



# The Sephardi Jewish Community in Pre-World War I Jerusalem

## Debates in the Hebrew Press

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On April 1, 1914, a commentator in the Sephardi newspaper *ha-Herut* declared:

*... We have to show to all the Nashashibis, Husaynis and Khalidis that we do not wish to exploit the people of the country [Am ha-Aretz, in Hebrew]... We wish to work and live side by side with our neighbors for the promotion of the economic condition of our empty country, and*

*for the development of the culture and education in the country...<sup>1</sup>*

This short paragraph demonstrates - in part - the unique approach of *ha-Herut* towards the Arab population in pre World War I Palestine. In his article, the writer, known by the pseudonym CBR<sup>2</sup>, represents the attitude of the newspaper and its reading population, the Sephardi community in Jerusalem. The ideas that appear in this paragraph - the hope to live in coexistence with the Arabs and develop Palestine together, the attempt to convince the Muslim elite families of the good intentions of the Jews living in Palestine - are molded by the perception of the Sephardi Jews in Jerusalem, the readers of *ha-Herut*, of the national question in Palestine.

This article focuses on a Zionist unique approach towards the Arab population in pre World War I Palestine and towards the future life of Jews and Arabs in the country. It examines the Sephardi Zionist newspaper *ha-Herut* between 1912-1914 and concentrates on three issues touching on the Arab-Jewish relation: firstly, efforts to convince the Arabs, and especially the Muslims, of the good intentions of the Jews in Palestine; secondly, the debate over Jewish loyalty to the Ottoman Empire; and thirdly, the desire to live in harmonious coexistence with the Arabs. The article also discusses the distinction made by *ha-Herut* between Muslim and Christian Arabs. This distinction is unique and uncommon, and the reasons for it will be discussed below.

### **The Sephardi community in Jerusalem in Pre World War I Palestine**

Estimates of the population in late Ottoman Palestine vary. According to

Ottoman data, there were around 712,000 inhabitants in Palestine before World War I.<sup>3</sup> Muslim Arabs consisted of the largest group and reached 83% of the entire population in 1914.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish population numbered around 80,000-90,000, or about 14% of the total population.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish community had experienced many changes. The waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine since 1882 created the "new Jewish community" (*ha-Yishuv ha-Chadash*), which differed from what was known as "the old community" (*ha-Yishuv ha-Yashan*), which consisted of Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews who settled in Palestine prior to 1882, mainly for religious reasons.<sup>6</sup>

The Sephardi community was the dominant community among the old Yishuv in Palestine and included Jews who immigrated from the Islamic countries, North Africa, the Balkans, Anatolia, and the former Andalusia, as well as indigenous Jews. Although both communities suffered from internal divisions, the Sephardi community was more united than the Ashkenazi one.<sup>7</sup> The Sephardi community lived mostly in the four "holy cities" - Jerusalem, Hebron, Tiberias, and Safed - but its center was in Jerusalem, where it was the hegemonic Jewish group until the end of the Ottoman rule.<sup>8</sup> Most of the Sephardi Jews held Ottoman citizenship, in contrast to the Ashkenazi Jews (from the old and new Yishuv) who held foreign citizenship and were dependent on the protection of European consulates, in Palestine under the privileges of capitulations. The Sephardi community was perceived by the Ottoman authority as the sole representatives of the Jewish community in Palestine and, as Ottoman subjects, were included in the

*millet* unit and granted fairly wide judicial powers.<sup>9</sup>

### ***ha-Herut*: an ethnic and national newspaper**

Published in Jerusalem between 1909-1917, and eventually closed in 6 April 1917 by the Ottoman government, *ha-Herut* was first a weekly, and then a biweekly, paper, until it became a daily paper in 1912. It was the only Jewish newspaper that was published throughout most of World War I.<sup>10</sup> Unlike other Zionist papers at that period, *ha-Herut* was not affiliated to any political party; the early version of *ha-Herut* was a Ladino newspaper, *al-Liberal*, which was published after the 1908 Young Turk revolution.

The main power behind the paper was its publisher, Moshe Azriel, who had owned a publishing house in Jerusalem since 1900 that became one of the largest Hebrew publishing houses in Palestine. The newspaper's first editor was Abraham Elmaliach; he was soon replaced by Haim Ben-Atar. Ben-Atar had begun his professional career as an assistant in the Azriel's publishing house before taking up translating literature to Ladino and, later, becoming a journalist and columnist.<sup>11</sup>

In its first issue, *ha-Herut* declared that it was a national paper, focused on reviving the Hebrew language:

*As a Hebrew language newspaper ha-Herut will reflect the hopes and feelings of our people. It will dedicate much attention to Jerusalem, to the Jewish communities, and to the development of trade, industry, and agriculture in the land of our*

*ancestors. As a general newspaper, ha-Herut will attempt to report from around the world ... all its information will be derived from the original sources, telegrams, newspapers and from special reports of writers who have promised to assist us.*<sup>12</sup>

The statement went on to stress that *ha-Herut* was not affiliated to any political party and that it aimed to create a platform for free speech and discussion.<sup>13</sup> *Ha-Herut* viewed itself not as aimed exclusively to the Sephardi community but as a Zionist-national paper for the entire Jewish population in the *Yishuv*. However, it was clear that the Sephardi community was its main target population and that the newspaper's establishers regarded it as a platform for the Sephardi community and a way to express their views and take part in the public life in Palestine. Furthermore, the writers of *ha-Herut* were drawn from the young intelligentsia in the Sephardi community of Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup>

Editorially, *ha-Herut* focused on several main topics. The first was the attempt to encourage the use of Hebrew in the school system in Palestine, as part as what was known as "the language struggle." This became an issue following an attempt by the German "Ezra" society to encourage the use of German in the Jewish schools. *Ha-Herut* paid much attention to this issue and perceived it as central to the Jewish revival in Palestine.<sup>15</sup> Another main focus in the newspaper was the question of loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, an issue that will be discussed in length below. The newspaper usually expressed pro-Ottoman views and encouraged the foreign subjects among the

Jews in Palestine to accept the Ottoman citizenship. At the same time, it also vigorously defended the Jewish religion and attacked anyone who called for conversion.<sup>16</sup>

*Ha-Herut* was also concerned about the "Arab question" and the future life of Jews and Arabs in Palestine. As part of its discussion regarding the language issue, *ha-Herut* presented a debate about the status of Arabic among the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, as well as the question of how to influence the Arab press and to expose it to the Zionist agenda.<sup>17</sup> Among many articles and editorials that discussed the Arab question, the newspaper presented translations from the Arabic press in Palestine with the aim of exposing its readers to the debates taking place among the Palestinian Arabs and alerting the Zionist leadership to the strong Arab objection to Zionism. However, I argue that the motive of *ha-Herut* and its writers was to try and encourage more understanding between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and create more integration between the two communities - a goal that lies at the core of its unique character in relation to the Arab question.

### **Jewish-Arab relations and future life with the Arabs in Palestine**

Following harsh attacks by the increasingly angry Palestinian Arabic press on the Jewish community in Palestine, *ha-Herut* argued there was a need to influence the Arabic newspapers and expose the Jewish readers to what was written in those papers. The two newspapers frequently mentioned in *ha-Herut* were the Christian-owned *al-Karmil* and *Filastin*. These newspapers, as well as the Syrian Muslim-owned *al-Muqtabas*,

spread anti-Zionist propaganda among the Palestinian Arabs.<sup>18</sup> Their criticism of the Jews focused on several issues, according to *ha-Herut*: the Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine; disloyalty of the Jews to the Ottoman Empire; and criticism of the Arab land sales to the Jews.<sup>19</sup> Following the attacks by the Christian-owned newspapers, *ha-Herut* distinguished between the Muslim and the Christian Arabs, identifying the Christians as the "worst enemy" of the Jewish community.<sup>20</sup>

In response to the harsh attacks of the Arabic press, the Palestinian Office in Jaffa, directed by Arthur Ruppin, established an Arabic Press Bureau. As part of this bureau, Jewish writers who were fluent in Arabic, such as Nissim Malul and Shimon Moyal, published articles in the Arabic press explaining the Zionist agenda and ideology; these articles were later published in translation in *ha-Herut*. However, *ha-Herut* took this debate to a more profound level in its discussion of the future Jewish-Arab relations in Palestine and the identity of the Jewish *Yishuv*.

One of the most debated topics was how best to influence Arab readers and approach the Arab community in Palestine. The first suggestion made in *ha-Herut* was to establish an Arabic-Hebrew paper that would expose the Arab reader to the "real intentions" of the Zionist movement and the Jewish community in Palestine. The second idea was to publish articles in the existing Arab newspapers to clarify the Zionist attitudes.

Views varied: in an essay dated 1 July 1912, the prominent writer Ben-Shabat declared that, if in the past he approved the idea of publishing a new Arabic newspaper, he had changed his mind and was now

supporting a "penetration" of the existing Arabic press.

Ben-Shabat claimed that the initial idea of publishing a new newspaper had been inspired by the constant attacks against Jews in the Arabic press, the Zionist leadership in Palestine never carried out this initiative. However, Ben-Shabat claimed, following the triumph of Ataturk's Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Istanbul and the publication of various articles in the Arabic press, which were written by Nissim Malul, the attacks against the Jews in the Arabic press significantly decreased. These articles, in which Malul praised the Jewish community and explained its necessity for the promotion of the life in Palestine, convinced Ben-Shabat that the best way to influence the was by publishing in the existing Arab newspapers.<sup>21</sup>

CBR expressed a different view was expressed in the 17 December 1912 issue of *ha-Herut*:<sup>22</sup> in reference to the renewed attacks in the Arabic press, CBR claims that the only way to influence the press was to publish an Arabic newspaper. Such a paper could be distributed among Palestinian Muslims, argued CBR, and used to moderate attacks towards the Jews. Moreover, an Arabic newspaper could have proved to the Muslims that the Jews were loyal to the Ottoman Empire, contrary to the accusations of the Arabic newspapers.

A profound and important contribution to the ongoing debate regarding the relations to the Arabs was offered in a three-part essay written by Dr. Nissim Malul himself.<sup>23</sup> Malul argued that, if the Jews want to settle in Palestine, they must learn the language that is spoken in the country - Arabic - and called for assimilation with the "people of the country," achieved by learning and speaking

their language. Malul also claimed that language is not a major component in national identity: "National consciousness is demonstrated by activities, not by the language spoken by the people," he wrote.<sup>24</sup>

This is, no doubt, a unique view that seems to contradict the spirit of *ha-Herut*, which perceived the spread of the Hebrew language among the Jews in Palestine as one of its main objectives. And indeed, at the end of Malul's essays, the *ha-Herut*'s editor of briefly commented on the idea of assimilation; he agreed that the Arabic language should be taught and used among the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine, but as the *second* language and not as the first and main one: the national language, claimed the editor, must be Hebrew. Assimilation with the Arabs would endanger the status of the Jews in Palestine and undermine their culture and traditions.<sup>25</sup>

Another harsh critique of Malul's series of essays was published by A. Leodopol, an occasional contributor, arguing that Hebrew was the basis of the Jewish revival in Palestine and one of the national assets of the Jews. Leopold accused Nissim Malul and *ha-Herut* (due to the editor's agreement to publish Malul's essays) of profaning Hebrew.<sup>26</sup>

Another issue raised in Malul's essays is the differing reaction of Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews to the idea of a joint Arabic-Hebrew newspaper. Malul claimed that, while most of the Ashkenazi Jews opposed the idea, the Sephardi Jews supported it. He pointed out that since Sephardi Jews who lived in countries such as Syria, Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco and were not involved in any nationalist activity spoke Arabic as a native language, establishing a newspaper that they could

read and that would expose them to the nationalist ideas was essential.<sup>27</sup>

### Loyalty to the Ottoman Empire

The two main themes on which *ha-Herut* writers wanted to focus in the Arabic newspapers were: Jewish loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and possible Jewish contribution to the advancement of Palestine, for the benefit of all inhabitants, Arab or Jew.

The first issue is exemplified in various ways: during the Balkan wars, for example, the newspaper expressed its concern over the weakening of the Empire and the future of the reforms promised by the CUP. In an article dated 9 September 1912, a *ha-Herut* writer objected to the internal divisions and rivalries within the Empire caused by the rivalry between the CUP and the decentralist forces, claiming that they were weakening the Empire while its external enemies - the Christians, who were also perceived as the enemies of the Jews and Muslims in the Empire. The writer then declared that the Jews were loyal Ottoman citizens, who were willing to sacrifice everything to ensure the Empire's continued success and health.<sup>28</sup> This same spirit of loyalty is reflected in another article, which describes the attitude towards Jews of the Christian-owned newspapers in Palestine:

*We hate the homeland? Is there any other people who were more loyal, caring and devoted to the Empire than the Jewish people [A'm Israel, in Hebrew]? Do we, who have sacrificed so much for the country, hate the homeland?*<sup>29</sup>

These efforts to prove Jewish loyalty to

the Ottoman homeland appeared again a few years later in response to the CUP's loosening of regulations on Jewish immigration to Palestine. In an article dated April 1914, the newspaper enthusiastically encouraged Jews in Palestine to adopt Ottoman citizenship:

*It is not enough that the majority of the inhabitants in Palestine is Jewish. The important factor is that the number of Jews who live in Palestine would be Ottoman. This is the main basis for our settlement in the country, and the essence of our success....*<sup>30</sup>

Ottomanization was also perceived as another means of convincing the Arab population to drop their objection to Jewish immigration to Palestine.<sup>31</sup> In the same 1914 article, the newspaper argued:

*...we came here to live and revive the land as Ottoman citizens, to fill the duties that this citizenship requires us, and to enjoy the rights that this citizenship provides us... We would like to work side by side with our neighbors for the promotion of our country...*<sup>32</sup>

Ottoman citizenship was perceived as the most important component of the Jewish identity, which should define the future of the Jewish *Yishuv*, as well as the future relations with Arabs living in Palestine - a view that seems unique to the Sephardi community.<sup>33</sup>

The other topic that *ha-Herut* sought to express in the Arab press was the argument that the Jewish community in Palestine could develop the country both culturally and

economically. It was a somewhat paternalistic approach, presenting the Jewish population as more advanced and sophisticated than the Arab population.

In a series of articles (17, 18, and 19 September 1913), *ha-Herut* claimed, since the start of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the late nineteenth century, the cultural and economic levels of Palestine had changed vastly, with benefits to the Arab population. Jewish farmers had developed new agricultural and mechanical techniques, species of plants and irrigation methods, and remedies for pests and diseases. Following the immigration of prominent Jewish physicians from Europe, the level of medicine improved. Jewish residents of Palestine, most of them Ottoman citizens, represented the country in academic conferences around the world. The education system grew, with the addition of the first technological university in the Empire (the Technikum), as well as a teacher's seminar, art institutions, and music schools.<sup>34</sup>

The article series argued that these developments benefited not only the inhabitants of Palestine, Jews as well as Arabs, but also the Ottoman government, who profited from taxes and gained in loyal and skilled bureaucrats, as Jews joined the Ottoman administration.<sup>35</sup> For all these reasons, *ha-Herut* believed that the advancement of the Jewish community in Palestine would lead to the advancement of the Arab community of the country, as well as the Ottoman Empire.

### **The distinction between Christians and Muslims in *ha-Herut***

As mentioned above, the Sephardi writers made a clear distinction between Muslim

and Christian Arabs; the latter were perceived as "the worst enemies" who incited the Muslims against the Zionist movement. These accusations were based on articles that appeared in various Arabic newspapers, mainly the Christian-owned *al-Karmil* and *Filastin* in Palestine and Muslim-owned *al-Muqtabas* in Syria.<sup>36</sup>

The Sephardi Jews were not the only ones to label Christians as enemies: Arthur Ruppin also held the Christians responsible for the hatred of Jews and the ongoing opposition to Jewish immigration. Ruppin blamed it on the religious education that the Christian population got in Jesuit schools, which encouraged hatred of Jews.<sup>37</sup> But was this distinction between Muslims and Christians justified? Were the Christian-owned newspapers really more aggressive towards the Jews than the Muslim-owned ones? Why did the Sephardi Jews in particular make this point?

This distinction was a common theme with several writers.<sup>38</sup> In his book *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, Neville Mandel claims that a newspaper's attitude towards Zionism was related to the religion of its editor. Basing his conclusions on reports about the Arab press issued by the Palestinian Office in Jaffa, and written mainly by Nissim Malul, Mandel argues that there was an additional correlation between the attitude towards Zionism and the CUP. Referring mainly to newspapers published in Damascus and Beirut, Mandel says that anti-CUP newspapers were edited by Muslims and expressed anti-Zionist views, whereas pro-CUP newspapers were edited by Christians and were either friendly or neutral towards Zionism.<sup>39</sup>

In *Palestinian Identity - The Construction of Modern National*

*Consciousness*, Rashid Khalidi discusses this argument at length and, following a careful survey of ten newspapers from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria, he opposes Mandel's view. Khalidi claims that, apart from one exception (the Egyptian *al-Muqattam*), all newspapers surveyed expressed anti-Zionists attitudes.<sup>40</sup>

Khalidi also objects to Mandel's linkage of attitudes towards the CUP and attitudes towards the Zionist movement. In the case of the Palestinian Christian newspaper *al-Karmil*, Khalidi tracks the change in the editor's position on the CUP from a positive position between 1908-1909 to an opposing view by 1911; he proves, however, that there was no change in the newspaper's position on the Jews and the Zionist movement. Both *al-Karmil* and *Filastin* were edited by Christians and were strong opponents of Zionism.<sup>41</sup>

In a 1914 review of the Arab press published in the Jewish *ha-Schiloah* newspaper, Malul argued a similar view.<sup>42</sup> He divided the Arab newspapers in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria into four groups, according to their attitudes towards the Jews and the Zionist movement: the "free papers," which disregard the issue; the "medium papers," which do not express their own views but print various articles that oppose or support the question; "extremist papers," which strongly oppose the Zionist movement and the Jews; and "protector papers," which support the Jews. After checking the religious affiliation of the editor or owner of the newspapers, Malul concluded that there was no clear-cut correlation between the religious affiliation and the attitude of the newspaper towards the Jews: among the 15 "extremists papers," 11 were Muslims and only four Christians. Among the seven

Palestinian newspapers, Christian newspapers were both "free" (like *al-Quds* and *al-Akhbar*) and "extremist" Christian papers (*al-Karmil* and *Filastin*). The only Muslim-owned newspaper checked in Palestine, *al-I'tidal*, was considered a "free newspaper."

Malul concluded that not all the Christian newspapers were against the Jewish *Yishuv*, whereas not all the Muslim papers supported it. Nonetheless, he still claimed that the Christians were indeed the main opponents of the Zionist movement.<sup>43</sup>

Based on the newspapers, then, it seems that there was no real justification for the distinction between the Christians and Muslims. However, it existed in the eyes of the Sephardim. How can this be explained?

One explanation has to do with the life experience of the Sephardi Jews, for while Jews and Muslims were closely linked to each other in the daily life, the Christians were always more remote - as is evident from Jacob Yehoshua's various descriptions of the life in Jerusalem.<sup>44</sup> However, another explanation could also be related to the Ottoman identity held by the Sephardi Jews, as well to the external condition of the Ottoman Empire in the period under discussion.

As described above, the Sephardi community placed great importance on its Ottoman identity and its loyalty to the Empire, and writers in *ha-Herut* tried to encourage the Ashkenazi immigrants to adopt Ottoman citizenship and abandon their foreign ones. During the period discussed in this article, mainly between 1912-1914, the Ottoman Empire faced many challenges, external as well as internal.

The two Balkan wars, and the loss of most of its Christian territories, shook the



Empire's stability. The conflict was also extremely harsh for the Empire's Muslim inhabitants, most of whom lost their homes and became refugees. The wars also signaled a growing tension between Muslims and Christians within the Empire, with Christians perceived as sympathizers of Europe, and sometimes collaborators.

In his book, Mandel claims that, despite the religious tensions in the larger Empire, Muslims and Christians in Palestine became closer through their common objection to the Jewish immigration.<sup>45</sup> However, based on the data collected, it seems that this was not the view held by the Sephardi community. It is thus suggested that growing anti-Christian sentiment throughout the Empire influenced the Sephardi population in Palestine, who also developed hostile feelings towards Christians. As loyal Ottoman citizens, the Sephardim viewed the Christians as part of the general betrayal process in the Empire that took place during the Balkan Wars.

Moreover, the Sephardi resentment towards the Christian Arabs can also be explained by the collective experience of Ottoman Jews in the Empire. Throughout the years, the Christian communities in the Empire had persecuted and competed with the Jews for economic, religious and ethnic reasons. The Jews perceived Ottoman rule as the best protector against Christian anti-Semitism and sought its protection when the Empire lost its European territories.<sup>46</sup> The Christians also enjoyed the protection and assistance of the western powers, which the Ottoman Empire perceived as imperialists. Thus, the Sephardim's reaction towards the Christians was influenced by this larger historical context.

### **Discussion: an alternative approach for future life in Palestine?**

From all the above, it seems that *ha-Herut* presented a unique approach for future life in Palestine. The writers of the newspaper tried to present the "new *Yishuv*" and the Zionist leadership with an alternative way of living with the Arabs in the country. The Arabs (in particular the Muslims, as was examined above) were perceived as potential partners for cooperation, with whom the Sephardim hoped to live in coexistence. Loyalty to the Ottoman Empire was of central importance to the Sephardim; they saw Ottoman citizenship as the "uniting component" for the people who lived in Palestine and essential for the country's progress.

Hence, the Sephardi community in Jerusalem, represented by *ha-Herut*, offered an interesting alternative to the more dominant approach of the European Zionist leadership to the national question. How can this approach be explained: after all, *ha-Herut* had a Zionist agenda as well, though different from that of the European Zionists? The main explanation lies in the experience of the Sephardim in Jerusalem.

The Sephardi community in Jerusalem, the readers of *ha-Herut*, lived very closely with the Arabs in the city. This proximity was both geographical and cultural, since some of the Sephardi Jews had lived among the Arabs in their countries of origin. One can learn about the Sephardi life in Jerusalem from the various books and memoirs written by Jacob Yehoshua. In his books, Yehoshua describes his life in the Sephardi community in pre-World War I Jerusalem. In his memoir *Childhood in Old Jerusalem*, Yehoshua discusses the close relations between Muslims and Sephardi Jews and describes the joint compounds in which the

Jewish and Muslim families lived:

*There were joint compounds of Jews and Muslims. We were like one family. We spent time together. Our mothers shared their thought with the Muslim women, and vice versa ... Our children played with their [the Muslim] children in the yard, and if children from the neighborhood hurt us the Muslim children who lived in our compound protected us. They were our allies.*<sup>47</sup>

Through his descriptions of daily life in Jerusalem, one learns about the close relations between the Muslims and the Sephardim: the children played together, the Jews used the Muslim public baths (*hamam*), and Muslims were treated by Jewish physicians.<sup>48</sup> Every Jewish family was related to a Muslim family, either in friendship or trading ties.<sup>49</sup> Jewish mothers breast-fed Muslim babies (and vice versa) if the mother died or was unable.<sup>50</sup> Muslims owned most of the houses in the old city of Jerusalem, and, as result, the Jews rented their houses or apartments from them. As Yehoshua also describes in much detail, Muslims and Jews shared celebrations in the Old City: he recounts how Muslim neighbors joined in the Jewish Purim celebrations, calling it *Eid al-Sukkar* (the sugar holiday, in Arabic);<sup>51</sup> how Muslims tasted the *matsa*, the Jewish Passover special bread;<sup>52</sup> how Jews and Muslims held joint parties in their compounds;<sup>53</sup> and how Muslims were invited to Jewish houses to eat the *shabat* dinner.<sup>54</sup>

The Muslim-Christian distinction is found in Yehoshua's books as well. "Our relations with our Muslim neighbors were different

than our relations with the Christians," he claims, due primarily to the close geographical proximity of the Sephardim to the Muslims and to the segregation between Muslim and Christian neighborhoods.<sup>55</sup>

A great majority of the Sephardi Jews was fluent in spoken and written Arabic. According to Yehoshua, many of the Sephardi Jews followed the Arabic press closely and even read the newspapers published in Syria or Lebanon.<sup>56</sup> There are frequent mentions in *ha-Herut* of this Sephardic ability to communicate in Arabic, particularly in relation to the initiatives of publishing a joint Arabic-Hebrew paper or writing in existing Arabic papers; two main figures mentioned in this respect were Nissim Malul and Shimon Moyal, both from the Sephardi community in Jerusalem.<sup>57</sup>

The close proximity to the Muslim population may offer one explanation for the unique character of the Sephardi national view. As was examined above, the Sephardi community reflected strong national feelings. As far as one can learn from the opinions expressed in *ha-Herut*, they did not wish to fully assimilate with the Arabs: the rejection of assimilation was clearly expressed in the reaction of *ha-Herut's* editor towards Malul's article on language assimilation.<sup>58</sup> Yet, despite these expressions of strong national feelings, the Sephardim seem to have realized the importance and necessity of coexisting, and cooperating, with the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. Although their attitude towards the Arabs might be viewed as somewhat arrogant (particularly the way they perceived the Jewish community as advancing Palestine), they believed that Jewish life in Palestine was tightly linked with the Arabs. According to the Sephardim, Jewish life in Palestine was subject to the

ability to cooperate with the Arabs. The Sephardim did not wish to undermine any Jewish national characteristics (such as the Hebrew language, for example), yet they wanted to respect and learn the customs and practices of the Arab population.

Furthermore, it seems that the Sephardim were "torn" between two identities: their local Palestinian-Zionist-Jewish identity and their Ottoman identity; on the one hand, they were Zionist, or Jewish nationalists, but on the other hand, they were loyal to the Empire and to the Ottoman identity. This "mix" between Jewish nationalism, Ottomanism, and cooperation with the Arabs exemplifies the complexity of the Sephardi identity in the context of this particular period and setting.

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Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> "The Time is Here", *ha-Herut*, Vol. 145, April 1, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> It is assumed the CBR is the pseudonym of the editor of *ha-Herut*, Chaim Ben-Atar.

<sup>3</sup> Justin McCarthy, *The Population of Palestine* (New York, 1990), p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> Israel Kolatt, "The Organization of the Jewish Population in Palestine and the Development of its Political Consciousness before World War I", in: Moshe Maoz (ed.), *Studies on Palestine During the Ottoman Period*, (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 211. McCarthy offers a somewhat different estimation of 60,000 Jews in 1914 (McCarthy, p. 24). In his book, Gorny claims that there were 85,000-90,000 Jews in Palestine, in comparison to 590,000 Arabs (Muslims and Christians). See: Yosef Gorny, *The Arab Question and the Jewish Problem*, (Tel Aviv, 1985), p. 21 (Hebrew)

<sup>6</sup> Yehoshua Kaniel, *In Transition - The Jews of Erets Israel in the Nineteenth Century between Old and New, and between Settlement of the Holy Land and Zionism*, (Jerusalem, 2000), pp. 17-30 (Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Sharabi, "The Seclusion of the Mizrahi

Communities from the Sephardi Community 1860-1914", in: *Pe'amim*, No. 21, 1984, pp. 31-49 (Hebrew); Mordechai Eliav, "Inter-Communal Relations in the Jewish Yishuv in Erets Israel in the 19th Century", in: *Pe'amim*, No. 11, 1982, pp. 118-134 (Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> Eliav, pp. 118-120.

<sup>9</sup> Kolatt, pp. 211-213.

<sup>10</sup> Yitzhak Bezael, 'On the Uniqueness of 'ha-Herut' and on Haim Ben Atar as its Editor', in: *Pe'amim*, No. 40, 1989, pp. 134-135.

<sup>11</sup> Gideon Kressel, *History of the Hebrew Press in Eretz Israel*, (Jerusalem, 1964) pp. 108-109 (Hebrew); David Yudolevitch, (ed.) *Collection of Articles on the History of the Press in Eretz Israel*, Vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1936), pp. 138-141, 176-177 (Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> Nurit Gubrin (ed.), *Literary Manifests*, (Tel Aviv, 1988) p. 49 (Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Bezael, p. 127, 129.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137; Yudolevitch, p. 181; Kressel, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Bezael, pp. 137-139.

<sup>17</sup> Yaakov Ro'i, "The Attempts of the Zionist Institutions to Effect the Arab Press in the Land of Israel throughout the years 1908-1914," in: *Zion*, Vol. 32, 1967, p. 213 (Hebrew); Bezael, pp. 138-139.

<sup>18</sup> The reference to a newspaper as a Christian or Muslim one is made according to the editor and owner of the newspaper. In the case of *al-Karmil* and *Filastin*, the editors were Christians: Najib Nassar (*al-Karmil*) and Yusuf and 'Isa al-'Isa (*Filastin*). The editor of *al-Muqtabas* was Muḥammad Kurd 'Ali.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example: 'On the Arab Hostility towards the Jews', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 74, 17 December 1912; 'On our Current Situation in the Country', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 128, 11 March 1914.

<sup>20</sup> The questions whether the Christians were more aggressive in their objection to the Jews than the Muslims, and whether there is a basis for *ha-Herut's* claim for such a distinction, will be discussed below.

<sup>21</sup> 'On Our Current Situation in the Country', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 153, 1 July 1912.

<sup>22</sup> 'On the Arab Hostility towards the Jews', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 74, 17 December 1912. As was mentioned above, it is assumed that this is the pseudonym of the editor of *ha-Herut*, Chaim Ben-Atar.

<sup>23</sup> 'Our Current Situation in the country', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 221-223, 17-19 June 1913.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 221, 17 June 1913.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 223, 19 June 1913. Yosef Gorny analyzes

Malul's essay, and ascribes him to what he calls "the assimilating-altruistic view regarding the Arab question." See: Yosef Gorny, "The Roots of the Jewish-Arab National Conflict's Consciousness and its Reflection in the Hebrew Press between the Years 1900-1918," in: *Zionism*, Vol. 4, 1975, pp. 81-82 (Hebrew).

<sup>26</sup> 'Those who Profane our Language', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 230, 16 June 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Malul, Vol. 222, 18 June 1913.

<sup>28</sup> 'The End of the Year', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 214, 9 September 1912.

<sup>29</sup> 'We and Them', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 277, 22 August 1913. The word "homeland" (*Moledet*, in Hebrew, *Watan*, in Arabic) is translated in Turkish to the word *Vatan*. Hence, it is possible that the writer relates the Sephardi community specifically, and the Jewish community generally, to the ongoing discourse regarding Ottomanist patriotism.

<sup>30</sup> 'The Time is Here', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 145, 1 April 1914. It is interesting to notice the word 'majority' here, since the Jews in Palestine were certainly not the majority in the country. At the same article, CBR also claims that many of the foreign citizens who immigrated to Palestine wanted to adopt the Ottoman citizenship, but their request was rejected by the Ottoman government.

<sup>31</sup> 'On the Attacks in the Arab Press', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 178, 18 May 1914.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Time is Here', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 145, 1 April 1914.

<sup>33</sup> As was mentioned above, the Sephardi community held Ottoman citizenship, whereas the Ashkenazi community usually held foreign citizenship. The citizenship issue and the question of Ottoman identity will be discussed below.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Hebrew Yishuv in Palestine', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 299, 230 17,18 September 1913.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 301, 19 September 1913.

<sup>36</sup> The reference to a newspaper as a Christian or Muslim one is made according to the editor and owner of the newspaper. In the case of al-Karmil and Filastin, the editors were Christians, Najib Nassar (*al-Karmil*) and Yusuf and 'Isa al-'Isa (*Filastin*). The editors of *al-Muktabas* was Muhammad Kurd 'Ali.

<sup>37</sup> Yaakov Ro'i, "The Zionist Attitude towards the Arabs, 1908-1914," in: *Keshet*, No. 11, Vol. 1, Fall 1968, pp. 171-172 (Hebrew). However, this does not explain the attitudes of specifically the Orthodox Christians towards the Jews.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example: Neville Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 129-133; Ro'i (*Keshet*), pp. 171-174; and Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity - The Construction of*

*Modern National Consciousness*, (New York, 1997), pp. 124-137.

<sup>39</sup> Mandel, p. 130.

<sup>40</sup> Khalidi, p. 124.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 124-126.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Arab Press', *ha-Schiloah*, Vol. 31, July-December 1914, pp. 364-374, 439-450.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 447-450.

<sup>44</sup> For example: Jacob Yehoshua, *Jerusalem in Days of Old*, (Jerusalem, 1977) (Hebrew), *Nostalgic Jerusalem*, (Jerusalem, 1988) (Hebrew). See further discussion on this issue below.

<sup>45</sup> Mandel, p. 138.

<sup>46</sup> Feroz Ahmad, 'Unionist Relations with the Greek, Armenian, and Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1914', in: Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1982), p.426.

<sup>47</sup> Jacob Yehoshua, *My Childhood in Old Jerusalem*, Part B - "The House and the Street in Old Jerusalem" (Jerusalem, 1966) p. 215 (Hebrew).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 44, 89-90, 131-132.

<sup>49</sup> Yehosua, *Jerusalem in Days of Old*, pp. 135-138.

<sup>50</sup> Yehosua, *My Childhood in Old Jerusalem*, p. 215, *Nostalgic Jerusalem*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>51</sup> Yehosua, *Nostalgic Jerusalem*, p. 140.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> Yehosua, *Jerusalem in Days of Old*, p. 135.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 126.

<sup>57</sup> Nissim Malul was born in Zefat, but immigrated with his family to Egypt as a child. He was the first lecturer at the Hebrew cathedra at the University of Cairo. When he returned to Palestine in 1911, Malul worked for the Palestinian office in Jaffa as an Arabic translator, and wrote in *ha-Herut*, among other papers. Shimon Moyal was a physician, and a prominent writer. In response to the anti-Zionist articles in the Arabic press he was a strong supporter of the idea to publish an Arabic-Hebrew newspaper. For a short while, between January and November 1914, Moyal issued an Arabic-Hebrew newspaper called *Sawt al-Uthmaniya*. Jacob Yehoshua, *The Arabic Press in Palestine During the Ottoman Regime 1908-1918*, (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 120-125 (Arabic); Ro'i (*Zion*), pp. 215, 220.

<sup>58</sup> 'Our Current Situation in the country', *ha-Herut*, Vol. 221-223, 17-19 June 1913.

I'M ELI BRONSTEIN, FROM  
THE BRONX, AND  
JERUSALEM BELONGS  
TO ME!



I'M NATHAN JABLONSKI,  
FROM RUSSIA, AND JERUSALEM  
BELONGS TO ME!



I'M SARAH FALASHA  
FROM ETHIOPIA, AND  
JERUSALEM BELONGS  
TO ME!



I'M JACOB COHEN,  
FROM THE AMAZON,  
AND JERUSALEM  
BELONGS TO ME!



I'M ITZHAK SHAPIRO,  
FROM THE NORTH POLE,  
AND JERUSALEM  
BELONGS TO ME!



I'M MOHAMMAD SALAM, FROM  
JERUSALEM, AND I GUESS I MUST  
HAVE BEEN CONFUSED ALL THIS TIME...



في الأسواق  
العدد ٤٩ من مجلة الدراسات الفلسطينية

مجلّة  
الدراسات الفلسطينية

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مقابلة مع سماحة السيد

محمد حسين فضل الله

بشأن أحداث أيلول/سبتمبر ٢٠٠١

أحداث أيلول/سبتمبر ٢٠٠١

والصراع الفلسطيني - الإسرائيلي

كميل منصور

الملف

شذرات من النقاش السياسي

في إسرائيل

وتحولات في معسكر السلام

خطاب دنيس روس

في العشاء السنوي

للجمعية البريطانية الإسرائيلية

مجلّة  
الدراسات الفلسطينية

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شتاء  
2002

شتاء 2002