



They changed land ownership laws and paved the way for settlement

Palestine... Was the Present of Ottomans to the World Zionist Movement

Ottoman propaganda exploited the complete ignorance by which the Arab World was forced throughout five centuries in order to enhance its historical forgery. Thus, they presented themselves as protectors of Islamic homelands, particularly Palestine. This has been believed by the wide Arab collective conscience, especially after promulgating the myth “that the main cause of the Ottoman Empire fall was their attitude towards the Jewish settlement in Palestine; in addition, Abdul Hamid II himself was a victim”.

While the historical truth supported by documents and events away from repulsive forgery was that the close relationship established by Turkish sultans with Zionist Movement, especially with its leader and founder Theodor Herzl, was more demonstrated and rational.

In the book of *The Role of Abdul Hamid II Facilitating Zionist Hegemony Over Palestine (1909 -1876)*, Fadwa Nuseirat, Jordanian researcher, revealed the attitudes of Abdul Hamid II towards the Zionist Movement activity in Ottoman Sultanate, and its persistent endeavor of purchasing lands and building settlements in Palestine. It also tackled the way he actually dealt with this file; the extent to which he was serious and strict preventing the settlement extension in Palestine; and the extent of his ability to protect land and holy sites there.

This book demolished the so- called “historical postulate” which has been frequently promulgated, stating That Abdul Hamid II was too eager to prevent the establishment of the Zionist entity in Palestine. However, the truth reflects his real attitudes towards the Zionist project in Palestine, as they were completely the opposite; they rather contributed to its fall and loss.

Perhaps the most accurate description regarding the relationship between World Zionism and Ottoman Sultanate is that “it was not coincidental”. Its harbingers started since Turks received Jews in large numbers following their escape from Al- Andalus after its fall. They also received other immigrations from Eastern Europe and Russia, and made them settle with Turkish Jews in cities and several areas including Istanbul.

All this established a widely influential Jewish nationalism managed by Zionists inside the Ottoman Empire. It had political and economic impact that contributed later to implementing their plans with the help of the Sultanate to seize Palestine. The relationship between World Zionism and Ottoman Empire was not secret and Ottoman Empire did not fear or disregard it. Nevertheless, the propaganda released later tried to extinguish the flames caused by that relationship, especially the sale of Palestine by Ottomans for the benefit of the Zionist movement.

The leader of Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, said in his memoirs: “Sultan Abdul Hamid promised us of an independent Jewish state, in return for paying his debts”, as Ottoman Empire that was described as the sick man was experiencing its worst states and its treasury was bankrupt. Sultan Abdul Hamid had Herzl as his only option to be able to save his crumbling sultanate. He initiated secret negotiations and correspondences between them until they reached a formulation titled money for Palestine. Such negotiations lasted for eight years (1903 -1896), eventually, it resulted in establishing the state of Israel at the expense of historical Palestine.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of Zionist Movement, revealed in his memoirs that Abdul Hamid II has agreed to sell Palestine for money.

The relationship developed between the two Turkish and Jewish nationalisms as they found themselves in the middle of Arab surroundings. Their interests required cooperation so that such surrounding would not overwhelm both of them. The Sultanate and its government bodies treated Zionist Jews as allies, while they treated Arabs as enemies. This was clear when it gave Jews privileges and influence, and drew them closer; however, it besieged and distrusted Arabs.

Dr. Ahmed Noury Al- Nuaimi confirmed that the interests and attempts of Zionist movement towards Ottoman Sultans in order to establish their state in Palestine does not date back to the emergence of Zionist movement in Basel conference in (1897); it is rather an earlier date, especially after such interests became clear since Russian policy followed a new strategy against Jews in (1882). This does not mean that Zionist Jews did not have endeavors before that date too. After they had settled in Ottoman Empire when they were expelled from Spain, their efforts were focused on controlling vital fields in Ottoman Empire after a group of them converted to Islam and were known, later, as Donmeh Jews.

The efforts of Zionist Jews seeking to establish their alleged state in Palestine were very clear and were not secret as claimed by Ottomans, especially after receiving large numbers of Russian Jews. The Sultan issued a group of firmans to facilitate their life, and directly gave them Ottoman nationality. This meant that they became as equal as the Sultanate nationals so that they had the same rights which others had. This was reflected on the case of Palestine when the spreading social disorder of purchasing lands from local Palestinians in favor of Jews started. They were rather registered in the Ottoman land departments while any opposing laws were removed. This contributed to establishing colonies.

Such welcome and indulgence to Zionist Jews prompted them to pressure Ottoman Sultans to allow the direct immigration from Europe to Palestine, which happened later on. Simultaneously, Ottoman Empire issued firmans in favor of Jews which they exploited to increase their immigration to Palestine and establish Zionist colonies.

Unfortunately, Zionist penetration was very deep within the Sultanate side scenes. Immigrant Jews aimed at bribing Ottoman officials, especially in the Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem, and they paid to change laws. Meanwhile, Ottomans, especially Abdul Hamid II, exerted huge efforts to enable Jews to possess the historical Palestine, the most important of which was changing land ownership law so that it would allow Jews to have land ownership after they were forbidden from such action.

Historical resources indicate that changing the law of foreign ownership of lands was a result of the Ottoman Empire debts to Europe. They allowed it in hope that they would obtain money so Jews lavished money on them. In addition, European churches took an interest in purchasing large areas of lands. They also started increasing land prices in the regions of Jerusalem, Jaffa and Haifa in order to achieve maximum profits.

Fadwa Nuseirat, the researcher, indicated that Abdul Hamid II issued in (1887) a firman to form the Mutasarrifate of Jerusalem as he turned it into an administrative entity independent from the state of Syria whose governor was directly connected to the Sultan in Istanbul. All this was to facilitate making decisions that support Zionist project although Jewish presence was previously increasing.

All this made the relationship between Zionist movement and Ottoman court actually fruitful particularly regarding Palestinian lands. The mere individual efforts and scattered futile homes turned into organized efforts governed by laws issued to facilitate settlement, and money lavished to protect settlements and enable them to stand still in the face of the Arab surroundings.

Numbers of Jews in Palestine tripled during the reign of Abdul Hamid II, as asserted by Fadwa Nuseirat, after their numbers increased from 25 thousand in (1182) to 80 thousand in (1908). Their proportion to the population also multiplied from 5% to 11%. In (1909), they possessed more than 400 thousand dunams of the best and most fertile lands of Palestine; 275 thousand dunams of which were under the name of the famous Zionist Jew Rothschild who had a strong and personal friendship with Abdul Hamid. In that year, they established the city of Tel Aviv next to the city of Jaffa that later became Israel's capital.

The real, not fake, history is the evidence that Ottomans were never good custodians of lands and Islamic holy places. Instead of returning lands to their owners, they handed them to another occupier. Turks have given away what they did not possess for the benefit of those who did not deserve. Perhaps we should remember here how Ottomans ceded, for trivial interests, Libya to Italians; Algeria to French; and finally, Palestine for the favor of the Zionist movement which has built its dream state, the state of Israel, with the support and backup of Ottoman Sultans.

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