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Ottomanism in Ladino

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## INTRODUCTION\*

At the turn of the last century, over a quarter of a million Jews lived in the European regions of the Ottoman Empire. Most of these were Sephardim, Jews who came to the empire after being expelled from Spain and Portugal in the late fifteenth century, and who retained a Judeo-Spanish language known as Ladino or Judezmo. For the next five centuries, Ottoman Jews would constitute a critical role in the Ottoman economy and political system, developing, in the meanwhile, a rich and unique culture that differentiated this population from Jews elsewhere in Europe. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a modern, secular culture print in Ladino began to emerge in the Ottoman Balkans: the native tongue of 85% of Turkish Jewry as last as the Second World War (Weiker 1992). For the first time, Ladino was used to produce new genres of Jewish culture: original works of poetry; drama; fiction; scholarly essays; dictionaries and encyclopedias; translations of world literature; and a dazzling array of daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals. In these media, readers and writers of Ladino debated and displayed what it meant to be modern, Ottoman, and Jewish.

Without a doubt, the single most prolific genre of Ladino print culture was the popular press. The first Ladino periodical, *La Buena Esperansa*, was published in 1842 and over the course of the next century, Jewish periodicals blossomed in Ottoman Empire and its successor states; by 1913, there were no less than 389 Jewish periodicals published in Turkey and the Balkans (Galante 1935, Gaon 1965, Levy 1992); this at roughly the same time that secular print cultures emerged in the many other languages of this extraordinarily multilingual empire (Bayrak 1994, Benbaneste 1988, Brummett 2000, Çetin 1979, Duman 1986, Frierson, 1996, Iskit 1939). Despite the enormous success of these newspapers, the genre remains one of the least-explored facets of turn-of-the-century Ottoman culture. Though there is a wealth of literature on popular presses in other historical fields, scholarship on Ottoman presses is sparse, and tends to focus on Turkish language sources. Scholars of Ottoman Jewish culture, meanwhile, have turned to popular newspapers in Jewish vernaculars for the events they chronicled, but have virtually ignored the press as an agent of historical change. Yet it is precisely in newspapers, with their plurality of subject matter and authors, their immediate reactions to cultural and political events, their need to appeal to many kinds of readers, and—not least—the

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responses provided by their readerships, that one can sense the complex ways in which Ottoman subjects responded to and described the events of their day.

This paper turns to one of the most important Ladino newspapers of the empire, *El Tiempo*, in order to consider how a certain portion of Ottoman Jewry envisioned themselves, other Ottoman subjects, and the empire as a whole: all in an era in which the structure of empire was giving way to newly-created successor states organized around ethnic and national affinities from which Jews would (by and large) be excluded. In particular, the ensuing pages explore *El Tiempo*'s vociferous support for the structure of empire and the philosophy of Ottomanism, on the one hand, and the paper's hostility to nationalism and irredentism, on the other. I aim to suggest that for many turn-of-the-century Ottoman readers and writers of Ladino, the ethnic break-up of the empire was anything but a desirable political goal but, on the contrary, represented a political threat and a philosophical hazard. The pages of *El Tiempo*, I would propose, tell us a great deal about what turn-of-the-century Ottoman Jews were reading and debating; more generally, they allow us to reconsider the inevitability of "the unmixing of peoples" that has so colored the writing of late Ottoman history (Brubaker 1997).

## **THE CREATION OF AN OTTOMAN LADINO READING PUBLIC**

*El Tiempo* was the first daily Ladino newspaper published in the empire and the longest-lived of them all. Arguably, it was the single most prolific source of secular Sephardic culture in print. Published in Istanbul, the paper ran continuously from 1872 until 1930, appearing first as a daily, soon after biweekly, and, from July 1882 to 1930, three times a week. *El Tiempo* was not circulated throughout the empire, nor did it appeal to all readers of Ladino: its subscribers by and large lived in the capital and tended to be sympathetic with the paper's Westernizing and secularizing agenda. But the reach of this paper extended far beyond this narrowly-defined reading circle. Because it was the first secular newspaper in Ladino to be published in the empire, it was received with enthusiasm that in some sense exceeded what its content should have demanded. It was passed from hand to hand, read out loud at public gatherings, reached readers who considered themselves religious as well as secular, critics of as well as sympathizers with the paper's Westernizing agenda: it published letters from readers as far away as Cairo, Sarajevo, Izmir, and Ruse. And for the Turkish-language journalistic world, *El Tiempo* came to represent the world of Ladino letters. Indeed, the impact of *El Tiempo* outlived the newspaper itself, for it influenced and inspired the further development of Ladino secular culture throughout the Balkans (Stein 1999).

The first page of the first issue of *El Tiempo*, published on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, 1872, thanked God and the Sultan for the appearance of the paper, and outlined its creators' motives. The paper was designed as a daily, the article explained, that would reach readers in the capital city and the provinces. Every second or third day, it would include a section written in Turkish transliterated in Hebrew letters: a practice employed by four papers published in the empire between 1867-1889 (Elmaleh 1912, 67-73). A fluency in Turkish, *El Tiempo*'s first editorial detailed, was important "because we find ourselves under the Ottoman government". This was hardly an expression of patriotism. On the contrary, it reflected a classic diasporic view of government, illustrating the extent to which the paper's producers conceived of a commitment to the Turkish language (and, by extension, Turkish culture) to be produced by physical rather than ideological condition.

Promises of instruction in Turkish were formulaic, perhaps designed to assuage censors or critics, and were not to be honored. There were, however, material reasons that *El Tiempo* extended them. The economic status of the Sephardim of the Ottoman Balkans had been in decline since the end of the eighteenth century largely because their success had relied upon an Ottoman system that had become antiquated by the mid-nineteenth—and certainly by the early twentieth—century. Traditionally, Ottoman Jews had served as "provisioners, customs agents, and tax farmers, bankers and money lenders, and were located overwhelmingly in the old financial nexus built around the Ottoman system of government" (Rodrigue and Benbassa 1995). Wealthy Jewish families had built their fortunes upon the maintenance of the Janissary Corps [a wing of the Ottoman military which depended upon the forcible enlisting of conquered subjects], and their success had, in turn, supported entire communities. When the Janissary Corps was abolished in 1826, family fortunes, and sometimes lives, were lost overnight. Other contemporary legislation abolished tax farming and tax collection concessions, jobs that thousand of Jews depended upon. Increasingly, the Ottoman Jewish economy was to rely on what has been called a capitalist world economy dominated by Western Europe: now, links to Western Europe—rather than links to the Ottoman government—were necessary for a group's economic survival (Islamoglu-Inan 1987, Kasaba 1988, Pamuk 1987, Wallerstein 1979).

While this scenario punished Ottoman Jewry, it materially rewarded Greeks and Armenians, who began to dominate international trade (in the case of the Greeks) and banking and money lending (in the case of the Armenians) (Barsoumian 1982, Clogg 1982, Dumont 1982, Issawi 1982). By 1885, there were far fewer Jews than Greeks and Armenians in Istanbul, and the latter millets dominated the key positions in the city's economy. Greeks and Armenians each represented just over 20 percent of the active population of

Istanbul and over 25 percent of the population working in trade craft and industry, while Jews represented 5.59 percent of the active population and 5.24 percent of the population working in trade, craft, and industry (Shaw 1979). One of the earliest expressions of the Greek and Armenian millets' newfound economic security was their production of newspapers in Greek, Armenian, and Turkish transliterated into the Greek and Armenian alphabets, all of which quickly gained in popularity.

The production of *El Tiempo* self-consciously responded to this reconfigured political and literary economy. The paper's first editorial referred to these dynamics explicitly. "Readers, we know very well", the article stated, that knowledge of *la lingua de su patria* (the language of your country) is necessary for survival, self-defense, and advancement. In this, it continued, "we are deficient in comparison to other millets that have already published journals in Turkish transliterated into the script of their *nasion* (millet)." For the creators of *El Tiempo*, Greek and Armenian language papers were competitors more than models; not because they vied for readers, but because they reflected the economic influence of the Greek and Armenian millets in the late nineteenth century and pointed to the dwindling economic strength of Jewry in the Ottoman interior. When *El Tiempo's* first editorial spoke enviously of the strength of "other millets" newspapers, it was because by the late nineteenth century, the production of a newspaper in a vernacular language reflected and facilitated a millet's economic and political security. A newspaper allowed readers to be educated in the modes of Western Europe, while fluency in Turkish offered them the skills needed to translate those trends into local practice. Thus was *El Tiempo* envisioned as a newspaper of commerce and finance as well as a journal of political and literary news. Indeed, the paper would diligently publish data on the arrival of ships, the budgets of towns, religious and secular organizations: would reproduce pages of winning lottery numbers and update readers on trends and technologies relevant to professional advancement. And yet, though *El Tiempo* was designed to have the economic influence to allow its readers to compete with their Armenian and Greek peers, it did not prove as popular as the leading newspapers in Armenian or Greek: itself a sign that Ottoman Jews were failing to regain the competitive edge that *El Tiempo's* editors longed for.

Circulation statistics offer one way of measuring the relative popularity of these papers. Information about the circulation of Ottoman newspapers in any language is extraordinarily scarce; surprisingly enough, both English- and Turkish-language studies of Ottoman presses tend to fail to quantify the circulation of popular periodicals. One study of 1908 suggests that the paper had only 900 readers, while a more recent scholarly source identifies a circulation of 10,000 (Fesch 1907, 68, Levy 2001). If we assume that the majority of readers of *El Tiempo* were concentrated in the Ottoman capital, we can conclude that by

the first years of the twentieth century the paper reached nearly half of Jewish adults in the city. This is a significant number: and the available evidence suggests the symbolic reach of this paper extended further still (Stein 1999).

## **BUILDING A WESTERNIZING AGENDA**

In contrast to many other Ladino papers of the day, *El Tiempo* relied on patrons rather than readers for its funding.<sup>1</sup> *El Tiempo's* main patron was *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (hereafter referred to as the AIU), an organization founded by French Jews in 1860 to encourage the reform, education, and defense of Eastern Jews. The Jews of France were the first Jews of Europe to be emancipated, and now, almost a century later, could boast a highly organized consistorial system and a strong Franco-Jewish elite. The Franco-Jewish elite was determined to use their social and economic influence to facilitate the emancipation of “Oriental Jewry”: and it was in this spirit that the AIU was founded. In the opinion of the organizations’ founders, emancipation could be achieved only after Levantine Jewry underwent a process of “regeneration”. In short, the Oriental Jew was to be civilized through education. By the eve of the First World War, the AIU had established 183 schools in the Ottoman Empire, its former territories, and in the Maghreb, with 43,700 students in attendance (Rodrigue 1990). All teaching was conducted in French: students were also expected to gain a command of local languages, Hebrew and Jewish history.

In addition to creating schools, the AIU provided funds for other civilizing projects. *El Tiempo* was supported by the organization, and much of its ideological itinerary was informed by it. In turn, the paper offered extensive coverage of AIU affairs and usually, though not always unequivocally, supported its endeavors. Because the producers of *El Tiempo* saw fluency in Western European languages and cultural trends (as well as in the language and culture of their Turkish neighbors) as necessary tools for readers wishing to succeed in an economy that revolved around Western economic interests, the

<sup>1</sup> *El Tiempo's* financial security distinguished it from other contemporary Ladino newspapers. The Salonika-based weekly *La Epoka*, for example, was plagued by debt and continually pleaded that readers remain loyal to the publication. “A journal is sustained by the kindness of its subscribers,” an article published in *La Epoka* in 1877 pleaded, “by the allegiance of a community, by the publication of valuable articles, by the support of friends of education, by the strength of the millet and by those who wish it sustained.” The circulation of *La Epoka* is weak, the author continued, because the Jews of Salonika are not unified, because they do not have the funds to support an editorial board. Subscribers in the provinces (in Monastir, Trieste, Alexandria) are unable to pay for the issues they continue to demand, while the 40 paying subscribers in Constantinople do not even cover the cost of postage. Strikingly, even in *El Tiempo's* waning days, it never reproduced such pleas.

“Komo se sostiene un jurnal?” *La Epoka*, #109, 28 November, 1877.

paper republished telegrams announcing the day's news which reported on events in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest. This focus was reiterated in the paper's advertisements, which promoted goods and stores based in these European cities. In the process, *El Tiempo* by and large neglected news of Ottoman urban centers, though it occasionally reported on events in "the provinces". Izmir, Salonika, and Edirne—major Jewish centers in the empire—began to receive regular attention only in the mid 1880s, and even news of Istanbul was hard to come by in the paper's earliest years. It was only in 1890 that the paper instituted the column "Del Mundo Izraelita", which reported on affairs in major Jewish centers throughout the world. An interest in Western European cities, and a lack of interest in affairs in the Ottoman Empire, could be described as cultural, but it had a material basis. As far as the majority of Ottoman Jews were concerned, by the late nineteenth century Paris, London, Vienna, and Berlin were eclipsing Istanbul, Izmir, Salonika, and Edirne in financial significance.

*El Tiempo* did more than recount European financial trends in its early years of production. It obsessively reported on political and cultural affairs in France, often citing contemporary French journals as its source of information. In the 1870s, *El Tiempo* devoted over 33 issues to a serialized article on the history of France's queens. In the ensuing years, it would almost religiously cover news of AIU schools throughout the empire, praising the organization, in particular, for its instruction in French. In 1891, the paper explained that to be a loyal member of the Ottoman nation, one had to be fluent in French as well as Turkish: hardly an unusual position for a pro-AIU periodical of the time.<sup>2</sup> The following year, an article prophesied that one day French would be the universal language because it was the most civilized.<sup>3</sup> This thesis, and the paper's love affair with Europe, was never refuted, but in many ways they faded from view. By the 1890's, the paper's adulation of French culture assumed a secondary position. Or, better put, it was simply taken for granted. Opinion pieces ceased to focus on the merits of French culture and reports on the affairs of AIU schools thinned. One can find little explicit support of the use of the French language in the pages of *El Tiempo* after about 1892. Still, though *El Tiempo*'s support for French culture faded, it did not disappear. The paper's advertisements, as we will see, sustained a vision of their readers that was self-consciously European. The fiction serialized in the paper was all European, and mostly French, in origin: much of it was translated by David Fresco, as was *Les Mysterès de Paris* by Eugène Sue, a novel that was serialized for many months in the paper (In 1902, Isaac Ferrara, a frequent contributor to *El Tiempo*, would

<sup>2</sup> "La Lucha de las linguas," *El Tiempo* #398, 24 September, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> "Orasion i disvulfamente de la lingua franseza," *El Tiempo*, #37, 1 February, 1892 and #38, 22 February, 1892.

criticize the practice of publishing fiction translated from French, offering the argument that readers had an obligation to familiarize themselves with Turkish literature).<sup>4</sup>

Orations on the importance of learning Turkish, like all articles in *El Tiempo*, were often composed in Gallicized Ladino, a practice that was criticized in 1893 by the journalist Nissim Yehuda Pardo of the Izmir-based *Novelista* (1889-1924). *El Tiempo* was corrupting Ladino with the inclusion of too many French words, Pardo wrote. Perhaps, he suggested, *El Tiempo*'s writers could offer parenthetical translations into Ladino after each imported word.<sup>5</sup> To some extent this bit of advice was heeded, though with an unintended result: parenthetical translations did begin to follow *El Tiempo*'s "French" words (these words were not so much French as French-inspired). The unexpected result was that journalists could include more, rather than fewer, foreign-sounding words and had even more freedom to jettison select words in Ladino, including those with Hebrew roots. "*Grande miseria*" now became "*pauporismo*", "*kreasion del mondo*" became "*kosmogonia*," even the Biblical "*Brashit*" was replaced by "*Genesis*".<sup>6</sup>

*El Tiempo* was far from alone in this linguistic practice. Most Ladino journals with a Westernizing agenda were published in a distinct style that was rich in international vocabulary French syntax and in which elements of Hebrew, Aramaic, and words from Turkish and other Balkan languages were avoided (Bunis 1999, 78). It was the rare Ladino periodical that drew upon every-day speech: the notable exception to the rule was the Salonikan *La Epoka*, whose writers went out of their way to translate borrowed terms into popular equivalents (Bunis 1999, 26-27). For the editor of *La Epoka*, this was part of an overarching strategy to defend and protect Ladino, a position that will be explored in more detail below. In contrast, by Gallicizing its Ladino, *El Tiempo* was producing a new kind of Ladino culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, one which depended upon its synthesis with French culture. This need not be seen as a destructive act. As Aron Rodrigue has suggested, Turkish Jewry's acquisition of French, "far from weakening Judeo-Spanish ethnicity, simply marked it even more. French became domesticated, Judaized, Hispanicized.... Ethnic boundaries shifted and accommodated French and western ways, and emerged strengthened. A strong Jewish identity and ethnicity,

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "De la literatura Otomana" *El Tiempo* #36, 27 February, 1902.

<sup>5</sup> Nissim Yehuda Pardo "El Judeo Espanyol," *El Tiempo* #72, 22 June 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Examples taken from "El Espirito del Judaismo," *El Tiempo* #40, 8 February, 1894; "El alegre en el Judaismo," *El Tiempo* #3, 8 October 1897. Abraham Galante, too, has also commented on this practice (Galante 1935, 6).

though now secularizing, remained paramount in the self-definition of the group” (Rodrigue 1995, 253).

By the 1890’s, adulation of French and Western European culture had faded from *El Tiempo*’s professed goals and from its main articles but it had not disappeared: thereafter it was only tacitly advanced. Yet it is perhaps only when cultural emulation becomes tacit that it is truly transformative. If references to the superiority of French culture had become implicit by the 1890s, it was, after all, largely because by this time, a generation of students (and a generation of *El Tiempo* readers) had graduated from AIU schools, just as a generation of students had completed studies at the *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale*, the AIU’s Paris-based teacher-training school that had been opened in 1867 (Rodrigue 1990). AIU graduates were fluent in French language and culture as a matter of course, and their appreciation of both was simply assumed. At the same time, by the 1890’s not only *El Tiempo* but the AIU itself had tempered its rhetoric concerning the importance of French. Though the organization had supported the use of Turkish in its schools from its inception, by 1887, its members were forced to admit it was almost impossible to teach it well given the lack of fluent instructors, a fact which coincided well with (and was, indeed, partly a result of) the AIU’s sense that French was the most civilizing language (Rodrigue 1990, 86-88).

If explicit references to French culture faded in the pages of *El Tiempo* by the 1890’s, it was also because *El Tiempo* was evolving to accommodate a changed political climate. On the one hand, by this decade, the paper was intent on fashioning itself as a proponent of the imperial system. It began to oppose separatist nationalism of all forms and to support the Turkicization of all Ottomans. Simultaneously, the paper was beginning to see a threat in Zionism, which was gaining a foundation in the Judeo-Spanish cultural area: since its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, Bulgaria had provided a particularly conducive climate for nationalism (Rodrigue and Benbassa 1995). To respond to Zionist (and, by extension, all separatist nationalist) claims, the contributors to *El Tiempo* subdued their lionization of Western Europe and began to argue that Jews were guaranteed a secure home in the Ottoman Empire. By 1899, an article spoke of the importance of Jews’ “Ottoman nationality”, a notion that was unthinkable two decades earlier.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> “Las israelitas i la Turkiya,” *El Tiempo* #46, 9 March, 1899.

Ottomanism had not, as we have already seen, been central to the newspaper's political agenda. Prior to the early 1890s, *El Tiempo* self-consciously stressed the Jewishness of its readers. The paper referred to its readers in terms that would remind them of their affiliation to one another: the *pueblo judeo* (Jewish people), *kehila de nosotros* (our community), *nuestra comunidad* (our community), *comunidad judia de oriente* (Jewish community of the Orient), *comunidad izraelita* (Israelite, or Jewish, community), *comunidad religioza* (religious community), *judaismo de Turkiya* (Jews of Turkey), *nuestra nasyon* (our millet). These were terms that stressed Jewish particularism, the cohesion of the Jewish community, and a strong sense of group identification. Though they relied on phrases that would reappear in Zionist discourse, these terms did not have nationalist implications. References to Jewishness, instead, were extraordinarily flexible and not self-consciously ideological. One week, the paper might reproduce an article from a Western European newspaper on the eternal nature of the “*rasa Judea*” (the Jewish race) and the Jewish “national spirit”, and the very next week publish a piece decrying the politics of ethnic particularism.

Such shifting of positions were not signs of disorganization. Instead, they hinted at how fluid was the notion of identity for Ottoman Jews in the late nineteenth century. *El Tiempo*'s many references to Jewish group cohesion were reiterations of traditional Ottoman designations: synonyms for “millet”. This political category simply could not accommodate the prevailing historical dichotomies of “minority/majority” and “ruler/ruled”, products of a post-Enlightenment and Europe-centered mentality (Rodrigue 1996). This reflects why the paper did not gesture towards readers' Ottomanness in its first decades: because (for both Jews and non-Jews) there existed no sense that the borders of empire provided cohesion or an identity for residents. This idea would emerge only at the turn of the century, when the paper began an active campaign to encourage readers to engage in a process of “*Turkifikasion*” (Turkicization), a noun first used in the pages of *El Tiempo* in 1901.<sup>8</sup> There was irony in this semantic choice: rather than emphasizing Ottomanization, this term, *Turkifikasion*, actually indicated that the salience of Ottomanness was being subdued by nationalist rhetoric. Even as *El Tiempo* began to actively support the notion of Ottomanism—which the paper defined as the construction of one country made up of different religious elements—the integrity of this platform was being eroded.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>“La lingua turka i los judios di turkia,” *El Tiempo* #31, 17 January, 1901.

<sup>9</sup>“Ottomanismo i ottomanizacion,” *El Tiempo* #116, 6 July 1910.

## OTTOMANISM IN/AND LADINO

*El Tiempo's* support for Ottomanism—at least at the outset—was surprisingly functional in nature. Perhaps ironically (given the theoretically democratic tinge of this philosophy), it was also prompted by a sense of competitiveness with other of the empire's ethnic minorities: much as had been the founding of the paper in the first place. The catalyst was Jews' inability to enter the Ottoman civil service in the immediate aftermath of the Tanzimat reforms. The rationalization of the Ottoman bureaucracy had, of course, allowed all non-Muslim groups to assume bureaucratic positions of prestige for the first time. In 1855, it was decreed that non-Muslims could be admitted to military service to the rank of colonel and to civil service without limit of grade. Thereafter Greeks and Armenians would be well-represented in the Ottoman civil service, attaining positions of high status, and receiving better salaries than Jews and other non-Muslims similarly employed (the most prestigious and highest paying jobs would always be reserved for modernist Muslims) (Findley 1982). According to *El Tiempo*, Jews were relatively unsuccessful in this regard because fluency in Turkish remained low among Ottoman Jews. Thus the paper began a two-tiered strategy. On the one hand, it began to vigorously promote Jews' acquisition of Turkish, and, on the other, it emphasized the importance of Turkish at moments of opportunity, in particular moments at which Armenians' and Greeks' ability to remain in the civil service seemed in doubt. As this suggests, positions of high status and salary were by no means guaranteed to Greeks and Armenians. Non-Muslims could prosper as civil servants only so long as there existed no irredentist claims among them. After the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, the number of Armenians in the civil service would drop, while the Greco-Turkish war of 1901 would negatively impact the standing of Greeks in the Ottoman bureaucracy. It is precisely at these moments that Ottoman Jewish professional aspirations could grow; as Greeks' and Armenians' hold on the civil service weakened, Jews (who were already represented in minor consular positions and as the lowest-ranked civil servants) saw the opportunity to fill the void left in their absence (Findley 1982, 356). They would, however, need the requisite skills, among which fluency in Turkish was the most important. Thus beginning in the 1890s *El Tiempo* began a vigorous campaign to promote Turkish among Ottoman Jewry.

In 1872, the paper had extended a rather weak promise of instruction in Turkish: now the reasons for fluency in the language were outlined in full. *El Tiempo's* campaign in support of Turkish marked one of the central tenets of the paper's support of Ottomanism. As it defended the notion of Ottomanism, the paper's contributors elaborated other arguments as well: a critique of Ladino, defense of the multi-ethnic structure of the empire, and, in the years after 1908, an assault on the politics of Jewish nationalism. Though *El Tiempo* would

passionately defend the use of Turkish in the years after the mid-1890s, no contributor to the paper would ever suggest that it, like French, was a “civilizing” language (a premise that was critical to the ideological foundation of the AIU). Turkish was, instead, the language of the country, a language that Jews had a civil obligation to know. Though these claims were informed by Western European (and particularly French) expressions of nationalism and patriotism, they were not naïve mimicry, but cleverly accommodated to the Ottoman landscape. The paper’s support of Turkish was almost always explained with reference to Jews’ loyalty to the empire and Sultan. Jews had lived in Turkey for over 500 years, one of the earliest of such articles reminded readers, and it is their obligation to be fluent in the language of the land.<sup>10</sup> A defense of this sense of loyalty inevitably proceeded from the historical: after the expulsion of Spanish Jewry, so the argument went, no country took so active a role in welcoming the Jews to their lands as did the Ottoman Empire, and no country had offered Jews as much freedom or autonomy. This tradition of tolerance, according to the contributors to *El Tiempo*, had been seamlessly maintained. Thus *El Tiempo* is filled with praise for Sultan Abdhülhamid II, praise that emerges in predictable ways and at predictable moments: the annual celebration of the Sultan’s coronation, the turning of each Hebrew year. With every Rosh HaShanah, *El Tiempo* published an article entitled “Judaism in the year X” on its front page. These pieces surveyed conditions for Jewish life in Russia, America, Turkey, and so on, and inevitably included resounding praise for the freedoms experienced by Jews in Turkey, the “classical terrain of tolerance and freedom of religion”.<sup>11</sup>

Essential to *El Tiempo*’s support of Turkicization was the assumption that Jews were not a nation, but a religious community. Jews in different countries ought to speak different languages, have different characters, and pursue different aspirations, explained one of *El Tiempo*’s first overtly anti-Zionist articles (published in 1901), for they are not a nation in the political sense, but a “*familia de israel dispersado en el mundo*” (a family of Israel dispersed in the world).<sup>12</sup> An article on Jewish names published the following year pointed out to readers that Jews had always adopted the names of the larger society, replacing Hebrew names such as Rachel with local equivalents, such as (in the German context) Rosa. If French Jews take on French names, the author concluded, they clearly do not have the character of a people or a nation of their own: they are simply French.<sup>13</sup> The implications of such a statement were somewhat

<sup>10</sup> “Propoganda de la lingua Turka i regeneration de los Judios de Turkiya,” *El Tiempo*, #26, 26 December 1893.

<sup>11</sup> “El Judaismo en el 5658,” *El Tiempo* #94, 15 September 1898.

<sup>12</sup> “Porke so yo kontra el Tsionism?” *El Tiempo* #62, 13 June, 1901.

<sup>13</sup> *El Tiempo*, #62, 1 May 1902.

dangerous given that not one of the contributors to *El Tiempo* (neither regular journalists nor authors of letters to the editors) signed their name with Turkish, or even Turkish-inspired pennames, but logic is not necessarily what is critical to such an argument. As is so often true of the ideological points advanced in *El Tiempo*, it was not so much their solidity as the passion with which they were defended that seemed to matter.

*El Tiempo*'s pro-Turkish stance is exquisitely captured in the writing of Isaac Ferrara, a frequent contributor to the paper in the first years of the twentieth century. In a series of articles published in 1902, he offered readers a cultural itinerary for the process of Turkicization. Ferrara urged readers to study Ottoman history: and not just the history that followed their arrival in 1492.<sup>14</sup> He proposed that Jewish knowledge of Turkish literature should be raised: his goal, he explained, was to prove a Turkish literary tradition existed and help "regenerate" it.<sup>15</sup> He encouraged readers to explore Ottoman poetry because poetry revealed the "deepest sentiments of every nation".<sup>16</sup> Ferrara disparaged the idea that Jewry should strengthen their ties with Spain, telling readers that though they speak a Spanish language, it had not remained intact, but absorbed many words from Turkish and other languages.<sup>17</sup> (The idea that Sephardic Jews should cultivate their ties with Spain had been raised in a letter to *El Tiempo* penned by Dr. Angel Pulido Fernandez of Spain. Dr. Pulido's *Españoles sin Patria y la Raza Sefardi* would attempt to raise Spaniards' interest in the culture of the Sephardim with the hope of establishing good relations between Spain and the Spanish Jews of the Levant).

Ferrara claimed that Ladino, "*nuestro espanyol*" (our Spanish), contained over 2,000 words of Turkish which would make the learning of Turkish easier.<sup>18</sup> And he reminded readers that studying Turkish was not only a patriotic act, but the gateway to the speaking of a superior tongue.<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, he cautioned readers that Turkish was difficult to learn because of the strong linguistic influence of Arabic. While European languages are based upon Latin cognates that are easy to understand, he sympathized, only "professionals" understand the "physiognomy" of Turkish. But, he argued, Arabic words are "considered distinct in Turkish, and don't amount to more than 1% (of the language). Each of them is completely foreign to every Turk's mouth". As a result, he concluded,

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "De la literatura Otomana," *El Tiempo* #52, 20 March 1902.

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "De la literatura Otomana," *El Tiempo* #36, 27 February, 1902.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "De la literatura Otomana," *El Tiempo* #52, 20 March, 1902.

<sup>17</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "La lingua Judeo-Espanyol i Sr. Polido," *El Tiempo* #89, 11 August, 1902.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "Los vocabelos turkos en el Judeo-espanyol," *El Tiempo* #95, 1 September, 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Isaac Ferrara, "Su Eksellensia Ahmed Midhat Efendi i los Israelitas de Turkiya," *El Tiempo* #2, 16 September, 1902.

they should be purged from the language, making it more accessible to Ottoman citizens.<sup>20</sup>

This final suggestion is astonishing partly because of its inaccuracy; far from suiting the needs of “every Turk”, Ferrara’s suggestion is useful only to a small minority of Ottoman citizens—those who spoke Romance languages—and, indeed, of great disadvantage to the many speakers of Arabic under Ottoman sovereignty (some twenty years later, the same motives would inform the linguistic reforms of the Kemalist Republic) (Lewis 1984). As this suggests, though Ferrara’s many contributions to *El Tiempo* provided readers with the most thorough cultural itinerary to the process of Turkicization that could be found in the paper, his articles did not provide readers with the reliable information, or practical suggestions, that they needed to embark upon this journey. Ferrara discussed the importance of Ottoman history but did not write historical essays. He described the importance of poetry but did not reproduce selections of poetry or offer reading suggestions. Again and again, he reiterated the importance of studying Turkish, but his paper did not include transliterated Turkish, as it once promised it would, did not publish articles in simple Turkish, did not even present the alphabet for readers who wished to memorize it. His articles, like so many in *El Tiempo*, outlined a political vision but failed to facilitate its achievement.

As part of the paper’s promotion of Turkish, *El Tiempo* began a concerted assault on Ladino beginning in the 1890s. In 1893, *El Tiempo* ran a series of articles entitled “El Judeo Espanyol”, published unsigned, though most likely written by editor David Fresco. These articles all reached the same conclusion: Ladino should be abandoned in favor of Turkish, which should be adopted not only as a mother tongue (*lingua madre*) but the language of the country (*lingua de su patria*). By the turn of the century, these stances were rigidified still further. It is a matter of life and death for the Jewish people, proclaimed one contributor, to abandon Ladino; we owe it to the Sultan!<sup>21</sup> Abandoning “this famous *patois* (*zhargon*) (sic) that we call Judeo-Espanyol” swore another, is not simply a question to be debated in the pages of *El Tiempo*, but is a pressing question for all of Turkey.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Isaac Ferrara, “De la literature Otomana,” *El Tiempo* #48, 20 March, 1902.

<sup>21</sup> “La comunidad del gran rabinato por la propagasion de la lingua Turka,” *El Tiempo* #35, 10 March 1900.

<sup>22</sup> “La Lingua Turka i los judios de Turkia,” *El Tiempo* #31, 17 January 1901.

Ladino had not been standardized by the turn of the century, and, partly as a result, Ladino periodicals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century lacked consistency in spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. A single article could be borrowed from one Ladino journal and “translated” for another: modified to fit local parlance (Galante 1935). This helps explain the humor behind one journalist’s ironic call for a Ladino—Ladino dictionary.<sup>23</sup> These “translations” however, reflect more than linguistic differences. Though Ladino was criticized for being a *patois*, its very flexibility allowed writers to assert their political predilections. They could, as we have seen, rely upon French words and eschew Hebrew ones. They could also spurn the influence of “provincial languages” such as Bulgarian, Greek, or Armenian. An article on Bulgarian Zionism published in *El Tiempo* in 1910, for example, described the convening of a *sueka*, a word it translated in a footnote as a “gathering of youths”, and, in the same footnote, scolded Bulgarian Jews for “disfiguring” their Ladino with this and other Bulgarian imports.<sup>24</sup> The implication, of course, was not only that a word such as *sueka* was foreign to Jewish lips, but that the phenomenon it was adopted to describe—a Zionist gathering attended by young people—was too. Opposition to Zionism was thereby articulated by the act of translation. Simultaneously, readers’ Ottomanness was implicitly illustrated: for this footnote intimated a second opinion, that Jews in the Ottoman interior were “purer” than their coreligionists in the provinces or neighboring states.

*El Tiempo*’s assault on Ladino would only intensify in the years after the Young Turk Revolt. *El Tiempo* celebrated the revolution and the recognition of the Constitution of 1876; its first editorial on the topic joyously proclaimed that Turkey had, at last, entered the “civilized world”, in a moment that “feels like a dream”.<sup>25</sup> An editorial on the subject reasserted that more than ever, a Ladino paper could be useful to the country (*patria*) and to Judaism, and could provide readers with a “democratic education”. This phrase, unique to the post-1908 period, contains all the optimism with which the paper greeted the empire’s transition to a constitutional regime. One senses that the democracy that *El Tiempo* envisioned was French in inspiration but Ottoman in implementation: a democracy that would prize rather than fear the diversity of its constituents. And there is evidence that the paper did its best to advance this cause—not only by defending the principles of the revolution, but by building alliances possibly only in the post-1908 period. *El Tiempo* was a charter member of an Ottoman publishing association (*Matbuat-ı Osmaniye Cemiyeti*) founded in Istanbul shortly after the revolution. The association was committed to supporting a

<sup>23</sup> “El Judeo-Espanyol,” *El Tiempo* #69, 9 July 1901.

<sup>24</sup> “El Tsionismo sembrando la discordia entre los Judios de Bulgaria,” *El Tiempo* #102, 1 June 1910.

<sup>25</sup> “El Imperio Ottomano salvado por la justisia,” *El Tiempo* #88, 27 July 1908.

constitutional regime and to fostering financial, political, and intellectual cooperation between a number of multi-lingual and like-minded newspapers. One Abdullah Zühtü Bey represented *El Tiempo* to the organization, most likely a Turkish pseudonym for one of its journalists, possibly even David Fresco himself (Brummett 2000, 31-2).

## THE YOUNG TURK REVOLT AND THE THREAT OF JEWISH NATIONALISM

Ottoman Jewish intellectuals seemed to have many reasons to welcome the Young Turk regime on the morrow of the Revolt, though by and large the regime lacked a mass following among Jews (Feroz 1982). The renewed Constitution of 1876 promised Jews equality under the law. The new parliamentary representatives included five Jewish deputies whose pictures and biographies were reproduced reverentially in *El Tiempo*. For the first time in over two decades, a Chief Rabbi was elected to represent Ottoman Jewry, albeit not without controversy (Haim Nahum, an Alliance supporter, assumed the position in 1908) (Benbassa 1986). In the same year, the World Zionist Organization established its first office in Istanbul. Simultaneously, the lifting of censorship allowed the creation of numerous Jewish newspapers: the new era of political laxity also enabled the creation of Hebrew language associations and youth groups emerged (Benbassa 1993, Brummett 2000).

The conditions for Jewish publishing in Ladino, French, and Hebrew would change dramatically after the Young Turk Revolt. With the lifting of censorship, dozens of periodicals were introduced in Istanbul and other cities of the empire. Many of these were founded by the World Zionist Organization (WZO), which aggressively sought to woo preexisting presses as well (Benbassa 1993).<sup>26</sup> After the 1908 Revolt, *La Epoka*, *Journal de Salonique*, *La Boz*, *El Judeo*, *El Avenir*, *El Pueblo*, *El Impartial*, and *El Telegrafo* all evolved into Zionist organs. Zionist newspapers were well received by readers of Ladino; the newly-established newspapers *L'Aurore* and *Le Jeune Turc* were to gain circulations of 1,500 and 15,000, respectively.<sup>27</sup> To put this another way, after publishing *El Tiempo* for over three decades, in 1908 David Fresco, editor of *El Tiempo* since its inception, confronted genuine economic and ideological competition for the first time. *El Telegrafo* and *La Epoka* ceased to be *El Tiempo*'s primary foes: replaced by the German- and French-language Zionist periodicals *Die Welt* and *L'Aurore* (based in Berlin and Istanbul, respectively)—

<sup>26</sup> Benbassa, *Une diaspora sépharade*.

<sup>27</sup> For presses in other languages, this was a period of greater, rather than fewer restrictions: Armenian presses suffered greatly under the new leadership, and almost all were forcibly closed after 1914 (Aivazian 1997).

papers that represented influential coalitions. The WZO tried to woo *El Tiempo*, too, and at first the journal seemed interested in a cooperative effort. Quickly, however, Fresco proved an unreliable ally of Zionism and, instead, an unwavering supporter of the anti-Zionist Chief Rabbi Nahum. By 1910, any hope of cooperation between *El Tiempo* and the Zionist establishment was dashed. In this year, Fresco published several articles that his critics considered anti-semitic: one a translation of an anti-Zionist article from a contemporary Turkish paper, the other an inflammatory series, “is Zionism compatible with Ottomanism?”

Fresco’s answer to the latter question was resoundingly negative. Zionism, he wrote, contradicts Judaism, the mission of Israel, and the aspirations of humanity. He called it primitive, exclusivist, utopian.<sup>28</sup> He saw it as an exploitation of the poor, a ruse that would woo Jews away from the synagogue, a philosophy crudely imported from Russia and Galicia.<sup>29</sup> The Zionists, Fresco argued, call anti-Zionists assimilationists, as if this were an insult. In fact, assimilation is part of nature, a sign of progress.<sup>30</sup> Imagine, he continued elsewhere, if Jews, Greeks, and Armenians all retreated into isolation, speaking only the language of their *pueblo* (people)?<sup>31</sup> In fact, both Greeks and Armenians have chosen to adopt the language of their country: do we, he demanded of his readers, wish to diverge from our peers?<sup>32</sup> Jews, he consistently argued, are not a race, but a religion: Jewish in origin and Ottoman “in spirit”.<sup>33</sup> “I am an Ottoman”, Fresco declared, “genuinely patriotic”.<sup>34</sup> And it was thus that he considered all Ottoman Jews: patriotic above all else, supporters of “mak(ing) the population as homogenous as possible”.<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, a contributor to *El Tiempo* argued that no Zionist messiah could bring about a Jewish nation in Palestine because “our fatherland, our holy land, our Jerusalem, our motherland is Turkey, a liberal and constitutional Turkey, which we should support with all our force and faith”.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>28</sup> “Las israelitas i la lingua Turka,” *El Tiempo* #20, 20 November 1908; David Fresco “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #13, 25 October, 1909

<sup>29</sup> Response to a letter to the editor by David Fresco, *El Tiempo* #34, 15 December, 1909; “El explotasion Tsionista, el nueva kongres,” *El Tiempo* #132, 12 August, 1910.

<sup>30</sup> David Fresco, “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #14, 27 October, 1909

<sup>31</sup> David Fresco, “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #14, 27 October 1909.

<sup>32</sup> David Fresco, “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #16, 1 November, 1909.

<sup>33</sup> Jed Franko, “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #8, 13 September, 1909.

<sup>34</sup> David Fresco, “La Monstrozo impostura, a Sr. Sokolow,” *El Tiempo* #20, 12 November, 1909.

<sup>35</sup> David Fresco, “El Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #17, 3 November 1909.

<sup>36</sup> La nasion, “Tsionismo, Judasimo, Ottomanismo,” *El Tiempo* #26, 14 December, 1911.

As it defended Jews' Ottomanness, the newspaper continued to lobby for Jews' use of Turkish, encouraging readers to study the language and parents to speak to their children only in Turkish, insisting all the while that a people could not be bilingual.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the process of adopting Turkish was not succeeding among Ottoman Jewry: as late as 1927, 85% of Turkish Jews would identify Ladino as their mother tongue (though the number of Jews claiming Turkish as their mother tongue thereafter would rise steadily) (Weiker 1992). According to Moïse Fresco, an Alliance teacher, few students were interested in a career in the civil service, and this represented the only context in which fluency in Turkish was truly necessary (Rodrigue 1995). *El Tiempo* never recognized the unpopularity (or ineffectual nature) of its position, though in 1911, it would introduce an article by Gad Franko by calling the author "one of the rare (Ottoman) Jews who knows the language of his country well" (The article itself, hardly designed to promote Ottoman culture, was a Ladino translation of Franko's Turkish translation of Rousseau's "On Education", which Franko had originally published in the Turkish newspaper *Ikdam*).

If *El Tiempo* was overestimating the appeal of its pro-Turkish stance, it was underestimating the popularity of its critics. To a great extent, this was because Fresco's anti-Zionists tracts were blind to the originality and flexibility of Ottoman Zionism. Jewish nationalism in Turkey did not, in fact, advocate the fragmentation of the empire, and there was little outright support among Sephardi Zionists for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. Ottoman Jewry, after all, feared nationalist claims to Palestine because they represented a threat to their own government. This fear shaped Zionism in the Ottoman Empire into a form of nationalism with virtually no territorial dimension. Fresco's mistake, perhaps, was that he understood Zionism as a rigid institution rather than an inspiration for Ottoman Jewry, failing to anticipate that Zionism might successfully recast Ottoman Jews' nostalgia for the millet system into support for the politics of ethnic particularism. He failed to see that Ottoman Zionism was nationalist in cultural orientation, allowing many of its supporters (like many Arab nationalists of the empire) to remain Ottomanists. Fresco's opposition to Ottoman Zionism prevented him from investigating Zionism's many mutations in journals such as *El Telegrafo*: he preferred, instead, to meticulously critique individual Zionist thinkers from Western Europe. In 1911, the paper would hurl a list of accusations at Max Nordau and his allies, written in a style which seemed to parody the Exodus' list of plagues meted upon the

<sup>37</sup> "Korsos gratuitas de lingua Turkia en los quartelas israelitas de Constantinople," *El Tiempo* #19, 25 November, 1910; David Fresco, "La kuestyon de la lingua Ebraika," *El Tiempo* #25, 12 December, 1910.

Egyptians: “False. Liar. Infamous. Traitor. Criminal. Conspirator. False to excess. Diabolical... Agitator... Disgraceful... Stupid”.<sup>38</sup>

There were concrete reasons that Fresco’s vision of Ottomanism lacked the popularity that Zionism was gaining. Ottomanism itself was proving utopian: an adjective that Fresco repeatedly hurled as an epithet at his Zionist interlocutors. In the years after the Young Turk Revolt, Ottoman Jews watched as the CUP’s vision of a multi-ethnic Ottomanism was transformed into a nationalist, and increasingly racist philosophy of Turkism. Even by the time his series “is Zionism compatible with Ottomanism?” was published, the CUP was beginning to compromise its vision of Ottomanism, a philosophy destined to expire before it was enacted. That one of *El Tiempo*’s journalists represented the newspaper to the post-revolutionary Ottoman publishing association with an assumed Turkish name (rather than Jewish nomenclature) seemed now not just the expression of optimism, but foreshadowing of this impending decay. Worse still, only months before Fresco looked to the Armenians as an example of successful assimilationists, the CUP had begun its massacres of thousands of Armenians seen as political foes (Adanir 2000, Davison 1982). These were events that *El Tiempo* reported on at some length, but with no explicit sympathy. On the contrary, the paper insisted that both ethnic nationalism and irredentism were dangerous threats. In July of 1909, the paper published an article that assured readers that the empire had a strong enough army to deter hostile forces from without or within.<sup>39</sup> After the issuing of the conscription law of 1909, which required all Ottoman citizens to serve in the army, *El Tiempo* reiterated its faith in the Ottoman military by publishing an article calling for the voluntary conscription of Jewish men, reminding readers that Jews had always been among the empire’s most loyal subjects (in fact, far from supporting the conscription law, the rate of Jewish emigration increased dramatically after 1909).<sup>40</sup> This loyalty could hardly prevent the disintegration of the empire. By this date, the empire had lost most of its European provinces. Bosnia and Herzegovina (including the Jewish center of Sarajevo) had been annexed by Austria-Hungary in 1878, the same year that Bulgaria declared independence. In the course of the next three years, Crete and Greece would announce their union; Italy would attack the Ottoman Tripolitania; and wars would be declared between Turkey and its Balkan neighbors. The kingdom of Greece, independent since 1830, seized the Sephardi center of Salonika in 1912. Macedonia was

<sup>38</sup> “El Linguasi di oro del apostolo del Tsionismo,” *El Tiempo* #118, 23 August, 1911.

<sup>39</sup> “Por la defensie del Imperio Otomano,” *El Tiempo* #120, 19 July, 1909.

<sup>40</sup> “Por la defensie de nuestra kerida patria,” *El Tiempo* #54, 2 February, 1910. The way in which Jews ‘voted with their feet’ in the 1909 may tarnish Caglar Keyder’s suggestion that the period between the fall of 1909 and elections in March 1912 hinted at the potential success of a multiethnic political sensibility (Keyder 1997).

divided among Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia. The much-reduced empire would face an additional decade of fighting before the emergence of the Turkish Republic in 1923, by which point the kingdoms of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes had also been established.

Throughout this massive change of territory, *El Tiempo* remained adamantly, even naively, opposed to separatism, but its priorities, by necessity, shifted. Tangles with Zionism all but disappeared from the paper by the autumn of 1911, overshadowed by wars and internal unrest. Clearly, Fresco had misjudged the power of Zionism and nationalist irredentism. Still, his trust of Ottomanism betrayed a kind of insight. Jews had indeed benefited from the Ottoman imperial system: their cooperation with the imperial regime had allowed them to thrive economically, culturally, and politically. Fresco was not alone in understanding this. The Jews of Salonika, who feared Greek antisemitism and cherished their domination of Salonika's economy, would formally protest Greek annexation of their city in the wake of the Balkan wars of 1912-13, proposing that the city exist as an international port (Rodrigue and Benbassa 1995). Indeed, as Fresco could not have known in 1911, Jews and other non-Muslim groups would suffer at the hands of nation-states born of nationalist irredentism in the Balkans. As early as the 1890s, legislation was passed to enforce the Bulgarianization of the Jews of Bulgaria: by the 1920s and 1930s similar laws were passed in Greece and Turkey, with the goal of Hellenizing and Turkicizing local Jews. Most of the Armenian population of Turkey perished, and the Greeks of Turkey (with exception of the Greeks of Istanbul) would be forcibly transferred to Greek territory in return for the transfer of most ethnic Turks to Turkey. In Turkey and the Balkans, the construction of ethnicity and often its wholesale creation (through population transfers or the random drawing of boundaries), was proving essential to the construction of nation-states. Among Jews, dwindling prosperity, anti-semitism, and the racism of many new nation-states caused a tremendous rise in emigration beginning in 1909. Many went to France: in 1939, it is estimated that there were 20,000-25,000 Sephardim living in Paris. Between 1889 and 1924, there were 20,027 Ottoman Jewish immigrants to the United States. Others left for Latin America (Cuba, Mexico and Argentina absorbed the majority) or for Africa (where the Belgian Congo, Rhodesia, and South Africa were favored destinations). In the late 1940s, many Sephardim of the Levant fled war-torn Europe for Palestine (Rodrigue and Benbassa 1995, Weiker 1982). *El Tiempo* instituted a new column in 1913 entitled "Across the world", which provided readers with the financial information they needed to negotiate these changes: the average cost of homes, for example, in Paris, Berlin, and London.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, "A traverso el Mundo," *El Tiempo* #64, 14 February, 1913.

*El Tiempo* would continue publishing until the 1930's, but even by the outbreak of the First World War, it seemed to be in a sort of decay. Arguably, it had been the paper's optimism that made it both a success and a curiosity. Its faith in the already-disintegrating imperial system, its attempt to resuscitate the flagging Ottoman Jewish economy, its persistent attack on the politics of nationalism: all could be considered challenges to the onslaught of modernity. And yet, within the context of modern Ottoman Jewish culture, these were not only distinctly modern impulses, they were signs of political vivacity. The Ladino press of the Ottoman interior was not against change: it tended to support the democratization of the empire, the freedom of the press, and open political debate. But it imagined that the best way to achieve these goals was to tinker with, rather than dissolve, the structure of empire. Readers of Ladino may not have been typical Ottoman subjects in their receptiveness to this position. But their story does remind us of the incredible diversity of political and cultural thought that existed in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. So too does it remind how important it is to problematize this era of transition. The case of *El Tiempo* can dissuade us from considering the ethnic break-up of the empire as an historical inevitability, and can lead us, instead, to appreciate the polyphony of voices that accompanied—and often opposed—this transformation.

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