:103–116.

34 *Ibid.*

35 TNA, FO 371/10171/E_633, confidential dispatch from Henderson to Curzon dated January 15, 1924.

36 *Ibid.*

[Turks] think that their own turn has now come not only to dispense with, but to oust, the foreign merchant. Hence it is that they are more hostile to the settled foreign element, of whose position they are envious, than to the foreigner in his own country with whom they know they must do business and think they can do it direct. This is not in itself an unreasonable ideal. The unreasonableness lies in thinking that Turks, with their inherited incapacity and inadequate equipment, can achieve it at a moment's notice. Reasonable or unreasonable, they are prepared to destroy faster than they can build, rather than let the foreigner keep or regain his ascendancy.³⁷

Considering these references to the inherited incapacity of a people prepared to destroy faster than they can build, and who needed time to achieve otherwise, it seems as though Henderson identified in “Turks” a people “not yet able to stand by themselves.” What is clear, in any case, is that he did not see Turkey as a country inhabited by a homogenous body of people with equally credible claims to the same abilities and capacities. What he meant by “Turks” was essentially Muslim Turks. The British High Commissioner was writing with keen attention to dynamics between different religious and ethnic communities in Turkey. He pointed out “the extent to which non-Moslems have hitherto been employed in foreign enterprises” as one of the factors which shaped the xenophobia he identified around him in January 1924. As he drew attention to “disastrous” Turkish endeavors in matters of employment, such as the compulsion of concessionary companies and institutions “to employ none but Turks,” he elaborated on these pressures with reference to sentiments he described as follows: “The European employer, who has habitually employed Armenians, Greeks and Jews because of their superior knowledge and general capacity, is regarded as having deliberately set himself to keep the Turk under.”³⁸ Although rather contradictory in a context of radical secularization, early republican aspirations about Turkish citizenry did prioritize Muslims as the defining element of the desired Turkish society. How European statesmen understood and used the term “Turk” in instances such as the example above were factors that helped reproduce and sustain that prioritization.³⁹

Henderson wrote of employment-related pressures and impositions also in the case of schools managed by foreigners and non-Muslims in Turkey, where Turkish teachers for certain subjects were appointed “without giving the management of the schools any voice in their selection.”⁴⁰ British statesmen expected their agreements with Turkey at Lausanne to prevent instances such as these, but the next couple of years would prove otherwise. Regarding one instance of this kind in 1926, examined in detail below, a leading British diplomat in Turkey wrote to London of the “infinity of trouble” and “anxiety” he suffered due to a matter that “would have been settled in a moment” “in any civilised country.”⁴¹ The issue was that it wounded their pride in Ankara when Turkish statesmen sensed Western doubt about Turks’ place among the civilized. This was a chief reason why the capitulations were considered offensive, and why there were profound tensions embedded in Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment in post-Lausanne Turkey.

***Amour Propre (İzzet-i nef)* and Pushing the Door Open for Paid Apprenticeships**

As mentioned above, in March 1926, *The Times* mentioned the English High School for Girls in Pera (EHSG) and the Ionian Bank to highlight Turkish attempts to foist incompetent Muslim Turks upon foreign institutions in Turkey. However, a closer look reveals a more nuanced picture of the encounters involving these institutions. In the case of the EHSG, an appointment by the Turkish Ministry of Education resulted in a public duel between Turkey and Britain, fueling questions about Turkey’s compliance with the Treaty of Lausanne as well as about British respect for the republic’s executive authority within

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The impacts of European usage of the term Turk deserves closer attention in analyses of the term’s significance in early republican Turkey—as an ethnoreligious category, nationality status, and/or citizenship. This renewed attention can contribute to a useful literature on the making of a modern Turkish nation, nation-state, and citizenry, which includes works by Füsün Üstel, Soner Çağaptay, Hale Yılmaz, and Murat Metinsoy, to name but only a few.

⁴⁰ TNA, FO 371/10171/E_633, confidential dispatch from Henderson to Curzon dated January 15, 1924.

⁴¹ TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2191, in particular points 11 and 13 in the confidential dispatch from Hoare in Istanbul to Chamberlain, March 31, 1926.

Turkey.⁴² A (real or perceived) challenge to the Ankara government's executive authority put the very sovereignty of the republic at stake, as well as the amour propre (*izzet-i nefis*) of those entrusted with the exercise of that sovereignty. Moreover, as illustrated in the case of the Ionian Bank, employment in institutions such as banks meant not only posts and income but also access to interactions with "the civilized world." The Ankara government was willing to push doors open for Muslim Turks to strengthen its support basis as well as to substantiate claims about Muslim Turks' ability and entitlement to sovereignty. However, this willingness to push doors open exacerbated British concerns about not only Muslim Turks' (lack of) ability but also about the Ankara government's economic wisdom and rationality. The powers of the Turkish government were indeed increased with the abrogation of the capitulations, but were the Turks still so unwise and blinded by xenophobia?

The case of the EHSG was essentially the question of what to do when a teacher appointed by the Ankara government was considered unfit for service at the school by its British officials.⁴³ Would the school be able to reject an appointment made by the Turkish Ministry of Education, headed at the time by the young and energetic Mustafa Necati Bey, or be obliged to employ the appointee? Publicized in the press and discussed in multiple parleys between British and Turkish statesmen, the matter quickly evolved into a multifaceted encounter. After resisting the Turkish ministry's insistence to have the teacher at least start the job, the EHSG was temporarily closed. It even became a possibility that the school's directress, Ms. Thomas, could be prosecuted for refusal to obey government orders.⁴⁴ Turkish newspapers wrote of the encounter in terms of whether or not this "foreign school" would respect the republic's state authority.⁴⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, for example, condemned "the audacity" (*cüretkarlık*) of the school in "refusing to obey government orders," and applauded its closure as resolute action by the government and "the pertinacious" (*azimkar*) Minister of Education Necati Bey.⁴⁶ As tensions built up and it became clear that the matter would soon produce victors and vanquished, a solution was sought through diplomatic talks.⁴⁷ In early March 1926, in a meeting with the Turkish minister of foreign affairs in Ankara, the British ambassador Lindsay ascribed the matter a significance not less than Turkish non-compliance with the Treaty of Lausanne.⁴⁸ In response, the Turkish minister affirmed commitment to existing agreements with Britain, underlining that "as long as there are treaty stipulations (*ahkam-ı ahdiye*), implementing them constitutes a primary aim (*başlıca emel*)" for his government.⁴⁹ What is particularly striking about an incident like this is how it escalated into an encounter involving such immense political stakes.⁵⁰ Clearly, some tensions charged the school

42 Education continues in this school to this day. The school's current name is *Beyoğlu Anadolu Lisesi*. For some useful general information on the EHSG and the encounter in question, see Mustafa Ergün, *Atatürk Devri Türk Eğitimi* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1982), 49–61; Cengiz Atlı, *İstanbul'da İki İngiliz Okulu: İngiliz Kız Ortaokulu, İngiliz Erkek Lisesi* (İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, 2015); and Enno Maessen, *Representing Modern Istanbul: Urban History and International Institutions in Twentieth Century Beyoğlu* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), chapter 5.

43 Accounts vary with respect to the reason for this consideration. The school officials claimed that the teacher was in a state of drunkenness when he showed up, but Turkish sources from the period emphasize a desire on the part of the EHSG to remain outside and above government control regardless of the appointed individual.

44 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1571, enclosure 2 of Lindsay's report to Chamberlain dated March 3, 1926. See this file also for an extract on "The High School Incident" from *Journal d'Orient* dated February 27, 1926.

45 Ergün, *Atatürk Devri Türk Eğitimi*, 60. This is also the main context of significance Ergün suggests for the encounter in question, with references to *Vakit*, March 6, 1926; *Milliyet*, March 26, 1926; and *Milliyet*, April 4 and 8, 1926.

46 *Cumhuriyet*, March 7, 1926, 1.

47 For insights into these talks from the perspective of Nusret Bey, the main Turkish interlocutor as the Turkish Foreign Ministry's delegate in Istanbul at the time, see Presidential Ottoman Archives (hereafter BOA), HR.İM. 252/67, 252/78, 252/84, 252/93, 253/5.

48 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1718, Ambassador Lindsay reporting on March 10, 1926, to Chamberlain on the meeting that took place on March 8, 1926. British statesmen believed that the appointment denied them rights set forth in Ismet Pasha's letter to Sir Horace Rumbold of July 24, 1923, as part of rights under the Treaty of Lausanne. See point 5 in the report Hoare sent to Chamberlain on March 23, 1926, in TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2057. For further details, see also TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1073.

49 See the Turkish minister Tevfik Rüşdü's handwritten note reporting on this meeting to Prime Minister İsmet Pasha on March 9/10, 1926, in Presidential Republican Archives (hereafter BCA), 30-10-0-0-12-71-28. For a more detailed Turkish response given to British complaints of non-compliance with the Treaty of Lausanne in this context, see also TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2327.

50 Not all disagreements about employment carried the same political weight at the time, even though they might be equally fascinating to the historian in retrospect. On January 20, 1926, for example, the Refugee Section of the League of Nations International Labour Office asked if the Ankara government could exempt "Russian refugees" from measures that stopped foreigners in Turkey from practicing certain professions, by pointing out that these Russians

appointment with great political significance. It is these tensions that need unpacking in order to grasp what the encounter was really about.

Turkish insistence to exercise executive authority over the EHSG and the British view of this as noncompliance with the Treaty of Lausanne charged the matter with unmistakable political significance, but there was more to it. The more profound concerns shaping the encounter can be traced by attending to conversations not only between ambassadors and ministers but also at lower levels of diplomatic interaction. One such conversation took place right after the abovementioned meeting between the minister and ambassador in Ankara. During the follow-up conversation, the Ankara government's delegate in Istanbul, Nusret Bey, suggested to his interlocutor, Reginald Hoare, the British *chargé d'affaires* in Istanbul, to have the appointed teacher transferred elsewhere but only after having him teach at the EHSG briefly.⁵¹ From Hoare's perspective, this was unacceptable now that "there had been a good deal in the press about the school suggesting that out of sheer willfulness a teacher regularly appointed had been rejected." He interpreted Turkish insistence on the teacher's acceptance at the EHSG as part of a desire "to show the world that a foreign institution had been brought to heel."⁵² Hoare suggested another solution: part of which would entail that the school would keep the name of the teacher on its books for a short time but preclude him from attending the EHSG for reasons of health. This, he believed, was one easy way to settle the incident "without victors or vanquished."⁵³ This might have seemed easy to Hoare, but as his interlocutor Nusret Bey pointed out to him, the matter involved another crucial dimension: the *amour propre* of the Turkish minister of education.⁵⁴

In Ankara, it was crucial to strike a fine balance between self-esteem and decisions with broad political significance. Earlier, when the British ambassador stated intentions to speak directly with Necati Bey regarding the EHSG, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs Tevfik Rüşdü had "demurred," as the ambassador put it, and promised to talk to the minister himself.⁵⁵ Concrete steps to overcome the difficulties were taken after mid-April 1926, following the personal visits in Ankara by Mr. Reid, the director of the Ottoman Bank and a member of the school committee, who had met with the Minister of Education Necati Bey as well as Prime Minister İsmet Pasha.⁵⁶ Mr. Reid's meeting with Necati Bey did not yield the desired results, but a new teacher was eventually appointed by April 14, owing, as the British ambassador Lindsay believed, "mainly to the opportunity Mr. Reid had of interesting the prime minister personally in the case." "Although the word Mosul was never once mentioned throughout the discussions," wrote the ambassador, he suspected that "the approaching negotiations did a good deal to smooth out the difficulties."⁵⁷ When settled, the matter was addressed not in submissive compliance with the requests of a reprimanding ambassador entitled to speak with whomever he wanted whenever he wanted but rather thanks to the calculated interest shown in the matter by the prime minister—Necati Bey's fellow revolutionary and superior in state hierarchy. At least this was the image conveyed to British diplomats, and early republican Turkish statesmen ascribed great significance to conveying this image as part of their efforts to assert the authority and sovereignty of their state.⁵⁸

(many of whom worked in Istanbul as drivers and waiters/waitresses) were "political refugees," not foreign nationals. It took less than a week for the governor of Istanbul to convey in this instance a simple no-can-do: BOA, HR.İM. 173/21.

51 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1713, Hoare's telegram to London dated March 13, 1926.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 In the telegram Hoare sent to London on March 13, 1926, he does note that "Nusret suggested Minister of Education's *amour propre* was involved." Ibid. One wonders, though, about how empathetic Hoare would be towards the minister whom he viewed as intransigent and "semi-Bolshevik." See TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2058, point 4 in Hoare's dispatch to Chamberlain dated March 24, 1926.

55 See Lindsay's above-cited account dated March 10, 1926, in TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1718.

56 TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2473, see the information Lindsay conveyed from Istanbul to Chamberlain on April 14, 1926.

57 Ibid. As of April 28, 1926, the British Embassy in Turkey informed London that the incident "may be considered closed," since the appointed teacher showed up only to receive a salary, did not try to enter any classrooms, and publications in the Turkish press on April 26 explained away the teacher's eventual dismissal with irregular attendance and lack of diligence. See TNA, FO 371/11541/E_2778, report to Chamberlain, signed by Leeper for the ambassador in Istanbul on April 28, 1926.

58 In January 1929, Mustafa Necati Bey tragically died at the young age of thirty-five. Once the vigorous statesman could not be saved following an appendectomy, despite the intensive medical attention he was expected to receive in Ankara, there was grief as well as publicly voiced doubt about the skills and abilities of doctors in Turkey. These debates attest to the historical significance of questions of ability in early republican Turkey. See, for instance, Kemal Arı,

If the EHSO incident was particularly significant regarding republican assertions of authority, the equally tense Anglo-Turkish encounter over employment at the Ionian Bank was significant in terms of the abilities claimed for the envisioned Turkish nation. Banks represented hubs of the commercial and financial activities performed by the civilized, able, and thus sovereign peoples of the 1920s. They were the kind of institutions where men like Halid Ziya (Uşaklıgil), for example, a prominent Turkish intellectual employed at an Ottoman Bank branch in the 1880s, dreamt of seeing a greater number of Turks constitute the staff.⁵⁹ Attention to employment at the Ionian Bank is particularly useful for our purposes, as it was the only “purely British” bank operating in Turkey in February 1926. It was at this time that the bank’s branch in Istanbul became the venue of a striking encounter between its manager, Mr. Wyatt, and an unnamed Turkish official who introduced himself as “Inspector for Foreign Companies.”⁶⁰

The record of this encounter between the manager and the “inspector” underscores that the Ankara government’s push for the employment of Turks in post-Lausanne Turkey favored not all Turkish nationals but essentially Muslim Turks. It also clearly indicates that foreign institutions were expected to help Muslim Turks acquire certain professional skills if they did not already possess them. When qualifying the motives for these expectations, the Turkish inspector reportedly expressed a desire for Muslim Turks to be on the same footing as “others”:

We want the Moslem Turks to have the same rights as the others, and we want them to work in banks and other companies. My answer is quite logical. I have not asked you to dismiss non-Moslem employees, you are only requested to take on Turks. You can add another £T. 5,000 to £T. 6,000 to the bank’s budget, can’t you? This is quite easy.⁶¹

As the manager saw it, however, complying with this request was far from easy. The bank was already in dire financial circumstances; taking on new employees would mean costs too high to maintain without firing the non-Muslims and foreign nationals on whom the bank relied for its operations.⁶² The Turkish inspector found objections with reference to the Treaty of Lausanne irrelevant and demanded cooperation so that Muslim Turks “get into” foreign companies. To the surprise of the manager, the inspector even stated that the bank “should have been able to form young Turks” by that point, exclaiming that “other banks are even having Turkish heads of departments.”⁶³ Besides motives regarding the control and distribution of posts and income, this reported exchange demonstrates a frustration that motivated similar demands of employment from foreign institutions in post-Lausanne Turkey.⁶⁴ This was a frustration with what was seen as a denial of access; with finding the doors of foreign institutions practically closed to Muslim Turks—doors that were expected to remain closed if not pushed open.

There was, however, something perplexing about this frustration. Why would, or should, foreign institutions carry the burden of employing Muslim Turks if this was going to result in

“Mustafa Necati’nin Ölümü ve Ölümü Sonrasında O’nun Eğitimci Yönüne Vurgular,” in *Ölümünün 80. Yılında Mustafa Necati ve Cumhuriyet Eğitim Devrimi: Sempozyum Bildirileri*, ed. Kemal Kocabaş and Zeki Arıkan (İzmir: Yeni Kuşak Köy Enstitüleri Derneği Yayınları, 2009), 108–120.

59 Eldem, “Reshuffling Nationality and Ethnicity,” 194; 210, n. 76. As pointed out by Eldem, Halid Ziya made comments along these lines in the memoirs he published in the 1930s. He was happy to see many Turks employed in banks by then and saw this as a blessing of the republic.

60 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1571, see the notes taken by Mr. Wyatt in the format of a dialogue between “Myself” and “Inspector” dated February 22, 1926, as enclosure 1 in confidential dispatch from Lindsay to Chamberlain dated March 3, 1926. For the qualification of the Ionian Bank as “the only purely British Bank now working in Turkey” by its general manager, see TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1540, letter from Caridia to the FO Under Secretary of State, March 5, 1926. For more on the Ionian Bank, which did not last much longer in Turkey after 1926, see Geoffrey Jones, *British Multinational Banking, 1830–1990* (London: Clarendon Press, 1995), 13–16, 206–207.

61 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1571, above-cited notes taken by Mr. Wyatt on February 22, 1926, enclosed in Lindsay’s dispatch to Chamberlain dated March 3, 1926.

62 Note, however, that Turkish officials did not always request only new employments without demanding dismissals. In some cases, the dismissal of non-Muslim employees was explicitly requested from certain companies. For an example from Istanbul in February 1926, see BCA, 230-0-0-28-24-16.

63 The conversation seems to have ended in a tense mood after the manager expressed consent to taking on Muslim Turks only as vacancies arose, refusing to commit himself to a timeline for making the requested employments. This made the manager’s “good will” questionable from the inspector’s perspective. TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1571, above-cited notes taken by Mr. Wyatt on February 22, 1926.

64 The Ionian Bank was not the only case where British economic involvement in Turkey faced risks of costs too large to bare due to pressures to employ Muslim Turks. Consider the case of the Smyrna-Aidin Railway around the same time in early 1926: TNA, FO 371/11541/E_1873; FO 371/11540/E_1470.

inefficiency? Were they not in Turkey with motives of their own? It is essential to recognize in this regard that the republic pulled and pushed in matters of employment from a position of (perceived) need and insecurity. Therefore, Turkish statesmen would promise British diplomats respect towards British firms in the matter of their employees while expressing hope, rather paradoxically, that the British embassy would make “friendly representation to firms with a view to employment of Turks.”⁶⁵ Far from conveying an image of ability for the envisioned Turkish nation, these instances would suggest vulnerability. They would fuel British skepticism about whether those in charge of this new republic really understood the rules of a game they sought to master. As one British diplomat put it at the time, “It was asking a lot if apprentices were to be both taught and paid. Elsewhere apprentices paid for their education.”⁶⁶ Being on the receiving end of seemingly immature requests about employment would only increase British skepticism about the rationality and wisdom of those making the requests.

The notion that early republican Turkish leaders lacked economic wisdom was one of the main reasons why British diplomats predicted a bleak future for Turkey in early 1926. In a report the British ambassador Lindsay sent to London in March 1926, he wrote of incidents such as those of the EHSB and the Ionian Bank as signs of worse times to come for Turkey.⁶⁷ Why he believed Turkey was heading towards a catastrophe now, unlike earlier when this was predicted but did not happen, is particularly significant. His reasoning evinces the historical significance of the capitulations as well as the persistent projection of lack of wisdom on “the Turkish Government”:

Many foreign traders are seriously meditating, if not preparing, withdrawal from the country; all agree that things have never been as bad before, and some, even the most serious and experienced, think that Turkey must come completely to grief in the near future. This sort of prophecy, I know, has been uttered often before, and yet Turkey has always somehow kept afloat. The new element in the situation of to-day is that since the abolition of the capitulations the powers of the Turkish Government have been immensely increased, but not its wisdom in economic matters. It is as if a crazy old régime lost its governor; the wheels revolve with much celerity that the engine-house may be shaken to bits and involve the whole plant in ruin.⁶⁸

The meanings ascribed to the capitulations and deep-seated notions about Turkish lack of wisdom remained pressingly relevant in post-Lausanne Turkey. In February 1926, “the Turkish campaign to freeze out foreign influence and interest” worried the British Foreign Office not only as violations of the Treaty of Lausanne but also as acts “of doubtful wisdom.”⁶⁹ It was recognized that “most countries restrict exploitation and employment to their own nationals,” but similar restriction by Turks was considered unwise because the much needed foreign help and money would “not be forthcoming on [Turkey’s] present terms.”⁷⁰

Similar pessimistic views about the future of Turkey in 1926 are hard to come across in Turkish sources from the period. The assertive confidence early republican leaders had in their economic priorities have been fruitfully examined by scholars such as Boyar and Fleet in the wider context of Anglo-Turkish relations in the interwar period.⁷¹ The gloomy British projections discussed above are particularly significant in terms of how Turkey remained in the position of *claiming* membership in a world of civilized, able nations even after the Treaty of Lausanne. The next part of the article illustrates that geopolitics played a key role in shaping new contexts for that claim in the course of 1926. Shared views and concerns as part of broader international politics mitigated the tensions in Anglo-Turkish encounters over employment and xenophobia.

⁶⁵ TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1713, the above-cited conversation between Hoare and Nusret as reported in Hoare’s telegram dated March 13, 1926.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1571, Lindsay’s confidential dispatch to Chamberlain, March 3, 1926.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1076, Foreign Office commentary on Lindsay’s dispatch from Istanbul to Chamberlain dated February 10, 1926.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Boyar, “Türk-İngiliz İlişkilerinde Prestij Faktörü”; Boyar and Fleet, “Great Britain and ‘a Small and Poor Peasant State.’”

Matters of (In)Security: Where Agreements Outweighed Disagreements

Early republican Turkish statesmen were keen to avoid isolation at home, isolation in the world. This was the principal reason why British notions of Turks' lack of ability and wisdom involved high stakes for the Ankara government. In addition to economic difficulties within the country, the newly established republic faced serious challenges to its territorial integrity in the mid-1920s. Besides risks of resistance to revolutionary measures at home, there were growing concerns in Ankara about aggression from Italy in the short term, and from Russia in the long term. Correcting perceptions of Turkish inability was crucial for the Ankara government in this wider context of international politics. It could lead to devastating consequences for Turkey if "the world" was to push Turks aside as incompetent. Geopolitical dynamics are crucial to see why, despite lingering British doubts about the republic's future, the year 1926 ended in a way that set the path for Turkey's membership in the League of Nations in 1932.

The consequences British statesmen predicted for the inabilities and irrationalities they saw in post-Lausanne Turkey went beyond the framework of employment. A weak economy and failure to resist foreign aggression were among the devastating consequences predicted for unwise choices. In March 1926, the commercial secretary to the British embassy in Turkey, Mr. Woods, believed that Turkey's loss of "foreign and non-Moslem middlemen" was damaging the Turkish economy as a whole, hurting even the peasants for whose benefit the Ankara government was "making large sacrifices."⁷² Woods predicted that "by the elimination of the only competent middleman, i.e., the foreigner or the Greek, Armenian and Jew," the peasant and the Turkish buyer in Anatolia would be unable to dispose of their produce abroad and find themselves with stock left on their hands, which would lead to disastrous outcomes for the entire country.⁷³ The notion that Turkey was exposed to existential dangers remained a recurring theme in British diplomatic reports on Turkey. In a report written in November 1926 after visits to Mersin, Izmir, and Rhodes that month, the first secretary at the British embassy, Mr. Leeper, highlighted that Turkey was "courting disaster" with an administrative machine functioning badly and discontent becoming more general.⁷⁴ According to Leeper, Turks' fear of Italians was obvious, but they showed "little sign of wisdom in meeting the danger": "They are paying attention to the defence of their coast, but are paying little attention to the removal of grievances in the vulnerable parts. On the contrary, they show apathy and neglect—usual characteristics of the Turks in all matters not connected with war."⁷⁵

Leeper believed that Turkey could not "develop the immense possibilities of Anatolia unaided" and needed to "swallow her excessive pride and ask for help in the proper spirit" to "secure herself against interference."⁷⁶ Many of Leeper's colleagues thought along similar lines. Reginald Hoare even went on to highlight a "sense of inferiority" among Turks as he analyzed their "intense suspicion of the foreigners, and especially of the Italian" in late 1926.⁷⁷ Hoare's description of this "sense of inferiority" is worth quoting in length as a particularly articulate expression of the views prevalent among his colleagues at the time. After firsthand experiences of the cases of the EHSG and the Ionian Bank discussed above, Hoare was confident enough to write about some "facts [the] Turk would never admit":

The Turk would never admit it, but in his heart of hearts he is aware of the fact that neither for business nor for administrative purposes has he men equal to the subject

⁷² TNA, FO 371/11548/E_1884, confidential memo by Woods to the Foreign Office, dated March 2, 1926.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Mr. Leeper's report received applause at the Foreign Office. See it enclosed to Hoare's dispatch from Istanbul to Chamberlain dated November 14, 1926, as well as Oliphant's note dated November 29, 1926, where he expressed appreciation of Leeper's "very good report," in TNA, FO 371/11528/E_6437.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, particularly points 17 and 18 in Leeper's report of November 1926.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, particularly point 21 in Leeper's report of November 1926.

⁷⁷ See Hoare introducing Leeper's report to London in his dispatch dated November 14, 1926, in *ibid.*

ances whose services he has lost or refuses to use. He is far from sure that he can form the men he needs and he feels that if he leaves a fair field for foreign business enterprise, his attempts to enter the field are foredoomed to failure. He believes, or compels himself to believe, that if the foreigner can be sufficiently severely handicapped or, better still, pushed out, he will gradually and by sheer force of necessity acquire sufficient capacity to run the ordinary business of the country; whereas if the foreign trader is allowed to flourish, Turkish indolence will be content to leave the conduct of business to him; the natural consequence would be foreign advisers and gradually by the slow pressure of increasing indispensability the foreigner would re-establish privileges akin to those hated capitulations which held Turkey in bondage.⁷⁸

British diplomats like Hoare saw that training capable individuals was essential for the goals pursued by the government in Ankara. They also believed, however, that the republic had neither the means nor the time required for that task. It caused Hoare frustration, for instance, that Turkish statesmen in Ankara were unwilling to see how “the world cannot stand still for a generation or two on the odd chance that this race of nomad warriors . . . may learn how to run an office.” It was not alliances that could “save” them, according to Hoare, it was “advisers.”⁷⁹ If early republican Turkish leaders were to read these remarks, they would likely be only more convinced of an urgent need to empower Muslim Turks through employment. The leaders of this “race of nomad warriors” believed they already knew how to run an office. Moreover, why wouldn’t Britain facilitate their push for the employment of Muslim Turks so that the Turkish nation could achieve its goals more rapidly? Didn’t Britain see that they agreed on the fundamentals, most notably, on the desirability of a capitalist socioeconomic order in which efficiency and profit were of paramount value?

A striking indication of this agreement was manifest in the meeting between the British ambassador Lindsay and the Turkish foreign minister Tevfik Rüşdü in early March 1926. In this meeting, the Turkish minister made a remarkable distinction between menace and persuasion when talking about the pressure exerted on foreign firms in Turkey to employ Muslim Turks. He underlined that Turks were “anxious to equip themselves for modern economic life, and must manage to enter within the closed doors of foreign firms.” He asked the ambassador to facilitate this process, as foreign firms might otherwise “find public opinion turning against them and their business suffering.”⁸⁰ To the British ambassador this sounded like a “veiled threat” at first, but the minister disclaimed any such intention and suggested, crucially, that British firms taking on Muslim employees would be a kind of “advertisement” given the circumstances in Turkey: “Most firms spent money on advertisement; the best advertisement for them now was a readiness to engage and train Moslem employees in commerce. If they refused they would lose the benefit of the advertisement.”⁸¹ Rather than simply trying to evade his interlocutor’s complaints, the Turkish minister was expressing willingness to inhabit an economic framework in which advertisement had key value. Early republican Turkish leaders did not challenge the basic tenets of capitalism. They sought equal footing in a capitalist world alongside European states.⁸² Unlike Soviet Russia, the Republic of Turkey did not try to change the world *per se*. Its priority was to secure a dignified place in that world for Muslim Turks. Agreement on this basis was a crucial factor that eased tensions in Anglo-Turkish relations during the 1920s.

Bringing about a change in Muslim Turks’ (projected) abilities was essential to securing that dignified place, but establishing recognition for any change in Turkey was an arduous task in itself. Even on occasions when republican efforts to radically change Turkish society were acknowledged as sincere and passionate, these views were often accompanied by European doubts about “whether, by changing the envelope, you alter the character

78 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_6108, point 9 in Hoare’s report from Istanbul to Chamberlain dated October 27, 1926.

79 *Ibid.*, point 10 in particular.

80 TNA, FO 371/11540/E_1718, Lindsay’s above-cited account dated March 10, 1926.

81 *Ibid.*

82 This was seen by British statesmen such as Ambassador Lindsay. Consider, for example, Lindsay’s report to Chamberlain dated February 8, 1926, in TNA, 371/11540/E_1072.

60 of the letter inside it.⁸³ Convincing “the West” on the changes that characterized “New Turkey” was considered essential for claiming agency and sovereignty for the Turkish nation, and it caused frustration when these changes were underplayed.⁸⁴ This frustration became especially manifest during the dispute with France that followed the collision of the French steamer *Lotus* with the Turkish steamer *Bozkurt* in August 1926, shortly before the abovementioned articles by Helsey appeared in *Le Journal*.⁸⁵ The Turkish press engaged with this dispute by emphasizing how the French failed to understand New Turkey, how the capitulations were dispensed with, and how Turkey was a sovereign state equal with France.⁸⁶ Emphasis on change was likewise at the heart of responses the Turkish press gave to Helsey’s articles in October 1926. Attention was drawn to what the abrogation of capitulations meant for Turkey, what Mustafa Kemal represented in the context of that liberating achievement, and how all this was overlooked by some foreigners who still wished for the capitulations.⁸⁷ According to Falih Rıfki (Atay), particularly significant about Helsey’s articles was the resentment they revealed among especially “the old foreigners of the Orient” (*eski Şark ecnebileri*), for whom the Treaty of Lausanne meant the loss of capitulatory privileges. In instances such as the *Lotus* dispute, it was this unwillingness to recognize change that surfaced in descriptions of Turks through “xenophobia, pride, and chauvinism” (*ecnebigürizlik, gurur, şovenlik*).⁸⁸ Claims about change involved claims about agency and power. In response to articles by Helsey in October 1926, Ahmet (Ağaoğlu) stressed that Europeanization under the guidance of Mustafa Kemal should have already proven that there was no xenophobia (*ecnebi düşmanlığı*) in republican Turkey. However, he reminded his readers that there was to be no mistake about it: those radical changes were carried out with the desire to walk towards Europe “not as slaves but as masters, like all Europeans” (*köle olarak değil, her Avrupalı gibi efendi olarak*).⁸⁹

In the second half of the 1920s, geopolitics increased the appeal of a radically westernized Turkey as well as the appeal of cordial relations between Turkey and Britain to statesmen of both countries. Already by October 1925, the British ambassador Lindsay was of the opinion that “international politics” would be favorable to “confidence and even cordiality between Great Britain and Turkey” for some years to come.⁹⁰ With growing concerns on both sides about Soviet Russia, and Turkish concerns about Italy in particular, disagreements over Mosul gradually became obstructions in the path of cordial relations.⁹¹ British statesmen knew that their Turkish counterparts were eager to avoid isolation in the case of aggression from Italy.⁹² In December 1926, the interview the British foreign secretary gave to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* of Yunus Nadi was published with the following subtitle: “Chamberlain recounts how they spoke with Mussolini about Turkey.”⁹³ It did not escape

83 This was a doubt the British ambassador Lindsay had, for example, after his semiofficial farewell audience with Mustafa Kemal in July 1926. See TNA, FO 371/11528/E_4421, Lindsay’s confidential dispatch from Istanbul to Chamberlain dated July 21, 1926.

84 This is crucial to note in the context of continuities that have been inspiringly examined in English by historians such as Erik Jan Zürcher, Ryan Gingeras, and Christine Philiou, to name but a few.

85 On the dispute that followed the collision, see, for instance, Stéphane Beaulac, “The *Lotus* Case in Context: Sovereignty, Westphalia, Vattel, and Positivism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jurisdiction in International Law*, ed. Stephen Allen et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 40–58; and Şaduman Halıcı, *Yeni Türkiye Devleti’nin Yapılanmasında Mahmut Esat Bozkurt (1892–1943)* (Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 2004), 351–365.

86 For specific examples, see Halıcı, *Yeni Türkiye Devleti*, 355. In July 1927, on his way to represent Turkey in “the *Lotus* case” at the Permanent Court of International Justice in the Hague, the Turkish minister of justice Mahmut Esat (Bozkurt) also highlighted the legal changes that the republic implemented by adopting European codes. See Halıcı, *Yeni Türkiye Devleti*, 362. Highlighting these changes contributed to establishing common grounds with the civilized world, and thus to defending sovereignty as part of that civilized world.

87 These responses were keenly observed and reported to London by British diplomats such as Hoare. See TNA, FO 371/11528/E_6194, Hoare’s dispatch from Istanbul to Chamberlain dated November 3, 1926.

88 Falih Rıfki, “Bin Yalan, Bir Hakikat!,” *Milliyet*, October 25, 1926, 1, 2.

89 Ağaoğlu Ahmed, “Fransızlara Ne Oluyor?,” *Milliyet*, October 26, 1926, 1, 4.

90 TNA, CO 730/86/CO_50808, Lindsay’s dispatch to Chamberlain dated October 16, 1925, forwarded to CO.

91 Attention to Italy is critical in analyses of “the Mosul dispute.” Consider in this regard, for instance, Mevlüt Çelebi, *Türkiye-İtalya Siyasi İlişkileri (1923–1939)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2020), 173, 642.

92 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_6564, Chamberlain’s letter to Ambassador Clerk in Istanbul on his conversation with the Turkish ambassador in London, November 26, 1926. Possibility of agreements between Britain and Italy in ways that would allow an attack by the latter on Turkey was particularly concerning for Turkish statesmen. Earlier in the year, in February and March 1926, news indicating at least the possibility of agreements as such reached the Ankara government from Turkish diplomats in Prague and Rome. See BCA, 30-10-0-0-12-71-38.

93 *Cumhuriyet*, December 16, 1926, 1.

British attention that by late 1926, the League of Nations was receiving increased attention in Turkey in terms of its potential to prevent military confrontations.⁹⁴ Views in favor of closer relations with Britain had become more evident in the Turkish press, though this certainly did not mean that all tensions were immediately resolved. British diplomats still regretted that “the effort to bring about a better understanding [was] expected from Great Britain,” while taking note of a silence on “the fact that Turkish xenophobia and administrative incompetence have been the chief impediments hitherto.”⁹⁵ The essence of the “effort” expected from Britain was a sincere appreciation of Turkey’s “determination to enter the civilized family” (*medeni aile içine girme azmi*)—and not as “a vulnerable, barely accepted additional member” (*sıfıntı vaziyetinde*) but with “rights, honor, dignity, and independent sovereignty” (*hukuk, şeref, haysiyet, ve istiklal*).⁹⁶ By late 1926, despite expectations yet to be fulfilled by both sides, a friendly spirit was beginning to manifest itself and “bearing fruit in a more helpful attitude on the part of the [Turkish] authorities where British interests are concerned.”⁹⁷ The final days of 1926 were described by the British ambassador in Turkey as a period when Turks were “mending their ways in many respects.”⁹⁸

How the Anglo-Turkish relations evolved in 1926 indicates the fragile bonds that were still under construction between Turkey and “the civilized world” of the 1920s. When Turkey finally did become a member of the League of Nations in 1932, it was a country still different enough that the welcome it received was accompanied by remarks about how this membership contributed to the League’s “universality.” As a polity that housed the caliphate until March 1924 and was populated mainly by Sunni Muslims, Turkey had a unique position in an international institution where the only founding member with a Muslim population majority was Iran. The Iranian delegate pointed out that Turkey’s entrance into the League would constitute a further step towards the universality of the Geneva institution; the British delegate spoke of Turkey’s admission as a manifestation of the trend towards universality in the League; the French delegate pointed out how Turkey provided a bridge between the East and the West.⁹⁹ After almost a decade of radical westernization under a republican regime, Turkey’s membership in the world represented by the League in 1932 was still characterized more by difference than by similarity.

Conclusion

In 1933, on the tenth anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, this difference likely influenced the need to underscore the Turks’ ability to achieve still more, in an even shorter period of time:

For the character of the Turkish nation is high. The Turkish nation is hardworking. The Turkish nation is intelligent. For the Turkish nation has succeeded in overcoming difficulties in national unity and companionship. And for it is the torch of positive science that the Turkish nation has in mind and hand while walking on the path of progress and civilization.¹⁰⁰

Why would Atatürk feel the need to emphasize the high character of the Turkish nation in 1933? Who needed to hear, and why, that the Turkish nation was hardworking and intelligent? The discussion in this article may be useful when thinking about this question. Throughout and beyond the 1920s, the Ankara government remained in the position

94 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_7063, Clerk reporting to Chamberlain on December 16, 1926, on the latter’s interview with Yunus Nadi at Lausanne, published in *Cumhuriyet* on December 16, 1926. The next day there was significant attention paid to the League on the very first page of the same newspaper, with Yunus Nadi reporting from Switzerland his contemplations and reflections about what ideals Woodrow Wilson and the League represented, rather than fixed opinions about the League. See, *Cumhuriyet*, December 17, 1926, 1.

95 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_6678, Clerk reporting to Chamberlain on November 30, 1926.

96 See the articulation of this expectation in Ağaoglu Ahmed, “İngiltere ve Biz,” *Milliyet*, November 24, 1926, 1.

97 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_6678, Clerk reporting to Chamberlain on November 30, 1926.

98 TNA, FO 371/11534/E_7063, Clerk’s description as he reported to Chamberlain on December 16, 1926.

99 See Yücel Güçlü, “Turkey’s Entrance into the League of Nations,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2003): 186–206, 196–197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200412331301637>.

100 These are words from the speech Mustafa Kemal Atatürk gave on the tenth anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, one of his best-known and most easily accessible public speeches to this day. See, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, “10. Yıl Nutku,” October 29, 1933, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.ktb.gov.tr/TR-96294/10-yil-nutku.html>.

62 of trying to convince the world—abroad and at home—that the Turkish nation had the abilities expected from civilized, sovereign peoples. Contestations over employment were particularly consequential for substantiating and sustaining that claim to ability. When these contestations involved Anglo-Turkish encounters and complaints about xenophobia, they were even more indicative of the dynamics that shaped Turkey's relations with “the world.”

The capitulations remained a source of concern in post-Lausanne Turkey, as the reasons European powers had identified for them included the (in-)abilities associated with Muslim Turks. These associations and projections did not disappear with the Treaty of Lausanne. The specter of the capitulations haunted the Ankara government as it claimed authority as well as ability—often through stereotypical contrasts with Ottoman apathy and neglect, not entirely different from the simplifications that hurt pride when projected from “the West.” After 1923, the Republic of Turkey sought to differentiate itself from the Ottoman Empire as well as from the polities to its southeast, where “advanced nations” had imposed themselves as mandatory powers to assist former Ottomans labeled not yet “able” to stand by themselves. As efforts to prove ability continued in Turkey as well, “others” at home would remain excluded under the shadows of a longing for inclusion by “others” in the world.

As final words to the article, there are several issues worthy of emphasis. Although this discussion foregrounded questions of ability, efforts to enforce Muslim Turks' employment did not revolve solely around these questions. Consider, for example, the frustration one comes across in the Turkish press in early 1926 with *still* seeing waiters of foreign nationality in Istanbul.¹⁰¹ Rather than concerns primarily about skills and abilities, such instances were equally about whose presence dominated where, and who had access to which scarce resources. Another crucial issue is whether the same abilities were desired and claimed for *all* Muslim Turks, even in contexts where an emphasis on equality was essential to the image projected for the republican regime. For instance, were the same abilities and jobs claimed for Muslim Turkish men *and* women in 1926? Ability was asserted for the envisioned Turkish nation through an evolving prioritization of some components of identity over others.¹⁰² Third, one must acknowledge the possibility that not all statesmen prioritized the nation's interests over their own in matters of employment. In 1926, some British diplomats in Turkey were convinced that bribery was rife in the country, and that “in the campaign to force the employment of Turks,” “anyone for whom a post has been found by a Turkish official” would later be “obliged to make a monthly contribution to the official concerned.”¹⁰³ Corruption was among the reasons suggesting to these diplomats that the republican regime was riding for a fall in early 1926. By the end of the year, the republic was shaken but had not fallen. In 1932, when Turkey finally entered the League of Nations, a new law was passed to reserve the majority of occupations in Turkey for Turkish nationals, regarding which xenophobia would again be a key point of reference.¹⁰⁴ The tensions underlying encounters over employment and xenophobia persisted in republican Turkey. Almost a century later, to think of these tensions as resolved would be merely wishful thinking.

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101 See the news under the subtitle “Hala Ecnebi Garsonları?,” in *İkdam*, February 20, 1926, 1.

102 Consider, for example, the cartoon on the first page of a *Cumhuriyet*, prominent newspaper close to the Ankara government, humorously playing with the idea that having women judges in Turkish courts would mean devastation for mothers-in-law in the country—as the women admitted into the profession would be very young and (irrationally) biased in favor of new brides. *Cumhuriyet*, February 21, 1926, 1.

103 Quoted are words by Woods in the above-cited memo dated March 2, 1926, in TNA, FO 371/11548/E_1884.

104 See, in this regard especially, Bali, *Xenophobia and Protectionism*.

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