Rethinking the Concept of Ottomanization: The Yishuv in the Aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908

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An examination of the discourse on Ottomanization in the sectarian Hebrew press in Palestine in the aftermath of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 shows that contrary to frequent scholarly claims, the pursuit of Jewish nationalism within the Ottoman framework was largely accepted among wide segments of the yishuv. Although the proponents varied considerably in their understanding of Ottomanism, level of support and motivation, overall it came to be viewed as their common denominator. The major bone of contention between the yishuv’s various segments revolved around the question of who would lead the community in the future and shape its policies and character, a fact well testified by their ongoing harsh mutual ideological attacks on the front pages of the Hebrew press.

Thus, Ottomanization, despite its disadvantages and the genuine fears it elicited among many, was considered the best way to preserve the interests of the Jewish community and further pursue the national project in light of the rapid political changes taking place in the Empire. This support for Ottomanization in the Hebrew press, I argue, represented a genuine feeling which prevailed in the yishuv at the time, and was 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. In this regard, the Revolution of 1908 constitutes a clear watershed in the yishuv’s position vis-à-vis the Empire compared to the policies pursued during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909).

The discourse on Ottomanization and integration in the Empire that developed in the yishuv following the Revolution of 1908 can serve as an especially instructive case study. It shows that at the time the national awakening of minorities in the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of the Revolution was more than a simple expression of irredentist aspirations. Some minorities sought to pursue their national goals within the structure of the Empire, for reasons which mainly had to do with realpolitik, the expectations that the Empire would be revived, and their evaluation of their relative power and status within the Empire. The yishuv’s diverse nature and fragmentation into several subgroups, as well as the fact that it was very small in size and did not have a demographic majority in any given region, make such a study particularly
intriguing. A great deal can be learned about the dilemmas confronting minorities in the Empire after 1908 by examining the case of the *yishuv*, its vision for national activity within the framework of the Empire, the way in which it dealt with possible contradictions that this vision entailed, and its preferred arrangements for resolving the relationships between the central Ottoman government and the Empire’s provinces. Above all, however, it highlights the complexity of the ill-defined term Ottomanism and demonstrates how its interpretation by different groups in the Empire varied.

It is hard to imagine any other event in the late history of the Ottoman Empire that created such high expectations for change and triggered so many political and social processes as did the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. The reinstitution of the 1876 Constitution, after the long despotic reign of Abdülhamid II, was especially welcomed by the ethnic and religious minorities in the Empire. When the strict censorship of the media and the ban on political activity were lifted nominally for the first time, members of all the minority groups in the Empire became equal citizens entitled to elect their own representatives to the Ottoman parliament and free to express their political opinions. The fact that the new rulers were more secular and modernist and less committed to Abdülhamid II’s pan-Islamic policies raised expectations even more, especially among the Empire’s non-Muslim subjects.

However, by allowing greater freedom of expression and easing the restrictions on political activity, the Revolution unintentionally encouraged national awakening throughout the Empire, and created new challenges for both the Empire and the religious and ethnic minorities remaining within its shrinking borders. As Kayali writes, ‘the introduction of mass politics, a liberal press, and greater educational opportunities enhanced ethnic communal consciousness among certain groups, whereas they were promoted by the government with the purpose of achieving greater societal integration and administrative amalgamation’.¹ Faced with the secession of several provinces in the Balkans, the new regime opposed any manifestation of national awakening among the Empire’s minorities, fearing it would further threaten its political and territorial integrity.

Unlike several other ethnic and religious minorities in the Ottoman Empire, Jews were traditionally considered devoid of irredentist aspirations. The fact that they were not geographically concentrated in one area contributed to their image as loyal subjects. Nonetheless, the gradual emergence of a nationally motivated Jewish community in Palestine at the end of the nineteen century, whose members came predominantly from countries hostile to the Ottoman Empire, considerably altered this situation. This became an especially acute problem in the aftermath of the Revolution, due to the rapid national awakening throughout the Empire, including in the Arab provinces where first signs of national awareness burgeoned among certain educated circles.

Following the Revolution, the *yishuv*, perhaps more than any other minority in the Empire, faced a crucial dilemma. At the time, Jews constituted only a small percentage of the population in the districts which later became known as Mandatory Palestine and were divided along several lines.² Given Palestine’s demography under the newly established parliamentary regime, the *yishuv’s* representation at both the municipal and national levels was expected to be
negligible. This problem was further exacerbated by the fact that most of the Jews residing in Palestine were not Ottoman citizens. Thus, at this critical historical juncture the yishuv’s ability to influence Ottoman policy in Palestine was likely to diminish, especially with regard to issues close to its heart such as immigration and the purchase of land.

The wide support in the yishuv for Ottomanization and the pursuit of Jewish national activity within the framework of the Empire needs to be understood against this backdrop. The Revolution constituted a watershed in the attitude of the mainstream yishuv towards the Ottoman Empire. The constitutional parliamentary regime re-established there after 1908 led many to support the Empire out of a belief that it would be revived, a situation which persisted well into the First World War. Nevertheless, the concept of Ottomanism, as the yishuv’s various segments interpreted it, was at odds with the way in which the government understood and promoted this concept in the aftermath of 1908. For the government it constituted a new type of identity, a form of a hybrid nationalism that would replace existing national identities among the Empire’s minorities. The yishuv members, however, largely perceived Ottomanism as a federal umbrella under which each minority would be free to run its own affairs with a considerable degree of autonomy.

To what extent did the Hebrew press in Palestine represent Jewish public opinion? From its onset in 1863, the Hebrew press was political-polemic in nature and served as the mouthpiece of various segments within the fragmented yishuv. The publishers of the Hebrew newspapers were motivated by ideological rather than economic considerations, a fact well testified by the newspapers’ lengthy lifetimes despite limited readership and low demand for advertising space. To a large extent, the dissemination of these newspapers was the life-project of a few individuals from various sectors in the yishuv who were willing to invest heavily both personally and financially to promote their sector’s agenda.

Compared to the press of other minorities in the Empire, in particular the Arab sector, the Hebrew press enjoyed considerable freedom even prior to the Revolution. The Ottoman authorities were apparently much more concerned with developments affecting the Arab population than with the tiny yishuv and thus allowed it greater autonomy and political freedom, from which the press benefited greatly. In addition, the local authorities in Palestine may have encountered technical problems censoring the Hebrew press, and had to rely on the services of someone within the Jewish community itself to translate the content of the newspapers. As a result, they only intervened rarely in the activity of the Hebrew newspapers. This usually occurred when the content of a given newspaper seemed inappropriate to them, or when someone from the Jewish community itself complained about their co-religionists for expressing disloyalty to the Empire. Nevertheless, the Revolution still provided the Hebrew press with many new opportunities, as the exponential increase in the publication of newspapers after 1908 indicates. This increased freedom also found its expression in the content, which became more diverse and polemical. The press expressed explicit criticism of some of the government’s policies and decisions, up to the point of declaring that the Empire would cease to exist if it failed to implement certain policies.
The four newspapers examined in this study are the most important and widely read to be published at the time, representing the *yishuv*’s four major sectors. *Havatselet* first appeared in 1863 for a brief period as part of the internal rivalry within the Ashkenazi ‘old *yishuv*’ in Jerusalem. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, *Havatselet* expressed support for the establishment of the Jewish colonies, but from the end of the 1880s it focused again on the ‘old *yishuv*’s’ internal affairs, while criticizing the activities of the national circles. As the rivalry within the Ashkenazi ‘old *yishuv*’ diminished, *Havatselet* became the mouthpiece of the entire Ashkenazi community. At the time of the Revolution it expressed more sympathetic positions toward the ‘new *yishuv*’ and once again became the mouthpiece of the young generation within the Ashkenazi ‘old *yishuv*’, a generation that was exposed to the ideas of the Jewish national movement and partially supported them.

*Ha-Tsvi* was published in Jerusalem between 1884 and 1911 by Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, who saw it as a tool for promoting the revival of the Jewish people in *Eretz-Yisrael* and developing a modern and secular Hebrew speaking society. Its readers were mainly from the circles of the first ‘aliyah colonizers and their supporters, but *ha-Tsvi* constantly attempted to make inroads into the Sephardic community, which Ben-Yehudah sought to bring closer to the national movement. *Ha-Tsvi* went through several transformations over the years and had different names, such as *Hashqafah* and *ha-Or*, although they all pursued a similar agenda. Ben-Yehudah maintained a bitter rivalry with members of the Ashkenazi ‘old *yishuv*’ in Jerusalem and was involved in severe ideological debates with *ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir*.

*Ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir* started 1907 and served as the mouthpiece of the second ‘aliyah party *ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir*. Its publication was motivated by discontent over *ha-Tsvi*, which many second ‘aliyah circles considered sensational and lacking intellectual depth and sensitivity to Hebrew workers.

*Ha-Herut* was published between 1909 and 1917 by the young generation of the Sephardic intelligentsia in Jerusalem. It supported the Jewish national revival in *Eretz-Yisrael* and sought to incorporate the Sephardic community in this project by transforming its traditional character from within.

These four newspapers provide a rather accurate reflection of public opinion in the *yishuv* at the time regarding the effects of the Revolution on the Jewish community in Palestine and the character of its national activity within the framework of the Empire. However, this type of inquiry entails a certain number of limitations. One can plausibly assume that particularly delicate issues were debated behind closed doors and did not find their way into the press. In this regard, researchers on the Ottoman Empire are well aware of the gap which often existed among the Empire’s minorities between expressions made in the public sphere and those that remained private. In addition, despite being critical of the Ottoman regime to an unprecedented level after 1908, the Hebrew newspapers still took care not to cross the fine line that would have drawn a vehement reaction from the authorities, such as openly questioning the right of the Empire to exist or calling for its demise. These limitations notwithstanding, the nature of the discussion in the press and the arguments raised, as will be discussed below, provide significant evidence for the broad support of Ottomanization in the *yishuv* at the time, as the best available framework to preserve its interests and continue pursuing the Jewish national project. The question which remains is how different sectors within the *yishuv*
interpreted the concept of Ottomanization, and how it differed from the Empire’s ‘official’ perception of this term.

The terms used in the Hebrew press to describe the Revolution emphasize the yishuv’s high expectations. ‘Never was the Messiah so close, so dependent on our deeds, as he is today’, wrote Eliezer Ben-Yehudah in ha-Tsvi, while clarifying that he referred to the Messiah in the national rather than the religious sense. In celebrations that took place in honour of the Revolution in the major towns of Palestine, Muslims, Christians, and Jews (from all the sectors in the yishuv), as well as Ottoman officials, came together to celebrate the new era. Speeches were made in Turkish, Arabic, and Hebrew, expressing the hope that the Revolution would bring equality and freedom to all the Empire’s inhabitants. Interestingly, during these celebrations, which some researchers identify as the first signs of the development of a civil society in Palestine, encompassing Muslims, Christians, and Jews, the Star of David flag, a clear Jewish national symbol, was raised by several of the celebrators and the national anthem, the Tikvah, was sung, reflecting the enthusiasm and high expectations from the Revolution prevalent among the yishuv’s national circles. Up until then, it should be noted, Jews in Palestine refrained from all public manifestations of Jewish nationalism to avoid friction with the Ottoman government or accusations of sedition.

In Jaffa, some Jews took advantage of this new spirit of fraternity to celebrate together with the town’s non-Jewish inhabitants Tu be-’Av, a biblical holiday which was revived during the first ‘aliyah and given nationalist overtones. The latter perceived these celebrations as the Jewish way of commemorating the Revolution, while playing down, or being unaware of, its importance for the Jews as a national festival. These celebrations were a symbolic indication that for many circles in the yishuv, integration into Ottoman society side by side with support for Jewish nationalism was seen as possible and feasible.

Nonetheless, once the celebrations were over and a new parliamentary representative regime was established, no one from the yishuv was elected to the Ottoman parliament in the first elections. This event clearly demonstrates the yishuv’s inability to unite behind agreed-upon candidates, which resulted in the loss of many votes in a race that had only a slim chance of success in any case. As a result, heated public debate developed in the yishuv concerning the way it should protect and promote its interests in light of the rapidly changing political environment in the Empire.

The issue of Ottomanization, the acceptance of Ottoman citizenship with its broader social and political implications, was the crux of public debate and was one of the most frequently discussed topics in the Hebrew press at that time. Some believed that the refusal to become Ottoman citizens was one of the major reasons behind the yishuv’s failure in the first elections. Part of the press perceived the collective acceptance of Ottoman citizenship as an effective political tool to change the Empire’s policy regarding Palestine from within, by increasing the Jews’ electoral power in Palestine. Others, however, considered Ottomanization more in terms of the process of social and cultural integration in the Empire, which in their eyes was no less important for the yishuv’s future and its development.
The most vehement supporter of Ottomanization was ha-Tsvi, which repeatedly called on the Jews in Palestine to become Ottoman citizens.\textsuperscript{25} The fact that this newspaper, a clear representative of the ‘new yishuv’, called for Ottomanization best contradicts the dichotomy often described in the literature between the national circles and the other sectors in the yishuv. In fact, ha-Tsvi, by running its vigorous campaign in favour of Ottomanization, set the tone for the debate on this topic in the Hebrew press, eliciting responses from the other newspapers.\textsuperscript{26} Its main argument was that only mass Ottomanization would 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. Otherwise, a growing number of Jews without Ottoman citizenship in Palestine might lead the Ottoman authorities to impose restrictions on Jewish immigration and settlement activity.

Ben-Yehudah, thus, clearly perceived the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional nature of the Empire as a suitable framework for pursuing the Jewish national goals, and saw no contradiction between supporting Jewish nationalism and remaining loyal to the Empire. He argued that Jews could live in Palestine under Ottoman rule in the same way they did in America as equally loyal Americans, and categorically rejected claims that Ottomanization was similar to the assimilation of Jews in Europe:\textsuperscript{27}

The call to accept Ottoman citizenship does not mean assimilation, to become Turkish citizens of the religion of Moses. It does not resemble the call of the assimilated Jews in Europe to be French, Polish, German: 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. Ottoman is not a synonym for Turk. No! God forbid! It is a political term, no more . . . the call: Jews, be Ottoman! does not mean Jews be Turk! Jews be Arab! It is not an appeal like that of the enlightened Jews in the Diaspora: Jews, be French! Jews, be German! Jews, be Russian! Be Polish! Its meaning in Hebrew is Jews, be the subjects of the state in which you live! Jews, enjoy the political rights of the country of freedom in which you reside and in which you want to live a national, Hebrew life, without giving up any part of your nationality! Jews, be Ottoman! be the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, so you can be Hebrew in the land of your forefathers.

Hence, although he referred to the American model, Ben-Yehudah in fact envisioned the Ottoman Empire as a mosaic of nations within which Jewish nationalism would be revived in the Jews’ ancient homeland. In this setting, each nation would be able to keep its own specific character and identity without jeopardizing the Ottoman nature of the Empire. Ben-Yehudah even argued that this structure would help revive the Empire, enhance its strength and prestige, and create a common source of identification for all its citizens. To support his claim he used a questionable historical precedent of Jewish life in Eretz-Yisrael during the Persian Kingdom, as an example for Jewish autonomous life under imperial rule.\textsuperscript{28}

Even though Ben-Yehudah did not refer to the Austro-Hungarian Empire as one of the models that influenced his position, it is more than likely that his vision was based on this model, more so than on the American one. The Austro-Hungarian
Empire comprised several small nations, each running its own affairs with a high degree of autonomy, while preserving its unique identity within the general framework of the Empire. Ben-Yehudah's arguments demonstrate that he believed such a model could be implemented in the Ottoman Empire following the Revolution; hence his vision for the future relationships between the yishuv and the Empire.

None of the other Hebrew newspapers dealt with the issue of Ottomanization as intensively as did ha-Tsvi, but in general they too largely accepted the framework proposed by Ben-Yehudah. Ha-Herut, for example, supported the Ottoman framework unequivocally and enthusiastically as the only option that would allow the yishuv to pursue its national goals. This is not surprising considering the Ottoman background of its Sephardic publishers, who were well integrated into Ottoman society. Following the Revolution, the young Sephardic intelligentsia in Jerusalem responsible for the publication of ha-Herut foresaw many new opportunities for the Jews in Palestine to promote their national project as part of the Empire, which they called ‘our homeland’, and did not fear the consequences of Ottomanization, above all the expected enlistment of Jewish youth in the army. Similar to ha-Tsvi, ha-Herut also linked the revival of the Empire with the Jewish nation within it, and did not see any conflicting loyalties.

Compared to the other newspapers, ha-Herut’s view of Ottomanism was focused more on its cultural and social features rather than its political implications, which was arguably more instrumental. Hence it emphasized integration within the fabric of Ottoman society, for instance by discussing at length the rising hostility of Palestine’s Arab population to the Jewish national project and claiming that the Sephardic community could serve as a bridge between Jews and Arabs, with whom it was familiar. Nonetheless, ha-Herut still vehemently called to preserve the unique religious and cultural Jewish identity of the yishuv within the Ottoman framework, a call testifying to its perception of Ottomanism.

The conservative Havatselet did not explicitly call on its readers to accept Ottoman citizenship, apart from one case in which Jews who wished to immigrate to Palestine were urged to consider becoming Ottoman. Nonetheless, between the lines there was some support for Ottomanization. For instance, Havatselet reported extensively about Jewish Ottoman societies, which were established in various cities in Palestine with the aim of protecting the Jews’ civil and political rights and promoting Ottomanization, and wrote about the new spirit in the country: ‘A pristine spirit is blowing in the mountains of Galilee, a spirit of freedom and equality, complete liberty, a spirit of Ottoman Jews’ unity, whose ideal is dedicated to the honour of our nation and Torah.’ Havatselet claimed that under the new regime it was possible to pursue the Jewish national revival in Eretz-Yisrael and concomitantly preserve the religious character of the yishuv. Moreover, the newspaper feared that the high profile of the Zionist activity in Palestine would eventually lead the Ottoman authorities to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine. Thus, Havatselet, a clear representative of the ‘old yishuv’ clearly accepted (and even supported) the Jewish national project, and believed that it was possible to implement it within the new political reality created in the Empire after the Revolution.

Only ha-Po‘el ha-Tsa‘ir expressed reservations about unconditional acceptance of Ottoman citizenship without first securing the political and individual rights of the
Jews in Palestine. While criticizing ha-Tsvi, it argued that it was too early to discuss the issue of Ottomanization with regard to the yishuv. Its main concern was that Jews’ unequivocal renunciation of their European citizenship would leave them devoid of the protection of foreign consulates in times of unrest. Nonetheless, like the other newspapers, ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir also realized that in the new set of circumstances created in the Empire, Ottomanization was necessary in the long run and could not be avoided. Hence, it called on its readers to prepare for it by establishing a Jewish federation that would represent all the Jews in Palestine and act to protect their rights through negotiations with the Ottoman authorities. Ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir debated the terms for accepting Ottoman citizenship but did not question actual acceptance itself. This realization apparently stemmed from the assumption that greater autonomy would be granted to the provinces and that national politics would take on more significance in the Empire. Hence it encouraged the yishuv to participate in the political process in Palestine, among other things by cooperating with the local Arab population. With respect to the latter, ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir differed from ha-Tsvi, which focused solely on political negotiations with the Ottoman authorities, and was closer to ha-Herut’s position. Interestingly, support for Ottomanization was also expressed during secret meetings of the ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir party, which ran the newspaper, although it was decided not to publish the decision.

Two issues directly connected to the question of Ottomanization, namely the expected enlistment of Jewish youth and the study of Turkish and Arabic in the yishuv schools, were widely debated in the Hebrew press at the time. Supporters of Ottomanization often linked the two, claiming that it was necessary to teach the Jewish youth both Arabic and Turkish as part of the process of preparing them for military service. The strongest supporters of enlistment were ha-Tsvi and ha-Herut, which argued that in the new era enlistment was a fait accompli. Therefore, they both called on their audiences to make the necessary arrangements for enlistment, including support for families of those ‘called up to serve’. Ha-Tsvi’s approach, however, was once again more instrumental than ha-Herut’s. It argued that despite the concerns among certain circles in the yishuv, in the long run conscription would best serve its interests. Moreover, it perceived the issue of military service and the learning of Arabic and Turkish as part of a broader need to become familiarized with Ottoman law, the political system and the economy, in order to better protect the yishuv’s interests in Ottoman institutions. Ha-Herut, on the other hand, treated these issues to a greater extent as a means for the yishuv to socially integrate into the Empire, and as part of the Jews’ obligation to it as loyal Ottoman citizens.

Interestingly, Havatselet also came out in favour of teaching Arabic and Turkish in Jewish schools as a way to prepare youth for military service. This surprising stand is intriguing given the fact that most members of the Ashkenazi ‘old yishuv’ were not Ottoman citizens at the time, and thus were not obliged to serve in the army. It indicates that despite genuine fears of conscription prevalent in the Ashkenazi ‘old yishuv’, some in this community aspired to have a hand in the political and social processes taking place in the yishuv and in the Empire. These segments of the ‘old yishuv’ who supported the national project, especially among the younger generation, realized that in the long run acceptance of Ottoman citizenship,
including army service, was unavoidable, especially if the interests of the *yishuv* were to be protected. Nevertheless, despite this cautious support, they were not at all enthusiastic about conscription for obvious reasons.

The election of a unified leadership for the *yishuv* constituted another theme that was extensively debated in the Hebrew press in the aftermath of the Revolution. The new era in the Empire soon led members of the *yishuv* to realize that in order to protect their interests and have a say in the Empire’s new representative institutions they had to unite politically, at least when operating vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities. Indeed, the long process that eventually led to the political unification of the entire *yishuv* under the leadership of the ‘new *yishuv*’ after the First World War can be said to have started immediately after the Revolution. The Hebrew press gives us a thorough assessment of the re-evaluation and reconfiguration processes that took place in the *yishuv* at the time and highlights the Revolution’s crucial role in their initiation.

All four newspapers emphasized the need to unite politically and stressed that the internal schisms within the *yishuv* were detrimental to the Jewish cause, especially at a time when precedents were being established in the new political system and the first signs of national awakening had emerged in the Arab provinces. Despite the call to unite, all the newspapers heavily criticized their counterparts, and each of them appealed to their readerships to implement its own agenda by electing a leadership that would reflect its ideals.

*Havatselet*, for instance, believed the elders of the community, the Rabbis, should lead the *yishuv*. They were obliged to:

Get down to the people’s level and clarify their needs to them, what their future existence and success depend on in the present, so that the people will willingly follow the wise and prominent people who seek their good... they should gather the people together, teach them the way of public leadership, which is accepted by all enlightened people, they should make it clear what issues are shared by us all and for all the people residing in Eretz-Yisrael, and what matters are unique to us, and how we should treat our gentile neighbours.

*Havatselet* stressed the need to maintain the religious nature of the *yishuv* and warned against the influence of foreign ideas that did not suit the Jewish community in Palestine, ideas that would hinder the implementation of the Jewish national project. It specifically referred to certain second ‘aliyah circles it considered radical and secular.

*Ha-Herut* also made fervent calls to preserve the *yishuv*’s Jewish identity and establish an Ottoman-Jewish committee that would represent all the segments of the *yishuv* under the auspices of the Empire’s Chief Rabbi in Istanbul (the *haham başı*). This stance was consistent with the traditional behaviour of the Sephardic community, given the fact that it was officially recognized by the Empire as a *millet*. At the same time it clearly demonstrates the belief among some Sephardic circles in the possibility of preserving the *yishuv*’s uniqueness and promoting its development, while integrating into Ottoman society, both culturally...
and socially. This approach clearly distinguishes it from the other newspapers discussed here.

*Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir* which, as noted, called for the establishment of a Jewish federation that would protect the *yishuv*'s interests vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities, emphasized the leading role that the Hebrew workers would play in the historical task of restoring the Jewish people in their ancient homeland. Hence it called upon the workers to take an active part in leading the *yishuv*. Similarily, *ha-Tsvi*, as part of its perception of Ottomanization as a panacea for all the *yishuv*'s problems, called for the establishment of a Hebrew federation (*histadrut*) which would represent all the Jews in Palestine in dealings with the authorities as part of the Ottoman political system, protect their civil and political rights, and negotiate their special needs.

Gradually, upon realizing their inability to overcome internal differences and bridge their deep ideological divides, a consensus emerged among the various segments of the *yishuv* that they should present, at least externally, a united front. In this regard, the debate over political unification and the need to protect the common interests of the Jews in Palestine reveals the breadth of the common denominator among the *yishuv*'s various segments and the ways in which the rapid changes taking place in the Empire in the aftermath of the Revolution contributed to bringing them together. The acceptance of Ottoman citizenship constituted a major part of this shared vision. Despite the different perceptions of Ottomanization by the *yishuv*'s various sectors, it was considered by all as a means for unifying the *yishuv* under one framework, and as the best way to ensure the continuation of the Jewish national project, given the changes in the Empire’s political system. The Ottoman framework hence served as the point of reference for all the future activities planned by the *yishuv*'s various sectors.

An examination of the ways in which the Hebrew press perceived the nature of the new regime in the Empire demonstrates how the *yishuv*, as a tiny minority, negotiated the gap between its vision, its assessment of its own ability and strength, and the government’s policies. Similar to the reactions of other minorities in the Empire, when the initial euphoria over the Revolution had dissipated, the Hebrew press began expressing disappointment with the outcomes. It claimed that no major alteration had taken place in the status of the Jews in Palestine and that the limitations on Jewish immigration had not been lifted. Moreover, it complained that the new regime had begun limiting freedom of speech and political activity in the Empire, and was acting dictorially to Turkify the Empire, while abandoning its former policy of Ottomanization. This development was perceived as a great threat to the *yishuv*'s interests, one that would not allow the Jewish community to preserve its distinct identity and further pursue its goals within the framework of the Empire.

The Hebrew press expressed the hope that the new regime would adhere to the original aims of the Revolution, guarantee rights of equal citizenship to all the inhabitants of the Empire under the House of Osman, and grant the minorities a high degree of autonomy by allowing them to run their own affairs.

In this context, the position of the Hebrew press as regards the renewed limitations on freedom of speech and political activity after the attempted counterrevolution of April 1909, especially with respect to the circles that opposed the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) such as the Decentralization Party of Prince al-Sabah, is especially instructive. It sheds light on the way in which concomitant adherence to
Jewish nationalism and loyalty to the Empire was resolved in the *yishuv*, as well as its interpretation of the term Ottomanism. Varying degrees of support for the proclaimed principles of the Decentralization Party, which aspired to govern the Empire as a loose federation of provinces under the house of Osman, can be found in three of the four newspapers discussed here. Only *Havatselet* did not refer to this issue at all. The *yishuv*, hence, favoured a decentralized regime, which would enable the provinces to run their own affairs, while remaining loyal to the Empire as an umbrella organization.

The strongest advocates of decentralization were *ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir* and *ha-Tsvi*, which, as mentioned, differed considerably in the level of support they expressed for Ottomanization. Both predicted an Empire in which national politics would gain greater importance, and argued that a federative regime was the most suitable arrangement for such a situation. *Ha-Herut*, not surprisingly given the way it interpreted the term Ottomanism, was less enthusiastic about a federative regime, but nevertheless supported it. This support for decentralization, it should be stressed, is surprising given Palestine’s demography at that time, which under a parliamentary regime was expected to constitute a major disadvantage for the *yishuv* at both the municipal and national levels, as proved by the first elections held after the Revolution. Moreover, a federative regime would not solve the problems confronting the *yishuv* or increase its representation and provide it with more opportunities to pursue its own agenda.

Members of the *yishuv* who supported decentralization were well aware of this problem. In a series of interviews conducted by the Hebrew press, as well as in translated articles from foreign newspapers it published, prominent leaders of the CUP clearly stated that Palestine’s demography would find its expression in the new representative elected institutions. Ben-Yehudah himself openly declared that in the new era that had begun in the Empire, policies would be determined by the number of votes. Similarly, *ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir* expressed its fear that under the new regime the *yishuv*’s members would no longer be able to buy their way, as they did in the past under the corrupt monarchy, by methods such as bribing Ottoman officials.

There are two possibly interconnected explanations that can reconcile these seemingly contradictory stands held by members of the *yishuv*: support for decentralization and Palestine’s demographic composition at the time. First, some in the *yishuv* truly believed in the possibility of somehow carving out a Jewish autonomous area in Palestine, in a small territory within the greater sphere of Arab provinces under Ottoman rule. Second, many expected the Jewish population to grow substantially and rapidly through massive immigration. They believed the Empire would reconsider its policies vis-à-vis the *yishuv* and open its doors to Jewish immigration and settlement once it realized what it could gain from the revival of the Jewish people in their ancient homeland. This scenario was a recurrent theme in the Hebrew press, which often linked up the idea of the revival of the Empire and that of the Jewish people in Palestine. *Ha-Tsvi*, for example, wrote:

Of all the nations in this Empire, the Jews were the natural allies of the Turks, the larger their number, the higher the Turks’ status . . . The Jews will never have a reason to obviate the Ottoman nature of this Empire. The Jews, as a nation in Eretz-Yisrael, will always be one of the most important powers that
can tilt the balance in favour of the Ottoman unity of this Empire. The Jewish nation in Eretz-Yisrael will always be one of the powers preserving the Ottoman Empire. A Jewish nation in Eretz-Yisrael is perhaps a necessary condition for the existence of the Ottoman Empire.\(^\text{55}\)

In short, an examination of the Hebrew press published in Palestine after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 provides a particularly instructive case study for learning about the complex ways in which this important event influenced one of the Empire’s minority groups. It sheds light on the dilemmas confronting the Jewish community in Palestine, and reveals the internal processes triggered by the Revolution and their impact on the formation of a common platform for the yishuv’s subgroups. Most importantly, however, it teaches us about the different ways in which the concept of Ottomanization was interpreted and dealt with by the various sectors in the Jewish community, and how it differed from the official interpretation of this term by the state, as a kind of hybrid Ottoman nationalism, whose aim was to replace existing particularistic loyalties.

Pursuing Jewish nationalism while at the same time remaining loyal to the Ottoman Empire became the dominant trend within the yishuv after the Revolution, although its sectors differed considerably in their level of support, motivation, and interpretation of the idea of Ottomanization. Ottomanization was supported not only by national circles within the ‘new yishuv’, such as the readers of ha-Tsvi, but also by some Sephardic circles, such as the readers of ha-Herut, and to a certain extent even by members of the Ashkenazi ‘old yishuv’, such as the readers of Havatselet. Even ha-Po’el ha-Tsa’ir, which represented some of the second ‘aliyah’ workers, eventually accepted this framework after realizing its importance for the Jewish national cause, despite its genuine fear that support for Ottoman nationalism in the yishuv would come at the expense of the Jewish national movement. In this regard, however, it is important to recall that around the time of the Revolution the newspapers examined in this study primarily represented the younger generation in the yishuv, a generation which was in general more enthusiastic about promoting the Jewish national project than the older generation, particularly in the Ashkenazi ‘old yishuv’ and among the Sephardic community in Jerusalem. Many in the latter’s older generation did not support the Jewish national cause, and some even explicitly opposed it.

The clearest manifestation for the decision to operate within the Ottoman framework was support for the idea of Ottomanization, and the acceptance of Ottoman citizenship. Due to realpolitik, many in the yishuv perceived Ottomanization, with all its disadvantages and the challenges it posed, as the most suitable framework for pursuing its development, while maintaining its unique character. Other options for running the Empire, such as Turkism and pan-Turkism, which the regime may have contemplated were considered detrimental to the Jewish national project. Thus, when at a certain stage after the Revolution members of the yishuv believed that the preferred policy of the government had become Turkism rather than Ottomanism, general opposition arose and arguments were made that the new policy was in stark contradiction to the proclaimed aims of the Revolution.

The yishuv’s perception of Ottomanization teaches us a great deal about the complexity of this concept. Many perceived it as a political and instrumental issue
(ha-Tsvi), whereas others also envisaged the idea of social and cultural integration into the Empire (ha-Herut). Both groups, however, wished to preserve the distinct character of the Jewish community in Palestine and believed it was possible to do so under the new regime. The meaning of Ottomanization as it was perceived by members of the yishuv was largely consistent with their vision of an Empire as a federative entity under the House of Osman, in which each province would be free to run its own affairs with considerable autonomy. Nevertheless, this view, best articulated by Ben-Yehudah, did not really address Palestine’s demographic reality at the time, a problem which, from the Jewish point of view, remained unresolved until the end of Ottoman rule in Palestine. The Empire’s new regime, obviously, had a very different interpretation of Ottomanism. It viewed this term as a kind of new hybrid nationalism which would replace the distinct national identities of the Empire’s minorities.

Finally, the methodology and analytic approach used in this study can be applied to other minorities in the Ottoman Empire for a more comprehensive grasp of the influence of the Revolution and the resulting concept of Ottomanization. The case of the yishuv demonstrates that the process of national awakening among the Empire’s minorities was not necessarily expressed in terms of irredentist aspirations. For various reasons which were surveyed in this article, the yishuv did not seek to separate itself from the Empire, but rather to develop its national character within its framework.

Notes

1. H. Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.13.
2. Israel Kolatt rightly noted that the Jews in Palestine, particularly in the ‘old yishuv’, ‘were divided according to their ethnic background, the languages they spoke (Yiddish or Ladino), their rabbinic courts, and the form of their prayers.’ See I. Kolatt, ‘The Organization of the Jewish Population of Palestine and the Development of its Political Consciousness before World War I’, in M. Ma’oz (ed.), *Studies on Palestine during the Ottoman Period* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), p.213.
3. U. Elyada, ‘The Sensationalist Press in Eretz Yisrael in the Early Twentieth Century’. *Kesher*, Vol.11 (1992), pp.70–71.
4. Ibid.; I. Bartal, ‘The Jewish Press as a Conduit for Modernization’, *Cathedra*, Vol.71 (1994), p.164.
5. Elyada, ‘The Sensationalist Press in Eretz Yisrael’.
6. On the Arab press after the Revolution see R. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp.53–9, 120–21. According to Khalidi, in the first year after the Revolution, 35 new Arab newspapers appeared in bilad al-Sham and dozens more afterwards, whereas before the Revolution most of the Arab press operated from abroad, either from Egypt or from Europe.
7. G. Frumkin, *Derekh Shofet bi-Yrushalayim* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1954), pp.120–21; see also I. Ben-Avi, ‘Im Shahan ‘Atzma’utenu: Memoirs of the First Hebrew Child’ (Tel Aviv: ha-Va’ad ha-Tsiburi le-Hotsa’at Kitvei Ittamar Ben-Avi, 1961), p.220.
8. For several illuminating examples of intervention by the authorities following the publication of articles in the Hebrew press and the guiding lines regarding the censorship of the Hebrew newspapers see Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, DH. MKT, 1310/N/23 [April 10, 1893] (investigation against Havatselet which published on 24 February 1893 an article accusing the government of preventing Jews from buying land and property. Following the incident, the Mutasarrıf of Jerusalem was ordered to scrutinize the newspaper more closely); DH. MKT, 122/3, 1311/S/15 [August 28, 1893] (investigation following the publication of an article in Havatselet on 12 August 1893 accusing the
authorities of bringing a Jew suspected of stealing to court in Hebron on Saturday. The Mutasarrıf of Jerusalem was ordered not to let Havatselet publish similar articles; DH. MKT, 2217/48, 1317/S/22 [July 2, 1899] (request by the Ministry of Interior from the Mutasarrıf of Jerusalem to update him about the censorship methods of a new newspaper which a Jewish woman named Hemdah Ben-Yehudah, the wife of Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, sought to publish); DH. MKT, 2128/6, 1316/C/20 [November 5, 1898] (correspondence between the Ministry of Interior and the Mutasarrıf of Jerusalem regarding a Jew who applied to open a printing house in Jerusalem. Among the things he was asked to do in order to get the license was to sign a statement saying that he will not criticize the sultan and will publish in accordance with the law and the will of the sultan.

9. For example, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah was arrested in 1891 and his newspaper ha-Tsvi was shut down following a quarrel with several Jerusalemite rabbis from the Ashkenazi old yishuv who complained about the alleged inflammatory content of his newspaper which criticized the government. Only following foreign intervention, was Ben-Yehudah released from jail and his license restored to him. See A.M. Luntz, Luach Eretz Yisrael 1910–11 (Jerusalem: A.M. Luntz, 1911), pp.121–3; see also Y. Kaniel, Ben-Yehudah in Prison, 1893: A Selection of Contemporary Correspondence (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1983), pp.11–23; Frumkin, Derekh Shofet bi-Yrushalayim, pp.121–2; Ben-Avi, ‘Im Shahar ‘Atzma’utenu, pp.69–72.

10. For example, in the period following the Revolution newspapers such as ha-Herut, ha-Ahdut, Moriah, ha-Pardes began to be printed.

11. For instance see ha-Tsevi, 25/135, 23 March 1909, pp.1–2 (the newspaper claimed that if the Empire would stick to the policy of Turkification and would not give equal rights to all the nations comprising it, it would cease to exist).

12. G. Jardeni, The Hebrew Press in Eretz-Israel, 1863–1904 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1969), pp.18–19, 30; Havatselet was the mouthpiece of the minority group within the Prushim (the Lithuanian segment in the Ashkenazi ‘old yishuv’) and served as a response to ha-Levanon, the organ of the majority. In addition, it also represented the Hassidim within the Ashkenazi old yishuv and certain segments within the Sephardic community.

13. G. Kressel, Toldot ha-Itonut ha-Ivir be-Eretz-Yisrael (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1964), p.111; see also Frumkin, Derekh Shofet, pp.130–43.

14. N. Efrati, The Sephardic Community in Jerusalem during the Years 1840–1917 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), pp.73–4.

15. For the various transformations in Ben-Yehudah’s newspapers see Luntz, Luach Eretz Yisrael 1910–11, pp.121–6.

16. Kressel, Toldot ha-Itonut, pp.100–104.

17. Ibid., p.109; M.D. Gaon, ‘ha-Herut’, in D. Yudelovitch (ed.), Kovetz Ma’amirim le-Divre Yeme ha-Itonut be-Eretz-Yisrael, Vol.II (Tel Aviv: Salomon Publishers, 1936), pp.140–41.

18. Efrati, The Sephardic Community, pp.67–9.

19. Ha-Tsvi, 25/3, 2 Oct. 1908, p. 1.

20. For example Hashqafah, 9/93, 10 Aug. 1908, pp.2–3; Havatselet, 38/73, 7 Aug. 1908, p.440.

21. M.U. Campos, ‘Between “Beloved Ottomania” and “The Land of Israel”’, International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Vol.37, No.4 (2005), p.464.

22. For example, when such symbols were displayed in a celebration in the colony of Nes-Zionah in 1890 by some of the celebrators, many in the yishuv were opposed claiming that it would pose a threat to its relationships with the Ottoman authorities. See Havatselet, 21/14, 8 Jan. 1891, p.106.

23. Havatselet, 38/77, 17 Aug. 1908, p.463. This holiday, which takes place on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Av (August), is a biblical holiday commemorating the grape harvest.

24. On the results of these elections see H. Weiner, ‘ha-Medinut ha-Tsiyonit be-Turkiah ‘ad 1914’, in I. Kollat (ed.), The History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Yisrael since 1882, Part 1 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), pp.273–5.

25. Ha-Tsvi, 25/3, 1 Oct. 1908, p.1; 25/80, 15 Jan. 1909, pp.1–2; 25/85, 21 Jan. 1909, p.2.

26. For instance see ha-Po’el ha-Ts’vir, 2/7, Dec. 1908–Jan. 1909, p.12 (the Hebrew month of Tevet).

27. Ha-Tsi, 25/85, 21 Jan. 1909, p.2.

28. Hashqafah, 9/96, 21 Aug. 1908, p.2.

29. Ha-Herut, 1/39, 27 Dec. 1909, p.1.

30. Ibid., 1/2, 14 May 1909, p.3.
31. Ibid. Arguably, this perception was influenced by the behavior of other groups in the Empire, following the Revolution, which all strove to protect their own interests within the changing political climate. See Campos, ‘Between “Beloved Ottomania” and “The Land of Israel”’, p.479.

32. "Havatselet", 39/44, 15 Jan. 1909, pp.229–30.

33. Ibid., 39/64, 3 Aug. 1908, p.340; 24 Aug. 1908, p.479; 38/85, 4 Sept. 1908, pp.503–4.

34. Ibid., 38/76, 14 Aug. 1908, pp.458–9 (a quote from a speech by Rabbi Kook, the Rabbi of Jaffa and the colonies in its vicinity).

35. "Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/7; 2/14, May–June 1909 (The Hebrew month of Sivan).

36. Ibid., 2/7.

37. Ibid., and also 2/1, Sept. 1908, p.14 (the Hebrew month of Tishre).

38. Ibid., 2/3, Oct.–Nov. 1908, p.10 (the Hebrew month of Heshvan).

39. For more about the tension between these two newspapers see Gaon, ‘ha-Herut’, pp.181–2; Y. Shapirah, "Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir": Ha-Ra'ayon veha-Ma'aseh (Tel Aviv: ‘Ayanot, 1967), pp.107–8.

40. "Ha-Tsvi", 25/80, 15 Jan. 1909, pp.1–2; "ha-Herut", 1/2, 14 April 1909, p.3.

41. "Havatselet", 38/80, 24 Aug. 1908, p.479; 38/85, 4 Sept. 1908, pp.503–4; 39/64, 3 March 1909, p.340.

42. Kolatt, ‘The Organization’, p.212.

43. "Havatselet", 33/44, 15 Jan. 1909, pp.229–30.

44. Ibid., 38/76.

45. "Ha-Herut", 1/2, 14 May 1909, p.3.

46. "Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/6, Dec. 1908–Jan. 1909, p.6 (the Hebrew month of Tevet).

47. "Ha-Tsvi", 25/90, 28 Jan. 1909, pp.1–2.

48. "ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/14, p.11; "ha-Tsvi", 25/122, 23 Feb. 1909, pp.2–3; "ha-Herut", 2/17, 5 Nov. 1909, p.1.

49. For instance, see "ha-Tsvi", 25/135, 23 March 1909, pp.1–2.

50. "ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir" openly supported decentralization of the Empire as was suggested by the party of Prince al-Sabah, see "ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/1; "ha-Tsvi", argued that the only way to save the Empire was to give equal rights to all its citizens under the house of Osman and expressed its hope that the Young Turks would allow each of the Empire's people (umot) to express their unique character. See "ha-Tsvi", 25/135 and 25/3, 1 Oct. 1908, p.1; "Ha-Herut" expressed strong opposition to Prince Sabah's arrest after the failure of the counterrevolution. The rebels, it stressed, should be punished, but the idea of freedom is to allow political opposition to operate freely. See "ha-Herut", 2/17.

51. For instance, see "Hashqafah", 9/100, 4 Sept. 1908, p.1 (an interview with one of the leaders of the Young Turks in Paris, quoted from the newspaper Hed ha-Zman).

52. "Ha-Tsvi", 25/127, 12 March 1909, p.2.

53. "Ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/2, Oct. 1908 (the Hebrew month of Heshvan); 2/3.

54. In line with this logic, "ha-Tsvi" wrote that each nation within the Empire would run its own affairs in the area where it constituted the majority. See "ha-Tsvi", 25/3, 10 Jan. 1908, p.1; see also "ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 2/2, pp.3–4.

55. "Ha-Tsvi", 25/124, 8 March 1909, pp.1–2 and 25/239, 8 Aug. 1909, p.1; "ha-Herut", 2/39, 27 Dec. 1909, p.1; "ha-Po'el ha-Tsa'ir", 3/18, 6 July 1910, p.3.