

“Jews, Be Ottomans!” Zionism, Ottomanism, and Ottomanisation in the Hebrew-Language Press, 1890-1914

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Abstract

In recent years the study of national and civic identities in the later Ottoman period has revealed huge degrees of complexity among previously homogenised groups, none more so than the Jewish population of the Sublime State. Those Jews who moved to the Ottoman Empire from the 1880s as part of a burgeoning expression of Jewish nationalism developed a complex relationship with an Ottomanist identity that requires further consideration. Through an examination of the Hebrew-language press in Palestine, run largely by immigrant Zionist Jews, complemented by the archival records of the Ottoman state and parliament, this paper aims to show the complexities of the engagement between Ottoman and Jewish national identities. The development of Jewish nationalism by largely foreign Jews came with an increase in suspicion from the Ottoman elites, sometimes manifesting itself in outright anti-Semitism, and strong expressions of nationalism in the Hebrew press were denounced both by Ottoman and non- and anti-nationalist Jewish populations. The controversy over immigrant Jewish land purchases in Palestine from the 1890s led to a number of discussions over how far foreign Jews could and should embrace an Ottoman cultural and political identity, with cultural, labour, and political Zionists taking different positions. The issue of Ottomanisation should also be taken in the context of the post-1908 political landscape in the Ottoman Empire, with separatist nationalisms increasingly under the spotlight, and the debates among the different forms of Jewish nationalism increasingly focusing on the limits of performative and civic Ottoman nationalism¹

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Keywords

Ottomanism – Zionism – Palestine – Ottoman press – Hebrew

Introduction

Ottomanism, the ideal of political equality for all the Ottoman Empire's diverse subjects-cum-citizens under a shared civic allegiance, existed in conjunction with a number of other isms vying for elite and popular support in the final decades of the empire's existence. One of these ideologies, Zionism, seemed to be yet another of the national identities threatening to destroy the Sublime State from within and to disrupt the Ottomanist ideal that aimed to unify the empire's different ethnic and religious groups. Zionism, however, was more than a local identity; it was a growing international movement that incorporated a number of contrasting and even conflicting ideologies. Zionism, with its programme of settling foreign Jews, often from the Ottoman archenemy, Russia, in Ottoman Palestine, posed a particular threat to the Ottoman state.² Such Jewish immigrants were therefore not Ottoman Jews who might embrace (or not) the vision of Ottomanism, but rather foreigners who, in order to further their national aims, required Ottomanisation through new processes of citizenship.

Zionism aimed to build a national home for a territorially stateless and demographically and linguistically disparate group of people. As part of the formation of a Jewish national identity, Hebrew was 'revived' as the national language, creating a print and literary culture intrinsically linked to the Zionist cause.³ Choosing the liturgical tongue as the new communal vernacular was intended to facilitate a cultural as well as national renaissance, what Michelle Campos has referred to as "cultural Hebraism".⁴ Hebrew works were censored in certain periods and, consequently, self-censored, meaning that expressions of loyalty to the state were a recurring theme; however, Hebrew loyalism was not the same as Zionist Ottomanism. But in seeking to establish a national identity within an imperial space where

² For Zionism in the Ottoman context in general, see: Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) especially 201–18; Yuval Ben-Bassat & Eyal Ginio (eds.), *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Mim Kemal Öke, "The Ottoman Empire, Zionism, and the Question of Palestine (1880–1908)", *IJMES* 14, no. 3 (1982): 329–41; Mim Kemal Öke, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Siyonizm ve Filistin Sorunu (1880–1914)* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1982).

³ See: Ghil'ad Zuckermann, "A New Vision of Israeli Hebrew: Theoretical and Practical Implications of Analysing Israel's Main Language as a Semi-Engineered Semito-European Hybrid Language", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5, no. 1 (2006): 57–71.

⁴ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 207f.

individuals were defined not just by confession or ethnicity but by internationally recognized citizenship, Zionist immigrants from beyond the borders of the Ottoman realms were faced with the prospect of becoming Ottoman through Ottomanisation (*hit'atmanut*) in order to pursue and consolidate Jewish settlement in Palestine, something that was possible through the Ottoman citizenship law of 1869, which permitted naturalisation for foreign subjects after five years of residency.⁵ It is through this seemingly self-contradictory idea of the realisation of Zionism through Ottomanism that the complexities of nationalist discourse in the late Ottoman state can be examined. The Hebrew press in Palestine in the later Hamidian (1876–1909) and Second Constitutional (1908–1920) periods provides an interesting insight into how some proponents of different forms of Jewish nationalism engaged with a civic Ottoman identity. This article will examine a number of Hebrew-language newspapers based in Ottoman Palestine aimed at a largely immigrant Jewish audience, building on the survey undertaken by Ruth Kark and Nadav Solomonovich of the Hebrew press between 1908 and 1918 and on the important framework of ‘Ottoman brotherhood’ put forward by Michelle Campos vis-à-vis Ottoman Jews, as well as documents from the Ottoman archives in Istanbul and the records of the Ottoman parliament, in order to consider how burgeoning Zionist identities interacted with an equally nascent sense of Ottomanism.⁶

It aims to illustrate the tensions and interactions between these two national ideologies: the tropes of loyalty displayed within the Hebrew press, the limits of the Zionist national discourse within an Ottoman sphere, and attempts to Ottomanise Zionism through the narratives developed by the *mit'atmanim*, those immigrant Jews ‘who became Ottomans’. Ultimately, this article will consider how far Ottomanism as the articulation of inter- and intracommunal unity within the Ottoman polity was a performative ideology,

⁵ Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 61; Kemal Karpat, *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 113ff. For the text of the 1869 law, see: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri (BOA), A.Y.EE.41/133.

⁶ Ruth Kark & Nadav Solomonovich, “The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 as Reflected in the Media of the Jewish Community in Palestine”, in Ben Bassat & Ginio, *Late Ottoman Palestine: 183–209*. For a discussion of politics in the Ladino press, see: Yaron Ben Naeb, “The Zionist Struggle as Reflected in the Jewish Press in Istanbul in the Aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution, 1908–1918”, in Ben-Basset & Ginio, *Late Ottoman Palestine: 241–58*. Michelle Campos’s work has been extremely important in formulating my thoughts on this subject: Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, particularly 74–81; Campos, “Between ‘Beloved Ottomania’ and ‘The Land of Israel’: The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine’s Sephardi Jews, 1908–13”, *IJMES* 37, no. 4 (2005): 461–83.

with different groups of Jewish nationalists participating to varying degrees as actors constructing overlapping national identities.

“In France, Everything Is French”: Ideas and Perceptions of Jewish Identity and Zionism

In 1888, the prolific Ottoman writer, publisher, and politician, Ebüzziya Tevfik Bey, published a polemic history of the Jews of Europe, *Millet-i İsrā'iliye*, examining their religion and history, and discussing their persecution and social status. How one translates the title of this book, as either ‘The Israelite Community’ or ‘The Israelite Nation’, is quite important; by the later 19th century, the idea of the *millet* had moved from being one based around a religious community or confession to a broader sense of a political nation. Within this text, Ebüzziya Tevfik expressed a number of anti-Semitic prejudices, claiming that “the Jews are held to be a most despicable and contemptible nation (*en zelil ve hakır bir millet*) by the peoples of both Islam and Christendom, and at the same time they pretend themselves to be the most noble of peoples (*eşref-iâkvām*)”.⁷ The contradiction between the supposed low status of the Jews and their purported arrogance was a familiar anti-Semitic trope, with their statelessness a key piece of evidence. However, an encounter in Istanbul caused Ebüzziya Tevfik to reconsider the complexities of Jewish national identities. In a section of the book headed ‘A Digression’ (*İstîrâd*), he narrated a conversation with a French bookseller in Galatasaray not long after the news of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1) reached the Ottoman capital:

Me: What is the matter, Monsieur Romp, has something distressed you?

Bookseller: Are you aware, my dear, of the great grief caused by the catastrophe that has befallen our fatherland?

Me: (Smiling) But you are not French, what is it to you?

Bookseller: What’s that?! I’m not French?! If I’m not French, what am I?!

Me: My dear, are you not a Jew?

Bookseller: (The smile on his face being replaced by an expression of offence) I beg your pardon, monsieur! In France, everything is French. [(*Çehresi bir tebessüm münfa‘ilene peydâ ederek*) ‘*Afv edersiniz mösyö! Fransa’da herşey Fransızdır.*]⁸

⁷ Ebüzziya Tevfik, *Millet-i İsrā'iliye* (Kostaniniye: Matbaa-ı Ebüzziya, 1305 [1888]), 5f.

⁸ Tevfik, *Millet-i İsrā'iliye*, 58.

This last statement came as something of a revelation to Ebüzziya Tevfik, and, by his own admission, the notion that a Jew could be a patriot was a powerful idea indeed:

My mind was filled with a reminiscence that had been ingrained from my youth, resulting in an overwhelming feeling caused by the thoughtless insult I had given to the patriotic honour of another Turk (*bilâ te'emmül bir ğayr-ı Türk'ün ğaysiyet-i vağanpervânesini tağkîr etmiş olduğumdan*); from my shame, I came to view that person in another light, and now I chastise myself at the recall of that memory.⁹

This was a moral tale in national identity and patriotism; if a Jew from France could be a loyal Frenchman, then an Ottoman Jew could be a loyal Ottoman. This was an idea at the heart of Ottomanism, that regardless of confession or other identities, Ottoman subjects were united by their being Ottoman.

On the other side of the patriotic scale was Jewish nationalism, a key moment in the development of which was the publication of Theodore Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* in 1896. Herzl lamented that "in vain are we loyal, and in some places even exuberant patriots", positing the solution to Europe's *Judenfrage* as the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state, with Palestine as a preferred location.¹⁰ However, Herzl noted the difficulties posed by "experiments in colonisation" (*Colonisirungsversuche*), through the "false principle of gradual infiltration of Jews" (*nach dem falschen Princip der allmäligen Infiltration von Juden*), warning that "such infiltration must always end badly, for it often continues until the moment when the local population feels threatened, and at their insistence the government blocks the further influx of Jews".¹¹ Indeed, the Ottoman authorities became increasingly aware of such colonial aims in Palestine. Some fifteen years after *Der Judenstaat*'s publication, the bilingual (Ottoman Turkish and French) satirical magazine *Djem/Cem* published an article referencing a heated debate in the Ottoman parliament that had raised the 'Zionist Question'. Mocking a number of anti-Semitic tropes, the author of this piece, writing under the pen name 'Gros Pierre', declared that "this project is no longer in the realms of fantasy, and we are at the same time to understand that it is already underway", before announcing that the king of this new Kingdom of Israel (*Royaume d'Israël*) would be the British Jewish

⁹ Ibid., 58f.

¹⁰ Theodore Herzl, *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer Modernen Lösung der Judenfrage* (Leipzig & Wien: M. Breitenstein's Verlags-Buchhandlung, 1896), 11. See: Anita Shapira, "Anti-Semitism and Zionism", *Modern Judaism* 15, no. 3 (1995): 215–32.

¹¹ Herzl, *Der Judenstaat*, 28.

banker Sir Ernest Cassel, a founding member of the National Bank of Turkey.¹²

The article referenced a speech by İsmâ‘il Hakkı Bey, deputy for Gümülcine (Komotini), made during a discussion about the Ottoman debt problems in March 1910. During a heated exchange, İsmâ‘il Hakkı declared that the “loan question” (*istikraz meselesi*) was not simply economic or political, but part of a question of Zionist aspirations (*Siyonist âmâli meselesidir*).¹³ The deputy for Tokat, İsmâ‘il Paşa, protested that this was an exaggeration and a lie (*bunda bir parça mübalağa ettin, yalan söyledin*), but İsmâ‘il Hakkı continued: “This is not about the Jews [...] Perhaps following from certain corruptive political intentions and, more often than not, from certain sections found in certain states in Europe, this is about the Zionists.”¹⁴ He proceeded to make links between European Jews involved in financial institutions lending money to the Ottoman state and the policies of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress, accusing Grand Vizier İsmâ‘il Hakkı Paşa and Interior Minister Mehmed Tal‘at Bey of being in the pockets of bankers such as Ernest Cassel and of permitting Jewish immigration.¹⁵ At one point in his speech, İsmâ‘il Hakkı declared:

So far I have briefly discussed what Zionism is, and from which point they are able to enter into the business of loans. Subsequently, the Finance Minister [Mehmed] Cavid Bey, without knowing, without understanding the risks – perhaps such heedlessness can be found in people, this is true of everyone – was tricked into these actions by those crafty people, and by enabling the advancement of this idea and its cause has its true path become readily apparent. Moreover, let me tell you right now, that this Zionism is a chronic disease within us, a political disease, and it has begun to have a terrible effect upon us (*bu Siyonizm bizim dahilimizde bir marazı müzmin, bir marazı siyâsi ve müthiş gibi tesirat icra etmeye başlamıştır*). [...] With a completely clear and completely evident definition, Zionism is: the greatest possible increase and augmentation of foreign Jews in the land of Palestine, in the valley of the Shatt al-Arab, and in Noble Jerusalem and its environs, and there, through the benefit of a concentration of

¹² *Djem/Cem* no.18, 11 March 1911 / 26 Şubat 1326. On Cassel, see: Marian Kent, “Agent of Empire? The National Bank of Turkey and British Foreign Policy”, *The Historical Journal* 18, no. 2 (1975): 367–89; Pat Thane, “Financiers and the British State: The Case of Sir Ernest Cassel”, *Business History* 28, no. 1 (1986): 80–99.

¹³ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: Kırkdokuzuncu İnikad, 16 Şubat 1326 (1910) Çarşamba*, Devre 1, Cilt 3, İçtima Senesi 3, 331.

¹⁴ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* 1:3:3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 331–36.

population, to form an Israelite government (*nüfusun kesâfetinden blîstifade bir hükümet-i İsrailiye teşkil etmektir*).¹⁶

Here, the implication was of treachery from within as well as without, as Mehmed Cavid Bey was of a *Dönme* family from Salonica.¹⁷ Two Jewish deputies, Nisim Mazelyah Efendi from Izmir and ‘Emanü’el Karasu Efendi from Salonica, rose to counter, with Nisim Mazelyah warning İsmâ‘il Hakkı that “you do not appreciate the consequence of your words, and you do not conceive of how much strife and agitation (*o kadar fitne, fesat*) you are causing by speaking them”.¹⁸ Zionism featured in other debates on state debt and finances in 1910, such as a sarcastic comment of Yorgo Boşo Efendi, deputy for Serifçe (Serbia), that he would not ask where the finance minister might find the necessary money for the budget deficit, “whether it was from Zionists or Masons.”¹⁹ In such discussions, anti-Semitic tropes mixed with concerns about immigration levels and challenges to Ottoman authority at the same time that Jewish identities were being challenged and (re)formulated in both Europe and the Ottoman Empire. It is against this backdrop that the Hebrew-language press, fairly recently established in Palestine, came under scrutiny for its links with Zionism, and itself debated the role of Jewish nationalism in the Ottoman state, and the limits of an Ottomanist identity for Jewish settlers.

Balancing Eretz and Arāzī: Jewish Nationalism and Ottoman Suspicions of the Hebrew Press

A report from Salonica in 1903 detailed an issue that came to official attention via a campaign run in a Vienna-based paper, *Die Zionistische Welt* – presumably referring to Herzl’s *Die Welt* – at the heart of which was the Hebrew language:

The Salonica society within this ideology is called “Kadima” [Heb. ‘forward’], a Jewish organisation that, although operating under the ostensible aim of spreading the Hebrew language, holds the actual aim of disseminating the fallacious ideas contained in ‘Zionism’, that is, the giving of Noble Jerusalem [to the Jews]; this was made known to the exalted interior ministry in a special report a year ago.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid., 331.

¹⁷ Marc Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 97–108.

¹⁸ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* 1:3:3, 331.

¹⁹ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: Ellibirinci İnikad, 19 Şubat 1326 (1910) Cumartesi*, 395f.

²⁰ BOA, DH.MKT 747/5, undated letter from the Salonica province to the Interior Ministry (1903).

Moreover, *Die Zionistische Welt* had run a campaign the previous month to collect funds to build a large school in Jerusalem for 200 Jewish children from Kishinev, following a major pogrom there in April 1903. The report feared that this would be “a source of discontent” (*bir menba‘-ı fesād*) in Jerusalem, a view echoed by the Ottoman Interior Ministry, revealing three main themes that helped to construct the relationship between the Hebrew press and the Ottoman state.²¹ First, Zionism was seen as a separatist nationalism, aimed at the “the giving of Noble Jerusalem [to the Jews]” (*Ḳudūs-ü Şerif’in Müsevîlere i‘tâsı*). Second, the Hebrew language was seen as a smokescreen for political movements propagating “fallacious ideas” (*efkâr-ı bâtılasını*): Salonican society’s efforts to promote Hebrew were only superficial (*mağşad-ı zâhirî*) compared to its true aims (*mağşad-ı aşlı*) of promoting Zionism. Third, any institutions or organisations engaged in the promotion of Hebrew could be seen as aiming to weaken Ottoman authority in Palestine by using Hebrew education to bring about a separate Jewish polity, both by educating young Ottoman Jews about Zionism, and by bringing in Jewish children from abroad to study in their schools.

Education was crucial, as schools were a key institution developing notions of shared citizenship, civic values, and loyalty to the state.²² Schools provided by missionary groups and other foreign organisations were a direct challenge to the development of Ottomanism as a socially coherent identity. The official yearbook of the Ottoman Education Ministry in 1903 reveals that the 6 Ottoman high schools (*mekâtib-i i‘dādîye*) in the Beirut province and the Jerusalem governorate had a total of 944 students enrolled, of whom 935 were Muslim and a mere 9 were non-Muslim.²³ By contrast, the Ottoman non-Muslim high schools had 786 students enrolled, and the foreign-run high schools, which mainly catered to non-Muslims, had 3,173 students in their classrooms. At the level below, the middle schools (*mekâtib-i rüşdîye*), there were 1,100 students in the Ottoman state schools, 1,352 in the Ottoman non-Muslim schools, and 2,541 in the foreign-run schools. This meant that Ottoman state schools held just a fifth of pupils.

Not all of the Jewish schools would have taught Hebrew, but the growing demand for Hebrew literature, both liturgical and secular, meant that seven

²¹ BOA, DH.MKT 747/5, undated letter from the Salonica province to the Interior Ministry (1903); BOA, DH.MKT 747/5, Dâhiliye mektûbi alemi, no.235, 9 Cemaziülevvel 1321 / 21 Temmuz 1319 (3 August 1903).

²² Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 23f. On education in the later Ottoman period, see: Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²³ *Sālnāme-i Neẓāret-i Ma‘ārif-i ‘Umūmiye* ([Istanbul]: Asr Matbaası, 1321 [1903]), 416–33; 727–34.

publishing houses were recorded as printing works in Hebrew in Jerusalem in 1903, almost as many as were listed as printing in Arabic.²⁴ The Hebrew newspapers in Palestine had a variety of audiences and aims.²⁵ *Havatzelet* (Lily), first appearing in 1863 and refounded in and edited from 1870 by the Russian immigrant Isra'el Dov Frumkin, was primarily aimed at the Hasidic community and other immigrants of the “Old Yishuv”, aside from a brief period when the Hebrew revivalist, Jewish nationalist, and Russian immigrant Eli'ezer Ben-Yehuda made major contributions to the paper in the early 1880s, introducing an editorial angle encouraging mass Jewish immigration to Palestine that reappeared in the paper's subsequent history. Ben-Yehuda went on to found and edit a number of newspapers from a Jewish nationalist perspective, notably *Ha-Tzevi* (The Gazelle) from 1884 – changed to *Ha-Or* (The Light) from 1910 – aimed at the “New Yishuv” of Jewish immigrants to Palestine, challenging religious orthodoxy in favour of a modern nationalist discourse. Linked to this paper was another Ben-Yehuda publication with a similar political message, *Ha-Shkafah* (The Viewpoint), published between 1896 and 1908. Other Jewish perspectives were represented in the labour Zionist paper *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'yir* (The Young Worker), published from 1907 and largely run by another Russian immigrant, Yosef Aharonovitch. Finally, *Ha-Herut* (The Freedom) was run by and aimed at the Ottoman Sephardic community with a Jewish nationalist perspective, edited by a native Jerusalemite, Avraham Elmalih.

The Ottoman authorities tried to monitor Hebrew-language publications for nationalist sedition and were assisted by local Jewish communities, who were often opposed to Jewish nationalism. In 1907, a letter was sent from the chief rabbinate in Istanbul to the Interior Ministry complaining that a Jewish newspaper published in Palestine written in the Hebrew language called *Ha-Shkafah* had published articles against the chief rabbinate and religious officials in Jerusalem, accusing the paper of stirring up discord and hatred (*iḥtilāfve münāferet*) among the Jews.²⁶ It was accompanied by a letter from the governorate of Jerusalem advocating the appointment of a salaried official responsible to the censor who was competent in the Hebrew language.²⁷ This was a rather pressing problem; as there was no-one in the censorship office who was competent in Hebrew (*sansur me'mūriyetin lisān-ı 'İbrānīye vukūfu olmamasından*), there was no Ottoman official monitoring Hebrew newspapers

²⁴ Ibid., 735.

²⁵ See: Oren Soffer, *Mass Communication in Israel: Nationalism, Globalization and Segmentation*, trans. Judith Yalon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 26ff.

²⁶ BOA, DH.MKT/1155/40, Dersa'adet ḥāḥāmḥānesi ve tevābi'i, no. 241, 25 Muharrem 1325 /20 Şubat 1322 (10 March 1907).

²⁷ Ibid., Kudūs-ü Şerif mutaşarrıflığı, no. 86, 18 Şaban 1325 / 13 Eylül 1323 (26 September 1907).

like *Ha-Shkafah*.²⁸ This issue had arisen earlier in a case in 1899 concerning a “Mrs Hemda bint Şlomlo, one of the subjects of the Sublime State residing in Jerusalem and a member of the Jewish congregation” (*Ḳudūs-ü Şerif’de mükîme tebe’a-ı Devlet-i ‘Aliye’den ve Müsevî cemâ’atından*), who had published a number of articles in *Ha-Shkafah*.²⁹ This was, in fact, Hemda Ben-Yehuda, wife of the major force in Hebrew revivalism, Eli‘ezer Ben-Yehuda, and in her own right a major Hebrew revivalist and journalist, who was seeking permission to publish a scientific treatise (*fennî bir risâle*) in Arabic and Hebrew on the subject of women’s qualities (*kādınların evşâf*). A responsible officer (*müdüri mes’ul*) was to be appointed to monitor the publication, another Ottoman Jewish subject named Borowicz; fears of Jewish separatism in the Hebrew press led to the recruitment of Hebrew-speaking censors.

An even earlier case shows the local reception of nationalist rhetoric. In 1894, the Jerusalem governorate dispatched a letter to the Interior Ministry detailing a scandal that had erupted as a result of an article published in *Ha-Tzevi* by “a Russian subject” (*Rusya tebe’asından*) writing under the anonymous name ‘Shenhi’.³⁰ The problems arose from an opinion piece entitled ‘Commandments That Require Intent’ (*Mitzvot Tzarikhot Kayanah*), a reference to a Jewish theological position that divine commandments can only be truly fulfilled if one intended to fulfil them in the first place, as opposed to an accidental or incidental fulfilment. After a discussion of the story of the approaching festival of Hanukkah, the article criticised Jews for meditating on abstract theological questions and not taking practical steps to strengthen the Jewish nation, as had, in the author’s opinion, the hero of the Hanukkah story, Judah Maccabeus. The final paragraph, a call to action, provides the text that proved so controversial:

We do not pretend [to have] the heart of this great and enlightened hero, to take his ethics and stir in ourselves this sacred emotion, to love our people and the land of our fathers with the might of the heart and the strength of the spirit (*ke- ḥazaḳ lev u-be-ometz ruaḥ le’ahavat ‘amenu u-leeretz avoteinu*), to enjoin a man to his brother so that we will have one heart and one will, so that we will stand firm and stand tall, to do all that we have forgotten to do, and to not despair in the face of calamity, to defend our honour, to defend our spirit, to gather strength and go forward –

²⁸Ibid., Dāhiliye mektûbi ḳalemi, no. 457, 20 Ramazan 1325 / 14 Teşrin-I Evvel 1323 (27 October 1907).

²⁹ BOA, DH.MKT 2217/105, Dāhiliye mektûbi ḳalemi, no.346/1, 22 Safer 1317 / 19 Haziran 1315 (1 July 1899).

³⁰ BOA, DH.MKT 196/26, Ḳudūs-ü Şerif Mutaşarrıflığı, taḥrîrât ḳalemi, no. 71, 4 Şaban 1311 / 29 Kanun-u Sani 1309 (10 February 1894).

forward, and not as a cancer that goes backwards and pours through our veins (*kadimah ye-lo ke-šarṭan haholekh aḥoranit, ye-sheyizal be-‘oreḳeinu*) – whether a little or a lot – for the great man’s respected blood that was spilled for his people and his land, still fresh in the annals of history. If we did this, then we could truly make the blessing: [Blessed are you, lord our God, king of the universe], who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.³¹

This final phrase, the Jewish blessing over things new or renewed, clearly referred to a Jewish national revival through unity and communal struggle. The Ottoman authorities in Jerusalem certainly picked up on the intent, explaining Hanukkah (*‘idū’l-isrāc*) as “the commemoration of the rescue of the synagogue [i.e. the Jewish temple] from the grip of Roman occupation in the time of an Israelite called Judah Maccabeus” (*Īsrā’il’den Yehūzā Makābī nām zātın zamānında Romalılarnın yed istilāsından havret taḥlişini tezkār*).³² The implication that the Ottoman Empire might be a similar occupying force was troubling, not least because the Ottomans were wont to describe their state as *Rūm*, the direct descendent of Roman authority (even though in the Hanukkah story Hellenic Seleucids were the enemy). Because of the radical and inflammatory content of the article, the governor’s letter condemned it as “exciting the Jews and fomenting civil strife” (*Müsevīleri tehyic ve fitneye müteḥarrık yolında*). It was deemed to have violated the third article of the Press Law of 1864 forbidding critical or threatening writing against the government, and the newspaper was referred to the court of fines (*maḥkeme-i ‘ā’ide*).

The Ottoman authorities were not the only ones alarmed by this newspaper article. The chief Sephardic rabbi of Palestine, Ya‘akov Sha‘ul Elyashar, together with the chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Shmu‘el Salant, issued a forceful declaration, ‘A Public Protest’ (*Meḥa‘ah Gluiyah*), renouncing the article in both communal and patriotic terms:

And here we make faithfully known that we, as with all the congregation of Israel that rests under the shade of the government of our lord, our king, His Majesty the Sultan, are faithful subjects of His Majesty our mighty King, and of his righteous and just ministers (*ye-hinenu modi‘im ne’emanah she anaḥnu ke-kol hamon Yisra’el ha-yoshvim beṭoḥ be-tzel memshelat adonenu malkenu ha-şulṭan yarom hodo, hinenu ‘avadim ne’emanim le-malkenu ha-adir yar[om] h[odo] u-le-şaray asher le-tzedekye-*

³¹ BOA, DH.MKT 196/26, encl. *Ha-Tzevi* no.10, 15 Kislev year 10 (24 November 1893), 1. An Ottoman translation of this article was enclosed, headed ‘15 Kislif tārīḥli Hasebi ğazetende derc olunan maḳaleniñ şüret tercümesidir’.

³² *Ibid.*, ‘15 Kislif tārīḥli Hasebi ğazetende...’.

lemishpat yishoru), and that we have no responsibility for any of the aforementioned things found in the said article – that is, no man from among the Children of Israel besides the aforesaid writer – as with all things published at any time in *Ha-Tzevi*, so that we have no knowledge of them and no responsibility falls on us at all; and may there be peace upon Israel.³³

The reaction of the Jerusalemite Jewish authorities represents a firm rejection of Jewish nationalism in favour of an Ottoman identity based on loyalty to the sultan. Indeed, the letter from the Jerusalem governorate emphasised that the protest revealed “the loyalty, sincerity, and subservience of all the Jews to the Eternal Ottoman State” (*bi’l-cümle-i Müsevilerin Devlet-i Ebediyet-i ‘Osmāniye’ye şadık ve hulus ve ‘ubūdiyettleri*).³⁴

This incident reveals the tensions between Jewish nationalists and the Ottoman state, and between nationalist and non-nationalist Jews developing less than two decades after the beginning of the period of major Jewish immigration to Palestine. Any rhetoric hinting at Jewish separatism was monitored and suppressed by the Ottoman authorities, struggling on a number of fronts against developing national movements among ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities. In addition, the public denouncement of *Ha-Tzevi*’s article by both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi religious authorities represents a certain form of loyalism towards the Ottoman state. Questioning the actions of the Ottoman government, let alone actively inciting Jewish separatism, not only saw the newspaper publically rejected by Jewish officials – in Hebrew – but was described by the Ottoman authorities as inciting *fitne*, or strife and division, among Palestine’s Jews, the same term that the parliamentary deputy Nisim Mazelyah had used to describe İsmā‘il Hakki’s inflammatory speech in 1910. In a debate on Zionism in the Ottoman parliament in 1911, an exchange between Nisim Mazelyah, Ebüzziya Tefik – the publisher, who was also a deputy for Antalya – and Ruhi El-Halidi Bey, the deputy for Jerusalem, revealed an attitude towards Zionism and Ottoman patriotism:

Nisim Mazelyah: [To Ruhi El-Halidi] In the statements that you have put forward so far, you have unearthed something unknown to the Government today; that is, you have declared the existence of a Jewish Government in the Land of Palestine, about which we knew nothing. You have explained today that, inside the Ottoman realms, there exists an Israelite government. (Cries of ‘No’).

³³ BOA, DH.MKT 196/26, ‘Meḥa’ah gluiyah’, 16 Kisley 5654 (25 November 1893).

³⁴ Ibid., Kudüs-ü Şerif Mutaşarrıflığı, tahrirāt kalemı, no. 71.

Ebüzziya Tevfik: [Interjecting] There is a goal revealed in this secret. It is certain that you know about it.

Ruhi El-Halidi: If you want my opinion, I will explain it to you, sir. Now, as for their opinions – I will not try to dictate the opinions you might hold about Zionism. And, not all of the Ottoman Jews are Zionists – those that *are* Zionist, I believe, are not patriotic men (*Siyonist olanlar, bendenizce vatanperver adamlar değildirler*). This is because they hold the idea of establishing a state within the state. And they have embraced the idea of a Jewish State, which exists at present; even Jacques Behar proposed it. This idea is held by all Zionists (*Bu fikir, bütün Siyonistlerde mevcuttur*).³⁵

The acerbic interjection of Ebüzziya Tevfik – forgetting his earlier remorse at questioning the loyalty of a fellow Ottoman – insinuating that Nisim Mazelyah was party to this Zionist conspiracy, is telling of the increasingly blurred lines between Jewish and Zionist identities based on anti-Semitism. Equally damaging, however, was Ruhi El-Halidi's contention that Zionists were not patriotic men (*vatanperver adamlar değildirler*), implying that as a homogeneous group they were separate from the Ottoman civic community because of their own separatism.

The status of the Jewish nationalists was complicated by the fact that many of them retained foreign citizenship. During the 1911 Zionism debate – coincidentally held on the same day as a reading for the new Passport Law – Hasan Şükrü Bey, the deputy for Syria, complained about the nature of Jewish settlement in Palestine, focusing particularly on the village of Zamarin, today's Zikhron Ya'akov, as an example of a settlement populated by foreigners.³⁶ The question of nationality was crucial for landownership, but also for legal jurisdiction, with Hasan Şükrü arguing that foreign Jews avoided Ottoman justice and legal obligations through their foreign citizenship: "By producing his Russian passport at the police station", the deputy declared, "he abnegates his Ottomanism" (*Zabıta Dairesinde Rusya'nın pasaportunu çıkarar, Osmanlılığını inkâr eder*).³⁷ Foreign citizenship posed a challenge to an Ottoman identity based on legal equality, and this episode also provides an insight into the role of symbols in articulating the

³⁵ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: Doksandokuzuncu İnikad, 3 Mayıs 1327 (1911) Salı*, Devre 1, Cilt 6, İçtima Senesi 3, 558. See: Louis Fishman, "Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism in Light of the Emergence of a 'Jewish Question'", in Ben-Bassat & Ginio, *Late Ottoman Palestine*, 103–24; Emmanuel Beška, "Political Opposition to Zionism in Palestine and Greater Syria: 1910–11 as a Turning Point", *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 54–67.

³⁶ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1:6:3, 547ff., 572.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 572.

relationship between subject and state, with a passport issued in the name of the sultan representing much more than a travel document in terms of civic responsibilities and identities.³⁸ This became a crucial issue for Zionism in Palestine due to Zionism's primary aim of purchasing land for settlement. Ottoman land regulations had been tightened with foreign Jewish settlers in mind, with a ban on further foreign immigration in 1892 only tempered a year later through the pressure of the European powers.³⁹

The question of identity, immigration, and land featured prominently in the Hebrew press of Palestine. *Ḥavatzelet* angered the Interior Ministry in 1893 with an article criticising the land regulations. A front-page article complained about the prohibition on selling land to foreign Jews, particularly those from Russia, claiming that whereas the regulation forbidding the sale of land to foreign Jews had been discarded in the provinces of Beirut and Damascus, it remained in force in Jerusalem and its environs.⁴⁰ The author's verdict is clear and damning, lamenting "how much worse this decree has been to the Jewish landowners" (*'ad kamah hera'ah ha-gzerah le-yehudim ba'alei qarḳa'ot*), by creating an unstable property market.⁴¹ To temper the criticism, protestations of loyalty to the sultan came into play, and the following Hebrew conclusion was also translated into Ottoman Turkish in an accompanying note:

The eyes of all Israel inhabiting our city look longingly towards the day that God will show mercy on his people, and that His Majesty, our lord, the benevolent and merciful sultan, will annul the decree that has led so many of his loyal subjects to disaster.⁴²

This brings into question the very idea of citizenship. These foreign Jews were not permitted to purchase land, not because they were Jews per se, but because they were Russian subjects. To then appeal to the Ottoman authorities on the basis that they were the sultan's "loyal subjects" – *avadav ha-ne'emanim* in Hebrew and translated as *tebe'a-ı şādıqları* in Ottoman Turkish – assumed that all those living under imperial protection were the

³⁸ On the legal reforms of this period, see: Avi Rubin, *Ottoman Nizamiye Courts: Law and Modernity* (London & New York: Palgrave, 2011), especially 19–54. On issues of passports in Palestine, see: Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 71ff.

³⁹ Mordechai Eliyav, "Pe'ilotam shel natzigei ha-ma'tzamot ha-zarot be-Eretz Yiśra'el be-ma'avak 'al ha-'aliyah ha-rekhishat qarḳa'ot be-sof ha-me'ah ha 19", *Ḳatedrah* 26 (1982): 117–32.

⁴⁰ BOA, DH.MKT 10/51, encl. *Ḥavatzelet*, 8 Adar 5653 / 24 February 1893.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

sultan's subjects; in other words, asserting the rights of citizens without the legal process of citizenship.⁴³

A similar article, published a few days later in the same paper by Ya'akov Orenstein, 'A Clear Reproach' (*Tokhaḥat Migoleh*), gave a more nationalist take on the crisis, with the opening paragraph defining the adjective "nationalism" (*le'umiyut*) as "a demand from each person to risk his life for his brother, to empathise with collective distress, to love the land of his birth, and to sacrifice his body and his wealth on the beloved altar of his nation".⁴⁴ Berating the Jewish community for forgetting their brothers in the face of "every evil decree" (*kol gzerah ra'ah*) and for failing to stand up to "our persecutors" (*rodfeinu*), Orenstein also strongly criticised the Ottoman government for the land regulations.

The Ottoman note with the article indicates that this sort of open dissent over the issue of the purchase of property and land (*emlāk ve ārāzī*) was troubling, not least given the foreign connections of many of the settlers, but also because it was difficult to enforce this policy at the local level.⁴⁵ However, land purchase for non-Ottoman subjects remained very difficult, and therefore the issue of Ottomanising through Ottoman citizenship was to become crucial to consolidating and furthering Zionist settlement.

Ottomanism as Ottomanisation

In the 1911 parliamentary Zionism debate, Hasan Şükrü described the inhabitants of a Zionist settlement, claiming that they played their own anthem at their special occasions, and, "in place of the Ottoman flag, they fly the Zion Flag, which is blue with a Seal of Solomon in the middle and 'Zion' written above."⁴⁶ The Ottoman flag, a symbol of unity under one ruler and one system, was thus challenged by a new banner representing a nationalist movement. In a prior parliamentary debate in 1910 about state finances, the Salonican Jewish deputy 'Emanü'el Karasu Efendi was challenged over his downplaying of the importance of the Zionism question by both Ruhi el-Halidi and Hasan Şükrü:

Ruhi el-Halidi: Karasu Efendi, this is not right. The Zionism question is a question of significant importance for the country.

⁴³ The Ottoman translation of the final sentence of the article is found in the BOA, DH.MKT 10/51 bundle, in the paper beginning 'Kudüs-ü Şerif'de ṭab' olunan Habaselet nām 'ibrānice ğazetesi...', undated.

⁴⁴ BOA, DH.MKT 10/51, encl. *Ḥavatzet*, 14 Adar 5653 / 30 February [2 March] 1893.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *Nezāret-i Celīle-i Dāḥiliye, İdāre-i Maṭbū'āt*, no.1, 10 Ramazan 1310 / 16 Mart 1309 (28 March 1893).

⁴⁶ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi* 1:6:3, 558.573.

‘Emanü’el Karasu: I did not say that it is not important.

Ruhi el-Halidi: Don’t say it’s an unimportant question, it is incredibly important, it has consequences.

Hasan Şükrü: Look, they are using their own postage stamps... (Showing a postage stamp)⁴⁷

The dramatic brandishing of a Zionist postal stamp – presumably one of those produced by the Jewish National Fund – was sufficient evidence for Hasan Şükrü of Zionist separatism. This returns to the common theme: that the Zionists were building a “state within a state” (*memleketin dahilinden bir memleket*), and that by rejecting Ottoman symbols they were not patriotic Ottomans. The focus on flags and stamps makes sense if we take Hasan Kayalı’s definition of Ottomanism, formed during the Tanzimat, as “a common allegiance of all subjects in equal status to the Ottoman dynasty”, based on a loose framework of symbols rather than institutions, later supplanted by more formal structures during the Young Ottoman, Hamidian, and Young Turk periods but still with the focus of loyalty to the state via the Ottoman sultan.⁴⁸⁴⁷ In other words, national or religious affiliations were to be overcome by a unifying imperial identity of symbolic and performative Ottomanism. Choosing to use a different flag, a different postage stamp – let alone a different passport – was thus a rejection of such unity. The Hebrew-language newspapers of Palestine explored this conundrum in two ways; through loyalism towards the sultan and, after the 1908 Revolution, through Ottomanisation.

For much of the later 19th century, the sultan was the focus of expressions of Hebrew loyalism. For instance, the accession of Murad V in May 1876 was greeted in *Ḥavatzelet* with a front-page declaration of loyalty and prayers for the sultan’s life and prosperity.⁴⁹⁴⁸ It was during the reign of ‘Abdülhamid II, however, that such print loyalism came into its own. In 1894, *Ḥavatzelet*, which targeted both Old and New Yishuv members, published a front-page editorial in honour of the sultan’s birthday. Underneath the title, “Long Live the King!” (*Yeḥi ha-Melekh*), which was flanked on either side by two Ottoman crescents and two Stars of David, the article provided a narrative of the celebrations:

⁴⁷ *Meclesi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: Ellüikinci İnikad, 21 Şubat 1326 (1910) Pazartesi*, Devre 1, Cilt 3, İçtima Senesi 3, 448.

⁴⁸ Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks*, 24, 31.

⁴⁹ *Ḥavatzelet*, 16 Sivan 5636 / 8 June 1876.

To honour the day, thousands of flags were raised above the houses of the city and the governor's palace, and the officials of the exalted government, the various religious leaders, and the representatives of the [foreign] governments resident in our city came to the governor's palace to deliver their blessings to honour the governor of our city. Among those who came were the esteemed rabbi, the First to Zion, the valued and important *Ḥakham-bashi*, accompanied by the esteemed rabbi, the head of the rabbis, the valued and important Shmu'el Salant, and other honoured members of the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities. That night, the people of our city made illuminations to celebrate the holiday, and army musicians delighted the heart of the people who gathered in their thousands through playing around the governor's palace and the army bases.⁵⁰

The crucial part of this celebration was that Jerusalem's Jews participated in an event "celebrated by all the inhabitants of our city" (*ḥaganu kol toshvei 'ireinu*) and "with our brothers living in our city" (*aḥinu toshvei 'ireinu*). In other words, it was a communal and public act of patriotism. The number of celebrations of the sultan given front-page prominence in *Ḥavatzelet* in the 1890s and 1900s with similar narratives and patriotic designs for the *Ḥag ha-Melekh* – the King's Festival – demonstrates not only perhaps a fear of Hamidian censorship, but the use of Hebrew print culture to participate in civic Ottomanism. A typical example is the front page of *Ḥavatzelet* of 31 August 1894, which, to celebrate the sultan's accession-day carried the headline ' € Julius Humayun € ', a transliteration of the Ottoman *cülüs-u hümāyūn*, the imperial enthronement, and emphasised that this was something celebrated by "all the subjects of the king, all the children of the different religions living in Turkey" (*kol 'avadei ha-melekh, kol bnei ha-datot ha-shunot ha-yoshvim be-Togarmah*).⁵¹ For 'Abdülhamid II's Silver Jubilee in September 1900, the front page of the paper had a prayer and a blessing for the sultan to be recited in all of the synagogues and seminaries, which itself included an egalitarian call to God to "please receive today the prayer of the many nations settled in our land" (*kabel na ha-yom tefilat 'amim rabim yoshvei artzeinu*).⁵² Beyond such formal occasions, *Ḥavatzelet* praised the sultan for being a fighter against anti-Semitism in his realms, with one front-page story printing an imperial command "to prevent the printing of any anti-Semitic publication or bringing it from anywhere into Turkey".⁵³ Such protection was repaid in major national events such as the Ottoman victory over Greece in 1897, with the front page of *Ḥavatzelet* of 11 June 1897 printing a telegram

⁵⁰ *Ḥavatzelet*, 17 Adar Rishon 5654 / 23 February 1894.

⁵¹ *Ḥavatzelet*, 29 Av 5654 / 31 August 1894.

⁵² *Ḥavatzelet*, 13 Elul 5660 / 7 September 1900.

⁵³ *Ḥavatzelet*, 26 Av 5652 / 19 August 1892.

from the sultan to the chief rabbinate declaring that “His Majesty was very satisfied to see the patriotism [lit. love of the land of birth, *ahavat erez muledet*] and spirit of loyalty to his government that the Jews never ceased to display”.⁵⁴

“Long Live the Sultan!” was a clear and simple slogan by which the Hebrew-speaking immigrant Jews could show their loyalty to and affiliation with the Ottoman state. The Constitutional Revolution of 1908, however, brought a new discourse into play. The arrival on 27 July 1908 of the news of the restoration of the constitution was greeted with a huge headline in *Ḥavatzelet*, ‘House of the People’s Representatives in Turkey’ (*Beit Nivḥarei ha-‘Am be-Togarmah*), printing a précis of the command announcing that, by the sultan’s gracious order, the constitution (*sefer ha-ḥukim ha-yesodi*) would be back in force for all Ottomans.⁵⁵ The opening of the parliament in 1908 was celebrated in a rather different way to how it had been reported in its first incarnation in 1877, when there had been simply narrative reporting and reprints of speeches.⁵⁶ On 18 December 1908, the front page of *Ḥavatzelet* was adorned with crescents with Stars of David, the same aesthetic and narrative as the articles celebrating loyalty to the sultan, cheering, “The Ottoman Parliament! Long Live the Sultan! Long Live the Constitution!”:

Today was a celebration of the Ottomans in every city of the land of Turkey, for today His Majesty the Sultan opened the Parliament with a speech that he gave in person. In our city, as in every city in Turkey, we celebrated this day in a glorious and majestic manner, flying thousands of flags on every house and shop, on every roof and ceiling.⁵⁷

At night, there were illuminations and music from the military band, but for *Ḥavatzelet* the implications of the revolution itself were a sufficient reason for celebration, and the focus of the article on its potential repercussions marks this as different from earlier loyal declarations to the monarch alone:

The hearts of the happy population would increase in joy even without the music, through the freedom that has been given to them, through the renewed constitution, and through the hope that they hold that the glorious prosperity of the land, the quality of the produce, and the majesty of labour will increase, and true peace will fall across the land, inside and out.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ *Ḥavatzelet*, 11 Sivan 5657 / 11 June 1897.

⁵⁵ *Ḥavatzelet*, 28 Tammuz 5668 / 27 July 1908. A similarly loyal front page appeared in *Ha-Shkafah*, 29 Tammuz 5668 / 28 July 1908.

⁵⁶ *Ḥavatzelet*, 28 Nisan 5637 / 11 April 1877.

⁵⁷ *Ḥavatzelet*, 24 Kislev 5669 / 18 December 1908.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Such a poetic ideal of the post-constitutional phase mixed with the Zionist dream of the redemption and settlement of the land, so that through an Ottoman utopia a Jewish national golden age would be forged in Palestine.

However, after the drama of revolution, counter-revolution, and constitutional reform came serious reflection. In June 1913, Nahum Taversky, a Russian Zionist immigrant living in Jerusalem, penned an article for the Zionist-socialist newspaper *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'yir*.⁵⁹ With a focus on improving and developing the Jewish economic presence in Palestine, the paper published a number of literary and political articles aimed at raising the profile of Hebrew as a language of political discourse, and of the labour Zionist project in general. Taversky's article, 'On Our Political Situation in the Land [of Israel]' (*Le-Matzavenu ha-Poliṭi ba-Aretz*), lamented the results of the local and municipal elections held in the summer of 1913, speaking of "a difficult defeat upon the landscape of local political life" (*mapalah ḳashah 'al śdeh ha-ḥayim ha-poliṭim hameḳomiyim*), with very few Jews represented on local councils.⁶⁰ Angered at the lack of collective action to further the aims of Jewish communities and workers, Taversky turned on other Hebrew newspapers and writers, particularly Eli'ezer Ben-Yehuda's campaign for Ottomanisation (*hit'atmanut*) run in *Ha-Tzevi* in 1909:

The Ottomanism question (*she'elat ha-'Otmaniyut*) in its new form of public politics (*tziburit-medinit*) was born with the declaration of the Constitution, and here we are today five years on; however, it is noteworthy that, despite it being so very important to us, the serious nature of this question is not clear to us to this day, and almost never occupies space either in our newspapers or in our communities. In the first year, Mr Ben-Yehuda wrote a few articles agitating in favour of Ottomanisation, for a whole year printing in his newspaper the stereotypical proclamation, "Jews, Be Ottomans", but this agitation achieved nothing, and the proclamation is used in jokes and nothing more. [...] Another thing is clear: the Ottoman [i.e. Ottomanised] part of our community is weak not only in quantity, but also, and perhaps especially, in quality. They do not know what the political issues are for the Sephardim, the various Arab Jews, the Yemenites (none of the Ottomans have ever known about these). They do not even understand the issues of the Ashkenazim, from whose numbers so many Ottomans come, particularly in Jerusalem, one little bit. None of that mob knows, even to this very day, anything about modern public life, not to mention modern political life. The number of people who know how

⁵⁹ For Interior Ministry discussions of this publication, see: BOA, DH.MKT 2670/96, *Nezāret-i Celīle-i Dāḥiliye, İdāre-i Maṭbū'āt*, no. 1162, 28 Şevval 1326 / 9 Teşrin-i Sani 1324 (23 November 1908); BOA, DH.MKT 2708/56, *Nezāret-i Celīle-i Dāḥiliye, İdāre-i Maṭbū'āt*, no. 1365, 7 Zilhicce 1326 / 18 Kanun-u Evvel 1324 (31 December 1908).

⁶⁰ *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'yir*, 15 Sivan 5673 / 20 June 1913.

to read and write in the language of the state [i.e. Ottoman Turkish] is very small indeed. They could only find two or three out of all the Ottoman community who could communicate with the representatives of the government, whilst our new community, the non-Ottoman community, appointed tens of people. Some among them believe that no obstacles can block the path to their Ottomanisation (*sheshum mekhshulim lo yakhlu la'amod 'al derekh hit'atmanutam*).⁶¹

For Taversky, Ottomanisation was a shallow response to the post-1908 political landscape, a response that could not further the aims of other forms of Jewish nationalism. None of these new Ottoman Jews could speak Ottoman Turkish – a sign of their political impotency, since knowledge of Ottoman Turkish was a requirement of election to the parliament. The ‘Ottomans’ were a divisive part of the Jewish *yishuv*, full of rhetoric but with little substance behind their newly adopted identity. For Taversky, the popular politics of the new political era would be defined by Jewish workers and Jewish solidarity, not by the ‘joke’ of Ottomanisation.

The object of Taversky’s rage was a series of articles published in *Ha-Tzevi* between January and April 1909, encouraging foreign Jews in Palestine to ‘Ottomanise’ by adopting Ottoman citizenship. According to the first of these manifestos, presented in the edition of 12 January, this was to enable Jews to rise from their current low position in Ottoman society and as a people – “poor and empty are we!” (*dalim ve reikim anu*) was his refrain – by increasing their numbers in Ottoman elections: “If we were now, at this moment, all of us Ottomans, how many thousands of voters we would have, and so how many people would have the right to be elected!”⁶² The refrain, “Jews, Be Ottomans!” (*Yehudim, hayu 'Otmanim!*) was carried as a slogan in almost every issue of the paper from 12 January until 1 April 1909 to encourage immigrant Jewish participation in the Ottoman electoral process which, as foreign subjects, they were unable to do.

A follow-up article, ‘The Jews and Ottomanism: A Reply to Mr Barzilai’ (*Ha-Yehudim ve ha-'Otmanut: Teshuvah le-ha-Adon Barzilai*), on 31 January again pushed for the importance of taking Ottoman citizenship to get a bigger say in Parliament, signed off under the pen name ‘Ottoman citizen’ (*natin 'Otmani*).⁶³ This was a response to an article written in an earlier edition of the same paper by Yehoshu'a Barzilai, a prolific writer for the Zionist cause whose short stories were often serialised in *Ha-Tzevi*. In his article, ‘A Little Restraint’ (*Me'at Metinut*), Barzilai agreed with the general premise of “Jews, Be Ottomans!” in terms of Jewish nationalism:

⁶¹ *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'yir*, 15 Sivan 5673 / 20 June 1913.

⁶² *Ha-Tzevi*, 19 Tevet 5669 / 12 January 1909.

⁶³ *Ha-Tzevi*, 9 Shevat 5669 / 31 January 1909.

[Ottomanisation], in itself, is positive, since it is impossible to become naturalised citizens in the Land [of Israel] and to permanently be settled in perpetuity without being citizens of the state. It is true that we hold a nationalist hope in the land of our fathers, and that we hope for the realisation of the Zionist idea in our generation and in our days, but even then we will surely be Ottoman citizens (*emet ki lanu yesh tikvah le'umit 'al eretz avoteinu ye-ki anu mekayim lehitgashmut ha-ra'iyon ha-tziyoni bedoreinu u-be-yameinu, aval gam az halo nehiyeh netinim 'Otomanim*).⁶⁴

This, then, presents something quite interesting, in that Barzilai saw that Jewish nationhood could be realised within the Ottoman community; Zionism would arise through embracing Ottomanism. Indeed, in a pamphlet published in 1912, 'A Little Bit of State' (*Ḳorṭov Medinah*), he articulated his adversity to "political Zionism" (*Tziyonut medinit*) in favour of a "Zionist state" (*medinah Tziyonit*), a limited polity based on institutions and networks – what Esther Benbassa has described as a form of "autochthonous social and cultural Zionism."⁶⁵ Speaking of the need to discard Herzlian Zionism, he extolled the virtues of building Jewish institutions under Ottoman authority and as Ottomans:

The Ottoman government does not interfere with the local rule of any of the nations or languages settled inside it, nor with internal autonomy (*ha-oyṭonamiyut ha-pnimit*). If we, the Children of Israel settled in Ottomania, do not enjoy these rights, then we should look to ourselves for this, for our habits, our customs, and our public manners that we have brought with us from the Diaspora are to blame, but absolutely not the Ottoman government, which does not have it in its nature, methods, and laws to interfere in the internal life of any of its populations (*aval beshum ofen lo ha memshalah ha-'Otmanit she-'ein miṭiva'ah darkah ye-ḥukeyhah lehit'arev ba ḥayim ha-pnimiym shel eizeh tzibur she-hu*). If you do not believe this, please, go and try to establish such high schools, such a "Tel Aviv", such settlements, and such primary schools in another country like those we have made in the Ottoman Land of Israel (*ba-Eretz Yiśra'el ha-'Otmanit*). In short, the government does not interfere at all in our internal life, and when it does intervene, things are resolved in a welcome manner.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ha Tzevi*, 5 Shevat 5669 / 27 January 1909.

⁶⁵ Esther Benbassa, "Zionism and the Ottoman Empire at the End of the 19th and the Beginning of the 20th Century", *Studies in Zionism* 11, no. 2 (1990): 127–41 at 140.

⁶⁶ Yehoshu'a Barzilai, *Ḳorṭov Medinah: Tokhnit le-'Avodah Yeshuvit Reḥavah be-Eretz Yiśra'el* (Yerushalayim: Y. Robinson, 5739 [1978/9]), 10.

Ottomanism for Barzilai was enjoying political and cultural autonomy within a polity that neither persecuted Jews nor hindered their national projects, of which settling the land – the “redemption of the Land of Israel” – was the most important thing. The construction of a separate nation state was out of the question because it would remove the protection of the Ottoman authorities, whose inclusive political ideology, a sort of *e pluribus unum* (or at least *in varietate unitas*), permitted the Jews to build a new national community as both Jews and Ottomans.⁶⁷ Moreover, in his article in *Ha Tzevi*, Barzilai was concerned about the diplomatic and political implications of large numbers of foreign Jews suddenly applying for Ottoman citizenship, concluding that proper legal advice would need to be sought to present a petition to the Ottoman parliament, with a considered proposal that would need to be endorsed by the Great Powers.⁶⁸

The question of Ottomanisation moved increasingly from the ink of the pages of Hebrew-language newspapers to daily politics throughout the empire following the CUP coup of 1913.⁶⁹ An article in the nationalist Sephardic paper *Ha-Ḥerut* of 28 October 1913 described a polemic war between two Ottoman newspapers, the anti-CUP *İkdām* (Effort) and the pro-CUP and Zionist run *Le Jeune Turc* (The Young Turk), over the proposal for a Hebrew college in Jerusalem, denying firmly that Zionism was a political conspiracy against the Ottoman state.⁷⁰ In April 1914, *Ha-Ḥerut* responded to criticism from the Arabic publication *Al-Karmil* (The Carmel) that foreign Jews had no intention of becoming Ottoman citizens, retorting that “the foreign Jews coming to our

⁶⁷ Steven Zipperstein, “Symbolic Politics, Religion, and the Emergence of Ahad Haam”, in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz & Anita Shapira (eds.), *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover & London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 55–66 at 56–59; Joseph Salmon, “Ahad Ha-Am and Benei Moshe: An ‘unsuccessful experiment?’”, in Jacques Kornberg (ed.), *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha-Am* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 98–105 especially 103ff.; Ruth Kark, “Land-God-Man: Concepts of Land Ownership in Traditional Cultures in Eretz-Israel”, in Alan Baker & Gideon Biger (eds.), *Ideology and Landscape in Historical Perspective: Essays on the Meanings of Some Places in the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 63–82 at 73.

⁶⁸ *Ha-Tzevi*, 9 Shevat 5669 / 31 January 1909.

⁶⁹ The ruling Committee of Union and Progress had taken a decidedly authoritarian turn by 1912 following rebellions in Albania and the Italian invasion of Libya, resulting in the infamous *Sopali Seçimler* (election of clubs) that literally beat the liberal opposition into submission before being forced to cede power by popular and military pressure. The Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 proved to be the final straw, and CUP military leaders led by Enver Bey stormed the Sublime Porte and seized power on 23 January 1913.

⁷⁰ *Ha-Ḥerut*, 27 Tisrhei 5674 / 28 October 1913. This was in the context of the ‘war of the languages’ over whether Hebrew or German would be the language of instruction at the Technion in Haifa. See: Margalit Shilo, “Milḥamah ha-śafot ke-‘tenu‘ah ‘amamit”, *Ḳatedrah* 74 (1994): 86–119.

land came with the intention to be Ottomanised!” (*ha-Yehudim ha-zarim ha-ba' im le-artzenu ba'im be-khayanah tehilah lehit'atmen*).⁷¹ The paper urged Hebrew newspaper propagandists to encourage Hebrew speakers in Palestine (*ha-yishuv ha-Ivri ha-Eretzyiśra'eli*) to take up Ottoman citizenship to prove their loyalty.⁷² The chief of these propagandists, Eli'ezer Ben-Yehuda, used *Ha-Or* at the outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 to push a number of agendas, including “the need to adapt” (*tzarikh lehistagel*) to Ottoman society, and the need to enlist in the army.⁷³ The latter aim was pushed in a patriotic article of 9 August 1914, ‘Day of the Young Hebrews’ (*Yom ha-Tza'yirim ha-Ivrim*), in which enlistment in the Ottoman army was portrayed as a key to Jewish success in Palestine: “when the necessary time comes, together and shoulder-to-shoulder with the children of the other Ottoman nations (*yaḥday ye-shekhem eḥad im bnei she'ar ha-le'umim ha-Otmanim*) you will be serving for the greatness of Ottomania... And, to add in French, ‘l’union fait la force!’”⁷⁴

The Ottoman entry into World War I, in November 1914, changed the dynamic of the situation entirely. On 6 November, Ben-Yehuda resumed his “Jews, Be Ottomans” campaign, but shared the front page with two other articles.⁷⁵ The first was about a parade held in Jaffa to demonstrate support for the government and the army, in which a “wonderful procession” (*tahalukhah nehederet*) of the Jewish community had made its way from Tel Aviv to Jaffa, led by the students and teachers of Jaffa College (*Midrashah Yafo'it*), the Hope of Israel School (*Mikveh-Yiśra'el*), and the Hebrew School (*Beit ha-Sefer ha-Ivri*).⁷⁶ The other article, however, rather complicated such displays of Hebrew loyalty. It was a letter to the editor from a senior postal official, Emin Bey, announcing that letters would only be permitted in Turkish, Arabic, French, and German.⁷⁷ On one sheet of paper, we have three major issues facing the Zionist community in late 1914: the rush for foreign Jews, particularly those with now enemy (i.e. Russian) passports, to obtain Ottoman citizenship; attempts to maintain displays of loyalty to the state; and increasingly repressive state measures.

Undeterred, Ben-Yehuda began a campaign throughout November to promote the Ottomanisation of the immigrant Jews of Palestine. On 15 November 1914, the headline of *Ha-Or* proclaimed, “‘Jews, Be Ottomans! Cast Off Your Foreign Names and Call Yourselves by Hebrew Names!’”⁷⁸ Such a declaration seems at first to be a non sequitur: what did Hebrew names have to do with being Ottomans? Ben-Yehuda’s reasons that the *mit'atmanim*

⁷¹ *Ha-Ḥerut*, 5 Nisan 5674 / 1 April 1914.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ha-Or*, 15 Av 5674 / 7 August 1914.

⁷⁴ *Ha-Or*, 17 Av 5674 / 9 August 1914.

⁷⁵ *Ha-Or*, 17 Heshvan 5675 / 6 November 1914.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ha-Or*, 25 Heshvan 5675 / 14 November 1914.

should get rid of their foreign names, particularly surnames with endings like -ski, -vitz and -ov, combined his particular vision for Hebrew-centred Zionist nationalism, Ottomanism, and pragmatism:

How ugly they are to the ear and the eye for a Jewish man in the land of his forefathers! Here is the day you became Ottomans, full citizens of the land in which you live (*ezrahim gmurim shel zo ha-eretz she-atem yoshvim bah*), so why do you always recall through your surnames your foreign origins of exile (*motza'akhem ha-nokhri ha-galuti*)? Why would you proclaim your foreign names to the ears of those who criticise us (*be-oznei ha-meḳatregim 'aleinu*) because you live here in the Land [of Israel]? Why do you presume to bequeath this ugly inheritance to your descendants, who will certainly be ashamed and who may suffer as a result of this, and for whom it will be difficult to repair this damage?⁷⁹

Adopting Hebrew names – a list of acceptable names was provided in the editions between 16 and 18 November – was therefore linked to both a Zionist and Ottomanist patriotic ideal. Shedding their Russian names removed both an enemy and a diasporic stigma, but it also allowed them to remain in Palestine and not be removed as enemy aliens.

Over the next week, the Ottomanisation campaign featured prominently in the pages of *Ha-Or*, as it had in *Ha-Tzevi* a few years earlier. Others involved in Ben-Yehuda's Ottomanisation Committee (*Ṿa'ad ha-Hit'atmanut*) joined the push, such as David Yellin, another major Hebrew revivalist and educator, who wrote an article in *Ha-Or*, 'To Ottomanisation' (*Le-ha-Hit'atmanut*), in which he described the relationship between the Jewish settlers and the Ottoman state:

And if every man is to be a citizen of this land, in order to benefit himself individually and in order to be useful in the land in which he lives, whichever it may be, it is of extreme importance for us Jews to take on the citizenship of our own land, the mighty land of Turkey. For indeed, this is the land that opened its gates to us in the days of barbarism and savagery of the Middle Ages, the land of the sultanate of the House of Osman that never discriminated between our nation and all the other peoples of its wide realms (*ki akhen zot ha-aretz asher be-yamei ha-barbariyut ye-hapra 'ut, yamei ha-beinayim, pathah she'areiyah lefaneinu, ye-eleh šaltaniyah le-beit 'Otman asher lo heflu me-'olam bein benei 'amenu ye-kol yeter toshvei mamlakhtam ha-reḥavah*).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Ha-Or*, 27 Heshvan 5675 / 16 November 1914; *Ha-Or*, 28 Heshvan 5675 / 17 November 1914. On Ottomanisation committees, see: Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*:

The historical narrative of the Ottoman state rescuing the Jews of Spain was a common trope. It had been used almost thirty years earlier in Ebüzziya Tevfik's *Millet-i İsrā'iliye*, and, as Julia Philips Cohen has shown, it continues to be retold in relation to the history of the Jews in the Republic of Turkey.⁸¹ This, in many ways, combines a number of the narratives expressed within the different sections of the Hebrew press: gratitude for Ottoman sanctuary and freedoms, expressions of loyalty to the sultan, and a belief that the aims of Zionism, both cultural and political, could be achieved by adopting an Ottoman civic identity. Yellin's claim that the Ottoman state never discriminated between Jews and its other subjects gets to the heart of what Ottomanism was, echoed in other opinion pieces by other Hebrew revivalists, such as A.M. Borochoy's 'I am a Hebrew!' (*Ivri Anochi*).⁸²

A final twist in the "Jews, Be Ottomans" saga comes from an article in the 13 November 1914 edition of *Ha-Ḥerut*, aimed at Ottoman Sephardic Jews, 'To My Jewish Brothers!' (*Le-Aḥai ha-Yehudim!*), written by the Jerusalemite notable Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥusaynī:

I, the undersigned fervent Ottoman (*'Otmani nilhav*), demand justice and virtue, know and appreciate the value of my Jewish brothers in the lands of Ottomania, and I came to ask you, the children of the people of Israel, descendants of the famous heroes David, Solomon, Judah Maccabeus, and many more, I came to ask you I say, to remember what the exalted government has done for you when you left the land of Spain, that it opened its gates and took you in, a people ceaselessly persecuted, a people that did not find rest in any land of even one of the governments that they set foot upon on their journey. The exalted government showed you a land to develop and prosper, and said: "Here before you is the land and everything in it, do with it as you see fit."⁸³ And you dwelled in safety there these five hundred years, a man under his vine and under his fig tree. And now that these polar bears [i.e. the Russians] are up and about to seek and destroy [the land] like vicious wolves, the time has come for you, the children faithful to our beloved government, to fulfil your obligations and to help with grace and spirit in order to humiliate and overcome the land

Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 28–34.

⁸¹ Ebüzziya Tevfik, *Millet-i İsrā'iliye*, 78; Julia Phillips Cohen, *Becoming Ottomans: Sephardi Jews and Imperial Citizenship in the Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1f., 132–42.

⁸² *Ha-Or*, 1 Kislev 5675 / 20 November 1914.

⁸³ This could be a reference to Deuteronomy 1:8.

of your cruel enemies who wanted to cut you off from the nations, and to crush the foes of the Ottoman government underfoot. Let's go, my brothers, rise up and help us! Be Ottomans from heart and soul, and in the name of God we will succeed (*hayu 'Otmanim mi-lev u-mi-nefesh, ye-be-shem Hashem na'ašeh ye-natzliah*).⁸⁴

This was the basis of a different kind of demand to 'be Ottomans', using biblical language and historic narratives of a Jewish military past – including Judah Maccabeus, the hero who had got *Ha-Tzevi* into so much trouble twenty years earlier – and arguing not for a shared Hebrew culture or the right of settlement, but for the other side of a contract in which being Ottoman came with duties. This perhaps chimes with Ben-Yehuda's cry for the Young Hebrews to enlist in the Ottoman armed forces; however, when war did break out, Ben-Yehuda was one of many of the Hebrew-speaking Zionists who lobbied to exempt the "community of Ottomanised Jews" (*kahal ha-mit'atmanim*) from conscription into the Ottoman army. Civic Ottomanism clearly had its limits for those who had Ottomanised.⁸⁵

Conclusions

Ben-Yehuda's "Jews, Be Ottomans!" campaign in some ways confirmed the assertions of Ruhi El-Halidi that Zionists were not truly patriotic Ottomans. After all, the sole purpose of gaining Ottoman passports was to remain in Palestine, not to truly Ottomanise in a civic or national sense, and al Ḥusaynī's plea to his Jewish brothers to fight the common foe did not really strike a chord with the *mit'atmanim*. In the Hamidian era, Hebrew-language newspapers like *Ha-Shkafah*, *Ha-Tzevi*, and *Ḥavatzelet* tested the boundaries of what the Ottoman authorities and their own co-religionists would tolerate in terms of nationalist sentiment, particularly when complaining about government-imposed immigration restrictions that necessarily hurt the Zionist cause. Polemics such as Shenhi's, stirring the Jews to active separatist nationalism, clearly overstepped the mark, and the state responded by instituting Hebrew censors and relying on reports from local officials, both state and religious, to monitor these new publications. Indeed, figuring out the place of a Zionist or Jewish national identity, be it cultural or more overtly political, in the Ottoman political landscape of the late 19th and early 20th centuries necessarily challenged what Ottomanism actually meant. Labour Zionists like Taversky rejected the "Jews, Be Ottomans" slogan in favour of "Hebrew Speech and Hebrew Labour" (*hadibur 'Ivri ye-ha'avodah 'Ivrit*).⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Ha-Ḥerut*, 24 Heshvan 5675 / 13 November 1914.

⁸⁵ *Ha-Or*, 29 Heshvan 5675 / 18 November 1914.

⁸⁶ *Ha-Po'el Ha-Tza'yir*, 15 Sivan 5673 / 20 June 1913.

They were the opposite of those who had Ottomanised; they were the *bilti-‘Otmanim*, the non-Ottomans, consciously rejecting an Ottomanist identity. On the other side were cultural Zionists like Barzilai, who extolled the benefits of living in a non-nation state that did not seek to change the identities of its constituent members provided they were loyal to the state and its symbols and accepted a broad Ottoman identity. This was *Eretz Yiśra’el ha-‘Otomanit*, the Ottoman Land of Israel, in which being Ottoman was the best way to secure a protected cultural Zionist community. In some ways, this was Ottomanism at its purest, “one citizenship for all subjects”, to use Kemal Karpat’s definition, with the creation of a culturally Hebrew and Jewish national identity in Palestine providing just another patch in the quilt of Ottoman identities.⁸⁷

For Ottomanised Jews like Ben-Yehuda, Ottomanism was largely something to be performed and displayed, in many respects the essence of Ottomanism in practice. In an early discussion in the Ottoman parliament in January 1909, the question was raised about instituting an Ottoman independence day. Yusuf Kemal Bey, the deputy for Sinop, opined:

I think that the purpose of appointing such a day is as a confirmation of the foundations of Ottomanism for all of the Ottoman peoples (*bütün efrâd-ı Osmaniye arasında Osmanlılık esasının teyididir*). That is, on that day all the Ottoman peoples shall congratulate one another, they shall embrace one another.⁸⁸

When newspapers like *Havatzet* reported the participation of the Hebrew speaking Jews in official celebrations, they were therefore placing the immigrant Jewish community within an Ottomanist milieu; flying the flag, cheering the troops, and praising the sultan were crucial elements of what one might term performative Ottomanism. What seems to have changed is what it meant to be Ottomanised, to become Ottoman. Many of the Hebrew authors examined here demanded autonomy, the right to settle, and the right to develop their own national culture, praising the Ottoman state for a lack of interference. However, Ottomanism, as al-Ḥusaynī tried to convey, was also a unification of peoples under common civic duties, something that did not fit in with many of these visions of Jewish autonomy. Indeed, the rush to Ottomanise in 1914 reflected a fear of deportation rather than a desire to embrace an Ottomanist ideal. “Jews, Be Ottomans!” was in some ways a successor to “Long Live the Sultan!” in providing a slogan for immigrant Jewish loyalty in the post-1908 Ottoman political landscape, but if the

⁸⁷ Kemal Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics: The Transition to a Multi-Party System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 11.

⁸⁸ *Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: On Sekizinci İnikad, 13 Kânunusani 1324 Salı*, Devre 1, Cilt 1, İçtima Senesi 1, 321.

ultimate aim of Ottomanisation was to ensure the establishment of a separate Jewish political, economic, or cultural entity in Palestine, then those who were Ottomanised did not really embrace Ottomanism; true Ottomans did not issue their own postage stamps.