BOOK CRITIQUE
OF
OTTOMAN BROTHERS: MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS, AND JEWS IN EARLY
TWENTIETH-CENTURY PALESTINE
BY MICHELLE CAMPOS

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The book *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* by Michelle Campos begins in 1908, following the success of the Young Turk Revolution in the Ottoman Empire. Under the absolutist rule of Sultan Abdülhamid II, the empire suffered from great territorial losses and economic instability. Young intellectuals, among others, were concerned for the future of the empire in relation to European and world powers. The revolution resulted in the restoration of the constitutional monarchy and the 1876 Constitution, both of which had been suspended in 1878 by Sultan Abdülhamid II. With the revival of parliament, many different political parties were established, and the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) continued to amass political power. The idea of “civic Ottomanism”, which is essentially the notion that loyalty to the empire should surpass loyalty to an individual’s ethnic and religious group, became a primary focus for citizens of the new parliamentary democracy.

Campos argues that while civic Ottomanism was successful for a brief period of time, it ultimately failed when tensions between ethno-religious groups arose out of fundamental issues within the Ottoman system and conflicts over land purchases, thus providing a basis for the current Arab-Israeli conflict. In chapters one and two, Campos looks at the ways in which people perceived the ideals of liberty, brotherhood, and equality in a post-revolutionary Ottoman Empire; and, how different groups translated these perceptions into their identity as Ottomans. In chapter three, Campos illustrates the ways citizens displayed their civic Ottomanism through participation in varying organizations (notably local CUP organizations), local politics and boycotts. In chapter four, effectively titled “The Mouthpiece of the People”, Campos discusses the multiple roles the press played in the new era; the effect of the press was essentially twofold—Campos says “the press in this period served not only to help ‘imagine’ the community
in universally inclusive imperial terms, but also increasingly in exclusionary sectarian and ethnic terms.\textsuperscript{1} Chapter five examines multiethnic membership to local organizations, including the Freemasons, in order to expand upon some of the ways civic Ottomanism was achieved. In chapter six, Campos discusses the problems posed to the empire by Zionism and how Zionism effected the Sephardic Jewish population. And finally, in chapter seven, Campos discusses challenges to a collective identity and concludes with the transition in ideals that resulted from the Balkan Wars in 1913.

Though Campos draws upon the works of other scholars in the field, it is her use of printed sources from the Ottoman Empire between roughly 1908 and 1914 that really bolster her argument. She cites various pamphlets, flyers, and first-hand accounts to give her audience a well-rounded perspective of the diverse population of the empire. Campos also mentions and/or includes quotations from at least 25 Arabic, Hebrew, Judeo-Spanish and Ottoman Turkish newspapers that represent all the ethno-religious communities and varying political opinions. The revolution ushered in a new era of the press and it’s important that Campos uses these sources to illustrate the ways in which civic Ottomanism was, or was not, taking hold.

Campos provides several examples of successful civic Ottomanism but one of the most significant is the boycott of Austrian goods and ships in 1908. Following the annexation the former Ottoman providences of Bosnia-Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary, newspapers from Istanbul, \textit{Servet-i Funun} and \textit{Tanin}, initiated a widespread boycott of incoming Austro-Hungarian goods. The annexation served as a reminder of the territorial losses suffered and the decline of the political status of the empire during the previous regime, and the boycott would express patriotism toward the new regime. The boycott gained support of the Ottoman

government despite the economic risk it would pose to the empire and within days expanded to include not only Austro-Hungarian cargo ships but also the Austrian postal service and stores. Campos references flyers demanding cooperation issued by the Ottoman Commercial Committee and the mayor of Jerusalem, Husayn Hashem al-Husayni. In early 1909, the boycott ended after Austria-Hungary suffered significant financial losses. The Ottoman Empire suffered economically as well, but this was somewhat overlooked in order to see the larger picture of Ottoman nationalism being displayed.

While there were successful exhibitions of Ottomanism, there were issues within the Ottoman system that created some tension between ethno-religious groups. Prior to the revolution Sultan Abdülhamid II strove to create an Islamic empire and incorporated many aspects of Islam into laws and policies. Reversal of these policies must have been difficult to implement as Campos states that the Ottoman Empire essentially remained an Islamic state. In her discussion of the first parliamentary elections in 1908, Campos looks at the exclusion of non-Muslims from the voting process based on taxpayer requirements, especially in Jerusalem; Ottoman males over the age of 25 were qualified to vote as long as they paid taxes. However, this category was further narrowed, despite numerous taxes that were paid by non-Muslims, when it was decided that only those who paid property tax on a home or store were qualified to vote. Campos uses data from the Jerusalem newspaper Ha-Hashkafa (“The Observation”) to show how these policies excluded large groups of people and kept many Christians and Jews out of the political process, leading to underrepresentation in the government.

Zionism was considered a threat to the collective Ottoman identity not only demographically and politically, but territorially as well. Conflict over land arose during the second wave of Zionist immigration, or the Second Aliya. Outrage of native Ottomans over the
Zionist purchase of land resulted first in the prohibition of selling land to foreign Jews. However, Zionist went around the ban by having Ottoman Jews purchase land for them. The al-Fula land sale controversy only fueled more anger and by 1912 various government authorities went as far as to ban land sales to Ottoman Jews as well. The newspaper *Liberty* expressed Ottoman Jews’ distress over these restrictions that could possibly serve to drive wedges between Ottoman/Sephardic Jews and Zionist Jews, as well as Ottoman/Sephardic Jews and Muslims and Christians.

Overall, Campos has a solid argument. While the subjects of the empire desired a collective Ottoman identity overall, it was difficult to reconcile diverging interests of ethno-religious groups, especially when policies within the Ottoman system did not incorporate true equality amongst the groups. Campos contributes greatly to the study of the Arab-Israeli Conflict by using multi-linguistic sources to accurately portray the post-revolutionary atmosphere, along with the way that each group viewed its state of affairs. Campos concludes her work with the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913 when the influx of Muslims from Balkan territories created a disproportionate demographic in Palestine. Because of this, Campos states, Muslims and Christians would not be able to cooperate. Conflict between the ethno-religious groups was not initially overt, but failures of Ottomanism possibly planted the seeds of greater issues to come.