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| **Alternative Voices in late Ottoman Palestine: Jews and Arabs on the Evolving National Conflict** |
| [**Abigail Jacobson**](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2004/May-24-Late-Ottoman-Palestine.htm#a1)May 24, 2004 PASSIA, Jerusalem  |  |

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| http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/thumbs/May24-Abigail-Jacobson.jpg[More Photos](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/May-24-Late-Ottoman-Palestine.htm) |

I would first of all like to thank all of you for coming, and especially Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi and PASSIA for inviting me to speak today. As I wrote in my synopsis, this talk is based on parts of my larger dissertation project, which focuses on Jerusalem in the transition period between Ottoman and Mandatory rule, between the years 1912-1920. The idea for this talk came during a conversation I had with Dr. Mahdi, during which we discussed all the unheard, alternative voices in late Ottoman Palestine that have never “made it” to the front stage of history books or of the historical narrative of the Jewish/Arab conflict. This presentation, then, is an attempt to “give voice” to these people, who presented an alternative view regarding the evolving national conflict at this period. What I will do is present briefly each of these figures, one Arab and 3 Jews, and then open it up for discussion. As you see, there is an imbalance in the number of Jews and Arabs I am discussing. This imbalance is due to lack of sources and difficulty to reach more information, mainly about Muslims during this period. I would greatly appreciate any comments and ideas on how to approach these people and how to view their role in the period under discussion, as well as any ideas about anyone else I can look at in similar ways.The two first figures that I would like to discuss are Nissim Malul and Shimon Moyal, both Sephardi Jews, fluent in Arabic, journalists and writers. They were also active in the political scene and involved in questions regarding the relations between Jews and Arabs in Palestine . I first “met” them both when I was reading the Sephardi newspaper *Ha-Herut*[***[1]***](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2004/May-24-Late-Ottoman-Palestine.htm#f1), which was published in Jerusalem , in which they both expressed very interesting views regarding the national tension in the country. I then started investigating some more about each of them. Nissim Malul was born to a Tunisian family in Zepat in 1892. At a young age he moved with his family to Egypt , where his father became a Rabbi in the Jewish communities of Cairo and Tanta . He studied in Jewish schools in Cairo , and completed his higher education in the American College in Tanta , where he studied philosophy, Arabic literature and journalism. At this period he started publishing in the Egyptian newspaper al-Muqattam. In 1911 he returned to Palestine , and started working for the Zionist office in Jaffa . His main role was to respond to the anti-Zionist articles which were published mainly in the Palestinian Arab-Christian newspapers *Filastin*and *al-Karmil*. He was fluent in Arabic, and his articles were published in other newspapers as well in Egypt and Lebanon . He was also involved in a short publication of a Jewish newspaper in Arabic, called *Sawt al-Uthmaniyah*, the Voice of Ottoman, with his friend Shimon Moyal. This newspaper targeted the Arab population in Palestine , in an attempt to explain the aims of the Zionist movement in Palestine and convince the Arabs of its good intentions. During WWI Malul was expelled to Damascus by the Turks, because he was suspected of anti-Turkish activities. He escaped to Egypt and stayed there until the end of the war. When he returned to Palestine he established two Arabic newspapers, *Al-Akhbar*and later *al-Salam*, both of which were funded by the Zionist movement, and preached Jewish-Arab understanding. Between 1922-1925 he became a member of the Zionist National Committee and later participated in the Arabic workers newspaper *Ittihad al-Ummal*. Shimon Moyal was born in Jaffa in 1866 to a Moroccan family and died in Jaffa in 1915. He studied medicine in Beirut and became a medical doctor. In 1894 he married an Arabic journalist and feminist, Ester Moyal. They moved to Cairo and started writing in different Egyptian newspapers, preaching about the need for close relations between Jews and Arabs and for understanding between the “people of the East”. In 1908 they returned to Jaffa , and in 1909 he finished translating selections of the Babylonian Talmud into Arabic. In 1913 the Moyals edited together the newspaper *Sawt al-Uthmaniyah*, which was mentioned above. In an attempt to respond to the Arab attacks on Zionism in the Palestinian Arabic press in the period before WWI, Shimon and Ester Moyal, together with some other Sephardi Jews, established in 1913 an organization called *ha-Magen*(the shield) whose goal was to reply to any article against Zionism which was published in the Arabic press, and to translate articles from Arabic to Hebrew. Among other things, this association declared as one of its goals to create better understanding between Jews and Arabs in Palestine , and to promote life in peace with the Arabs living in the country. Moyal had many contacts with Arab nationalists, and was very active in the Free Masons society in Jaffa , as well as in the activities of the Decentralization party in Egypt ( *al-Lamarkaziyah*). In my view, both Moyal and Malul present a very unique perspective on the evolving national conflict during the years before WWI (and in the case of Malul- also during the Mandate), as well as towards future Arab-Jewish life in Palestine . Being fluent in Arabic, and living in both Cairo and Beirut , they were deeply involved in the literature and intellectual life of the Arab world. As I mentioned, they were both involved with the Zionist office in Jaffa and translated articles from Arabic newspapers, which dealt with Zionism and the Jews in Palestine . In my view, what stood in the base of their literature and intellectual activity in Palestine was their belief in the need to develop close relations between Jews and Arabs (especially Muslims) in the country, to expose the Jews who do not know Arabic to the Arabs and their culture, and act as loyal Ottomans for the development of Palestine . I think that with these views they offered a complex voice which combined in it an interesting mix between different kinds of Zionism and Ottomanism. An example to Nissim Malul's profound contribution to the debate regarding Jewish relations with the Arabs is a three-part essay published in June 1913 in *Ha-Herut**.*Malul argued that if the Jews want to settle in Palestine they must learn Arabic, the language that is spoken in the country. However, he goes as far as calling for assimilation with the “people of the country”, which would be achieved by learning and speaking their language. According to Malul, “National consciousness is achieved by activities, not by the language spoken by the people”. This is an extremely unique view at the time, which sharply contrasts the Zionist attitude regarding the importance and centrality of Hebrew, and differs from *ha-Herut's*own line as well. The newspaper's editor added a brief comment at the end of Malul's essay, stressing his belief that Arabic should be taught and used among the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine , but only as a second language. Indeed, Moyal and Malul both viewed the knowledge of Arabic among the Jews living in the country as the key for a better understanding between the two people. They emphasized the commonalties between Jews and Muslims, while viewing the Christian Arabs as trying to create national tension and hatred of the Jews and the Zionists. Moyal, in his activities in *ha-Magen*association, acted strongly against the two Christian newspapers which were published in Palestine at the time, while trying to expose their readers to the real intentions of the Jews in Palestine , and the ability to work together for the development of the country. In writing for the Arabic newspapers they tried to explain the possibilities of cooperation between Jews and Arabs living in Palestine . This, also as a sign of the loyalty of the Ottoman subjects in Palestine , Jews and Arabs alike, to the Ottoman homeland, *Watan*. They viewed Sephardi Jews, who know the language and culture of the Arabs and live among them, as people who can bridge between Jews and Arabs and help promote the understanding between them. Haim Margaliyot Kalvaryski is an alternative voice of a different kind. Born in Poland in 1867, he arrived to Palestine in 1895 as an agronomist and served for many years as the administrator of the agricultural settlements in lower and upper Galilee . One of his major roles was to purchase lands from the Arabs and develop the Jewish settlements in the region. During WWI Kalvaryski managed to use his good connections with the Turkish authorities in Palestine to help the Jewish community in the settlements and ease their difficult situation as much as possible. He managed to stay in Palestine throughout the war, and unlike other Jews and Zionist activists was not expelled by the Turks to Damascus or Egypt . After the war, he served as a member of the general council ( *Vaad Leumi*) of the Jewish community and the head of the Arab bureau, until 1928. In later years he was one of the leaders of the leftist *Brit Shalom*movement that sought to reach Jewish-Arab understanding in Palestine . Kalvaryski's awareness of the Arab question and of the national tension between Jews and Arabs in Palestine began to develop early in his life. In a discussion on the relations between Jews and Arabs, which took place in a meeting of the Jewish **http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/images/may24-a.gif** in 1919, Kalvaryski described how this awareness evolved:“I realized how serious the issue of our relations with the Arabs is when I first purchased lands from the Arabs (In the Galilee)…. I realized how close the Bedouin is to his land… During my 25 years of colonial work I have dispossessed http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/images/may24-b.gif many Arabs from their lands, and you understand that this job- of dispossessing people from the land in which they and maybe their father were born- is not at all an easy thing, especially when one looks at these people as human beings… I had to do this, because this is what the *Yishuv*asked for, but I always tried to do it in the best way possible… I got familiar with the Arabs and the Arab question very early on.” In 1910, following the development of the Arab national movement in the Ottoman Empire, Kalvaryski began to see the connection between the Jewish movement in Palestine and the national awareness among the Arabs. In 1913, according to his own words, he “came to the realization that we should reach some kind of a *modus vivendi*with the Arabs”. He began developing close connections with Arab leaders, and discussed with them ways of promoting Jewish-Arab understanding. He tried to stimulate such a discussion with some Zionist leaders, among them Nahum Sokolov, and in 1914 he managed to arrange a meeting with Jewish and Arab leaders in Lebanon , to discuss possible ways of reaching Jewish-Arab understanding and agreement. This meeting was canceled at the very last minute. According to Kalvaryski, “the meeting was canceled because of many reasons, but mainly because the Jews did not understand its importance, and treated the Arab national movement flippantly http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/images/may24-c.gif, or ignored it altogether.” Another attempt of Kalvaryski to reach an agreement between Arab and Jewish leaders was in 1919, when he discussed the national issue with King Feisal, who asked him to prepare a draft for an agreement between Jews and Arabs. Kalvaryski prepared such a draft, which stated, among other things, that Palestine will remain the national home of the Jewish people, and allowed free Jewish immigration to Palestine . Interestingly, Kalvaryski also noted that the Jewish national home cannot be based on the destruction of others, and hence he claimed that while thinking about future life in the country the Arabs have to be taken into account as well. This proposal failed, due to disagreements among the Zionist movement. Kalvaryski was a very ‘colorful' figure, and there are many assumptions regarding the reasons that motivated him and the Arabs with whom he negotiated. However, I think that he is yet another “outsider's” voice that is important to be heard. Like Malul and Moyal he too was very critical of the Zionist movement, even though he was part of it, and argued that it missed an opportunity to negotiate with the Arab leaders and recognize the Arab national movement and its future influence. He charged the Zionist movement with ignoring the Arabs who live in Palestine , and said that instead of negotiating with the indigenous population they negotiated with the imperial power, the Turks. And now, to the last figure I wanted to talk about, Hussein Effendi al-Husseini.I first “met” Hussein Effendi al-Husseini when I was reading the Hebrew Sephardi newspaper *ha-Herut*. I was reading about the elections for the mayorship of Jerusalem in 1914, and what struck me were the very favorable descriptions of the mayor of the city, Hussein al-Husseini by the writers of the newspaper. He was a member of one of the most prominent Palestinian families, but unlike other members of this family, Husseini did not win much attention in the literature or scholarship. That made me very curious to learn more about him and about the role he played in late Ottoman Jerusalem. I started looking into this figure a bit more, and was convinced that indeed he deserves further exploration. (I am basing this overview mainly on Jawhariyah's memoir, edited by Tamari and Nassar, on Pappe's book, on A'adel Mana's Ia'lam Filastin and on what I read in *Ha-Herut*.) Hussein Salim al-Husseini was the son of Salim al-Husseini, who served as mayor of Jerusalem at the beginning of the 20 th Century, and the brother of Musa Kazim al-Husseini, who was to later play an important role in the Palestinian leadership during the mandate and served as the President of the Arab Executive. Husseini served as the last mayor of Jerusalem between 1910-1917. In the famous picture of the surrender of Jerusalem to British forces in December 1917, Husseini, as the mayor of the city, is seen holding a white flag and handing the city's surrender pact. He passed away a few weeks after the British entered Jerusalem , supposedly from pneumonia. Around the period of the Young Turks revolution in 1908, according to some reports of the British council in Jerusalem, Hussein al-Husseini expressed some critical views towards the new regime in the Ottoman Empire, and was among the Arab notables who were discussing the possibilities of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of a new state in its Arab provinces. This is an interesting view when it comes from the son of Salim al-Husseini, who was a loyal Ottomanist who also served as a member on the Ottoman administrative council (Majlis Idara) **.** According to one source (Jawhariyah's memoir, editted by Salim Tamari and Issam Nassar), Husseini paid a price for his Arab nationalistic views, and was fired in 1915 from the mayorship by the Turks. However, I didn't find confirmation of this in any other source. In relation to the Zionist movement, A'adl Mana, in his entry on Husseini, mentions an article published in March 1914 in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Iqdam*, in which Husseini claims that the Zionist movement in not a political movement and does not risk Palestine . The real risk comes from the settlers movement ( *Harikat al-istitan*), and it is necessary to prevent land sales to Jews. It is maybe worth mentioning here that although many members of the Husseini family were very critical about land sales for the Jews, some of them sold land as well. It seems that Hussein Effendi al-Husseini was highly respected by the inhabitants of Jerusalem , and was perceived as a man who cares greatly for the city and its residents. Already his father, Salim Effendi, was described as walking around the streets of Jerusalem making sure that they are clean. During his period in office the Turks started paving roads in the city. Hussein himself seemed to be highly appreciated by the Jerusalemites from all religions, Muslims, Christian and Jews alike. For example, in an article in the Jewish newspaper *ha-Herut*from January 11 1914, the writer expresses his hope the Husseini will be reelected as the mayor of Jerusalem . He says: “Al-Hussein is a wise, humble and progressive man, and a lover of Israel . During his reign as mayor he tried to make many reforms and changes in the Jerusalem municipality. Thanks to his and his notable friends' energies we gained http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/2004/images/may24-d.gif light and clean streets, and our city got a different shape. If Husseini will stay as a mayor there is no doubt that he will continue working for the development and progress of the city.” In these elections no Jewish representative was elected for the city council. The editor of *ha-Herut*expressed his great regret and disappointment about that, but mentioned that “the only beam of light (in this election) is the fact that Hussein al-Husseini was reelected” (May 1914). Indeed, Hussein won the support of many Jerusalemite Jews. Specifically, the Society of Ottoman Jews, composed mainly by Sephardi Jews, was very supportive of him. Another indication of Husseini's dedication for the well being of the residents of Jerusalem was during the war when he traveled with Roshan Bey, a prominent Turkish officer in Jerusalem , to al-Salt in Jordan in order to import some wheat for the starving residents of Jerusalem . Hussein al-Huseeini was involved in different projects that brought together Jews, Muslims and Christians in the city. One of these projects was the Red Crescent Society, established in 1915, which Husseini served as its director. His deputy was Abraham Antebi, a prominent Jew who also established the Alliance school in Jerusalem . (I don't know much about this organization and would love to learn more). Another joint project is described by Ilan Pappe in his book. In December 1915, in the midst of Djemal Pasha's persecutions of Arab nationalists, members of the Husseini family (Muhammad Salah, Fahri) and others met with Eliezer Ben Yehuda, David Yellin, Albert Antebi, Yakov Tahon and some other prominent Jews to discuss ways to promote Jewish-Arab understanding. Hussein al-Husseini sent a letter in which he congratulated the meeting and the people participating in it. He saw in this meeting an attempt to discuss the possibilities for a joint homeland. I view Husseini as an intriguing figure, worthy of further exploration. He combines a dedication to the city of Jerusalem as an urban locale and for its residents, of all religious beliefs. He cooperated with Jews and Christians in an attempt to create a “post Ottoman” alternative, and also worked together with some Turkish officers during the war. In a period that seems very nationally segregated, I view Husseini as a bridge between the local communities of Jerusalem , and as a kind of “local patriot”. In conclusion:What I tried to do in this talk was to touch upon four figures that I “met” during my research. They were all parts of bigger collectives and institutions: Malul and Moyal as Sephardi Zionists/Ottomanists, Kalvaryski as an Ashkenazi Jew who worked for the Zionist movement, and Husseini who came from one of the most prominent Muslim families and played a central role in Jerusalem in the late Ottoman period. The connecting line between all these figures is the different, alternative, views they expressed towards Jewish-Arab relations in this nationally-tensed period, and towards future life in Palestine . Their attitudes towards the role of the Ottoman Empire is also interesting, with Moyal and Malul as Ottoman patriots, and Husseini as Arab nationalist. It is important not to romanticize these people and give them roles that they did not play. However, I see in these figures an attempt to break the strict national-based dichotomies of the period, and I use them in an attempt to complicate and create a more dynamic and rich picture of life in Jerusalem and Palestine in the late Ottoman period.

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| **Discussion** |

A number of comments were made during the discussion:* Firstly the issue of the distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Zionists and there different approaches to relations with the Arabs. The former tended to be more hostile, and believed in using force if necessary against the Arabs to achieve Zionist aims. The Sephardim tended to be more positive towards the Arabs, with whom they shared a similar culture. The Sephardim tended to argue for coexistence with the Arabs, rather than conflict.
* Another point that was made was that the Jewish figures mentioned were all active Zionists, working for Zionist organizations, so any reservations they had about Zionism must be placed within that context. Perhaps we should regard their misgivings as feelings of “guilt” (like Catholic-style confession of misdeeds) rather than genuine efforts to change Zionist policy. After all, many Zionist leaders (including Ben Gurion or even Jabotinsky) said positive things about Arabs, but this does not mean they opposed Zionist policy.
* Regarding Kalvarisky, it was pointed out that Kalvarisky was hardly a trustworthy figure. He used ‘sneaky’, underhand tactics to split the Palestinian national movement. He created the Peasant Party (which later evolved into the ‘Village Leagues’) in an attempt to persuade Palestinian peasants to reject the traditional Palestinian leadership and create divisions between Palestinians. The speakers reply to these comments and those above was that she was not attempting to turn these figures into ‘saints’, or to make them appear better than they were. Her aim is to present an alternative perspective on Arab-Jewish relations as held by certain individuals who have faded from history.
* There were also questions raised about Hussein Al-Husseini, in particular about his leadership skills and his understanding of what was happening around him. It was suggested that the fact that Hussein claimed “Zionism is not the problem; the settlers are the problem” shows that he did not appreciate that settlement was a fundamental aim of Zionism and the two were and are inseparable. Another participant argued that Hussein was a local leader with local concerns and it is a mistake to blame him for not having a sufficient grasp of national politics.

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**[**[**1 ]**](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2004/May-24-Late-Ottoman-Palestine.htm#p1)“Our current Situation in the Country”, *Ha-Herut,*Vol. 221-223, June 17-19, 1913

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