

# ***Falastin* versus the British Mandate and Zionism (1921-1931): Between a Rock and a Hard Place**

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*The injunction to remember risks being heard as an invitation addressed to memory to short-circuit the work of history. For my part, I am all the more attentive to this danger as this book is a plea on behalf of memory as the womb of history...*

Paul Ricoeur<sup>1</sup>

This study<sup>2</sup> attempts to shed light on the career of the newspaper *Falastin* during the first decade of the British Mandate (1921–1931) by looking at the relevant historical content in two bodies of work by the Palestinian journalist ‘Issa al-‘Issa: his memoirs and his newspaper, *Falastin*. Since the history of the newspaper itself reflects the major political developments of this period, it is necessary to outline the main elements constituting the contemporary political background.

## ***Min dhikrayat al-madi* (Memoirs)<sup>3</sup>**

*Min dhikrayat al-madi*, literally “memories from the past”, is the title given to his memoirs by ‘Issa al-‘Issa, who founded the newspaper *Falastin* in Jaffa in 1911.<sup>4</sup> The author recorded these remembrances in the last years of his life, after leaving Jaffa, basing them on his recollection of what he considered to be some of the crucial events and stories of his life.

In *L’autobiographie*<sup>5</sup> the French writer Miraux distinguishes between the different forms and genres of autobiographical writing, variously called notebooks, diaries, memoirs, chronicles, souvenirs or reminiscences. He regarded memoirs as a form of recollection distinguished by the freedom and selectivity it allows the writer. While the memoirist’s

purpose is close to that of the autobiographical writer, his project is different in that it does not require him to recount everything. Naturally the memoirist is writing about himself, but he may choose to write about some and not all events, relationships, or encounters with public personalities. The memoirist can select, summarize, or ignore events he had witnessed. He cannot be blamed for not delving very deeply in his writing project, or if he chooses to remain vague about certain areas. The only expectation is that he avoid mixing memory with imagination, or fact with fiction, and that he establish a certain measure of credibility with the reader.

One may safely say that 'Issa al-'Issa's hitherto unpublished manuscript exhibits all the features Miraux ascribes to memoirs, particularly since he makes the disclaimer that they are not meant as a historical record. Thus it becomes necessary to refer to the information contained in the newspaper *Falastin* in order to reconstruct a more complete historical picture.

In his memoirs al-'Issa reveals most aspects of his life, particularly during those periods when *Falastin* was not being published. He relates some events that befell him before the paper was launched, and during periods when it was suspended or its publication otherwise interrupted, as during his exile in Turkey, or when he was in the service of King Faisal.

'Issa al-'Issa devoted only thirteen of the seventy-six pages of his memoirs to the nearly sixteen years of the Mandate period during which he was in Jaffa. This period extended from 1921, the year of his return from Damascus, to 1937-1938, when he left Palestine for Lebanon. The thirteen pages are divided into twenty-two sections.

The brevity with which he treated every subject and issue, each seeming to constitute a certain aspect of his life, reveals the urgency with which the author was completing his memoirs during the latter part of his life. It also confirms the need to re-examine the career of the newspaper *Falastin* in order to complement the author's impressions in a manner allowing a more accurate evaluation of the real political role that both he and his paper played. It may be added that in his memoirs al-'Issa makes certain disclosures and confessions that are doubtless offered to explain his ultimate political marginalization, away from his hometown.

## **The Crucial Period, 1914 – 1922**

Historians view the years between 1914 and 1922 as a crucial period in the general history of the Middle East. "Creating the Modern Middle East 1914 – 1922" is the subtitle David Fromkin chose for his book *A Peace to End All Peace*<sup>6</sup>, while the French historian Nadine Picaudou called hers "the decade that shook the Middle East"<sup>7</sup>. The drafting of the fateful Balfour Declaration came in 1917, in the midst of this crucial period.

The British Mandate period, which began during these historic years in 1920 and ended in 1948, is considered to be one of the most complicated phases of Palestine's history. It is difficult to find anything comparable in the history of colonialism,

since normally there are only two conflicting sides: the foreign colonizing power in confrontation with the indigenous population of the country. Palestine presents a unique case in that conflicts on the political arena branched out in multiple directions. This was due to interlocking struggles between three main parties: British colonialism, represented by the British Mandate authorities; the Zionist movement, embodied in various political trends with clear strategic goals; and the third party, the Arab population of Palestine, which was beginning to form the nucleus of a nationalist political movement defined by its resistance to the two alien forces colluding against them.

## **The Balfour Declaration**

The Balfour Declaration provides the main background to the subsequent conflicts among the three political entities. This document determined the existence of the three parties on the actual political arena of Palestine, literally defining them as follows: The British government is “His Majesty’s Government”; the Zionist Federation is represented as “the Jewish people”; while the Arabs of Palestine are dismissively called “the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

According to this declaration the first party undertook to facilitate “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” at the expense of the indigenous population.

However we may try to simplify the meaning of this document, which today appears to some to be a hackneyed slogan, the fact remains that every word in it, whether large or small, offers a wide scope for analysis.

According to J.M.N. Jeffries,<sup>8</sup> the document had “travelled back and forth, within England or over the Ocean, to be scrutinized by some two score draftsmen” and “was a pronouncement which was weighed to the last penny-weight before it was issued” despite its “sham character and deceptive phraseology.”<sup>9</sup>

Nahum Sokolov, a Zionist leader confirmed that “every idea born in London was tested by the Zionist Organization in America, and every suggestion in America received the most careful attention in London,”<sup>10</sup> while Rabbi Wise admitted that the Balfour Declaration was in process of making for nearly two years.”<sup>11</sup>

After it was officially adopted on the 2 November 1917, the Balfour Declaration reached the general public a week later, on 9 November, “it was given forth, of course, under the guise of an entirely British communication embodying an entirely British conception.”<sup>12</sup> John Marlowe, writes that although the Declaration “was explained to the Sherif of Mecca in a message,”<sup>13</sup> yet “it was decided by General Allenby that the Declaration would not be officially published in Palestine (it was not in fact officially published in Palestine until May 1920). One reason for this decision probably was that Allenby had received no guidance from the British Government about their precise intentions regarding the implementation of the Balfour Declaration.”<sup>14</sup>

## The British Mandate and al-‘Issa’s return from exile

According to Bernard Wasserstein, “British rule in Palestine formally began on 11 December 1917, when General Allenby made his official entry through the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem on foot.”<sup>15</sup> The military campaign ended in August 1918, and military rule was terminated in 1920 when General Bols handed over power to the first civil governor High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel, a Jew and ardent Zionist. This controversial appointment is believed to have been brought about by Zionist pressure and Haim Weizmann himself.

At the start of the Mandate the founder of the newspaper *Falastin* was returning from exile in Anatolia, a banishment of two years imposed on him in 1916 by the Ottoman governor. He writes of that time in his memoirs:

After the defeat of the Ottoman army and the entry of the English forces into Irbid I knew nothing of what was happening in the war other than what I would read in the newspapers and magazines I got from soldiers. There I happened to see the Balfour Declaration, and that was the first I heard of it.<sup>16</sup>

When al-‘Issa learnt that Emir Faysal’s army was encamped at Dir‘a he went there to meet him. The emir asked him to join his staff after his army’s entry into Damascus, and al-‘Issa duly joined him there on 10 October 1918, Arab forces having entered Damascus on the first of the month.

In his memoirs al-‘Issa recounts some of the important events he witnessed during the period he remained in the emir’s employment. This ended in July 1920, when French forces entered Damascus and Faisal, who by then had become king of Greater Syria, left the city.

Al-‘Issa relates how he was the last to vacate the palace after King Faisal left it, as he had been charged with the task of handing over the palace to the French. He then tried to return to Jaffa in Palestine to revive the newspaper *Falastin* that he had founded in 1911 and published there until its suspension in 1914 because of the First World War.

“A few days after the French came,” al-‘Issa writes,

I went to the English commissioner’s house ... to ask him for a permit to travel to Palestine. His response was, “I am sorry t have to tell you that you and your cousin are on the black list and cannot return to Palestine.” I was thunderstruck by those words. I could not believe what I was hearing and thought he must be joking, but he confirmed what he had said. “Is this how you reward one who shunned the Turks and the Germans,” I asked, “and championed the Allies’ cause in his paper, suffering conviction and exile? Not to mention that I was recently in the service of His Majesty King Faisal, who was absolutely loyal to you.” But my words were to no avail. My cousin

and I remained blacklisted and barred from returning to our homeland... now that it had become a Zionist homeland.<sup>17</sup>

Thus al-‘Issa had to establish another newspaper in Damascus, called *Alef Ba’*, in partnership with his cousin Yousef al-‘Issa. But he made another attempt to return to Jaffa:

I recalled that I had an English friend in Jaffa, the city’s governor Colonel Stirling<sup>18</sup>, whom I used to teach Arabic while I was working for Emir Faisal. I wrote to him concerning my return, and also to Omar Effendi al-Bittar and ‘Assem Bey al-Sa‘id, both of whom had become his friends. They worked together to elicit an order from the High Commissioner Sir Herbert Samuel allowing me to return. I did so, while my cousin Yousef remained in Damascus to publish *Alef Ba’*.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Falastin* during the Mandate**

Once the authorization to return was obtained, al-‘Issa returned to Jaffa in 1921 and applied for a permit to publish his newspaper:

...this was refused at first, but Colonel Sterling interceded with the British High Commissioner who finally did grant me permission to publish the paper. When informing me of this decision, the Colonel told me, “I am now responsible to the High Commissioner for everything that you write, so I ask you to avoid printing anything that might earn me his censure.”<sup>20</sup>

The first issue of the post-war *Falastin* appeared on 6 March 1921. The front-page editorial made this statement:

This issue marks the fifth year of publication of our paper, ten years after its official debut. It was published for only four years, and then was banned for the next six. We hope that our work will faithfully serve the nation, gain the confidence of our readers, and meet the expectations of the honorable citizenry.<sup>21</sup>

Under the subtitle “An old speech and a new declaration”, the editor explained that:

This paper was banned from appearing to its friends and readers for six years, for reasons that you all know. The most important was our exile during the war, and then the order forbidding our return after the end of hostilities [...] We have now returned, and observed that the land is no longer what it was, the people have changed, and the government has been

replaced. Palestine, which suffered from the stranglehold and repression of the Turks, in fact preferred the Allies, and trusted them. But those Allies turned around, invaded the country and raped it. They preferred another people over its people, taking their side, supporting them, and trusting in their loyalty. We had realized that Palestine, with sister Syria, was a bone in Turkey's gullet, and had, once the war ended, begged and pleaded with the Allies to defend its cause and foil the plots of its enemies so that good would triumph over evil, progress would prevail over savagery, and the weak countries would finally get their share of liberty and independence. That was what Palestine demanded, in recompense for its endurance, and especially in light of Wilson's principles and the position of the Allies and their leaders. The damage that the Turks inflicted on this land, in the form of torture, famine, expulsion, exile, murder, and crucifixion, far exceeds what other Turkish provinces had to endure.

We were shocked to see that the Allies did not recognize Palestinian suffering, did not acknowledge its sacrifices, and literally ignored its cause, condemning it to become a national homeland for a powerful foreign group who fought against the impoverished sons of this land and sought to deprive them of the right to life. Palestine feared that the Turks would sell off this land like merchandise to the Zionists, for money that Turkey so badly needed. That was why Palestine wanted to get rid of the Sultanate. Turkey wanted to get rid of Palestine because it felt that the country would eventually break away from it anyway, given the spirit of independence and the principles of liberty that had taken root there, especially in the decentralization movement. But Turkey did not carry out this policy for fear of Christian public opinion and the feelings of the Islamic world.

So, Christian Europe, led by Great Britain, friend of Muslims and country of tradition, arrived to make a gift of Palestine to the Zionists, as Balfour had promised, seconded by the Allies!<sup>22</sup>

*Falastin* now appeared three times a week instead of two, and ran to six pages instead of four.

Colonel Sterling, having intervened to allow publication of the paper, now had to assume the role of censor. In his memoirs, 'Issa al-'Issa wrote:

The military governor, Colonel Stirling, summoned me several times to inform me of criticisms he had received from the Administration about what I had written. He considered himself responsible for my actions. I finally got fed up with this. "Colonel," I said, "I chose this policy before the Balfour Declaration, and it is now impossible for me not to continue along the same path with even greater determination than before. So let me fulfill my national duty, and you do your job. You can suspend publication of the paper or bring charges against it and I won't hold it against you". He replied:

“Don’t you know that the order barring your return to Palestine was due to your campaign against Zionism, and that it was the Zionists who opposed your return? So, don’t harm yourself any further.”

I said that I had suspected as much, but still it was not possible for me to leave the path I had chosen. After that day, the government and the Zionists both renewed their efforts against me, and I suffered one lawsuit after the other: sometimes I was declared innocent, other times I had to pay fines.<sup>23</sup>

Later, ‘Issa al-‘Issa recounted that, on some important social occasion, he had to appear before the British High Commissioner, Herbert Samuel, on the insistence of the military governor:

The High Commissioner rose to greet me, shook my hand then said, “I read your paper with a lot of interest but without pleasure. Won’t you make a truce with me, and end your campaign?”

“Is Sir Herbert Samuel speaking to me as a Zionist leader, or as the High Commissioner?” I asked.

“As High Commissioner and as leader,” he replied.

I then asked, “Are you asking for a truce from a defender or an attacker?”

“From an attacker, of course,” he replied.

I answered, “I am only defending the rights of my country in the face of a Zionist attack, so how can you ask me to be silent?”

“You are indiscriminately spreading around any and all kinds of Zionist pronouncements. If you weren’t publishing these things, we wouldn’t have the tension that exists in the country,” he said.<sup>24</sup>

The 30 March 1921 issue of *Falastin* included an editorial on the occasion of Churchill’s visit to Palestine, called “To My People” and signed by Yousef al-‘Issa:

Although Mr. Churchill will be in Palestine the day that these lines will be published, the words of this minister are not and will never be the last concerning the Palestinian national question. No. It is not right for Mr. Churchill to present himself as the final dose of poison to be administered to a sick person hovering between life and death.

If, as has been stated, the aim of Mr. Churchill’s visit is to make the nationalists believe that the Balfour Declaration was written by God on two stone tablets in the Sinai, then he should know that this is a fiction we have already heard, and a ploy that we have seen through since the beginning of the occupation. So, there is no need for Mr. Churchill to go to all this trouble, and experience all the exhaustion and stress of traveling so long to come to a Christian city, just in order to announce this news from the top of Mount Zion.<sup>25</sup>

Two months after the paper resumed publication, an editorial explained its policies and the obstacles it was encountering:

This is the situation of the newspaper: barely two months after its reappearance, a complaint was filed against it, and it was banned twice. This time, the paper made no immoderate statements, though it did publish the facts as viewed from its nationalist perspective. But the Zionists continued to view the paper as an insurmountable obstacle to their plans and interests. They plotted both secretly and overtly to extinguish its flame and silence its voice so they can implement their program unimpeded [...] What we ask of the mandatory government, now and in the future, is to be assured of the loyalty of this paper; not to fall into the traps laid by its enemies, especially if the government's intentions are good vis-à-vis the Palestinian people who place all their confidence in them; and to be content with applying official censorship only, turning a deaf ear to the thousands of reports written by Zionist observers, who monitor every word and sigh we utter. This would be more conducive to fairness, and less like bias.<sup>26</sup>

During the events of 1921, the mandatory government banned the publication of the paper not only because of its criticism of government policy, but also to prevent the circulation of information concerning what was taking place in Jaffa. In May 1921, in an act of defiance, the paper's editor published three issues under the masthead of another paper, *al-Akhbar*.

With the reappearance of *Falastin* in 1921 a plan was unveiled and preparations made to publish an English edition. Many factors, particularly the departure of Shibli al-Jamal<sup>27</sup>, who was supposed to manage the project, contributed to a long delay, so that the first English edition did not appear until nine years later, on 16 September 1929.

Starting in 1925, efforts were also launched to form a public company with a capital of 5,000 Palestinian pounds, so that the paper would become the property of the nation and not of a single person or region. Those efforts did not succeed.<sup>28</sup>

The editorial published by *Falastin* on 17 February 1926, "Our Tenth Year," pointed out that the paper was only beginning its tenth year of publication, although it had been inaugurated fifteen years earlier. The editorial continued:

*Falastin* will remain, as it has always been, a free paper, directed only by the conscience of its owner, defending justice and criticizing injustice wherever they occur. It will only follow what it considers to be the general interest of the country.<sup>29</sup>

An editorial in its issue of 7 to 20 August 1926 said that holding a national congress would be positive and useful, and explained the importance of publishing an English-language edition of the paper:



If we were happy to note the desire to convene the congress, which we consider an indication of the nation's concern for its future, we are made even happier by what we have heard and continue to hear from a number of leaders, thinkers, men of letters, and opinion-makers, about the need for the country to have an English-language paper which would reflect its desires, and serve as its voice and defender of its rights. So, we now say that it is the right time to publish this paper and launch a new appeal to the nation to join us in this vital project. Without an English paper no one will hear us because, in our Arabic papers, our voices will not carry beyond our own ears. [...] We now declare that we are ready to publish an English-language magazine on a weekly basis, which will be the same size as the Zionist magazine, *The Palestine Weekly*. We have in our print shops everything needed to do this. Furthermore, we have engaged a competent editor-in-chief from among our compatriots. He returned recently to the country after having brilliantly earned a degree in journalism from an English university. We have decided to underwrite half the cost of producing this magazine, if the nation would support us and cover the other half. This can be achieved if 60 people would contribute 10 pounds, or if 120 people would give 5 pounds each. We have, moreover, published in our last issue a sampling of the articles we would like to include, and we are sure that those who know English appreciated both their style and content. The opportunity is here, and we must seize it. We are committed to making many sacrifices, so you must give us your support.<sup>30</sup>

In the same issue the editorial "Everything in its Time: the National Congress, and the English Edition", declared:

Before today we never saw such fervor for holding a national congress to study the conditions in which the country finds itself, and all the developments that are taking place. We think this is the result of a general anxiety about the dangers that all classes in the nation are dreading. Property-owners fear for their possessions, farmers for their harvests, businessmen for their concerns, factory owners and small manufacturers for their products, and employees for their jobs!

We believed in the past and we continue to believe that the period of stagnation the country has suffered because of internal divisions created by the multiplicity of political parties will not last long – especially when these parties and their leaders come to see that these divisions led them to losing what they had rather than to fulfilling their ambitions, and when they realize instead what gains solidarity and unity of thought and action can bring.

Fortunately this period seems to have ended and the convening of a national congress now seems certain, following the consensus noted in the preparatory committee's decisions. Such a consensus was impossible earlier

because of the opposition of certain leaders. But what displeases us is the presence in the country, especially in the north, of a group that continues to think that the national question is already a lost cause. For this reason they don't share in its defense, and refuse to contribute a penny to the cause, or to give a minute of their time to thinking about it. This is not due to intelligence, or to a gift given by God to them alone. It is because of certain interests they fear will be lost if the nationalists gain some of their rights and succeed in preventing the flood of Zionist immigration. That would lead to a depression in the price of land and the end of a lucrative real estate market. It is probable that the previous presence of Mr. Symes as governor of that region [the north] and the current term of Mr. Abramson are the principal reasons for the suppression, or banning, of the national spirit there.

But it will not be long before this group will realize its error and see, as others have done, that their personal interests cannot be separated from the public good. They will be obliged to support their brothers in their struggle and go forward with them shoulder to shoulder in order to live as free men and not as strangers and slaves. All these matters depend on the time factor.<sup>31</sup>

In 1929, the Indian Muslim writer Akhter became the editor of the English-language paper, supervised by 'Issa al-'Issa and assisted by 'Azmi al-Nashashibi. This paper was published for three years only. The last issue, the thirty-ninth, appeared on 28 May 1932. This English-language edition was distributed free of charge to all members of the British parliament in order to explain the Palestinian problem to them, defend the Arab point of view and refute Zionist arguments. It was quickly appreciated in European press circles. The Zionists themselves recognized that it became the only organ advocating for the Arab cause abroad.<sup>32</sup>

'Issa al-'Issa described the importance of this English paper in his memoirs,:

The English-language paper *Falastin* contributed the most to propaganda for the Palestinian cause.

The British High Commissioner at that time, I think he was named Wauchope, didn't wait for the paper to be delivered to him, but went himself to get it at the Sa'id Bookstore so he could read it as soon as possible.

The editor-in-chief of the paper, who worked under my guidance, was a great Indian writer named Akhter, an Oxford graduate.

When the Hope Simpson Commission arrived in Palestine to make its report, the Jewish papers were saying that all the information in that report had been previously published in *Falastin*, while others even claimed that the report had been written and edited in the paper's offices.<sup>33</sup>

In 1929, *Falastin* went to eight pages, and in the first editorial, "*Falastin* in its new era, our contribution to the *nahda* [revival] of the press," 'Issa al-'Issa wrote:

Starting with the next edition, our paper will have eight pages and will appear three times a week, as promised [...] In writing these words, we feel much pain because the time for *Falastin* to be transformed into a daily paper has not yet arrived, despite the fact that it is now the most widely-read paper. The Jewish minority publishes three weekly papers in Hebrew in addition to two English-language papers, *Palestine Weekly* and *Palestine Bulletin*, as well as several other weekly and monthly magazines. We are really pained because *Falastin*, until now, does not come out daily – and this for a reason that has to be stated: the Palestinian people do not yet appreciate the need for a daily paper, unlike the Iraqis, Syrians and Lebanese, even though the Palestinians’ level of development is neither lower nor higher than that of their brothers.<sup>34</sup>

In June 1930, the government once again banned the publication of the paper for sixteen days.

*Falastin*, in all the legal actions brought against it, and in this latest suspension, is only one among many victims of Zionism. This is a result of its tenacity and courageous defense of a violated country. The government suspended publication of the paper because it published an Arabic translation of an article that had appeared in *Douar Hayom* ten days earlier. It was only when *Falastin* decided to respond in Arabic to the arguments in that article, two days after its publication in Arabic, in order to refute all the false rumors that it contained, that the government took notice and demanded that the journal (*Douar Hayom*) stop publication. In order to protect the Jews from an angry reaction, the government decided to suspend two other papers, one Christian and one Muslim, so that it would appear that justice prevails among all religious faiths, and no one would accuse the government of bias. But it is precisely through such acts that the government reveals that it is in fact taking sides.<sup>35</sup>

During one of the many periods it was banned, *Falastin* was published under the name of *al-Sirat al-mustaqim*, whose owner was ‘Abdallah al-Qalqili. An article that appeared on 21 November 1930 in *al-Sirat al-mustaqim* explained the reason *Falastin* had been suspended:

The government ordered the closure of our sister publication, *Falastin*, for an indeterminate period, because of an article published on 11 November, with the title “The Arabs of Palestine: Between Collaboration and Non-Collaboration.” Looking over this article, we saw that it didn’t contain anything very different from what had been appearing in other Arab papers, ever since they realized that the Jews might influence the British government and compel them to abandon the policy outlined in their new White Paper.

This article merely warned the government that the Arabs would reverse their policy of cooperation into non-cooperation should the government look away from the plain truth. We note here that the Jewish paper *Palestine Bulletin* pressured the government to act against *Falastin* mere/ a few hours before the order to stop publication was issued [...] and the strangest thing of all is that the government suspended all the papers in accordance with a well-established strategy from which it never deviates: each time it orders the suspension of a Jewish paper, it feels obliged to do the same thing with an Arab paper, with or without reason, and these suspensions must be applied to all papers in turn. It was now *Falastin's* turn, since *al-Hayat* and *al-Jami' al-'arabiyya* had already been suspended this time round. It is hard to know what to think of a government that fears the Jews to such a degree that it cannot suspend a rebel paper such as *Douar Hayom* without simultaneously stopping a pro-peace paper like *Falastin*, even though the latter was the first to support cooperation with the government prior to the new policy. What can one think except that this government is good for absolutely nothing as long as it is gripped by fear of the Jews.<sup>36</sup>

In the editorial “The issues of the day: 1) Promoting the Fella (Peasant-farmer)” which appeared in *Falastin* on 4 February 1931, the author showed that:

...the Palestinian problem in its totality is “the peasant-farmer problem”, and it is the duty of all loyal patriots to think about how to solve it. Sir John Hope Simpson<sup>37</sup> and Mr. Starkland recognized the poverty and misery of the Palestinian peasant, just as the Johnson-Crosby<sup>38</sup> report did. [...] But to this day, none of the recommendations made in these reports have been adopted by the government, despite the urgency of the situation.<sup>39</sup>

In the 18 March 1931 issue of *Falastin*, the editorial “During the ‘Forced Vacation’: a Word on the Suspension of the Paper” asks,

Why was *Falastin* suspended? That’s the question everyone asked when the paper did not appear. Everyone heard the answer repeated orally at first; then it appeared in the local Arab and Jewish press, based on reports in Egyptian and Syrian papers. From those stories one could see that the news *Falastin* published that caused its suspension actually spread faster and further than if the government had not stopped the paper. One has to wonder whether the logical conclusion to be drawn is that the government ordered the ban precisely to disseminate this information. Is this a policy? Is there any wisdom or far-sightedness in such governmental measures? The answer is plain. But, let’s leave that aside for a moment, and look at the issue from another angle: *Falastin* is the only paper to have been materially harmed by this suspension, as is the case each time it is banned, and it has – thank

God – been banned too many times to count.

Did the government, therefore, by its ban, want to inflict material punishment on us? That is to say, did it want to sink us directly, by its perverse administrative methods – before we could appeal to the courts and decisively settle the issue in a manner that would have to be respected by all, including the government? When the police referred us to the judicial system, we were then cleared of the charge and declared innocent by a judge who recognized that what we had published was guileless and well-intentioned... We felt confident then, and could proudly claim that the judiciary is the only power in our devastated country capable of being fair and supporting us. All Palestinians must know that it is the government that committed a crime against us by suspending our publication and inflicting high losses... This is not the first administrative blow we receive, nor the first time that we have to go to court and are declared innocent, or not guilty. But what we would like to inform the government is that we are prepared to bear all this attrition and oppression with patience, and that the entire world will continue to detect in us no trace of defeatism or slackness in defending the rights of the country... come what may.<sup>40</sup>

On 6 May 1931, the condition of the Palestinian *fellah* [peasant farmer] is once again discussed in the editorial “The *Fellah* Question,” which incorporated a letter addressed to ‘Issa al-‘Issa. It came from a certain ‘Aref Sa‘id al-Hassan of Jenin, who wrote:

Do you know that the government is considering the future of the tithe? It is this tax that causes land to pass into Zionist hands. Those who know the condition of the *fellah* cannot keep quiet concerning his miserable situation, which is beyond human endurance. These taxes burden the *fellah* with mounting debt until it drives him to despair. The government pressures him, ultimately forcing him to sell his land with no regret, because after having been the source of his livelihood, his land becomes a crushing burden. I believe that sustained support for this important part of the populace would be more beneficial to the national cause than traveling to London to negotiate with these unjust men who destroy humanity while pretending to save it.<sup>41</sup>

The writer of this letter then asked the paper to make the issue its top priority. In response the paper referred to all the articles previously published on this matter, mentioning that other letters had been received on the same subject from several Palestinian regions, including al Khalil (Hebron) and Bir el Sabe‘ (Beersheba), and concluded by saying:

But what can we say to the British authorities? We will tell them nothing. But this letter is enough for them to see that their blind submission to Zionism

has made the Arabs perceive them as “unjust men who destroy humanity while pretending to save it”.<sup>42</sup>

## ***Falastin* and the Zionist movement**

The confrontation with Zionism was one of the most frequently treated topics in *Falastin*, which never missed a chance to expose Zionist policy and practice. These were discovered through the assiduous and sustained reading of all the foreign papers by a number of qualified correspondents.

In its edition of 13-26 October 1926, the editorial “Jabotinsky’s Speech” analyzed the role of the various Zionist parties:

If the methods and strategies of Zionist parties differ, their aim remains the same: the establishment of a Jewish national home in this Arab country... Most of the leaders of the Zionist movement have declared that a return of Israeli rule in Palestine would provide “a land without a people for a people without a land”, after having used false propaganda to deceive the world into believing that Palestine after the war had neither sovereignty nor people... Israel Zangwill<sup>43</sup> went even further, arguing that the doors of Jewish hospitals should be closed to the Arabs of Palestine; that soup should not be offered to their poor to avoid prolonging their lives and helping them propagate; and that it was necessary to harass them so they’d return to the Arabian peninsula, their land of origin.<sup>44</sup>

The uproar such declarations sparked in Arab clubs and associations, the revolts that subsequently broke out in Jerusalem and in Jaffa, the persistent monitoring by *Falastin* of all that was being published in any language concerning Zionist aims and ambitions, and the alarms the paper sounded to the Arab public, led to new developments:

Dr. Weizmann, the president of the Zionist Organization, and its Executive Council, which he chairs, adopted a program that on the surface appeared to lean towards moderation, but which was really based on covert action, greater caution in public declarations, and the pretense of being at peace with Palestinians and wanting to cooperate with them for the good of the country... But Jabotinsky, one of the members of the Executive Council, the rebel of Jerusalem, disapproved of this strategy and broke with the Executive Council and its chairman arguing that deceiving Arabs would entail deceiving Jews as well, since the Jew who desires to return to the Kingdom of Israel will not contribute to achieving this aim if Jews are not in exclusive possession of this realm, sharing it with no one else.<sup>45</sup>

Jabotinsky, who had been barred from Jerusalem, went on to form the Revisionist Zionist Party that would continue to grow and openly declared its animosity toward Dr. Weizmann. *Falastin* reproduced the speech delivered by Jabotinsky to an audience of 6,000 people in Jerusalem:

There are rumors I know will reach government headquarters on the Mount of Olives as well as at Whitehall in London that within the Zionist movement there is an extremist faction preaching hate of our Arab neighbors and a lack of confidence in the Mandatory government. I don't want today either to defend this party or to deny the rumors about it. On the contrary, my words are more a critique than a defense. It would be good for us and for the government to know exactly what the real Zionist tendencies are... And to understand revisionist Zionism properly, it is necessary to clarify one single point: the Jews did not come to develop Palestine to have it become a country no different from any which they knew in the diaspora, where they were only a small minority. And, if they are compelled to be a minority in Palestine also, then it would be no different than all the other countries where they were dispersed, and would not be worth all this trouble. The Mandatory government would not have needed to anger our Semitic neighbors if it were merely to establish one more paradise in addition to the more than 77 that Jews have across the world. The aim of Jews ...is clearly to establish a strong national home in Palestine, where they will constitute the majority, not the minority. And this is not only the opinion of extremists but also of each and every Zionist, including those who pretend to deny it.<sup>46</sup>

Five years later, on 3 January 1931, the editorial "The Trial of Great Britain" stated that:

The Jews know, as we all know perfectly well, that political Zionism is dead. Weizmann himself had to admit it, because when he declared that Zionism had for its aim the establishment of a bi-national state in Palestine, most of the Jews were in disagreement, and they will not support him if he nominates himself for another term as chairman of the next Zionist Congress. That is patently clear already.<sup>47</sup>

The writer of the editorial then opines that the success of Jabotinsky would be desirable, because Great Britain, which supported Weizmann's policy for ten years, would not support Jabotinsky's for one day. The Arabs who were fooled by the words of Weizmann and his party will not for one minute be taken in by the revisionist Zionists who openly declare the abominable goals they intend to achieve by force. In addition, Jabotinsky had just proclaimed that Great Britain ought to be tried for dishonorably breaking faith:

You made us a promise that you have not kept. Examine your consciences. They will tell you that you didn't promise us a small ghetto in an Arab country – you promised to liberate an entire country for us. You have turned this promise into a farce. You should therefore bring to justice the responsible officials, even if they are English.<sup>48</sup>

The editorial further claims that if the revisionists were to lead the Zionist movement, “we would encounter our declared enemies rather than face adversaries who clandestinely wage a secret war against us while pretending to be our friends”.<sup>49</sup>

A *Falastin* editorial of 22 January 1931, “Zionist Propaganda Takes Advantage of Arabs”, noted the Zionist propaganda strategy that was spreading as far as India:

As soon as India began to express sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs *Ha'aretz*, one of the organs of the Zionist Executive Council, expressed the opinion that its propaganda should not be limited to the West and America, but should extend to the Far East, and to India in particular. Their argument was that Easterners sympathizing with Palestinian Arabs would withdraw their support and give it instead to the Zionists as soon as they understood the truth.[...] The day before yesterday we reported that Dr. Haim Weizmann appealed to Jews in India to spread Zionist propaganda in their communities so they would only sympathize with Zionist aspirations in future. We also reported that Dr. Stephen Weis and Mr. Robert Zold, two American Jews, have called on world Jewry to explain to all around them the truth about the “just” Jewish aspirations, and, to warn that the Jewish national homeland is in crisis, and that the Jews of the world must save it by propagandizing to gentiles around the world about the Zionist mission.<sup>50</sup>

According to this editorial's analysis, propaganda seeking to explain the aims of Zionism would only unveil its true nature thereby losing friends rather than gaining them. This would happen despite new Zionist themes, such as the claim that they love the Arabs. The editorial comments mockingly on this claim:

The world has never known and will never know such love, where the lover uses all means at his disposal to destroy the object of his love as quickly as possible.<sup>51</sup>

More than once *Falastin* exposed the collusion of all Jewish parties to ensure their control of Palestine.

On 11 February 1931, *Falastin* noted Jabotinsky's absence from the 9 February session of the Jewish Community Council in Jerusalem, during which

... a member of the Zionist Revisionist Party took the floor to declare that a fellow member of the Council was absent because the government had



barred him from entering the country – ignoring his “diplomatic immunity” – and that the barred member was none other than Jabotinsky. A great uproar ensued, with calls for the Council to pass a resolution to complain. This, resulted in the following statement: “The Council has resolved to file a general complaint from the Jews of Palestine against the barring of any Jew from entry into Palestine, whether he be a member of the Jewish parliament or not...” This first resolution of the new Council demanded the admission not only of the rebel Jabotinsky but of any Jew wishing to enter Palestine!<sup>52</sup>

On 12 February 1931, an editorial with three sub-headings analyzed and criticized the program of the Jewish Workers Party:

This party is the majority party in the Jewish Community Council elected by all the Jews of Palestine, and yesterday we published the agenda that they continue to defend within the Council. As our readers would have surely noticed, theirs is a strange agenda indeed. They call for the convening of an Arab-Jewish congress, but then impose conditions that seem more like a declaration of war than an appeal for unity and peace ... This party speaks of the need to annul the White Paper, despite the small benefit the document gives the Arabs! [...] They advocate for the replacement of the current system of government with a system wherein the native inhabitants of the country would be equal in all things with the foreign community of Jews [...] and conclude that the Palestinian Arabs should not run their own country, because it's unthinkable that one people should control another. This invalidates the Jewish claim to control the entire country! Next the party declares in total frankness, by way of elucidating its aims, that it could not accept the Legislative Council proposed in the White Paper, but would not refuse another council where the number of Jews would be equal to the number of Arabs. It would be better for this stupid party to look for some people besides the Palestinians with whom to convene an Arab-Jewish congress.<sup>53</sup>

It is possible to conclude from the material surveyed in this study that the Palestinians were fully aware of all the methods the Mandatory Government employed to serve the Zionist cause – methods that plainly revealed the British bias towards Zionism. This awareness was achieved through various means, the reports published in *Falastin* possibly being one of the most effective. Additionally, and despite the various means used by differing trends within Zionism to claim internal differences, moderation, affection for the Arabs and demands for collaboration with them, Zionist stratagems were exposed for what they were on the pages of *Falastin*, where they were refuted with facts and documents.

Looking at the course taken by *Falastin* at the end of 1931 and beginning of 1932, the final months of the period under study, it becomes evident that a certain measure of hope and optimism was entering into the paper's editorials concerning the

possibility of countering and defeating Zionist propaganda. Was this due to more effort being put into raising international awareness of the dangers of Zionism? Such efforts were manifest in the launching of an English edition of *Falastin* aimed at publicizing the Palestinian cause by countering Zionist falsehoods with the truth, as well as in the attempt to upgrade *Falastin* into an Arabic journal vying with others to become the entire Arab nation's major paper through publishing illustrated weekly issues. One such was the special issue of 1 December 1932 that included articles by a large number of renowned Arab intellectuals and writers centering on Arab cultural unity and the development of the Arab press.

Ironically, all efforts at advancement and development by *Falastin* failed by the end of the 1930s when the situation in Palestine lapsed into chaos and confusion, allowing Zionist strategies to fulfill their aims by 1948 through the establishment of the Zionist state and the uprooting of the Palestinian population.

Was it only the strength of the Zionist movement and the perversion of British colonial policies that led to such a debacle, despite Palestinian awareness of their aims? Or were there other factors weakening Palestinian resistance by dissipating efforts – in large part through plunging Palestinians into internal conflicts oftentimes caused by rivalries between the different political factions that lead to a process of disintegration and disunity, all to the benefit of Zionism?

These are basic questions that are still puzzling historians and intellectuals. The answers will require collaborative efforts at shedding light on the past in order to better understand the present. As the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said has aptly observed, “Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions – about influence, about blame and judgment, about present actualities and future priorities.”<sup>54</sup>

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#### Endnotes

- 1 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 87.
- 2 This paper is a revised version of chapter 4, “*Falastin* et le mandat” in Part II, “Le Journal *Falastin*: un combat pour la liberté,” of Noha Tadros Khalaf’s *Les mémoires de 'Issa al- 'Issa:*

*journaliste et intellectuel palestinien (1878-1950)*, (Paris: Karthala, 2009). The paper is based on an English translation by Marian Houk of the original chapter.

- 3 'Issa al-'Issa, *Min dhikrayat al-madi* (Memoirs). Unpublished manuscript in family archives.
- 4 *Falastin* was transferred from Jaffa to Jerusalem after 1948, and continued to be published until 1967.

- 5 Jean Philippe Miraux, *L'autobiographie: écriture de soi et sincérité*, (Paris: Nathan, 1966) 13-14.
- 6 David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914 – 1922* (London: Penguin Books, 1989), title-page.
- 7 Nadine Picaudou, *La Décennie qui Ébranla la Moyen Orient: 1914 – 1923*, (Bruxelles: Éditions complexes, 1991), title-page.
- 8 Joseph Mary Negel Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1939). See Chapter IX of this distinguished work, “Analysis of the Balfour Declaration – Its sham character and deceptive phraseology,” pp, 172-185.
- 9 Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality*, 172.
- 10 Nahum Sokolov((1861-1936)is a Polish-born Jewish writer and Zionist leader recounted those facts in his *History of Zionism* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919).
- 11 Rabbi Wise took part in the negotiations that preceded the public announcement of the Declaration.
- 12 Jeffries, *Palestine: The Reality*, 174.
- 13 John Marlowe, *The Seat of Pilate: an account of the Palestine Mandate* (London: The Cresset Press, 1959), 27.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Bernard Wasserstein, *The British in Palestine: the Mandatory Government and the Arab Jewish Conflict, 1917 – 1929*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1.
- 16 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs), section 37, “Emir Faysal ‘s Army at Dera‘a.”
- 17 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs), section 46, “The Return to the Homeland.”
- 18 Colonel Walter Francis Stirling (1880-1958) was a British staff officer, working under T.E. Lawrence. He was appointed counselor to Emir Faysal in Damascus(1918-1919), and then Governor of Jaffa between 1919 and 1923. In 1953 he published a book entitled *Safety Last* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1953).
- 19 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs), section 45, “The Newspaper Alef Ba’.”
- 20 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs) section 47, “The reappearance of the Newspaper *Falastin*.”
- 21 *Falastin*, 6 March 1921.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs) section 47, “The reappearance of the Newspaper *Falastin*.”
- 24 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs), section 49, “My Meeting with the British High Commissioner.”
- 25 *Falastin*, 21 March 1921.
- 26 *Falastin*, May 1921.
- 27 Shibli al-Jamal, a Protestant from Jerusalem, was elected Secretary of the first Palestinian delegation to the Fourth Palestine Congress held in 1921.
- 28 Qustandi Shomali, *Fihras al-nusus al adabiyya fi jaridat Falastin , 1911-1967*, 3 vols., (Jerusalem: Arab studies Society, 1990), vol 1, p.72.
- 29 *Falastin*, 17 February to 2 March 1926.
- 30 *Falastin*, 7 to 20 August 1926.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Shomali, *op. cit*, p. 72-73.
- 33 al-‘Issa, Min dhikrayat al-madi (Memoirs), section 58, “Some Observations on the Political Situation.” See also footnote 37 about the Hope Simpson report.
- 34 Shomali, *op.cit*, p. 64-65
- 35 *Falastin*, June 1930.
- 36 *Al-Sirat al-mustaqim*, 21 November 1930.
- 37 Hope Simpson (1868-1961) was the author of the report on the employment of Arab workers, according to which “the population of Palestine is very affected by the conditions in which the different Jewish organizations seize, sell, and rent Arab lands.” The report further states that “the result of the purchase of land in Palestine by the Jewish National Fund has been that land has been extraterritorialised. It ceases to be land from which the Arab can gain any advantage either now or at any time in the future. Not only can he never hope to lease or to cultivate it, but, by the stringent provisions of the lease of the Jewish National Fund, he is deprived for ever from employment on that land.”
- 38 In 1930, the Johnson-Crosby commission estimated that “The peasants, in fact...were the most heavily taxed group in Palestine...the policy pursued by the government clearly aimed at placing the peasant in an economic situation that would ensure the establishment of a Jewish national home.”
- 39 *Falastin*, 4 February 1931.
- 40 *Falastin*, 18 March 1931.
- 41 *Falastin*, 6 May 1931.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Israel Zangwill (January 21, 1864 - August 1, 1926) was a British humorist and writer. “Israel Zangwill,” Wikipedia, accessed February 9, 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel\\_Zangwill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Zangwill)
- 44 *Falastin*, 13-26 October 1926
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 *Falastin*, 3 January 1931.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 *Falastin*, 22 January 1931.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 *Falastin*, 11 February 1931.
- 53 *Falastin*, 12 February 1931.
- 54 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993)

He was caught between a rock and a hard place. If he accepted the offer, he would have to work long hours with low pay, if he didn't, he would lose his livelihood. Our company was caught between a rock and a hard place. If we made the deal, we would make a monetary loss and if we didn't, we would lose our reputation. They are both my brothers! I can't go against either of them. I am stuck between a rock and a hard place. Origin: This phrase originated in USA in the early 1900s. Several other phrases having the same meaning also exist in many cultures. This phrase was used during