

***Filastin's* Changing Attitude toward Zionism before World War I**

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This article explores the evolution of attitudes toward Zionism expressed by the editors of the Jaffa-based newspaper *Filastin* in the first years of its publication, 1911–1914. During this short time span, the opinions published by the editors showed a profound metamorphosis. At the beginning, their stance could be described as cautious neutrality with a guardedly favorable perception of Zionist colonization. However, in the months leading to World War I, *Filastin* had become an unequivocally anti-Zionist newspaper that warned its readers about the political ambitions of the Zionists and the looming threat of losing Palestine to them.

The Young Turk Revolution of July 1908 ushered in the second constitutional period and led to profound changes in the Ottoman Empire in general and in Palestine in particular. Among the most important of these were the end of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II’s autocracy, reinstatement of the constitution, election of a new parliament, and lifting of censorship. Palestine witnessed a boom in newspaper publication. Whereas previously there were no private Arabic newspapers in Palestine, in the short period before World War I more than thirty Arabic periodicals were founded.¹ Among the most important and influential was the biweekly *Filastin*, published from the beginning of 1911 by the cousins ‘Isa al-‘Isa (owner and managing director) and Yusuf al-‘Isa (editor-in-chief) in Jaffa.² These Arab Orthodox Christians established the newspaper as an organ of the “Orthodox Renaissance,” among whose goals was the empowerment of the native Arab Christians in their struggle against the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, which monopolized the patriarchate of Jerusalem.³

Modern Jewish immigration to Palestine began at the turn of the 1880s and in 1897 the Zionist Organization was established at the

First Zionist Congress in Basel. By 1914, various Jewish individuals and organizations had purchased about 450 square kilometers of land for the foundation of almost fifty settlements.⁴ Arab responses to Zionist colonization became more vocal only after 1908, when periodical publications were established.⁵ It took several more years for anti-Zionism to become a widely held sentiment in Palestine and Greater Syria. By the beginning of 1911, the editorial line of several newspapers from Haifa, Beirut, and Damascus had become highly critical of Zionist colonization especially following the al-Fula Affair and al-Asfar Project.⁶

The Period of Positive Neutrality

Initially *Filastin*'s attitude toward Zionist colonization was cautiously favorable, grounded in the Ottomanist belief that the progress of inhabitants of the country regardless of their faith and country of origin meant progress for all. Yet over time the exclusivist nature of the Zionist project and specifically of the Second Aliyah became clear to the 'Isa cousins, first in the urban settings where they were familiar with it and subsequently in the rural areas as well. This led them increasingly to associate Zionism with danger, and to suppress all memory of what had previously been a more ambivalent than antagonistic relationship. Several scholars have pointed out *Filastin*'s changing position on Zionism, among them Neville Mandel, Khayriyya Qasimiyya, and Evelin Dierauff, but this is the first known attempt to analyze the changes that took place in *Filastin*'s discourse on Zionism during the second constitutional period of Ottoman rule.⁷

Unfortunately, the earliest issues of *Filastin* printed in the first half of 1911 are missing; the first issue extant is number 51, published on 15 July 1911. Soon thereafter an anti-Zionist article by Mustafa Tamr was published in the newspaper. However, the editors changed the original title submitted by the author "The Danger of the Zionist Colonization" (*Khatar al-isti'mar al-sahyuni*), removing the word "danger" (*khatar*).⁸ In the article, Tamr writes openly about the economic damage the Zionists would cause and their political ambitions: "they seek to establish their independent government."⁹

The article "An Example for Our Municipality and an Inquiry" (*Umthula li-baladiyyatina wa istifham*), published in the same issue, tells a story of two Arab vegetable vendors who were each fined a quarter of a *mecidiye* (a silver coin worth about twenty piasters) by the commission of the Jewish settlement of Rishon le-Zion for cheating on weights. It is written in a neutral manner. However, at the end the author wonders about the legal aspect of this procedure, asking, "To which box will go this fine, which is coming out of the pocket of the Ottomans in a country over which an Ottoman flag still flutters?"¹⁰ The following issue of the newspaper contained a critical response by a Zionist author to the article.¹¹ This is the first available example of a pattern that recurred in the periodical in the following period: whenever *Filastin* published information regarding Jewish settlements or Jews in Palestine which was somewhat critical, Jewish authors would respond to it, usually rather quickly, in the same newspaper. The editors

were very forthcoming to reactions from readers and published even those that were disapproving of the newspaper's content.

In August 1911, the newspaper reprinted the last two paragraphs of a long article, "Tourism in Palestine," written by Shukri al-'Asali, which had originally been featured in *al-Muqtabas* in Damascus. In the original piece Shukri al-'Asali refers to a treatise on Zionism in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* and talks unequivocally about political ambitions of the Zionists, mentioning "their efforts to establish a Jewish government in Palestine."¹² This part was not included in *Filastin*. In their comment, the editors paraphrase his words much more mildly and leave out Zionist political aspirations. They note only that Shukri al-'Asali sees in the Zionists "harm to his homeland."¹³

In mid-September 1911, the first of a series of disputes between supporters and opponents of Zionism commenced. Several such altercations occurred on the pages of *Filastin* in the years 1911–1912. The participants in this first acrimonious exchange were the Sephardi Zionist activist Shimon Moyal (Sham'un Muyal) and the Arab pharmacist Muhammad Amin Sahyun.¹⁴ It began when Moyal accused the Economic Commercial Company in Jaffa of having as its goal "to fight the Jews [*al-yahud*] and to plant hatred of them in the hearts of the inhabitants of the city and the villages and to incite them [the Jaffans and villagers] against them [Jews] in order to force them to leave this country."¹⁵ The editors, after being asked for details by someone with the penname "a free Ottoman," contended that "Doctor Moyal confused it [the company] with the Patriotic Party which has recently been formed in our city and this party has no relation to the company."¹⁶ Concerning the Ottoman Patriotic Party, "it is convinced that the Zionist colonization harms the country and wants to resist it."¹⁷ The next issue contains Moyal's response both to this article and to Yusuf al-'Isa's comment.¹⁸ The same issue also includes Sahyun's reply to Moyal's first article. With regard to the above-mentioned party, Sahyun explained that "a strong factor in its foundation was its members' perception and its founders' sense of an imminent danger to the country and a violent torrent that has come over it and has almost definitively destroyed its political and economic life: the Zionist Organization. This is the strongest motive for its establishment."¹⁹ However, he insisted that "the party opposes the Zionists specifically, not Israelites in general." He concluded his long piece with the following words: "we will oppose the Zionist Organization; it is our archenemy against which we desperately fight by just and lawful means."²⁰ After another round of discussion, in which Moyal accused his opponent of anti-Semitism (*'ada'uka li-l-yahud*), the newspaper ended the exchange.²¹

Clearly during this period, even though the newspaper facilitated a discussion of Zionism by contributors, the editors were unwilling to take sides in the debate and avoided their own examination of this issue as much as possible. Even when Yusuf al-'Isa treated the subject in passing in some of his editorials, he did so while discussing other topics and emphasized that it was not his objective to explore Zionism itself. In Yusuf al-'Isa's discussion of the practices pertaining to the Red Paper policy,²² he wrote: "We do not intend to go into the subject of Israelite immigration and colonization and to talk about its harm or benefit."²³ The purpose of this editorial was to inform

the authorities about foreign meddling in internal Ottoman affairs, since the Russian consul was disregarding proper procedure by bypassing the *qa'immaqam* (governor of the subdistrict) and dealing directly with a lower official in the port of Jaffa.²⁴

A piece published at the beginning of November 1911 sheds more light on the newspaper's policy vis-à-vis Zionism. *Filastin* received a letter from an author with the pen-name "a friend of justice" who wrote: "You say that you are neutral in the Israelite issue."²⁵ The response of the editors contains important information regarding the discussion of Zionism: "The reader has made a mistake when he mentioned that we opened the rubric 'From and To' concerning the Israelites, for we have opened it because of the Zionist issue so that the pens of the writers have sufficient space to criticize or commend the Zionist colonization."²⁶ The fact that the editors actively solicited the opinions of readers on these questions suggests that they were far from decided on the issue.

Based on textual analysis of the content of the newspaper, it seems that until the summer of 1912, the editors of *Filastin* did not consider Zionism either an economic or a political threat to Palestine. Moreover, in some cases, when they published writings of external authors, they evidently downplayed or omitted their remarks on the danger of Zionism or its political character.

From Neutrality to Criticism

Almost a year and a half after its inception, *Filastin* began to change its attitude toward Zionism. At the outset of this shift was the article "The Immigrants and the High Costs of Living," in which Yusuf al-'Isa discussed the reasons for increased living costs in his hometown. First he dealt with general causes and then proceeded to the particular situation in Jaffa: "We believe that the greatest reason for our hard contemporary life here is the continuous increase in the number of Israelite immigrants among us."²⁷ The author immediately emphasized that the goal of this report was not to attack the "Israelites" and said that "they have the right to live how they want and in any country they want."²⁸ He thought that the general increase in population was a positive development, but only if the immigrants integrated with the native population, which was not true of Jewish newcomers. "They are receiving two natural consequences of the population growth: I mean high living costs and increased earnings, while we are only facing one consequence and it is: high living costs."²⁹

The subsequent editorial "We Are Silent and They Make Us Speak" is crucial to understanding the thinking of Yusuf al-'Isa at this time regarding Jews in general and Zionist colonization in particular.³⁰ It responds to a harsh rejoinder by Abraham Ludvipol, head of the Press Bureau of the Palestine Office (the Jaffa branch of the Zionist Organization), to the earlier article on rising living costs.³¹ Yusuf al-'Isa included the translation of Ludvipol's letter, which refuted the allegations of Jews' economic exclusiveness and their boycott of non-Jewish shops and extolled the benefits brought to the natives by three settlements – Petah Tikva, Rehovot, and Rishon le-Zion – where

thousands of non-Jews were employed. In addition, he accused the editor-in-chief of being “filled with hatred of Jews and [that] this view of anti-Semitism follows him wherever he turns.”³² Yusuf al-‘Isa thought that the harshness of the response resulted from a mistranslation of his editorial:

We are not permeated with hatred of the Jewish race, as the author assumes, because we do not recognize and do not want to recognize the existence of a Jewish race [*al-‘unsur al-yahudi*]. We only acknowledge that there is an Israelite religion [*al-diyana al-isra‘iliyya*], which we honor and esteem . . . and that among the sons of this religion are those [who belong to] Turkish, Indian, Russian, and Arab races [*al-‘anasir*].³³

This quotation is key to understanding the perspective of the newspaper’s editors toward Jews and Zionism at that time. Clearly, in Yusuf al-‘Isa’s perception, Jews were adherents of Judaism from various racial and national origins. This offers a possible explanation as to why the editors did not attribute political and national ambitions to the Zionists. Then Yusuf al-‘Isa proceeded to the issue of economic exclusiveness. According to him, the two communities behaved differently: whereas the “Israelites” search for a shop of their coreligionist, the natives searched for the cheapest shop and did not care who its owner was. The editor-in-chief further revealed his ambivalence and even positive associations with Jewish immigration and colonization while also rejecting the notion of exclusivist Zionism in a passage that deserves quoting at length (with emphasis added):

We have laughed because the writer, like our other Jewish authors [*katabat al-yahud*], has used the usual spell and directed our attention to the “blue pearl” which they are accustomed to bringing as soon as you [start] talking about them, namely Dayran, Mulabbis, and ‘Uyun Qara [the Arabic names for Rehovot, Petah Tikva, and Rishon le-Zion] and the non-Israelite workers [employed] in them. We did not turn our attention to colonization in our writing, and if we wanted to go into it . . . we would have reminded them of the Yemeni Jews [*al-yahud al-yaman* (sic)] whom the organization collects in the markets of Jerusalem and sends every day by train to the settlement of ‘Artuf and others in spite of the abundance of native peasants there. But *we have said and continue to say that we do not believe Israelite colonization of our vast open country to be dangerous; no, we even see some benefits from it*, because the mutual embrace of the Israelites in the villages does not represent an obstacle to civilization. This is because the interest of every village is independent in itself and does not depend on the interest of the village next to it, unlike a city in which one group of inhabitants rises and forms a city within the city and the mutual benefit is lost and not [much] time will pass until the strong will destroy the existence of the weak . . . , the original inhabitants will be scattered and will leave for other countries. . .

In conclusion, our Israelite brothers will allow us to say that the vehemence of this sensitivity that overcomes them every time their name is mentioned in a civilizational matter makes a man doubt and think that there is something fishy. You should be content with our respect toward you as the adherents of a divine religion and not try to force us to consider you a secular race [‘*unsuran madaniyyan*] in spite of the diversity of languages, races, and citizenships of their members [*lughat, ajnas wa tabi‘iyyat afradihim*].³⁴

There is no doubt that the editors of *Filastin* were aware that many fellow journalists, writers, officials, and politicians were convinced of the political ambitions of the Zionists and the economic harmfulness of Zionism, and considered the movement a danger to Palestine and the Ottoman Empire. The question is why they did not share their view from the very beginning. There are likely several reasons. As mentioned above, among the most important was their conviction that being a Jew meant being a member of a religious group. Because of that and the fact that Jews originated in various states and spoke different languages, the editors did not think at that time that Jews constituted a separate race or nation. Furthermore, as declared in Yusuf al-‘Isa’s editorial, initially they considered Zionist colonization beneficial for the rural areas.³⁵ It seems that the editors were convinced that the positive example of the Jewish settlements and exposure to modern agricultural practices could help peasants in neighboring villages to learn from them and improve their lot. Here we can also find their motivation for cooperation with the Zionist agronomist Menashe Meirovitch in the series of seventeen “Letters from a Peasant” (*rasa’il fallah*) published in *Filastin* in 1911–1912.³⁶ Unlike Najib Nassar, editor of the Haifa-based newspaper *al-Karmil*, or Shukri al-‘Asali, *qa’immaqam* (subdistrict governor) of Nazareth and later a member of the Ottoman parliament, who were aware of the situation in the countryside due to their first-hand experience with Zionist land purchases and evictions of the peasants inhabiting them by the new owners, it seems that the ‘Isa cousins lacked this understanding as they were much more familiar with the urban environment.³⁷ This contention is supported by the editorial “We Are Silent and They Make Us Speak,” which indicates that the editors of *Filastin* first started to consider Zionist immigration damaging to the native urban population, and only later to the peasants.³⁸

Their delayed awakening to the dangers of Zionism, in contrast to Nassar and al-‘Asali, could also have been due to the differences in the progress of Jewish settlement expansion in previous years between the northern districts of Palestine and the Jerusalem mutasarrifate. From the beginning of the twentieth century, land purchases and new settlements were concentrated in the north, especially in the Galilee where, according to Rashid Khalidi, “twelve of the fifteen Jewish settlements established in Palestine between 1901 and 1912 were located.”³⁹ Ruppin gives slightly different numbers, but the overall picture is similar: According to him, no Jewish settlements were established in the Jerusalem mutasarrifate from 1897–1905. In the years 1899–1913, twelve Jewish colonies were set up on more than 95,000 dunums in the lower Galilee, where there were previously none. Another four were founded at that time around Haifa and in the Marj

ibn ‘Amir plain on almost 38,000 dunums. On the other hand, from 1906–1913, seven Jewish settlements were established in the Jerusalem mutasarrifate on 22,000 dunums, which was less than 17 percent of the size of the settlements in the *sanjaq* of Acre. Overall, the area purchased by Jews in the years 1881–1914 in the northern regions was almost three times larger than the area they acquired in the Jerusalem mutasarrifate.⁴⁰

These land purchases were often accompanied by the forced expulsion of Arab peasants. Two such prominent affairs took place in the first decade of the twentieth century in the Tiberias subdistrict and in al-Fula in the Nazareth subdistrict, which were both situated in the district of Acre where *al-Karmil* was published.⁴¹ In light of the fact that the Jerusalem mutasarrifate had not witnessed such high-profile cases in previous years and, moreover, the long-established Jewish settlements located there relied heavily on the Arab workforce, the different perspective of *Filastin*’s editors is understandable. One also has to bear in mind that the newspapers published in Palestine during the Ottoman period were, as Ya‘qub Yehoshua called them, “newspapers of the mutasarrifates” and primarily focused on the events that took place within their district.⁴² In addition, Jaffa was the seat of the Zionist Organization’s Palestine Office and in the city was a group of Ashkenazi and Sephardi activists dedicated to the propagation of the benefits of Zionist colonization for both Palestine and the Ottoman Empire.⁴³ Thus, contradictory information in this regard was widely disseminated, which people unfamiliar with the rural conditions and the Zionist movement might have had difficulty in discerning.

The seeds of doubt planted in the minds of the editors were substantiated in the second half of 1912 when several contentious issues arose and were discussed in the newspaper. Crucial among them were the admission of non-Jewish students to the Miqve Yisra’el (Netter) school, Shimon Moyal’s publication of articles under false identities in Arabic newspapers, and the Jarisha mills sale.

Miqve Yisra’el, an agricultural school founded in 1870 by Charles Netter, was part of the system of educational institutions run by the Alliance Israélite Universelle.⁴⁴ A heated discussion took place in the newspaper from August to October 1912 with regard to the school’s treatment of non-Jewish students. As stated in its founding imperial *firman* (decree), it was an Ottoman school and was therefore obliged to accept all Ottomans regardless of their faith, a requirement that, according to *Filastin*, was not observed.⁴⁵ Nissim Malul (a Sephardi Jew employed in the Press Bureau of the Palestine Office) entered this debate by publishing an article in the Beirut newspaper *al-Nasir* in which he denied that the school would not be accepting “non-Israelites”; on the contrary, it would welcome everyone. To prove his point, he brought up the names of eleven such students who had supposedly completed their studies at the school in recent years.⁴⁶ *Filastin* objected, claiming that the reality was completely different and only a very few non-Jewish students, mostly with fathers who were high-ranking officials or worked in the settlement, were admitted to study there.⁴⁷ One former student, Fayiz Effendi Haddad, sent a letter to the newspaper in which he shared with readers his experiences as well as those of his two Arab classmates. He claimed that they were only allowed to attend general subjects and were not permitted to study agriculture. Furthermore, he bitterly

complained about the contemptuous way they were treated by their Jewish schoolmates and teachers. His classmate Hilmi Ahmad, the son of Hafiz Bey al-Sa'id, the former deputy in the Ottoman parliament for the Jerusalem mutasarrifate, was dismissed from the school after two months of attendance.⁴⁸ Another Arab Palestinian, Muhammad 'Ali al-Tahir, a youth whom the director of the Netter school had refused to admit, also recounted his humiliating experience in the pages of *Filastin*.⁴⁹ This affair was different from the previous ones discussed in the newspaper. Not only did it last longer, for about two months, but even more importantly, the editors took active part in the discussions and did not hesitate to openly declare their critical position, unlike in the past, when they had restricted themselves to defensively justifying their handling of the subject.

This affair must have profoundly affected the editors of *Filastin* for two reasons. First, they considered modernization of agriculture crucial to improving the situation of the peasants and the predominantly rural society as a whole. The discriminatory admission policy of the Netter school could be interpreted as aimed at preventing the non-Jewish native population from gaining the necessary skills to advance their farming and enhance their situation. Another important lesson the editors and the readers of *Filastin* took from this and similar controversies was the realization that Zionist authors were engaged in a systematic campaign to concoct and distort the truth with regard to Zionism. Participants were not only Ashkenazim (like Ludvipol), but also Sephardim, some of them, like Malul and Moyal, at its forefront. In this particular case, the testimonies of both the former student and the unsuccessful applicant were unequivocal and confirmed the version provided by the newspaper's editors. In this light, it is not surprising that the "Letters from a Peasant" were discontinued at precisely the same time that this controversy arose. The editors might have arrived at the conclusion that Meirovitch was also engaged in whitewashing Zionist colonization. The timing of the termination of this long-established series with the Netter school affair is a further indication of the severe impact of the controversy.

The dispute with Ludvipol on rising living costs had aroused the suspicions of the editors, but the policy of the Netter school and the concomitant dispute opened their eyes and, after further episodes discussed below confirmed their suspicions, led to the abandonment of the newspaper's neutrality toward Zionism.

The deteriorating relationship was further underscored in December 1912 when *Filastin* printed a number of articles about a mysterious *walad mash'um* (sinister son), which very likely referred to Shimon Moyal. Even though Moyal's name is not mentioned in any of *Filastin*'s articles dealing with this matter, several indications point to him. In an article published in *Filastin* that month, Wahba Tamari wrote about a letter sent by "the sinister son" under the pseudonym Sab' Effendi al-Tayyib to the newspaper *al-Haqiqa*. He reproduced the text of this letter, at the end of which its author asked the editor-in-chief of *al-Haqiqa* to send him a few copies of the issue in which his article would be printed to the following address: "Sab' Effendi al-Tayyib in the Moyal agency, opposite the fish market."⁵⁰ Further, both Tamari (in his December 1912 article) and 'Isa al-'Isa (in his later memoirs) reference the latter's satirical poem on Moyal.⁵¹

In an editorial entitled “The Sinister Son,” Yusuf al-‘Isa described this individual’s activities in the following words: “This sinister son insisted on arousing the aversion of the native population toward his Israelite people. He made it his habit to sow seeds of hatred and stoke the fire of discord between Christians and Muslims.”⁵² The editor-in-chief also accused him of planting articles under false identities in various Arabic newspapers.⁵³ Yusuf al-‘Isa wrote that during the previous year every time the word “Israelite” was mentioned in the newspaper, the “sinister son” responded with provocations “claiming that he is the sole defender of this energetic religious community [*umma*] which is only marred by the existence of people like him among them.”⁵⁴ Yusuf al-‘Isa wrote this editorial because Moyal, under the pseudonym Muhammad Amin Midhat, published a letter in the Jerusalem newspaper *al-Nafir* calling for people to attack the premises of *Filastin*, destroy the printing equipment, and throw its editors in jail for their support of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Yusuf al-‘Isa pointed out the hypocrisy of the inciter, saying: “Nevertheless, we remember that the [person] indignant at us used to be in the center of the front row in every picture that was taken of the members of the [CUP] club. And he relished in marching under the Unionist emblem and sitting at the head of the people on every official holiday.”⁵⁵ At the end of this article, Yusuf al-‘Isa asked the Jewish community to dissociate themselves from this person to show that they did not agree with him.⁵⁶

In early December, *Filastin* reported about the planned purchase at auction of the Jarisha mills on al-‘Awja River by Yusuf Effendi Wafa, who was considered a Zionist middleman. The administrative council had discussed the sale behind closed doors. However, as the editors came to believe that this was a matter of public interest, they decided to publicize it so that the people would prevent the “transfer of the most significant vital resource in their country to the hands of others [*ghayrihim*] after a large part of its water had been taken away by the settlement of Mulabbis [Petah Tikva].”⁵⁷ One week later it reported joyfully that a petition had resulted in the administrative council changing its decision about the “necessity to buy the Jarisha and al-Farukhiyya river mills for the public interest.”⁵⁸ This was the first time that *Filastin* took a stand against a real estate transaction that would have resulted in an addition to Zionist properties. This was a significant shift, and from this point on *Filastin* began to see such property sales in a different light and started opposing them actively and even inducing the public and the authorities to take steps to prevent them.⁵⁹

Previously, the newspaper had discussed land sales to Zionists in a neutral manner as regular real estate transactions. In August 1911, for example, the newspaper treated the sale of Khur al-Wadi to the Zionists as an ordinary transaction, with no critical comment attached. It was described as a “profitable trade for the broker,” an unnamed prominent inhabitant of Jaffa, who was to buy the land from the Bedouin Shaykh Muhammad al-Faris and then sell it on with a profit of 66 percent. *Filastin*’s editors expressed no alarm at this imminent land sale in either of the two articles dealing with this matter at that time.⁶⁰ Even in September 1912, when the settlers from Petah Tikva installed a powerful (120 horsepower) pump on al-‘Awja River in order to water their plantations, *Filastin* had reported on it in a matter-of-fact way.⁶¹ Three months later, its position changed

and the editors clearly considered the sale of the Jarisha mills an economic threat to the native inhabitants of Jaffa.

From Criticism to Perceived Danger

From mid-1912, *Filastin's* editors began to consider Zionism an economic threat first to the urban and subsequently to the rural population of Palestine. Despite this considerable shift in their position, it seems that at this time they still did not consider Zionism an acute existential threat to the country and its native inhabitants. The second profound change in the newspaper's discourse on Zionism took place in the summer and autumn of 1913. This transformation was a likely result of several events which occurred at that time, the most consequential of which were the Zarnuqa incident, the controversy pertaining to the former private estates (*al-aradi al-mudawwara*) of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II, and the Eleventh Zionist Congress. The end of the Red Paper policy, whose aim had been to prevent Jewish immigration to Palestine, also has to be taken into account.⁶² Furthermore, the Balkan Wars that had recently ended, leading to the loss of almost all Ottoman possessions in Europe, fuelled the fears of some Palestinians that their country could meet a similar fate. These developments moved *Filastin* further into the anti-Zionist camp. Gradually, the editors started to consider Zionist immigration and colonization a grave political, demographic, and existential threat to the Arab Palestinians. The word danger or menace (*khatar*) in this context had previously been used sporadically and only by authors other than the editors in contributors' letters or articles republished from other newspapers. But beginning in summer 1913, this word began to appear regularly, starting with the articles dealing with the former private lands of the sultan.

The Zarnuqa incident was a massive clash on 23 July 1913 between armed guards of the Rehovot settlement and villagers of Zarnuqa, which ended with two people dead and several injured.⁶³ *Filastin* discussed it at length in about twenty articles. A few months earlier, at the end of April 1913, *Filastin* had sent a "special reporter" to Rehovot's annual parade. During his visit a military exhibition took place which made a strong impression on him: "Thereafter the sports began and it appeared to me that there was a very well organized and well trained regular army, because the military prowess [exhibited] in their physical exercises could not be executed any better."⁶⁴ Now this trained force was aiming its guns at the native rural population. A petition sent six days after the clash by a number of *mukhtars* and *imams* from the Gaza subdistrict to Istanbul accused the settlement guards of aggressive and contemptuous behavior toward the native peasants.⁶⁵

Filastin's editors had previously regarded Rehovot, along with Petah Tikva and Rishon le-Zion, as models of coexistence with Arab peasants. Zionist authors invoked the example of these three settlements as an illustration of the positive effects of Zionist colonization for the local population. Instead of such benefits, now the result was injury and death. This bloody incident apparently shattered the last illusions the editors might

have entertained about the long-term benefits of Zionist settlement for the surrounding native rural environment. One year previously, Yusuf al-‘Isa had considered every village to be a separate entity on its own, unconnected to its neighbors, but this incident proved him wrong. Again a Zionist author, this time David Moyal, appeared to present a contradictory narrative. In addition, fabricated stories accusing the peasants of acts of violence and brutality made their way into the foreign-language Ottoman press.⁶⁶

From June 1913 *Filastin* began to deal with another affair in which the Zionists were involved. Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II had acquired large estates throughout the Ottoman Empire including in Palestine during his long reign (1876–1909). These estates comprised a not insignificant portion (about 3 percent) of Palestine.⁶⁷ After the Young Turk Revolution, these lands were confiscated by the state. The attempt to purchase the former private estates of the sultan in Palestine unveiled to the editors the real scope of Zionist ambitions in Palestine and their determination to take their enterprise to a new level. Whereas previous purchases had involved individual plots whose size rarely exceeded 10,000 Ottoman dunums,⁶⁸ in this case a staggering 750,000–800,000 Ottoman dunums were at stake.⁶⁹ If the Zionists took hold of them, they would consolidate their autonomous presence in Palestine and would be able to exercise their activities on a much larger scale. The state within a state that they had already established in their settlements would encompass large contiguous areas and make further expansion much easier.⁷⁰ In the context of this affair, the word “danger” (*khatar*) began to be regularly used in connection with Zionism on the pages of *Filastin*.

Just as these controversies were cooling down in September 1913, the Eleventh Zionist Congress took place in Vienna. An article published in June 1914 indicates the congress’s impact on *Filastin*’s perspective vis-à-vis Zionism:

When the order to lift the suspension of the newspaper *Filastin* was given, the Eleventh Zionist Congress that convened in Vienna had already completed its sessions and we saw there the Zionists revealing what they had been holding their tongues about. This has frightened us as natives [*wataniyyin*] because of the congress’s connection to our country and its conspiracies against us. We began to translate what our eyes had seen and publicize to the general public what the Zionist designs toward us encompass and what subterfuge they entertain for our country because we believed that not to publish that would be a crime on our part [for] which our conscience would not forgive us.⁷¹

The editors and other authors perceived that two opposite trends were taking place: many natives were leaving Palestine, while the Jewish population was growing rapidly.⁷² Several articles dealt with the number of Jews living in Palestine and estimates were reprinted from Egyptian and European newspapers. Ibrahim Salim Najjar, correspondent and agent of *al-Ahram*, gave the highest estimate, in 1914 calculating the number of Jews in Palestine to be 300,000 (between one-quarter and one-third of the population).⁷³ These estimates substantiated concerns about the potential demographic threat of

Zionism.⁷⁴ Articles reporting the continual arrival of ships with Jewish immigrants might have been seen as a confirmation of the ongoing trends.⁷⁵

It is remarkable that, even though *Filastin* began its sustained anti-Zionist campaign only in the second half of 1913, from that time on it treated it as a long-standing policy, as if projecting this approach across the whole existence of the newspaper. Already in October 1913 Yusuf al-'Isa said: "Everyone who follows what this newspaper writes knows that we have spared no effort in the criticism of the Israelites as a religious community [*umma*] isolated from the rest of the communities, and in the fight against those among them we identify as Zionists, a group setting its sights on our physical destruction and our moral subjugation in this Palestinian land [*buq'a*]."⁷⁶ Another example, from the introduction of an article discussing the May 1914 trial against the newspaper,⁷⁷ begins as follows: "The newspaper *Filastin* has since its establishment continued to emphasize the Zionist danger for the country and to warn the people [*al-ahlin*] about it and to alert the natives [*al-wataniyyin*] to what threatens their existence."⁷⁸ Similarly, in his memoirs 'Isa al-'Isa does not mention *Filastin*'s somewhat positive attitude toward Zionism during the first year and a half of its existence.⁷⁹

All the events discussed above caused considerable alarm and represent a watershed in *Filastin*'s coverage of Zionism. The use of the word "danger" (*khatar*) in the context of Zionist colonization is another indication of the editors' changed attitude. Until summer 1913 it occurred only a few times, and almost exclusively in articles written by contributors. When Yusuf al-'Isa mentioned it in his editorial in mid-1912, he did so to counter the assertion that Zionism posed a danger.⁸⁰ This term began to appear regularly from the summer of 1913, initially in articles dealing with the proposed sale of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II's former private estates.⁸¹ From the end of 1913 and throughout 1914 more than three dozen articles published in *Filastin* mentioned or discussed the danger that Zionism posed for the native inhabitants of Palestine.

The Transformation of Terminology

The second transformation in the editors' perceptions of Zionism that took place in the second half of 1913 is confirmed by a change in the terminology they used regarding Jews; this shift in vocabulary supports the previous findings and provides a corroborative argument. During the first two years of *Filastin*'s existence, the editors considered Jews in religious terms and employed almost exclusively the term "Israelites" (*isra'iliyyun*) to identify the Jewish population. During this initial period, they only rarely used the term "Jews" (*yahud*), which they understood as denoting the non-religious categories of race and nation. Many of the contributors and correspondents of *Filastin*, however, were using a terminology that was different from the vocabulary of the editors. Several authors, among them Mustafa Tamr, Rashid Abu Khadra, and an anonymous "*isra'ili 'uthmani*" (Israelite Ottoman), used the term "Jews" (*yahud*) in their writings in *Filastin* in the years 1911–1912.⁸²

As the editors, under the impact of events in the summer and autumn of 1913, arrived at the conclusion that Zionism was indeed a political movement striving to carve out an autonomous entity for Jews in Palestine, they began to use the term “Jews” (*yahud*) alongside the previously employed “Israelites” (*isra’iliyyun*). The former did not supersede the latter, but by 1914 it had become used slightly more often. The editors’ employment of the term *yahud* can be seen as a manifestation of their changed perception of Jews, since it took place simultaneously with the transformation of their view of the Zionist movement. No longer perceived in purely religious terms as “Israelites,” a layer of Jewish national identity was added. Thus, in the eyes of the editors they also became “Jews” in national terms. This change, occurring over a relatively short period, is thus observable not only in the content of the newspaper, but also in its language.

As this article has shown, in the four years of its pre–World War I existence, *Filastin*’s perspective vis-à-vis Zionism went through a radical transformation. Initially, its editors adopted a neutral attitude while considering Zionism potentially beneficial for the rural areas of Palestine. In the following years, their attitudes changed in two phases and by the end of 1913 *Filastin* became, alongside *al-Karmil*, the most outspoken anti-Zionist periodical in Palestine.

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Endnotes

- 1 Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 58–61.
- 2 For more information on *Filastin* and its editors, see Ya‘qub Yehoshua, *Tarikh al-sahafa al-‘arabiyya fi Filastin fi al-‘ahd al-‘uthmani (1908–1918)* [The History of the Arabic Press in Palestine in the Ottoman Era (1908–1918)] (Jerusalem: Matba‘at al-ma‘arif, 1974), 116–120; Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 90–104; Noha Tadros Khalaf, *Les Mémoires de ‘Issa al-‘Issa: Journaliste et intellectuel Palestinien (1878–1950)* (Paris: Karthala – Institut Magreb-Europe, 2009); Emanuel Beška, *From Ambivalence to Hostility: The Arabic Newspaper Filastin and Zionism, 1911–1914* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2016).
- 3 Yusuf al-Hakim, *Suriya wa al-‘ahd al-‘uthmani* [Syria and the Ottoman Period] (Beirut: al-Matba‘a al-kathulikiyya, 1966), 196.
- 4 Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), 270; Yossi Katz, “Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882–1914,” *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1–2 (1988): 65.
- 5 Emanuel Beška, “Responses of Prominent Arabs towards Zionist Aspirations and Colonization prior to 1908,” *Asian and African Studies* 16, no. 1 (2007): 22–44.
- 6 Both these events took place in 1910. The al-Fula affair concerned a sale of the village of al-Fula to the Jewish National Fund and involved displacement of its Arab Palestinian inhabitants. The person behind al-Asfar Project was Najib Ibrahim al-Asfar, a Lebanese landlord, who sought to buy the former private estates of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid II in Greater Syria. It

- was (incorrectly) assumed that he was a Zionist front man. For more information about these affairs, see Emanuel Beška, “Political Opposition to Zionism in Palestine and Greater Syria: A Turning Point,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 55–58.
- 7 Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 128; Khayriyya Qasimiyya, *Al-nashat al-sahyuni fi al-sharq al-‘arabi wa sadahu, 1908–1918* [Zionist Activities in the Arab East and Their Echo, 1908–1914] (Beirut: Munazzamat al-tahrir al-filastiniyya, markaz al-abhath, 1973), 115 note 95; Evelin Dierauff, “Global Migration into Late Ottoman Jaffa as Reflected in the Arab-Palestinian Newspaper *Filastin* (1911–1913),” in *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality, and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880–1940*, ed. Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh, and Avner Wishnitzer (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 166.
 - 8 The original title is mentioned in the introductory comment to the article written by the editors.
 - 9 *Filastin*, 22 July 1911, 2.
 - 10 *Filastin*, 22 July 1911, 3.
 - 11 *Filastin*, 26 July 1911, 1.
 - 12 *al-Muqtabas*, 11 August 1911, 1. For an analysis of this article, see Emanuel Beška, “Shukri al-‘Asali, an Extraordinary Anti-Zionist Activist,” *Asian and African Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 250–52. The Jewish Encyclopedia article cited was: Richard Gottheil, “Zionism,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Ktav, 1905), vol. 12, 666–686. Najib Nassar published an abridged translation of the article into Arabic in 1911. For a discussion of the translation, see Emanuel Beška, “Arabic Translations of Writings on Zionism Published in Palestine before the First World War,” *Asian and African Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 156–161; Jonathan M. Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 90–91.
 - 13 *Filastin*, 19 August 1911, 1–2.
 - 14 This dispute is examined by Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism*, 122–23.
 - 15 *Filastin*, 16 September 1911, 2.
 - 16 *Filastin*, 16 September 1911, 2. The “free Ottoman” translated the article which had been published in the Hebrew newspaper *ha-Herut* and sent it to *Filastin* together with his inquiring commentary. The first known sign of the Ottoman Patriotic Party’s existence is an open letter it published in *Filastin* in May 1911 concerning the debate on Zionism that took place the same month in the Ottoman parliament. It included warnings of the Zionist danger. See Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 121–22.
 - 17 *Filastin*, 16 September 1911, 2.
 - 18 Moyal mentioned him as the author of *Filastin*’s comment, *Filastin*, 20 September 1911, 2.
 - 19 *Filastin*, 20 September 1911, 2.
 - 20 *Filastin*, 20 September 1911, 3.
 - 21 *Filastin*, 23 September 1911, 2–3.
 - 22 The Red Paper (Slip) Policy, introduced in 1901, obliged all Jewish visitors to exchange their passports on their arrival to Palestine for a document called the Red Paper [*al-waraqa al-hamra*] which allowed them to stay in the country for a period of three months.
 - 23 *Filastin*, 16 September 1911, 1.
 - 24 *Filastin*, 16 September 1911, 1.
 - 25 *Filastin*, 4 November 1911, 2. It is noteworthy that the editors did not contradict his words.
 - 26 The unsettled terminology and often synonymous use of the terms “Zionist” and “Israelite” by the editors led to this confusion. *Filastin*, 4 November 1911, 2.
 - 27 *Filastin*, 29 May 1912, 1.
 - 28 *Filastin*, 29 May 1912, 1.
 - 29 *Filastin*, 29 May 1912, 1.
 - 30 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1–2.
 - 31 Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors*, 196.
 - 32 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1.
 - 33 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1.
 - 34 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1–2. In this passage the editor-in-chief twice employs the term *yahud* rather than *isra’iliyyin*, apparently by mistake.
 - 35 Jacob Norris discusses the perception and utilization of European Jews as agents of development by colonial powers at the turn of the twentieth century. This presumption was not limited to European governments, as the Ottoman government also “frequently encouraged Jews to resettle in areas where rapid economic development was desired.” Jacob Norris, *Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development, 1905–1948* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 63–98, quote at 76. The attitude of *Filastin*’s editors to Zionist colonisation might have been influenced by this consideration.
 - 36 For an analysis of the “Letters from a Peasant,” see Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani, “‘Impossible is Not Ottoman’: Menashe Meirovitch, ‘Isa

- al-‘Isa, and Imperial Citizenship in Palestine,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 241–262; Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani, “Unlikely Identities: Abu Ibrahim and the Politics of Possibility in Late Ottoman Palestine,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 63–64 (2015): 24–39; Dierauff, “Global Migration,” 169–170.
- 37 Salim Tamari, “Issa al Issa’s Unorthodox Orthodoxy: Banned in Jerusalem, Permitted in Jaffa,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 31.
- 38 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1.
- 39 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 110.
- 40 Arthur Ruppin, *Syrien als Wirtschaftsgebiet* (Berlin: Verlag Benjamin Harz, 1920), 111–13.
- 41 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 100–111; Beška, “Shukri al-‘Asali,” 241–47; Neville Barbour, *Nisi Dominus: A Survey of the Palestine Controversy* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1969), 116–17.
- 42 Yehoshua, *Tarikh al-sahafa*, 16.
- 43 Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors*, 11, 126–130.
- 44 Michael Graetz and Jane Todd, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 251.
- 45 *Filastin*, 10 August 1912, 3. For the Arabic translation of the *firman*, see *Filastin*, 2 October 1912, 1–2.
- 46 The editors included some passages from this article in the editorial, *Filastin*, 4 September 1912, 1.
- 47 *Filastin*, 4 September 1912, 1.
- 48 *Filastin*, 4 September 1912, 1; *Filastin*, 11 September 1912, 2.
- 49 *Filastin*, 25 September 1912, 2–3.
- 50 *Filastin*, 18 December 1912, 4.
- 51 The author of the poem, which was published anonymously, is not identified in Wahba Tamari’s article. In ‘Isa al-‘Isa’s memoirs, Moyal’s name is explicitly mentioned. Salim Tamari included the English translation of the poem in his article. In Khalaf’s translation, the text of the poem is missing. *Filastin*, 18 December 1912, 4; Tamari, “Issa al Issa’s Unorthodox Orthodoxy,” 29–30; Khalaf, *Les Mémoires de ‘Issa al-‘Issa*, 140–41.
- 52 *Filastin*, 7 December 1912, 1.
- 53 *Filastin*, 7 December 1912, 1.
- 54 *Filastin*, 7 December 1912, 1.
- 55 *Filastin*, 7 December 1912, 1.
- 56 *Filastin*, 7 December 1912, 1.
- 57 *Filastin*, 4 December 1912, 3.
- 58 *Filastin*, 11 December 1912, 3.
- 59 Two months later, the newspaper took pride in the role it played in calling the attention of the government to this issue. *Filastin*, 22 February 1913, 3; *Filastin*, 26 February 1913, 3.
- 60 *Filastin*, 23 August 1911, 3; *Filastin*, 26 August 1911, 3.
- 61 *Filastin*, 14 September 1912, 3.
- 62 *Filastin*, 2 August 1913, 3.
- 63 For more details on this incident, see Yuval Ben-Bassat and Gur Alroey, “The Zionist-Arab Incident of Zarnuqa 1913: A Chronicle and Several Methodological Remarks,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 5 (2016): 787–803; Beška, *From Ambivalence to Hostility*, 96–100.
- 64 *Filastin*, 3 May 1913, 3.
- 65 Louis Andrew Fishman, “Palestine Revisited: Reassessing the Jewish and Arab National Movements, 1908–1914” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2007), 58–61; Yuval Ben-Bassat, “Rural Reactions to Zionist Activity before and after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 as Reflected in Petitions to Istanbul,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 49, no. 3 (2013): 357–58; Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 169–170, 223–25.
- 66 *Filastin*, 13 August 1913, 3; *Filastin*, 27 August 1913, 2.
- 67 Fischel and Kark have shown that ‘Abd al-Hamid II acted methodically and with patience in order to form large estates. Roy S. Fischel and Ruth Kark, *Sultan Abdülhamid II and Palestine: Private Lands and Imperial Policy*, *New Perspectives on Turkey* 39 (2008): 129, 132–35, 137–38; Ruth Kark, “Consequences of the Ottoman Land Law: Agrarian and Privatization Processes in Palestine, 1858–1918,” in *Marginalization, Globalization, and Regional and Local Response*, ed. Raghbir Chand (New Delhi, forthcoming), 5.
- 68 See, for example: *Filastin*, 26 August 1911, 3; *Filastin*, 28 August 1912, 3; *Filastin*, 27 November 1912, 3. One Ottoman dunum equals 919.3 square meters.
- 69 *Filastin*, 19 July 1913, 4; *Filastin*, 30 July 1913, 1.
- 70 *Filastin*, 19 July 1913, 4.
- 71 *Filastin*, 6 June 1914, 7. The quote refers to the first suspension of *Filastin* by the Ottoman authorities that occurred in November–December 1913 and was caused by *Filastin*’s criticism of the Greek Orthodox patriarchate. It seems that it took some time until details of the Zionist Congress’s deliberations reached the newspaper’s editors, since the articles published during and immediately after the congress did

- not specifically discuss political ambitions of the Zionists.
- 72 *Filastin*, 15 October 1913, 1; *Filastin*, 6 June 1914, 3; *Filastin*, 6 June 1914, 6.
- 73 According to his long report republished from *al-Ahram*, there were 180,000 Jews in the Jerusalem mutasarrifate and 120,000 in the districts of Nablus and Acre. *Filastin*, 6 June 1914, 3.
- 74 Louis Fishman has pointed out the importance of this perception. Fishman, “Palestine Revisited,” 24–25.
- 75 According to the following article, two hundred Jewish immigrants arrived in the port of Jaffa weekly on board Russian and Austrian steamers. *Filastin*, 1 July 1914, 5. Another column reported on the arrival of 250 immigrants on a Russian ship and 50 more brought by an Austrian steamer. *Filastin*, 11 July 1914, 5.
- 76 *Filastin*, 25 October 1913, 1.
- 77 For a discussion of *Filastin*’s second suspension and the trial of its owner, see Beška, *From Ambivalence to Hostility*, 67–74. For an analysis of ‘Isa al-‘Isa’s speech at the trial, see “‘Īsā al-‘Īsā’s Defence Speech at the May 1914 Trial in Jaffa,” in *Studia orientalia Victori Krupa dedicata*, ed. Martina Bucková and Anna Rácová (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2016), 27–36.
- 78 *Filastin*, 6 June 1914, 7. Emphasis added. The trial took place during *Filastin*’s second suspension, which lasted for seven weeks from mid-April until the beginning of June 1914, and was prompted by a column written by ‘Isa al-‘Isa that dealt with the Zionist newspaper *Sawt al-‘Uthmaniyya*.
- 79 Khalaf, *Les Mémoires*, 135.
- 80 *Filastin*, 5 June 1912, 1.
- 81 *Filastin*, 12 July 1913, 1; *Filastin*, 19 July 1913, 4; *Filastin*, 30 July 1913, 1–2; *Filastin*, 9 August 1913, 1–2; *Filastin*, 9 August 1913, 3.
- 82 See *Filastin*, 22 July 1911, 2; *Filastin*, 28 October 1911, 3; *Filastin*, 7 February 1912, 4.