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Isolated Nation: Language Orientation and the Sephardi Intellectual Circle of Late Ottoman Palestine
Boaz Israel Levy

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Esther Moyal neé Azhari and Dr. Nissim Ya'acov Malul, two members of a Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine. This circle was unique from and related to its counterparts among European Zionists, non-Jewish *Mashriqis*, and the broader Sephardi community within and outside of Palestine. This study investigates the language orientations of these two intellectuals in order to demonstrate the contours of the Ottomanist, *Nahdawi*, and Zionist intellectual traditions from which they drew. This entails a review of the scholarship of the late Ottoman *Mashriq* in general, and this circle in particular. The article then introduces Azhari and Malul, their relationship to this circle, and their connections to Ottomanism, the *Nahda,* and Zionism. The study then analyzes their orientations towards language as expressed in a speech by Azhari and in an essay series by Malul. Through an analysis of Language Orientation, this study demonstrates that the unique intellectual synthesis and activities of Azhari and Malul distinguished them from European Zionists, non-Jewish *Mashriqis*, the Sephardim in Palestine, and the Sephardi community outside of Palestine.

BY

Boaz Israel Levy

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Boaz Israel Levy is the Museum Educator at the Jewish Museum of Florida-Florida International University. He holds a BA in Political Science from the University of North Florida. He researches Middle Eastern and North African Jewish communities in the twentieth century. He is particularly interested in their migration, their relations with non-Jewish communities, and their engagement with non-Zionist ideologies.

Introduction

Scholars of late Ottoman Palestine identify an intellectual circle of Sephardi Jews[1] whose experiences across the *Mashriq* resulted in a distinct set of common experiences, joint activities, and shared ideological views.[2] Primarily active between the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the First World War, this circle was characterized by proficiency in Arabic, extensive travel outside of Palestine, experience in journalism, and participation in the founding of the following publications and institutions (discussed at length later in this study): the Hebrew-language journal *Ha-Herut* ("Freedom"), the Arabic-language Zionist journal *Sawt al-Uthmaniya* ("Voice of Ottomanism"), and *Hevrat Ha-Magen* ("Society for Protection," also known simply as *Ha-Magen*, or "The Shield").[3] Ideologically, this circle shared the perception that, "the East" was a specific geographical region variously defined to include parts or the whole of the *Mashriq* and *Maghreb*, with "Eastern" identity having meaningful implications for geography, social networks, culture, and history.[4] Members included Albert Antebi (1873-1919), who was a key intermediary in the process of Zionist land purchases in Palestine, Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche (1870-1934), who helped found the city of Tel Aviv, and Avraham Elmaleh (1885-1976), a journalist and member of the first Israeli *Knesset* (parliament).[5] Scholars typically focus on the differences between this circle and European Jewish intellectuals based in Palestine who were involved in the Zionist movement,[6]

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1   Scholars and these historical figures themselves have used many identifiers to refer to this population, including MENA Jews, Mizrahi Jews, and Arab Jews. This article utilizes "Sephardi" to highlight the "Sephardi model" of relations between Jews and non-Jews in the Muslim world, characterized by an interest in both Arab and Zionist culture, coexistence between European Jews and non-Jewish Palestinians, and the unique position of Sephardi Jews to address such issues; Orit Bashkin, "Arab Jews: History, Memory, and Literary Identities in the *Naḥḍah*," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* [Online], (June 20, 2022): 8-9, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1305.

2   "*Mashriq*" ("east") refers to the part of the Arabic-speaking world contrasted by the "Maghreb" ("west"), which includes most of North Africa. This article employs a limited definition of the region including parts of modern Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon. This spatial concept of analysis is relevant because it cultivated modern Arab identity via the *Nahda*, and therefore relates to the question of what it meant to be Jewish within an Arab cultural context; Lital Levy, "Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the '*Mashriq*,'" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 4 (Fall 2008): 460, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25470275.

3   Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, "The Possibility of Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 47-48, 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43917049.; Louis Fishman, "Arab Jewish Voices in Ottoman Palestine: Caught between the Sephardim and Palestinians," *Revue d'histoire culturelle*, no. 2 (2021): 6, https://doi.org/10.4000/rhc.915.

4   Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 47-48.

5   Also included were Hayyim Ben-Kiki (1887-1935), Moshe Matalon (1872-1959), Dr. Shimon Moyal (1866-1915), and Yitzhak Shami (1888-1949); Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 55; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 6.

6   It is critical to emphasize this study does not focus on Sephardi or European Jews outside of Palestine, nor those in Palestine uninvolved in the Zionist movement. There were

often comparing their views on the relationship between Jews and non-Jewish *Mashriqis*.[7] One of the most contentious issues between this circle and European Zionists was whether or not the Jewish community in Palestine ought to establish a Jewish Arabic-language journal,[8] a debate which formed the basis for future distinctions between Sephardi and European Zionist discourses in Palestine.[9]

Language Orientation, the political, social, moral, and epistemological currency with which historical agents view different languages, was central to this debate which served as the foundation of future controversies between Sephardim and European Zionists in Palestine.[10] Therefore, Language Orientation is relevant to understanding further differences between this circle and other intellectuals in Palestine. Although scholars have analyzed the discourse of language in the context of this specific debate, this study goes further by deepening the ties between Language Orientation, this Sephardi

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crucial commonalities between Sephardi and European Jews in Palestine, especially with regard to language. For instance, while Sephardi intellectuals in Palestine were much more connected to Ottoman and Arab politics and culture, European Jews still "underwent a process of acculturation and integration within the Arab environment," albeit a quotidian and transactional one; Yair Wallach, "Rethinking the *yishuv:* late-Ottoman Palestine's Jewish communities revisited," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 281-282, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2016.1246230. This study calls attention to the perceptions of difference by European and Sephardi Jews. The commonality of Sephardi Jews perceiving themselves as being "Eastern Jews" and having a favorable relationship to "the East," defined in myriad ways, ultimately distinguished Sephardi intellectuals in Palestine from their European Jewish counterparts; Moshe Behar, "1911: the birth of the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 313-314, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2017.1295588. Less relevant to Sephardi Zionists were the differences between themselves. For a discussion on how Sephardi intellectuals constructed such a commonality between individuals from communities as divergent as Morocco and Iraq, see Yehuda Sharim, "*The Struggle for Sephardic-Mizrahi Autonomy: Racial Identities in Palestine-Israel, 1918–1948.*" Ph.D diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2013.

7   This study utilizes the term "non-Jewish *Mashriqis*" to reflect that this Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine interacted with various nationalities in the *Mashriq*, and to emphasize that such national communities once had the opportunity to refer to themselves as part of a broader group, such as the *Mashriq* or "Greater Syria"; Behar and Benite, "The Possible of Modern ME Jewish Thought," 60; Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 313; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 5; Abigail Jacobson, "Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the 'Arab Question' in Pre-First World War Palestine: A Reading of Three Zionist Newspapers," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2003): 126, https://www.jstor.org/stable/4284294.

8   At times, proponents advocated for a bilingual Hebrew-Arabic journal, but at others they advocated for an Arabic journal published by the "Hebrew" community, "Hebrew" here employed as a national rather than linguistic term; Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 314. For consistency, this article describes this as a "Jewish Arabic journal" except when quoting sources.

9   Behar describes "Mizrahi discourse" as "a multifaceted discourse [… that] existed in the pre-1948 modern Middle East, and remains chiefly inside Israel/Palestine today, a distinct sociocultural collectivity consisting of Eastern (non-Ashkenazi) Jews"; Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 313.

10   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 312-331.

intellectual circle, and their *Mashriqi* contexts.[11] This paper argues that the Language Orientation of the Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine demonstrated a unique, albeit unpopular fusion of Ottomanist, *Nahdawi*, and Zionist thought. To this end, this paper analyzes two works by influential members of this circle: a speech by Esther Moyal neé Azhari and an essay series by Dr. Nissim Ya'acov Malul, both members of this circle.[12] On the one hand, these sources emphasized a shared intellectual tradition between Azhari and Malul, while on the other they highlighted important distinctions within the Sephardi intellectual circle.

Language Orientation in the late Ottoman Empire was complex and fluid; an individual's belonging to one specific community and it's related language did not necessarily exclude that individual from identifying with another community or it's language, in part because few forces in the Ottoman government or its many religious communities stimulated the use of a specific language.[13] This was reflected in *Ottomanism*, an ideology which came about in the late 1800s during the Ottoman *Tanzimat* ("reorganization") reforms and proliferated after the 1908 Young Turk Revolution.[14] Ottomanism can be defined as an ideology under which the empire granted subjects equality, with the objective of uniting them through a sense of common citizenship and territory, and dissuading them from forming separatist nationalist movements along ethnic or linguistic lines.[15] Therefore, cultural movements which were not necessarily separatist, such as the *Nahda* ("awakening"), were able to flourish under Ottomanism. The *Nahda* can be described as multiple movements during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries which sought to revive the Islamic Golden Age through the renewal of Arabic literature and the adoption of European sciences.[16] Arabic occupied a central role for *Nahdawais* (the participants in the *Nahda*), who sought to turn it into, "a

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11   For instance, Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers," 126.

12   Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 55; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 6.

13   Heleen Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives: Language and Religion in the Ottoman Empire and its Successor States," in *Arabic and its Alternatives: Religious Minorities and Their Languages in the Emerging Nation States of the Middle East (1920-1950)*, ed. Murre-van den Berg, Karène Sanchez Summerer, and Tijmen C. Baardamurre (Koninklijke Brill NV, 2020): 2, 4-5, 27, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwzqw.

14   Daniel J. Schroeter, "The Changing Relationship between the Jews of the Arab Middle East and the Ottoman state in the Nineteenth Century," in *Jews, Turks, Ottomans: Fifteenth through the Twentieth Century* ed. Avigdor Levy (University of Syracuse, 2002): 88.

15   Ibid.; Michelle U. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine,* (Stanford University Press, 2011): 61, http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=17157.

16   Moshe Behar, "Fusing Arab *Nahda*, European *Haskalah,* and Euro-Zionism: Eastern Jewish thought in late-Ottoman and post-Ottoman Palestine," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 273, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2017.1295589; Bashkin, "Arab Jews" 2-3.

modern language of literature, science, and politics."[17] This linguistic mission was intimately tied to pan-Arab nationalism, with the modernization of Arabic serving as, "an instrument to forge an 'Arab' people," from the multiple societies, regions, religions, and religious denominations of the Arabic-speaking Ottoman provinces.[18] Furthermore, the *Nahda* had a multilingual character: *Nahdawais* drew from works in a variety of world languages to develop the ideas they published in Arabic, their thought compared the historical and ethnic trajectories of Arabic to other languages, and they often employed translations of the same works in multiple world languages.[19] The language orientations of these Ottomanist and *Nahdawi* intellectual traditions stood in direct contrast to a hegemonic Hebrew language orientation then developing in the Zionist movement in Palestine. Historically, Palestine was multilingual, and the Jewish community there expressed itself in multiple languages both privately and publicly.[20] Moreover, the official Zionist discourse accepted multiple languages, including Arabic, for practical purposes and as a means to further Zionism.[21] Nevertheless, according to the contemporary historian Liora R. Halperin, "the Zionist vision, writ large, was to create a self-sufficient Hebrew culture [... to] signal the end of dependence on surrounding cultures."[22] She continues, " [...] the imperative for [Hebrew] monolingualism came from the perception that Jews [in Palestine] were, and could manifestly be, an autonomous nation in the European model."[23]

The Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine integrated elements from all three of these intellectual traditions. During the 1908 Revolution, the Young Turks reinstated the *Tanzimat*-era constitution, boosting Ottoman identity among Palestine's elites and popularizing Ottomanism among Palestine's Sephardi community.[24] Contemporary historians such as Moshe Behar, Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Louis Fishman, and Abigail Jacobson find that the Hebrew journal *Ha-Herut* ("Freedom"), which avidly supported the revolution and Ottomanism, consistently represented the Sephardi intellectual

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17   Bashkin, "Arab Jews" 3; Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 21.

18   Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 4-5, 21-22.

19   Bashkin, "Arab Jews" 3-4.

20   Liora R. Halperin, "Majority and Minority Languages in the Middle East: The Case of Hebrew in Mandatory Palestine," in *Minorities and the Modern Arab World: New Perspectives*, ed. Laura Robson (Syracuse University Press, 2016): 177, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j2n7nw.

21   Liora R. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920-1948.* (Yale University Press, 2015): 5, 15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1sx3.

22   Halperin, "The Case of Hebrew," 176.

23   Halperin, "The Case of Hebrew," 179.

24   Wallach, "Rethinking the *yishuv*," 280-281. For Ottomanism, see Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*.

circle.[25] Furthermore, many of the individuals in this Sephardi intellectual circle had *Nahdawi* ties, with the scholars Lital Levy and Orit Bashkin specifically mentioning Azhari, Malul, Elmaleh, and Dr. Shimon Moyal for their cultural contributions.[26] Before settling in Palestine, many of these intellectuals or their families had roots in Jewish communities across the *Mashriq* and *Maghreb*.[27] Like other Sephardim in Palestine, they maintained ties to their communities of origin.[28] However, they diverged from other Sephardim in Palestine and elsewhere because they engaged with a network of *Nahdawais*, traveling across and outside of the *Mashriq* and contributing to the Arabic press centers of Cairo and Beirut. This circle was also unique compared to European Zionist intellectuals in Palestine: while both contributed to the Hebrew press, the latter lacked the former's involvement in the Arabic press and command of the Arabic language.[29]

Nevertheless, the Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine was decidedly Zionist; they subscribed to the revival of Hebrew, and they believed the emerging hostility between European Zionists and non-Jewish Palestinians[30] was based on the latter's misunderstanding of the former's aims.[31] Generally, this circle upheld cooperation between Jews and non-Jewish Palestinians while opposing concepts such as "Hebrew Labor."[32] However, scholars should not overemphasize this circle's focus on non-Jewish Palestinians and mediation, for in many cases the Sephardi intellectuals failed to satisfy critiques of Zionism from the perspective of non-Jewish Palestinians.[33] Instead, they aimed to shut down criticism of Zionism in the Arabic press altogether while propagandizing Zionism to both Jewish

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25   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 313-314; Wallach, "Rethinking the *yishuv,*" 288; Regarding *Ha-Herut* as representative of the Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine, see Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 313-314; Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 55; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 4; Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers," 106-107.

26   Lital Levy, "The Naḥḍa and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform,'" *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16, no. 3 (2013): 306-307, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/147526 2X.2013.891391; Bashkin, "Arab Jews" 10, 14.

27   Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 47-48.

28   Ibid.; Bashkin, "Arab Jews," 9-10, 14; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 9.

29   Ibid.

30   While I have used "non-Jewish *Mashriqis*" elsewhere, I here specify "non-Jewish Palestinians" to emphasize that Palestine and Palestinians were at the center of this contention.

31   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 314; Menachem Klein, "Arab Jew in Palestine," *Israel Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 145.

32   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 314; "Hebrew Labor" refers to a European Zionist concept which argued the Jewish community in Palestine should only employ Jews.

33   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 4-5; For more on the role Sephardi Zionists played in mediation, see Abigail Jacobson and Moshe Naor, *Oriental Neighbors: Middle Eastern Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine*, (Brandeis University Press, 2016).

and non-Jewish *Mashriqis*.[34] This resulted in criticism from the non-Jewish *Mashriqi* press.[35] Relatedly, this circle's *Nahdawi* convictions were a point of contention with regards to many European Zionist intellectuals in Palestine, who tended to view Arabic with hostility and derided the circle's connections to Arab culture as assimilationist.[36] At the same time, the combination of their transnational experiences in the *Nahdawi* circles of Beirut and Cairo on the one hand, and their relationship with Zionist institutions in Jerusalem on the other, distinguished this circle from the broader Jewish community in Palestine as well as the many Sephardi communities outside of Palestine.[37]

This study focuses on the writings of Esther Moyal neé Azhari and Dr. Nissim Ya'acov Malul. While other studies have discussed Azhari and Malul,[38] this article argues they do not emphasize simultaneously the Ottomanist, *Nahdawi*, and Zionist intellectual traditions which Azhari and Malul adopted, nor do they specifically compare these two historical figures. Furthermore, Azhari and Malul's Language Orientations were representative of this circle, and therefore merit additional research. Azhari and Malul were representative of this Sephardi intellectual circle in three ways. First, because of the influential role they played in the issues most important to the circle: developing a Jewish Arabic press and defending Zionism in the extant Arabic press. For example, in January 1914, Malul, Azhari, and her husband Dr. Shimon Moyal were the sole founders of *Sawt al-Uthmaniyya* ("The Voice of Ottomanism"), a journal which sought to propagandize Zionism to non-Jewish Mashriqi readers.[39] Moreover, Azhari and Malul were co-founders of *Hevrat Ha-Magen* ("Society for Protection," also known simply as *Ha-Magen*, or "The Shield"), an organization which sought to challenge perceived Arab

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34   Ibid.

35   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 10.

36   Behar specifically mentions Yosef Klausner, YH Brenner, Ya'acov Rabinovitch, and the publication *Ha-Poel Ha-Tzair*, among many other instances; Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 314-317, 319-320, 323, 325, 329.

37   Bashkin, "Arab Jews: History, Memory, and Literary Identities," 9-10; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 8; Lital Levy, "Partitioned Pasts: Arab Jewish intellectuals and the case of Esther Azharī Moyal (1873–1948)," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual: Empire, public sphere and the colonial coordinates of selfhood,* ed. Dyala Hamzah (Routledge, 2013): 136.

38   See Bashkin, "Arab Jews;" Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy;" Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians;" Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers;" Levy, "Partitioned Pasts"; Abigail Jacobson, "The Sephardi Jewish Community in Pre-World War I Jerusalem: Debates in the Hebrew Press," *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 14, (2001), https://cris.huji.ac.il/en/publications/the-sephardi-jewish-community-in-pre-world-war-i-jerusalem-debate;

39   Behar and Benite, "The Possibility of Modern Middle Eastern Thought," 55; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 8; Jacobson, "The Sephardi Jewish Community," 34. The paper largely failed, with contributors Malul and Moyal ridiculed in the Palestinian press which deemed *Sawt al-Uthmaniyya* a Zionist paper, even anti-Muslim; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 10, 12.

antisemitism and anti-Zionism in the Arabic press.[40] Second, both Azhari and Malul achieved considerable status in *Nahdawi* society independent of these activities, which are discussed later in the study. Third, Malul received special recognition by this circle for his impact in the Arabic press. Specifically, after arriving in Jaffa in 1911, Malul was well-received by this Sephardi intellectual circle because of his extensive experience defending Zionism in the Arabic press.[41] However, Azhari did not receive the same recognition during her career. For example, while *Ha-Herut* published extensively on which Jewish writers proficient in Arabic could champion a Jewish Arabic journal, its editors never named Azhari.[42] Louis Fishman claims the views towards women of the more conservative Jewish community of Palestine, in addition to Azhari's weaker possession of Hebrew, contributed to her diminished influence in Palestine when compared to her status in *Nahdawi* society.[43]

Nahdawi Elements of Language Orientation

Within the Sephardi intellectual circle of late Ottoman Palestine, Esther Moyal neé Azhari clearly demonstrated a fusion of Ottomanist, *Nahdawi,* and Zionist thought, while specifically leaning towards the intellectual tradition of the *Nahda*. Azhari was born in Beirut in 1873 to a Sephardi family. Despite being raised in a family of lower status than other Jewish families in Beirut, Azhari achieved a remarkable education; she memorized the Quran, studied with a respected Arab writer, obtained a degree from the Syrian Protestant College of Beirut, and taught in several Beirut schools while serving as member and founder of multiple women's organizations.[44] Like many *Nahdawais*, Azhari translated various European texts into Arabic, with venues including the local Jewish theater, Beirut publications, and prestigious Cairene journals.[45]

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40   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 13-14; Halperin, *Babel in Zion,* 163-164.

41   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 6-7; Behar calls Malul "the most authoritative individual on Arabic journalism by Jews;" Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 318. Furthermore, Malul's Arabic writings in the defense of Zionism were celebrated by his contemporaries; Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers," 26-27.

42   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 8.

43   Ibid.

44   Levy, "Partitioned pasts," 136; Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, & Culture, 1893-1958, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2013): 30, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv102bhzm.

45   Behar and Benite, *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* 30; Levy, "Partitioned pasts," 128-129, 136-138; Shmuel Moreh and Philip Sadgrove, *Jewish Contributions to Nineteenth-Century Arabic Theatre: Plays from Algeria and Syria - a Study and Texts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 80-81.

In 1894, Azhari married Shimon Moyal, a Jew from Jaffa who also constituted a member of this intellectual circle.[46] After marrying, the couple moved to Istanbul, later spending several years traveling between Cairo, Safed, Tiberias, and Beirut before settling in Cairo, a *Nahadawi* center. There they joined the vibrant *Nahdawi* society of native Egyptians and Syrian migrants. Shortly after the move, Azhari founded *al-Aila* ("The Family"), a bimonthly journal which was devoted in part to *Nahadawi* topics such as literature and science and well-received by the Cairene press.[47] Azhari's involvement in the *Nahda* can be confirmed through this brief introduction to her educational background, her relationship with *Nahdawi* circles, her corpus of translation, and her contributions to newer scholarly and literary genres in Arabic.[48] Azhari and Moyal would move to Jaffa between 1908-1909, where they became heavily involved in Ottomanist and Zionist politics (discussed later in this study).[49]

We can glean the *Nahdawi* character of Azhari's Language Orientation from a commencement speech she delivered to the 1911 graduating class of the American College for Girls in Beirut. Azhari said, "Note, my dear ladies, that you are Arab Syrians and that your knowledge of English or French does not make you an Englishwoman or a Frenchwoman."[50] For Azhari, "no matter how hard," her audience tried "to hide your [Arab Syrian] nationality […] the Westerner will remind you [of it] through her treatment of you." Azhari linked language to nationalism in this portion of the speech, arguing the acquisition of English and French threatened an Arab Syrian identity she sought to promote. Following her logic that language could pose a cultural threat, Azhari pressed her audience to,

> [...] stop following Westerners in every situation, whether good or bad. Let us go back and learn our language [Arabic], refine its expression when we talk, and make our children keen on learning it along with the poetry of our poets and the proverbs of our wise men. Let us go back to giving our sons and daughters names that remind us of our great history and the poems of our significant poets.[51]

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46 Levy, "Partitioned pasts," 136; regarding Shimon Moyal, see Behar and Benite, " Jewish Thought," 55; Fishman, "Arab Jewish Voices," 6.

47 Ibid., 137.

48 Additionally, Bashkin has included Azhari in her article on Arab Jews and the *Nahda*; see Bashkin, "Arab Jews," 4-5, 15.

49 Levy, "Partitioned pasts," 138.

50 Beirut, then still a part of the Ottoman Empire, was at times understood as part of "Greater Syria." ; Esther Moyal neé Azhari, "Khitab" ("Speech"), *al-Hasna'*, (October 1911): 24-29, in *Modern ME Jewish Thought*, ed. by Behar and Benite, 31-37.

51 Esther Moyal neé Azhari, pages 24-29 in an article entitled "Khitab" ("Speech") in the journal *al-Hasna',* October 1911, in Behar and Benite, *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* 31-37.

Azhari then endowed the Arabic language with political currency, demanding, "Let us establish an Eastern Arab [referring to the *Mashriq*] Civilization in which the woman will make half the effort to promote and glorify it in front of civilized people."[52] Present in Azhari's language orientation was the central *Nahdawi* concept that the Arabic language in particular was a tool which could produce a single Arab people from the diverse Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire.[53] By contrast, according to Azhari, foreign languages like English and French misled the "Eastern Arab Civilization."

While the language orientation of this speech emphasized the *Nahdawi* character of Azhari's thought, it should not betray her commitments to Ottomanism and Zionism. For instance, Azhari's call to establish an Eastern Arab Civilization should not be read as a promotion of separatist nationalism. *Nahdawais* could share Azhari's commitment to Arabic and a related Arab identity without excluding themselves from other Middle Eastern identities or languages.[54] Furthermore, her vast experiences giving Ottomanist speeches, hosting Ottomanist celebrations, publishing in the Ottomanist press, and associating with Ottomanist organizations also evinced her dedication to the Ottoman Empire.[55] In order to better understand Azhari's relationship to Zionism, her colleague, who joined in many of her Zionist efforts and leaned further towards that ideology, must be introduced.

Zionist Elements of Language Orientation

From the Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine, Dr. Nissim Ya'acov Malul also represented a synthesis of Ottomanist, *Nahdawi*, and Zionist thought. However, Malul was more committed to Zionism than Azhari. Malul was born in Safed in 1892 to a family which had inhabited Palestine for generations and, as a child, his family immigrated to Tanta and then Cairo.[56] Malul began his journalistic career writing for the prestigious *al-Muqattam* ("The Mokattam," a hill range near Cairo) paper, also publishing in the widely-read Egyptian and Lebanese press with a focus on responding to perceived antisemitic attacks.[57] Moving to Jaffa in 1911, Malul weighed in on the prospects of a Jewish Arabic journal, the topic of much debate between this Sephardi intellectual circle and the European Zionist intellectuals in

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52   Ibid., 37.

53   Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 21-22.

54   Ibid., 6.

55   Levy, "Partitioned pasts," 128-129, 138, 147-150.

56   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 6.

57   Ibid., 7.

Palestine.[58] In this early 1911 discussion, which Moshe Behar has termed "the birth of the Mizrahi-Ashkenazi controversy" because of the ethnic characteristics of the debate, Malul argued for the importance of a Jewish Arabic journal on the basis that the Ottomans expected Jews to publish in Arabic and the lack thereof created a "silence" signifying "betrayal" to the empire.[59] Malul would go on to work in the Arabic press bureau, established by the Zionist movement in 1911 in order to monitor the opinion of Zionism in the Arabic press and publish pro-Zionist articles in existing Arabic journals.[60]

The 1911 controversy over the proposal of publishing a Jewish Arabic journal resurfaced in 1913, when a dispute erupted between Malul and Ya'acov Rabinovitch, a European Zionist writer.[61] Rabinovitch had written an article in the popular labor Zionist paper *Ha-Poel Ha-Tsair* (*"The Young Worker"*) objecting to three of Malul's activities: a proposal to form a Jewish Arabic teacher's union, his support for "Arab Rights," and his aim to create a Jewish Arabic-language journal.[62] Malul responded with a series of three essays, defending his position in *Ha-Herut*.[63] The contemporary historians Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite emphasize the ethnic dimensions of this debate by focusing on Rabinovitch, who rebutted Malul's proposals for the teaching of Arabic and a Jewish Arabic teachers union, casting the Sephardim as, "Arabised intellectuals" who represented an, "internal threat" to the Zionist movement.[64] Abigail Jacobson argues the essays broke from the Zionism of both European Zionist intellectuals and this Sephardi intellectual circle given the wide array of critiques from both parties.[65] Dedicating analysis to the Language Orientation of Malul's essays by and relating them to their specific intellectual contexts expands upon the existing scholarship. While these essays do indicate *Nahdawi* influences which distinguished Malul's Zionism from his European Zionist contemporaries, he clearly adopted elements of a hegemonic Hebrew Language Orientation.

In his first essay, Malul offered two options for the future of the Jewish community in Palestine. Malul advocated for a plan to galvanize the study of

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58   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 324.

59   Ibid.

60   Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers," 110-111, 119.

61   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 329; Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 50.

62   Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: She'elat Limud 'Ivrit-'Aravit" ("Our status in the country: the question of Hebrew teaching of Arabic"), *Ha-Herut*, (17 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 65-67.

63   Ibid.

64   Behar and Benite, "Jewish Thought," 50-51.

65   Jacobson, "The Sephardi Jewish Community," 27; Jacobson, "Three Zionist Newspapers," 121, 125-126.

Arabic in the Jewish community in Palestine through the formation of a Jewish Arabic teachers union and the composition of an Arabic textbook. According to Malul, the alternative option was to, " [...] cease teaching Arabic [... and] become a Jewish nation in our own right with our own unique language, customs, and public and private affairs."[66] While such a nation reflected the hegemonic Hebrew vision of an independent Jewish community in Palestine, for Malul such an outcome was dangerous. He warned,

> [...] we will become an isolated nation, separated from all other peoples living under Ottoman rule. We will not [be able to] engage with the existing nation [of non-Jewish Palestinians] in any way, thereby destroying this [linguistic] connection with the outside world, and our situation will become similar to that faced in the past by Spain, Portugal, and now in Russia.[67]

Malul's Ottomanist thought is clearly indicated by the currency he placed on remaining connected to the Ottoman Empire, and how he rebutted the idea of an independent Jewish nation. For Malul, the inability of the Jewish community to engage with its multilingual Ottoman landscape was akin to what he perceived as the isolation of Jewish communities in Europe.[68] Perplexingly, though perhaps in line with that multilingual reality, Malul wrote, " [...] there is no requirement for a nationalist person to know his language [...] the nationalist is one who experiences feelings of nationalism [...] through his nationalist deeds."[69]

Nahdawi strains of thought also permeated his ideas, eliciting fascinating comparisons between Malul and Azhari. Malul wrote, "it is criminal to teach our children all those European languages that push them to leave the country and live in the Diaspora."[70]At the end of his third essay, Malul argued,

> If we, the heirs of Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Levi and Maimonides, wish to follow in their ways, we must know Arabic well and merge with the Arabs the way they, the great sages, did. As a semitic nation we must reinforce our semitic nationhood and not blur it within European culture. By utilizing

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66   Halperin, "The Case of Hebrew," 176, 179-180.

67   Behar and Benite argue Malul intended to warn the Jewish community of Palestine of "repeating the pattern" of "ghettoization" as experienced in "some locations in Europe before the twentieth century"; Behar and Benite, *Modern ME Jewish Thought*, 66.

68   Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 2, 4-5, 27.

69   Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: She'elat Limud 'Ivrit-'Aravit" ("Our status in the country: the question of Hebrew teaching of Arabic"), *Ha-Herut*, (17 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 65-67.

70   Ibid.

Arabic we can create a real Hebrew culture, but if we blend it with European elements we will simply be committing suicide.[71]

Like other *Nahdawais*, Malul here argued for the power of Arabic to create a nation.[72] Just as Azhari linked the Arabic language to an "Eastern Arab Civilization," Malul believed Arabic would forge "a semitic nation" and "a real Hebrew culture." In line with Azhari, Malul found European languages and culture to be misleading, which convinced the children of settlers "to leave the country and live in the Diaspora."[73]

Nevertheless, there are significant distinctions between Azhari and Malul. He called "the fears about learning Arabic and assimilating with the other people of this land, and losing our sense of nationality […] nonsense" because "it is unimaginable and impossible that such a toddler culture [Arab] could push us back." Malul's paternalistic view of Arab culture certainly clashed with Azhari's views and contradicted his former statements. For instance, his call to "merge with the Arabs" contradicted directly his claim that "it is not true […] that I call for merging and assimilation with them [the non-Jewish Palestinians]."[74] Malul's paternalistic attitudes toward Arabic distinguished him from Azhari, cautioning against a strictly *Nahdawi* reading of his thought. Introducing the Zionist elements of his language orientation contextualizes these apparent contradictions.

In his second essay, Malul reminded the audience of the 1911 controversy over the Jewish Arabic-language newspaper proposal. While Malul had previously argued for the Jewish Arabic-language journal on the basis that it would propagandize Zionism to non-Jewish Arabs,[75] here Malul's target was Sephardim, writing,

Who does not know that our [Jewish] brothers in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and the rest of the countries of the Orient do not really care about the movement to settle the Land of Israel, and in general are very removed from all this business of our national movement? These brothers of ours do not know any language except Arabic. So […] the

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71   Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: Sof" ("Our status in the country: end"), *Ha-Herut*, (19 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 69.

72   Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 21-22.

73   Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: She'elat Limud 'Ivrit-'Aravit" ("Our status in the country: the question of Hebrew teaching of Arabic"), *Ha-Herut*, (17 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 67.

74   During the 1911 controversy, Malul also described paternalistically the non-Jewish Arabs in Palestine as a "minor culture;" Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 8.

75   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 324.

best means to draw their hearts toward us is by creating a journal […] in Arabic. In this journal we can speak to our [Jewish] brothers about the benefits of the national movement and […] enfold our Oriental brothers within the wings of nationalism.[76]

According to Malul, the Sephardim outside of Palestine were agnostic on Zionism and the only avenue for propagandizing was Arabic. In this section, Malul reflected a hegemonic Hebrew language orientation, where Arabic was simply a practical tool to further the aims of Zionism.[77]

Conclusion

Both Azhari and Malul were dedicated Zionists, evinced by their roles in propagandizing Zionism through *Sawt al-Uthmaniya* and Ha-Magen. For example, Azhari, Malul, and other members of Ha-Magen played with a variety of strategies to promote Zionism, including running Jewish candidates for Ottoman parliamentary elections, building legal teams to prosecute anti-Zionist papers in Ottoman courts, shutting down Arabic papers through contacts in Istanbul, and bribing "medium"[78]Arabic papers to publish Zionist responses to anti-Zionist articles.[79] In light of these Zionist activities alone, it would appear Azhari and Malul were mostly influenced by Zionism and Ottomanism.

Therefore, these sources on Language Orientation play a critical role in understanding these historical figures, which not only blended Zionism and Ottomanism, but *Nahdawi* thought as well. The Language Orientations of Azhari and Malul fit into the multilingual late Ottoman Empire.[80] Neither of them sought to separate from the Ottoman Empire, and both viewed European languages and culture as misguiding. Thus, Azhari and Moyal shared Ottomanism as a foundation of their thought. However, the extent

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76   Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: Hishtatfut ba-Ta'amula li-Drishat Zekhuyot ha-'Arviyyim ve-Yisud 'Iton 'Aravi-Yehudi" ("Our status in the country: participating in the struggle for Arab rights and establishing a Jewish-Arab newspaper"), *Ha-Herut*, (18 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 67-69.

77   Halperin, *Babel in Zion,* 5, 15.

78   In a 1914 article, Malul divided the Arabic press into four groups: "free papers" ignored Zionism, "medium papers" only reprinted arguments on Zionism, "extremist papers" strongly opposed Zionism, and "protector papers" supported Zionism; Jacobson, "The Sephardi Jewish Community," 29-30. However, Rashid Khalidi's survey of the Arabic press between 1908-1914 found all but one were anti-Zionist; Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (Columbia University Press, 2010): 122-124, https://hdl-handle-net.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/2027/heb00158.0001.001.

79   Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 13-14; Halperin, *Babel in Zion*, 164.

80   Murre-van den Berg, "Arabic and its Alternatives," 2, 4-5, 27.

to which they were committed to *Nahdawi* or Zionist traditions differed. While these strains were not necessarily opposed, their writings on Language Orientation revealed the possibility for contention. Azhari leaned closer to *Nahdawi* traditions, glorifying Arabic and its role in forging an "Eastern Arab Civilization." Malul echoed this Language Orientation as well, arguing that the Jewish community needed Arab culture in order to become a "semitic nation" and a "real Hebrew culture."[81] However, unlike Azhari, Malul also invoked elements of a hegemonic Hebrew language orientation, where Arabic was the language of a "toddler culture," whose ability to "reinforce our semitic nationhood" and propagandize to Sephardim was simply a practical means to the ends of Zionism.

While both Azhari and Malul were Ottomanists, *Nahdawais*, and Zionists, the former represented an intellectual tradition weighted towards the *Nahda* while the latter leaned closer to Zionism. By focusing on their Language Orientations, the readers can appreciate the complicated ways in which Azhari and Malul synthesized Ottomanist, *Nahdawi*, and Zionist intellectual traditions while contributing to both *Nahdawi* society and Zionist institutions. As a result, both Azhari and Malul distinguished themselves from non-Jewish *Mashriqis*, European Zionists, Sephardim in Palestine, and Sephardi communities outside of Palestine. Unique in their cultural contributions, journalistic endeavors, and political thought, the Sephardi intellectual circle in late Ottoman Palestine was the target of criticism from both European Zionists and non-Jewish *Mashriqis*, the circle itself becoming an "isolated nation" to use Malul's words of warning.[82]

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81   This article considers Malul's use of the term "semitic" to be national, rather than racial or linguistic. According to Behar and Benite, Malul was "an advocate of semitic Jewish nationalism," though they do not elaborate; Behar and Benite, *Modern ME Jewish Thought*, 62. Furthermore, Malul himself connects the "semitic nation" with a "semitic nationhood" opposed to "European culture," not race or language; Nissim Ya'acov Malul, "Ma'amadenu ba-Aretz: Sof" ("Our status in the country: end"), *Ha-Herut*, (19 June 1913), in *Modern ME Jewish Thought,* ed. by Behar and Benite, 69.

82   Behar, "Mizrahi-Ashkenazi Controversy," 314-317, 319-320, 323, 325, 329; Fishman, "Sephardim and Palestinians," 10.