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### Title

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### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/78d3h3pd>

### Journal

Past & Present, 226(1)

### ISSN

0031-2746

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### Publication Date

2015-02-01

### DOI

10.1093/pastj/gtu039

Peer reviewed

# CITIZENS OF A FICTIONAL NATION: OTTOMAN-BORN JEWS IN FRANCE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR\*

Before he was a stowaway, Jack Azose was an Ottoman subject. Upon his arrival in France he was undocumented and a suspected spy until, with the assistance of Paris' Prefecture of Police, he became ' . . . a foreigner of Jewish nationality from the Levant' (*un étranger de nationalité Israélite du Levant*) in the eyes of the law. It was the time of the First World War. Jack was fifteen, claiming to be eighteen.<sup>1</sup> The legal nomenclature that was granted him had not existed prior to the First World War and would disappear soon after the war's end.

The fact of being Jewish was not yet a guarantor of citizenship to any national or international body, and the Levant was an amorphous geographic entity. And yet, in the course of the First World War and its immediate aftermath, thousands of Jews who were Ottoman by birth but extraterritorial by circumstance came to be codified in a new and inventive fashion in France and its colonies. Immediately after the Ottoman Empire's entry into the First World War, the Third Republic determined that most of the 7,000 Ottoman subjects living in France, the majority of whom were Jewish and a significant minority of whom were Armenian Christian, would be deemed *protégés spéciaux* (special protégés). The formulation and application of this nomenclature was the result of careful orchestration by the Prefecture of Police, the Foreign Ministry,

\* My appreciation is due to Jordanna Bailkin, Paris Papamichos Chronakis, David Myers, Aron Rodrigue, Richard Stein and Fred Zimmerman, all of whom read and commented upon earlier drafts of this article. Versions of this essay were presented as a component of the 2014 George L. Mosse Lectures at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, at the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara, and at the Center for European Studies at Harvard University. I extend thanks to my hosts at these institutions for their hospitality and engagement, especially Tony Michels, Mary Louise Roberts and John Tortorice (in Madison); Peter Gordon and Mary Dewhurst Lewis (in Cambridge); and Erika Rappaport and Dwight Reynolds (in Santa Barbara).

<sup>1</sup> On Azose's illegal emigration: University of Washington Special Collections, Jack Azose papers, 1978, accession no. 2795-001: transcript of tape-recorded interview conducted by F. Roberts in February 1978 [hereafter, UWSC, Azose interview], 1-7.

the Ministry of the Interior and (when it came to cases including Jews) two Franco-Jewish philanthropic organizations — the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Association Culturelle Orientale — which aided the administration in identifying and allocating papers to Ottoman-born Jews. The papers issued as a result allowed thousands of Jewish (as well as Armenian Christian and some Muslim) women, men and children living as extraterritorial Ottoman subjects in France to avoid surveillance, deportation or (with tens of thousands of Germans, Austrians and Ottomans) internment as enemy aliens; to travel within their country of residence and abroad; and to acquire the passports, residence permits and official papers that were ever more indispensable in the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

Those Ottoman-born Jews who lived in France at the outbreak of the First World War reached the country in possession of myriads of papers and legal identities. Some could claim French protection, or the protection of another Western European power as a result of the Capitulations. A series of acts negotiated between Sultan Selim II and the French authorities in the sixteenth century and renewed in 1740, the capitulatory regime conferred rights and privileges upon European subjects who lived or conducted commerce in Ottoman territories, a subject to which we shall return shortly. Others emigrated with little more than an Ottoman birth certificate.

As the boundaries of the empire retracted, a portion of Ottoman-born Jews applied for citizenship in the countries that now claimed territorial possession of their places of birth

<sup>2</sup> On the role of passports, protégé status and the carrying of papers in the modern Mediterranean context, see Will Hanley, 'Foreignness and Localness in Alexandria, 1880–1914' (Princeton University, Ph.D. thesis, 2007); Will Hanley, 'When Did Egyptians Stop Being Ottomans? An Imperial Citizenship Case Study', in Willem Maas (ed.), *Multilevel Citizenship* (Philadelphia, 2013); Will Hanley, 'Papers for Going, Papers for Staying: Identification and Documentation in the East Mediterranean', in Cyrus Schayegh, Avner Wishnitzer and Liat Kozma (eds.), *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality, and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880–1940*, (London, 2014); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley, 2013), especially ch. 3; Jessica M. Marglin, 'In the Courts of the Nations: Jews, Muslims, and Legal Pluralism in Nineteenth-Century Morocco' (Princeton University, Ph.D. thesis, 2012). For the broader contours of this theme, see Donald N. Baker, 'The Surveillance of Subversion in Interwar France: the Carnet B in the Seine, 1922–1940', *French Historical Studies*, x (1978); Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca, 2006); John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge, 2000).

(for example, Greece, Bulgaria and so on), as was their right according to the terms of the Treaty of Berlin (1878) and the various national constitutions formed by Ottoman successor states.<sup>3</sup> Others ignored associated deadlines, either intentionally or accidentally, thereby becoming stateless. Many of the Ottoman Jews who lived in France at the war's start possessed only the *carnet de séjour*, *permis de séjour* or *laissez-passer*: temporary documents of the French state that attested to the holder's ability to enter, reside in or travel in France, but which were not coterminous with citizenship.

In peacetime, one could comfortably occupy legal grey zones such as this for years, or even generations.<sup>4</sup> In times of war, matters were otherwise. With the outbreak of the First World War, amid a climate of heightened anxiety about loyalty, thousands of foreigners living in France were targeted for arrest and deportation, surveillance became more sophisticated and the checking of papers more common.<sup>5</sup> Desperate to fit legal categories born of the empire state into the logic of a nation state at war, the Third Republic and the many non-naturalized Mediterranean Jews living within its borders sought new legal fixity, reversing a trend that was generations old. This fixity found impermanent form in the label ' . . . a foreigner of Jewish nationality from the Levant'.

European Jewish historians have long considered citizenship crucial. Jews either had it, or they did not. Countries either granted it to Jews (or, during the Second World War, revoked it from Jews), or they did not. However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, and particularly during the First World War and its immediate aftermath, citizenship existed on a spectrum for many Jews born in the Ottoman Empire, especially if they lived outside the boundaries of that empire. The first contribution of this article is to examine this spectrum, considering how it was variously affected by gender, class and personal histories. My second ambition is to use Ottoman Jewish émigrés' stories to illustrate the legal ambiguities

<sup>3</sup> Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries* (Oxford, 1993), ch. 3, 90.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Abrevaya Stein, 'Protected Persons? The Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora, the British State, and the Persistence of Empire', *American Historical Review*, cxvi (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Rosenberg, *Policing Paris*, ch. 1; Patrick Weil, *How to Be French: Nationality in the Making since 1789*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC, 2008), ch. 3.

multiplied by the major conflicts of the early twentieth century, joining European historians in rethinking the First World War as a richly complex legal terrain, and joining scholars of North Africa and South Asia in carrying a conversation about legal pluralism from the colonial to the continental setting.<sup>6</sup> European historians have paid close attention to many aspects of this story, including the plight of refugees and enemy aliens, but the experience of ‘friendly aliens’ has commanded rather less attention.<sup>7</sup> In reversing this trend, this article fills out a multichromatic picture of the complex legal possibilities unleashed by decades of conflict and border change in early twentieth-century Europe.

In addition to offering lessons about the nature of citizenship for Mediterranean Jews and the legal experience of war for twentieth-century Europe, this article seeks to explore the influence of Ottoman law upon the wartime policies of France. This is an absent dimension in the otherwise rich literature on citizenship and the Third Republic, much of which focuses on North Africa (and, to a lesser extent, West Africa) and formal French colonialism.<sup>8</sup> But France’s semi-colonial reach into

<sup>6</sup> For legal histories of the First World War, see, in particular, Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2003); Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: the Campaign Against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Paniko Panayi, *The Enemy in Our Midst: Germans in Britain during the First World War* (New York, 1991); Laura Tabili, ‘Outsiders in the Land of their Birth: Exogamy, Citizenship, and Identity in War and Peace’, *Journal of British History*, xlv (2005). On the notion of legal pluralism see Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2002); Sally Engle Merry, ‘Legal Pluralism’, *Law and Society Review*, xxii (1988).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Gattrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington, 1999); Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire*; Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1995); Claudena M. Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: the Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford, 1995); Keith David Watenpugh, ‘The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–1927’, *American Historical Review*, cxv (2010).

<sup>8</sup> In particular, see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (New Haven, 1992); Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, 1997); Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (New York, 1988); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918–1940* (Stanford, 2007); Gérard Noiriel, *Réfugiés et sans-papiers: la République face au droit d’asile* (Paris, 1998); Catherine Raissiguier, *Reinventing the Republic: Gender, Migration, and Citizenship in France* (Stanford, 2010); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago, 2014); Weil, *How to Be French*.

Ottoman territory, too, made the meaning of citizenship complex within France, particularly at a time of war — and, more particularly still, when France and the Ottoman Empire found themselves on opposing sides of the conflict. When the Quai d'Orsay granted Ottoman-born Jews the status of special protégés in 1914, it did so to solve a pressing problem. France had a long history of protecting Ottoman (and, especially, Ottoman Jewish) merchants who provided financial benefit to the French state by serving as local intermediaries. By the outbreak of the First World War, Jewish merchants of this description were not only numerous, but had a powerful lobby behind them. With the Third Republic at war with the Ottoman Empire, the administration was obliged either to subject Ottoman-born Jews to arrest, internment and expulsion (thereby contravening an enduring relationship and putting the regime at risk of public criticism), or to engage in deft legal manoeuvring. For self-serving reasons, the administration chose the latter course. In this instance, as in so many other situations that took shape across France's colonies and protectorates, the Third Republic distorted itself in the interest of creating legal categories that suited its own interests.<sup>9</sup>

To be specific, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of the Interior cannily borrowed a category born of the early modern empire state (the protégé), legally codified an amorphous geo-cultural entity (the Levant) and strategically repackaged an element of Ottoman foreign policy (the Capitulations regime) to craft wartime policy at home. What makes this story all the more interesting is that these legal sleights of hand took place at the very instant that the Ottoman authorities suspended the Capitulations regime and, indeed, confronted

<sup>9</sup> One thinks, in a comparative vein, of the idiosyncratic legal nomenclature and privileges granted to Algerians living outside Algeria, or residents of the M'zab in southern Algeria, or certain protected subjects of the Tunisian Bey, or residents of Saharan lands claimed by Morocco (among many other groups). Nouredine Amara, 'Être algérien en situation impériale, fin XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle – début XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle: l'usage de la catégorie "nationalité algérienne" par les consulats français dans leur relation avec les Algériens fixes au Maroc et dans l'Empire Ottoman', *European Review of History — Revue européenne d'histoire*, xix (2012); Benjamin Claude Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: the Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844–1902* (New York, 2009); Lewis, *Divided Rule*; Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*; Stein, *Saharan Jews*. The colonial logic behind certain of these policies is explored in Patricia M. E. Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (London, 1995).

the dramatic dismemberment of their empire amid a climate of ascendant nationalism. A centuries-old Ottoman policy towards Levantine subjects — and, with it, an early modern, extra-national legal sensibility — was thus reincarnated in wartime France even as these phenomena were denuded of meaning in south-eastern Europe and replaced by various forms of colonial rule in North Africa and the Middle East.

As this article concludes, we consider a chain of implications that stemmed from France's protection of Ottoman-born Jews and stretched through the war, across the inter-war period and into the world war that followed. Here, I examine policy reverberations in Great Britain and propose that the Third Republic assigned new value to its determination to protect certain Ottoman-born subjects as the First World War progressed. First, the Foreign Ministry made use of its historic protection of Ottoman-born Jews in the attempt to urge the American Jewish community to pressure the United States to enter the war on the side of the Allies, emphasizing that granting papers to Levantine Jews had been based on humanitarian motives. Simultaneously, the Quai d'Orsay came to see these policies as a tool of *realpolitik*. By 1916 and 1917, this office flaunted France's protection of the Ottoman-born as evidence of the Third Republic's claims on Syria and Lebanon — in this case, as in Tunisia, Morocco and the Sahara, French claims of protection proved a precondition for formal control in one form or another. As the symbolic value of special protection shifted, what remained constant was the surprising fact that, amid an environment of heightened nationalism and in tandem with France's zealous denaturalization of hundreds of foreign-born and/or recently naturalized French men and women, Jewish nationals from the Levant continued to be codified as citizens of their own, fictional nation. This legal reality outlived the war, only to be definitively shattered by the Vichy regime.

## I

### PROTÉGÉS AND PAPERS, A PRE-WAR HISTORY

Ottoman Jewish subjects were among those who sought the protection of foreign powers from the sixteenth century onwards, when the first of a series of Capitulations was

negotiated between the Ottoman leadership and French authorities. These acts conferred rights and privileges upon Western European subjects who lived or conducted commerce within Ottoman territories, including relief from certain taxes and tolls, and immunity from local civil justice.<sup>10</sup> Among the first Jews to pursue foreign protection were Tuscan and Livornese merchants who came to the Ottoman lands in the eighteenth century as French protégés, thereby earning themselves the Judaeo-Spanish designation ‘Francos’. (In the nineteenth century, after Italy became a unified state, this population ‘became’ Italian, in most cases without ever leaving the Ottoman lands.) As Francesca Trivellato has described, the resulting ‘collaboration between a stateless diaspora and state commercial power, though asymmetrical, was mutually beneficial’, allowing France to become the ascendant European economic force in the Mediterranean in the eighteenth century and to maintain semi-colonial influence in the region thereafter.<sup>11</sup> Jewish and non-Jewish merchants, for their part, were quick to appreciate the value of the Capitulations, initiating a rush on foreign protection that continued until the Treaty of Lausanne formally abolished the Capitulations in 1923 (during the First World War, the Capitulations were temporarily suspended by the Ottoman leadership). By this time, countless Jewish families of Ottoman origin — many of whom lived outside the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire — had been ‘Italian’, ‘British’ or ‘French’ for generations, notwithstanding the fact that they, their parents or their grandparents might have never set foot in their ostensible ‘home’.<sup>12</sup>

The acquisition of foreign protection was an old tradition, then: a modern practice carried over from the early modern era. Its lure was nonetheless contingent on circumstance. During the Balkan Wars and First World War, as regional violence escalated, xenophobic nationalist parties gained ascendancy in south-eastern Europe and, as the political future of so many once

<sup>10</sup> Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period* (New Haven, 2009), ch. 4; Halil İnalcık, ‘İmtiyâzât’, in P. Bearman *et al.* (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, 12 vols (Leiden, 1960–2007); Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, ii, 1600–1914* (Cambridge, 1994), 194–5.

<sup>11</sup> Trivellato, *Familiarity of Strangers*, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Stein, ‘Protected Persons?’



Ottoman communities, cities and regions became uncertain, foreign protection seemed to offer Jews a new kind of security. Affording more than financial advantage (the principal lure of protection in the early modern era), the modern protégé status was a hedge against an unstable world. In the city of Salonica alone, at least 2,750 Jews came to be protégés of foreign governments in the course of 1912–13. This dramatic (and admittedly exceptional) development unfolded against the backdrop of the First Balkan War (1912–13), as Austria-Hungary, Portugal and Spain began a competitive scramble to ‘claim’ members of the city’s Jewish mercantile elite at the very moment that the fate of Salonica was up for grabs. Hundreds of politically wary and socially mobile Jews met these countries’ invitations with enthusiasm.<sup>13</sup> Watching this fight for papers and people, Joseph Nehama, a distinguished historian of Salonican Jewry, fretted that the Jewish rush for citizenship papers posed a serious danger, for those that procured foreign papers deprived themselves of certain communal and municipal rights — and, therefore, deprived their community of their civic activism. Their actions, he wrote, threatened to ‘decapitate’ Salonica.<sup>14</sup>

Many of the Ottoman-born Jewish immigrants who came to France before the First World War lacked proof of protégé status (unless they arrived as French citizens), a birth certificate or a passport. If they held any state-approved paperwork, it was

<sup>13</sup> Writing to the Paris office of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1913, Nehama specified that approximately 850 Jews in his native Salonica had acquired Spanish papers, 1,500 Portuguese papers and 400 Austrian papers. Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris (hereafter, AIU), série Grèce IGIII: Joseph Nehama to the AIU, 8 Dec. 1913. My warm thanks to Paris Papamichos Chronakis for alerting me to this correspondence. On this episode see K. E. Fleming, *Greece: a Jewish History* (Princeton, 2008), 68–72; Manuela Franco, ‘The Twentieth-Century Portuguese Jews from Salonika: “Oriental Jews of Portuguese Origin”’, in Judith Frishman *et al.* (eds.), *Borders and Boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish History* (Amsterdam, 2011); N. M. Gelber, ‘An Attempt to Internationalize Salonika, 1912–1913’, *Jewish Social Studies*, xvii (1955); David Recanat, *Zikhron Saloniki; gedulatah ve-hurbanah shel Yerushalayim de-Balkan, ha-‘orekh*, 2 vols. (Tel Aviv, 1972); Kostas E. Skordylès, ‘Reactions juives à l’annexion de Salonique par la Grèce, 1912–1913’, in I. K. Hassiotis (ed.), *The Jewish Communities of Southeastern Europe: from the Fifteenth Century to the End of World War II* (Thessaloniki, 1997). I explore this history further in the larger project of which this is a part: Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams: Sephardi Jews, Citizenship, and the Calamitous Twentieth Century* (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> AIU, série Grèce IG III: Joseph Nehama to the AIU, 28 May 1913.

likely to be the more temporary *carnet de séjour*, *permis de séjour* or *laissez-passer*, documentation extended either by French consuls in the applicant's place of origin or by the Foreign Ministry or police in France. None of these permits was meant to grant or provide proof of French citizenship. But the authorities tended to re-extend them blithely, and many Ottoman-born Jews had come not only to see them as a right, but to invest the papers with an almost metaphysical meaning. When, in 1916, thirty-one-year-old Youda Leon Nissim requested permission from the Foreign Ministry to travel with his wife and French-born children to Vichy for medical care, he informed the ministry that he had arrived in France in 1903 as a medical student, on a *permis de séjour*: thirteen years later, he felt himself to be 'Ottoman in name alone'.<sup>15</sup>

These complex dynamics reverberated in wartime France. When the western Allies declared war on the Ottoman Empire in the late winter of 1914, between 6,000 and 7,000 Ottoman-born Jews were thought to live in Paris, with additional, smaller communities in Marseille and Lyon.<sup>16</sup> This community represented somewhere between 50 per cent and 58 per cent of all Ottoman subjects living in France, and it included some 2,500 men who had enlisted in the French military.<sup>17</sup> (Armenians constituted the next largest population of Ottoman subjects in the country, numbering roughly 4,000 in the years preceding the outbreak of war.)<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman Jewish community

<sup>15</sup> Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve (hereafter AMAE), correspondance politique et commerciale, Français en Turquie–Ottomans en France, 'Ottomans en France' (hereafter AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France'): dossier of Youda Leon Nissim.

<sup>16</sup> AMAE, correspondance politique et commercial, 1897–1918 (nouvelle série), vol. 970, 'Ottomans en France', 'Dossier général, 1917, mars–juil.' (hereafter, AMAE, vol. 970): Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, 22 May 1917.

<sup>17</sup> A number of sources identify the total number of Ottomans living in France at this time as 12,000. When, in the early years of the war, the Prefecture of Police in Paris sought to identify all the Ottoman subjects living in that city in 1914, it assembled 7,000 dossiers (AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, 22 May 1917). On Ottoman-born Jews' voluntary conscription see Captain Sylvain Halff, 'The Participation of the Jews of France in the Great War', *The American Jewish Yearbook*, xxi (1919–20).

<sup>18</sup> Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham, NC, 2003), 11.

in France was recent: a decade earlier, the number of Ottoman-born Jews living in Paris numbered less than one hundred.<sup>19</sup> But the Balkan Wars catalyzed a tremendous wave of Jewish emigration from south-eastern Europe, prompted both by the violence of war and by Jewish fears that regional irredentism would spark a rise in anti-Semitism.

With the onset of war, France could no longer serve as a casual, temporary dwelling place for Ottoman Jewish businessmen and their families, travellers, students or teachers-in-training. Now, holders of foreign papers — and subjects of countries at war with France, especially — found themselves prone to heightened state surveillance and control. The number of French naturalizations plummeted in the course of the war (from 2,117 in 1914 to 282 in 1918), while tens of thousands of Germans, Austrians and Ottomans were interned in camps for enemy aliens, and hundreds of French citizens who were German, Austrian or Ottoman by birth were stripped of their citizenship.<sup>20</sup> The first step, taken on 2 August 1914 (even before the Ottoman Empire entered the war), was to expel many so-called enemy aliens and to require all so-called friendly aliens living within France to register with the authorities.<sup>21</sup>

This ruling posed a problem for undocumented immigrants such as Jack Azose. Azose had sneaked into France by stowing away on a Turkish ship bound for Marseille. Upon arrival, the young man evaded passport control by sliding down his boat's rigging. Penniless, he boarded a train to Paris, eluding the ticket collector at the station where he arrived by helping an unassuming porter unload an armful of suitcases. Luckily, Azose had met a schoolmate while still en route to France, 'a young man from Istanbul [sic], Turkey, who was going to France, just like me,

<sup>19</sup> Sam Lévy, 'Les Israélites sefardis en France (Juifs orientaux)', *L'univers Israélite*, 26 Feb. 1926, 95.

<sup>20</sup> The French laws of 7 April 1915 and 18 June 1917 enabled the denaturalization of naturalized citizens of enemy origin. Weil, *How to Be French*, 60–2, 187. On enemy alien camps in France, see Jean-Claude Farcy, *Les Camps de concentration français de la première guerre mondiale, 1914–1920* (Paris, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> For an articulation of this policy see AMAE, correspondance politique et commercial, 1897–1918 (nouvelle série), vol. 971, 'Ottomans en France', 'Dossier général, 1917, aout–1918, janv.', Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, 18 Aug. 1917.

with the exception that he had all his papers in order and plenty of money with a rich uncle in Paris whom he was going to meet'. The friend took Azose to his uncle's house and the uncle helped Azose find a night's lodging above a nearby restaurant.<sup>22</sup> Thus far, Azose's illegal journey to France had been marked by good fortune. Now his troubles began. Azose recalled:

No one in Paris could rent a room in a hotel or rooming house without first obtaining a visa or a permit from the *prefecture de police*. The penalty was very severe if anyone would be caught on that offence so everyone was afraid to give me a place to sleep, knowing that I was a stowaway and that I did not have a permit.<sup>23</sup>

Fortunately, Azose's friend had an idea. He urged his undocumented companion to lie to the Parisian police, telling them that he had entered France legally but had had his pocket picked in Marseille, whereupon he lost his money and passport. The plan worked. The police granted Azose his temporary permit, making him promise he would not stray from his stated address — that of a nearby hotel. Permit in hand, Azose returned to the restaurateur who had lodged him the night before. The owner offered Azose work and allowed him to sleep above his restaurant.

Three months after the Foreign Ministry reshaped its laws regarding enemy aliens, the Allied powers declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Now, the Quai d'Orsay was obliged to fine-tune its policies yet again, this time relative to the treatment of Ottoman subjects who lived in or who wished to gain entry to France. While the ministry was stringent in its treatment of German, Austro-Hungarian, Bulgarian and some Ottoman citizens, it saw fit to grant an exemption to Ottoman-born Christians 'of good character' who 'professed Francophilic sentiment'.<sup>24</sup> Those who qualified were entitled to live in and travel through France. However, these individuals were not to

<sup>22</sup> UWSC Azose interview, 5–6.

<sup>23</sup> UWSC Azose interview, 6.

<sup>24</sup> This policy was made public on 7 November 1914, when it was published in various journals. AMAE, vol. 970: 'Avis concernant les sujets ottomans resident en France, approuvé par le Conseil des Ministres le 7 Novembre 1914 et publié dans la presse'. It took a bit longer for the Ministry to communicate its new policy to its representatives overseas: see, for example, AMAE, *correspondance politique et commercial, 1897–1918 (nouvelle série)*, vol. 968, 'Ottomans en France', 'Dossier général, 1916, fév.-aout' (hereafter, AMAE, vol. 968): confidential dispatch by Ministry of Foreign Affairs to France's diplomatic agents and consular representatives, 1 Mar. 1916.

be considered citizens, nor could they receive French protection when in another country or in the event that they returned to Ottoman soil.<sup>25</sup>

Immediately, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) lobbied the administration to extend protection to Ottoman-born Jews of good character. The organization had reason to believe its voice would be heard. Created in 1860 by members of the Franco-Jewish elite, the AIU aimed to provide education and social 'uplift' to Jews across the Levant, and had, by the First World War, established hundreds of schools in the Ottoman Empire and North Africa, educating generations of Middle Eastern Jewish girls and boys in the French language, according to French bourgeois norms. The AIU's prominence and relationship with the leadership of the Third Republic predated the war — the organization gained prestige after successfully lobbying for Romanian Jews' acquisition of equal rights by the Treaty of Berlin (1878). In subsequent decades the AIU had deepened its ties with the leadership of the Third Republic by successfully repackaging the regime's civilizing mission for Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Jewry, and because its own graduates, founders and leaders were well represented in the upper echelons of French society and government.<sup>26</sup> In November 1914, the organization was, in short, well positioned to exert influence upon the Foreign Ministry. Its position on extra-territorial Ottoman Jews was embraced by the Quai d'Orsay only nine days after the Foreign Minister announced its policies towards the Ottoman-born, paving the way for a cooperative wartime relationship between that office and the AIU.<sup>27</sup>

When the Foreign Ministry allowed Jews to be recognized as 'Ottomans of good character', it took but one step towards the

<sup>25</sup> 'Le statut des Juifs orientaux en France: deux questions parlementaires et deux réponses ministérielles', *L'univers Israélite*, 3 Mar. 1922; 'Informations: 6. Turquie. Les Israélites du Levant protégés Français', *Paix et Droit*, 1 Feb. 1922.

<sup>26</sup> On the history of the AIU and its ties to the Third Republic see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington, 1990), 155–7.

<sup>27</sup> On the successful lobbying efforts of the AIU in November 1914 see AIU, série France FR IV 16: 'Notice lue devant le groupe des députés de Paris par M. Alfred Levy, le 28 November [1914]'; AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, 22 May 1917, appendix, 'Alliance Israélite Universelle'; AMAE, correspondance politique et commercial, 1897–1918 (nouvelle série), vol. 960: 'Alliance Israélite Universelle'.

fine-tuning of a policy that proved far less practicable than it might have first appeared. Many questions remained: How were the Ottoman-born to be identified? How was 'good character' to be gauged? What papers would these extra-territorial subjects hold? In the section that follows, we consider how the Quai d'Orsay sought to answer these questions, and how Jewish applicants for French protection negotiated this process.

## II

### 'OF JEWISH NATIONALITY FROM THE LEVANT': THE SHAPING OF A WARTIME FICTION

Immediately after the Foreign Ministry adopted its wartime policy towards Ottoman subjects living in France, it initiated an ambitious, thirty-two-month-long effort to count and evaluate all Ottoman subjects living in France. Working closely with the Ministry of the Interior, Prefecture of Police, local police prefectures and various organizations representing the communities in question, the Foreign Ministry assembled 7,000 dossiers.<sup>28</sup> Based upon this information, the Third Republic tried to draw distinctions between Ottoman-born subjects residing in France. On the one hand, the administration grouped together those who were 'Turkish', considering them 'enemy aliens' who ought to be subject to expulsion or internment. On the other hand, it classed together those who had fallen under 'the Turkish yoke'. These groups were to be considered *protégés spéciaux*. If a given individual from within this class was considered of good character, he or she was deemed worthy of a so-called 'Ottoman' identity card that stated 'nationality' — in the case of most Ottoman-born Jews, '*un étranger de nationalité Israélite du Levant*'.

Building on Orientalist tropes from the nineteenth century, the Foreign Ministry's list of privileged Ottoman subjects combined and mixed racial, religious, sub-religious, linguistic and regional categories. This list included 'Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula, Armenians, Levantine Greek Orthodox, Levantine Jews, Levantine Latins, Italian protégés from Rhodes and Syrians'. This last category ('Syrians') was further divided to

<sup>28</sup> AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister of the Interior, 22 May 1917.

include Chaldean Christians, Druze, Greek Melkites and Greek Catholics, Lebanese Christians including Maronites, and Muslim Arabs.<sup>29</sup> The central unifying feature of this list is its crude characterization of the Ottoman *millet* system as a tool of repression wielded against Jews, Christians and other religious minorities. The Jews of the Levant were seen as worthy of being saved, according to this vision, precisely because they were thought to be subjects of a despotic Turkish Empire. The Third Republic's wartime policy towards Ottoman-born subjects living within French territories was in this sense born of an essentially sectarian view of Ottoman society combined with a republican commitment to *laïcité*.<sup>30</sup> According to this vision, persecuted religious minorities from the Ottoman Empire could find protection from the claims of Islam at the hands of a benevolent French state. At the same time, the Third Republic could overshadow (if not entirely explain away) its agile legal manoeuvrings by presenting itself as a saviour of the oppressed.

From the perspective of Jewish history, the Foreign Ministry's expressed preference for 'Italian protégés from Rhodes' (*Rhodiciens protégés italiens*) — a group that was almost entirely Jewish in constitution — reflects the regime's strategic deployment of Mediterranean history. At the outbreak of the First World War, the vast majority of Rhodes's 4,500 Jews had been born when the island was Ottoman — which it had been since 1522. Many members of this community (along with many Rhodesli Jewish émigrés) received Italian protection after 1912, when Italy wrested the Dodecanese Islands from Ottoman control. By the start of the First World War, these Jews had been 'protégés italiens' for only a few short years. Indeed, those who lived in émigré settings (including South Africa, Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo, Tunisia and Egypt) received Italian protection through local consuls and representatives, despite having never set foot on the island in its 'Italian' incarnation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to Police Prefect M. Laurent, 22 May 1917.

<sup>30</sup> For an erudite description of the notion of *laïcité* as it has been shaped in France relative to Muslim subjects in the contemporary period see Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Evidence of this surfaces most vividly in the British archives. In 1916, the British consul in Johannesburg wrote to his superiors in the British Foreign Office notifying them that fifteen Jewish men (and, one assumes, unidentified numbers of wives and children) from Rhodes, living in South Africa, were under the protection of the Italian

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French authorities might well have chosen to fix the general label 'Levantine' upon this community. By labelling them 'Italian protégés from Rhodes', the regime honoured recent history and politics over a more complex past.<sup>32</sup>

Even the Foreign Minister had to concede that, given the ethno-religious diversity of Ottoman subjects, errors of categorization were inevitable. This office initially advised that police functionaries in charge of overseeing a given district might invite Ottoman subjects who lacked official documentation to volunteer their religion or race. This procedure was soon superseded by a rather more bureaucratic system in which sanctioned organizations were relied upon to testify to the good character of a given individual; when it came to Jews, the Foreign Ministry relied on the Alliance Israélite Universelle and a smaller Franco-Sephardic philanthropic organization, the Association Culturelle Orientale, to identify, vouch for and deliver papers to worthy Ottoman-born Jews living in France.<sup>33</sup> No matter the number of its institutional allies, the process of identifying and assigning appropriate paperwork to all Ottoman-born Jews living in France proved to be thorny for the Third Republic. Though it was evidently the intention of the Foreign Ministry and Ministry

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consul in Pretoria. This information was transmitted to London in order to exempt the Jews in question from being deemed 'enemy aliens' by Britain. The National Archive, London (hereafter, TNA), FO 388/88: Ped. Medici, Italian Consul in Johannesburg, to the Governor General's Office, Pretoria, 5 Jan. 1915. Associated correspondence in this file documents the transmission of this letter to the British Foreign Office.

<sup>32</sup> AMAE, vol. 968: Minister of Foreign Affairs to Police Prefect M. Laurent, 24 Nov. 1916.

<sup>33</sup> Founded in 1909 in a café in the eleventh arrondissement of Paris by Nissim Rozanes (Rosanes), a native of Istanbul who had come to France as a small-scale trader and made a fortune in the gem trade, the Association Culturelle Orientale was formed to support the Judeo-Spanish immigrant community of Paris. In large part owing to Rozanes's charitable generosity, it had some 2,000 members by the outbreak of the First World War, at which point it also claimed its own address and employed (with the financial assistance of the Grand Rabbi of Istanbul) an 'orator'. Rozanes had earlier come under the suspicion of the Foreign Ministry owing to his extended visits to Germany (and to the apparently suspect fact that the outbreak of the war had plunged him into a three-week long depression, during which he never left his apartment). Subsequent police surveillance found him trustworthy, however, fit to partner with the Quai d'Orsay in its management of its would-be special protégés. AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to Minister of the Interior, 22 May 1917, Appendix, 'Association Culturelle Orientale en Paris'; AMAE, vol. 965, 'Ottomans en France', 'Dossier général, 1914, oct.-nov.': Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, 14 Nov. 1914.



of the Interior to treat the majority of Ottoman subjects leniently, local police who were responsible for gathering data on these individuals viewed them with rather more suspicion. Indeed, though publicly the Foreign Ministry spoke in the most glowing terms about its 'precious' collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior and Prefecture of Police in managing Ottoman subjects dwelling in France, there were many instances in which the offices of the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of the Interior were obliged to mop up after police error.

Lines of communication seemed particularly faulty between the Foreign Minister's office and French representatives outside continental France, with Tunisia providing a particularly muddled context. France had granted protection to a great number of Jews (as well as Muslims and Christians) in Tunisia in the nineteenth century in the hope of strengthening French influence over the Regency. When the French Protectorate was formed, protection was retracted from Tunisian Jews and Muslims.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, after France entered a belligerent relationship with the Ottoman Empire, it was unclear whether these erstwhile French protégés should be treated as native subjects of Tunisia, Ottoman-born Jews or one-time French protégés. The Foreign Ministry leaned towards generosity, extending the reach of its policy towards Ottoman-born subjects to France's colonies and possessions, and offering specific assurance to Alliance Israélite Universelle representatives in Tunisia that Ottoman-born Jews dwelling there 'would be treated in the same fashion as Christians'. Nevertheless, just weeks after France announced its protection of honourable Ottomans, large numbers of Ottoman Jews living in Tunisia received notification of their imminent expulsion, despite having obtained the appropriate *permis de séjour* required of foreigners at the outset of the war. (Whether this action was due to confusion about the novel policy, anti-Jewish sentiment or obstinacy is not clear.) The AIU protested against

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, *Divided Rule*, especially ch. 3. For a general discussion of the shaping of French policies towards 'Muslims' at this time see Henry Laurens, 'La politique musulmane de la France: caractères généraux', *Monde arab Maghreb Machrek*, clii (1996); Jalila Sbaï, 'La République et la Mosquée: genèse et institution(s) d'Islam en France', in Pierre-Jean Luizard (ed.), *Le Choc colonial et l'Islam: les politiques religieuses des puissances coloniales en terres d'Islam* (Paris, 2006); Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*.

this action, arguing that most of the Jews living in Tunisia who held Ottoman papers were graduates of AIU schools, including some 2,500 who had served in the French army. These Jews, the AIU maintained, merited the administration's fealty.<sup>35</sup> The Foreign Ministry's commitments towards Ottoman Jews in Tunisia were honoured, but it was not the last time that this office's instructions would be misinterpreted or badly executed by French officials.<sup>36</sup>

French bureaucratic formality (as well as a concern for public opinion) kept the Foreign Minister's office from sparring publicly with the Prefecture of Police or local police prefectures — but tensions between the units ripple through their correspondence.<sup>37</sup> Consider, for example, this exchange, prompted by the Foreign Minister's dismissal of a writ of expulsion issued against Ottoman Jews living in the department of Alpes-Maritimes. In explaining its decision, the Foreign Ministry noted that the individuals in question, Isaac Matalon and 'the wife of Albert Adoutte and their children' had lived in Alpes-Maritimes since 1903 and 1915 (respectively), that none carried on trade in violation of wartime sanctions and that each was able to support him- or herself economically. Rather more impressionistically, the ministry thought it regrettable that, in targeting Matalon, Adoutte and other Jewish Ottoman subjects living in Alpes-Maritimes, officials in the district had fallen prey to 'regrettable generalities that do not accord with the feelings of loyalism and devotion that have animated the great majority of *protégés spéciaux*'.<sup>38</sup>

Such recriminations belied the essential imprecision of French policy. Vagaries produced by labyrinthine paths of Jewish

<sup>35</sup> AIU, série France FR IV 16: 'Notice lue devant le groupe des députés de Paris par M. Alfred Levy, le 28 November [1914]'.  
<sup>36</sup> In 1915, for example, the police identified twelve Ottoman-born Jews as enemy aliens and sent them to an internment camp in Blanzay. This was despite the fact that the Jews in question possessed the requisite papers identifying them as 'of good character'. This group of Jews was shortly freed by order of the Foreign Minister's office. AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France': dossier of Joseph Levy.

<sup>37</sup> Criticism of the government's treatment of Ottoman subjects flared up in the popular press at various points, sparking impassioned responses by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. See, for example, AMAE, vol. 970: Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, 5 July 1917.

<sup>38</sup> AMAE, correspondance politique et commercial, 1897–1918 (nouvelle série), vol. 971, 'Ottomans en France', 'Dossier général, 1917, aout–1918, janv.': Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, 4 Jan. 1918.

migration, by the shifting of political borders in south-eastern Europe and by uncertainty — on the part of French officials and Ottoman-born Jews themselves — about the legal and social categories imposed by the Quai d'Orsay, ensured that confusion surrounding the Third Republic's course of action towards the Ottoman-born would persist throughout wartime and, indeed, linger beyond its end. These intricate factors obfuscated a policy that seemed more practicable in the abstract than it proved to be in reality. How can the conundrum facing Lina Covo, Tamar Ovadia, Allegra Taboh and Renée Benveniste in the summer of 1916 otherwise be explained? Each of these Jewish women was born in Ottoman Salonica, graduated from the local AIU school, attended the AIU's elite teaching college in Paris and sought to visit her childhood home. The women's papers declared them Ottoman nationals but, since the place of their birth was no longer Ottoman, France considered them Jewish nationals from the Levant — but with Salonica now a Greek city (Thessaloniki), they no longer merited this title. As per the Treaty of Bucharest (1913), international law allowed the four to claim Greek citizenship, but none had applied for the requisite paperwork. The AIU appealed to the Foreign Minister to give the police prefecture the instructions necessary to grant the four women appropriate passports; but what, under these circumstances, was appropriate?<sup>39</sup> The question was as philosophical as it was legal. Small wonder that local police representatives erred as they struggled to manage these and comparable cases.

Some Jewish applicants for paperwork objected to the rigidity and anachronism implicit in the classification 'of Jewish nationality from the Levant'. Nahum Vidal, a native of Salonica, sought in December 1917 to register with the French authorities in Marseille as a 'Salonican' by nationality. This appeal may have reflected the applicant's support of the short-lived movement (shaped in the denouement of the First Balkan War, before Greek claims to Salonica were consolidated) to 'internationalize' the once majority-Jewish city of Salonica.<sup>40</sup> Or it may have reflected that the appellation 'Levantine' had

<sup>39</sup> AIU, série France FR IV D: Secretary of AIU to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 July 1916.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 15, above.

little resonance to a Jewish supplicant more tightly moored to his home town than an impressionistic zone of the French and British imagination. No matter: the police accepted Vidal's application, but unceremoniously overruled his semantic quibble. The inspector on staff simply crossed out the word 'Salonica' on Vidal's application, inscribing Vidal's completed identity card with the phrase 'Levantine Jew'.<sup>41</sup> For Vidal, this was just a temporary legal designation, to be supplanted first by Greek and then French citizenship.

Perhaps the most poignant dossiers gathered by the Foreign Ministry concern French-born women married to Ottoman-born men. Since 1803, the French Civil Code mandated that any French woman who married a foreigner automatically forsook her nationality for her husband's. During the First World War, the Civil Code, combined with novel laws concerning the foreign-born, resulted in the denaturalization of thousands of French-born women. Patrick Weil has noted that: 'between 1914 and 1924, France "lost" almost twice as many Frenchwomen (130,000) as it gained (53,000)'.<sup>42</sup>

Jewish women were among these ranks. Mathilde (Rachel) Lévy (née Arditi), an erstwhile French citizen living in Izmir with her Ottoman-born husband, sought permission to travel to or through France not once but three times in the course of the war. Official correspondence pertaining to Lévy's first request, in July 1916, affirmed her as a French national by birth. Nonetheless, as per the terms of the Civil Code and wartime regulations, Lévy was labelled as an '*Israélite ottomane, d'origine française*' (an Ottoman Jew of French origin) and granted the *laissez-passer* required of a foreign visitor. Lévy's subsequent requests were also positively received: in 1917 and again a year later, she sought permission to travel with her children to Saint-Honoré-les-Bains and Narbonne respectively. In each

<sup>41</sup> As cited in Edgar Morin, 'Vidal and his People', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, iv (1994).

<sup>42</sup> Weil, *How to Be French*: 64, see also chapter 8. In 1927, the Senate and Chamber of Deputies adopted a code that allowed French women who had married foreigners to 'reintegrate' into their French nationality, and granted French women the choice of retaining their nationality upon marriage to a foreigner. Nonetheless, the complexity of such marriages and the built-in ambiguities associated with the 1927 nationality code lingered on. Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic*, ch. 4; Elisa Camiscioli, 'Intermarriage, Independent Nationality, and the Individual Rights of French Women: the Law of 10 August 1927', *French Politics, Culture and Society*, xvii (1999).

case, the Foreign Ministry granted Lévy and her children travel visas, mandating that they register with the appropriate authorities in their new locations.<sup>43</sup>

Suzanne Nassi (née Gargallo) was in a similar position. In 1918, the twenty-year-old applied for a certificate of safe conduct with her husband, Albert Nassi, who wished to leave their home in Versailles to conduct a business transaction in Baule. Albert, a dealer in 'Asian rugs', was born in Istanbul: together with his wife, who was born in Nogent-sur-Marne, he had lived in Versailles for a decade. The Nassis' application to the Foreign Ministry declared them Ottoman (in Albert's case) and 'Ottoman by marriage' (in Suzanne's case). The authorities found both applicants' paperwork to be in order — both possessed the requisite foreign identity card as per wartime policy — and granted them certificates of safe conduct. Suzanne Nassi's story, like that of Mathilde Lévy, has less to do with Jewish history, per se, than with the history of women and nationality in wartime Europe; as Laura Tabili has argued (relative to the British context), 'the wartime context raised the stakes in . . . gendered ways'. At times of war, a British or French woman's marriage to a foreigner — and, all the more, a subject of a warring nation — could transform her into a threatening body. 'Such a woman was not to be trusted', explains Tabili: in wartime, a woman's marriage to a foreigner rendered permanently suspect 'her loyalty to the state as well as her respectability, bound up as the latter was with sexual probity'.<sup>44</sup> For Nassi and Lévy, as for so many other women, gendered law and wartime circumstances conspired to exclude them from the notion of *jus soli* (the principle that one's place of birth determines one's nationality) that had ostensibly guided French nationality policies since the turn of the nineteenth century. These subjects (like most Algerian men and women) were French nationals without being citizens.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France': dossier of Mathilde Arditì Levy.

<sup>44</sup> Tabili, 'Outsiders in the Land of their Birth', 807–8. Similar arguments arise in Gullace, 'The Blood of Our Sons'. For a comparative context see Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Algerian men were granted French nationality by the sénatus-consulte of 1865, but were denied French citizenship (and all associated rights) on the basis that they fell under 'local civil status law'. This signalled that most Algerian Muslims, and some southern Algerian Jews, were to be regulated by Koranic or Mosaic laws respectively, eligible for citizenship only if they forsook their right to be adjudicated by local civil law

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If French policy and legal praxis sutured the label 'Ottoman' on to certain native-born women — even if the Foreign Ministry reserved the right subsequently to expunge this label through the granting of 'special protégé' status — it actively erased the Ottomanness of certain Ottoman-born men. Labelling Syrians, Armenians and Italian protégés from Rhodes as 'special protégés' had precisely this effect, as did the classification 'a foreigner of Jewish nationality from the Levant'. In all instances, French bureaucratic parlance eschewed the term 'Ottoman' as a legal designation, even as it acknowledged its protected subjects as Ottoman-born. This impulse was made explicit on occasion as French officials approved a given set of papers. The Police Prefect labelled one Ottoman-born Jew '*en qualité Ottoman, Israélite non-suspect*'.<sup>46</sup> Isaac Chicourel, an Ottoman-born Jewish protégé of France, who wished to travel from Rio de Janeiro to Paris, carried papers that identified him 'a beneficiary of French protection as a Jew originally from Bayonne'.<sup>47</sup> Isaac Delbourge, an Egyptian Jew who inherited French protected status from his father, was granted a *permis de séjour* that 'lacked indication of nationality'.<sup>48</sup> Individuals in pursuit of permits cottoned on to the advantages of such discursive slights of hand. In Youda Leon Nissim's appeal for paperwork, he called himself 'Ottoman in name alone'; Moise Nichli described himself as being 'born in Turkey of Jewish parents'; Elia Levy wrote that she 'loved France more than her own country'; and Raphael

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or local law courts, which few Muslims or Jews were willing to do. The legal position of the Third Republic was upheld by the 1889 Nationality Code, which consolidated the barrier to legal assimilation. Historians have interpreted these developments variously. Patrick Weil has argued that the principle of *jus soli* regained an important place within French nationality law after 1889, while Todd Shepard has launched an effective critique, arguing that Weil's interpretation denies the nationality of Algerian Muslims, leaving 'in place a normative and coherent conception of French nationality as race-blind and egalitarian . . . while defining the case of Algerian 'Muslims' as an aberration'. Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 33; Weil, *How to Be French*.

<sup>46</sup> AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France': dossier of David Levy; Police Prefect to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 30 June 1917.

<sup>47</sup> AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France': dossier of David Levy; Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French Consul, Rio de Janeiro, 11 Oct. 1916.

<sup>48</sup> AMAE, vol. 970: Minister of Foreign Affairs to Police Prefect M. Laurent, 26 Mar. 1917.

Lévy carefully edited his handwritten appeal to the Foreign Ministry, such that it read: 'I am an Ottoman subject ~~originally from Spain~~, it is true, but a Jew originally from Spain'.<sup>49</sup> These individuals appreciated that for select Ottoman-born Jewish men, an Ottoman (and even Spanish) past could be rhetorically manipulated to suit the exigencies of war.<sup>50</sup> French nationality could be taken from French women married to Ottoman men, replaced with an illusory 'Ottoman' status that the Ottoman authorities would surely not recognize. However, when it came to Jewish and Christian men 'of good character' who sought to live in, travel to or relocate within France, Ottoman subjecthood could be strategically ignored.

Class also mattered. Azose travelled to France because he 'had a yearning for travel' and a brother who lived in France, and because he spoke French. He travelled as a stowaway because he lacked the funds to accord with the policies of the French consulate in Istanbul. In Azose's words: 'If I were to start taking steps towards securing the proper identification papers for my passport it would probably take me three months to get them at a cost of about 40 liras or twenty American dollars, something I did not have . . .'<sup>51</sup> Azose's poverty conditioned his subsequent vulnerability as an undocumented immigrant to Paris. After he lied to the police about the theft of his papers, the police (apparently suspicious of his claims) contacted the French consul in Istanbul. That office announced it had no record of an émigré by the name Azose, and feared he might be a spy. The Parisian police intensified their search but the young man eluded arrest, because — in violation of the law — he was not staying at the hotel listed on his permit.

<sup>49</sup> AMAE CPC, 'Ottomans en France': dossiers of Yeouda Leon Nissim, Moise Nichli, Elia Levy and Raphael Lévy.

<sup>50</sup> These claims contrasted starkly with contemporaneous expressions of Ottomanism that had become a regular feature of Sephardic political culture since the late nineteenth century. See Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford, 2010); Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford, 2014). Cohen also explores Sephardi Jews' sense of fealty to Spain, which reached a crescendo in this period.

<sup>51</sup> UWSC, Azose interview, 1.

## III

## LEGACIES OF PROTECTION

As the First World War progressed, the protection of French dwelling, Ottoman-born Jews took on new meanings. The shifts were various. By 1916 and 1917, inter-ministerial dialogue came to tout the humanitarian motives that underlined this legislation. In a lengthy letter to the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Foreign Affairs now proclaimed that the procedures were shaped by a 'loyalty to the traditions of our race and conscience', designed 'not in the service of history, but in support of our effort to advance liberation from the Ottoman yoke', and to promote greater freedom for 'Syrians, Armenians, Levantine Jews and others who are oppressed by the Turks'.<sup>52</sup> The authorities considered the truth of these claims to be reaffirmed when juxtaposed with the Ottoman Empire's treatment of its own 'enemy aliens', on whom the regime began an assault in the late winter of 1914, especially as France opened its doors to refugees of the Armenian genocide.<sup>53</sup> Ottoman-born Jews seeking papers from the Foreign Ministry echoed Republican language cannily, appreciating the symbolic cachet of humanitarian need. One seeker of papers, an Ottoman-born Jewish pedlar who had lived in Marseille for some twenty years, had the cheek to remind the Foreign Minister that the regime had extended favour to Ottoman Jews for the same reason that it extended good will to Armenians and residents of

<sup>52</sup> AMAE, vol. 970: Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, 5 July 1917.

<sup>53</sup> In the late winter of 1914, the Ottoman authorities demanded that French, British and Russian subjects dwelling in Syria and Palestine — the vast majority of whom were Jewish protégés — either renounce their foreign nationality or face expulsion. Thus began a minor refugee crisis that Britain and France struggled to address with the aid of the United States, which had the vessels in the eastern Mediterranean which could ferry the refugees to safety. On the elaborate unfolding of the negotiations surrounding this crisis, conducted primarily by United States' Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, see *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: 1915 Supplement. The World War* (Washington, DC, 1915). After being taken to Egypt, the dispossessed were ferried to Cyprus (in the case of British subjects) or Crete (in the case of French subjects), where they were housed in refugee camps for the duration of the war. On the fate of those roughly 750 French Jews from the eastern Mediterranean who were settled in a camp in Ajaccio, Crete, see AIU, série France IC 5; and 'Autour de la guerre: les réfugiés de Syrie', *L'univers Israélite*, 21 Jan. 1916; 'Cruelties to Jews Deported from Jaffa', *New York Times*, 3 June 1917; 'Le statut des Juifs orientaux en France'. This story is explored further in Stein, *Extraterritorial Dreams*.



Alsace-Lorraine: because they were ‘victims of a nation that conquered them by force and caused them all measure of misery and trouble’.<sup>54</sup>

That many of the Ottoman Jews who appealed to France for special protection during the First World War had come, like Elia Levy, to ‘love France more than their country of origin’ is believable enough. Not only had many of these individuals received a French education at the hands of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, but a great number had lived in France for decades by the war’s outbreak. Less convincing are the claims of the Third Republic that it adopted its policies towards the Ottoman-born out of purely humanitarian motives. Such Republican rhetoric was disingenuous at best at a time when so many subjects of countries at war with France were imprisoned or expelled, irrespective of their sentiments towards France or personal history; when French-born women married to foreign men were denaturalized en masse; and when Algerian Muslims, though technically citizens of the republic themselves, were denied the rights accorded to ‘full’ French citizens.

Indeed, the implicit *realpolitik* of the Foreign Ministry’s wartime protection of Ottoman-born Jews came to the fore with time, lending truth to the claim that ‘modern humanitarianism was in symbiosis with colonialism’.<sup>55</sup> As French designs on the eastern Mediterranean took shape in the course of the war, the authorities came to see French-dwelling extraterritorial Ottoman merchants (Jews as well as Christians) as useful allies. The Sykes–Picot agreement, which negotiated a post-war partition of Ottoman territory in the eastern Mediterranean by Britain, France and (as a lesser player) Russia, and which Britain and France formally ratified in May 1916, announced the Third Republic’s designs on Syria and Lebanon.<sup>56</sup> Keeping Ottoman-born Armenians and Jews, and

<sup>54</sup> The applicant’s claims were, in fact, counter-factual — Sephardi Jews were the rare subjects who had moved to the Ottoman Empire rather than becoming Ottoman through the polity’s aggressive expansion. AMAE CPC, ‘Ottomans en France’: dossier of Raphael Lévy; Raphael Lévy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 July 1916.

<sup>55</sup> Watenpaugh, ‘The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors’, 1320. See also Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

<sup>56</sup> On the shaping of French wartime ambitions in the Middle East see, among other sources, Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner, *France Overseas: the Great War and the Climax of French Imperial Expansion* (London, 1981); Edward Peter

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Syrian Christians, under state protection abetted these plans, anticipating a Triple Entente victory and the imminent dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. As the Foreign Minister argued, Jewish 'Orientals with residential permits' had, prior to the war, proved important auxiliaries 'in all branches of French industry and commerce' by engaging in direct commercial negotiations around the Mediterranean and by serving as indirect suppliers.<sup>57</sup> Their utility (according to prevailing Foreign Ministry logic) promised only to grow as the war eroded trade between France and the Middle East. Whether there was truth to such claims or not, in the context of wartime geo-political machinations, building goodwill with Ottoman mercantile diasporas — Armenian as well as Jewish — came to be understood by Quai d'Orsay officials as one strand of a broader colonial strategy. Though I can broach the topic only superficially here, it is worth noting that the British authorities shared this strategic fantasy and shaped their own legal loophole for Ottoman-born Jews living in wartime Great Britain which carefully emulated that adopted in France.<sup>58</sup> While the French Foreign Ministry protected citizens of the Jewish nation from the Levant, the British Foreign Office extended papers to 'Ottoman subjects of Jewish nationality'. And while French officials relied on local Franco-Jewish philanthropic organizations to help them identify, contact and classify Ottoman Jewish émigrés, the British Foreign Office turned to the Central Zionist Association and local Zionist organizations (in Manchester and London) to effect its policies. Among the ironic repercussions of French policies towards Ottoman-born Jews and Christians, then, was the tightening of relations between the British authorities and the Zionist movement such that Britain's hand might be

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Fitzgerald, 'France's Middle Eastern Ambitions, the Sykes-Picot Negotiations, and the Oil Fields of Mosul, 1915–1918', *Journal of Modern History*, lxvi (1994); Jukka Nevakivi, *Britain, France and the Arab Middle East, 1914–1920* (London, 1969); Jan Karl Tanenbaum, *France and the Arab Middle East, 1914–1920* (Philadelphia, 1978).

<sup>57</sup> AMAE, vol. 970: Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of the Interior, 5 July 1917.

<sup>58</sup> Britain's Foreign Office kept tabs on French policies through its consuls overseas. For example, in March 1915 the British consul in Cairo wrote a series of dispatches to the British Foreign Office detailing 'the treatment in the allied countries of Ottoman subjects belonging to a community well known to be opposed to the Turkish regime'. TNA, 383/388: Sir E. Grey Bart to the Foreign Office, 8 Mar. 1915.

strengthened in the competitive international struggle for control of Syria and Palestine.

As the war advanced, the Foreign Ministry also hoped that its generosity towards Ottoman-born Jews might be deployed to curry favour with US Jews — and, by extension, the wider US public — in hopes of prompting the United States to join the Allied war effort. Presenting the Third Republic as the United States' philo-Semitic ally was also imagined to assuage the sting for US Jews of Eastern European background of an alliance with Russia. The Alliance Israélite Universelle and Association Culturelle Orientale were the conduits for these ambitions. The Association Culturelle Orientale explicitly reached out to US Jewry on behalf of the administration, writing to the *Kehillah* of New York City in the spring of 1916 to tout the success of French policies towards Ottoman-born Jews and to encourage the *Kehillah* to voice its praise of the Third Republic.<sup>59</sup> The Alliance Israélite Universelle, too, orchestrated a campaign to influence Jewish opinion in neutral countries — the United States, in particular — in favour of the Allies, boasting of the Third Republic's generosity towards the Ottoman-born.<sup>60</sup> When France's policy towards the Ottoman-born was shaped, the opinion of US Jewry was hardly of strategic interest. The course of the war changed this, and therefore shifted too the implications of the Foreign Ministry's erstwhile actions.

The last citizenship papers issued to a Jewish national of the Levant might well have been granted to Isaac Azose. In 1920, the Paris Police Prefecture, at last convinced that Azose was not a spy, granted the young man a passport that would carry him to Seattle, in which he was described as 'a foreigner, of Jewish nationality from the Levant'.<sup>61</sup> There is no evidence that the Foreign Ministry ever annulled this legal nomenclature. However, with the conclusion of the war and, ultimately, the final dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the utility of the designation waned

<sup>59</sup> AMAE, Vol. 968: unsigned letter from the Association Culturelle Orientale Israélite de Paris to the Jewish community of New York [New York City, that is, the *Kehillah*], 4 Apr. 1916.

<sup>60</sup> Michel Abitbol, *Les Deux terres promises: les juifs de France et le sionisme, 1897–1945* (Paris, 1989), 70; Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 156.

<sup>61</sup> UWSC, Azose interview; Passport délivré à un étranger de nationalité Israélite du Levant [Jack Azouz (Azose)], 1 March 1920. Warm thanks to Hazzan Isaac Azose for sharing a copy of his father's passport with me, and to Maureen Jackson for facilitating the introduction.

of its own accord. In the absence of specific legislation nullifying the classification, it is possible that the Parisian police approved Azose's request out of administrative negligence. Two years later, Azose could be found performing in the first Ladino-language play to be staged in Seattle: a dramatization of the Dreyfus affair, the scandal that galvanized anti-Semitic politics in France and nearly brought down the young Third Republic.<sup>62</sup> With anti-immigrant sentiment waxing in 1920s France, it is perhaps apt that the performance attributed Dreyfus' exoneration not to the triumph of justice but to divine intervention.

The shaping of a temporary classification for 'foreigners of Jewish nationality from the Levant' (and 'special protégés' more generally) provides evidence of the complex legal contortions that the leadership of the Third Republic was willing to undertake to advance its own shifting interests. More than anything, the French Foreign Ministry perceived Ottoman-born Jews living in France as symbols: as would-be intermediaries in the eastern Mediterranean, as a lure that might attract the US Jewish public to the allied cause, as worthy (and, significantly, trustworthy) subjects of French benevolence whose very existence exposed the despotism of Ottoman rule. It is a wonderful irony that the Foreign Ministry, in seeking to advance these distinctly twentieth-century ambitions, developed a system of classification that awkwardly recycled Ottoman (or ostensibly Ottoman) social categories and gave new life in wartime France to relationships of protection that dated to the sixteenth century. Such complex legal callisthenics, as I have suggested, resembled those pursued in Algeria and French Protectorate Tunisia and Morocco: but their application in metropolitan France is

<sup>62</sup> Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a military officer of Alsatian Jewish descent was, famously, accused of passing state documents to the German embassy in Paris, convicted in 1894 (upon the suppression by military authorities of evidence testifying to his innocence) and sent to the French penal colony on Devil's Island to serve a life sentence. Dreyfus's arrest stoked the flames of anti-Semitism in France and Algeria — flames that continued to burn even after the captain was exonerated and reinstated into the French military in 1906. On the play *Dreyfus* and its staging in Seattle see Marc D. Angel, 'The Sephardic Theater of Seattle', *American Jewish Archives*, xxv (1973), 158; Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: Press, Belles Lettres, and Theater in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Bloomington, 2012), 206, 226. For the play itself see Jacques Loria, *Dreyfus*, trans. Olga Borovaya, at <[http://www.stanford.edu/dept/jewishstudies/programs/sephardi/borovaya\\_texts.html](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/jewishstudies/programs/sephardi/borovaya_texts.html)> (accessed 22 April 2014).

arresting, shedding light on the inequities inherent in Third Republican notions of citizenship and on the spectrum of legal identities through which Jews in Europe could journey in the early twentieth century.

An epilogue to our story, really a story in its own right, concerns those Ottoman-born Jews who remained in France after the First World War. For them, the legacy of wartime protection was lugubrious. Many Ottoman-born Jews were naturalized as French citizens in the inter-war period, especially in the wake of Turkey's 1935 regulation that declared Turkish and Ottoman-born citizens who had not returned to the country between 1924 and 1927, and had not renewed their passports, to be Turkish nationals no longer.<sup>63</sup> Other Ottoman-born Jews living in France continued to rely on the *laissez-passer* as their principal form of state-issued documentation through the inter-war period. With the outbreak and advance of the Second World War, this choice proved irrelevant. While the Vichy regime protected most of its native-born Jewish citizens, it stripped citizenship from many French men and women who were recently naturalized, ultimately deporting them, along with all non-naturalized foreign-born Jews, to the Nazi death camps.<sup>64</sup> Ottoman-born Jews living in France came to occupy an extra-national (and essentially early modern) legal niche in the course of the First World War. This mode of legal liminality proved untenable in the Second World War.

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<sup>63</sup> This directive proved an informal way for Turkey to free itself of legal obligation towards vast numbers of non-Muslims who lived outside the borders of the Turkish Republic. Corry Guttstadt, *Turkey, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 2013), 54–55, 95; Rodrigue and Benbassa, *The Jews of the Balkans*, 180.

<sup>64</sup> Approximately two-thirds of the Jews deported from Vichy France were immigrants or recently naturalized citizens retroactively stripped of their status. See Michael Robert R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York, 1981), especially ch. 6. In an ironic twist, the Salonica-based Joseph Nehama, who was earlier fearful of the consequences of foreign protection, proved to be one of a small minority of Salonican Jews who were spared deportation by the Nazis, owing to his recent acquisition of Spanish citizenship. See D. Gershon Lewental, 'Nehama, Joseph', in Norman Stillman *et al.* (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, 5 vols. (Leiden, 2010), also available at <<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopedia-of-jews-in-the-islamic-world>>.