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Zionism, Ottomanism, and the Young Turk Revolution

What Palestinian Jewish Identity Says About Zionist Political Separatism in 1908-1912

Dimitri Savidis '18

I. Introduction

The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 led to Sultan Abdul Hamid II restoring the Ottoman constitution of 1876, announcing elections to a new Ottoman Parliament, and promising political and social reforms, which included individual freedoms for Ottoman citizens and regulation of all government bodies. Like communities in other parts of the empire, the ethno-religious communities in Palestine – which included Muslims, Christians, and Jews – greeted these political changes and promises for social reform with enthusiasm as they believed the revolution would bring about an era of equality, protection, and cultural and economic prosperity for all of the empire's citizens.

In fact, the notion of Ottoman citizenship took on a more significant meaning in the aftermath of the revolution. The empire's previously subjugated communities saw the emergence of representative national politics as an opportunity to reclaim their strength to not only rejuvenate their people, but to also contribute positively to the progress of the Ottoman nation. Central to this idea of imperial citizenship was an emerging sentiment of comradeship or "love and brotherhood" amongst Ottomans that was meant to transcend the borders of the *millet* system – the network of ethno-religious confessional communities that traditionally dominated local social and political life in the empire. Within this context, the revolution of 1908 inspired optimism for "liberty, fraternity [and] justice" throughout the empire, resulting, at least temporarily, in the hope for a shared pan-imperial, national identity termed "Ottomanism."

The development of the Zionist project in Palestine had the potential to run up against the emergence of the idea of Ottomanism in the immediate post-revolutionary period. As described by historian Walter Laqueur, Zionism, by the turn of the century, could be best characterized as a project focused on creating a particular *society in the land of Israel* – one that was undoubtedly nationalistic but

Author's note: This paper was originally submitted in fulfillment of the History Major Capstone requirement in the seminar course "Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" led by Professor Sabar Bazgaz. I thank Professor Bazgaz for introducing me to the fascinating world of Ottoman history as an underclassman some years ago, guiding me through its intricacies, and advising me throughout this project.

concentrated on the benefits of redeeming the Jewish people through labor.¹ Taking this basic characterization of the Zionist movement at the time into account, there is potential for both the compatibility and complete incompatibility of Zionism and Ottomanism from what defined such a *national* Jewish project. More specifically, the question of compatibility lies on whether or not such a national plan predominantly embodied separatist political goals and aspirations.

Michelle Campos is an influential scholar of Ottomanism and the Jewish experience in Palestine in the immediate post-1908 period. She views the relationship between Ottoman Palestinian Jews and European Jewish settlers as one of dichotomy. The former were steadfast in their beliefs of a Jewish nation in Palestine with political separatism as their ultimate goal, whereas the latter were devoid of political separatist aspirations and saw a Jewish national movement as being solely a Jewish cultural revival project while maintaining their Ottoman identity.² However, such a dichotomy may not have existed as distinctively as Campos may perceive. Arieh Saposnik proposes an array of ideas that question (1) the political separatist aims that Campos attributes to European Jewish settlers, (2) the tension between Ottoman Jews and European Jewish immigrants over the adoption of Ottomanism, and (3) the potential that – if political separatist aims were predominant in European Zionist thought within Palestine – the Ottoman Jews did not seek to use Ottomanism in the same practical fashion in which Campos claims the European Jewish settlers had done.³

I aim to present the divergent perspectives in the narrow and unique historiography of Palestinian Jewry and Ottomanism to provide validity to the distinct conclusions that Campos and Saposnik make in their analyses of Zionism in the immediate post-1908 period. In doing so, I wish to answer the question of whether political aspirations were a predominant part of the Jewish national project at this time *within Palestine* by analyzing how various Palestinian Jewish groups identified themselves against both their fellow co-religionist and their Ottoman brother. In other words, I aim to answer whether the aspirations to establish an independent, sovereign Jewish homeland can be taken for granted in the post-1908 period from the perspective of the various groups of Jews in Palestine.

To achieve this end, I plan to first define Ottomanism within the context of the promises for social and political reform ushered by the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Next, I will present Campos's view on the relationship between Ottomanism, Zionism, and the various Jewish groups in Palestine to establish a perspective on what is traditionally defined as Zionism and Ottomanism to Palestinian Jewry in this

¹ Walter Lacqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (Shocken Books, 1972), 297.

² Michelle Campos, *Between "Beloved Ottomania" and "The Land of Israel": The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine's Sephardi Jews, 1908-13* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 466.

³ Arieh Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 178.

period. Campos's work remains foundational in a narrow historiography on the relationship between Palestinian Jewry and Ottomanism. Her characterization of Ottomanism has generally been accepted.

However, while there is little disagreement over her characterization of Ottomanism, doubt has been cast over her conclusions on the relationship between Ottomanism and the various Jewish groups in Palestine. Saposnik's critique of Campos's analysis offers more of a list of touchpoints of contention than a real counterargument to Campos's claims on this front. I will therefore clarify Saposnik's viewpoint solely as a gateway for introducing commentary and analysis from other historians that may shed light on the divergence. These analyses will provide a perspective on relations between Palestinian Jewry and critical components of Ottomanism that will offer unique insight into the debate. I will conclude with an overall assessment of the historiography to assess the predominance of political aspirations in Zionist thought as it pertained to the various Jewish groups within Palestine.⁴

II. Understanding Ottomanism – Hurriyya, Citizenship, and Brotherhood

The political and social reforms and promises for equality amongst all Ottoman citizens that arose from the success of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 descended from a liberal sentiment that first materialized in the mid-1800s through the Tanzimat Reforms. These reforms were significant in introducing the idea of nationhood, which was at the core of the Ottomanist ideology after the 1908 revolution. Recognizing the demise of the empire, Ottoman subjects were able to instill checks on the absolutism of the sultan's power, invoking traditional Islamic thought on justice, public good, and consultation while emphasizing the "will of the people-nation."⁵ With the suspension of the parliament and constitution in the late 19th century, the return of these checks on power also represented the arrival of a nation to its people. It represented an essential step in the transition from empire to a republic.

In her work on the relationship between the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim, and Ottomanism, Campos quotes a prominent Zionist radical in Palestine on the Ottoman Jews' affinity with the idea of Ottoman brotherhood as a "tendency to be more Marxist than Marx." However, this commentator underestimated the significance of the revolution and the Ottomans' appreciation for their newfound liberty, or *hurriyya* (Ara.). Official celebration ceremonies were scheduled throughout

⁴ Hereafter, I will refer to European Jewish settlers in Palestine as the Ashkenazim, native Ottoman Jewish citizens as the Sephardim, and the collective of Jews in Palestine (Ashkenazim and Sephardim collectively) as Palestinian Jewry.

⁵ Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 48.

Palestine in the aftermath of the revolution, and unofficial parades and celebrations erupted for weeks throughout the region. One observer in Jerusalem noted, “Cries of ‘Liberty, equality, fraternity!’ [were] heard from thousands of people, and ‘love and brotherhood’ sang between all the sons of the different communities in Jerusalem.”⁶ The future Christian parliamentary candidate of Beirut, Suleiman al-Bustani, waxed lyrically, “If you had seen them on the day of the constitution the imam and the priest and the rabbi – all were united with tears of joy.” Another article noted that “the Muslim shook hands with the Christian, and the Kurd reconciled with the Armenian, and the Turk hugged the Arab.”⁷

The Jerusalem crowd, which most likely contained only a minimal amount of Ottoman Turkish speakers, only positively reacted to the Ottoman governor’s proclamation of the reforms when he mentioned *hürriyet* (Ott. Turk.). When Jerusalem notable Sa’id al-Husayni translated the declaration into Arabic, he linked – as did others – the imminent political changes with the economic revival and social renewal that was expected to follow throughout the empire. Some of these were envisioned in the form of new schools, increased commerce, and improved public works projects among others.⁸

In this way, newfound liberty not only meant equality among Ottoman citizens but also the expectation of tangible improvements within the empire – a responsibility held not only by the state but also by Ottoman citizens. Campos succinctly explains:

The theater of revolutionary brotherhood was premised on the expectation that all Ottomans would share not only rights, but also obligations, and that all communities – being recast as Ottoman first and foremost – would work for the public good in a republican spirit of shared citizenship.⁹

This spirit of shared citizenship ultimately led to a sense of comradeship among Ottoman citizens as they believed that they were handed the keys to the imperial shackles with which the sultan had once restrained them. The term *Ottoman*, rather than being used to identify the imperial bureaucratic ruling class, now became a self-identifier for Ottoman citizens because of their shared experiences under a corrupt, unjust, and unchecked dynasty and their commitment to improving their homeland through the newly-acquired political powers.¹⁰

Recognizing the underlining unifying force of Ottomanism in this way is important because it emphasizes the civic nature of Ottoman brotherhood that developed through the liberation of the 1908 revolution. This imperial collective recalled its base in political membership and citizenship rights.¹¹ It was a

⁶ Campos (2011), 29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

brotherhood that had been born of the revolution – through the constitution and obligations of citizenship. David Yellin, a Jewish celebrant in Jerusalem, later explained:

[The revolution] caused the whole nation to be brothers in one endeavor – the success of the homeland and its people and the pride of membership in one family: the Ottoman family. And who among us does not remember how the fire of brotherhood was kindled suddenly in the hearts of all the Ottomans, and how the whole nation experienced in one stroke...the feeling of unity to endeavor for the good of the country and the success of the state.¹²

The Jerusalem-based Muslim lawyer Ragheb al-Imam reiterated the civic-based nature of Ottoman brotherhood, explaining, “The Ottoman races who were of different nations entered through the melting pot of the constitution and came out as one bullion of pure gold which is Ottomanism, which unites the hearts of the *umma* and brings together their souls.”¹³

III. Ottomanism and Palestinian Jewry

A. Realities of Ottomanism

While the civic nature of Ottomanism is a near certainty, Campos presents three different facts of Ottomanism that existed at the same time and that have far-reaching implications for how Palestinian Jewry would come to compromise their Zionist and Ottomanist sentiments. The first reality is the Ottomanism that has political roots but also attempts to take the place of the ethno-religious identities that had defined Ottoman subjects for centuries. This form of Ottomanism was most prevalent in the very aftermath of the revolution, and perhaps was a result of overjoy and unrealistic expectations for the extent of social and economic progress. For example, in the wake of the revolution, the American consul in Beirut reported:

Moslems and Christians publicly embrace each other, protesting that henceforth they are brethren, that there are Christians, Moslems, Jews, Mitwalehs, etc., no more, only loyal Ottoman subjects standing shoulder to shoulder prepared to fight for the liberties granted by the Sultan, long live the Sultan!¹⁴

Such an interpretation may be viewed as extreme, as it was formulated mainly during times of high spirits and ignored the realities of the impermeable *millet* system on which the second and third facts of Ottomanism are based. Nonetheless, the emergence of such a sentiment – even if only temporary – is telling of the vigor of revolution in creating a shared Ottomanist sentiment.

The second and third realities of Ottomanism were unable to deconstruct the various ethno-religious identities of the empire, but instead, function in tandem with them. In this sense, Ottomanism takes on a wholly civil and political meaning but

¹² Campos (2011), 78.

¹³ Campos, (2011), 78.

¹⁴ Campos (2011), 76.

still serves as a national identity. Christian Arab writer Adib Ishaq articulated Ottomanism at the time in neither lingual, religious, nor ethnic terms but rather as a collective agreement of belonging to one nation. In his words, “The ‘Ottoman nationality’ covers all the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire, in Europe as well as in Asia, whether they be, by origin, Turks, Arabs, or Tartars.”¹⁵ In comparing the Ottomans’ nationalization and liberalization project with that of the ethnically, religiously, and linguistically French nation, Rashid Rida, editor of *al-Manar*, reiterated this reality of Ottomanism at the time:

But we, the Ottomans, have already united from the different nationalities in a way that has not yet happened in any other kingdom. We are different in race, descent, language, religion, sect, education, and culture...but despite that we demand equality and celebrate its granting in a general covenant and in the places of worship and no doubt in this magazine.¹⁶

For Rida and his audience, the emergence of Ottomanism was the conscious adoption of a political project of an empire that was to be united while maintaining its ethno-religious and linguistic heterogeneity. This understanding was echoed by early twentieth century Ottoman dictionaries which emphasized the distinction between the term *millet* to denote the empire’s religious communities and the terms *iimmet* or *kavim* to denote the Ottoman nation. A dictionary at the time noted that “it is absurd to speak of an Ottoman *millet*. Rather it is correct to speak of an Ottoman *iimmet*. Because the different nations and peoples form a single *iimmet* called Ottoman.” These commentaries make clear the compatibility of *millet* identity with Ottomanism and the acknowledgment of the coexistence of different ethno-religious identities within Ottoman nationalism.

Finally, the third reality of Ottomanism is best characterized as the demise of the previous two facts by the increasing empowerment and rigidity of the *millet* system. This intensified intercommunal conflicts within the national political project. Such strife arose in parliamentary elections and appeals to Ottoman officials. Religious communities attempted to secure an influential position of power in the new political order to provide greater rights and benefits for themselves in the name of equality. As Campos explains, “Rights and privileges were measured not only against absolute standards of Ottomanist civic identity but also, more important, against those enjoyed by the other ethnic and religious groups in the empire.”¹⁷ Therefore, this period provided an opportunity for ethno-religious groups to quickly mobilize and strategize to assure that their communities received fair share of the benefits promised by the revolution.

In the wake of the revolution, the young Jewish journalist Avraham Elmaliach

¹⁵ Campos (2011), 67.

¹⁶ Campos (2011), 59.

¹⁷ Campos (2011), 145.

perfectly captured this reality of Ottomanism when he wrote, “Our homeland has returned to rebirth...and therefore our brothers the Jewish people, residents of Turkey, will endeavor through the freedoms given to us to bring closer all that is good and useful for our homeland.”¹⁸ In this he reiterated the need to “redeem the Jews’ honor” by electing Jews to Ottoman parliament. A writer for the Hebrew newspaper *Paradise* echoed this sentiment by explaining that the reason for this demand, he wrote, was “so that we will not be considered less than the Christians...Forward, brothers, a little bit of force and everything can be accomplished. In order to save our honor before everything!”¹⁹ By 1912, such community-centric sentiment was also shared by the empire’s Arab-speaking peoples who envisioned a united, yet highly decentralized empire. While Ottomanism manifested in specific instances as optimistic cooperation between all peoples of the empire, its downfall was the reality that it could not deter the exclusionary forces of the existing *millet* system.

B. Campos’s Viewpoint and Saposnik’s Critique

Understanding these differing realities of Ottomanism is vital to Campos’s analysis of the way the different ethnic groups within Palestinian Jewry struggled with Zionism and Ottomanism.²⁰ Campos divides Palestinian Jewry between the immigrating Ashkenazim and the Sephardim, the native Ottoman Jewish population. Campos claims that for the Ashkenazim of the “New *Yishuv*”:

Participation in the new Ottoman political system was a good strategy, but it was devoid of any inherent value. In this utilitarian approach, the political enfranchisement of Palestinian Jews would allow them to push for separatist Zionist aims within the framework of the expected proto-nationalistic campaigns for decentralization.²¹

According to Campos, the Ashkenazim in Palestine were committed mainly to separatist political aims and accepted Ottomanism nominally only as a means to a separatist political end. On the other end, Campos divides the Sephardim into two camps: Ottomanist who viewed any national Jewish project as incompatible with Ottomanism and Ottoman Zionists who are characterized by their commitment to Cultural Hebraism within the Ottoman political and civic framework. In this view, the Sephardic camps follow the first and second realities of Ottomanism, respectively, set out in the previous section. As the Ottomanist poet Reuben Qattan wrote to readers of Ladino newspaper *El Liberal*:

Before everything we should live Ottoman lives, cultivate the language of the Ottomans, form an integral part of the Ottoman nation, and sincerely love the Ottoman patria. We

¹⁸ Campos (2011), 145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁰ I am using the term “ethnic” here to mean Ashkenazi or Sephardic.

²¹ Campos (2005), 466.

are Ottomans and nothing else...To work and to die for Turkey – that should be our only and sacred duty.²²

In response to Qattan, Ottoman Zionist writer Yehuta Burla reassured, “In short, it will become clear to us how we must be Ottomans and something else in addition.”²³

Burla, like his other co-Ottoman Zionists, was committed to Ottomanism as a civic and political project and believed it to be in line with the aim of rejuvenating the Jewish people. Campos coined the term *cultural Hebraism* in describing this unique mix of ideologies. Cultural Hebraism was a response to perceived communal stagnation, calling to modernize the Jewish community while incorporating an authentic element of Jewish culture and identity that harkened back to the Jewish people’s Hebraic roots. Burla and other Ottoman Zionists believed that “the rebirth of the Jewish people in its cultural, social, and economic dimensions would work to the benefit of the empire at large,” touching upon an Ottomanist obligation to assist in improving the empire.²⁴

In *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine*, Arieh Saposnik does not substantially challenge, but only puts into question the stark dichotomy that Campos presents. First, Saposnik questions the purely political separatist aims that Campos attributes to Ashkenazim, by stating:

Most of Palestine’s Zionists – whether they were focused principally on the production of a new national music or art, on the Hebrew language, or on ‘Hebrew labor’ – were only remotely concerned during these years with the kinds of political objectives that might have exercised Zionists in Cologne and Berlin.²⁵

Saposnik further asserts that, instead of political separatist ambitions, the Ashkenazim were focused on cultural Hebraism just as much as the Sephardim:

The Zionism of Palestine’s Ashkenazi nationalizing elite – no less than that of their Ottoman Sephardic counterparts – was often aimed principally at precisely the kind of ‘cultural Hebraism’ Campos presents as a unique feature of the Sephardim.²⁶

Finally, Saposnik proposes that – contrary to Campos’s claim on the authenticity of the Sephardim’s attraction to Ottomanism – there is little reason to believe that Ottoman Zionists were not consciously hiding political separatist ambitions themselves:

While there were undoubtedly tactical reasons for the choice of such language by European Zionists, there is little reason to suppose that such tactical considerations were entirely absent when pro-Zionist Ottoman supporters denied that Zionism had any anti-Ottoman aims or repercussions.²⁷

I do not intend on answering Saposnik’s questions and doubts directly. Instead, I aim

²² Campos (2005), 471.

²³ Campos (2005), 472.

²⁴ Campos (2005), 470.

²⁵ Saposnik, 179.

²⁶ Saposnik, 179.

²⁷ Saposnik, 179.

to present unique historiography on the intersection between Zionism and Ottomanism that diverts from Campos's traditional views, to shed light on the issue of separatist political aspirations of Palestinian Jewry that is apparent in the different perspectives offered by Campos's work and Saposnik's questions.

IV. A Unique Historiography

A. "Impossible Is Not Ottoman" – An Ashkenazi Ottomanist

Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani, in their article "Impossible Is Not Ottoman?: Menashe Meirovitch, 'Isa al-'Isa, and Imperial Citizenship In Palestine," explore a covert partnership between a prominent Zionist agronomist, Menash Meirovitch, and the Christian Arab editor of the newspaper *Filastin*, 'Isa al-'Isa, a founding father of Palestinian nationalism. Under the literary guise of an Arab Muslim peasant called Abu Ibrahim, the two men produced a series of Arabic-language columns in 1911–1912 that exhibited Campos's exact definition of Ottoman citizenship – an effort to spur infrastructure and public works improvements through an open dialogue and pressure in the press, in the name of equality for all Ottoman citizens. More importantly, it sheds light on the Ottomanist aspirations of an Ashkenazi Jew, Menashe Meirovitch, and the motivations for an Arab Christian to collaborate with a potential Zionist.

Under the guise of Abu Ibrahim, the Russian-born Ashkenazi Jew Menashe Meirovitch presents himself as a Muslim Arab peasant and focuses his literary advocacy on improving the lives of the peasants. He calls for better roads, well-trained veterinarians, modern agricultural machinery, and state-sponsored forestry in the name of strengthening the Ottoman Empire.²⁸ Both men were committed to the goal of improving the standard of living in Palestine through modernization. In Meirovitch, al-'Isa found an expert in agronomy that would be able to make salient and knowledgeable arguments for the improvement of the land. When al-'Isa initially approached Meirovitch about the partnership, he reportedly admitted, "You know the nature of the land, the conditions of its inhabitants." In al-'Isa, Meirovitch found a public platform to voice his expertise. He responded, "But, you know, first of all, I live in a colony, far from politics...And third, as a Jew, it would be impossible for me not to touch upon our conditions and what we were able to do in this land for the thirty years of our existence."²⁹As for the necessity of the guise of Abu Ibrahim, both men understood that Palestine's population of majority Muslim peasants would not be receptive to the advocacy of an Arab Christian and Ashkenazi Jew.

The divergence from Campos's traditional Ashkenazi-Anti-Ottomanist narrative is evident: an Ashkenazi Jew using a literary guise to make claims upon the

²⁸ Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani, "Impossible Is Not Ottoman?: Menashe Meirovitch, 'Isa al-'Isa, and Imperial Citizenship in Palestine," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47 (2015), 242.

²⁹ Dolbee and Hazkani, 249.

Ottoman government and call for unity among the empire's different communities through the freedom of the press to improve his new homeland's condition. However, Dolbee and Hazkani's analysis gives us the opportunity to dive deeper. As Campos characterizes Ottoman brotherhood as a theatrical outwardly performance, Dolbee and Hazkani point out that:

Our Ottoman brothers did almost the opposite. They revised and published articles collaboratively while erasing any evidence of personal connection. The product of their imperial citizenship – the columns – may have been public, but its input – their brotherhood – was private.³⁰

One could argue that Meirovitch's "obedience" to Ottomanism could have been a matter of practical strategy to achieve Zionist political goals. In response, Dolbee and Hazkani would argue against such a claim because "their partnership involved not the betrayal of a sacred national cause but rather the mutual pursuit of modernist goals"³¹ – an aim that is wholly Ottomanist by Campos's definition. Also, Dolbee and Hazkani note that Meirovitch received no funding from Zionist organizations to plant stories of unity in *Filastin* to curb emerging anti-Semitic sentiment. This undermines the possibility that Meirovitch's actions were motivated by pragmatism to achieve alleged Zionist separatist aims.

Finally, Dolbee and Hazkani profile al-'Isa as having close relations to the Decentralization Party, which the authors claim "viewed the Zionists as comrades due to what they saw as the region's need for the 'capital and energy' that Jewish immigrants could provide."³² This affiliation was given greater credibility when al-'Isa complained in his memoir that the exodus of the Jews from Jaffa immediately after World War I had decimated the local economy. This is significant because it reveals that Arabs of the Decentralization Party – a party that itself was on the cusp of betraying Ottoman political rule but still viewed its political future under the Ottoman rule – saw their interests at least somewhat aligned with those of the Zionists. I would conclude that for this alignment to be a reality, Zionist separatist aims must not have yet been as apparent as traditionally believed.

B. "Rethinking the Yishuv and Ottomanization" – Ottomanism as an End for the Yishuv

In his article "Rethinking the Concept of Ottomanization: The Yishuv in the Aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908," Yuval Ben-Bassat argues that the pursuit of Jewish nationalism within the Ottoman framework was largely accepted among wide segments of the *yishuv*, the body of Jews living in the land of Israel. More importantly, he asserts that support for Ottomanization in the Hebrew press "represented a genuine feeling which prevailed in the *yishuv* at the time, and was

³⁰ Dolbee and Hazkani, 244.

³¹ Dolbee and Hazkani, 247.

³² Dolbee and Hazkani, 248.

a far cry from being merely a tactical stance or an effort to temporarily conceal the true aims of Zionism in order to appease the Ottoman government.”³³ His argument is based on the rhetoric of four major newspapers that represent the main segments of the *yishuv*: conservative Ashkenazi newspaper *Havatselet*, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah’s *ba-Tsvi* which enjoyed a large audience from the colonizers and supporters of the first *aliyah*, the first wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the second *aliyah*’s *ba-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir*, and the Sephardic *Ha-Herut*.

In the wake of the 1908 revolution, the question of Ottomanization for immigrating Jewish settlers dominated most Zionist conversations. Ben-Yehuda’s Ashkenazi-backed *ba-Tsvi* ignited a pro-Ottomanization discourse that not only diverged from the traditional Ashkenazi-Anti-Ottomanist narrative as proposed by Campos, but also persuaded other segments of the *yishuv* to follow its lead toward Ottomanization. Ben-Yehuda called for Ottomanization to “convince the government that the members of the *yishuv* were loyal citizens, and allow them to take an active part in political processes in the Empire, influence the future of Palestine, and freely pursue their national project.”³⁴

Ben-Yehuda recognized the ethno-religious heterogeneity of the empire and found it a suitable framework for pursuing the Jewish national goals. He saw no contradiction between supporting Jewish nationalism and remaining loyal to the empire because he perceived nationalist aims within a future federal Ottoman political framework. He argued that Jews living in Ottoman Palestine would be able to retain their Jewish identity and support the federal system just like Jewish Americans had done in the United States. He proclaimed:

The call to accept Ottoman citizenship does not mean assimilation...What is the meaning of the term Ottoman? It is not the name for a nationality, a race, or a nation in the natural sense of the word...It is a political term, no more...Jews, be Ottoman! Be the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, so you can be Hebrew in the land of your forefathers.³⁵

According to Ben-Yehuda, the Ottoman Empire was to become a mosaic of different nations under Ottoman political authority, giving the Jewish people the opportunity to revive Jewish nationalism in their ancient homeland. Here, the term “nationalism” is used by Ben-Yehuda in a cultural, social, and economic context, devoid of irredentist political sentiment.³⁶

Ben-Bassat claims that, following *ba-Tsvi*’s example, the Ashkenazi newspaper *Havatselet* stated that under the post-revolutionary regime it was “possible to pursue

³³ Yuval Ben-Bassat, “Rethinking the Concept of Ottomanization: The Yishuv in the Aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 3 (2009), 461.

³⁴ Ben-Bassat, 466.

³⁵ Ben-Bassat, 466.

³⁶ Ben-Bassat, 466.

the Jewish national revival in *Eretz-Yisrael* and concomitantly preserve the religious character of the *yishuv*.³⁷ Ben-Bassat concludes this is a clear representation of the “old *yishuv*’s” belief in the possibility of implementing the Jewish national project within the new political reality of the post-revolutionary period.

Finally, Ben-Bassat argues that, although hesitant at first, the Ashkenazi *ba-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir* accepted Ottomanization after the revolution because it believed that the future of politics in the empire rested in a decentralized federal system similar to what Ben-Yehuda and the Arabs’ Decentralization Party had envisioned at the time.³⁸ However, unlike *ba-Tsvi*’s emphasis on cooperating with the current Ottoman officials, *ba-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir* found it more practical to cooperate with their Palestinian neighbors with whom they would be sharing national borders within the broader empire. Naturally, the Sephardic *Ha-Herut* was inclined to support Ottomanization without Ben-Yehuda’s persuasion.

C. Zionism as told by Rashid Rida

In his article “Zionism as told by Rashid Rida,” Uriya Shavit examines and explains Muhammad Rashid Rida’s radical shifts in views on Zionism from admiration in the late 19th century to revulsion by the end of the post-revolutionary period. The prominent Ottoman Muslim thinker and *al-Manar* editor underwent a transformation in thought that does not align with trends in popular Arab thinking of Zionism. Similarly, the accuracy with which he predicts the future of Zionism in Palestine begs the question if the factors of pre-destined Zionist sovereignty were in place in Palestine by the 1908 revolution.

Shavit’s analysis shows that by 1902, Rida had recognized the cultural and educational strides Jews had made in Europe, had defined the Jewish people as a “mighty nation,” and “underlined the plausibility of the plan to take over Palestine.”³⁹ In the wake of the 1908 revolution, Rida was convinced that the Jews had orchestrated the movement, had plans to take over al-Aqsa mosque as their first step in eradicating Muslims and Christians from Palestine and wielded unmatched influence in the Committee of Union and Progress.⁴⁰

It is important to remember that during this period, the sentiments of Ottomanist brotherhood and shared citizenship were running high. Therefore, I present this article of Rida’s transformation not as a gauge for popular opinion in the empire on what Zionism represented. But rather as a counterweight or reminder that although the post-revolutionary period may have masked Zionist separatist aspirations, hints of political aims in general Zionist thought did exist. Compared to Dolbee and Hazkani and Ben-Bassat, Rida appears as a paranoid conspiracy theorist.

³⁷ Ben-Bassat, 467.

³⁸ Ben-Bassat, 468.

³⁹ Uriya Shavit, “Zionism as told by Rashid Rida,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 34 (2015), 25.

⁴⁰ Shavit, 30.

However, as Rida's fears of a Zionist rule in Palestine became a reality in the aftermath of the empire's fall, his paranoia certainly sheds light on the validity of Campos's claims of a continued existence of separatist aims throughout the post-revolutionary period.

V. Conclusion

Given the benefit of hindsight, historians today are naturally inclined to view the Zionist project in Palestine as having a continuous stream of separatist thought and sentiment, even throughout the post-revolutionary period. For the same reason, historians may also be inclined to disprove such a sentiment for the sake of providing an alternate viewpoint of a narrative that is often taken for granted. My aim in this essay was to investigate this dilemma and present the traditional views through Campos's work along with differing or unique perspectives on the issue of how Palestinian Jewry reconciled Zionist and Ottomanist identities and what this reconciliation said about the existence of separatist political aims in Zionist thought.

The evidence provided by Campos's dissenters did not satisfy the need to prove intent – a near impossibility for any historical account. Although the dissenters indeed confirmed that the Ashkenazi were at least publicly willing to support Ottomanism and express an authentic belief in the alignment of Jewish nationalism and Ottomanism, the fact that separatist political aims eventually superseded other political ties or affinities naturally puts into question the real intent of Zionists in the post-revolutionary period. Certainly, the question of separatist political aims of Palestinian Jewry in the post-revolutionary period is an area that has been underdeveloped and warrants additional examination to track Zionism's development in such a unique, optimistic and yet disappointing period in Ottoman history.