Beyond Hebrew: Zionism and the Politics of Multilingualism in Palestine, 1920-1948

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The promotion of modern Hebrew as a spoken vernacular is often viewed as a central accomplishment of the Zionist movement in Palestine before Israeli statehood. But by viewing twentieth-century history through the lens of language, author Liora Halperin questions the common narrative of a Zionist move away from multilingualism during the years following World War I. She demonstrates how Jews in Palestine remained connected by both preference and necessity to a world of languages outside the boundaries of the pro-Hebrew community even as many of them promoted Hebrew and achieved that language's dominance.

The story of language encounters in the Jewish community of Palestine is a fascinating tale of shifting power relationships, both locally and globally. Halperin's absorbing study explores how a young national community was compelled to modify demands for Hebrew exclusivity as it negotiated its relationships with its diverse Jewish population, Palestinian Arabs, the British, and others outside the margins of the national project and ultimately came to terms with the limitations of its influence and power in an interconnected world.

Liora R. Halperin is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and the Program in Jewish Studies and the holder of the Endowed Professorship in Israel/Palestine Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, where she has taught since 2013. Her research focuses on Jewish cultural history, Jewish-Arab relations in Ottoman and Mandate Palestine, language ideology and policy, and the politics surrounding nation formation in Palestine in the years leading up to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. She is also a member of the advisory board for CU's Archive of Post-Holocaust American Judaism, and affiliated faculty in Middle Eastern Studies at the CU Center for Asian Studies.

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