

# Political Opposition to Zionism in Palestine and Greater Syria: 1910–1911 as a Turning Point

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The relatively short period at the turn of the year 1910–1911 was of profound importance for the development of political opposition to Zionism in Palestine and its neighboring Arab regions. During a period of about a year, several important events and incidents occurred; a number of Arab journalists, notables, and officers became involved in anti-Zionist activities and campaigns; and the quantity of articles critical of Zionism published in the Arabic press markedly increased. Based on these and other reasons, we are convinced that the months at the end of 1910 and the first half of 1911 represent the turning point in the attitudes of the educated Arab public toward Jewish land purchases in Palestine, Jewish immigration, and the Zionist movement. The first part of this study consists of short portrayals of a number of momentous events during this period. In the second part we present and discuss the far-reaching impact of these events which lead us to the conclusion that it was at that particular point in time that anti-Zionism became an important factor in Greater Syria in general and Palestine in particular.

We draw a conclusion similar to that of Neville Mandel, who asserts in his pioneering monograph *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*: “The reactions of the Arabs to the Zionist movement and the New Yishuv only came clearly to the surface after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908.”<sup>1</sup> Although several Arab figures expressed their critical views or took action against the activities of the Zionists in the previous period, these were isolated attempts and efforts which did not evoke a broader response or coalesce into a larger movement.<sup>2</sup> Under the circumstances – because of the autocracy of Sultan Abdulhamid II, censorship, and the fact

that the press had yet to emerge in Palestine – it could not have been different. Mandel also specifies that “Arab opposition to Zionism had emerged by 1914.”<sup>3</sup> Rashid Khalidi emphasizes one particular aspect as having a crucial effect on creating the awareness of the gravity of the Zionist threat among urban inhabitants of Palestine: “the intensity of the post-1908 reaction can only be explained by the cumulative effect of a series of land purchases from absentee landlords involving the expulsions of *fellahin* and the ensuing clashes. That is what brought important elements among the Arab urban elite to the realization of the full import of Zionism.”<sup>4</sup> Neither of these authors, however, elaborates as to when exactly the crucial shift happened and do not specifically emphasize this short period and the events that are the main subject of this paper. We are convinced that the critical limit necessary for the general dissemination of anti-Zionism in the region was reached at the turn of 1910–1911.

## Crown Lands and the al-Fula Affair

In 1910, the Lebanese landlord Najib Ibrahim al-Asfar began to seek a long-term lease (for a period of 95 years) of the extensive crown lands in Palestine and Syria.<sup>5</sup> A false rumor spread that al-Asfar was acting in the interest of the Zionists.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, at the end of 1910, Najib Nassar, the editor-in-chief and publisher of the bi-weekly newspaper *al-Karmil* managed to convince editors of four important papers (*al-Mufid*, *al-Haqiqa*, *al-Ra’i al-‘Amm* – all published in Beirut – and *al-Muqtabas*, which was the most influential Damascus daily) to get involved in anti-Zionist activities.<sup>7</sup> All these newspapers had a much larger circulation (and therefore public reach) than *al-Karmil*. However, the importance and impact of *al-Karmil* was greater than would appear at first sight. First, the number of readers was much higher than the number of subscribers. According to Najib Nassar, at the beginning of 1914 *al-Karmil* had about one thousand subscribers; however, only two-thirds of them were paying for the subscription. Yet it is noteworthy that he estimated the number of readers of the newspaper at several tens of thousands. He gives an interesting example to support his claim. “Once I went to one of the Palestinian towns in which there was only one subscriber. Many received me with honor as the owner of *al-Karmil*, which I had not expected and found strange, until I learned that more than fifty persons from that town read the newspaper at the subscriber’s [house].”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the content of the newspaper also reached many illiterate people, since newspapers were often read aloud at gathering places in Palestinian towns and villages.<sup>9</sup> In addition, *al-Karmil* became the most important source of information on Zionist endeavors for other Arabic newspapers in Palestine and beyond.<sup>10</sup> Khayriyya Qasimiyya rightly labels its campaign against the lease of crown lands as “the first concerted action against the growing Zionist activities.”<sup>11</sup>

As the debate regarding the crown lands was still under way another, more important event started to develop. The sale of lands of the village of al-Fula to the Jewish National Fund can be considered in this context the most significant event that took place in the period before the outbreak of the First World War. The lands of al-Fula belonged to Ilyas

Sursuq, the wealthy Greek Orthodox banker, merchant, and landowner from Beirut, who in 1910 reached a deal on their sale with the Zionists. However, this transaction was accompanied by considerable complications. The affected peasants petitioned Istanbul in May 1910 to forestall the sale.<sup>12</sup> The peasant inhabitants refused to leave their village and were supported in their resistance by the *qa'immaqam* (district governor) of Nazareth, Shukri al-ʿAsali (1878–1916), who was resolutely opposed to this transaction and became a major protagonist in the affair.<sup>13</sup>

ʿAsali commenced a newspaper campaign against it and later, when he was elected as a member of the *majlis al-mabʿuthan* (the Ottoman parliament) for Damascus in the by-election in January 1911, he also utilized the stage of the parliament for mobilization, criticism, and spreading information about the al-Fula case. He defied the order of the wali of Beirut and refused to officially approve the sale and to issue the title deed to the buyers.<sup>14</sup> He also turned to the military command of the *sanjak* with the information that a strategically important castle was located on the lands of the estate that had been sold. Furthermore, he informed the governor Nürettin Bey that the real force behind the purchase of the village lands was the Zionist Organization, which was using straw men for this purpose.<sup>15</sup> ʿAsali also fought against the displacement of the peasants from their village and did not accept payments from the new owners.<sup>16</sup> In addition, he tried to convince the government either to buy the land or to compel the owner to sell it to the Arab peasants.<sup>17</sup> When he learned that a group of Jewish guards had arrived in al-Fula, he sent forces there to drive them away.<sup>18</sup> This was the first time that members of the Zionist paramilitary organization *Hashomer* (the Watchman) established in 1909 were used in order to occupy newly-acquired land before settlers would move in.<sup>19</sup>

Shukri al-ʿAsali had a forerunner in the previous decade. The Druze notable *Amir Amin Arslan*, at that time *qa'immaqam* of the Tiberias district, had taken action against a land sale to Zionists near the town of Tiberias at the beginning of the twentieth century in the pre-Young Turk Revolution era.<sup>20</sup> At that time, however, the press was almost non-existent in the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire and therefore Arslan could not employ it for the purpose of informing the public about this case. The situation changed profoundly immediately after the Young Turk Revolution. Censorship was lifted and newspapers mushroomed, and this was a major advantage which Shukri al-ʿAsali fully utilized. Without access to the press and his position in parliament, his efforts and impact would have been considerably weaker and would likely have influenced only a small number of people.

Shukri al-ʿAsali's publications can be divided into two phases. The first period lasted until January 1911, when he held the position of *qa'immaqam* of Nazareth and was forced to publish under the pseudonym Salah al-Din (Saladin). After giving up his official position, ʿAsali commenced a new phase. It should also be noted that he took his anti-Zionist actions into his campaign for the January by-election to the Ottoman parliament.

Between November 1910 and August 1911, Shukri al-ʿAsali published at least fourteen articles. His articles appeared in various newspapers in Istanbul, Damascus, Beirut, and Haifa. The greatest number were printed in *al-Muqtabas* and *al-Karmil*, which published three each.<sup>21</sup> One of these articles is the "Letter of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi to the

Commander of the Expedition to Hawran Sami Pasha al-Faruqi.” This is a fictitious letter utilizing the name of the Ayyubid Sultan addressed to a present-day Ottoman general of Arab origin.<sup>22</sup> Saladin pleads in the letter with Sami Pasha to stand up to Zionism: “I beg you ... to hurry and repel the Zionist threat from Palestine, whose soil is soaked with the blood of the Prophet’s companions and with the blood of my armies and for the retrieval of which I have sacrificed [the lives] of my brothers, my people and commanders.”<sup>23</sup>

In the letter, Shukri al-‘Asali describes the diverse activities of the Zionists in Palestine. Inter alia, he specifies regions that they had recently been targeting – the Sharon plain and the Marj ibn ‘Amr valley. To this end, ‘Asali charged, they are using a front from the ranks of Ottoman citizens and they are assisted by distinguished Ottomans who serve them as *simsars* (middlemen). ‘Asali then proceeds to the al-Fula affair. He deals with Zionist separation from the local population and the boycott of their shops. Furthermore, he addresses the Zionists’ banking system, their institutions, symbols, postal service, and so on. His remark on double citizenship is very interesting: “They have deceived the government and falsely registered as Ottomans in the population register and they continue to hold foreign passports that protect them. When they get to the courts they present their passports and request foreign protection.”<sup>24</sup> They operate autonomously and ignore official institutions, train their youth and amass weapons. Toward the end, ‘Asali warns: “If [our] deputies do not pay attention and the government is not vigilant and does not stop this violent torrent, it will not take much time in Palestine and you will see that it will become the property of the Zionist Organization, its accomplices or its nation.”<sup>25</sup> At the end he again appeals to Sami Pasha al-Faruqi to prompt “our Turkish brothers ... to protect Palestine.”<sup>26</sup>

It is remarkable that when Shukri al-‘Asali had to choose between a successful career as a state officer and the interests of Palestinian peasants, he did not hesitate to choose the latter. This is a paraphrase of his words from an interview with Najib Nassar: “I am young and my soul desires high positions, but you can be sure that I prefer suspension from my office and losing my future to agreeing with the sale of my homeland to the enemy of my nation and my state.”<sup>27</sup>

Another article written by Shukri al-‘Asali dedicated to the al-Fula affair appeared in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, *al-Mufid*, and *al-Haqiqa* after he was elected to parliament. In this piece he called the replacement of the local peasants by foreign colonists a betrayal. The author included samples from the messages he had exchanged with the Beirut governor while dealing with this transaction. In this article ‘Asali employed several motifs with the potential to touch the patriotic and religious sentiments of the readers. One of them was the assertion that a castle that Saladin captured from the Crusaders was located on the estates purchased by the Zionists. Another was a reference to the proximity of the Hijaz railway (actually its extension from Dar‘a to Haifa), by which pilgrims were transported to the Muslim holy places, to the land.<sup>28</sup>

The press in the region devoted intensive, sustained, and systematic attention to the al-Fula affair.<sup>29</sup> The gravity of the situation is manifested in the fact that in February and March 1911 the governor of Beirut, Nürettin Bey, felt the need to vindicate his decisions regarding the al-Fula land sales in several newspapers – *Hadiqat al-akhbar*,<sup>30</sup> *al-Ittihad*

*al-Uthmani*,<sup>31</sup> *al-Iqbal*, and *al-Muqtabas*. A few weeks later, Nürettin Bey resigned, citing an eye illness as the reason. Khayriyya Qasimiyya, however, makes the connection between his abdication and the al-Fula case since the resignation took place so soon after the events described above.<sup>32</sup>

During the spring of 1911, a sharp exchange of views on Zionism took place in the Ottoman parliament. On 1 March, Ismail Hakki Bey from Gümülcüne took the floor and accused the ruling Committee for Union and Progress of support for the Zionists and their aims. The Grand Vizier responded to his criticism and attempted to refute his arguments. During his speech he labeled the Zionists “a ‘handful of charlatans,’ incapable of establishing a Jewish government in Palestine” and denied that the government would support them.<sup>33</sup> As a result of this discussion, opposition newspapers again started to concern themselves with the Zionist movement and the Committee for Union and Progress found itself on the defensive.<sup>34</sup> On 3 March 1911, *al-Muqtabas* wrote the following praise of Shukri al-‘Asali: “We saw the *qa’immaqam* in one of the districts of the province [Beirut], how he rose from the second league into the first ... and his fatherland rewarded him for his good efforts and made him a representative for 50,000 [citizens] who are followed by thirty million Ottomans.”<sup>35</sup>

An important consequence of this debate was the decision of Najib Nassar to publish an abridged translation of the article on Zionism from the *Jewish Encyclopedia* accompanied by his commentary. He did so first, in the spring of 1911, as a series of articles in his newspaper *al-Karmil* and later the same year (in November) in the form of a book. Nassar’s explanation for his motives in doing so comprises the introduction of the book and deserves to be quoted at length:

The discussions that took place in parliament on the Zionist issue showed us that its real nature is still unknown. And those who steer the wheel of politics in Istanbul have not comprehended the significance of the Zionist movement, despite all that we and others have written about it.... [T]he Grand Vizier Haqqi Pasha says on the *minbar* [rostrum] of the nation that Zionism is nothing but a tale and those who carry it out are nothing but fantasists. This belief alarmed us ... Therefore, we resorted to various Jewish sources among which is the unique *Jewish Encyclopedia*, in which such facts are found that do not leave room for doubt about the real character of Zionism and its significance. [These] will convince the Grand Vizier that it is more than a tale [and] it is necessary to be wary of it and take precautions with regard to it.<sup>36</sup>

Nassar’s translation influenced several Palestinian figures. Shukri al-‘Asali mentions it in connection with Zionist political ambitions in his article “Tourism in Palestine.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Ruhi al-Khalidi extracted from it and copied large parts of the translation into his book *al-Siyunizm aw al-mas’ala al-sahyuniyya* (Zionism, or the Zionist Question), which because of his unexpected death was not published and has remained in the form of a manuscript.<sup>38</sup>

Another event of extraordinary importance that took place in this period were anti-Zionist speeches given by three Arab deputies – Ruhi al-Khalidi, Sa‘id al-Husayni, and Shukri al-‘Asali – in May 1911.<sup>39</sup> These three deputies made a stand against Zionist political and separatist ambitions, describing the conduct of Jewish immigrants in Palestine, their actions, and the de facto autonomy of the Jewish communities. Ruhi al-Khalidi focused on the historical context, Sa‘id al-Husayni on Menachem Ussishkin’s booklet *Our Program* and the demographic capacity of Palestine,<sup>40</sup> whereas Shukri al-‘Asali described in detail the background and course of the al-Fula affair, Zionist autonomy, and the proliferation of weapons in their settlements.<sup>41</sup> Ruhi al-Khalidi was very circumspect in his address and made a clear distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism: “Just as I am an anti-Zionist, I am not an anti-Semite, which is proved by the letters sent here by the rabbi of Izmir and other rabbis who oppose Zionism.”<sup>42</sup> When after his speech Shukri al-‘Asali returned to his hometown of Damascus, the rival candidate Haqqi al-‘Azm, whom he had defeated in the January by-election, appealed to the readers of the daily newspaper *al-Muqtabas* to welcome him enthusiastically.<sup>43</sup> During his summer visit in 1911 to Jerusalem, meanwhile, Ruhi al-Khalidi gave instructions to the director of the cadaster not to allow Jewish land purchases and declared that he would continue his efforts in the capital for this cause.<sup>44</sup>

## Exchanges of Views in Newspapers

In the period discussed, the number of newspaper articles on Zionism markedly increased. Among the main themes of the published articles were the al-Fula affair, the anti-Zionist speeches in parliament, the translation of the article on Zionism from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, and discussions between advocates and opponents of Zionism. In the first half of 1911, a debate started in which Zionist or pro-Zionist authors (most active among them was Nissim Malul)<sup>45</sup> highlighted the apolitical nature of Zionism and its advantages for the local population. Prominent among those who stood on the other side of the fence was Najib Nassar, who rebutted these claims.<sup>46</sup> For instance, at the beginning of February he responded in *al-Muqtabas* to the article by Shlomo (Sulayman Bey) Yellin, who denied the Zionists’ political ambitions, praising their contribution to the wellbeing of the local population and their loyalty to the Ottoman Empire. The editor of *al-Karmil* refuted Yellin’s assertions one after another. As for the arguments about the Zionist contribution to the prosperity of the local community, he openly ridiculed them.<sup>47</sup>

The unprecedented number of articles on Zionism that were published in the Arabic-language press during this period provides evidence that a fundamental change was taking place. Whereas the first articles on Zionism began to appear in Syrian and Palestinian newspapers in the middle of 1909 (in July in *al-Karmil*), as a result of the circumstances described above, the situation radically changed by the end of 1910.<sup>48</sup>

Rashid Khalidi examined twenty-two different newspapers (altogether more than ten thousand issues) published in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt in the years 1908–1914. Many issues of these newspapers from this time span are not extant, however

for ten papers he had three or more complete years at his disposal. In 1911, 286 articles dealing with Zionism appeared in periodicals examined by him, more than forty percent of all items published in the period 1908–1914 (during which more than 650 total articles appeared). The most active among the periodicals in 1911 was *al-Karmil*, which contained seventy-three articles concerning Zionism. Among the non-Palestinian papers, *al-Mufid* containing fifty-three pieces during the first nine months of 1911, of which twenty-four were feature articles.<sup>49</sup> Although thereafter the number of articles declined temporarily and the intensity of discussion abated, it never stopped, and the number of items published remained high in the following period. In this respect it is important to see the big picture and take into account that from the autumn of 1911 until the autumn of 1913, the Ottoman Empire was involved in three major wars: first, the struggle against the Italian invasion in Tripolitania (September 1911–October 1912) and then two Balkan wars (October 1912–May 1913 and June 1913–August 1913). However, during the last year before the outbreak of the First World War, the number of articles dealing with Zionism in the two main Palestinian newspapers – *al-Karmil* and *Falastin* – grew again, and in both cases considerably exceeded the number of articles compared with 1911.<sup>50</sup> This was the case even though newspaper publishing was suspended in Palestine in the summer of 1914 after the First World War broke out. Moreover, *Falastin* was suspended for more than two months by the decree of the Ministry of Interior in April 1914.<sup>51</sup> For these reasons, only forty-eight issues of *Falastin* appeared during 1914 (less than half of the 104 issues regularly produced by a bi-weekly newspaper), which included about eighty articles on Zionism. In the case of *al-Karmil*, it seems that fifty-six issues were published and they contained more than ninety articles that dealt with Zionism. The average number of articles per issue in both *al-Karmil* and *Falastin* is in both cases very similar – more than 1.6 articles per issue, more than twice as many articles per issue as *al-Karmil* had published on Zionism in 1911.

Fiery discussions in the papers are further proof that Zionism became a significant theme in the Palestinian as well as the broader Arab context and that opposition to Zionism expanded significantly. The most important forum for these debates was the Egyptian daily *al-Muqattam*, which was the only influential periodical that from 1908 to 1914 published more pro-Zionist than anti-Zionist pieces. On its pages advocates of Zionism like Nissim Malul and Jacques Levy al-Tantawi confronted the arguments of their opponents, including Shakib Arslan, Rafiq al-‘Azm, Shibli Shumayyil, ‘Isa al-‘Isa, and others. Here, in the course of critiquing and rebutting the arguments of pro-Zionist authors, the argumentation of opponents of Zionism was refined and honed.<sup>52</sup>

Further indirect evidence concerning the significance of the period at the turn of the years 1910–1911 in this connection is the fact that in the two previous years, 1908 and 1909, it was not Palestinian or Syrian papers, but Egyptian dailies *al-Ahram* and *al-Muqattam* that published the highest number of articles on Zionism.<sup>53</sup> Thus, until 1910 Syrian and Palestinian papers had not devoted nearly as much attention to Zionism as they did thereafter and especially since the turn of the years 1910–1911.

## Zionist Efforts to Influence Arab Public Opinion

It is not possible to disregard the growing attention that representatives of the Zionist movement aimed at Arab (but also Turkish) newspapers and public opinion. The subsidiary press bureau of the Zionist Palestinian Office in Jaffa was founded in 1911. Its assignment was both to systematically monitor the Arabic press and to influence it. In general, these “public relations” activities can be divided into four categories: 1) bribing Arab journalists and subsidizing newspapers sympathetic to Zionism; 2) monitoring the Arabic press; 3) undertaking efforts to influence Arab public opinion by publishing pro-Zionist articles by authors from the Sephardic community; 4) attempting to establish a pro-Zionist newspaper in Arabic.<sup>54</sup> The themes that the Zionist Palestinian Office’s press bureau emphasized included: that the Zionist movement is well-intentioned; that Jews are loyal to the state; that Jews share similar concerns with the Arabs and do not want to keep apart from them; and that the local population will derive benefits from Jewish presence in Palestine.<sup>55</sup> Sephardic Jews, especially Nissim Malul and Shim‘on Moyal, played leading roles in this operation.<sup>56</sup> These activities manifest unequivocally the growing influence of anti-Zionism among Palestinian and Syrian Arabs and the fact that representatives of the Zionist movement and members of the Jewish community in Palestine were very much aware of it. Furthermore, during the first six months of 1912, the press bureau compiled an analysis of two dozen Arabic newspapers published in Damascus and Beirut and one of its most important objectives was to identify the attitude of the periodicals toward Zionism.<sup>57</sup>

Attempts to bribe and subsidize Arabic and Turkish papers did not escape the notice of several Arab journalists and politicians. In *al-Siyunizm*, Ruhi al-Khalidi describes the methods Zionists used to influence the Arabic press. One of the periodicals he mentions in this regard is the newspaper *Le Jeune-Turc*, published in Istanbul, which came under Zionist control. Khalidi exposes the astute methods by which the Zionists managed to disguise their manipulation: “Eventually, [the Zionists] bought this paper and allocated to [its editor] Celâl Nuri Bey a monthly salary ... non-Jewish authors are employed to write for the newspaper, so that the people do not have a poor opinion of it when it advocates benefits [brought about by] the Zionists.”<sup>58</sup>

Zionists also gained influence over several periodicals published in Greater Syria: *al-Nasir* (the Helper) from Beirut, *al-Nafir* (the Clarion)<sup>59</sup> from Jerusalem, and *al-Akhbar* (the News)<sup>60</sup> from Jaffa. Ruhi al-Khalidi noted clever tactics that the Zionists put to use in their campaign to manipulate the press: “If an article was published in defense of Zionism for instance in the newspaper *al-Nasir*, the paper *Le Jeune-Turc* would print it immediately and pretend that this defense was published in respected Syrian newspapers.”<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, newspapers, too, sought to take advantage of Zionist propaganda efforts. An interesting insight is given by the historian Ya‘qub Yehoshua who wrote about the newspaper *al-Nafir al-‘Uthmani*, edited by Iliya Zakka that it “published articles praising the Jewish colonization in the country when it received payment from them, but launched attacks on it any time the payments were interrupted.”<sup>62</sup>

Different kinds of Zionist efforts to promote their project were described and analyzed





An excerpt from the article “al-Siyaha fi Filastin” (Tourism in Palestine), written by Shukri al-‘Asali, published on the front page of *al-Muqtabas*, 11 August 1911. Source: Microfilm collection, *al-Asad Library [Maktabat al-Asad]*, Damascus.

by Shukri al-‘Asali in *al-Muqtabas*. His article “al-Siyaha fi Filastin” (Tourism in Palestine) was primarily based on an article published in the newspaper *L’Aurore* about a promotional educational journey from Thessalonica to Palestine organized by Zionists. ‘Asali received this issue of the periodical from a friend in Istanbul. In his article, Shukri al-‘Asali illustrates the links connecting Zionist institutions in Istanbul with certain newspapers – specifically, the financial backing provided by the Anglo-Levantine Bank headed by Victor Jacobson (who was at the same time the Zionist Organization representative in Istanbul) to *L’Aurore* and *Le Jeune-Turc*.<sup>63</sup>

Indirect evidence of the anti-Zionist public mood can also be traced in the course of lawsuits against journalists critical of Zionism, and the interest and participation of the public at courtroom sessions, particularly the enthusiastic response of the audience if the court decided in favor of the journalist or the periodical. On 10 June 1910, for example, the *Jewish Chronicle* published an article by its Palestine correspondent on a lawsuit against Najib Nassar, editor of *al-Karmil*. The correspondent wrote: “The lawsuit against Nassar was attended by a numerous audience which after his acquittal carried him triumphantly in a demonstration hostile to the Jews.”<sup>64</sup> Such were the consequences of the year-long anti-Zionist journalistic and editorial activities of Najib Nassar on the public opinion in Haifa.

The fact that Arab newspapers were influencing the sentiment of the uneducated

masses is supported by statements of two notable members of the Jewish community in Palestine, Isaac Nahon and Shim'on Moyal. The former, who managed the Alliance school in Haifa, remarked in the summer of 1911 that *al-Karmil's* accusations had spread among the Muslim population. In January 1912, the latter noted that "a 'spirit of enmity' had began 'to gain a foothold among the masses because of the influence of the antagonistic press'."<sup>65</sup>

## **Anti-Zionist Petitions**

Resistance to Zionism was not solely the domain of journalists and editors, however. It also took the form of petitions from Palestinians to their representatives in the Ottoman government. Already in May 1910 when first news on negotiations between the Zionists and Ilyas Sursuq concerning the sale of lands of the villages al-Fula and 'Afula appeared, the Ottoman government received protest telegrams from Haifa notables and religious dignitaries from Nazareth. Shortly after, further petitions followed.<sup>66</sup> The petition sent by the inhabitants of al-Fula has already been mentioned.<sup>67</sup>

In the spring of 1911, chiefly in a response to the debate on Zionism that took place in parliament in March and to the sale of lands of the village al-Fula, 150 inhabitants of Jaffa signed a telegram sent to the highest state representatives and several newspapers, in which they called for the adoption of appropriate measures. In the telegram they came out against Jewish immigration, land purchases by dummies with Ottoman citizenship, and the abuse of double citizenship by Jewish immigrants.<sup>68</sup>

Parliamentary speeches critical of Zionism given by Arab deputies in May 1911 reverberated directly in Palestine. In a June 1911 report, Albert Antébi, a prominent representative of the Sephardic community,<sup>69</sup> noted that Arab peasants were familiar with the content of the addresses delivered by the Arab deputies in parliament and that these speeches had negatively influenced their attitude toward Jews. "In all eyes the Jew is becoming the anti-patriot, the traitor prepared to plunder his neighbor to take possession of his goods. The Christian excels in these accusations, but the Muslim follows on his heels."<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the widespread antipathy toward Zionism is evident in the fact that the Arab deputies who delivered their speeches during the May session of parliament stood on opposing sides of the barricades. Shukri al-'Asali had become by this time one of the leaders of the opposition, whereas Ruhi al-Khalidi was a staunch protagonist of the governing Committee for Union and Progress. In spite of this, they attributed Zionism such importance that they were able and willing to overcome their political differences and cooperate on this issue. Indeed, Shukri al-'Asali's success in the by-election to the Ottoman parliament at the beginning of 1911 also indicates the growing importance of anti-Zionism even in areas neighboring Palestine. 'Asali defeated several strong and influential rival candidates (Haqqi al-'Azm, 'Ata al-Bakri, Hashim Nazim) based on a political program a central point of which was his vow to resist Zionism "to his last drop of blood."<sup>71</sup> Alongside his membership in the Committee for Union and Progress, this



The transcript of the parliamentary speech authored by Haqqi al-'Azam and delivered by Shukri al-'Asali, published in *al-Muqtabas* under the headline "al-Isti'mar al-sahyuni fi majlis al-umma: Khitab rannan" (Zionist Colonization in Parliament: A Resounding Speech), 31 May 1911. Source: Microfilm collection, *al-Asad Library [Maktabat al-Asad]*, Damascus.

was perhaps the second most important reason for his success. That his efforts to prevent the sale of al-Fula to the Zionists played an essential role in his success was also the belief of the Damascus daily *al-Muqtabas*.<sup>72</sup>

Whereas in the period prior to the Young Turk Revolution only a few educated individuals and those Arab peasants who either lived in the vicinity of Jewish settlements or were evicted from their land were familiar with Jewish immigration, land purchases, or Zionist ambitions, in the span of time analyzed in this article a fundamental change took place. All the aforementioned reasons and arguments lead us to the conclusion that the short period of about a year from 1910 to 1911 was decisive in the spread of anti-Zionism in Palestine and its neighboring regions. The press, which since the Young Turk Revolution experienced unprecedented growth, played a crucial role, influencing educated elites and, thanks to the traditional mechanisms of information dissemination, some segments of the illiterate population, especially in towns and their vicinity. This crucial development was not lost on the representatives of the Zionist movement and it led the Zionist Organization to begin systematic monitoring of the Arabic press and to exert efforts to influence it. We agree with Muhammad Muslih, who writes: "It is no exaggeration to state that the press was perhaps the single most effective vehicle through which the initiators and advocates of various political persuasions made their views known to the masses throughout Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Arab opposition to Zionism was no exception."<sup>73</sup>

Significantly for the growth of anti-Zionism, events occurred one after another and just when it might have seemed that the

situation was calming down, yet another affair broke out and attention was once again directed at the Zionist movement and its activities in Palestine. Among the most significant events of this period were the project of Ilyas Sursuq, the al-Fula affair, the two debates in the parliament in March and May 1911, discussions between pro- and anti-Zionist authors in the Arabic newspapers, and the publication of the Arabic translation of the article on Zionism from the *Jewish Encyclopedia* by Najib Nassar. All of these combined to fuel a prolonged and sustained multifaceted campaign that lasted for approximately a year and led to a profound change in the public opinion not only in Palestine, but in Greater Syria in general, playing a key role in the formation of political opposition to Zionism.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), xxiv.
- 2 For more detailed information see Emanuel Beška, “Responses of Prominent Arabs towards Zionist Aspirations and Colonization prior to 1908,” *Asian and African Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 22–44.
- 3 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, xvii.
- 4 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 110.
- 5 “Jafalik ‘Abd al-Hamid wa mashru‘ Najib Bey Asfar” [The Crown Lands of Abdulhamid and the Project of Najib Bey Asfar], *al-Ahram*, 24 January 1911, 1; Khayriyya Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni fi al-sharq al-‘Arabi wa sadahu, 1908-1918* [Zionist Activities in the Arab East and Their Echo, 1908–1918] (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1973), 80–81.
- 6 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 87; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 127–28.
- 7 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 87; *Ha-Herut* also mentions *al-Najah* as another newspaper influenced by *al-Karmil*’s anti-Zionist campaign. Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 161, 287 note 112. In the years 1909–1914, *al-Muqtabas* republished at least fifteen articles from *al-Karmil*. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 138.
- 8 Najib al-Khuri Nassar, “al-Fallah wa-l-sahafi sinwan” [The Peasant and the Journalist are Twins], *al-Karmil*, 20 February 1914, 1.
- 9 Ami Ayalon, *Reading Palestine: Printing and Literacy, 1900–1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 3–4, 159.
- 10 Rashid Khalidi, “The Role of the Press in the Early Arab Reaction to Zionism,” *Peuples méditerranéens/Mediterranean Peoples* 20 (Jul.–Sep. 1982): 108, 115–16; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 138.
- 11 Khayriyya Qasimiyya, “Najib Nassar fi jaridatihi *al-Karmil* (1901–1914): Ahad ruwwad munahadat al-sahyuniya” [Najib Nassar in His Newspaper *al-Karmil* (1901–1914): One of the Pioneers of Anti-Zionist Resistance], *Shu‘un Filastiniyya* 23 (1973), 105.
- 12 Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 168–69, 280 note 60.
- 13 For more information on Shukri al-‘Asali’s political activities see Samir Seikaly, “Shukri al-‘Asali: A Case Study of a Political Activist,” in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeva S. Simon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 73–96. On his family and educational background and early career, see Corinne Lee Blake, “Training Arab-Ottoman Bureaucrats: Syrian Graduates of the Mülkiye Mektebi, 1890–1920” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1991), 42–43, 45, 54, 94–95, 121, 166, 203, 223, 270, 297. For more details on his anti-Zionist activities, see Emanuel Beška, “Shukri al-‘Asali, an Extraordinary Anti-Zionist

- Activist,” *Asian and African Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 237–254. Corrine Lee Blake has managed to trace the date of birth of Shukri al-‘Asali (1878) based on two sources: Ali Çankaya, *Mülkiye Tarihi ve Mülkiyeliler*, vol. 3 (Ankara: Örnek Matbaası, 1968–1969), 943; and Shukri al-‘Asali’s personal record in *Sicill-i ahval*. Corrine Lee Blake, e-mail message to author, 14 June 2014.
- 14 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 107.
  - 15 Haqqi al-‘Azm, “al-Isti‘mar al-sahyuni fi majlis al-umma: Khitab rannan” [Zionist Colonization in Parliament: A Resounding Speech], *al-Muqtabas*, 31 May 1911, 2.
  - 16 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 106.
  - 17 ‘Azm, “al-Isti‘mar al-sahyuni,” 2.
  - 18 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 108.
  - 19 Gershon Shafir, “Revolutionary Pioneer: Manya Schochat and Her Commune,” in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine/Israel*, ed. Mark LeVine and Gershon Shafir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 73–74.
  - 20 Nevill Barbour, *Nisi Dominus: A Survey of the Palestine Controversy* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), 116–17
  - 21 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 139.
  - 22 Shukri al-‘Asali, “Kitab min Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi ila qa’id al-hamla al-Hawraniyya Sami Basha al-Faruqi,” *al-Muqtabas*, 5 December 1910, 1. Neville Mandel deals with this letter at length in his monograph. However, he did not draw from the original article, but from an incomplete translation of it published in the Hebrew newspaper *ha-Herut* which omitted the first part of the letter. Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 87–90.
  - 23 ‘Asali, “Kitab min Salah al-Din,” 1.
  - 24 This is very interesting, and is also mentioned in articles written by other authors from this era (e.g., Najib al-Khuri Nassar, “al-Sahyuniyun ‘wa-l-jam‘iyya al-sahyuniya” [The Zionists and the “Zionist Organization”], *al-Muqtabas*, 4 February 1911, 1). It shows that many Jewish immigrants accepted Ottoman citizenship, but at the same time retained their original nationality. Then, according to the circumstances, they exploited the benefits of dual citizenship.
  - 25 Shukri al-‘Asali, “Kitab min Salah al-Din,” 1.
  - 26 Shukri al-‘Asali, “Kitab min Salah al-Din,” 1.
  - 27 Qasimiyya, “Najib Nassar fi jaridatihi,” 105.
  - 28 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 139.
  - 29 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 109.
  - 30 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 107.
  - 31 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 251 note 67.
  - 32 Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni*, 99.
  - 33 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 99.
  - 34 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 100–2. Louis Fishman discusses conspiracy theories that were spreading at that time in Istanbul concerning Jewish ambitions and their influence on CUP. Louis Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism in Light of the Emergence of a ‘Jewish Question,’” in *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule*, ed. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Ginio (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 108–9.
  - 35 Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni*, 83.
  - 36 Najib al-Khuri Nassar, *al-Sahyuniya, tarikhuha – gharaduha – ahammiyatuha. Mulakkkhasan ‘an al-insiklubidiya al-yahudiya* [Zionism. Its History, Objective, and Importance. Abridged from the Jewish Encyclopedia] (Haifa: Matba‘at al-Karmil bi-shari‘ Dayr ar-Rum, 1911), 2–3.
  - 37 Shukri al-‘Asali, “al-Siyaha fi Filastin” [Tourism in Palestine], *al-Muqtabas*, 11 August 1911, 1.
  - 38 Ruhi al-Khalidi (1864–1913) was a historian, diplomat, and politician. After his second election to the Ottoman parliament, he became its vice president. Regarding his manuscript, see Walid al-Khalidi, “Kitab *al-Siyunizm aw al-mas‘ala al-sahyuniya* li Muhammad Ruhi al-Khalidi al-mutawaffi sanat 1913” [The Book *Zionism, or the Zionist Question*, by Muhammad Ruhi al-Khalidi, died 1913], in *Studia Palaestina: Studies in Honour of Constantine K. Zurayk*, ed. Hisham Nashabe (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1988), 74.
  - 39 According to Ibrahim Effendi, the “Jewish Question” had been discussed fifteen times in the parliament before this debate took place on 16 May 1911. Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate,” 117.
  - 40 Sa‘id al-Husayni was not against Jewish immigration to the Ottoman Empire, only against their settlement in Palestine.
  - 41 Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 105; Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni*, 101; Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 112–16; ‘Azm, “al-Isti‘mar al-sahyuni,” 1–2; Louis Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate,” 111–19.
  - 42 Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni*, 101.
  - 43 Haqqi al-‘Azm, “Letter to the Editor,” *al-Muqtabas*, no. 681 (no date), 2.
  - 44 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 118.
  - 45 Nissim Malul was a Sephardi Jew of Tunisian origins who spent his childhood and youth in Egypt and in 1911 he became a correspondent

- of the Egyptian daily *al-Muqattam* in Jaffa. At the same time, he was secretly translating articles dealing with Zionism from Arabic newspapers for the newly established press bureau of the Palestinian Office (which was set up by the Zionist Organization). Furthermore, his job was also to respond to anti-Zionist articles published in the Arabic press. Michelle Campos labels him as “the paid translator and main propagandist for the Zionist movement from 1911 to 1914.” Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 287 note 123. See also: Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule* (New York: Syracuse Press, 2011), 102, 114–15; Abigail Jacobson, “Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the ‘Arab Question’ in pre-First World War Palestine: A Reading of Three Zionist Newspapers,” *Middle East Studies* 39, no. 2 (Apr. 2003): 119–120, 130 note 83; Qasimiyya, “Najib Nassar fi jaridatihi,” 104.
- 46 Qasimiyya, “Najib Nassar fi jaridatihi,” 106.
- 47 Nassar, “al-Sahyuniyun,” 1.
- 48 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 143.
- 49 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 122–24, 127, 143; Rashid Khalidi, “The Press as a Source for Modern Arab Political History: ‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Uraisi and *al-Mufid*,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 33.
- 50 Two issues of *Falastin* that were published on 3 and 7 January 1914 contain four more articles on Zionism. However, according to the Julian calendar, they are part of the 1913 volume.
- 51 “Bi munasabat ‘awdat *Falastin*” [On the Occasion of *Falastin*’s Return], *Falastin*, 6 June 1914, 1. At the end of the spring 1914, efforts were made to achieve Arab-Zionist rapprochement in Cairo, Beirut, and Palestine. Subsequently at the beginning of the summer all important newspapers in Cairo (with the exception of *al-Iqdam*) agreed not to publish articles on Zionism. Nazif Bey al-Khalidi was trying to achieve the same goal with regard to newspapers in Beirut. This was another reason for the decrease in the number of anti-Zionist articles in 1914 outside Palestine. Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 192–93, 199; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 124.
- 52 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 130–33.
- 53 The first two articles dealing with Zionism were published in December 1908 in *al-Ahram*. Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 133.
- 54 This took place in 1913 when the periodical *Sawt al-‘Uthmaniyya* was founded in Jaffa.
- 55 Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*, 102.
- 56 Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire*, 102; Jacobson, “Sephardim, Ashkenazim, and the ‘Arab Question,’” 110–11, 119.
- 57 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 130.
- 58 Khalidi, “*Kitab al-Siyunizm*,” 74.
- 59 The complete title of the newspaper was *al-Nafir al-‘Uthmani* (The Ottoman Trumpet). Mandel writes: “*Al-Nafir* received a small subsidy from the Zionist Office in Jaffa, and during 1911 was managed by a Jew.” Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 127.
- 60 This newspaper was edited by the wife of Shim‘on Moyal, Esther al-Azhari. Lisa Lital Levy, “Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863–1914” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007), 242.
- 61 Khalidi, “*Kitab al-Siyunizm*,” 74.
- 62 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 58.
- 63 ‘Asali, “al-Siyaha fi Filastin,” 1.
- 64 Qasimiyya, “Najib Nassar fi jaridatihi,” 104. Similar responses are described in connection to later trials. See, for example: Najib al-Khuri Nassar, “Bara’at jaridat *Falastin*” [The Innocence of *Falastin* Newspaper], *al-Karmil*, 8 May 1914, 2.
- 65 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 126. For more details on how information from the press was disseminated among the illiterate population through traditional circulation mechanisms among the illiterate population and on the borrowing of newspaper as an important factor in information diffusion see Ayalon, *Reading Palestine*, 63–64, 148–49.
- 66 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 103–4.
- 67 Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan*, 168–69.
- 68 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 107.
- 69 Though Antébi was opposed to Zionism ideologically, he can be labeled as practical Zionist since “he served as an intermediary in land sales, mediated between Jewish colonies and Arab villages in periods of clashes, and repeatedly intervened with local Ottoman officials in matters of importance to Jews.” Furthermore, he was employed by the Jewish Colonization Association and the Anglo-Palestine Bank and often helped their Palestinian Office. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 219.
- 70 Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 121.
- 71 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 109.
- 72 Qasimiyya, *al-Nashat al-sahyuni*, 83 note 166.
- 73 Muhammad Y. Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York and Washington: Columbia University Press and Institute for Palestine Studies, 1988), 79.