

The Double Bind of Race and Religion: The Conversion of the Dönme to Turkish Secular Nationalism

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INTRODUCTION

For over two centuries the Dönme lived an open secret in Ottoman Salonika following their conversion from Judaism to Islam in the wake of the conversion of the messianic rabbi Shabbatai Tzevi in 1666.¹ Neither the category “Jewish” nor “Muslim” expresses their religious identity. Unlike Jews, the Dönme ostensibly followed the requirements of Islam, including fasting at Ramadan and praying in mosques, one of which they built. Unlike Muslims, the Dönme maintained a belief that Shabbatai Tzevi was the messiah, practiced kabbalistic rituals, and recited prayers in Hebrew and Judeo-Spanish. According to the descendants of Dönme in Istanbul, the Dönme in Salonika saw themselves as a community apart; fulfilling the commandments of Shabbatai Tzevi caused Dönme to only marry among themselves, avoid relations with Jews, maintain their separate identity guided by detailed genealogies, and bury their dead in

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¹ Members of this group called themselves Believers (Hebrew: *Ma'aminim*); Muslims in the modern era label their descendants “those who turn, convert” (Turkish: *Dönme*). The terms Sabbatean (*Sabatayist*) and Salonikan (*Selânikli*) have also been used. The latter term is not preferred because Muslims of Salonikan origins who are not Dönme are sometimes confused with the group. Likewise, there is a tendency in Turkey to incorrectly use the term “Dönme” to refer to all converts to Islam. I use “Dönme” in this article to denote the descendants of Jewish followers of Shabbatai Tzevi who converted to Islam.

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distinct cemeteries. (*Dönmeler* 1919:15; Galanté 1935:67; and Stavroulakis 1993).²

Despite their differences from Jews and Muslims, the Dönme did not attract the attention of Ottoman authorities after their conversion in the late seventeenth century. The issue of interiority and sincerity of religious belief was not raised about the Dönme before the modern era. Once the Dönme converted, it was assumed they were Muslims, and their public religious practices were considered signs of their belief. Twice in the second half of the nineteenth century authorities investigated them, but there were no serious consequences (Gövsa 1939:74–76). Only during the last years of the empire, between 1908 and 1922, did Muslims begin to question the religious and racial identity of the Dönme in their midst.

In January 1924, as thousands of Muslims who were deported by Greece arrived in the new nation-state of Turkey in accordance with the Greco-Turkish population exchange, the Dönme deportees drew considerable public scrutiny (Gordlevsky 1926). The group presented a puzzle to Muslims in Turkey. Were they really Muslims, or were they secret Jews? Were they Turks or foreigners? Incited by the public pronouncements of Dönme, the identity of the group was debated in the Turkish press and parliament. Most crucial was the role that the Dönme played in defining the parameters of the discussion about who belonged to the Turkish nation. Two Dönme, Mehmed Karakaşzade Rüşdü and Ahmed Emin Yalman, presented to the anxious public radically different interpretations of their group's identity, the Dönme's ability to integrate into the Turkish nation, and the boundaries of Turkishness. An investigation of the debate about whether the Dönme belonged in Turkey provides insight into the contradictions of the construction of being Turkish, and how the Dönme propelled the issue of their identity into public consciousness while struggling to legitimize their existence in the new republic.

This article, based mainly on Dönme writings and material provided by descendants of Dönme, is the first to describe and analyze Dönme attempts to come to terms with the conversion from a religious to a secular national identity in the period between the waning years of the Ottoman Empire and the first two decades of the Turkish nation-state. It explores how the Dönme attempted to explain the group's past in the Ottoman Empire and their future in the Turkish republic. By focusing on Dönme interpretations of nationalism, I will illustrate the inherent tension of creating a single, homogenizing, and secular na-

² Some Dönme were pious Muslims. A descendant of Dönme now living in the United States told me his ancestors included Sufi masters of a dervish lodge (*tekke şeyhi*) in Salonika and Arabic calligraphers who decorated mosques. Galanté (1935), the author of the first monograph on the group, fails to concede that the Dönme could have been pious Muslims, instead arguing they had a tendency to be reconciled to Judaism. This approach set the tone for scholarship that continues to explore Dönme belief within the context of Jewish history and *kabbalah* and does not allow for the complexity of their identity to emerge (Scholem 1971; 1973).

tional identity from a plural society that had been organized around religious identities. I will explore the perceived danger of hybridity and the interrelation of racism and nationalism (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991:37–106; Stoler 1992; Asad 1993). This study also will shed light on the process through which majorities and minorities are constructed as modern nations come into being. Although the nationalism and loyalty of the nation's core group were assumed to be givens in new states such as Turkey and India, minorities had to prove their loyalty in order for them to demonstrate they deserved citizenship (Pandey 1999). The history of the Dönme demonstrates that despite the public efforts of minorities to integrate in new nation-states, religious identities—*ascribed* by the very states that attempted to abolish them, or maintained furtively by the groups in question—can persist and not be entirely replaced by secular citizenship.

By investigating the conversion of the Dönme to secular nationalism and the religious and racial hindrances they faced, this article contributes to the scholarly literature concerning identification, nationalism, and citizenship. Peoples' identities are formed at the confluence of two types of identification, those "externally generated, ascribed, or imposed by state or other authorities," and "self-generated subjective identification that individuals make spontaneously" (Suny 2001:867–68). Identity theory emphasizes how people have "multiple, fluid, situational identities" (*ibid.*: 869). Becoming a citizen of a modern nation-state tests the ability of individuals to define themselves as they struggle between externally imposed and self-ascribed identities. Much of the scholarship on nationalism discusses the slow development of the formation of "nationness" (Gellner 1983; Smith 1986; Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm 1992). It is described as a gradual process lasting centuries, from nation building, to the emergence of nationalism and nationalist movements, to processes of nationalization (Eley and Suny 1996:9). For our purposes it is productive to consider how people react when nationness is suddenly, powerfully thrust upon them (Brubaker 1996:21). Scholars posit a distinction between a civic/French model of national identity and an ethnic/German model (Greenfeld 1992:11–12; Brubaker 1992:x–xi, 1). The former is characterized as open, universalist, and secular where citizenship is defined expansively, and nationhood is assimilationist; the latter is considered organic, cultural, linguistic, and racial where citizenship is defined restrictively, except for those included within the core nation, and nationhood is ethnocultural and differentialist. When "nationalizing nationalisms" work for the interests of the core nation alone, an individual's ability to define himself or herself may be limited. When the core nation is considered the "legitimate 'owner' of the state, which is conceived as the state *of* and *for* the core nation," nationalizing states promote that group's "language, culture, demographic preponderance, economic flourishing, or political hegemony" (Brubaker 1996:4–5, 9, 83–84). In a state where ethno-nationalism is the main frame for identification, citizenship is defined as "membership in a homoge-

nous descent group,” which “denies the possibility of cultural assimilation” (Shafir and Peled 2002:6; Greenfeld 1992; Brubaker 1992). Since citizenship is not only a collection of formal rights but also “the entire mode of incorporation of individuals and groups into society,” stratification within such a society emerges (Shafir and Peled 2002:11). Despite “a unitary legal framework,” some are denied full membership in the body of the nation and receive fewer rights and privileges than members of the core nation (*ibid.*: 8).

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and creation of the Turkish republic witnessed the transition from an empire that granted group cultural rights and promoted multicultural autonomy, but denied universal civic, political, and social rights of individuals, to a nation-state which theoretically granted universal individual rights, but denied group rights (Shafir and Peled 2002:343–48). It is conventional wisdom that this change signifies Turkey’s adaptation of the civic model, whether this is intended as praise by those promoting what they consider the liberating, enlightening secular aspects of the positivist, rational state, or as a critique of the state by those criticizing what they assert is a totalitarian, Jacobin regime. The latter recognize how the civic model of citizenship may appear to be more inclusive than the ethno-national model, but that in practice it contains “inegalitarian and exclusionary elements” (*ibid.*: 6–7). As Peter van der Veer argues, the rise of the nation-state makes new “forms of freedom and unfreedom, tolerance and intolerance possible” (2001:29). In fact, states can combine both the civic and ethnic models in the way they treat citizens, using inclusionary and exclusionary principles at the same time (Neyzi 2002:140). They may use different “discourses of citizenship”—liberal, republican, and ethno-nationalist—to legitimize different allocation of rights and privileges to different groups within society (Shafir and Peled 2002:11, 22, 335). In its first two decades, Turkey followed both models since it treated those incorporated as Muslim Turks with the civic understanding of nationalism, and those considered non-Muslims and non-Turks with ethno-cultural nationalism. Despite the official universalist ideology, Turkey granted equal, individual rights in practice to Muslim Turks while denying full integration to non-Muslims and non-Turks, thus maintaining the pre-state division of society based on religious groups, but adding race as a determining factor. The experience of the Dönme illustrates how modern understandings of religion essential in the formation of national identity, when coupled with the modern construct of race, served to hinder some groups from achieving the promise of equal citizenship.

SECULARISM, NATIONALISM, AND MINORITIES

Secular nation-states seek to liberate individuals from group loyalties and religious identities and remake them as conscious individuals who freely choose to be part of the nation. By doing so, they present anomalous choices to newly made minorities. Whether the compulsion to change is couched in positive or negative terms, or manifested in violent or peaceful methods, minorities must

ostensibly drop their former convictions and identities. Either they are told outright that they can no longer maintain their previous religious identity, or, because they are emancipated from a rigid status, they are encouraged to integrate with the rest of society (Mufti 1995). The two options are not real alternatives, for they lead to the same result—the dissolution of that which made them different. Talal Asad has noted how modernity defines new choices, annihilating old possibilities and putting others in their place (Asad 1996:263). The politics of secularization require that ethical moralities supersede theocentric ways of being (Davison 1998:2). State-imposed morality replaces individual moral conscience. The nation-state requires a self-determining citizen, but it is an illusion of freedom since citizens are presented with a set of propositions to which they must assent (Asad 1993:40–41). The clash between self-ascribed religious identities, and state-granted rights which deny subjectivity and the ability to define the self (Viswanathan 1998:97), exacts a heavy price because it allows people fewer alternatives and less flexibility in determining their identities.

The conflict between incompatible religious and secular components of minority identities created new questions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Secular nationalism faced the question of how to handle, for example, secular Jews in a Christian state such as Germany and secular Muslims in Hindu India. Gauri Viswanathan summarizes the aims of secularism projects as turning Hindus into non-Hindu Hindus and Muslims into non-Muslim Muslims in India, and Catholics into non-Catholic Catholics and Jews into non-Jewish Jews in Britain (1998:5). The state maintained distinctions between groups in order to perpetuate the rule of one group. Where Jews and Muslims found themselves in the position of minorities, they had to explain who they were. If they remained Jews and Muslims they may have negated their welcome in the new state, but they may not have wanted to or could not abandon their identity or accept an ambivalent position in a new national civil society, nor completely disappear (Mufti 1995). To be secular and Jewish in Germany or secular and Muslim in India was to attempt to maintain a separate culture while being incorporated into a nation whose defining characteristics were based on the majority culture and religion (Viswanathan 1998:xi). If they did not renounce their identity, minorities were branded separatists and perceived as a “fifth column,” an internal danger to the majority. Even when they attempted to play their part, minorities were not always accepted as equal citizens in practice. Accordingly, minority groups sought other strategies for maintaining their corporate identities, such as dissimulation, which allowed them to act as the majority while maintaining beliefs and rites in private.

The process of secularism in Turkey in the 1920s and 1930s posed problems to minorities not unlike those occurring in Britain, Germany, and India. The administration of Ottoman society had been based on cultural difference, religious identity, corporate autonomy, and communities. For most of its over six centuries of existence, the Ottoman dynasty was more concerned with recognizing

and maintaining difference among its subjects than with producing sameness (Reynolds 1995). Social organization in the Ottoman Empire was based on the principle that Christians, Jews, and Muslims were allowed to be different without having to assimilate into any shared cultural norm. Except for a small window of time in the late nineteenth century when an ideology of Ottomanism emerged, there was no common culture or ideal that the empire's rulers desired its subjects to share. Ottoman authorities, in other words, did not attempt to compel the majority of Christians and Jews to become Muslims (Deringil 2000).

The architects of the Turkish republic aimed to jettison the four organizing principles of Ottoman society along with the empire it replaced in 1923. By erasing the vestiges of a plural society, they expected shared culture, national identity, equal citizenship, and individuals to become the pillars of the new society. The end of empire spelled the end of the tolerance of difference since the founders of Turkey took upon themselves the task of clarifying identities by disallowing mixed identities. The leaders of the Turkish republic intended to create a socially cohesive population and a unified economy. They desired a nation instilled with a new Turkish identity acquired through schooling in a Turkish language stripped of Ottoman hybridity and Turkocentric history lessons, serving in the national army, and socializing in a culturally homogenized reality (Zürcher 1995:198–99). Citizens were taught to distinguish difference, which was equated with foreignness, from sameness, which meant belonging to the nation.

Christians and Jews in Turkey were to forsake the privileges of communal autonomy and thus reject corporate difference in order to be treated as equal citizens and obtain full enfranchisement (Lewis 1968:254–56; Zürcher 1995, 167–70; Baer 2000). This was based on the assumption that citizens of a nation-state must be the same in order to be treated the same. Non-Muslims in Turkey were to declare their allegiance to being Turkish and the Turkish state, assimilate into Turkish culture, speak Turkish, and adopt the national consciousness in place of their own communal consciousness (Mardin 1993:367–71). Rather than having religious authorities of each recognized community serve as mediators between individuals and the state, the clergy were only to concern themselves with religious matters, since the state would have direct relations with individual members of religious minorities (Alexandris 1983:87). No special privileges would be needed since the leveling of differences would ensure that all citizens receive the full benefits of citizenship as individuals.

Turkey aimed to create not citizens who were non-Muslim Muslims, non-Jewish Jews, or non-Christian Christians, as in Britain and India, but rather non-Muslim Turks, non-Jewish Turks, and non-Christian Turks. One national identity would supersede all religious identities, and difference would be effaced by the adoption of a single, secular national identity. According to Şerif Mardin, all citizens in Turkey were required to believe that they worked for society, and

not for the family, social group, or community, and that society became a totality that had priority over individual wishes (1989:10, 163). Islam, however, was embedded in Turkish nationalism. In the first five years of the Turkish republic the constitution established the religion of the state to be Islam and the state to be the executor of Islamic law. In addition, secular Muslims were privileged in the new nation-state since religious Muslims, non-Muslims, and non-Turkish groups could not rise to the top of society. This was similar to the Ottoman Empire, where conversion was required to hold leading positions in the military and administration. Yet in the Ottoman Empire a convert could rise to the top of the political establishment no matter what his or her origins were. In Turkey, however, no matter how fervent a nationalistic secular Turk a non-Muslim became, he or she eventually realized that power was reserved for secular Muslims, who became the most privileged group.³ And as in other nation-states, the existence of previously inconsequential religious groups became problematic. As Van der Veer notes, “with the rise of the nation-state comes an enormous shift in what religion means” since religion becomes less indicative of belief systems than of social and political identity (2001:20). Although secular nation-states attempted to remove from the public sphere manifestations of religion that did not support the modern state project and to restrict them to the private, this process ironically increased the significance of religion and religious identity and made them issues of public debate. In theory, the problem of how minority citizens related to the state and civil society would be resolved by their subjective choice to integrate. The waning years of the Ottoman Empire witnessed changing perceptions of religious difference and the rise of race-based nationalism, which serve as the background for how the Dönme were treated in the new nation-state of Turkey.

MUSLIM ANXIETY OVER THE DÖNME, 1908 – 1922

When Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid II (reigned 1876–1909) was told of Shabbatai Tzevi’s conversion and piety, he called the man “a friend of God” (*veli*, “saint”) and did not concern himself with the Dönme (Galanté 1935:75–77). Perhaps the sultan should have taken heed. In the late nineteenth century and first years of the twentieth century, the Dönme played an important founding and supporting role in the revolutionary movement that would eventually topple the sultan, control the empire, and usher in events that would contribute to the creation of the secular Turkish republic out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

The Dönme played a significant role in turn-of-the-century radical politics (Lewis 1968:207–8; Kedourie 1971; Farhi 1981; Ahmad 1982) and figured among the leading militants and activists of the revolutionary movement of the

³ Religious Muslims bore the brunt of the state’s concern with controlling religion in all its manifestations, from education to prayer, since secular elites operated on the mistaken modern assumption that once the public role of Islam was subsumed to state purposes and Islamic practices and beliefs were segregated to the private sphere, religion would wither away and disappear.

Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). An article “written by a member of the Central Committee and published in *Mechveret*, the central organ of the CUP” argued that the Dönme “were the only group working in the movement in Salonika” (Hanioglu 1994:522). The significance of the Dönme is corroborated by one of the first memoirs written by a CUP activist, the 1911 account of Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf (1991). He argues that the Dönme were passionate proponents of liberty and supporters of the overthrow of despotism (the sultan), being “more advanced in the struggle for freedom than their Muslim brothers” (85). Other contemporaries concurred that the Dönme were the revolutionary vanguard (Georgeon 1993:118). It is not difficult to determine why this was the case. The Dönme were revolutionary agents in the realm of culture, as the Dönme were among the first to promote the equality of men and women, the most progressive pedagogical methods in their schools, and European fashion and architecture (Baer 1997). It is no coincidence that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the secular Turkish republic who was born and raised in Salonika, attended a Dönme school as did other sons of progressive Muslim parents. He was clearly influenced by its ideals (Zorlu 1994).⁴

Sparked by Dönme involvement in politics, the identity and beliefs of the group began to concern Muslims between the revolution of 1908 and the founding of the Turkish republic.⁵ Some Muslims enunciated opposition to politically active Dönme who publicly avowed secularism, such as Dervish Vahdetî, a Naqshbandi shaykh (head of a religious order) and editor of the Islamist newspaper *Volkan* (*Volcano*), who opposed the revolution of 1908 and helped incite the counter coup the following year. Dervish Vahdetî and others opposed the “atheism” (secularism) of the CUP, its alleged attacks on Islam, the fact that many of its members were influential Freemasons, and the Jews and Dönme in its ranks (Düzdağ 1992).⁶ Contributors to *Volkan* engaged in polemical writings against Dönme writers such as Fazlı Necip, who vociferously supported the CUP in the newspapers *Zaman* (*Time*) and *Asır* (*Century*) (Düzdağ 1992, 408). Leskovikli Mehmet Rauf notes how “some ignoramuses” doubted the soundness of Dönme Islamic piety and believed they acted contrary to their true beliefs (1991:85–86).⁷ These popular views of Dönme insincerity fueled the battles of the pen between religious Muslims and Dönme concerning the governing of the empire and society.

⁴ The grave of Atatürk’s teacher, Şemsi Efendi, adorned with his photograph, is located in the Dönme Bülbüldere (Nightingale Valley) cemetery in Üsküdar, Istanbul.

⁵ As is evident from an 1892 dispute heard before the Imperial Council concerning the marriage of a Dönme girl to her Muslim tutor and her “conversion” (*ihtida*) to Islam, by the 1890s it was recognized that the Dönme formed a distinct religious group (Deringil 1998:81).

⁶ A ringleader of the revolt and a founder of the Muslim Union (*İttihad-i Muhammedi*), Dervish Vahdetî was executed following the suppression of the counter coup.

⁷ The author of the article defends the group by claiming they attentively practiced Islam like other Muslims. He concedes, however, that these descendants of Jewish converts did not marry other Muslims, “and in this way guarded the boundaries” of the group.

Between 1909 and 1918, as Muslims and Dönme fought in print over the future shape of society, relations between Muslims, Christians, and Jews deteriorated in the empire. Along with the continued immigration of millions of Muslims fleeing persecution in the Mediterranean, southeastern Europe, and the Caucasus, Ottoman authorities faced the loss of the last of Rumelia, the “heartland” of the Ottoman Empire and home of the leaders of the CUP during the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913. Salonika fell to Greece in 1913, leading to a new phase in the history of the Dönme. It also set in motion radical changes for the other elements of the population since for the next five years the authorities instituted policies of social engineering in Anatolia and Thrace, the remains of the empire (Dündar 2001; Naimark 2001:17–55). This social engineering included the “cleansing” of Christians by expulsion and massacre beginning with the Bulgarians and Greeks in Thrace and western Anatolia in 1913 and followed by the Armenians in Anatolia in 1915. Jews were also to be deported, but a plan to expel the Jews of Palestine was suspended when British forces took the area during World War I. Muslim refugees were settled in the place of Christians, and non-Turkish Muslims, which included Albanians, Arabs, Bosnians, Circassians, Kurds, and Tatars, were sent to different parts of Anatolia in order to diffuse and “Turkify” them by assimilation so they would lose their identities. After unsuccessful Turkification policies during the war, the empire lost its Arab-populated provinces as well (Kayalı 1997).

The core of the CUP, which planned and implemented policies that promoted Turks and Muslims at the expense of Christians and other non-Turkish peoples adopted currents of European thought that promoted new ways of thinking about religious and national difference. Interior Minister Talat Pasha, who was the architect of the deportation of the Armenians, and Mehmed Reşid, a co-founder of the CUP and the governor in eastern Anatolia in 1915–1916 who implemented the deportations, were Social Darwinists and positivists who believed there was a life-or-death battle of the fittest between Armenians and Greeks on the one side and Muslims and Turks on the other (Keiser 2002). In order to save the fatherland they believed they had to cure the disease (Christians) in the body of the nation (Turks), and this required violent measures in order to liberate the economy and people (Muslims).

As a result of these policies and a devastating war, the populace faced cataclysmic mortality rates. Anatolia was utterly devastated, facing proportionally greater population losses than even France during World War I. Two million Muslims died, and up to one million Armenians and several hundred thousand Greeks were expelled from Anatolia or killed between 1915 and 1922. Half of the Jews fled during the 1920s (Levi 1992:64). Whereas in 1913 one in five people within the borders of what would become Turkey were Christian or Jewish, by 1923 only one in forty were non-Muslim (Zürcher 1995:172). This demographic change, and the general feeling among Muslims that non-Muslims,

particularly Armenians and Greeks, had acted as fifth columns, led to unprecedented anti-Christian sentiment. This became worse during the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 when Allied and Greek forces occupied western Anatolia and committed atrocities.

In this time of great loss, suffering, and anxiety, as the Ottoman Empire was disintegrating, Turkish nationalism came to the fore among Muslim peoples in Anatolia. The new demographic and political situation allowed Muslims to imagine the creation of their own national state. And in this period, Muslims began to look more closely at the identity of the Dönme. They began to question the vanguard role that Dönme, such as parliament and cabinet member Mehmed Cavid Bey, were playing in society. Cavid Bey was a prominent minister of finance for six of the ten years the CUP was in power, and the most visible Dönme who helped shaped the course of the history of the empire between 1908 and 1918 (İlkin 1993; Zürcher 1995:351).⁸ There was no parallel debate about Armenian or Jewish identity, since members of these groups openly identified themselves and did not claim to be Muslims. In addition, the numbers of Christians and Jews had been radically reduced, so they could no longer be considered a problem. The uncertainty surrounding the Dönme was due to the fact that they appeared to hide their true identity, although there was little if anything that would outwardly distinguish them from other Muslims.

A treatise written in 1919—a time of heightened insecurity for Muslims because the Allies occupied Istanbul—illustrates a new racialized attitude toward the Dönme. The anonymous author who wrote *Dönmeler* claims the Dönme are neither Jews nor Muslims (*Dönmeler* 1919:6).⁹ Instead, according to the author, they are a strange group whose members marry only each other, leading to peculiar biological traits: “Whereas the Hunyos and Kuvayrus types resemble each other in appearance, the Sazan, or the Sazaniko type, are distinguished and separated from the others because they have big and arched noses” (pp. 7–8).¹⁰ The other effect of marrying only among themselves was that “all types of sicknesses and contagious diseases were prevalent among them,” including nervous disorders (pp. 9–10). Illustrating their strange gestures, curious ways of behaving, and neuroses, he argues that Dönme women “speak like the chatter of cocks crowing together. Their eyes, eyebrows, and even their whole bodies incessantly move while they talk” (p. 10). In order to “ameliorate their

⁸ Cavid Bey was executed for his alleged role in the attempted assassination of Atatürk in 1926, although this punishment probably was due to his efforts to revive the CUP.

⁹ Said Molla, about whom no further information is available, allegedly wrote the treatise (Küçük 1997:405).

¹⁰ A “Sazan” is a type of carp. When the fish turns in the water, sunlight reflects different colors on its scales. Like the Sazan, the Dönme appeared different to outsiders depending on the circumstances. In addition, carp can live in both freshwater and saltwater. The Dönme, the author implies, could thrive in both Judaism and Islam. “Iko” is the diminutive ending in Judeo-Spanish (Galanté 1935:72).

health," he asserts, Dönme men began to marry Muslim and European women, "who placed their lives in danger" because intermarriage meant the women's "murder." He informs his readers how "the Salonikan Dönme are the greatest factor in the spreading and expanding of immorality, irreligion, and contagious diseases among Muslims" (p. 10). In addition, the author states, not only are they a threat to the health of the Turkish and Muslim community, they are also an economic and political danger, for they are corrupt, disloyal, and concerned only with their own advancement and interests (pp. 10, 12).

These racial stereotypes are similar to those found in European race science literature concerning Jews (Gilman 1991:60–103, 169–233; Efron 1994:13–57). This is not surprising, considering how the elite and learned in Ottoman society, including the leaders of the CUP, and influential writers such as Ebüzzüya Tevfik, were influenced by the latest European science and literature and the biological racism contained therein. In that literature, Jews had unique psychopathologies, higher instances of insanity, abnormal sexual desires that led to high incidences of sexually transmitted diseases, and were considered physically and biologically different. This discourse emerged in Germany in the late nineteenth century at a time when Jews were integrating as never before in society. Similarly, defining who was a Turk became important when the possibility emerged that other races would try to pass as Turks. If the racial or inherent difference could be proven, these people, whether Jews in Germany or Dönme in Turkey, would not be assimilated and made into citizens. Racism, which separated formerly commingled peoples into distinct racial categories, could be used to hinder the integration of minorities and exclude them from the body politic.

Those who defended the Dönme used another criterion of nationhood. Instead of race, they emphasized service to the fatherland. For example, a pious and patriotic retired army veteran who was taken prisoner during the Balkan War in the province of Salonika when his battalion fell prisoner to Greek troops wrote a lengthy rebuttal entitled *Dönmelerin Hakikati* (The truth about the Dönme). Retired Major Sadık son of Süleyman, who may have been a Dönme, illustrates the community's loyalty to the nation by describing their service in the military during World War I and how they aided the nation in numerous other ways (1919 [1335]:12). He describes their fidelity to Islam and attempts to refute every argument made in the anonymous treatise. For example, Sadık son of Süleyman claims Shabbatai Tzevi's conversion was sincere because the light of Islam entered his heart and he guided others onto the true path (ibid.: 7). Sadık son of Süleyman denies that the Dönme were disease-ridden. Indeed, so great was their attention to cleanliness that some lived to be 120 years old (ibid.: 13). Moreover, he disputes the argument that the Dönme had only recently begun to mix with Muslims, and asserts that they had intermarried with Turks in the past (ibid.: 11). The issue of Dönme identity would grow much larger than these two treatises after the Republic of Turkey was founded.

THE UNMIXING OF POPULATIONS: THE CREATION OF TURKEY, 1923 – 1924

After three years of warfare, the military, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, defeated the Greek forces, who were supported by the Allies. When a Turkish delegation met at Lausanne in 1923 with representatives of Greece and the Allied powers, the treaty they signed contained several key clauses. First, it recognized Turkey as an independent, sovereign state. Second, non-Muslims in Turkey were to give up the privileges of communal autonomy in order to be treated as equal citizens (Lewis 1968:254–56; Zürcher 1995:167–70). Third, Turkey was to be a secular republic; Islam was also disestablished and the caliphate abolished. Finally, the treaty called for an “exchange” of populations. Muslims of Greece, excluding those in western Thrace, and Orthodox Christians of Anatolia, not including those in Istanbul and the two islands remaining in Turkish possession, were expelled. As a result, four hundred thousand Muslims, many of whom mainly spoke Greek, were forced to go to Turkey, and 1.2 million Orthodox Christians, including a sizeable number who spoke only Turkish, were sent to Greece (Alexandris 1983:77–104; Zürcher 1995:170–72); the Greeks call this event “the catastrophe.” The expulsion of these groups so that they would not be able to be potential fifth columns was an admission that minorities would not be considered a significant part of the social fabric of either country—a final turn from plural society to xenophobia. This contributed to the ethno-religious homogenization of the population and economy of each country, a process begun in the deportations, migrations, and massacres of the Balkan wars, World War I, and the Greco-Turkish War (Aktar 2000:17–69; Bali 1999:196–240; Alexandris 1983:105–12). Lord Curzon labelled the process “the unmixing of peoples” (Brubaker 1996:152). It is ironic that a secular state approved a population exchange based on religion. Like the India-Pakistan population exchange two decades later, legalized expulsions in newly established secular nation-states made enemies of neighbors, divided people along religious lines, and alienated individuals from self-ascribed identities (Viswanathan 1998:xii).

Because they were considered Muslims by the Greek government, the Dönme of Salonika were subject to deportation to Turkey as part of the population exchange.¹¹ Relying on their Jewish origins, some Dönme asked the Greek government to excuse them from the expulsion, an odd request considering that the rabbis of Salonika refused to allow the Dönme to return to Judaism since they opposed the sect’s customs and did not consider them Jews (Galanté 1935:77–79). The government in Athens refused to allow the Dönme to remain, probably because it wanted to be rid of a significant non-Greek economic element.

¹¹ Romanian-speaking peasants called Vlachs were divided: those who were Orthodox Christians were sent to Greece; those who were Muslim were accepted in Turkey.

Other Dönme approached Turkish officials with the same aim. When a Dönme asked Rıza Nur, the second most important representative of the Turkish delegation to the Lausanne conference, to exclude the community from the population exchange, the Turkish diplomat realized that “this means they are a group in Turkey that thinks differently and has opposite interests than Turks. The disaster (for us) is that they appear as Turks. Greeks and Armenians are better than they if for no other reason than we know they are Greeks and Armenians. This foreign element, this parasite, hides in our blood” (Nur 1967–1968:3, 1081). Despite their protests and Turkish apprehension about their true identity and potential danger, the estimated ten to fifteen thousand Dönme were compelled to abandon their native Salonika.

In 1923 and 1924, thousands of Dönme arrived in Turkey. Initially dispersed to cities throughout Anatolia, most soon migrated to Istanbul. Muslims demanded to know their religious and national identity. Muslim anxiety about whether the Dönme could be considered both Muslims and Turks reflects the confusion about who belonged to the Turkish nation and nation-state. Defining who was a Turk had not yet been resolved when the republic was founded. The 1924 constitution of the new republic and the ideology of its leader, Atatürk, represented a voluntarist, political, secular, civic nationalist ideology (Smith 2001:36–42). According to Article 88 of the constitution, “the people of Turkey, regardless of religion and race, are Turks as regards Turkish citizenship” (Çağaptay 2001/2002:3). Although all people within the boundaries of Turkey were not considered members of the Turkish people or nation, this political notion of being Turkish would allow the assimilation of the major components of Ottoman society: Arabs, Armenians, Jews, Kurds, and Orthodox Christians. This was based on the idea that what one is, is a matter of self-attribution. Yet there was an opposing understanding of being Turkish based not on what people do or say, but on what they are. According to an organic, ethnolinguistic, communal, ethnic view, only those who were of the Turkish “race” or “lineage” and, by extension, only Muslims, could be considered Turks (Yıldız 2001:15–20). This biological and religiously bounded understanding of the Turkish nation, which was based on blood and soil, did not allow for the assimilation of any (other than some Muslim) peoples, such as Bosnians, Chechens, Circassians, Crimeans, and Pomaks, who were reconfigured as Turks. In either definition, there was a distinction between Turks, members of a primordial nation, and Turkish citizens, members of the modern nation-state.

The two contradictory strands of nationalism and the tension between defining identity on the basis of being or becoming Turkish stand out in the debate over the identity of the Dönme. They became a focal point of contention since their existence called into question what it meant to be Turkish, tested the limits of Turkishness, and troubled social and national categories. The Dönme were in a better position than Christians or Jews to assimilate into Turkish society; they were already outwardly Muslims, and their identity cards and passports

would list “Islam” as their religion. But their acceptance required a two-phase conversion: they had to first of all prove their sincerity as Muslims, and then, after being recognized as Muslims, the Dönme were compelled to abandon this accepted religious identity for a secular one. But they faced handicaps in the process of becoming secular, not only because they had to endure a double stripping of identity (Dönme and Muslim), but because they were perceived as a threat on several levels. First, they were foreign, having arrived from Greece. Second, they were not of the Turkish race (*ırk*) since they had apparently only intermarried among themselves, descendants of Jewish converts. Thus by blood (*kan*) and lineage (*soy*) they were not Turks. Third, they were rumored to have inordinate financial power, but in the new republic economic power was to be in the hands of True Turks (*Öz Türkler*) as the state aimed to liberate the economy of non-Muslims and create a Turkish bourgeoisie. Finally, their loyalty was considered in doubt. For some in Turkey, the original Dönme desire to remain in Greece proved their lack of fidelity to the nation. For all of these reasons, the Dönme would have to prove themselves to be loyal Turks by ceasing to work for their own interests and instead act for the good of the new nation. They would have to consciously and publicly identify with Turks.

THE DEBATE OF 1924

Mehmed Karakaşzade Rüşdü: Organic National Identity

Immediately following their arrival in Turkey, the Dönme faced a wave of controversy. Ironically, the public debate over the Dönme was incited by the proclamations of one of their own, Mehmed Karakaşzade Rüşdü, a nationalist whose views primarily represented an organic understanding of national identity. To him, Dönme could not be considered members of the Turkish race since Turks were Muslims by birth and not by conversion. Befitting the group’s international ties, Karakaşzade was a cosmopolitan Dönme trader who owned stores and properties in Berlin and Istanbul. For unexplained reasons he had been banished from the community at the age of fifteen. He also quarreled with some Dönme over loans and payments, and went to court in a dispute over alimony and ownership of properties with his Dönme ex-wife. He may have decided to take out his anger at these people by castigating all Dönme.¹² At the beginning of 1924, as thousands of fellow Dönme began arriving in Turkey, Karakaşzade engaged in a campaign to alert the public of their hybrid identity. He petitioned the Grand National Assembly, met with Atatürk, was interviewed by all the major newspapers in Ankara and Istanbul, and published an open letter to the Dönme.

Karakaşzade argues that the Dönme, “Together with being Jews in essence and by custom, have no relation to Islam in spirit or conscience. Like other

¹² This hypothesis is based on articles that appeared in the dailies *Vakit* and *Vatan* in the first week of January 1924.

Jews, for two to three centuries they have lived in their own communities according to their own particular customs and conscience, absolutely not mixing with Turks and Muslims.”¹³ He claims they were registered as Muslims and deceived others because they acted ostensibly like Muslims. Yet, he says, they are not Turks because they never intermarried with other groups; they are “fake” Turks and “fake” Muslims who had great economic power in Salonika. Karakaşzade asks the parliamentarians whether it would be better to send them back because they are not truly Turks and Muslims and thus cannot belong to the nation, and because they will pose an economic threat. He implores the members of parliament to either expel those who are not of the same blood and religion, or to mark them, disperse them throughout the country, or pass a special law assuring that they integrate with Turkish families. Karakaşzade holds out the possibility that the Dönme may mix with Turks, although this contradicts his understanding of being Turkish. He mentions intermarriage as a strategy of integration, which may have offered a way for the Dönme to belong while acknowledging their stark difference. One wonders whether Muslims would accept the Dönme into the heart of the nation if they were actually marked as Karakaşzade desired.

Karakaşzade’s “Open Letter to All Salonikan Dönme,” which appeared in the daily *Vakit* (Time) on 7 January 1924, at the beginning of the wave of Dönme immigration, is a phenomenal statement of racialized nationalism (*Sebîlürreşat* 23, no. 583 (10 Jan. 1924):174). The author begins by claiming that the Dönme, despite “taking refuge under the compassionate and pitying wing of the pure and honored Turkish nation,” deceived their “hosts” by not revealing their true identity and distinctiveness. The Ottoman government should be blamed, he argues, for not impelling them to have social relations with Turks and allowing them to live apart relying on mutual assistance. But the time for separateness is past. There is no way to “explain away our foreignness” after “the great Turkish revolution and victory that astonishes the world.” A new country has been born in which “the hearts of people living in the lands that this honored Turkish nation rules” beat as one and their minds all “bear the ideal of being Turkish.” Karakaşzade was astonished that the Dönme continued to maintain separate customs. He claims five or ten Dönme may openly mix with Turks, but this fact does not absolve the rest of the ten to fifteen thousand Dönme who maintain a separate and secret existence. He argues that the Turkish nation will no longer tolerate foreigners: “Do you think Turks will endure and suffer a foreigner to remain? You are mistaken, gentlemen!”

Karakaşzade explicitly presents organic criteria for membership in the nation, but finds the Dönme deficient. He writes that in Turkey, “only Turks truly have the right to live because it is the Turks who defended this soil by irrigating

¹³ *Sebîlürreşat* (The straight course) 23, 583 (10 Jan. 1924):171. This Islamist weekly reprinted articles from the previous week’s newspapers.

it with their blood.” While Turks were mixing their blood with the soil, or becoming one with it, the Dönme, whom he labels “sponging parasites,” hoarded their wealth and “did not sacrifice even a fraction of their blood, riches, or wealth.” This reflected the view of some in the political elite, such as Talat Pasha, the minister of the interior until 1918, that Armenians, Greeks, and Jews shared all the benefits of the fatherland, yet bore none of its burden (Talat Paşa 1986:75). They “never participated in war” and “never spilled a drop of blood,” but during times of war continued to make money through trade and lived well. Because Turks “defended the fatherland,” and the Dönme did not, Karakaşzade claims they should not be surprised that in 1924 people objected to their continuing their distinct traditions and living “as a parasite” (*Sebülürreşat* 23, no. 583 (10 Jan. 1924:174). Karakaşzade develops the host and parasite motif, which was current at the time: the Turks are the unwitting host to a dangerous parasite that can destroy them. But the author of the letter trusts the Grand National Assembly, “which even writes laws concerning wild boars” that damage farmland, since the leaders of the nation will not “be able to support in its breast a clump of foreigners.” Karakaşzade uses the metaphor of comparing the Dönme to the filthiest animal imaginable to Muslims to refer to the damage these foreigners can cause to the nation’s precious soil. He urges the Dönme to either integrate or leave: “Today there are two alternatives for us: either definitively mixing and intermarrying with Turks living under the same law to work in common for the entire fatherland and nation whether during good times or bad, or to take care of ourselves outside the nation’s boundary in whatever material and spiritual form.” At the end of the letter Karakaşzade asserts the time is right for the Grand National Assembly, “which is successfully purifying the filth accumulated over centuries,” to “also soon destroy this inauspicious problem.”

Karakaşzade did not stop with his letter to the Dönme and petition to the parliament. He also presented a petition to Atatürk in which he explained how the Dönme preserved a separate existence like “many separate races” (ibid.: 175). He praises the Turks for establishing their nation on the principle of Turkism and with the understanding that all people living within Turkey’s borders would have a shared national consciousness. But he informs the leader of the nation that the Dönme did not share anything in common, racially or religiously, with Turks. Karakaşzade told Interior Minister Ferid Efendi that the Dönme needed to completely identify themselves with Turkishness and Islam. Karakaşzade urged him to take action, and the interior minister stated, “Without a doubt, the government will investigate this problem.”

Karakaşzade tried to shock the Dönme and alarm the Muslim public and thereby cause the immediate flight or integration of the Dönme. Contradicting a basic tenet of Islam, he proclaimed that even if the Dönme called themselves Muslims and acted like Muslims, because of their origins they could not be considered Muslims. Karakaşzade may have been motivated by an aim to avenge his community since he had been banished and had financial disputes. Yet his

public declarations and frantic trips between Ankara and Istanbul to meet with press, parliament, and president speak of a man desperate to prove his own Turkishness, despite his lineage. He appears as a zealous convert to being Turkish who is more pious than those born into the religion he urged the Dönme to join. Ironically, Karakaşzade often vacillates between using the term “us” and “you” when discussing the Dönme. This pronoun-switching illustrates the difficulty he faced in defining his own place in the new nation. Yet did he imagine he could distance himself from being associated with the Dönme by expressing such loathing for them? His plan was contradictory, for by making Dönme identity a public scandal, and playing a key role in depicting Dönme distinctiveness to others, he may have hindered their smooth integration.

Dönme identity was difficult to resolve so long as the question of race surfaced and conceptions of race fed into understandings of the nation. People asked whether those of alien or non-Turkish or Jewish blood could be received as Turks if they pronounced a change in conscience to a belief in Turkishness, whether as part of “pragmatic considerations of survival and stratagem” or not (Viswanathan 1998:36). This raises the larger question of whether self-ascribed identities or identities imposed from the outside are more relevant. How could minority attempts at maintaining a hybrid identity and embracing different beliefs and affiliations be feasible if belonging to the nation meant belonging to an imagined race? (Viswanathan 1998:37–39). Faced with biological requirements for citizenship, how could Dönme defend and define their place in the nation? Would an argument presenting the Dönme as longtime loyal servants who are already secular be the more pragmatic path?

Ahmed Emin Yalman: Civic National Identity

Following a week of front-page stories about the Dönme in other dailies, which asked why the Dönme, who differed in race and religion from Turks and Muslims (considered the same), had been allowed to immigrate to Turkey, it was not surprising that when readers purchased a copy of *Vatan* on Friday, 11 January 1924, they were met with a front-page article entitled “A Mysterious Page of History” (Tarihin esrarengiz bir sahifesi), written by an anonymous “investigator of history.” From 11–17 and 19–22 January, readers were treated to the first and most in-depth history of the Dönme to appear in Turkish, and it adopted a civic understanding of national identity, presenting a historical and sociological narrative of the origins and history of the group. Ahmed Emin Yalman, the newspaper’s founder and owner, was not only the editor-in-chief, but also a Dönme who had received a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University (Yalman 1997:ix–xxii). The terminology, point of view, depth of knowledge, and methodology of the articles all point to Yalman as the anonymous author.¹⁴

¹⁴ Yalman’s nearly two-thousand-page autobiography (Yalman 1997), which is largely based on his writings in *Vatan*, contains neither a single reference to the Dönme nor to the debate of 1924.

On the heated question of whether Dönme were Jews or Muslims, foreigners or Turks, the author claims they were just another “backward” Sufi order (*tarikât*), a unique sect within the Muslim community that was on the verge of dissolution. Moreover, the author claims, they were small in number. Unlike the figure of ten to fifteen thousand Dönme spoken of in the press, the only numbers the author gives are the two hundred original families that followed Shabbatai Tzevi into conversion. The original Dönme are described as living by the laws of Islam, not the laws of Judaism, as Karakaşzade had asserted, although the author admits they also had distinct customs. Concerning their future, he asserts that the new generations of progressive youth would identify themselves with Turkey and the nation, and he urges people to consider Dönme identity as a social and not a governmental problem, arguing that no one should be persecuted. Overall, he gives a rather positive assessment of the issue. What is remarkable is what the author does not mention in his series: Dönme belief and race, and the role the Dönme played in the revolution of 1908, the CUP, and the economy.

The author makes his position clear at the beginning of the first article. Like Karakaşzade, he anachronistically criticizes the Ottoman state for not attempting to create a homogenous population, and for allowing a mosaic of peoples to flourish.¹⁵ He claims that in the Turkish republic all markers of distinction from the previous era had to be wiped out: “The aim of the person writing these lines is neither to defend and protect the very strange social organizations that came into existence centuries ago in Salonika, nor to attack them for personal reasons. The only aim is to present the naked historical truth and to render safe and sure the decisive dissolution and disappearance of this ridiculous situation” (*Vatan*, 11 Jan. 1924:1). The “ridiculous situation” to which he refers is the continued existence of the Dönme. Here he agrees with Karakaşzade, claiming the Dönme were allowed to flourish in the Ottoman Empire because there was no social solidarity among the populace, which had been left to its own devices by a sultan uninterested in nationalism. In the new republic, identity would not be self-ascribed; the state would impose an identity on the population. In the past, difference always prevailed, an unfortunate legacy for the new nation-state of Turkey where the populace was divided by many local identities. According to the author, the only action that would put the new Turkish nation on the path of development was the building of a true melting pot, to be accomplished “by asking everyone ‘are you one of us, or not,’” accepting individuals and groups that could be assimilated, and throwing out “the foreign parts that do not accept assimilation.”

The author then turns his attention to the Dönme, the group that most clearly signals for him the disturbing persistence of difference. He castigates Ot-

¹⁵ Yalman again criticized the remnants of the Ottoman cultural mosaic in a lead article in *Tan* (Sunrise) on 4 March 1937. “Umumi Yerlerde Türkçe” urges Turkish citizens to speak Turkish in public in order to prove that they had rejected the foreignness of the past (Aktar 2000:122–24).

toman society since it “did not find it necessary to look for the origin of a person who called himself a Turk and a Muslim,” a position Yalman would later interpret in a positive fashion. He asserts that the Dönme call themselves Turks and Muslims, yet actually maintain a secret life. In sharp contrast to the assertions of Karakaşzade, the author claims the Dönme are becoming “extinct” since they are dissolving as a community and abandoning a corporate identity. Yet they still manifest “superstitions” and characteristics that “must be decisively eliminated.” Unlike Karakaşzade, the author claims it was not a problem for the government; only the social pressure of public opinion, he argues, can solve this: “Those who are truly Turkish and Muslim must be distinguished in public opinion and must be saved from the necessity of carrying on their back the social stain and mark that is only appropriate for those who are not” (*Vatan*, 11 Jan. 1924:1). Surprisingly, the author then declares that if some people still desire to be separate it is their duty to openly declare their identity and their wish to remain apart. Was he offering the Dönme the autonomous status that non-Muslims were given in the Ottoman Empire but had recently publicly abandoned? According to the author, there is freedom of conscience in Turkey, and no one is to be subject to persecution on account of behaving differently. He then contradicts himself by asserting that the Dönme had to understand the true nature of the Turkish body politic and act accordingly by assimilating, for they had no other choice. One could no longer have a hybrid identity.

To explain the Dönme’s centuries-long coherence as a social group, the author claims the original families faced hostile external pressure, so they turned inward and decided not to mix with others (*Vatan*, 17 Jan. 1924:2). Their marriage pattern was the only reason they were able to maintain their separation from the society around them and not disappear without a trace like other groups. Although the younger generation ceased following “tribal superstitions,” the Dönme continued to exist in the 1920s since they were slow to end endogamous marriage. Yet marrying out was “increasingly and definitively demolishing the old walls” (*Vatan*, 22 Jan. 1924:2).

As for their future, the author asserts that since the 1880s the organization of the community and the marks that distinguished its members from others had disappeared; the new generation opposed being members of the “tribe” (*Vatan*, 20 Jan. 1924:2). They knew nothing about their own customs yet were born as members of the group against their wish. Yalman, who was born in 1888, was likely including himself in this group. For the writer of the series: “The two-century existence of this strange society is a thing of the past. Today one can only find a feeling of attachment to the past in the minds of a few elderly people who are in their 70s and 80s. But because they view the past as completely extinct, they do not even dare mention it to the new generations who view it as a ridiculous nightmare. People sent to the four corners of the nation as civil servants have completely become part of society” (*ibid.*).

Yet some “debris” remains and needs “to be clearly swept away.” He argues

that the discussion of the public pronouncements of Karakaşzade presented a good opportunity to compel the dissolution of the “tribe” and to “publicly rip the veil of secrecy that has been covering them for centuries, and do away with it once and for all.” Only some traces remain among the elderly, mainly mutual assistance and the desire to maintain a separate cemetery. The author criticizes them for only wanting to aid those they know; he urges them to destroy the old group boundaries and aid all Turks and Muslims and to give up the “ridiculous” idea of having a separate cemetery since if they are Muslims they can be buried with other Muslims. The author calls upon rational men to be zealous in wiping away old, meaningless beliefs. He concludes by arguing “it is ridiculous that for generations three tribes lived a life in Salonika as a Sufi order [*tarikât*] bound by superstition or as a secret society. Endogamy is very harmful” (ibid.).

Yalman tried to calm the public by asserting that Dönme separateness was a thing of the past and that members of the group had for generations been serving the nation and allying with its causes. In 1937, when he was attacked as the grandson of Shabbatai Tzevi and for hiding his true identity behind the Turkish label, Yalman defended himself: “You say ‘you’re not a Turk, you’re a Dönme, and you have no right to open your mouth.’ Yet for three centuries my ancestors have taken their part in the Turkish and Muslim community, people who always spent their lives serving the state. How many other people could say this?” (Karaca 1998:127–29). Thus he acknowledges having a Dönme background, converts it to a point of honor, and reveals that the term is derogatory and used as a last resort, usually by those who were the targets of his journalistic exposés of corruption (ibid.: 130). Asserting that the Dönme have always served the state may prove their loyalty, but it does not refute the claim that they are not sincere Muslims; nor does the assertion solve the problem of Dönme religious or racial identity. To solve these dilemmas, he would have had to argue that the Dönme have been Muslim for three centuries and thus longer than those whose ancestors had more recently converted to Islam.

Yalman’s efforts strike the reader as those of a person attempting to prevent his own future from being clouded by his upbringing. This interpretation gives added meaning to the line in the *Vatan* series, “Those who are truly Turkish and Muslim must be distinguished in public opinion” and “saved from . . . carrying on their back the social stain . . . that is only fitting for those who are not.” We have no access to his private practices and can only read his public declarations. Accordingly, one can interpret his writings to mean that, like minorities in all homogenizing, modern nation-states, Yalman was calling for acceptance and integration. His strategy was to promote nationality as a conscious political identity using Atatürk’s vision of a Turkish nation-state established on the basis of the equality of citizens who agreed to identify with being Turkish. Yet despite Yalman’s claims, the actions of the Dönme provided evidence of the persistence of their belief and disproved him time and again.

ASSESSING DÖNME STRATEGIES

It is understandable why Karakaşzade and Yalman publicly called for all Dönme to become Turks. Yet why were they not concerned only about their own personal integration? Was denigrating their origins a way to establish authenticity? (Endelman 1999:344). Answers to these questions may come from judging Dönme actions against those of Jewish converts seeking integration in Europe. Comparing the attitudes of Jewish converts to Christianity toward Jews in contemporary Britain and Germany, Todd Endelman found that when societies are more resistant to integration, and demand that minorities prove their citizenship by freeing themselves of minority identities, individuals with minority backgrounds are compelled to distance themselves in public from unconverted members of their communities and even urge others to follow their example (1999:362–63). The experience of Jewish converts in Europe and Dönme in Turkey reflects the difficulty of converting to secular identities, both in the eyes of the converts and the majority. The main difference was that the Dönme had changed religion over two centuries prior to the period when the sincerity of their conversion was called into question. Some people from both groups publicly denounced the group that they sought to abandon in order to be accepted by the group they were attempting to join. Individuals with fractured identities, such as Karakaşzade and Yalman, who seek personal salvation through cultural conversion, but find that the society denies the affiliation they desire, discover a role as intermediaries between society and the community.

One might be tempted to argue that rather than promoting strategies of assimilation or dissolution, Karakaşzade and Yalman wanted to be seen opposing Dönme separatism, when in fact they were adopting false personas, the appearance of disappearance, in order to hide their true identities and protect the community. Promoting the separation of religion and state could theoretically free minority groups from being hindered in their religious practices, as a tactic to create more freedom of religion in the private and public spheres. One need only think of the Alevi (Alawite) Muslim sect to understand the application of this strategy in Turkey (Olsson 1998; Shankland 1999:132–68). Alevis narrate how they were considered heretics and consequently persecuted in the Ottoman Empire. Alevis believed only a secular state which establishes no religion, but protects the freedom of all could relieve them of oppression and allow them to maintain their unique religious identity. For this reason they wholeheartedly joined Atatürk's revolution, many seeing it as a chance to no longer be a central concern of an oppressive state. Considered Turks by race, if formerly schismatic Muslims, many of those who publicly abandoned an Alevi identity and embraced secular nationalism were able to integrate into Turkish society, although the extent to which the state has allowed them to maintain their religious practices is debatable. The Dönme and Alevis, therefore, faced historically opposite pressures since the latter were persecuted by the imperial

state for their religious beliefs, but were not a primary concern of the secular state which approved of their racial identity.

Some Dönme saw the possibility inherent in secularism to ostensibly become secular Turks in public, just as once they had manifested themselves as Muslims in order to continue their religious rituals and practices in private. By donning the mask of Muslims their ancestors had managed to flourish for over two centuries. It might seem difficult for readers to accept that the Dönme would want to integrate. Perhaps, it might be suggested, they were maintaining their duplicity. If that had been the case, however, why would Karakaşzade go to such great lengths to attract attention to the Dönme and ultimately himself, and how could Yalman, a well-known journalist, afford to risk exposing his secret rituals if he practiced any? Yalman's strategy may have been more successful. Rather than pointing out the group's racial difference, distinct belief system, and economic strength, the series in Yalman's newspaper presented the group as a relic of the past, which would soon completely disappear just as the Ottoman Empire had vanished. Soon after the debate in 1924, Karakaşzade disappeared from the historical record. Yalman, on the other hand, had a very long and successful career as a journalist and vocal patriot.¹⁶

Ironically, the logic of both a voluntarist and organic nationalist ideology would lead to the same result for the Dönme. In a nation in which membership was defined politically, people were free to choose whether they belonged or not. Non-Muslims and non-Turks were given the option of identifying themselves as Turks and saying, "how happy is the one who calls himself a Turk" (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene*). Whether non-Muslim or Muslim, equal Turkish citizens were to be distinguishable by religion in their private practice, but not by ethnicity. Religion was to become less a mark of belief than a social identity since religion was removed as a basis of primordial identity and subordinated to national identity (Viswanathan 1998:xii). For example, one group of non-Muslims was to be transformed from being "Jews" (*Yahudiler*), members of an ethno-religious community with communal autonomy and its own language, to being "Turkish citizens of the Mosaic persuasion" (*Museviler*), as in France (Reynolds 1995). A melting pot was to erase all difference and a shared Turkish culture was to emerge. Integration of diverse elements would contribute to the nation-building project.

Turkish national identity in practice in the first two decades of the republic, however, was not always based on citizenship, but often on race (Yıldız

¹⁶ Yet foreigners and Turkish citizens reminded Yalman of his Dönme lineage to the end of his life. In 1943 the acting first secretary of the British embassy in Ankara referred to Yalman as the "grandson of Salonican Jews" (Olson 1986:219). Incited by vicious anti-Dönme articles in the press, a far-right militant wounded Yalman in a 1952 assassination attempt (Yalman 1997, 2:1589–621). Despite a lifetime of dedication to Turkey, Yalman is remembered primarily as a Dönme by many rightists and Islamists. In this respect his experience is similar to his contemporary, Moiz Kohen, also known as Tekinalp, the dedicated superpatriot of Jewish origin who devoted his life to the Turkish cause yet is often considered a Jew, but not a Turk (Landau 1984).

2001:15–20). Rather than political identity, blood and lineage were often most important. True Turks were distinguished from those considered Turks by law. Being an Arab, Armenian, Jew, Kurd, or Orthodox Christian was often equated with foreignness. These groups were compelled to assimilate, especially by beginning to speak only Turkish, yet were not always viewed as Turks. According to Avner Levi (1992), Jews in the early Turkish republic were neither members of an autonomous community nor equal citizens since the public and government reminded them of their difference. The constitution established the principle of equality regardless of religion. Yet non-Muslims were not made candidates for political office, nor could they serve in municipalities or state economic institutions. They were not allowed to hold positions in public service, such as policemen, judges, prosecutors, diplomats, government ministers, or bureaucrats. Distinguished military service was also prohibited since Christians and Jews were not allowed into the military academies to become officers (Şaul 1999). Announcements for government jobs stated the applicant “had to be a Turk,” which was meant to exclude non-Muslims.

In an ethnolinguistic nation diverse ethnic identities were to be superseded by one racial identity; those who were born without the genealogy of the majority had no right to be citizens. In this view of nationalism, minorities were to be purified from the body politic, and extraneous elements were to become parasites. In the 1930s in Turkey, nationalists Cevat Rifat Atilhan and Nihal Atsız publicly called for those who were not Muslims to be expelled since they could not be assimilated. Atsız argued, “just as we never expect them [Jews] to be Turkified, nor do we want it. For just as no matter how long you bake mud it will never turn into iron, a Jew can never become a Turk no matter how much he struggles” (Levi 1992:110). This sentiment should not be attributed solely to his fascination with Nazi ideology. A previous version of European race science had long been influential. Atsız also attacked Yalman, claiming although he carried a Turkish passport as a Turkish citizen, “Ahmed Emin Yalman is not a Turk and not a Muslim,” but a Jew (Özdoğan 2001:197).

Acceptance as a Turkish citizen was predicated on a citizen acquiring a set of secular nationalist beliefs and rituals. The abandonment of belief, a *fait accompli* according to Yalman’s series in *Vatan*, would mark the conversion of the Dönme. Throughout the 1930s, however, Muslims continued to harshly attack Dönme because they considered their conversion to secularism to be insincere since some Dönme still kept Shabbatai Tzevi’s memory, traditions, and customs “fully alive” (Gövsa 1939:3, 6). In the 1940s, the state did not forget that the Dönme had been distinct and a potential economic threat. Popular perceptions of secret Jewish economic power and treachery for not using their wealth to help in the struggle for independence dovetailed with conspiracy theories of Dönme power, which still had resonance twenty years after the group arrived en masse in Turkey. The wealth tax (*varlık vergisi*), which divided so-

ciety into four religious categories—Muslim, non-Muslim, foreigner, and Dönme—between 1942 and 1944 demonstrates how the government failed to live up to its founding principle of secular citizenship and equality (Akar 1999; Bali 1999:424–95; Aktar 2000:135–214; Ökte 1987; Şaul 1999; Lewis 1968:297–302; Alexandris 1983:207–33).¹⁷ Because some Dönme also did not keep their end of the deal by not becoming sincerely secular, their continued pursuit of a separate identity also played a role in their being categorized as a distinct group. The Turkish nation-state reactivated an Ottoman practice of social division by demarcating Muslims from non-Muslims, but then added a modern touch by separating Dönme from Muslim. Those Dönme who were compelled to pay the wealth tax were placed in a distinct category between Muslims and non-Muslims—they paid twice as much as Muslims. This may have been another attempt by the state to limit the boundaries of the nation. The international financial ties of the Dönme, an asset in the Ottoman period, became a liability in the nation-state. The tax came as a great shock to the Dönme, who believed they had become indistinguishable from other citizens (Neyzi 2002:146).

The saliency of the ostensibly abandoned Ottoman system of social stratification based upon religion illustrates that the transition from empire to republic was less abrupt than previously envisioned. But the practices of the republic were radically different since a belief in biological race, not merely ethnicity as some claim (Çağaptay 2001/2002:16), made boundaries separating groups far more rigid than they had been in the empire. With the introduction of the idea of racial difference in the latter years of the empire, the possibility for cultural conversion became far more difficult for groups considered racially different than the core group that was to constitute the nation in the republic. Turkey applied an ethno-national model to those considered non-Muslims and non-Turks. Yet even if the nation-state had employed a civic model of nationness for these groups, because of the deployment of racial thinking, in the Turkish case there are great similarities between the secular and communal ideas of nationhood. Neither tolerates the multiple identities that had existed in the plural society of the empire they replaced nor allows for any exit strategies such as cultural separateness. The problem the Dönme faced was that pluralism based upon accepting and maintaining difference was replaced by an attempt to create a nation based upon ideas of race which excluded formerly integral components of the whole. The nation that was the direct successor of the empire was unable in its first decades to sustain the pluralism that had accommodated separateness and multiple identities. The modern nation state requires transparency to rule. No matter what approach the Dönme pursued, their identity could no longer be an open secret. The logic of Turkish nationalism ensured it had to become a “mysterious page of history,” a disappearing relic of the Ottoman past.

¹⁷ “Foreigners” included German Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany.

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