

# Anti-Zionist Tendencies and Social Messages in the Hebrew Poetry Published in *El Tiempo*: the Newspaper of the Ottoman Empire's Ladino-Speaking Community in the Early Twentieth Century

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## Abstract

*The newspaper El Tiempo, was circulated throughout the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the twentieth-century, which was a time of many changes for Sephardic Jewish society. These changes included the loss of time-held traditions in the face of the Zionist vision, the conflict between loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and commitment to the Zionist Movement, and the Young Turks revolution and modernization of education. The newspaper adhered to an anti-Zionist, nationalistic, ideological-literary trend, and the paper's editor, David Fresco, provided a platform for the literary works of Mercado Fresco, with the aim of establishing and spreading these ideologies. It was a publicist newspaper, which, in addition to opposing Zionist ideology, reflected social criticism and protest. It accused the Zionist idea and its implementation in the Ottoman Empire of upsetting the community's social equilibrium.*

*This article will examine the essence of El Tiempo and the literary-political line it supported through the analysis of the unique thematic and poetic characteristics of the following works: two "Songs of Praise," one written by an anonymous teacher and the other by the teacher Yitzhak. B. Shabtai; and five poems and three laments written by Mercado Fresco (signed with his initials, מ"פ). All of the poems reproduced in this article appear in the original Hebrew, as published in El Tiempo between the years 1908 and 1911. This article will explore how works of unlimited symbolism, seemingly unconnected to their time and place of creation, can nonetheless serve as a mirror of their time and as a medium for social criticism and protest, expressing the prevailing mood of a period.*

## Keywords

Ladino language;  
Newspapers;  
Ottoman Empire;  
*El Tiempo*;  
Poemas.

The Ladino language daily newspaper *El Tiempo*, printed in Rashi script, was the most widely circulated newspaper among the Ladino speaking Jews of the Ottoman Empire. Published continuously for over 50 years (1872-1930), *El Tiempo* was firmly rooted in the Jewish community throughout the Empire, especially in Constantinople (Kushta). The newspaper's readership included educated, enlightened Jewish circles but also Jewish religious factions. It is estimated that the paper's readership made up over 16 percent of all Ladino speakers in Western Turkey. Its owner was an enthusiastic supporter of Kol Yisrael Haverim (also known as AIU or Alliance Israelite Universelle), of processes of Westernization, and of the undivided and total loyalty of the Jewish community to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>1</sup>

The years chosen as the focus of the study (1908 to 1911), were fateful ones for the Ladino speaking Jews throughout the Ottoman Empire, including the Greek territories under the rule of the Empire. *El Tiempo* faithfully reflected the social, cultural, economic, and political changes, upheavals, and controversies of the time. Several events stood at the center of the Jewish community's agenda. One was the election of a new Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire. This election was particularly significant since, until the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the chosen candidate, Rabbi Haim Nahoum, had been the only Chief Rabbi selected for the position in an orderly and organized process. From an official point of view, all of the other rabbis had held the post of Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi in an acting, non-permanent, capacity. Another important event was the revolution of the Young Turks and its influence on the Jewish community, notably on the election of the Chief Rabbi. In addition, Zionist movement activities in Constantinople (Kushta) had begun.

The newspaper supported modernization and the Jewish community's loyalty to the Ottoman Empire which was heightened after the Young Turks' revolution and through the latter's "sensitivity" to perceived disloyalty to the empire by ethnic minorities. *El Tiempo* also adopted an ideological stance characterized by literary and nationalist anti-Zionist tendencies. The editorial line of the newspaper reflected social and political criticism and protest aimed at the Zionist idea, accusing the movement and its aspiration to establish a Jewish national entity within the Ottoman Empire, in the historic land of Israel, as threatening to the community's social equilibrium.<sup>2</sup>

The editor of *El Tiempo* saw the national aspirations of the Zionist movement as contradicting the policy of the Young Turks, for whom the national unity of the Ottoman Empire was both an ideal and a means of strengthening the Empire. Thus, in his view, these aspirations contradicted the interests of establishing the Jewish community as a community of loyal subjects.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Advertisements in Ottoman Ladino Journals," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 105/106 (2000): 9-20.

2 Evidence of David Fresco's anti-Zionist doctrine and the editorial stance he promoted can be seen in his open letter to David Nordau. See: Letter from David Fresco, editor of *El Tiempo*, to David Nordau in *El Tiempo*, 116, 23.8 (1911): 1911:

I am not an anti-Zionist of the hour, I was one from the first day this movement was born, and the more I studied the subject the more I understood the harm it does to Judaism in general and the Ottoman Empire in particular ... The deeper I delve, the deeper my awareness that Zionism is a disaster for Judaism that I have to fight against, as a Jew and an Arab.

3 On the connection between the revolution of the Young Turks, modernization, and the interests of the Jewish commu-

With the encouragement and support of the Alliance, *El Tiempo* unreservedly supported the election of Rabbi Haim Nahoum and his implementation of modern liberal ideas as Chief Rabbi. Rabbi Nahoum served as Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire from 1908 to 1920. He possessed an extensive knowledge of the Torah and had a modern general education, with a modern, liberal, French orientation, having studied in Paris between 1893 and 1897 under the auspices and support of the Alliance.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Unique Contribution of *El Tiempo* as a Platform Promoting Modernity and Western-oriented Education among Ladino Speakers**

*El Tiempo* was founded in the year 1871 in Istanbul, Turkey by Mercado Fresco, Sammy Alkabetz, Yitzhak Carmona, and David Fresco.<sup>5</sup> It survived and flourished for fifty-five years, mainly thanks to the efforts of its devoted editor, David Fresco.<sup>6</sup> The first editor was Yitzhak Chai Carmona, after whom the task of editing fell to Mercado Fresco and Sammy Alkabetz, and finally, to David Fresco, a man who was enlightened for his time, culturally active, and who died in the 1933. In an article that appeared on the front-page of the last issue of the paper in 1930, the editor, David Fresco, bid farewell to his readers after fifty-five years as a journalist. He summed up his work as an editor and a public figure and, in a personal confession, recalled his far reaching ambitions, the various obstacles that stood in his way, and his last wishes. Due to advancing age, he felt forced to step down after intensive activity on the editorial boards of Turkey's first Ladino language Jewish newspapers.

### **The Rise in the Use of Hebrew in the “Spanish Arena”: The Dialectical Relationship Between Hebrew and Ladino**

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Sephardic Ladino-speaking community was in the throes of a process that could best be described as a ‘cultural revolution.’ Its situation had changed drastically from that at the beginning of the eighteenth century. From the mid- nineteenth century, the Sephardic Jewish world had been characterized by its search for the means to break away from local cultural patterns and gain exposure to Western culture. It was the literary journals that advanced

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nity, see articles published in *El Tiempo*: Vol 97, 19.8 (1908): 1127-1188; Vol 98, 21.8 (1908):1137-1388, 1141-1143. On the unreserved support of *El Tiempo* for the election of Rabbi Haim Nahoum to the position of Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi of the Empire, see the following articles: Vol 91, 3.8 (1908): 1068; Vol 95, 4.8 (1908): 1111-1113; Vol 17.8.1908, 1117-1188; Vol 62, 1.3 (1909): 597; Vol 63, 3.3 (1909): 607.

4 On the unequivocal support of *El Tiempo* for the election of Rabbi Haim Nahoum to the position of Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi of the empire, see the following articles: Vol 91, 3.8 (1908): 1068; Vol 95, 4.8 (1908): 1111- 1113; Vol 17.8 (1908): 1117-1188; Vol 62, 1.3 (1909): 597; Vol 63, 3.3 (1909): 607.

5 An apostrophe over the letter ’ב’ in the Hebrew alphabet, when used to write in Ladino, indicates that the pronunciation should be faint and not emphasized.

6 David Moshe Gaon, *The Ladino Press* (Jerusalem: Yad Itzhal Ben-Zvi, 1965), 55. For more on the Ladino press, see: S. A. Stein, “Ladino in Print,” *Jewish History* 16 (2002); S. A. Stein, “Creating a Taste for News: Historicizing Judeo – Spanish Periodicals of the Ottoman Empire,” *Jewish History* 14 (2000).

this exposure. As literary platforms, they were engaged in contact with a wide range of contemporary Hebrew poetry, fiction, essays, and plays (published in collections or as separate books).<sup>7</sup> Popular aspirations for political and national revival filled the conscious awareness and the innermost recesses of the minds of every Jewish visionary and poet. From the time of the loss of Jewish national independence, the central pulsing motif of Jewish literature lay in the idea of 'Redemption' and the dream of the 'Rebirth of Israel.'<sup>8</sup> This fact explains the Jewish writers' need to switch from one language to another: Mendele, for example, switched from Hebrew to Yiddish and from Yiddish to Hebrew; Peretz, from Hebrew to Yiddish; Berkowitz remained a bilingual author, and there are other similar cases.<sup>9</sup>

*El Tiempo* supported a decidedly liberal line and backed processes of modernization.<sup>10</sup> In addition, organizations of a political-ideological nature began to appear on the Sephardic Jewish social scene and influence its literary world. The Ladino language press, including *El Tiempo*, was embroiled in the fierce political controversies that were on the agenda of the Ottoman Empire, those of the Jewish Community within the Empire, the issues affecting the settlement of Jews in the Land of Israel, and those affecting the Jewish World in general.<sup>11</sup>

The history of Hebrew literature clearly illustrates the fact that often, the literature of two languages served as one literature. From the day of their exile from their homeland, the people of Israel have intermingled with other nations and learned their languages.<sup>12</sup> Yet, to a greater or lesser degree, they have always preserved their original Hebrew tongue. In general, we can say that the Hebrew language served as a "written language" during the years of exile.<sup>13</sup> Every child learned to read and write in Hebrew, but daily life was carried out in the local language. Jews reserved Hebrew for religious practices: for prayer, for the reading of the Torah, and for writing on Torah-related topics such as commentaries on the Torah, lamentations, and hymns. Over the years, the Jews developed and adapted local Jewish languages such as Yiddish, Ladino, and various forms of Judeo-Arabic. These languages were a mixture of several

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7 See, for example: B. Even-Zohar, "The Emergences of the Literary Figure of the New Hebrew in Hebrew Literature from 1880 to 1930," (Master's Thesis, Tel Aviv, 1998). On the status of translated literature within the multilateral system of literature, see: I. Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the literary Polysystem," *Hasifrut* 25 (1997): 40-45; Aldina Quintana Rodriguez, *Geografia Lingüística del Judeoespañol. Estudio sincrónico y diacrónico*, (Berne: Peter Lang, 2006); Elena Romero, *La Creación Literaria en Lengua Sefardi* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992).

8 For the more complete context, see: Moshe Steiner, *The National Rebirth in our Literature* (Tel Aviv: Tcherikover, 1982), 34; Rosa Asenjo, "Narrativa patrimonial y de autor," *Sefardies: literatura y lengua de unanación dispersa*, ed. Elena Romero (Cuentos: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2008); Elena Romero, *La Creación Literaria en Lengua Sefardi* (Madrid: Editorial MAPFRE, 1992); David Bunis, *Sepharadic Studies: A Research Bibliography Incorporating Judezmo Language, Literature and Folklore and Historical Background* (New York: Garland, 1981).

9 See: Dov Sadan, *Studies in Hebrew Literature Vol. 4* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2000), 42; Shmuel Refael, "Hebrew Poetic Manifesto Kotzo Shel Yod," *Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien* 19 (2013), 145-159.

10 See: *El Tiempo*, 98, 24 Av (1908):1138-1141; *Ibid*, 63, Adar (1909): 608.

11 See: Channah Magid, *The History of Our Language*, (Tel Aviv: Y.L. Peretz, 1984), 151-172.

12 "And their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." Nehemiah 13:24. See: Paloma Diaz Más, *Sephardim: The Jews From Spain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

13 On this issue, see: Magid, 151-172.

languages and, together with the local language spoken by the indigenous population, were used in the daily life of the community alongside the Hebrew language which was reserved for religious practices. The approach of Eliezer Ben Yehuda (the 'Reviver of the Hebrew Language') to the Hebrew language, following the rise of the idea of 'National Rebirth,' represented a major revolution. His motto was: "There is no people without a language and no language without a nation."<sup>14</sup>

In general, at a certain stage, centers of the Jewish population with a developed press and sophisticated high-level language-literature, succumbed to linguistic assimilation and wrote in the local Jewish language rather than in Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> The Jewish environment, with its uniqueness in the field of religion, culture, and spirituality, adopted and adapted the local language: changing and suiting it to the emotional experiences and the spiritual tradition of the Jews, to the historical character of the Jews immersed in and faithful to their tradition. The technical nature of the local language remained in effect if Jews used it in external surroundings, but, when used between Jews themselves, a new Jewish language was created, the Jews' own language.

Dov Sadan notes that the Jewish People in the Diaspora needed three languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, and the local language. He observes that Hebrew enriched Yiddish just as Yiddish enriched Hebrew.<sup>16</sup> This article attempts to shed light on Sadan's claim from another angle; that of the Ladino language, which maintained a similar dialectical interaction with internal and external spiritual resources of Hebrew culture. An unexpected finding that arises from this discussion concerns the way in which old Spanish, the spoken language of the Jews of Spain, was transformed after their expulsion and move to a new environment into a written language, Ladino. From this grew the new, wide-ranging literature of a people separated from their former land.

It is of interest to note that Ladino was in a state of diglossia: the spoken language was Ladino and its written language was Hebrew. Rodrigue Schwarzwald claims that processes of education and secularization made enlightened Jews aware that many of their people were not sufficiently exposed to Hebrew sources and were unable to deal with academic writing in Hebrew. They saw the education of the masses as a lofty task and wrote intentionally in the Jewish languages. Successive generations of journalists and authors arose who preferred to address the people in their tongue, Ladino.<sup>17</sup> Rodrigue Schwarzwald also notes that most Jewish newspapers published in Greece prior to the Second World

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15 On Ben Yehuda's efforts to enrich the Hebrew language by translating it into a living, spoken language, see: Galia Yardeni, *The Hebrew Press in Eretz Yisrael, 1863-1904* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1979), 31. It should be noted that Ben Yehuda was not the first to revive the Hebrew language. See: Shlomo Haramti, *Three Who Preceded Ben-Yehuda* (Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi Institute).

15 On linguistic assimilation, see: Jacob Lestschinsky, *The National Aspect of the Jews in the Diaspora* (Tel Aviv: Y.L. Peretz, 1959), 53; Esther Benbassa, "Newspapers Serving Zionism in Istanbul and Salonika, 1908-1914," *Quesher* 4 (1988): 11-21.

16 See: Sadan, 28.

17 See: Ora Rodrigue Schwarzwald, "The Literature of Greek Jewry: Its Language and Variety," *Paamin* 30 (1987): 71; Jacob M. Hasán, "Vision panorámica de la literatura Sefardi," *Hispanica Judaica* 25-44 (1982).



War were in Ladino.<sup>18</sup>

The Hebrew alphabet formed the Ladino language and turned it into something half secular, half sacred. A prominent description of this phenomenon, a principle that characterized many diasporas, is provided by the Jewish philosopher Yehuda (Franz) Rosenzweig in his work *Star of Redemption*. He writes that, “the linguistic life of the Jews, mired in foreign lands, with the motherland of their language elsewhere, is evidence that everyday language tries to maintain contact with the ancient holy tongue, at least through the mute written letters.”<sup>19</sup> Rosenzweig’s remarks were not a commentary on the interaction between Hebrew and Ladino. Still, the theme of his statement can serve to illuminate the prevailing mood of Ladino. We will further note the symbiotic relationship between Ladino and Hebrew and consider the connections between words when we examine several poems published in *El Tiempo*. We can compare this phenomenon to a magnificent tapestry whose pictures we have seen daily, but that can now be viewed only from the reverse side, as threads connecting different points. Accordingly, we can study the philosophy that lies concealed in Ladino and which expresses the spirit of the culture to which Ladino belongs. In general, every artistic trend has its own movement and its own evolution. It is the artist who creates the work, but the innovations and changes revealed in the work depend on both the literary tradition and the social elements that surround the artist.<sup>20</sup> Literature is not a mirror of social reality. Rather, it is influenced by, and in turn, influences social reality.

When considering the non-literary social elements that influenced Jewish literature in general, and the poetry published in *El Tiempo* in particular, we should emphasize two main factors:

- a. Key historical events which served as raw-material for literary works and shaped the consciousness of their creators.
- b. The development of the physical and social conditions (education, distribution, printing, and the emerging reader-audience) that determined the interrelationship between the creators and those they addressed.

Sephardic Jews, a people without a territory, created an artificial cultural territory for themselves. The daily press often served as a meeting-place for different creators, who were brought together under the same roof by the love of a common culture.<sup>21</sup> The literary and poetic works in *El Tiempo* were written in Hebrew using Rashi Script, and featured in a newspaper that was typically written in Ladino. As such, writers drew from and contributed to the culture out of which they grew: a culture composed of a mix of various ethnic, religious, and linguistic elements, poured into literary molds.

The question of two languages was a subject of contention, widely discussed by those writing in Ladino

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18 Rodrigue Schwarzwald, 74.

19 Judah Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929) was a Jewish philosopher. His major philosophical work, *The Star of Redemption*, was published in 1921 in Germany. The book was reprinted four times and translated by Y. Amir. For above quote, see: Yehoyada Amir, *Reason out of Faith: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 327.

20 For a detailed explanation of this distinction, see: Sadan, 27.

21 For more on this phenomenon, see: Sadan, 35.

and Hebrew.<sup>22</sup> The circumstances of both readers and writers meant that extensive contact with European literary and cultural circles was inevitable.<sup>23</sup> The works of poetry published in *El Tiempo* were literary works, linked to real life and reflecting the historical, communal, and social realities of the time while centered around the messianic expectation. A vast and varied abundance of Hebrew prose was produced in Eastern Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. This body of prose consisted of bilingual works by authors who wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish. These authors included Abramovitch, Mendele, Mocher, Sefarim, and Y.L. Peretz. This phenomenon was also partly an internal process marking the rediscovery of Jewish popular literature, extending from the Talmud to the most recent Hassidic Tales, a collection of texts that emphasized national folklore and held aesthetic and moral values worthy of consideration.<sup>24</sup>

The Hebrew periodicals and daily press that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, both in Palestine and in the Jewish Diaspora, focused on emphasizing the need to develop, teach, and spread the Hebrew language. The main problem of concern to the periodicals and newspapers was that of language; how to preserve the Hebrew language and how to disseminate, research, and develop it.<sup>25</sup> For generations, Hebrew was studied, written, and read but almost never spoken. The rebirth of the Jewish people and the resurrection of its freedom and independence, which began in the previous century, was linked to the Hebrew letters. Many songs and stories dealing with the return to Zion were written in Hebrew long before the establishment of the State of Israel. The rebirth of the language preceded the rebirth of the nation and awakened it from a long sleep and state of petrification.<sup>26</sup> It seems that the desire for redemption is the central motif in the works before us. The desired redemption is not seen as a coincidental, one-time event, but rather, as an ongoing historical process involving a continuous struggle for national liberation.<sup>27</sup> In poetry, it is the historical, communal, messianic, or social dimension that provides the source of inspiration and the motivation for its composition.

It should be noted that for many years, certain topics were better served by Ladino than by Hebrew. Ladino's main strength came from its status as a living, spoken language and from the colorful vernacular it developed. The power of Hebrew, on the other hand, lay in its ancient cultural roots, despite the fact that it was a dormant language characterized by paucity and dryness. In the future, words or sentences would be borrowed from Ladino and used in Hebrew, just as Burla did in his works, as a way of

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22 Compare also: Sadan, 41.

23 See: Even-Zohar, 1998, 34; Aharon Ben-Or, *The History of Hebrew Literature in the Modern Era, Vol. 3* (Tel Aviv: Yizreel, 1959); Avner Holtzman, *Aesthetics and National Revival: Hebrew Literature in Light of the Visual Arts* (Haifa: Zamora-Bitan & Haifa University Press, 1999); Gideon Toury, "Literature in Translation," *Hasifrut* 28 (1979).

24 On this subject, see: Aviva Mahalo, *Between Two Horizons: The Fiction of the Third Aliya: Between the Diaspora and Eretz Israel* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mass Publication, 1991), 19. On processes undergone by Yiddish Literature as a basis for comparison with similar, parallel processes undergone by Ladino, see: Ibid., 21.

25 See: Toury, 58-69; Even-Zohar, 68.

26 On this subject, see: Aharon Megged, *The Writing Desk: Essays on Literature* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1989), 103.

27 For the full context, see: Steiner, 40; Gad Nassi, *Jewish Journalism and Printing Houses in Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2001).

indicating the social character of a literary figure.<sup>28</sup> The primary significance of the literary revolution of the turn of the century, in which Ladino authors brought Hebrew writers to the reader's attention, was the way in which it laid the foundation for the establishment of the same secular Hebrew identity that so many had struggled to define just a few years earlier. The new cultural identity was constructed from several common traits that emerged in works of fiction and poetry published during those years.<sup>29</sup>

Holtzman notes that a breaching of the limits of language took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. This breach found its expression in the free and flexible use of all of the age-old resources of the Hebrew language, and in the construction of multi-branched systems which exploited the traditional associative weight of words and phrases. At the same time, words and phrases were expropriated from their sacred sources and embedded in new secular contexts.<sup>30</sup> He further adds that authors learned various ways of adopting words from Jewish and foreign languages to widen their range of expression and that of their characters. Hebrew literature thus served as one of the factors that accelerated the revival of Hebrew as a language capable of fulfilling all the functions required of a living national language.

### The Literary Creation of *El Tiempo*: A Four-Year Case Study (1908-1911)

Literary works published in Hebrew in *El Tiempo* can be divided into three main genres: songs of praise, poems, and lamentations. From this analysis, we can learn about the literary genres favored by the readers and by the author himself. We can also witness the dynamism and creativity of Sephardic Jewish Ladino speakers who sought to invent their own literary forms. These speakers were not content with preserving traditional Hispanic forms such as the romancero.<sup>31</sup> The genres mentioned typify *El Tiempo* as a non-elitist newspaper and illustrates Ladino literature's general trend of providing a platform for writers who emerged from the community (and not just for poets of the first rank), engaging them in the process of literary creation.

#### a. Songs of Praise

The song of praise was a medieval literary genre that was divided between sacred literature and secular literature. Sacred literature included liturgical hymns, sacred songs, and passages from daily prayer books, while secular literature included drinking songs, songs of nature, songs of complaint, philosophical songs, wedding songs, songs of desire, boasting songs, war songs, lamentations, riddle songs, and songs of praise.<sup>32</sup> Songs written during this period shared fixed and identical characteristics regard-

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28 Compare further: Aldina Quintana Rodriguez, "Ladino Translation as a Means of Spreading the Zionist Ideology," *Zion and Zionism Among Shephardi and Oriental Jews* (Jerusalem: Misgav Institute, 2002): 514-515. It should be noted that these passages on the nature of Ladino as a spoken language are also valid in regard to Yiddish.

29 On this process, see: Holtzman, 35.

30 See: B. Shahevitch and M. Perry, *Shimon Helkin Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem: Reuven Mas., 1972).

31 On this process, see: Shmeul Refael, *I Will Tell A Poem: A Study of the Judeo-Spanish Coplas* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2004), 12.

32 For more on this genre, see: Haviva Ishay, *The Poems of Moshe Ibn Ezra* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2010),



ing structure and subject. They had a strong attachment to Jewish cultural sources. For example, the use of Hebrew and the insertion of phrases and verses from traditional sources was widespread. Medieval Arabic poetry influenced medieval poetry, and also Turkish poetry. Therefore, it was only natural that writers at the beginning of the twentieth century would choose a genre that would allow them to express these common cultural influences. The aim of the song of praise was to honor the poet's patron (characterized as wise, honest, generous, of noble birth, and exalted) using colorful and decorative poetic linguistic conventions. In the Middle Ages, songs of praise served as a powerful tool for maintaining social ties and for writers, they were a source of income, provided by the poems' subjects.<sup>33</sup> The songs of praise presented here, and published in the Ladino press at the beginning of the twentieth century, represent a different case; the aims and motivation of the writers were ideological. The author reflects on his thoughts, feelings, views, and attitude regarding the subject, without any thought of financial reward. The first Song of Praise to Sultan Hamid is presented below and was written in Hebrew by a Jewish teacher from the community. The chances that this song would come into the hands of the Sultan were obviously very slim; clearly, the song was written solely to express the author's worldview, without any covert goal of deriving material benefit.

### a.1 A Song of Praise to Sultan Hamid

*El Tiempo*, 98, 21 August (1908): 1143<sup>34</sup>

Brotherhood, freedom, equality, and law	אחוּוה, חרות, שווי, משפט
All the inhabitants were informed, sanctified	הַתְּבַשְׂרוֹן, הַתְּקַדְּשׁוּ כָּל שׁוֹכְנֵי אֶרֶץ
For the leavened (chametz) was nullified, robbery	כִּי אִפְסָ חֻמֶּץ כָּלָה שׁוֹד וּקְרָץ
and exploitation ended	
Liberty and tolerance were engraved on the tablets	חרות על הלוחות חרות וחופש
Freedom was proclaimed to every living soul	וּדְרוֹר יִקְרָא לְכָל בָּשָׂר וְנֶפֶשׁ
Slavery and suffering, like the potter's vessel, will be shattered	עַבְדוּת וְסִבָּל כְּכֵלִי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפֹּץ
Consent will be given to all things good and desired	חֶפְשָׁה תִּתֵּן לְכָל דָּבָר טוֹב וְחֶפֶץ
Turks, Hebrews, and Christians with advantage to none...	טוֹרְקִים עֵבְרִים נוצרים אין יתרון לאחד...
I, a teacher of the Hebrew tongue	כִּי אֲנֹכִי מוֹרֶה שֶׁפֶת עֵבֶר וּמַקְצוּעוּתִיָּה
To the students of the "Tzror Chayim" (Eternal Life) School	בבית הספר "צרור החיים" ללומדיה
Under the guiding hand of the "Hilfsverein der	תחת יד השגחת חברת "הילפספיראין" ונכבדיה
Deutschen Juden" (a Jewish Philanthropy	
Organization) Society and her dignitaries	
For it is good to praise	כִּי טוֹב לְבָרֵךְ

The above song of praise, written by an anonymous teacher, sought to celebrate Sultan Hamid's declaration promoting equality between peoples as expressed in the "Canon Nama" (a compilation of

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33 See: S. Elizur, *Secular Hebrew Poetry in Moslem Spain* (Ramat Gan: The Open University, 2004), 5; Esther Benbasa, "Haim Nahoum Une Grande Rabbin Separde en Politique 1892-1923," (Jerusalem: The Dinur Centre, The Hebrew University, 1998): 18-24.

34 All the passages quoted from *El Tiempo* were taken from copies of the newspaper found in the archive of Yad Itzhak Ben-Zvi Institute, Jerusalem.

secular regulations, in the spirit of the Tanzimat). It was in the year 1908 that the Young Turks, a Turkish nationalist party, overthrew Sultan Hamid the Second, after which, the government remained unstable. Therefore, the writer was careful not to identify with the instigators of the uprising for fear of harm and felt the need to praise the deposed Sultan. The Young Turks had demanded the reinstatement of the Constitution of 1876, and it was in 1908, the year in which the song of praise was written, that the Sultan capitulated to this demand.<sup>35</sup> The author maintains exact rhyme and conveys optimism in hoping for unity between peoples and between nations. He does this by inserting relevant phrases from different Jewish cultural sources. From the Bible, he uses the phrase, "For the stranger and for the resident." From the liturgy, he inserts, "Liberty proclaimed." From Passover, "Hametz (leaven) nullified" (where leaven is a metaphor for something repulsive and forbidden). The words *liberty*, *freedom*, and *consent* are repeated several times in the song and emphasize the aspiration to fully experience these sensations, as opposed to the experience of the past which was so contrary to the spirit of these "tidings of spring." The writer repeatedly uses contrasting parallels; "the wicked and the evil," as opposed to "brothers and comrades," in order to create the message he seeks. This message has to do with bridging the gap between the Jews who supported the revolution and those who opposed it. The writer tries to endow the song with aesthetic and harmonic qualities and to maintain exact rhyme and meter. The song has grand opening and closing lines characteristic of the Medieval song of praise.

Despite the *political correctness* and caution that characterizes the song, the editorial line of the paper supported the *Young Turks*' Revolution. Its editor, David Fresco, believed that the new regime would promote modernization and the integration of the Jews of the Turkish Empire and of Turkey into all aspects of political, social, and economic activity.<sup>36</sup>

## a.2. Song of Praise to Rabbi Haim Nahoum

*El Tiempo*, 73, (1909): 709-710

### A song of praise in honor of our teacher, our Rabbi, the 'Crown of our Heads' the Great Rabbi Haim Nahoum n"y (may his light illuminate)

Two out of the poem's eight original verses are reproduced below.

a.

א

The sphere of justice glimmers above the ranks of the people  
He proclaims love, goodwill, and virtues,  
Curtails wars, hinders enmity and hate  
He will judge justly, strengthen the maintainers, save his people

גלגל צדק מבעד מפלשי עם הגיה,  
אהבה ורצון, ומידות טובות הוא מודיע,  
משבית מלחמות, ואיבה ושנאה מפריע  
ישפוט בצדק, יחזק בדק, עמו ישיע.

<sup>35</sup> On the effect of the Young Turks Revolution on the Jewish community and on relations between the revolution and *El Tiempo*, see: Benbassa, From the Age of Reform to the Revolution of the 'Young Turks', 70-77. On the period of changes in the modern 'spirit of the West,' see Bartel and Shavit, 11-13.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example: *El Tiempo*, 99, 27 Av (1908):115; *Ibid.*, 103, 29 Av (1908):1168; *Ibid.*, 70, 26 Adar (1909): 675; Benbassa, From the Age of Reform to the Revolution of the 'Young Turks', 70-77.

b.

ב

The honor of his person is greater than all seventy-five  
[seventy-five provinces of the Ottoman Empire]

כבוד גופו גדול מכל שבעים וחמישה,

Voices of the people were heard at that time, man and  
rejoiced woman

קולות עם עת נשמעו צהלו איש ואישה,

A stone rejected by the rebellious became the keystone  
Moreover, the countenance of the rebels against the light  
fell as if blinded by shame

אבן מאסו מורדים היתה אבן הראשה,  
ופני מורדי אור חפו, כסמו בושה

**Yitzhak B. Shabtai, Teacher of Hebrew to the Youth of Yeshurun at the Hasköy School, the Second Day of the Month of Adar 5669 (23/2/1909)**

Composed of eight, four line verses of exact rhyme, this “Song of Praise to Rabbi Chaim Nahum” stresses, with some exaggeration, the Rabbi’s positive qualities, particularly his leadership ability. At the same time, the song hints at the “rebels” who did not want him to be chosen as Chief Rabbi. According to the poem, their faces “fell in shame” at their opposition to his appointment and when confronted by the rejoicing of the majority of the people. In the song of praise, these “rebels” are also referred to as “traitors” and metaphorically as “a cloak of deceit.” Using contrasting parallelism, the more the writer criticizes the Rabbi’s opponents by describing their negative properties, the more he strengthens the Rabbi’s unique qualities. The song also hints at a certain person, who apparently objected to the Rabbi and conspired against his appointment. The song refers to this person as a “scoundrel” and a “miser.” The writer asks the dignitaries of the people to boldly and courageously defend the Rabbi from this person. The last three verses conclude with the hope that the new Rabbi will be able to bring about equality and social justice, and lists the tasks ahead of him, emphasizing the caring for orphans, widows, and the poor. The last verse stresses the Rabbi’s appointment as the will of God: “God said, he is the one, chosen by fate, who will reign over my people.” The motif of light is repeated several times in this song. The word “light” is mentioned twice in the last verse as well as the word “magic” in the song’s first verse. This song also has grand opening and closing lines characteristic of the Medieval song of praise.

The editor of *El Tiempo*, David Fresco, actively supported the appointment of Rabbi Haim Nahoum to the post of Hakham Bashi-Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the newspaper became a platform for promoting the “vital need” for his appointment. This need was explained as a consequence of his personality, his education, and his good connections with all elements of the Ottoman leadership, from the Generals to the Viziers, the Chief-Vizier, and even the Sultan himself. Almost daily, the paper described the Rabbi’s achievements in his dealings with the authorities and his success in introducing reforms and modernization into the Jewish Community in Istanbul, even though his results within the Jewish Community itself were not impressive.<sup>37</sup>

37 For examples, see: : *El Tiempo*, 96, 20 Av (1908): 1117-8; Ibid., 98, 24 Av (1908): 1141; Ibid., 99, 29 Av (1908): 1158; Ibid., 63, 10 Adar (1909): 607; Benbassa, *Haim Nahoum Une Grande Rabbim Separde en Politique 1892-1923*, 9-52; Hagar Hillel, “Nachum Effendi, Court Jew or Statesman,” *Yehadut Zmaneinu* 7 (1992): 367-370.

### **b. The Poema**

At the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century, the status of the Hebrew poema was well established.<sup>38</sup> At that time, the poema was characteristically a long poem with a narrative axis, open in theme, structure, and design. Researchers describe the literary system in which the poema existed as “a system in full bloom.” In the course of the first two decades of the twentieth century, the poema dealt with, in parallel and sometimes in combination, issues affecting the mental and spiritual world of the individual and with historical and topical national issues. The choice of topics was made against the background of the national-Zionist revival that attained significant achievements during this period.<sup>39</sup>

The poems published in *El Tiempo* constitute a model of a chronology linked to the emotional events experienced by the poet-hero: first, as a man lamenting his nation's fate, and second, as a man who stands in awe in the face of various revelations. These emotions are also expressed in the structure of the poema: many of the lines, for example, end with three periods, hinting at concern, embarrassment, and sorrow. Similarly, the verses that end with exclamation marks indicate an outpouring of nationalist sentiments and feelings of pride at the immensely significant historical process taking place in front of the poet's eyes. The poems also reflect a deep sense of loss and distress. The sole author of the following poems and lamentations was the previous editor of *El Tiempo*, Mercado Fresco (who signed his poems as M.F.).<sup>40</sup> Fresco's poems combine the epic with the historical and use history as a reflection of psychological currents. His sentences move with considerable momentum between vast vistas and close-up images. The allusions taken from Jewish cultural sources create an analogy with the present, emphasizing criticism of the moral, political, and educational situation of the community.

It should also be stressed that the period in which Mercado Fresco and other authors were writing original literature for Ladino journals and newspapers was a period in which the Hebrew author was party to a vision of redemption which had shed its traditional mystic-messianic form and donned the form of a practical and political Zionism. At the same time, he was witness to the darkening shadows of growing anti-Semitism. Within this dilemma, the Jewish author struggled to find creative paths to express both “The Spring and the Slaughter.”<sup>41</sup> The narrowing of perspective and the exposure of the individual's private world became part of the framework of the poema's narrative.<sup>42</sup> This exposure differentiated the poema from the short genres and gave expression to all the conflicting trends arising from historical and social processes and the newfound aesthetic freedom.

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38 On this issue, see: Judith Bar-El, *The Hebrew Long Poem from Its Emergence to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1995), 159.

39 Ibid., 160.

40 There may have been a family relationship between him and David Fresco, the editor who succeeded him. The name Mercado Fresco will appear in the article initialed (M.F.), as he signed his name when writing the poems.

41 On this issue, see: Ben-Or, 5-6. For more on the literary tradition, character, and language of literary fiction between the two World Wars, see: Gershon Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1890- Vol.3* (Tel Aviv: Hakkibbutz Hameuchad Publishing, 1988) 34.

42 Interesting information on this subject can be found in: Einat Baram Eshel, *Between the Pathway and the Highway* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2001), 70.

M.F. chose to write poems on historical themes, not just to highlight the central ideology of the day, but also because it was extremely problematic to write about present-day changes since the present had not yet crystallized sufficiently.<sup>43</sup> One of the main characteristics of M.F.'s poems was their wide-ranging narrative and considerable length, which allowed the writer to freely express his ideas, thoughts, involvement, and interpretation. Another was the poem's *grand opening*, which was an introduction with long quotations from the Jewish sources (Bible, Talmud, Midrashim) which served to explain the poem's topic using *dramatization* to heighten the writer's contemplations and emotions. Other characteristics included *transformation*, the crossbreeding of other literary genres with that of the poem, and *concretization*, the palpable formation of the characters, partly using dramatic dialogues and monologues.

The author's decision to write in Hebrew in a Ladino language newspaper sprung from a desire to strengthen the national spirit. He preferred to write in Hebrew once he felt confident in his literary ability to create in a living, vibrant Hebrew. He hoped that this would act as a literary expression of a promising national future. The subjects of his work, the themes he uses, the modes of speech, and the ways in which he designed his poetry, encapsulate a kind of autobiography of the Jewish community of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century.

## **b.1 The Theatrical Poema**

The Hebrew poem was initially created because of the need for a format that could fill several roles that existing genres of the newly formed literary system of the Hebrew Enlightenment could not.<sup>44</sup> It was the result of the crossbreeding of a variety of genres, an element that reflects its core characteristics of openness and flexibilities. The poem can absorb within it formats and templates of other lyrical genres, but also of non-lyrical genres.<sup>45</sup> In this section of the article, we will discuss the theatrical poem which, composed of a dialogue between one participant and his or her partner, constitutes a combination of the sub-genre of the complex play poem within the genre of the poem.

### **b.1.1 Purim Poem**

*El Tiempo*, 76, 14 Adar [22 February] (1910): 5-6

This 97-column poem based on *The Scroll of Esther* contains hints pointing to the Zionists and emphasizing the negative traits of the "Jews" as metonymies for the adverse characteristics of "the Zionists." The poem takes the form of a lengthy dialogue between Haman and Ahasuerus, written in exact rhyme and without separate verses. Within the poem, M.F. conceals harsh criticism of the Zionists, as if spoken by Haman with reference to the Jews of the capital, Shushan: "Liberty and freedom will spoil them... violating the command not to assemble...their religion, sects and more factions. How much ink has been spilled and how many quills have been broken on their Zionism. The King cannot let

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43 For more detail on this phenomenon, see: Nurit Guvrin, *Lands and Landmarks on the Map of Hebrew Literature* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1988).

44 See: Bar-El, 19.

45 See: Bar-El, 20.



them be for their culture is very mischievous.” The introduction to the poema is a long quotation from the *Midrash Hazal Shemot Raba* (רבה שמות, ל”ח מדרש) [Rabinnic commentary on the *Book of Exodus*] which includes the following sentence:

“They and their seed, and all those standing with them, accepted and adhered to keeping those two days and all they entail, each and every year.”

קיימו וקבלו עליהם ועל זרעם, ועל כל הנצבים עליהם ולא יעבור, להיות עושים את שני הימים האלה ככתבם וכזמנם, בכל שנה ושנה....”

The selected lines from the poema included below represent only those relevant to our discussion (emphasis added to relevant words):

### Haman:

המן:

Behold my King, in their gathering; they transgress on the prohibition “be not assembled.”	ראה מלכי, עוברים על לא תתגודדו באחדותם,
In the words of their wise-so as not to make the religion one of countless sects	כמאמר חכמיהם שלא יעשו כתות כתות בדתם,
How much ink has been spilled and quills broken on their <b>Zionism</b>	כמה דיו נשפך וקולומסים נשברו על ציונותם,
Moreover, in their lands, their quarrels have been made public among their neighbors	והויכוחים התפרסמו בין שכניהם בארצותם,
Knowing that disunity nests among those who study Torah, The King cannot let them be for their culture is very mischievous	שמה קננה ה”אי אחדות” בין תופשי-תורתם, למלך אין שווה להניחם, כי שובבה מאד תרבותם.

M.F.

פ. מ.

Benbassa and Rodrigue note that the forerunners of Zionism and the Zionist Movement itself were an integral part of the westernization of the Sephardic culture.<sup>46</sup> On the one hand, the Zionist Movement was a movement that rebelled against the Diaspora and its limitations, and on the other hand, it was a movement that drew much from the roots of the Jewish experience in the Diaspora. Zionism signified a reaction to both the emancipation of the Jews and to anti-Semitism, and it sought to create an appropriate solution for the Jewish People.<sup>47</sup> This poema draws inspiration from Social Democratic Movements, notably the *Bund*. Founded in Russia at the same time as the Zionist Movement, the two movements competed for dominance among the Jewish public with the *Bund* enjoying a large measure of success, despite its opposition to Herzl and his policies.<sup>48</sup> Those movements influenced M.F., as did

46 See: Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1995), 141. See also: Reuven, 65-106.

47 For an expanded discussion on this topic, see: Kaufman and Harif, 10.

48 See: Yakov Rabkin, *A Threat From Within: Jewish Opposition to Zionism: History of an Ongoing Conflict* (Haifa: Pardes, 2014), 226.

their belief that an imminent Socialist revolution would bring about a new, universal social order within which “the Jewish Question” would solve itself. These movements, in which Jews played a prominent role, expressed a strong opposition to Zionism which they saw as a deviation from the universal revolutionary stance. At the Fourth Conference of the *Bund* in Bialystock in 1901, members of the movement argued that not only was Zionism incapable of solving the Jewish Problem, but it was, in fact, proving detrimental to the status of the Jewish working-class by disrupting the development of its class consciousness. The blurring of borders employed by M.F. served a double purpose. On the one hand, it enabled him to present Jewish historical events familiar to his readers, and on the other hand, it served to examine the meaning of events from his period and milieu through a historical perspective. The newspaper *El Tiempo* provided a broad platform for all opponents of the Zionist Movement and conducted a virulent propaganda campaign against the movement, its leaders, emissaries, and spokesmen: “Zionism represents a danger to Ottoman Jewry. The newspapers she has hired are ignorant and dangerous.”<sup>49</sup>

### b.1.2 Rosh Hashana Poem

*El Tiempo*, 131, 29 Elul [3 October] (1910): 1352-1353

This poem of 92 lines (without a division into verses) was written before Rosh Hashanah and contains a sharp dialogue between the writer, M.F., and “The Previous Year.” He blames “The Year” for the stressful and fateful events of the year. “The Year” excuses itself by claiming that the stressful events were not its doing, but the doing of human beings. The poem contains the recurring motifs of salt, fish, and the sea, which may hint at the superstitious belief that salt can purge the evil-eye. Thus, the salt will banish the bad luck of the past year. It could also hint at the notion of a salty tear shed for the year, or to an over-salted, inedible dish. The dramatic dimension of this poem influences the composition.

The quote that opens the poem:

“Oh, that my people would hearken unto me and Israel walk in my ways. I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their adversaries” (Psalms 81:14-15)

Only the relevant sections of the poem are presented below (emphasis added to relevant words and sentences).

Year! Oh, year! ‘עֲרֵא-you are bad	שנה! שנה! שנה אֲתָרֵעַ מוֹלֵךְ!
[spelled by the Hebrew letters of the Hebrew year-5670]	
Our soul has had its fill of you, from your ladle of poison	רבת שבעה לך נפשנו מכף רעלך.
To the depths, the Sailor will not pass and survive	למצולות ים, לא יעבור ספן ימנה.
If they kick you with their pardon and forgive,	אם יבעטוך בסנפיריהם מחול וסלח.

<sup>49</sup> See editorial entitled “The Zionist Danger,” which encourages Ottomanization: *El Tiempo*, 47, 7 Shevat (1910):6-7. For articles with a clear anti-Zionist message, see: Ibid., 126, 22 Tamuz (1910): 3-6; Ibid., 132, 7 Av (1910): 3-4,6-7; Ibid., 148, 17 Elul (1910): 1-3; Ibid., 81, 24 Iyar (1911): 828-9; Ibid., 116, 29 Av (1911): 1190; Ibid., 125, 15 Elul (1911): 1281-3. For Benbassa’s analysis of the debate for and against Zionism, as expressed in the Ladino press, and her description of *El Tiempo*’s anti-Zionist editorial line, see: Benbassa, *From the Age of Reform to the Revolution of the ‘Young Turks’*, 70-77.

Bring atonement on you and salty incense  
We are all of us “grateful” to you

**The Year:**

**Without Torah and without awe, your children grow**

**A perverse generation**, there is no trust in them, your generation

**Search! For the light of the candle will check** your deeds

Dark **gratuitous hatred** stands before you

**And the Angel of Slaughter is within your camp**

**Withdraw your hand and let him not come into your houses**

**Let the year and its gifts be gone from you and**

**let the year 3672 and its blessings**

**be upon you and upon**

הביאי כפרה עליך וקטורת ממולח.

כולנו אנחנו “אסירי תודה” לך.

השנה:

ללא תורה וללא יראה גדלים בניכם.

דור תהפוכות, לא אמון בם, דורכם.

מעליכם לבדוק ר ומלאך המשחית במ

מוקדת לפניכם. שנאת חנם עמוקה מ

חנכם חפשו! אין לאור הנ

בוא בבתיכם. הרף ירך, ולא יתן ל

מעליכם מתנותיהו 3671 שנת תכלה.

עליכם ברכותיהו 3672 שנת ותחל.

M.F.

ועל מ.

In this poema, M.F. employs figurative language to personify the year. The dialogue with “The Year” moves the poema forward and transforms the passage from the year gone by to the coming year and then into a mystic-hallucinatory dimension. From an ideological standpoint, the poema contains a sharp, social criticism of Jewish fathers who send their children to schools run by nuns and of children who do not follow the path of their ancestors. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rule of the religious authorities in the Ottoman Empire had weakened, and people began to withdraw from the traditional orientations and ways of life.<sup>50</sup> These changes influenced the Jews, as they did the rest of the minorities. For the Jews, the changes were numerous. The power of the Rabbis gradually declined. After initial opposition from conservative elements, children began to receive a general education in schools set up in the Empire by European bodies. The Sephardic Jewish community underwent processes of westernization and secularization that were mirrored in new linguistic and literary trends. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, Protestant missionaries were permitted to try to convert the Jews of the Empire; they sought to attract the Sephardic Jews of the Ottoman Empire to their churches and schools, making it easier for Jews to meet secular types of literature. It is worth noting that the Association of Graduates of the Schools of Col Yisrael Haverim (also known as Alliance Israélite Universelle) spread the Torah that originated from the center of the Alliance in Paris. It claimed that Jews should be French (or Turks) of the Mosaic religion and that the Jewish People should cease to exist as a separate ethnic unit and assimilate into the nations of the world. In the face of these new developments, the traditional barriers that kept most of the community within the traditional framework and prevented outside influences from penetrating into that framework were breached, and wide gaps appeared. Educated youth were tempted to gravitate towards one of the two poles of assimilation: either through a linguistic, ideological, and spiritual identification with the Turkish homeland or through a fierce ambition to acquire a western (primarily French) education and integrate into social and cultural trends foreign to Judaism. The results of both paths were the same; they necessitated the rapid abandonment of past traditions and national identity. From the beginning of its exile, the Jewish People was torn between two opposite trends: either to assimilate, even to the extent of complete absorption, or to retreat from the assimilated surroundings and even more from assimilating Jews. These

50 On this topic, see: Haim Beinart, *The Shephardi Legacy* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994), 703.

trends became institutionalized as ideologies that crystallized within the Jewish people and reinforced each other through their conflict.<sup>51</sup>

*El Tiempo* espoused a clear editorial line favoring modernization and Ottomanization (full social and national identification with the Ottoman Empire, including service in its military forces) without forfeiting Jewish national identity. Therefore, David Fresco, the editor, and owner of the Newspaper, supported the appointment of Rabbi Haim Nahoum to the post of Chief Rabbi, since he possessed a broad, western education and supported loyalty to the Empire.<sup>52</sup>

### b.1.3. Yom HaKipurim [Day of Atonement] Poema,

*El Tiempo*, 2, 8 Tishri [30 September] (1911): 1 - 12

This poema by M.F. criticized the social divisions within the Turkish Jewish Community, which had arisen against the background of support and opposition to Zionism. The writer argues with the “Echo” [“קול בת”] and puts in her mouth words which carry a message of social importance to the readers.

From the poema’s introduction:

“Will the Lord cast off forever, and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone forever? Will his promise fail for evermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he, in his anger, shut up his tender mercies? Thus.” (Psalms 77:8-10)

“How was the prayer of the High-Priest on safely leaving the Holy of Holies...?” (Vayikra Raba- Portion Aharei Mot) (מות אחרי פרשת רבה ויקרא)

Presented below are sections of the 41 line poema, with emphasis added to relevant words and sentences:

#### Oh, Lord! Have you forsaken us forever?

We have not insolence to raise the our heads

See today, your people the House of Israel

Its fate is bitter, **rough and terrible**

**Disgraced and derided** among the nations

Our eyes beholding visions of horror

The people of Israel subjected to **defamation**

**Day by day detached from our bonds**

ה' אלוהים! האם תשכחנו נצח?

להרים ראש אין לנו מצח.

ראה עמך בית ישראל היום.

גורלו מר, נורא, גס ואיום.

לחרפה ולקלסה בין האומות.

למראה עינינו אחזונו אימות.

שם ישראל נתון לשמצה.

מיום אל יום ינתקו מוסרותינו.

51 This was pointed out by Eliezer Schweid in *The Idea of Judaism as a Culture* (Tel Aviv: Om Oved, 1986), 60.

52 See, for example: *El Tiempo*, 96, 2 Av (1908): 1117-1118, 1120; Ibid., 98, 24 Av (1908): 1141; Ibid., 99, 27 Av (1908): 1147; Ibid., 63, 10 Adar (1909): 607; Ibid., 65, 13 Adar (1909): 625; Ibid., 63, 14 Adar (1910): 4; Ibid., 4-6, 22 Tamuz (1910); Ibid., 1-2, 26 Adar (1910). For Benbassa’s analysis of Rabbi Haim Nahoum’s background, his positions on contemporary issues, and his actions as the standard-bearer for modernization and loyalty to the Ottoman Empire, see: Benbassa, Haim Nahoum Une Grande Rabbin Separde en Politique 1892-1923, 18-24.

**Moreover, becoming free in our liberty**

On all sides and from every corner there is **no pardon**

**The Assembly of Israel subject to nightmares****The Echo:**

**Tribe against tribe, the quarrels of my people**

**As if their opponents were not also my people**

**Disputes between families**

**As if they were the offspring of mistresses and handmaidens**

**“And all were one society made” at first**

5672 (1911-12) Year of salvation.

ונהיה חופשים בחירותינו.

מכל עבר ומכל פינה אין חנינה.

כנסת-ישראל לבלהות נתונה.

בת קול

שבט על שבט, הם מריבי עמי.

כאילו מתנגדיהם ללא עמי.

מריבה, בין משפחה למשפחה.

כאילו הם בני פילגש ושפחה.

ועשו כולם אגודה אחת “בראשונה”.

התרע”ב שנת ישע.

As mentioned, in this poem M.F. expresses sorrow at the social and religious division in the community. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the start of a conflict between two Jewish identities (which in turn split into sub-identities): the traditional Jew, and the “new,” modern Jew who appeared with the emergence of the Jewish national movement. *El Tiempo* often referred to the “fracture” and schism within the Ottoman Empire’s Jewish community in general, and specifically within the community of Istanbul.<sup>53</sup> The guiding ethos of “the new Jew” was the secular, revolutionary ethos which was based on a new value system, on the connection between the Jew and his historical homeland, and on new norms of conduct between the Jews themselves and between Jews and non-Jews. The term *Negation of the Diaspora* represented the negation of the old Jewish identity. In the eyes of its critics, this identity embodied the dependency of the Jew on the non-Jew and the inferior social status of the Jew. The critics also saw this identity as a combination of traits that characterized the Jew’s relationship to himself, to his community, to his physical surroundings, and his attitude to the world as a whole. In practice, M.F. does not write about just one “crossroad” but about “several crossroads.” It should be noted that, at that time, every disagreement had the potential to turn into a fierce argument on issues such as choosing the language appropriate for the Jews, deciding which values and norms constitute the moral behavior required between Jews themselves and between Jews and non-Jews, deciding on issues of community and family ethos, selecting the narratives making up the historical memory, and determining the proper attitude to the “traditional sources.” All of these issues were inextricably linked to the heated debate over choosing a comprehensive educational process, its content, its values, and its methods. Any philosophy seeking a leading role had to contend with all of the above and propose alternatives that could shape cultural identity.<sup>54</sup>

## **b.2 The Critical Poema**

### **Poema for the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth),**

*El Tiempo*, 4, 14 Tishrei [ 6 October] (1911): 35

This poem by M.F. was written just before the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth). The writer uses the festival symbolizing national unity as a means to emphasize the disunity. He casts severe criticism at the

<sup>53</sup> See, for example: *El Tiempo*, 98, 24 Av (1908): 1139; *Ibid.*, 63, 10 Adar (1909): 608.

<sup>54</sup> See further: Schweid, 70-71.



supporters of Zionism, who, in his opinion, the authorities are liable to see as those who “drink from one cup while casting an eye to another.” In other words, they are loyal to the Turkish homeland, enjoy its pleasures, but have given their heart over to the Zionist idea. At the same time, the writer regrets the split in the community resulting from the conflicting ideologies prevalent within it.

From the introduction to the poema:

“And they shall go up, from year to year, to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts and to keep the feast of tabernacles.” (Psalms 15:16)

So that your generations shall know, that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them out of the land of Egypt... God our help, yeah God who in our exile did make great wonders before us, and will be a booth for our everlasting shelter and refuge.” Safa Lenachmanim. (לנחמנים שפה 470)

Of the 47-line poem, only the relevant lines are reprinted here (emphasis added to relevant words and sentences).

<b>May their land be in our eyes as the land</b>	אבותינו כארץ בעינינו נתונות בכוס אחר,
<b>of our forefathers</b>	
<b>Showing to our neighbors our love for them and our faith</b>	ואמונתנו להם בתנו לחולא יעלילו עלינו
<b>So that they will not falsely accuse us of drinking</b>	ועינינו זה בכוס ותים כש להראות לשכנינו
<b>from his cup, with eyes,</b>	
<b>To our shame and disgrace, given to another cup</b>	ולכלימתנו רפתנו אה תהי נחשבת ארצותם
Build your booth and resurrect the fallen	יסודותיה לשותת
Set its foundations and erect it intact	תלה על ה ולבנות בנה סוכתך והקם הנפול

M.F.  
Haidir Pasha, Istanbul

חא  
יידר פאשה בקושטא מ.פ.

It should be noted that the poems of M.F. were written approximately three years before the outbreak of World War One (1914-1918) swept up the Ottoman Empire and that, just six years after the publication of this poema, the Zionist movement in the Eastern countries began to gain momentum. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued during the war. However, the writer, residing in relative calm in the Ottoman Empire had no inkling of these impending changes. So much so, that the slightest breeze, hinting at a movement of opposition, rebellion or nationalism undermined his tranquility. He preferred to write and warn of social injustices rather than open a new front that would demand from the community, already divided on social grounds, a confrontation beyond its powers. As mentioned, 1917 was a year of fulfillment for the Zionist idea. It was marked by the recognition of the Balfour Declaration and the beginning of an awakening among the Sephardic Jewish Communities of Turkey, Morocco, and Tunis. The awakening was relatively slow as Zionist propaganda was scarce in those regions. Consequently, this poema, written six years earlier, saw in the Zionist vision a distant, and even dangerous, dream. Other Middle-Eastern communities of the time are described as mired in depress-

ing materialism and lacking in any cultural or spiritual aspirations.<sup>55</sup>

In her article, “On the Brink of the Twentieth Century,” Nourit Guvrin relates to the phenomenon of poetry that responds to external events, which began appearing in journals, and refers to it as “Occasional Poetry.”<sup>56</sup> This poetry, notes Guvrin, was characterized by a pessimism influenced by the personal biography of the writers and Jewish society in general, and by the pessimistic philosophy of their time. National and public awareness fills the work emphasizing the troubles of the nation and celebrating its unity.

### ***b.3 Poema of Parable-Moral***

#### **Poema for the Day of Atonement [Yom HaKipurim]**

*El Tiempo*, 2, 8 Tishri (1910): 14

This socially critical poema by M.F. combines parables and moral themes with various additions from Jewish cultural sources. He uses the phrase, “Listless, they are listless,” which were the Pharaoh’s words, used in the book of Exodus (Shemot) to describe the People of Israel. He also uses the passage, “Transgressions that a man flaps with his heel,” in reference to a corruption of “commandments which a man flaps with his heel” (Rashi’s commentary on the opening verse of the portion of Akev (Deuteronomy 7:12).

The use of the parable is an early practice in universal culture in general, and in Jewish culture in particular, which begins with the books of the Bible (e.g. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes [Kohelet], Job, Song of Songs, and others). Further examples include the proverbs from Rabbinic Literature, fables, legends, and homiletic literature. The defining characteristic of the parable is its enigmatic character and its hidden didactic message, while the defining characteristic of the moral is its ability to decipher the preceding parable.<sup>57</sup> As already mentioned, the poema acted as a framework that could draw on themes of national folklore and storytelling. These were themes that contemporary prose could not contend with. It also served as a path for composing concrete, realistic, and objective stories of a kind that lyrical poetry, with its exaggerated, subjective emotion, did not allow.<sup>58</sup> This poema is unusual in that the writer does not offer a quote from the Jewish sources as an introduction, as he did in the previous poems. The poema has 53 lines, and the passage presented here was chosen to illustrate the parable and its connection to the moral.<sup>59</sup>

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55 Compare also: Benbassa, *Ottoman Jewry: Between Westernization and Zionism, 1908-1920*, 249.

56 See: Guvrin, *Lands and Landmarks on the Map of Hebrew Literature*, 125-157. see also: (Sadan 2000, 27- 35).

57 See: Hannah Herzig, *The Early 20th Century Hebrew Short Story* (Tel Aviv: The Open University, 1994), 96.

58 See: Bar-El, 28.

59 The poema is based on the well-known proverb from the book “-“Mishalei HaShoalim” ילשם מילעוש [Proverbs of Foxes] by Berchia Ben Ntroni, the thirteenth century author. See: Shlomo Aviner, *Tal Hermon on the Torah* (Beth, EI: Beth EI Publishing, 1999), 42.

Those who did not hasten to repent on Rosh Hashanah,	בראש השנה לשוב לא החישו,
They are likened to a fox with no tail,	המה כשועל חסר הזנב יחשבו,
<b>They are lax, lax, but alone they sit,</b>	נרפים הם, נרפים, אך בדד ישבו,
Before all the transgressions that a man flips with his heels,	טרם כל בעבירות שאדם דש בעקביו,
Moreover, in dismay, there is none among us who notices them,	ואין מאיתנו לדאבון ישים עליהם לבב,
<b>Our envy towards each other has overcome</b>	גברה עלינו קנאת איש ברעהו מקנאת ה'
<b>our envy of G-d,</b>	
<b>Moreover, instead of pursuing peace and</b>	ותחת לרדוף השלום והאחוה בכוללות העיר,
<b>brotherhood throughout the city</b>	
<b>Our destructors and destroyers have emerged</b>	מהרסינו ומחריבנו ממנו יצאו כסלון ממאיר,
<b>from among us as a malignant stream</b>	

Haider Pasha, Istanbul M.F.<sup>60</sup>

חאיידר פאשה בקושטא, מ.פ.

This parable poem serves, in the author's opinion, to emphasize the social-cultural state of the nation, with each good portion that is taken representing a further social or religious decline until ultimately, its very survival is threatened. Just as the Fox concedes one limb after another, in the hope that he will be able to continue to survive without the part taken, eventually, he reaches the verge of death. Most of the disputes among Jews who continued to hold on to at least one of the sources of Jewish identity were dialectic in nature. Completely unambiguous attitudes - religious Judaism bereft of any connection to the nation or peoplehood, or Jewish nationalism with no regard for religion - were found only at the extremes.<sup>61</sup> At the time *El Tiempo* was first published, there was a feeling that literature could change reality. A review of the poems reveals that the writers hoped and believed in their ability to influence political, social, and religious processes (including Zionism) and change reality, even if only slightly.

In the poema quoted above, we can see how M.F. searches for a source that could provide his poems with a store of narrative material whose subject matter would allow him to express his positions on national issues. Therefore, he makes use of parables that are steeped in pathos and amplified, exaggerated emotion, with the aim of arousing an emotional response and identification with the message he is trying to embed in his works.

### **b. Public Lamentations**

The lamentations can be divided into four sub-types: individual, public, prophetic, and universal. The public lament is rich in rhetorical devices with some key features: conflicts of behaviour, a combination of different speakers, movement from the private to the public, and the diversion of focus to the living and the future. It highlights a range of inner strengths and sometimes includes the figure of a mourner undergoing a religious crisis.<sup>62</sup> Some of the lamentations include onomatopoeic consonants that imi-

60 A few days after writing this poem, prior to the Festival of Tabernacles (Succoth), M.F. writes another poem in which he includes a verse criticizing the press and disapproving of the divisive opinions expressed by its various elements, hoping they will eventually unite. See: *El Tiempo*, 35, 14 Tishrei (1910): 4.

61 See: Schweid, 61.

62 T. Horowitz, *The Lamentation in the Poetry of Uri Tzi Greenberg* (Haifa: Shaanan College, 1998), 33.

tate phenomena linked to the act of lamenting; many make extensive use of rhetorical questions and parables.<sup>63</sup>

Through the composition of lamentations by private individuals – and not just by the learned – everyone is summoned to help enrich the Jewish people's accumulative store of liturgical treasures. This composition emphasizes to the reader that the individual is permitted – even obligated – to air his personal account and interpretation of events, whether private or public, in his voice.

### ***g.1 The Lamentation on Social Division***

*El Tiempo*, 132, 7 Av [5760] (1910): 6-7

From the introduction:

“Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine.” (Psalms 80:15)

Rabbi Tanchuma Bar-Abba: For when you come to do battle against a city, you will first call for peace...” (From Tanchuma Raba- Collected Sayings of the Learned Elders-רבה תנחומה)

Where are my inkwell and pens, come hither my writing tools	אייכם קסתי ועסי? גשו נא כלי כתיבתי,
Not as I lamented before do I lament today	לא כלפנים יללתי, אין ככל-טב קינתי,
This year my grief is double because <b>the heart of my</b>	השנה כפלים תוגתי, כי חלק לב עדתי,
<b>community is divided</b>	
<b>Between a brother and a colleague between a father and his son</b>	בין אח ועמיתי בין אב ובן אמיתי,
<b>My community excretes vipers, my brother</b>	צפעוני יפריש עדתי, מתגודדים אחי ואחותי,
<b>and sister huddle</b>	
<b>Faction after faction erupt, bursting out of my virtuous quarter</b>	מריבים על “ציון” נחלתי, מי יתן ולא
<b>Arguing about “Zion” my inheritance,</b>	כתות כתות פרצתי, פרוץ מרובה
<b>O that I should have no part in such an inheritance</b>	סגולתי,
<b>“Zionists” rushing my redemption, as one urging “the end of my salvation.”</b>	”נדיבתי”,
Oh, <b>how can</b> I bear burden, <b>how will</b> I be able having seen,	”ציונים” אצים גאולתי, כדוחקים “קץ ישועתי”,
	כי איככה אוכל ונשאתי, איככה אוכל וראיתי,
<b>There is no peace in my party, no brotherhood</b>	בקהילתי חווה לא תקרא שמה שירה זה
<b>in my community</b>	
<b>Suffice the sorrow of my exile, is this not an</b>	את איככה רבתי? רב-לי צרת גלותי, האין ז
<b>even greater lamentation?</b>	
<b>Let not her name be song, let her name be sorrow</b>	צרה שמה יה אין שלום ביחידתי, אין,

Haider Pasha, M.F.

חאידר פאשה, מ.פ.

This lamentation has 53 lines of which only a few, those most relevant to our discussion, were reproduced above. The widespread reliance on Jewish sources is clearly noticeable, and their primary

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 50.

purpose seems clear; in light of the social and political background of the period, it was to act as a tool to oppose the Zionist idea. The inclusion of the terms “Zion” and “Zionism” in quotation marks indicates the cynicism and disregard which the writer felt towards the Zionist idea and towards the “Zionists who urge ‘the end of salvation.’” The price the community paid as a result of these ideas, the rift between the supporters and the opponents of the Zionist idea, all pained the writer to the brink of illness. The literary inventory of *El Tiempo* echoed the claim that culture in its entirety is the evolving and renewing manifestation of the religious experience of each nation and that a direct and visible link exists between the religious experience and the totality of the culture and its creations.<sup>64</sup> The writer uses images and expressions taken from traditional, religious lamentations to mourn the loss of national sovereignty (*Aicha* - “How...the city is desolate,” *Aiyaicha* - “where art thou”). At the same time, he uses the lamentation to attack Zionist ideology and the division he believes it has brought to the Jewish Community throughout the Ottoman Empire.

## **g.2 Lamentation on Social Indifference**

*El Tiempo*, 153, 29 Elul [ 5760] (1910): 4-5

This lamentation, the longest of all Mercado Fresco’s literary works to date (135 lines), has no introductory quotation and opens directly with the lamentation itself. The poem uses a dialogue between the writer and the past year as a literary device. In the first four lines, the author complains that salvation has yet to come to the “Jews of Turgama” (a nineteenth century Jewish term for Turkey), and in the remaining lines, the passing year justifies the situation by bringing up a variety of claims against the Jews. The writer inserts a variety of words that emphasize the poem’s elegiac nature (e.g. “aye,” “ho,” “alas,” “אח”). M.F. omits none of the social hardships of the time: these include the indifference to the suffering of the Congregation of Israel in Russia, the newspapers that hold divergent views and constantly battle against each other, and the lethargic, recumbent Jewry of the Ottoman Empire (which should be setting an example to other communities). The writer also bewails the Christian mission of taking control of the tender souls of Jewish children, the Community Administration Committee that had resigned, mired in indifference, burying their heads in the sand like an ostrich, and “virulent” anti-Semitism.<sup>65</sup> Mainly, the author complains of hatred amongst the members of the community themselves. Reprinted below is a selection of lines from the poem which are relevant to the article (emphasis added to relevant words and sentences).

**The Congregation of Israel has blocked its ears  
The Congregation of Israel has thrust his hand into the plate  
As if she falls asleep and in her slumber, sleeps  
Hurry! Have mercy! Lest we are both disgraced  
“Oh” and the newspapers in their freedom, their restraint gone**

וכנסת ישראל פה בתרגומה אטמה אזנה!  
כנסת ישראל פה! ידה בצלחת טמנה,  
כאילו היא נרדמת בתנומתה וישנה,  
חוש! חוש! לבל תהי נקלסה ולשנינה,  
העיתונים בחופשיותם הה! לקחו,  
רסנה

<sup>64</sup> For further discussion on the issue, see: Schweid, 246.

<sup>65</sup> Throughout its history, “remember and remind” was a basic value of the Jewish people. Memory plays a central role in the religious and communal life of the Jewish people and undoubtedly played a key role in Jewish survival. Like many other writers, the issue of anti-Semitism occupied M.F. and from time to time, he mentioned outbreaks of anti-Semitism within the Ottoman Empire’s Jewish Community and within the world more generally.



**Are not of one correct opinion Condemnation!**  
**Moreover, that one without law opens a breach through**  
**which to show the nations its faults**  
**This capital, the mother of states, where is her advantage**  
**Is this all the fruit of freedom, a cloud will dwell upon it**  
 Ai! The Community Administration Committee,  
 all of them men of faith  
 Which did much good and whose hand was trusted  
**Has resigned its post and is like an ostrich**  
 [head in the sand]!  
**This is a great loss and who will make up its lack**  
**Where will a support and a prop be found**  
 Go and behold! For many arise to hate  
**The anti-Semites too, with their cancerous gift**  
 Are coming closer to us, are in our dwellings  
 and neighborhoods  
**The Assembly of Israel, nests here like a solitary bird**  
 And the Community Administration Committee and the  
 Head of the Diaspora  
 Have lost all honor  
 May it be a fruitful year of peace and blessing  
**And to remove from your assembly all grudges and hatred**  
 And as of one heart, you will all break into song  
 To raise in honor the light of the "Little Sister"  
 [a term for the Congregation of Israel]

M.F.

למורת-רוח! אינם בדעה אחת נכונה,  
 וזה פוער לבלי-חוק, להראות לעמים חסרונה,

בירה זאת אם-המדינות, איה יתרונה?  
 הזה כל פרי החירות? תשכון עליו עננה,  
 הה! הועד הגשמי כולם אנשי אמונה,

אשר רבות פעל לטובה, ויהי ידיו אמונה,  
 התפטר ממשרתו, ונשארו כ"בנות יענה",

אבדה גדולה זאת, ומי ימצא חסרונה?  
 אנה ימצאו כמוהם משען ומשענת?  
 לכו חזו! כי רבים (מעה) קמים לשטנה,  
 גם האנטישמיטים מתנת סרטנה,  
 קרובים הם אלינו, במגורינו בשכונה,

ועדת ישראל פה כציפור בודדת מקנה,  
 והועד הגשמי ומאור הגולה כל ששונה,

גלה כבוד ממנה, הודה וזיוה פנה,  
 שתהיה לשלום וברכת שנה דשונה,  
 ולהסיר מעדתכם כל נטירה ושנאה,  
 וכברי-לבב יחד כולכם פצחו רנה,  
 לרומם קרנה בכבוד של אחות קטנה.

פ.מ.

What makes this lamentation unusual and thought-provoking is that it is the first time that M.F. relates positively to the Zionist idea.

**"And our holy city Jerusalem – may it be rebuilt -**  
**has given a guarantee**  
**There will be peace among her host and**  
**tranquility in her palaces**  
**In the peace and unity of the capital**  
**will its light be uplifted**  
**Then she will give voice "Daughters of**  
**Zion, go forth and behold"**

"ועיר קדשנו ירושלים ת"ו נתנה ערבונה,

ויהי שלום בחילה, שלוה בארמונה,

ובשלום הבירה ואחדותה תרום קרנה,

אז, תתן קולה בנות ציון צאנה וראינה!"

The author had, so far, avoided any connection to the Zionist idea, and had not related himself to the Land of Israel and the desire of Jews to return there. In this lamentation, M.F. raises, for the first time, the idea of the "negation of the Diaspora." Zionism put forward a positive, attractive, vision of an independent, national existence in the framework of a national homeland and the rebirth of a unique, na-

tional culture. However, at the same time, it made use of the negative force embodied in the rejection experienced by Jews in the Diaspora. This rejection fostered a keen awareness that if the Jewish people remained in the Diaspora, they would eventually be subjected to the dangers of extreme discrimination and persecution from without, and to national degeneration from within.<sup>66</sup> One of the central goals of the Zionist Movement was to rescue the Jewish people from the tribulations and confrontations experienced in the Diaspora and transport it to a safe-haven in the Land of Israel.<sup>67</sup> The chronicles of the Zionist movement up until World War I and after, when viewed from a historical perspective, reveal a stubborn, sometimes heroic struggle, to preserve that message in its entirety.

Zionist education was based on three premises: the negation of the Diaspora, the creation of the “the New Jew,” and the fostering of a positive attitude towards the continuity of the historical Jewish heritage. It is an accepted fact that many of the early adherents to the fledgling Zionist Movement, including Theodor Herzl, the founder of political Zionism and the World Zionist Organization, arrived at Zionism only after despairing of assimilation as a universal solution to the question of Jewish existence in Europe. This loss of hope was due to the re-emergence of the anti-Semitic movement. This aspect of the interrelationship between anti-Semitism and Zionism is widely accepted. The repeated confrontation with modern-day hatred of the Jews sharpened the Jews’ national consciousness.<sup>68</sup>

Anti-Semitism was a force pushing Jews to leave the Diaspora and a motivating factor, albeit negative, that played a significant role in all of the mass migrations of Jews to the Land of Israel, both before and after the establishment of the State of Israel. The Zionist Movement made use of the extremes of hatred towards Jews to promote what it saw as the national interest. This use added to the attraction of the Zionist ideology and vision that served as a positive force for immigration and encouraged the quest for personal and national realization in the “Land of Israel.”<sup>69</sup> In the lamentation, M.F. relates to the phenomena of anti-Semitism and assimilation in the same breath. This linkage may indicate a change of view on his part. It may indicate his understanding that Zionism sought to change the existential state of the Jewish People as a minority among the nations of the world by providing it with a territorial base in the Land of Israel. Similarly, he may have begun to realize that one of Zionism’s chief aims was to change the Jewish people’s socio-economic structure and bring about a cultural rebirth, and not to sow division between supporters and opponents or worsen the Jews’ situation by having the authorities perceive them as “traitors.” Zionism was unique in that it accepted the underlying assumption of anti-Semitism; that the Jews constitute a foreign element in the ethnic makeup of European nations and are unable to be assimilated smoothly into the general society. The assumptions of Zionism derive, in part, from this basic assertion.<sup>70</sup>

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66 See, for example: S. Almog, “From Muscular Jewry to the Religion of Labour,” *Israel: Studies in Zionism and the State of Israel – History, Society, Culture* 9 (1984): 21.

67 Ibid., 147.

68 On the wider context, see: Anita Shapira, *New Jews Old Jews* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1995), 175.

69 See: Almog, 23.

70 Relative to other countries, Turkish Jews did not suffer from anti-Semitic decrees and pogroms. However, anti-Semitism occurred occasionally and traces could be found in spoken literature, with proverbs such as: “Where the Jew steps, grass does not grow,” and, “Jews only get smart when it’s too late, get smart after time” (from Masoretes).

**g.3 Lamentation on the State of Education;  
Lack of Respect for the Fathers and Elders of the Community**  
*El Tiempo*, 110, 8 Av [5671] (1911): 128

This Lament deals with one of the biggest problems of the Jewish community in the late twentieth century; education. The subject of education occupied much of the attention of the leaders of the Turkish Jewish Community. The specific focus of attention was the conflict between the demands of parents and the pedagogical requirements of community leaders; between economic concerns and considerations of the welfare of the child. Above all, the disagreements hovered over the central question; should the community settle for the Torah based education provided by Jewish schools, or should it provide the child with a general education that would broaden his horizons and advance his prospects, but also entail the risk of assimilation and withdrawal from the Jewish tradition. It should be noted that, while the Alliance sought to both strengthen the Jewish identity of Eastern Jews and integrate them into the modern world, it seems that they were not successful in achieving the former. On the contrary, the activity of the Alliance brought members of the Jewish community in the Ottoman Empire to distance themselves from the Jewish tradition.<sup>71</sup> In the Jewish community of the early twentieth century, the dilemmas of identity and culture were reflected mainly in the field of education. This problem became the key indicator of the mood within the community and the many internal and external influences exerted upon it.

The opening quotation:

My heart is wounded because of the rift within Israel;  
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.  
(Jeremiah 8:21).

על שבר בת עמי השברתי, קדרתי, שמה"  
החזיקתני"

Selected lines from the lament are presented below:

Alas! If from a lack of shame  
Oh Yeah! Was the city of Jerusalem destroyed in the past  
Ahh! What will we answer today with insolence rife  
Our hands are slack, without strength and impotent  
Over this, heaven and earth will weep  
For respect is exiled and there is coarseness  
between father and son  
Between laymen and esteemed Rabbis  
The young in days and the advanced in years  
Sons have blasphemed moral lessons and correction  
Our enemies have found an opportune time for  
slander betrayal  
Will indeed youth sneer at elders

אללי! אם מחסרון בושת פנים,  
אוי! חרבה עיר הקודש ירושלים מלפנים,  
אהה, מה נענה היום רבו עזי פנים,  
רפו ידינו ואין כוח ואין אונים,  
על זה ידו עליונים ותחתונים,  
כי גלה כבוד, גס בין אבות ובנים,  
בין הדיוטים ורבני רבנים,  
עולי ימים עם באים בשנים,  
מוסר השכל ותוכחת נאצו בנים,  
מצאו עת רצון אויבינו ומעללים ומלשינים,  
הן המה ירחבו נערים בזקנים,

71 Nitsa Dori, "Educational Trends in the Jewish Community of Salonika at the Beginning of the Last Century and their Reflections in 'Il Macbiao,' (The Maccabee)- Ladino-Zionist Literary Yearbook," *Shaanan* 17 (2011): 99-109.

In the place of the great will stand the small	במקום גדולים, יעמדו קטנים,
Moreover, the voice of wailing will be heard,	וקול יללה נשמע קול קינים מקוננים,
the voice of mourners lamenting	
As on our destruction, 1843 times (1843 years from	כעל חרבוננו שנות עמל 1843 מונים,
the destruction of the Second Temple)	
Return us oh Lord unto you and renew our days as of old	השיבנו ה' וכו' חדש ימינו כקדמונים.
M.F.	פ.מ.
Av, the month of consolations	אב הנחמות ש. א' ע' ת' ר
May God's favor crown Istanbul the capital	לקושטא הבירה רצון תעטר,

### Summary

This article highlights the connections between the historical-cultural systems and the literary systems of the Ottoman Empire's Jewish community in the early twentieth century. *El Tiempo* was published during a period of considerable turmoil for Sephardic Jewish society. It was a period marked by the loss of traditions rooted in the past, the emergence of the modern Zionist vision, the conflict of dual loyalties to the Ottoman Empire and the Zionist movement, the revolution of the Young Turks, and the modernization of education and higher education. Along with the geopolitical changes in the Ottoman Empire, the period also saw changes in the literary sphere. Ladino-speaking Jews began to develop new literary tools and to pour into them the emerging political content of the time.

After the Spanish expulsion, Ladino literature experienced periods of decline and recovery. The two kinds of literature - written and spoken - did not develop in parallel. First, spoken literature stabilized, found its form, and continued upon its natural path. Written literature, on the other hand, had to undergo a lengthy rehabilitation. Still, the two streams, in unison, sculpted the features of Ladino literature. Popular spoken literature preserved the past and written Ladino literature shaped the future. The transition between old and new, between different geographies, and between the various identities that consolidated into one, was a natural one for the Ladino Jews who came to the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain. From the nineteenth century onwards, literature written in Ladino took on a central role in the life of Sephardic Jews, a role equal to that of spoken literature. The two kinds of writing did not contradict, but, rather, complemented each other. Most Ladino speakers respected the written word, even if they did not read.

Esther Benbassa's research on the westernization of Ottoman Jewry in the early twentieth century emphasizes the gradual development of the Jewish press in Jewish communities throughout the Empire. It also reveals how the growing public interest in the Zionist idea coincided with the adoption of the newspaper as a framework for spreading Zionist ideas, or, as in the case of *El Tiempo*, for opposing them.<sup>72</sup>

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72 See: Benbassa, "Newspapers Serving Zionism in Istanbul and Salonika, 1908-1914," 92. Mina Graur notes that political scientists and media scholars have long understood the great importance of a newspaper to political parties and identified two major roles of the party newspaper. The first: political socialization and party advocacy, and the second: helping to form the party leadership and to strengthen its control over the party rank and file. See: Mina Graur, *The Voice*

This article attempts to examine relevant aspects of *El Tiempo*: its nature, its methods of operation, its content, its various fields of activity, its target audience, and its circulation.

Considering these aspects of the newspaper, together with the external and technological constraints under which it operated, this analysis paves the way to a fuller understanding of its messages and their place in the contemporary social-literary milieu. The newspaper followed both a literary- ideological and a political anti-Zionist orientation. Its editor, David Fresco, provided the writer Mercado Fresco with a platform for his literary works (symbolic poems and dramatic lamentations) which propagated these ideologies. These literary works had two roles. The first, the metaphorical or metonymy-contextual role, served to establish the link between the lyrical materials in the text and the social-political reality. The second, the function of the voice of honesty and decency, pointed to the flaws in the conduct of contemporary Jewish religion, community, and society.<sup>73</sup> *El Tiempo* was, therefore, not only a publicist-type newspaper opposed to the Zionist ideology, but also, a mirror for social criticism and widespread protest, which in turn, strengthened opposition to the Zionist idea by accusing it of disrupting the social equilibrium of the community. Thus, the literary works of Mercado Fresco and others, who dealt with these issues, served as a key component of its reason for its existence.

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*of a Party: The Revisionist Movement and its Press* (Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute, 2002), 10.

<sup>73</sup> It is worth noting in this context the distinction of G. Shaked (Hebrew fiction): "The strength and greatness of a literary work is that it is not fully attainable, and the more deeply we dig in our interpretation the more its meaning is revealed to us" (Shaked, *Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1890- Vol.3*, 53). E. Schweid adds that "There is no separating the reality described from the meaning it embodies" (84).