

THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE OTTOMANS, ZIONISTS AND PALESTINIAN JEWS AS REFLECTED IN ISRAELI HISTORY TEXTBOOKS*

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In Israeli history curriculum the timespan 1870-1920 constitutes a key period, serving as the subject of individual textbooks. This formative epoch, which witnessed such critical developments as the emergence of Zionism, the first two Aliyahs, the Balfour Declaration, the split of Palestine from the Ottoman territories, and the establishment of the British Mandate, proved a milestone on the path leading to the establishment of Israel three decades later. The textbooks considering this period dwell at length on the policies of Abdulhamid II and the Young Turks toward the Jewish settlers in Palestine, as well as toward Herzl and other Zionist leaders. In this context, the present study aims to investigate how the Israeli history textbooks used in state schools since 1948 reflect the Ottoman authorities' relations with the Zionists and the Palestinian Jews when the region was still under Ottoman rule. The results of this research will help grasp the role that the textbooks attribute to the Ottomans in the process leading up to the Declaration of Independence, as well as the Ottoman image they reflect in general.

Research on textbooks was taken up in earnest after the end of World War II, when the important role they had played in the nurturing of hostilities against other countries as well as against ethnic and religious minorities came to light. In order to remedy this situation, and to prevent the books from contributing to civil and international strife in the future, organizations like UNESCO, the European Council and the Georg Eckert Institute, as well as bilateral commissions like the German-French and the German-Polish Textbook Commissions, set out

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to scrutinize textbooks and remove the passages that were objectionable in this respect. Scholarly studies were dedicated to textbook research as well to illuminate the images of other peoples and minorities presented in the textbooks of various countries.

In this context, many Israeli scholars have examined the Palestinian as well as the German image presented in Israeli textbooks,¹ but no individual study has been dedicated to the treatment of Turkish/Ottoman image in the books. There are only two Israeli studies that briefly touch upon the topic. One of these is an article by Eyal Naveh, himself also a textbook author.² The author dwells on several textbook passages that focus on the late Ottoman Empire and the *Tanzimat* reforms, and states that the Ottoman Empire is used in the books to exemplify the state of decline in which the entire Islamic world found itself. Naveh observes that the books attribute the failure of the reforms to the resistance of the Muslim majority, and argue that the Ottoman Empire never succeeded in becoming a truly secular and modern country until the foundation of the Turkish republic.

The other author, Elie Podeh, not only includes a four-page section entitled “The Ottoman Empire and the Image of the Turks” in his work *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks, 1948-2000*,³ but also directly touches upon the topic of the present study. He argues that the textbooks published until the early 1990s present a highly negative image of the Turks, which has improved somewhat since, even though a subtle bias still remains in the books’ approach. As far as the textbooks’ treatment of the Ottoman policies toward the Palestinian Jews and

¹ Yoram Bar-Gal, “The Image of the ‘Palestinian’ in Geography Textbooks in Israel”, *Journal of Geography*, 93, 5, 1994, pp. 224-32; Daniel Bar-Tal, “The Arab Image in Hebrew School Textbooks”, *Palestine-Israel Journal*, 8, 2, 2001, pp. 5-18; Daniel Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman, *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2005; Elie Podeh, “History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System: The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948–2000)”, *History & Memory*, 12, 1, 2000, pp. 65-100; idem, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Israeli History Textbooks, 1948-2000*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, CT 2002; idem, “Univocality within Multivocality: The Israeli-Arab-Palestinian Conflict as Reflected in Israeli History Textbooks, 2000–2010”, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, 2, 2, 2010, pp. 46-62; Ismael Abu-Saad, “The Portrayal of Arabs in Textbooks in the Jewish School System in Israel”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 29, 1, 2007, pp. 21-38; Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli School Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2012; Rafi Nets-Zehngut, “Israeli Approved Textbooks and the 1948 Palestinian Exodus”, *Israel Studies*, 18, 3, 2013, pp. 41-68; Chaim Schatzker, “The German image in Israeli Textbooks”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 10, 6 1976, pp. 21-35.

² Eyal Naveh, “La imagen de Europa y del mundo árabe-islámico en el currículo escolar y los libros de texto de historia en Israel,” in *Conociendo al otro: El islam y Europa en sus manuales de historia*, ed. Luigi Cajani, Fundación ATMAN, Madrid 2008, pp. 197-98.

³ Podeh, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 77-80.

the Zionists is concerned, Podeh observes that the books under consideration concentrated on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the first Zionist settlers confronted the representatives of the Turkish government, but mostly “ignored or distorted the Ottoman reality.” Corruption of the Turkish officials was emphasized when relating their encounter with the pioneers, and the choice of adopting Ottoman citizenship to avoid expulsion during World War I was presented as an unviable option that amounted to placing oneself at the discretion of a despotic and inhumane regime. The books asserted that Turks viewed all Jews in Palestine as traitors eagerly awaiting British victory, and sent them in retaliation to toil at the work brigades. Finally, Podeh observes that all the books praised the Jewish spy network Nili that helped the British during the war, lauding its courage while emphasizing the cruelty of the interrogations conducted after its discovery.⁴ Despite these useful observations, Podeh’s treatment of the specific topic at hand remains limited to a single paragraph based on six books published between the 1950s and 1970s, and a single one published in 1992.

In Turkey as well, the recent years have seen the publication of many studies on the treatment of Turkish/Ottoman history and image in the textbooks of other countries.⁵ Among these, there are four works by the author of the present article and his colleagues that deal with the handling of these topics in Israeli history

⁴ Podeh, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 78-79.

⁵ See Suat Kınıkloğlu, “Images and Representations of Turks and Turkey in Soviet History Textbooks”, *International Textbook Research*, 29, 3, 2007, pp. 259-71; Mehmet Ali Kapar, “Sovyetler Birliği Dönemi Ders Kitaplarında Eskiçağ Tarihi ve Eski Türk Tarihi’nin Öğretimi”, *USAD*, 5, 2016, pp. 239-52; Evren Balta and Süheyla Demir, “Tarih, Kimlik ve Dış Politika: Rusya Federasyonu Güncel Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı-Türk İmajı”, *Bilgi*, 76, 2016, pp. 1-31; Ahmet Şimşek and Nigar Maharramova Cengiz, “Rusya Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk-Osmanlı İmgesi”, *Türk Tarih Eğitimi Dergisi*, 4, 2015, pp. 225-58; Hülya M. Çelik and Bilal Çelik, “Devrim Sonrası İran Ortaokul Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türklere İlişkin Söylemlerin Analizi”, *Türk Tarih Eğitimi Dergisi*, 4, 2, 2015, pp. 202-24; Yıldız Devci Bozkuz, “Ermeni Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk İmgesi”, *Yeni Türkiye*, 60, 2014, pp. 1-45; idem, “Ermeni Tarih Ders Kitaplarında 1915 Olayları”, *TESAM Akademi Dergisi*, 2, 1, 2015, pp. 89-105; idem, *Ermeni Ders Kitaplarında “Türkler”*, TEPAV, Ankara 2016; İsa Tak and Nurses Yıldız, “1980–1990 Yılları Arasında Bulgaristan’da İlköğretim ve Ortaöğretim Kurumlarında Okutulan Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk ve Osmanlı Algısı”, *Uluslararası Türk Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 2, 2014, pp. 67-100; Mümin İsov, “Bulgaristan Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk Azınlığın Yerine İlişkin Bazı Gözlemler”, *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 3, 1, 2014, pp. 37-51; Selçuk Ural, “Makedonya’da 6, 7 ve 8. Sınıf Türkçe Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı-Türk Algısı”, *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, 7, 2014, pp. 797-826; Ahmet Alibašić, “Images of the Ottomans in History Textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 17, 2007, pp. 103-37; Ozan Erözden, “Hırvatistan Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı-Türk İmajı”, *İ.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 50, 2014, pp. 39-54; Gabriel Pirický, “The Ottoman Age in Southern Central Europe as Represented in Secondary School History Textbooks in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia”, *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, 5, 2013, pp. 108-29; Bülent Bilmez, “Arnavutluk Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Osmanlı/Türk İmgesi”, *Osmanlı Araştırmaları*, 49, 2017, pp. 343-80.

textbooks.⁶ One of them concentrates on the books' reflection of Ottoman-Jewish relations up to the period of *Tanzimat*, but it does not cover the relations between the Ottomans and the Jewish community in Palestine during the last decades of the Empire.⁷ Many Israeli history textbooks, both old and new, focus on this later period in question and include a great deal of material on the issue, so a detailed examination of their contents seems necessary to reach a full grasp of how Israeli textbooks cover the related themes.

The prevailing historical narrative in the Israeli textbooks mainly rests on Zionist historiography, according to which the Jews were exiled from their homeland Palestine two thousand years ago, but were never fully accepted by the majority of the population in either Christian or Muslim countries. Finally, thanks to the emergence of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century, they first managed to return to their national home in Palestine, and then to establish there a Jewish state as had existed at the beginning. Although this general framework has not been altered since 1948, as Podeh points out, the rigidly ethnocentric and nationalist nature of the curriculum published in 1954 began to change with the curriculum of 1975, and a more pluralistic, multi-perspective outlook was adopted with the curricula published in the 1990s and 2000s. The changes in the textbooks themselves followed these changes in the curricula. While the textbooks were commissioned and published until the early nineties by the state, they are prepared since then in a modern format by private publishing houses and submitted to the Ministry of Education for official checks and approval. Most textbook authors are scholars or pedagogues with an expertise in history. Up to the high school level, general history subjects are taught in a chronological order, while in the high school certain specific subjects like nationalism, Zionism, the Holocaust and the history of the Jewish community in Palestine are treated in a more detailed manner.⁸

⁶ Selim Tezcan, Alper Sarıbaş, et al., "İsrail Tarih Ders Kitaplarının (1948-2014) Gözünden Tanzimat'a Kadar Osmanlı-Yahudi İlişkileri", *TYB Akademi*, 7, 21, 2017, pp. 77-103; Selim Tezcan, Mehmet Sadık Gür, et al., "İsrail Tarih Ders Kitaplarının (1948-2014) Gözünden Selçuklular: Filistin-Kudüs Hâkimiyetleri ve Haçlı Seferleri ile Cihad Hareketinin Başlangıcındaki Roller", *Filistin Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2, 2017, pp. 103-33; idem, "İsrail Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk İstiklal Savaşı ve Cumhuriyet Dönemi", *Bilgi*, 86, 2018, pp. 137-67; Selim Tezcan, "İsrail Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk İmajı", in *Dünyada Türk İmajı: Tarih Ders Kitaplarındaki Durum*, ed. Ahmet Şimşek, Pegem Akademi, Ankara 2018, pp. 283-302.

⁷ Tezcan, Sarıbaş, et al., "Tanzimat'a Kadar Osmanlı-Yahudi İlişkileri".

⁸ Naveh, "La imagen de Europa," pp. 175-90; Podeh, *Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 12-14.

In the present research, the approved book list of the Israeli Ministry of Education and the extensive textbook collections of Georg Eckert Institute and the National Library of Israel were examined to determine and acquire the textbooks that contained material of relevance. Among the books published since 1948 for use in the state schools, forty-nine different history textbooks in Hebrew were found to contain material about Turkish and Ottoman history in general. Nineteen of these were observed to touch upon the period and subjects handled in the present study. Six of the books in question were prepared for the middle schools, and the remaining thirteen for the high schools. Two of the books were published in the 1950s, three in the 1960s, one in the 1970s, two in the 1980s, three in the 1990s, and eight in the 2000s. A great increase was observed from the late 1990s onwards in the number of the books touching upon the relevant subjects, and certain topics like Nili and the Hebrew Battalions began to receive detailed treatment only in these years.

The importance attached to the related subjects in the more recent books is also observable in the actual curricula for middle and high schools. Indeed the only subject with explicit mention of Turks or Ottomans is found in the curriculum for the high schools, in the subtopic “*The Zionist Movement and the Jewish Yishuv⁹ in Eretz Israel at the Time of World War I*,” which is under the general topic “*Nationalism Among Israel and other Nations: The Beginning of the Road Until 1920*.” The second subject to be covered under this subtopic reads: “*The policies of the Ottoman government (Jamal Pasha) against the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Israel at the time of World War I: its goals and methods*.” It is immediately followed by two related subjects: “*The ways of struggle of the Jewish Yishuv in Eretz Israel: the Nili organization*,” and “*The Hebrew Battalions: the aims of their establishment and the activities conducted within them*.”¹⁰ This shows the importance attached to these topics in the actual history curricula, as well as the failure of the curricula to provide for an independent coverage of Turkish and Ottoman history.

Based on an analysis of the relevant material found in Israeli textbooks published since 1948, the present study seeks to explore the main themes

⁹ The word “Yishuv,” with the literal meaning of “settlement,” is traditionally used to refer to the Jewish community in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel.

¹⁰ Misrad ha-Hinukh, “Tokhnit ha-Limudim ba-Historia la-Hativa ha-Elyona,” p. 23, http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Mazkirut_Pedagogit/Historya/tochnitlimudimtachaz.pdf, 03/09/2018. For the history curricula for the middle schools, see Misrad ha-Hinukh, “Historia le-Kitot waw-tet ba-Bet ha-Sefer ha-Mamlakhti,” http://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Tochniyot_Limudim/Historia/History.pdf, 03/09/2018.

concerning the Ottoman government's relations with the Palestinian Jews and the Zionists from the beginning of the First Aliyah in 1882 to the final Ottoman loss of Palestine in 1918. In chronological order, it first examines how the textbook authors relate and interpret the Ottoman authorities' negative attitude toward Zionism and their restrictive measures against Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine. Given that the immigration continued despite these measures, the authors' explanation of this apparent paradox also comes under scrutiny. The analysis next dwells on the books' relation of Herzl's meetings with Abdulhamid II and his aides, with a special focus on the motives they attribute to the Sultan and his associates in the negotiations. The study then proceeds to examine the authors' evaluation of the Young Turks' policies toward Jewish immigration and the Zionist Movement, and concentrates on their reflection of Jamal Pasha's policies against the Jews in Palestine during World War I. This is followed by an examination of the books' account of the discussions among the Zionists and the Palestinian Jews about which side to support in the war, the Ottoman Empire or Britain. It is discussed which of these positions they tend to justify, and on what grounds. Continuing with this theme, the study proceeds to examine the books' account of the emergence and activities of the pro-British organizations established by Jews from Palestine, the Hebrew Battalions and especially the Nili spy ring. The authors' overall assessment of Nili and its role in the fate of the Jewish community of Palestine, as well as their interpretation of the latter's negative attitude toward the network, comes under scrutiny. The final theme in the analysis concerns the approach adopted by the books toward the British occupation of Palestine.

Ottoman Policies against Jewish Migration to Palestine

As the textbooks relate the first two waves of Zionist Jewish migration to Palestine, the First (1882-1903) and Second (1904-1914) Aliyah, they touch upon the difficulties raised by the Turkish authorities and attempt to explain their negative stance and restrictive measures against Jewish settlement in the region. In *Divrey ha-Yamim* ("Chronicles"), published in 1963, Ziv, Ettinger, et al. note that the Ottomans prohibited Jewish immigration to Palestine as early as May 1882, concerned as they were that the interference of the Great Powers in the internal affairs of the Empire would increase in direct proportion to the growing Jewish population in Palestine.¹¹ On similar lines, Zingrov and Shahar indicate in their

¹¹ Michael Ziv, Samuel Ettinger, et al., *Divrey ha-Yamim* [Chronicles], Volume 4, Part 1, Yuval, Haifa 1963, pp. 342, 344.

1998 book *Am ve-'Olam* ("The Nation and the World") that the Turkish government adopted a negative attitude against the Jewish immigrants to Palestine, prohibiting from 1882 onwards all Jewish immigration and settlement as well as land purchases and commercial enterprises by Jews. The authors' explanation for this attitude is that the Ottoman rulers, considering that the non-Muslim minorities created problems in their dealings with the Great Powers, were apprehensive lest a large and concentrated Jewish population in Palestine would follow in the steps of the other nations that wanted to secede from the Empire.¹²

Despite the ongoing restrictions on Jewish immigration, the Jewish population in Palestine rose from a mere 24,000 to around 80,000 within the thirty-odd years from 1882 to 1914, that is, from 5 to 11% of the total population of Palestine.¹³ The books account for this state of affairs primarily by emphasizing the corruption of Ottoman officials. Thus Ziv, Ettinger, et al. indicate in *Divrey ha-Yamim* (1963) that the immigrants were compelled to infiltrate the region secretly, or alternatively to bribe the officials so that they would turn a blind eye to their arrival.¹⁴ In the more recently published book *Am ve-'Olam* (1998), on the other hand, Zingrov and Shahar explain that the restrictive measures failed because the local officials received bribes, the immigrants found alternative routes to reach Palestine, and the Great Powers helped them through their consulates. Thus they mention bribery in the first place, but also add as a third factor the intervention of the Great Powers. Their book is the only one to mention this factor, however.¹⁵ In another new book, published in 2014, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim: Reshit ha-Derekh 'ad 1920* ("Nationalism among Israel and other Nations: the Beginning of the Road until 1920," henceforth to be referred to as *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*), Kovarsky concentrates only on the inefficiency and corruption of the

¹² Israel Zingrov and David Shahar, *Am ve-'Olam* [The Nation and the World], Volume 1, 'Idan, Rehovot 1998, p. 295. For other books that dwell on the difficulties that the Ottoman authorities raised before Jewish settlement in Palestine, see Eliezer Riegel, *Toldot Yisrael ba-Zeman ha-Hadash* [The History of Israel in the Modern Age], Tel Aviv Dvir, Tel-Aviv 1955, pp. 121-22; Michael Ziv and Jacob Toury, *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash* [Chronicles – The Modern Age], Volume 2, Yavneh, Tel Aviv 1958, p. 80; Eyal Naveh and Ne'omi Vered, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim: Reshit ha-Derekh 'ad 1920* [Nationalism among Israel and other Nations: The Beginning of the Road until 1920], Rekhes, Even Yehudah 2008, p. 192; idem, *Tsemihah ve Mashberim ba-'Idan ha-Moderni* [Development and Crises in the Modern Age], Rekhes, Even Yehudah 2012, p. 215.

¹³ Neville J. Mandel, "Ottoman Practice as Regards Yishuv in Palestine: 1881–1908", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 11, 1, 1975, p. 42.

¹⁴ Ziv, Ettinger, et al., *Divrey ha-Yamim*, pp. 342, 344.

¹⁵ Zingrov and Shahar, *Am ve-'Olam*, p. 295.

Ottoman local officials. He states that the immigrants had to give bribes or to hope that the local officials would fail to enforce the restrictions.¹⁶

Although corruption among the local officials might have been a contributing factor,¹⁷ the books seem to downplay or completely omit the intervention of the Great Powers in the immigrants' favor, except for Zingrov and Sahar's passing reference to the consuls' aid. This was probably the chief reason for the failure of the restrictions, however, since the Great Powers pressed the Ottoman Government to rescind its measures against Jewish immigration and forced it to accept, if not *en-masse*, at least individual immigration. They also compelled the government to revoke its prohibition against land acquisition in Palestine by the Jews.¹⁸ So foreign intervention in fact constituted the most important reason why the restrictive measures of the government remained ineffective, but this seems to have been passed over in silence or at best relegated to the background by the textbook authors, who preferred to emphasize the corruption and inefficiency of the Ottoman officials.

Herzl's Negotiations with Abdulhamid II's Government

Considerable space is dedicated in the textbooks to Theodor Herzl's negotiations with Abdulhamid II and his counselors. The authors relate how Herzl came to Istanbul with the offer that the debts of the Ottoman State would be consolidated by Jewish financiers in return for a charter allowing for Jewish settlement and autonomous rule in Palestine. In explaining the failure of this initiative, the books fall into three groups. The books in the first, largest group argue that the Ottomans never intended to allow Jewish settlement in Palestine, and some of them state that they only used Herzl's proposal as an asset in their financial negotiations with the French. The books in the second group, in contrast, seem to assume that the Ottomans' attitude toward Herzl's proposal was initially not negative, but they turned it down only after seeing that he would not be able

¹⁶ Yuval Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim: Reshit ha-Derekh 'ad 1920* [Nationalism among Israel and other Nations: The Beginning of the Road until 1920], Motsiim le-Or, Kinneret 2014, p. 146.

¹⁷ For a dissenting view see Mim Kemal Öke, "The Ottoman Empire, Zionism, and the Question of Palestine (1880-1908)", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14, 1982, p. 336 and note 56. The author argues that most of the local Ottoman officials were "exceptionally honest and competent men" and that corruption remained a marginal phenomenon with no significant contribution to the increase of the Jewish population in Palestine.

¹⁸ Neville J. Mandel, "Ottoman Policy and Restrictions on Yishuv in Palestine: 1881-1908 — Part I", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 10, 3, 1974, pp. 322-25; Öke, "Ottoman Empire", pp. 336-38.

to secure the funds he had promised. Finally, both arguments are found side by side in the remaining books in the third group, even though they appear to be conflicting.

A typical example of the accounts provided by the seven books in the first group, one of which was published in the 1950s, one in the 1980s and five in the 2000s, is found in Kovarsky's *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim* (2014). The author explains that the negotiations failed to reach a conclusion despite the Ottomans' apparent interest in the money promised by Herzl, because they put up an intransigent resistance against organized Jewish settlement in Palestine and consented to accept the Jews only on condition that they would settle in scattered fashion over the whole Empire. Finally, it turned out that the Ottomans maintained their contacts with Herzl only in order to place pressure on the French with whom they had been negotiating for the consolidation of the Ottoman debt. The author stresses that the idea of alienating part of Ottoman territory to the Jews in return for money was in any case inconceivable for the Ottoman rulers.¹⁹ An attempt to explain why it was so "inconceivable" is only found in an older book however, Ziv and Toury's *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash* ("Chronicles – The Modern Age"), published in 1958. In accounting for Abdulhamid's final refusal to allow Jewish settlement in Palestine, the authors refer to the existence of religious motives, noting that "[Palestine] was holy in the eyes of the Muslims as well."²⁰ Later books in contrast do not mention the religious importance of Palestine for the Ottoman rulers who ultimately rejected Herzl's plans.

The other books in this group offer similar accounts to that of Kovarsky, with some differences in emphasis and details. In their 2008 book *Ha-Leumiyyut: Reshit ha-Derekh* ("Nationalism: The Beginning of the Road," henceforth to be referred to as *Ha-Leumiyyut*), Domkeh, Urbach, et al. underline what they consider to be the deceptive attitude of the Ottoman authorities against Herzl. They point out that in his meeting with Abdulhamid Herzl gained the impression that the Sultan would eventually consent to his proposals, and this impression was confirmed on his second visit to Istanbul when the Abdulhamid's officials assured him that the Sultan would probably accept his plans. The fact soon turned out to be otherwise, however.²¹

¹⁹ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, pp. 100-101.

²⁰ Ziv and Toury, *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash*, pp. 91-92.

²¹ Eli'ezer Domkeh, Hanah Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut: Reshit ha-Derekh* [Nationalism: The Beginning

The accounts of the textbooks in the second group, one of which was published in 1960 and the other in 2014, seem to suggest that the Ottomans backed down from giving support to Herzl's plan only when they became convinced that he would be unable to secure the necessary capital from the Jewish financiers. The implication of this is that they could have given Herzl the charter he sought if the latter had been able to raise the necessary funds. One of the two textbooks, Horowitz's *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael ba-'Et ha-Hadashah* ("Concise History of Israel in the Modern Age," henceforth to be referred to as *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael*), published in 1960, is also the book that presents the most detailed narrative about Herzl's negotiations with the Ottoman rulers, dwelling on the latter's concerns as well. The author argues that although Herzl had nothing to offer in return for the charter he sought, his "great diplomatic genius" ensured that he was approached with great respect in Istanbul and formal negotiations were conducted with him. Horowitz stresses that this was all the more astonishing in light of the serious concerns harbored by the Turkish rulers against the Zionist plan:

"In the future, Jewish migration to Eretz Israel would mainly —according to the state of affairs at that time— come from Russia, and in view of the imperialistic ambitions of that power, which would probably take advantage of every opportunity to meddle with Turkey's internal affairs, the Turkish rulers were apprehensive of this fact above all. Moreover, even though the Jews living in the Ottoman Empire were loyal subjects, was there any guarantee that the newcomers to the borderlands would remain loyal like them to the Empire? The Jews who were present lived scattered all over the country, and they did not have any political ambitions. What would happen when a large Jewish community concentrated in Eretz Israel? Wouldn't it sooner or later desire to secede from the Empire, in the same way that all the provinces with a non-Turkish population had already seceded or were planning to do so?"²²

Horowitz contends that despite all these concerns Herzl, on being finally received by Abdulhamid, "managed to arouse not only sympathy in the suspicious Sultan for

of the Road], Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem 2008, p. 95. Some books in this group do not mention the negotiations with the French, but only stress the opposition of the Ottoman government to all kinds of Jewish settlement with a political aspect in Palestine. For the other books in the group see Jacob, Katz and Zvi Bakharakh, *Yisrael ve-ha-'Amim* [Israel and other Nations], Part 3, Tel Aviv Dvir, Tel-Aviv 1982, p. 210; *Shulah Inbar, Mahapekha ve-Temurah: Mavat 'al 1870-1920* [Revolution and Change: A Glance at 1870-1920], Lilach, Petach Tikva 2004, p. 66; Naveh and Vered, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-'Amim*, pp. 119-20; Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 95.

²² Shelomoh Horowitz, *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael ba-'Et ha-Hadashah* [Concise History of Israel in the Modern Age], Part 2, Haifa 1960, pp. 90-91. This and the following translations are mine.

his person and the plan he proposed, but also confidence in them.” He had the feeling that he would be able to obtain the charter from the Turks if he managed to collect the required sum of five million pounds as soon as possible. But he failed to do so, Horowitz relates, and although he tried hard to conceal this from Istanbul, the true state of affairs was already known in the Sultan’s palace. He was offered therefore only a charter for Jewish settlement outside Palestine. Thus although Horowitz describes in detail all the concerns of the Ottoman authorities concerning Jewish settlement in Palestine, he argues that Herzl had managed at first to gain their confidence, and could have persuaded them to accept his plan if he had been able to raise the necessary sums.²³

The two books in the third and final group, which were published in the 2000s, explain Herzl’s failure in the negotiations by referring to both the Turkish reluctance to grant the charter and to the unwillingness of Jewish financiers to provide the necessary funds. Unlike the books in the second group, however, they do not attempt to reconcile these implicitly contradictory explanations and content themselves with presenting them side by side. Thus, in Inbar’s *Mahapekhah u-Geulah be-Yisrael w-‘Amim* (“Revolution and Emancipation among Israel and other Nations,” henceforth to be referred to as *Mahapekhah u-Geulah*), published in 2006, the reasons for Herzl’s failure are enumerated as follows:

“a. The refusal of the Jewish capitalists in Western Europe to dedicate a part of their capital to the Zionist project undermined Herzl’s position in the negotiations and cast doubts on the genuineness of his financial promises.

b. The Turkish Sultan was against the Zionist plan, and was in no way prepared to see the Jews settle in Eretz Israel within a framework of political sovereignty.”²⁴

Although it is stated here that Abdulhamid was by no means ready to consent to Jewish settlement in Palestine, the fact that this reason is cited only in the second place suggests paradoxically that the Sultan might still have accepted the proposal if the Jewish financiers had proved willing to provide the necessary sum.²⁵

²³ Horowitz, *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael*, pp. 91-92. For the other book in this group see Iloni Orli, Shalhevet Ofir, et al., *Ve-Ele Toldot* [And This is History], Matach, Ramat Aviv 2014, p. 338.

²⁴ Shulah Inbar, *Mahapekhah u-Geulah be-Yisrael w-‘Amim* [Revolution and Emancipation among Israel and other Nations], Part 1, Lilach, Petach Tikva 2006, p. 142.

²⁵ For the second book in this group see Yigal Mish’ol, *Ha-Leumiyyut ha-Modernit ve-Reshit ha-Tsiyonut* [Modern Nationalism and the Beginnings of Zionism], Hay Sikkol, Me’ala Edomim 2011, pp. 81-83.

Among these three versions, the first one seems to come the closest to the truth, as Abdulhamid had neither the intention nor —despite his absolutist rule— the power to alienate Palestine to the Jews. Beside the concern of seeing another national problem arise in the Ottoman Empire and provide further opportunity for Western intervention, it ran counter to his “Pan-Islamist” policy that sought to reconcile the Muslim nations of the Empire, the Arabs in particular.²⁶ The important point here is that the books seem to acknowledge the concerns of the Sultan as they describe these in detail, even though the recent ones overlook Palestine’s religious importance for him, and refrain from directly criticizing his rejection of Herzl’s plans. Some books even intimate that he could still have agreed to these plans had it not been for Herzl’s failure to realize his promises.

Attitude of the Young Turks toward Zionism

Abdulhamid’s regime came to an end in 1908 through a revolution staged by its opponents among intellectuals and army officers, known collectively as the “Young Turks,” and the Sultan himself was dethroned in the following year after an unsuccessful attempt to restore the former status quo. The Young Turks held the reins of government for most of the following period until the end of World War I. What do the books have to say about their attitude toward the national aspirations of the non-Turkish and non-Muslim peoples of the Empire in general, and toward Zionism in particular? On the first question, Toury and Schmidt observe in *Toldot ha-ʿAmim ba-ʿZeman ha-Hadash*, Volume 2 (“The History of Nations in the Modern Age,” henceforth to be referred to as *Toldot ha-ʿAmim*), published in 1973, that the Young Turks were convinced that the Turks had to occupy a superior position vis-à-vis-the other peoples in the Empire, and therefore seemed in no hurry to share the power with the representatives of the non-Turkish and non-Muslim population of the Empire. On the contrary, the authors assert, they continued “the traditional policies of oppression” against the Muslim Arabs as well as against the non-Muslim communities of the Empire. This attitude, which stood in clear conflict with their promises of a liberal constitutional regime, caused their motto “Union and Progress” to remain a hollow slogan according to the authors.²⁷

²⁶ Mandel, “Ottoman Policy”, pp. 316-17, 321.

²⁷ Jacob Toury and Dan Helmut Schmidt, *Toldot ha-ʿAmim ba-ʿZeman ha-Hadash* [The History of Nations in the Modern Age], Volume 2, Yavneh, Tel Aviv 1973, p. 241-42.

As for the Young Turks' policies toward Zionism, the book that dwells most on this question is Horowitz's *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael* (1960). After drawing attention to the arguably significant role played by the Jews in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, Horowitz states that the revolution initially aroused great hopes among the Zionists that the rights denied by the previous government would be recognized by the new one. However, although the Young Turks were ready to grant full political and civic equality to the national minorities, they were far from the idea of giving them national autonomy as well. In contrast, Horowitz stresses, they sought to bolster the unitary character of the state by centralizing power as much as possible, and wanted to lend a clearly Ottoman character to a country where the Turks made up only one-third of the population. Consequently, just as they were loath to acknowledge the national demands of the Greeks, Armenians and Jews, they were also intransigently opposed to the Zionist aspirations. Although ready to receive Jewish immigrants who could contribute to the economic and cultural development of the country, they stipulated like Abdulhamid that these had to disperse throughout the Empire, settle outside Palestine, and assimilate to the Ottoman society. They were stringently against concentrated Jewish settlement in Palestine, being reluctant to see another non-Muslim nation added to those already present and demand autonomy like them in the future. For this reason, Horowitz explains, Zionist politics hit the same impenetrable wall that had been erected before it by Abdulhamid II and his counselors.²⁸

Ziv, Ettinger, et al. similarly indicate in *Divrey ha-Yamim* (1963) that some Jews, believing in the Young Turks' promise of a liberal constitutional regime, had participated in the political activities of the Jerusalem branch of the Committee of Union and Progress. But it became clear before long that the Young Turks were dedicated to the ideas of centralization and Ottomanization, and afraid that Zionism could contribute to the disintegration of the Empire. The efforts of the Zionist leadership to persuade them otherwise proved to be in vain.²⁹

Likewise, Domkeh, Urbach, et al. observe in their more recently published book *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008) that the links of the Zionists with Britain (such as the presence of their financial institutions in London), and the fact that most of them were the nationals of the Ottomans' archenemy, Russia, increased the Young Turks' suspicions that the Zionist movement was on the lookout for the first

²⁸ Horowitz, *Kitsur Toldot Yisrael*, pp. 110-11.

²⁹ Ziv, Ettinger, et al., *Divrey ha-Yamim*, pp. 348-49.

opportunity to revolt, much like the other national movements in the Empire. Having considered Zionism an enemy from the beginning, they saw it necessary therefore to adopt an all the more stringent policy against the movement.³⁰

Ottoman Policies toward the Yishuv during World War I

The textbooks, especially those published in the last two decades, dedicate a considerable place to the policies that the Ottoman authorities and especially Jamal Pasha, commander of the Fourth Army and de-facto ruler of Syria and Palestine, adopted against the Yishuv, and dwell at length on the difficulties it suffered as a result. In her 2006 book *Mahapekhah u-Geulah*, Inbar states that the Turkish army used Palestine as a base for its planned operations against the Suez Channel, and the military tension that ensued with Britain aroused feelings of enmity against the Yishuv as well. The author introduces Jamal Pasha as “a member of the Young Turk group who harbored feelings of hate and enmity against the minorities in the whole Ottoman Empire.” She argues that both Jamal Pasha and the military commander Hassan Bey regarded Zionism as the main enemy of the Turks in Palestine, and aspired to destroy the Yishuv for this reason.³¹ Similarly, Kovarsky points out in *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-Amim* (2014) that many Jews in Palestine were citizens of the enemy states in the war, so Jamal Pasha and the local Ottoman authorities suspected them of sympathizing with the Allies and carrying out espionage and sabotage work for the British. As a result, they maltreated the Jews in Palestine and tried to suppress their national aspirations. Nevertheless, Kovarsky offers a more nuanced analysis than Inbar and the other authors as he cites Jamal Pasha’s statement that he did not have anything against Jews per se, but was solely opposed to Zionism and determined to fight the Zionists in Palestine. He points out that Jamal did not refrain from drawing upon Jewish proficiency in various fields, appointing as his counselors Jewish experts like the agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn (later leader of the Nili spy ring), and even allowed the Rishon le-Tzion settlement to acquire a new plot of land.³²

The books also touch upon the persecutions they say the Ottomans inflicted on the Jewish population of Palestine. Inbar relates in her 2004 book *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah: Mavat ‘al 1870-1920* (“Revolution and Change: a Glance at 1870-

³⁰ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, pp. 168, 170.

³¹ Inbar, *Mahapekhah u-Geulah*, p. 208.

³² Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 181.

1920,” henceforth to be referred to as *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah*) that the Ottoman administration issued stern orders against the Yishuv, which made life unbearable for its members. She also states in a separate box summarizing the final years of Ottoman rule in Palestine that the Yishuv was heavily afflicted by orders, persecutions and deportations, coming to the brink of ruin as a result.³³ Focusing on the economic dimension of these policies, Mish’ol states in his 2011 book *Ha-Leumiyyut ha-Modernit ve-Reshit ha-Tsiyonut* (“Modern Nationalism and the Beginnings of Zionism”) that Jamal Pasha caused most of the financial burden of the war effort in Palestine to be borne by the Jewish population.³⁴

In some of the older books, the Ottomans’ attitude toward the Jews in Palestine is subjected to an unfavorable comparison with that of their German and Austrian allies. In a common passage found in Ziv and Toury’s *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash*, published in 1958, and in Toury and Schmidt’s *Toldot ha-Amim ba-Zeman ha-Hadash*, Volume 2, published in 1967, the authors maintain that while the Germans and Austrians adopted a generally discreet approach toward the Jews in their country as well as in the territories occupied during the war, their Turkish allies assumed a hostile attitude toward the Jews in Palestine. Suspecting that the Jews in the region could collaborate with the Russians and the English, and regarding them for this reason as potential or actual spies, they began under Jamal’s leadership to cleanse Palestine of these “spies.” After the capitulations were abolished for this purpose, and the legal protection they had provided for the Jews of foreign nationality was removed, the latter were asked to adopt Ottoman nationality and serve in the army or leave Palestine. The authors note that while many Jews refused to adopt Ottoman nationality and fled to Egypt, some did change their nationality and enlist in the army.³⁵

In a rare exception, Barnavi seems to find some degree of justification in these policies of the Ottomans in his more recent book, *Ha-Meah ha-20: Toldot Am Yisrael ba-Dorot ha-Aharonim* (“20th Century: the History of the People of Israel in the Modern Age,” henceforth to be referred to as *Ha-Meah ha-20*), published in 1998. He stresses that the Jews had been traditionally comfortable under Ottoman rule, but it was the appearance of new Jewish settlements and the beginning of the war

³³ Inbar, *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah*, p. 93.

³⁴ Mish’ol, *Ha-Leumiyyut ha-Modernit*, pp. 174-75.

³⁵ Jacob Toury and Dan Helmut Schmidt, *Toldot ha-Amim ba-Zeman ha-Hadash* [The History of Nations in the Modern Age], Volume 3, Yavneh, Tel Aviv 1967, p. 16; Ziv and Toury, *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash*, 128.

that changed this state of affairs and brought the Jamal Pasha administration face-to-face with a new situation. Significantly, Barnavi does not content himself like the previous authors with noting that the numerous Jews of Russian nationality in the new settlements found themselves in the status of enemy nationals, but also contends that Zionism had already chosen its side and posed the danger of wresting Palestine away from the Empire. For this reason, he says, the Jews in question were asked to adopt Ottoman nationality, and while refusing this demand brought risk of deportation, complying with it entailed the duty of military service in the army. Consequently, more than eleven thousand Jews had to leave Palestine. In contrast to the previous authors, Barnavi notes that the majority of the Yishuv chose to adopt Ottoman nationality and remain in Palestine, but evaded conscription insofar as this was condoned by the authorities.³⁶

Kovarsky clarifies in *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim* (2014) why the compulsory military service that came with the adoption of Ottoman citizenship proved so dissuasive for the Jews in Palestine. The main reason for this, according to the author, was that the Ottoman army was notorious for the “*poor conditions of military service, the despotism of its commanders, and the difficult circumstances of famine and poor health afflicting its troops.*” He adds that some of the Jews conscripted into the Ottoman army were sent to labor battalions in which the conditions were especially difficult, with high rates of mortality due to diseases and epidemics.³⁷

On the other hand, Domkeh, Urbach, et al. point out in their book *Ha-Leumiyut* (2008) that the willingness to adopt Ottoman citizenship and serve in the army was not sufficient either to satisfy the Ottoman authorities: although many Jews who considered it “*a crime and a treachery*” to leave Palestine at such a moment preferred to remain there and adopt Ottoman citizenship, the Ottomans encouraged emigration from Palestine. The authors relate how the authorities constantly issued new orders restricting the adoption of Ottoman nationality and refused to grant citizenship to many settlers they considered dangerous, especially teachers, lawyers and scholars. They state that this policy culminated in a manhunt against the Jews of Jaffa and Jerusalem, and many Jews, including those like David Ben Gurion and Yitzhak Ben Zvi who had already adopted Ottoman

³⁶ Elie Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20: Toldot Am Yisrael ba-Dorot ha-Aharonim* [20th Century: The History of the People of Israel in the Modern Age], Sifre, Tel Aviv 1998, p. 71.

³⁷ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 179. For the dissuasive conditions of military service in the Ottoman Empire also see Ednah El'azari and Miryam Geva', *Ha-Tsiyonut be-Miḥan ha-Ma'aseh, 1914-1939* [Zionism in the Test of Action, 1914-1939], Misrad ha-Hinukh veva-Tarbut, Jerusalem 1984, p. 12.

nationality, were deported. Most of the twelve to fifteen thousand deportees went to Alexandria, and the rest to Syria.³⁸

The textbooks also touch upon the measures taken by the Ottoman authorities to suppress all manifestations of Zionism in Palestine. In this connection Domkeh, Urbach, et al. in *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008) and Kovarksy in *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-Amim* (2014) note that the Ottoman authorities closed down newspapers published in Hebrew, prevented the display of Zionist symbols, prohibited street names and signposts in Hebrew, and banned the use of the stamps of the Jewish National Fund.³⁹

Remaining Neutral or Taking Sides: the Ottomans or the Allies?

Under these circumstances, among both the Palestinian Jews and the leaders of the Zionist movement, there emerged groups with different opinions about whether it was advisable to stay neutral or not, and if sides were to be taken, which side it would be best to support. Domkeh, Urbach, et al. dwell on these conflicting attitudes in their book *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008). The neutral attitude, they explain, was the one adopted by the Zionist Organization to avert any harm to the Jewish subjects of the states on either side of the war. On the other hand, those who argued it was preferable to support Germany and the Ottoman Empire thought that they would thus be in a position to persuade those countries to agree to the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. They also believed that supporting the Axis powers would help alleviate the sufferings of the Yishuv during the war. The authors stress that the majority of the Palestinian Jews and their leaders were of this opinion and sided with the Ottoman Empire. In their view, supporting the Turks was the responsible and sensible thing to do as long as Palestine remained under Ottoman sovereignty. Accordingly, those members of the Yishuv who did not leave Palestine joined the Ottoman army and tried to prove their loyalty to the authorities.⁴⁰

Domkeh, Urbach, et al. observe at this point that while the pro-Ottoman attitude did not pose any dangers for the Jews in Palestine, its chances of serving

³⁸ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, pp. 168-70. For a similar narrative see Eli'ezer Domkeh, (ed.), *Ha-'Olam veba-Yehudim ba-Dorot ha-Aharonim* [The World and the Jews in the Modern Age], Part 2, Volume 1, Zalman Shazar Center, Jerusalem 1999, p. 269.

³⁹ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 181. See also Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, pp. 168, 170.

⁴⁰ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, pp. 171-72.

the interests of Zionism were nevertheless low. Those who promoted a pro-British attitude, on the other hand, were also convinced that Britain would repay this by establishing a national home for the Jews in Palestine in case of victory. The authors acknowledge that giving support to Britain entailed many dangers: “*Since Eretz Israel was ruled by Turkey, supporting Britain would be seen as an act of treachery and endanger the Yishuv in the Eretz. Moreover, if Britain was defeated in the war, all the gains of the Zionist settlement in Eretz Israel would be thrown away.*” Despite this, they insist that the pro-British attitude was “*the one that finally brought the greatest gains to the Zionist movement.*”⁴¹

In *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-ʿAmim* (2014), Kovarsky similarly observes that while neutrality had certain advantages, like averting the threats to the Zionist gains in Palestine and allowing Zionist organizations to continue functioning, the neutral position rendered it difficult to demand Jewish national rights from the victors. For this reason, from the very beginning of the war there were voices calling for the adoption of a pro-British position. The author explains that the reason why these circles had set their hopes on Britain was that it had not only adopted a positive attitude toward the Zionist movement and offered al-Arish and Uganda for Jewish settlement, but now, already ensconced in Egypt, stood poised to capture Palestine as well. They believed that it would therefore be possible to persuade that country as well as other Allied powers to recognize the Jewish national rights in Palestine if they won the war. The author notes that within the Yishuv as well there were people who preferred to support the British rather than the Ottomans, and contends like Like Domkeh, Urbach, et al. that this was also the right choice in hindsight: “*The support for Britain, which was also manifested in the establishment of the Hebrew Battalions, eventually turned out to be right. Britain captured Eretz Israel and gave the Zionist movement the Balfour Declaration in recognition of the Jewish national rights in Palestine.*”⁴²

Hebrew Battalions

The Jews of Russian nationality who had been deported from Palestine in 1915 and sought refuge in Alexandria constituted the majority among those Palestinian Jews who had come to adopt a pro-British position. They were involved in the establishment of Jewish units to fight in the British army against the Ottomans,

⁴¹ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 172.

⁴² Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael w-ʿAmim*, pp. 187-89.

as an investment for the peace conference to follow the war. The books published from 1998 onwards also dedicate an individual section to these units known under the general name of “Hebrew Battalions.” There were three of the battalions in question. The first, the Zion Mule Corps, served as a transport unit on the Gallipoli Front, and the other two, the 38th and 39th Brigades of Royal Fusiliers, served as combat units in the final clashes of the war in Palestine. Explaining the reasons for the establishment of the battalions, Domkeh, Urbach, et al. enumerate three motives in *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008): the need to prove that the Jews were ready to fight for the liberation of Palestine, the necessity of active collaboration with Britain to secure its support for the Zionist cause, and, in the long run, the formation of a corps of experienced soldiers to serve as the nucleus of a future Jewish army.⁴³ More explicitly, Kovarsky states in his 2014 book *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim* that the original founders of the battalions, Joseph Trumpeldor and Vladimir Jabotinsky, expected a British victory and believed that supporting it could bring critical gains in an eventual peace conference. If the Jews desired to keep Palestine after the war, they had to be ready to fight for it and take part in its capture.⁴⁴

Most textbook authors appear to have a dim view of the Hebrew Battalions’ overall contribution to the British struggle against the Ottomans. Domkeh, Urbach, et al. assert in *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008) that the Hebrew Battalions made no important contribution to the British war effort, and assert that their importance lay rather on the moral plane, as they showed the Jews fighting for Palestine in support of Britain.⁴⁵ Similarly, Kovarsky argues in *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim* (2014) that the Battalions’ contribution was slight and denies that their establishment and activities had any effect in obtaining the Balfour Declaration.⁴⁶

Inbar diverges from these assessments in her book *Mahapekhah u-Geulah* (2006). After relating how the Jewish soldiers in Gallipoli carried water and ammunition among the trenches under heavy fire, she remarks that by this show of courage they won the appreciation of the British high command. In her words, “*The admiration gained by the Mule Corps also helped improve the opinion about the capacity of*

⁴³ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 175.

⁴⁴ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, pp. 190-91. See also Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 72 for a similar explanation.

⁴⁵ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 175. For a similar evaluation see Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 73; Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, p. 193.

⁴⁶ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, p. 193.

*the Yishuv in Palestine to assist the British.*⁴⁷ In keeping with this approach, Inbar avoids statements about the insignificance of the battalions' overall contribution to the British war effort, and also offers a more appreciative assessment of their moral value: “*The Hebrew Battalions... provided ethical and moral legitimacy to the Yishuv’s struggle for cultural and social autonomy, on the one hand, and to its resistance against the brutal Turkish rule, on the other.*”⁴⁸ In a passage further on, she adds that the battalions “*improved the Yishuv’s morale and constituted a source of national pride.*”⁴⁹ This is interesting in view of the same author’s acknowledgment of the Yishuv’s opposition to such explicitly pro-British activities, as will become clear in examining her treatment of the Nili spy ring.

Establishment of the Nili Spy Ring

Although the majority of the Yishuv supported the Ottoman Empire, there was a pro-British minority among them as well, and a group from the settlement of Zikhron Ya‘akov, led by the agronomist Aaron Aaronsohn, established an espionage network under the name Nili (an acronym for the Biblical phrase *Netzakh Yisrael lo’ yeshaker*: “The Glory of Israel will not lie”). The network transmitted information to the British about the position and the movements of the Turkish army.⁵⁰ The books published from 1998 onwards also dedicate an individual section to Nili. Even though they acknowledge that most of the Palestinian Jews supported the Ottomans and objected to the activities of Nili, they argue that this was only for fear of the harsh punitive measures they would face in case it was uncovered. Some books also suggest that the resentment otherwise felt by the Yishuv members towards the stringent Ottoman policies targeting them contributed to the establishment of the spy network. Concomitant with this approach, they offer a very positive, even exalting assessment of Nili.

Thus Barnavi in *Ha-Meah ha-20* (1998) attempts to justify the establishment of the network by relating how a small group of young men from Zikhron Ya‘akov, believing that the adoption of a pro-Ottoman position would provide the Jews with an advantageous bargaining position, volunteered to serve in the Ottoman

⁴⁷ Inbar, *Mahapekhal u-Geulah*, p. 212.

⁴⁸ Inbar, *Mahapekhal u-Geulah*, p. 214. The same sentence is also found in idem, *Mahapekhal ve-Temurah*, p. 97.

⁴⁹ Inbar, *Mahapekhal u-Geulah*, p. 220.

⁵⁰ For some of the scholarly literature on Nili see Anita Engle, *The Nili Spies*, Frank Cass, London 1966; Anthony Verrier, (ed.), *Agents of Empire*, Brassey’s, London 1995; Ronald Florence, *Lawrence and Aaronsohn*, Viking, New York 2007; Necmettin Alkan, *Nili: Ortadoğu’da Casuslar Savaşı*, Kronik, İstanbul 2017.

army at the beginning of the war. But the disillusionment they underwent because of the humiliating and violent treatment they suffered during their term of service led them to shift to a pro-British position and establish the Nili network.⁵¹ A similar attempt may be observed in Domkeh, Urbach, et al.'s *Ha-Leumiyut* (2008), where the authors state that “*The anti-Turkish mood that suddenly developed in the Yishuv was the natural result of the policies pursued by Turkey. One of the symptoms of this mood was the establishment of a pro-British spy network named Nili.*”⁵²

In a more veiled effort, Kovarsky refers to the Yishuv’s “sense of an existential threat” in *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim* (2014). He states that both this sense and the consideration that Britain would emerge victorious from the war led a small group of young men to mobilize against the Ottoman government despite the pro-Ottoman stance of the majority in the Yishuv. There is implicit support for this decision in the author’s remark that the Nili founders were expressing their “*gratefulness and sympathy for those who had helped the Yishuv*” as they established contact with the British army and assisted it during the war.⁵³

Kovarsky supplements these remarks with a primary source reading, a letter by Aaron Aaronsohn dated 9 October 1916, in which the latter explains why he had established Nili:

“It is natural for us Jews to feel the iron fist [of the Ottoman government] even more strongly. What had not only enabled us to live and work in Eretz Israel despite Turkish misrule, but also lent a special charm to living and working there, was the religious freedom and autonomous life of the Yishuv, the chance to develop the national culture, the use of Hebrew... As long as we were at least safe under Turkish misrule, I did not think I had the right to contribute to the ruin of the Turks. However, when it became clear to me beyond all shadow of doubt that we were dependent on the mercy and the whims of a man called Jamal, or of any other Turk with sadistic tendencies, the feeling matured in my heart that I was responsible for drawing the necessary conclusions from this situation... I had been convinced for a long time that we had to side with Britain... and I did so as well. I immediately defected to the side of the ‘enemy’... We do this only because of our conviction that it is in our interests, namely the interests of the Jewish people.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 71.

⁵² Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyut*, p. 173.

⁵³ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 184.

⁵⁴ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 185.

The Yishuv's Negative Attitude toward Nili

The textbooks acknowledge that the majority of the Yishuv adopted a negative attitude toward Nili, but mainly attribute this to their fear of retaliation from the Ottoman government. Thus in the common section entitled “*Why the Yishuv did not approve of the activities of Nili?*” found in her books *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah* (2004) and *Mahapekhah u-Geulah* (2006), Inbar acknowledges that the leaders and majority of the Yishuv objected to the underground activities of Nili. While explaining this objection, the author refers in both of her books to their fears that espionage for the British would provoke a harsh reaction from the Turks and bring a disaster upon the Yishuv. Nevertheless, she also acknowledges in *Mahapekhah u-Geulah* that another reason why most Yishuv members refrained from espionage was that “*they did not regard it as a respectable occupation for Jews.*”⁵⁵ Similarly, Kovarsky indicates in his 2014 book *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim* that the activities of Nili received scathing criticism from most of the Jews in Palestine, who regarded the Nili members as dangerous adventurers and feared that the uncovering of their activities would deliver the *coup de grâce* to a Yishuv that was already at the end of its tether. He observes further that the fear of Ottoman retribution was not baseless in view of the deportation of the Armenians by the Ottomans, who had similarly accused the former of disloyalty.⁵⁶

Some authors proceed to take the Yishuv to task for having failed to support Nili. Thus although Barnavi observes in *Ha-Meah ha-20* (1998) that “*The attitude of the Yishuv... toward the activities of the Nili members was cautious because of their fear of the punitive measures of the Turks,*” he also criticizes what he calls their “*ambivalent attitude toward the Nili.*” The author strikes a reproachful note as he recounts how the entire Yishuv, fearful of the consequences, abandoned the Nili members to their fate as soon as the network was uncovered, while Hashomer even assumed an active role in the capture of the Nili member Lishansky.⁵⁷

Uncovering of Nili and Collective Punishment of the Yishuv

The textbooks also dwell at some length on the uncovering of the Nili and the punitive measures of the government which they say targeted not only the spy ring itself, but the entire Yishuv. In *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah* (2004) and *Mahapekhah*

⁵⁵ Inbar, *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah*, p. 96; idem, *Mahapekhah u-Geulah*, p. 211.

⁵⁶ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, p. 185.

⁵⁷ Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 72. Also see Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyut*, p. 174.

u-Geulah (2006), Inbar relates that the Nili member Na'aman Belkind was captured while taking the gathered intelligence to Egypt. She points out that he was forced under heavy torture to inform the Turks about the network, which led to the arrest of most of its members in *Zikhron Ya'akov*.⁵⁸ Domkeh, Urbach, et al. similarly indicate in *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008) that many Nili members were arrested, and while some of them including Aaronsohn's sister Sarah committed suicide, the others were executed or imprisoned. They also note that the entire Yishuv was "afflicted by a wave of persecutions" after Nili was uncovered in October 1917.⁵⁹

Many other books, old and new, assert likewise that the local Ottoman government under Jamal Pasha mistreated the entire Jewish population after the uncovering of Nili, without distinguishing between the guilty and the innocent. Ziv and Toury, in *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash* (1958), and Toury and Schmidt in *Toldot ha-Amim*, Volume 2 (1967), claim that the Turks perpetrated many malicious and cruel deeds against the Yishuv.⁶⁰ Ziv, Ettinger, et al. similarly relate in *Divrey ha-Yamim* (1963) that after the uncovering of the spy ring, which they stress was acting outside the knowledge of the Jewish leaders in Palestine, Jamal Pasha launched a ruthless persecution against the Yishuv, arresting and torturing hundreds of Jewish young men.⁶¹ In their 1984 book *Ha-Tsiyonut be-Mivhan ha-Ma'aseh, 1914-1939* ("Zionism in the Test of Action, 1914-1939," henceforth to be referred to as *Ha-Tsiyonut be-Mivhan ha-Ma'aseh*), El'azari and Geva' state likewise that after Nili was uncovered the Turkish soldiers randomly vented their anger on all members of the Yishuv, ill-treating many and causing suffering among all of its members.⁶² The sharpest criticism in this regard is found in Barnavi's *Ha-Meah ha-20* (1998): "The cruel persecution they faced after the uncovering of the spy ring was at a level unexpected even from a regime and an army that had previously proved they knew all sorts of cruel persecution."⁶³

Evaluation of Nili

Some textbooks also offer a general evaluation of Nili. Inbar observes in *Mahapekhhah ve-Temurah* (2004) that the organization was ahead of its time, for a

⁵⁸ Inbar, *Mahapekhhah ve-Temurah*, p. 96; idem, *Mahapekhhah u-Geulah*, p. 210.

⁵⁹ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 174.

⁶⁰ Ziv and Toury, *Divrey ha-Yamim - ha-Zeman ha-Hadash*, p. 128; Toury and Schmidt, *Toldot ha-Amim*, p. 16.

⁶¹ Ziv, Ettinger, et al., *Divrey ha-Yamim*, p. 349.

⁶² El'azari and Geva', *Ha-Tsiyonut be-Mivhan ha-Ma'aseh*, p. 16.

⁶³ Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 72.

year after its uncovering, the Palestinian Jewish leaders also became convinced of the need to shift to a pro-British position. She then proceeds to praise Nili in the following words: “*The Nili members acted with resoluteness and endangered their lives for a goal they believed in. Their faith in the ideal of self-sacrifice for their people proved superior to any calculations of self-interest.*”⁶⁴

The same positive, even exalting approach toward Nili evident in this passage is also notable in Inbar’s *Mahapekhhah u-Geulah* (2006). At one point she states that “*Most members of Nili were caught and killed, but they left behind for us a legacy of courage and heroism.*”⁶⁵ Her overall evaluation of Nili is found in a section entitled tellingly as “*It is necessary to recognize the contribution of Nili to the struggle of the Yishuv.*” After the same laudatory passage about the resoluteness and idealism of the Nili members found in her previous book, Inbar stresses that the British army was spared as many as thirty thousand casualties thanks to the reliable intelligence provided by Nili. She observes as well that the Nili members’ struggle and contribution to the victory against the Turks also facilitated the political efforts directed at obtaining the Balfour Declaration. In a final note, Inbar points out that “*Nili contributed a great deal to saving the Yishuv in Palestine when it communicated to the world the news of the deportation of the Jews of Tel Aviv and Jaffa during the Pesah of 1917. By alerting the world public opinion, this move ended Jamal Pasha’s plans of destroying the Yishuv.*”⁶⁶

Deportations from Jaffa and Tel Aviv

The aforementioned deportation of the Jews of Jaffa and Tel Aviv by Jamal Pasha in spring 1917 is also a topic that receives considerable attention in the textbooks published from the late nineties onwards. Naveh and Vered relate in their 2008 book *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim: Reshit ha-Derekh ‘ad 1920* (“Nationalism among Israel and other Nations: The Beginning of the Road until 1920”) that the Turks deported the inhabitants of Tel Aviv, Jaffa and the surrounding settlements to north Palestine for fear that they could collaborate with the advancing British army: “*Thousands of people who went north found themselves homeless, jobless, deprived of even the most basic conditions necessary for survival. The Yishuv in Palestine stood on the brink of complete ruin.*”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Inbar, *Mahapekhhah ve-Temurah*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ Inbar, *Mahapekhhah u-Geulah*, p. 220.

⁶⁶ Inbar, *Mahapekhhah u-Geulah*, p. 211.

⁶⁷ Naveh and Vered, *Ha-Leumiyut be-Yisrael w-Amim*, p. 192

In *Ha-Leumiyyut* (2008) Domkeh, Urbach, et al. quote a telegram that Aaron Aaronsohn wrote about a month after the deportation, drawing a dark picture of the conditions under which the operation was carried out:

“The Jews were ordered on April 1 to leave within forty-eight hours. They were not provided with any means of transport. About a week before this, around three hundred Jews had been deported from Jerusalem in a most ruthless manner. Jamal Pasha had declared that the joy of the Jews at the British advance would be cut short... Eight thousand Jews were thus expelled from their homes without being given the opportunity to take along their belongings. The houses of the Jews were plundered before they had even left... The Jewish quarters were also completely pillaged before the very eyes of the authorities. To serve as an example... in order to show the fate awaiting those Jews who resisted these acts of plunder, two Yemenite Jews were hung at the entry to the quarters. The roads leading to the settlements in the north of Jaffa were filled with thousands of starving Jewish refugees.”⁶⁸

One of the most detailed narratives on the subject is found in Kovarsky’s 2014 book *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, in the section entitled “*Deportation from Jaffa and Tel Aviv*.” The author relates how in spring 1917, before the advance of the British army through Palestine, Jamal Pasha commanded the residents of Jaffa and Tel Aviv to abandon their homes. His pretext was that the British could attack these towns and it was necessary therefore to evacuate their civilian population. Kovarsky draws attention to the discriminatory approach that he says was adopted in the implementation of this command: while the Arab population was allowed to remain in the villages nearby, the Jewish population was compelled to migrate north, towards Galilee. It is related in the book that Tel Aviv was almost completely emptied of its inhabitants, while the deportees had to live for a few months in makeshift barracks, subject to famine and disease, many unable to return home before the end of the war. The author indicates that the news of the deportation had a broad repercussion in the whole Jewish world, and led to widespread rumors of Jewish massacres.⁶⁹

In this connection, some of the books assert that foreign powers, especially Germany, played an important role in saving the Yishuv from certain destruction.

⁶⁸ Domkeh, Urbach, et al., *Ha-Leumiyyut*, p. 170.

⁶⁹ Kovarsky, *Ha-Leumiyyut be-Yisrael uv-Amim*, p. 182.

Barnavi indicates in *Ha-Meah ha-20* (1998) that only the German government's intervention of through its representatives in Istanbul saved the Yishuv from destruction.⁷⁰ Inbar similarly states in her 2006 book *Mahapekhah u-Geulah* that “*The Yishuv... was saved from total ruin only by the intervention of the foreign consuls who placed pressure on the Turks to prevent them from inflicting physical harm on it.*”⁷¹

British Occupation of Palestine

The books evaluate the British occupation of Palestine shortly after the deportation as a positive development that saved the Yishuv from almost certain ruin and gave it free rein to continue its development. In El'azari and Geva's 1984 book *Ha-Tsiyonut-be-Mivhan ha-Ma'aseh*, the authors relate how the Australian advance guard from the British army, arriving at Gedara in November 1917, spoke to the settlers of their profound admiration for the Old Testament — they would restore their ancient homeland to the Jewish people in accordance with that Holy Book. According to the authors, this caused widespread excitement among the settlers, who were convinced that the period of Ottoman domination had finally come to an end.⁷²

In *Ha-Meah ha-20* (1998), Barnavi indicates that although the initial enthusiasm of the Yishuv in receiving the British as saviors was quickly dispelled through subsequent British policies, the fact remained that they had saved it from destruction, enabled it to flourish, and, willingly or not, paved the way towards its eventual statehood.⁷³ Inbar, dwelling on the same points in *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah* (2004), rises to eulogy:

“The British conquest changed the fate of the Yishuv in Eretz Israel. Although military rule was established in the Eretz, the Yishuv evaded the threat of deportation by the Turks and found the opportunity to develop autonomously under enlightened British rule. In the history of the Yishuv in Palestine, this was the first time in the last two thousand years that a liberal and enlightened government was in power.”⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 72. See on this subject Isaiah Friedman, *Germany, Turkey, and Zionism, 1897-1918*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ 1998, pp. 351-53.

⁷¹ Inbar, *Mahapekhah u-Geulah*, p. 209.

⁷² El'azari and Geva, *Ha-Tsiyonut be-Mivhan ha-Ma'aseh*, p. 16.

⁷³ Barnavi, *Ha-Meah ha-20*, p. 73.

⁷⁴ Inbar, *Mahapekhah ve-Temurah*, p. 93.

Conclusions

The years 1870-1920 constituted a critical phase in the history of the Yishuv in Palestine. Rapid population increase and socio-cultural development was interrupted by a period of intense hardship during the war, which ended with the British occupation of Palestine and the paving of the road to statehood. The same period also saw the emergence of political Zionism and Herzl's efforts to secure Palestine as an internationally recognized "national home" for the Jewish people. The preceding analysis has served to shed light on what kind of role Israeli textbooks attribute to the Ottomans in this formative epoch. The books recount at length how the Ottoman rulers rejected Herzl's plans and resisted the expansion of the Yishuv as much as they could, but this does not conjure up so negative an Ottoman image as might be expected. It is rather explained in detail that the Ottoman rulers were concerned that ongoing Jewish immigration to Palestine could lead to the emergence of yet another regionally concentrated, non-Muslim nation aspiring to autonomy, as had happened in the Balkans. In keeping with this approach, even the oft-repeated argument that Abdulhamid and his aides merely used Herzl's offer as a leverage in their negotiations with the French is not much belabored. There are also several books suggesting that despite their reservations the Ottomans could still have agreed to Herzl's offer if he had managed to raise the sums he promised. A negative image is presented in this context only when the textbook authors explain the failure of the Ottoman measures to stop Jewish immigration by referring to the corruptness and inefficiency of the local officials, mostly ignoring the pressures of the Great Powers anxious to protect the capitulations regime.

The attitude of the textbooks toward the Ottoman government grows more critical as they proceed to comment on the policies of the Young Turks, who they say proved as hostile as Abdulhamid II to the Zionist movement. They point out the disillusionment that the Zionists and Palestinian Jews underwent on realizing this fact, after they had shared in the brief post-revolution euphoria with hopes for liberalization and a change of policy toward Zionism. Significantly, they project a very negative image of the Jamal Pasha government in Palestine as they dwell on his wartime measures against the Yishuv, mentioning forcible deportations, suppression of Hebrew, and cases of collective punishment.

The Ottoman image in the books undergoes a turn for the worse from the late 1990s onward, as they begin to dedicate individual sections to the pro-British

Nili spy ring and the Hebrew Battalions. Dwelling on these topics, they place special emphasis on what they regard as Jamal Pasha's willful maltreatment of the Jews in the Yishuv, in an effort to justify both the split of Palestine from the Empire and the role that Nili and the Hebrew Battalions played in the process. Suggesting that the destruction of the whole Yishuv was not very far from the minds of Jamal Pasha and his associates, they explicitly refer to the deportation of the Armenians as something the like of which could have struck the Yishuv were it not for the Nili's promulgation of the news, German intervention, and the British occupation of Palestine.

The arrival of the British army is evaluated in this context as an event that saved the Yishuv from almost certain ruin and allowed it to develop freely on the path to statehood. From this perspective, the contribution of the Nili spy ring and the Hebrew Battalions to the British war effort against the Ottomans is presented not only as a natural and justified response to the Ottoman policies allegedly threatening the existence of the Yishuv, but also a good investment for its future. Even though it is conceded that the adoption of an explicitly pro-British attitude by these organizations ran counter to the wishes of the pro-Ottoman Jewish majority in Palestine, this is attributed mainly to their fears of retaliation from the government, and the Yishuv is criticized for its failure to support Nili members despite what the books praise as the heroic self-sacrifice they had made for its sake.

In his general report on the main results of the Symposium on "Facing Misuses of History," organized in Oslo in 1999, Laurent Wirth describes different types of abuse of history encountered in various fields extending from history education to mass media. Among the factors leading to these abuses, he mentions the traditions of historiography that serve the purposes of nation and state building.⁷⁵ We have seen in the introduction that the Israeli textbooks continue to rely on a Zionist interpretation of history, and Maurus Reinkowski indicates that this is also largely true for the academic historiography in Israel.⁷⁶ Insofar as Zionism may be considered another nationalist ideology serving nation and state building purposes, an important question to address at this point is to what extent the various abuses of history enumerated by Wirth may have found their way into

⁷⁵ Laurent Wirth, "Facing Misuses of History", in *The Misuses of History: Symposium on "Facing Misuses of History"*, Oslo (Norway) 28-30 June 1999, pp. 23-56, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg 2000, pp. 31-33.

⁷⁶ Maurus Reinkowski, "Late Ottoman Rule over Palestine: its Evaluation in Arab, Turkish and Israeli Histories, 1970-90", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35, 1, 1999, pp. 78-79.

the Israeli textbooks that handle this critical period leading to the establishment of the state of Israel.

Wirth enumerates the types of abuse in question as abuse by denial of a clear historical fact, abuse by falsification, abuse by fixation, abuse by omission, abuse out of laziness or ignorance, and abuse through the exploitation of history for the sake of commercial interests.⁷⁷ Amongst these, the preceding analysis of the Israeli history textbooks has revealed the existence of abuses by omission and especially by fixation. Abuse by omission is encountered in the passages that attempt to explain the great increase in the Palestinian Jewish population despite the restrictions imposed by the Ottoman authorities on Jewish immigration and settlement. Most textbooks' omission of the role of the Great Powers in the failure of these measures, and corresponding fixation on the corruption of the Ottoman officials, serve to discredit Ottoman rule and legitimize the Zionists' disrespect of its restrictions, as Reinkowski observes in connection with Israeli academic historiography.⁷⁸

One of the most conspicuous types of abuse encountered in the textbooks, especially those published since the late 1990s, is their fixation on what they present as the oppressive policies of the Ottoman governor of Syria and Palestine, Jamal Pasha, against the Yishuv during World War I. This fixation is also evident as we have seen in the actual history curricula for the middle and high schools, where the only subject with explicit mention of the Turks or Ottomans is Jamal Pasha's policies against the Yishuv during the war. In close connection with this, the books published since the late nineties also fix upon the topics of Nili and the Hebrew Battalions, which are presented as "*the ways of struggle of the Yishuv*" against these policies, to quote the actual high school curriculum.⁷⁹ The fact that the textbook authors themselves admit the marginal status of the Nili members vis-à-vis the overwhelming majority in the Yishuv who objected to their activities, and acknowledge the failure of the Hebrew Battalions to play any significant role in the British conquest of Palestine, sheds further light on the abuse of fixation involved in their particular focus on these organizations.

Reinkowski's study reveals that the negative image of Jamal Pasha that we have encountered in the textbooks is also present in academic Israeli historiography,

⁷⁷ Wirth, "Facing Misuses of History", pp. 38-48.

⁷⁸ Reinkowski, "Late Ottoman Rule over Palestine," p. 81.

⁷⁹ Misrad ha-Hinukh, "Tokhnit ha-Limudim ba-Historia," p. 23.

where, the author observes, Ottoman rule assumes the function of a “hostile counterpart” against the Yishuv during World War I. As Reinkowski remarks in connection with historiography, the fixation of the textbooks on the policies of Jamal Pasha also goes beyond describing the difficult conditions prevailing in Palestine during World War I, or attempting to secure acknowledgment of the sufferings of the Jewish community. It emerges instead as a key plot element of the historical narrative, meant to serve an important legitimating function. In this context, Reinkowski points out that the negative image of Jamal Pasha is also predominant in Arab historiography: Since Palestine was the scene of a bitter Arab-Jewish conflict during the period of the British Mandate succeeding the Ottoman rule, the historians of both sides strove to outbid each other in an effort to demonstrate that their own community had suffered more at the hands of Jamal Pasha, and therefore had a greater claim to national self-realization and the establishment of an independent state.⁸⁰ A comparison with the existing studies on the history textbooks of Arabic countries such as Syria and Jordan indeed supports this argument. According to these studies, the Arabic textbooks also fix on an extremely negative image of Jamal Pasha, whom they regularly refer to as *as-Saffah* (“The Blood-Shedder”). The books relate at length how he massacred, deported or dispossessed the local Arab population in revenge for his failed attacks on the Suez, executed many Arab notables, and closed down Arabic newspapers in line with his policies of “Turkification.” This narrative is then used to lend legitimacy to the revolt of Sharif Hussein, which is dubbed as “the Arab Revolution,” and to justify his collaboration with the British to overthrow Ottoman rule and establish Arab national independence.⁸¹ It can be argued on the same lines that the fixation of the Israeli history curricula and textbooks on Jamal Pasha’s policies serves to justify the collaboration of Nili and the Hebrew Battalions with the British, the split of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, and the eventual establishment of a Jewish state following the long period of rivalry and conflict with the Arabs during the British Mandate. Similarly, the fixation on Nili and the Hebrew Battalions themselves fulfills an important function in presenting this final period of Ottoman rule in Palestine as the first important milestone of the Yishuv’s struggle against its “oppressors,” eventually leading to national self-realization.

⁸⁰ Reinkowski, “Late Ottoman Rule over Palestine,” p. 88.

⁸¹ Yenal Gökşun, *Şuriye İlk ve Ortaöğretim Ders Kitaplarında Türkler ve Türk İmajı*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Marmara Üniversitesi, İstanbul 2011, pp. 109-13; Mehmet Yiğit, *Arap Ülkelerinde Okutulan Lise Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türkler (Ürdün ve Suriye Örneği)*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Gazi Üniversitesi, Ankara 2009, pp. 23-24, 27-28, 46, 70, 76-80, 92, 99.

An important observation to make in this connection is the fact that Jamal Pasha dedicated an entire chapter of his memories to his relations with the Arabs in Syria and Palestine and the Sharif Hussein revolt, while he failed to make any mention of Nili or the Hebrew Battalions, and touched upon his relations with the Jews briefly at four points only. In the memories he relates how has spent his best efforts to protect the Jews as well as the Christians from the assaults of the local Muslim and Druze population and extended financial aid to Christian and Jewish orphanages. He complains of the small sums donated by the Zionists for feeding the poor in Jerusalem, which he says they used as an opportunity to spread Zionist propaganda. On a more positive note, he speaks appreciatively of “the great efforts” that a Jewish agricultural expert and his officials from Rishon le-Zion put into the construction work of one of the relay stations along the new road that was being built then.⁸² This might be taken to imply that Jamal Pasha himself attached much less importance to his relations with the Jews and Jewish collaboration with the British than he did to his policies toward the Arabs and the “Arab Revolt” as he put it. This was perhaps only natural, given the great difference between their population sizes. If true, this would help place in perspective the fixation of the Israeli textbooks on the Palestinian Jews’ confrontation with the Jamal Pasha government, as well as the general rivalry between Israeli and Arab historiographies in this respect.

Drawing upon such alternative primary sources alongside those of pro-Zionist provenance, like the diary and letters of Aaron Aaronsohn, could contribute to the elimination of some of the abuses examined here, and help achieve a multi-perspectivity that would be desirable from both a historiographical and a pedagogic point of view. However, the legitimating functions that Jamal Pasha’s image and policies seem to have assumed in the Israeli textbooks’ historical narrative extending from the final period of Ottoman rule, through the Arab-Jewish conflicts during the British mandate, and up to the Declaration of Independence, significantly decreases the likelihood of textbook authors adopting such a multi-perspectival approach to the issue within the foreseeable future.

⁸² Cemal Paşa, *Hatıralar*, ed. Alpay Kabacalı, Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, İstanbul 2001, pp. 263, 351-52, 361.

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