

Polemikos 'Isa al-'Isa and Printing Class: Too Much Borrowing?

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Printing Class: 'Isa al-'Isa, Filastin, and the Textual Construction of National Identity, 1911-1931. R. Michael Bracy, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2010. 172 pages.



The main objective of R. Michael Bracy's book is the analysis of the formation and development of Palestinian identity during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The major sources on which his research is purportedly based are contemporary issues of the newspaper *Falastin*. There are very few scholarly works on 'Isa al-'Isa and *Falastin*. Most recently an important biography of him appeared in French, *Les mémoires de 'Issa al-'Issa* by Noha Tadros Khalaf (Institut Maghreb-Europe, Paris 2009).^{*} For this reason this book is a welcome addition to this subject. Unfortunately the book is marred by serious problems.

Printing Class consists of six parts. The introductory chapter provides the readers with basic information about the newspaper, its usual content, central and recurring themes as well as about its two owners and editors 'Isa al-'Isa and Yusuf al-'Isa. Great attention is given to an outline of nationalism in general and Arab nationalism in particular.

The second chapter covers an extensive number of issues. The early life of 'Isa al-'Isa and the start of his journalistic career are described, followed by a detailed discussion of a very important issue – “Orthodox matters” – concerning the situation within the Orthodox church in Palestine at the turn of the twentieth century. The importance of this issue lies in the fact that this was the catalyst that led 'Isa al-'Isa to found *Falastin*. Again,

^{*} *Editor's note:* See Noha Tadros Khalaf, “*Falastin* versus the British Mandate and Zionism (1921-1931): Between a Rock and a Hard Place,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 45 (Spring 2011): 6-24. *JQ* here uses the colloquial spelling *Falastin* (rather than the more literary/classical *Filastin*) for the title of al-'Isa's Jaffa newspaper, except where the latter occurs in quoted passages. This seems to accord with the publisher's preference, as can be seen from the masthead of the Arabic edition.

a sizable section of this chapter deals with the newspaper itself, its content, periodicity, number of pages and pricing, covering the period before and also after WWI.

The pre-WWI era is the subject of the third chapter. This examines various affairs, scandals and other events that occurred during the first four years of the newspaper's publication, especially those that had a formative influence on Palestinian identity (al-Fula affair, the Arab Congress in Paris, and the attempt to achieve Arab-Zionist Entente).

The next chapter is concerned with the second decade of *Falastin's* existence. Again, the author deals with the most important events and developments of this period. Considerable space is dedicated to the General Islamic Congress, its main focus and consequences.

Economic and social issues are the subject of the penultimate chapter, which starts with a brief excursus on the main problems of Palestinian rural areas and is followed by a short history of Palestinian agriculture. The rest of the chapter covers Palestinian-Zionist economic competition and British favoritism towards the Zionists. The last part of this chapter deals with one of the biggest land sales of the Mandate period – that of Wadi al-Hawarith. Astonishingly, the earlier and much larger sale of the remaining Sursuq family real estate holdings in the plain of Marj ibn 'Amir is never mentioned in the book.

The last chapter discusses the changing identity of the Palestinians, concerning not only its national, but also cultural and social dimensions.

Let us now move to the main part of this review which aims to expose the wrongdoings of the author of *Printing Class*. As early as the first lines of Chapter One, the English translation of a short poem in Arabic¹ is copied word by word from Rashid Khalidi's *The Iron Cage*² first published in 2007, although the reference is to Ya'qub 'Awdat's *Min a'lam al-fikr wa al-adab fi Filastin*. In addition, this verse is dated incorrectly. Bracy dates it to the year 1922 while, in fact, it was written by 'Isa al-'Isa in the aftermath of an-Nakba. This is unequivocally clear from the book given as reference by Bracy which states: "After the tragedy and catastrophe took place, and the inhabitants and beloved ones were dispersed, the deceased ['Isa al-'Isa] said in a desperate and sad tone"³

In the first paragraph of Chapter Two the author partially paraphrases and partially "borrows" from Rashid Khalidi's *The Iron Cage*.⁴ On page 19 Bracy describes the family background of 'Isa al-'Isa: "He came from a family that produced a number of writers, journalists, and intellectuals, including his uncle Hanna 'Abdullah al-'Isa, who founded the bi-monthly Jerusalem journal *al-Asma'i* (The Listening [sic]) in 1908, and his cousin Yusuf, with whom he founded *Falastin*.⁵" Compare with Khalidi's formulation: "His family produced a number of writers, journalists, and intellectuals, including his uncle, Hanna al-'Isa, founder in 1908 of the Jerusalem bimonthly journal *al-Asma'i*, and his cousin Yusuf, with whom he founded *Falastin*, ..."⁶

It is noteworthy that even though R. Michael Bracy verifiably copied extensive parts of Rashid Khalidi's monograph *The Iron Cage*, this book does not appear among the bibliographic sources cited at the end of the book, nor is it referred to anywhere

else in the volume.

Another example occurs on page 30 of Bracy's book: "What was at issue was control of the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine, and the considerable assets in land and property that it controlled, by the local communities and by priests who issued from the Arabic-speaking laity, rather than by the Greek-speaking upper clergy who earlier had dominated the Orthodox Church throughout the Ottoman Empire." The wording is almost identical with Khalidi's text: "What was at issue was control of the Greek Orthodox Church in Palestine, and the considerable assets in land and property that it owned, by the local communities and by priests who issued from the Arabic-speaking laity, rather than by the Greek-speaking upper clergy who previously had dominated the Orthodox Church throughout the Ottoman Empire."⁷

One more example can be found on page 31 of *Printing Class*: "However, 'Isa never developed the same close relationship with 'Abdullah as he had had with his younger brother, Faysal, nor did he ever have the same degree of respect for 'Abdullah. This is apparent from the uncomplimentary passages in his poetry describing the Transjordanian ruler in which 'Isa describes two unsatisfying encounters with the monarch.⁸ Having for much of his life advocated the inter-relation of the Palestinian and Arab spheres and the need for the Palestinians to rely on the other Arabs, near the end of his days, in exile from a Jaffa which was no longer an Arab city, 'Isa was forced to recognize that the rulers of the Arabs could not be relied upon." As before, large parts of the text have been copied word by word from *The Iron Cage*: "It is apparent, moreover that al-'Isa never developed the same close relationship with 'Abdullah as he had had with the amir's younger brother Faysal, nor did he ever have the same degree of respect for 'Abdullah. This is evidenced by the uncomplimentary passages in his memoir where al-'Isa describes two unsatisfying encounters with the Jordanian ruler.⁹ Having for much of his life advocated the interrelation of the Palestinian and Arab spheres, and the need for the Palestinians to rely on the other Arabs, near the end of his days, in exile from a Jaffa that was no longer an Arab city, 'Isa al-'Isa was forced to recognize that the Arab rulers could not be relied upon, just as he had long argued that the Palestinian leadership had failed."¹⁰

The Iron Cage is not the only book written by Rashid Khalidi that Bracy "borrowed" from. The same is true for his *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. The situation here is slightly different, because in some places Bracy refers to this book. However, elsewhere he simply copies long sentences from Khalidi's monograph without marking them as citations and he does not mention the actual source. Instead, he refers to the original sources used by Khalidi.

The first example is from page 46 in Bracy: "Shukri al-'Asali's next step was even more radical. He was informed that at the orders of the local agent of the JNF, Yehoshua Hankin, a band of thirty armed members of *Ha-Shomer*, the precursor of the Haganah, had been sent to occupy the lands of the al-Fula villagers. This was part of what Gershon Shafir describes as 'a new method of Jewish presence through 'conquest groups' that initially settled and prepared newly purchased land until it had

been handed over to its permanent Jewish owners.¹¹ The *qa'imaqam* immediately sent a large body of troops to the scene to drive them away.” Let us now compare it this with the text from *Palestinian Identity*: “Shukri al-‘Asali’s next step was even more radical. He was informed that at the orders of the local agent of the JNF, Yehoshua Hankin, a band of thirty armed members of *Ha-Shomer* had been sent to occupy the lands of the al-Fula villagers. This was part of what Shafir describes as ‘a new method of Jewish presence through ‘conquest groups’ that initially settled and prepared newly purchased land until it had been handed over to its permanent Jewish owners.¹² The *qa'immaqam* immediately sent a large body of troops to the scene to drive them away.”¹³

Although a part of the previously cited passage does include the relevant bibliographical reference, it is not up to the usual academic standards, since it is the source from which the quote was taken that should be used. In this case it is without any doubt Rashid Khalidi’s *Palestinian Identity*.

Furthermore, consider the paragraph on page 47 for which Bracy gives the newspaper *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* as his source: “In large part due to ‘Asali’s actions, the al-Fula incident became a *cause célèbre* in Syria, with dozens of articles appearing in newspapers in Damascus, Beirut, Haifa, and elsewhere over a period of over a year. In the press and during debates in the Ottoman parliament after ‘Asali’s arrival there, it served as a striking illustration of charges regarding the ruling CUP’s failure to take into account concerns raised by Arabs restive over what increasingly seemed like Turkish domination of the Empire. From the press accounts and descriptions of ‘Asali’s speeches during the election campaign and later on in the Ottoman parliament, it is clear that it was the spectacle of Arab peasants resisting expulsion from their homes and lands to make room for foreign colonists which gave this incident its potent impact for most Arab audiences.”¹⁴ I did not have access to the newspaper, but when we compare this text with the paragraph in *The Palestinian Identity* on page 109 which is almost identical (and also after careful consideration of the content),¹⁵ it is certain that *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* is not the real source: “In large part as a result of al-‘Asali’s actions, the al-Fula incident became a *cause célèbre* in *bilad al-Sham*, with dozens of articles appearing in newspapers in Damascus, Beirut, Haifa, and elsewhere over a period of over a year. In the press and during debates in the Ottoman parliament after al-‘Asali’s arrival there, it served as a striking illustration of charges regarding the ruling CUP’s failure to take into account Arab concerns made by Arabs restive over what increasingly seemed like Turkish domination of the Empire. From the press accounts and descriptions of al-‘Asali’s speeches during the election campaign and later on in the Ottoman Parliament, it is clear that it was the spectacle of Arab peasants resisting expulsion from their homes and lands to make room for foreign colonists which gave this incident its potent impact for most Arab audiences.”¹⁶

On the next two pages (pp. 47-48) in Bracy, there are repeated cases of “borrowing” from *Palestinian Identity* (pp. 109-111). However, I think the two examples presented above are sufficient as evidence.

Excessive “borrowing” is not the only kind of academic misconduct perpetrated in

this publication. The author also purports to use primary sources in Arabic extensively, especially the newspaper *Falastin*. Concerning the pre-WWI issues, I can prove that he has fabricated a lot of the references. This also concerns Khalil as-Sakakini's diaries *Kadha ana ya dunya*. On page 19 Bracy writes: "Following graduation, 'Isa returned to Palestine and worked at both the Qajari Consulate and the Coptic Monastery in Jerusalem. He became a close friend to Khalil al-Sakakini at this time, with whom he shared strong nationalist feelings."¹⁷" After inspecting the page referred to, I found that it does not contain any information about 'Isa al-'Isa whatsoever.¹⁸

Now let us proceed to the newspaper *Falastin*. In this regard Bracy makes the task of verification often more difficult by giving incomplete references. He frequently omits title of the article and sometimes does not even give the page number.

On page 54 Bracy describes a letter sent by Rafiq al-Azm to Mahmud al-Humusani on 20 June 1914. Bracy claims that the letter was published in *Falastin* on 30 June 1914. However, no issue was published on that date and none of the issues printed during the previous or subsequent weeks contain this letter. It appears that the information that the letter was published in the paper has been fabricated. Indeed, the real source of this information is the book *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians* by Abdelaziz A. Ayyad. It can be proven by comparing both the citation and the text preceding it. The translated quotations from the letter are almost identical and out of six sentences they comprise, only one is slightly different. In the preceding paragraph which offers contextual information some formulations were also "borrowed" by Bracy.¹⁹ Compare the following: "... explained the ideology of the party and the attitude adopted toward Zionism and Jews"²⁰ and "...explained the ideology of the party and the attitude adopted toward Zionists and the Jews."²¹

On the next page Bracy refers to the newspaper *Falastin* (19 April 1913, p.1), but in reality, he "borrows" again from Abdelaziz A. Ayyad: "If there were no strong imperial authority in Palestine the Zionists would be able to use their wealth and influence to obtain the power of the majority, going on to become members in the municipalities, the administrations, the general council of the *mutasarriifya*."²² Compare with: "Were they to do this, the Zionists would be able to use their wealth and influence to obtain the power of the majority, going on to become members in the municipalities, the administrations, the general council of the *Mutasarrifyah*."²³

The paragraph on page 58 with the references numbered 91 and 92²⁴ describes activities and meetings of the Wali of Beirut, Nasif Bey al-Khalidi and Dr. Thon regarding an Arab-Zionist Entente. It also contains the list of Arab delegates who were supposed to attend the Arab-Zionist meeting. Bracy concludes the paragraph thus: "... 'Isa devoted an entire front-page editorial to the issue of affiliation between various groups of people in the region because '... governments are transient and fluctuate, only the people are the constant factor, and one must come to an agreement with the people.'" As a matter of fact, there was no issue of *Falastin* published on 30 July 1914. On 29 July issue no. 340-43 and on 1 August issue no. 341-44 were printed which proves that there was no other issue in between. Now let us inspect the first page of the issue 340-43. The editorial *Al-atibba' ghadu marda* [The doctors Have

Become Patients] covers the situation in Europe. Other articles on this page also deal with European matters, except for the last one titled *Al-ir'ida 'c'ala al-khidiwi* [Attack on the Khedive]. Similarly, on pages 2-6 the activities concerning Arab-Zionist entente are not mentioned at all. The editorial of the next issue 341-44 bears the title *Asr al-jinsiyat* [The Era of Nations] and concerns the starting war. In both cases the first pages of the issues from the following week – 5 and 8 August also cover the war in Europe. Issue no. 344-47 was printed on 12 August, i.e. 30 July according to the Julian Calendar. As in the previous cases, the whole first page deals with the war. Again, the quotation has not been taken and translated from the newspaper as Bracy claims. On the contrary, it has been “borrowed” from Neville Mandel’s book *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* and the original source is a document from the Central Zionist Archive with the date 30.7.1914: “Governments are transient and fluctuate; the people are the constant factor, and one must come to an agreement with the people.”²⁵

The whole of page 56 has been lifted from *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I*, including the translation of a long poem that consists of 38 lines. Only one word of the literary piece is different; Bracy has changed the verb “awake” into “awaken”. Despite this fact, the author refers to *Falastin* and not to Mandel’s monograph.²⁶

A very interesting illustration of Bracy’s approach can be found on page 52. There he pretends to quote from an article published in *Falastin* on 25 January, 1913. However, the real source of this passage is Neville Mandel’s monograph, as can be easily demonstrated. Firstly, the quotation is identical with that given by Mandel: “if this state of affairs continues ... then the Zionists will gain mastery over our country, village by village, town by town; tomorrow the whole of Jerusalem will be sold and then Palestine in its entirety.”²⁷ Furthermore, the title of the article written by ‘Arif al-‘Arif – *Ila mutasarrifina al-jadid: As-sahyuniyuna wa Abu Shusha* [To Our New Mutasarrif: The Zionists and Abu Shusha] – is not given by Mandel. As he introduces the aforementioned quotation with the following words – “*Inter alia*, he wrote that ...”, Bracy mistook the Latin phrase for the title of the article. And finally, Bracy places the article on page 1 – as is his usual habit – and not on pages 3-4 where it is located.

The next example proves that the author did not inspect issues of the newspaper and is not familiar with its fortunes in the spring and early summer of 1914. At that time, the publication of *Falastin* was suspended for almost two months between 15 April (issue 324-27) and 6 June 1914 (issue 325-28). The problem with this reference (and a number of others) is that it refers to an issue of *Falastin* printed in May 1914 whereas, in fact, no issue of the newspaper was published during this month.²⁸ On page 59 Bracy writes: “‘Isa’s voice was matched by opinions expressed throughout the summer of 1914 by Palestinian leaders such as the Jerusalem shaykh, ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzghar, who called for an extension of local schools and ‘public councils’ in order to organize both peasants in the countryside and the population of the cities to understand the implications of increasing immigration and the avoidance of ‘chauvinistic tensions.’”²⁹ It seems that in this case the author was also “inspired”

by Mandel's monograph: "A month later, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Muzghar, a well-known shaykh in Jerusalem, also spoke of the new mood. He told Dr. Isaac Lévy, the manager of the Jerusalem branch of the Anglo-Palestine Company, that he was perturbed at attitudes held by Arab and Zionist youth, both of whom harboured extremely chauvinistic and potentially dangerous elements."³⁰ Mandel does not refer to *Falastin*, but draws on a document from the Central Zionist Archive.

In September 1914, *Falastin* was closed down for six years.³¹ Nevertheless, this does not prevent the author from referring to issues supposedly published in the following year (12 January, 12 and 23 February and 6 March 1915).³² This is even stranger considering the fact that in the book he repeatedly states that the publication of *Falastin* was suspended in autumn 1914 and reappeared only after the end of WWI.³³

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Endnotes

- 1 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 1.
- 2 Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 100.
- 3 My translation from Arabic to English. Ya'qub 'Awdat, *Min a'lam al-fikr wa al-adab fi Filastin*. (Jerusalem and Amman: Wakalat at-tawzi' al-urdiniyya, 1987), 478.
- 4 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*.
- 5 Yusuf Khury, *Al-Sahafa al-'Arabiyya fi Falastin* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1976), 7.
- 6 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 95.
- 7 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 99.
- 8 'Isa al-'Isa, *Nafathat qalb*, (Beirut: Haquq al-Taba' Muhafutha [sic], 1927), 104-105, 118-119.
- 9 'Isa al-'Isa, "Min Dhikrayat al-Madi," 64-65, 68-69.
- 10 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 101.
- 11 Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 139.
- 12 Shafir, *Land, Labor*, 139.
- 13 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 108.
- 14 *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, no. 737, February 21, 1911, p. 2.
- 15 Shukri al-'Asali was elected to parliament in January 1911 and gave his anti-Zionist speech only in May 1911. The text of his address can be found in Haqqi al-cAzm, *Al-isticmar as-sahyuni fi majlis al-umma: Khitab rannan. [Zionist Colonization in the Parliament: Resounding Speech.]* in *al-Muqtabas*, 691, 31.5.1911, pp. 1-2.
- 16 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 109.
- 17 Khalil as-Sakakini, *Kadha ana ya dunya* (Beirut: al-Ittihad al-'Amm lil-Kutub wa al-Suhufiyin al-Filastiniyya, 1982), 37.
- 18 The real source seems to be Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 95.
- 19 Abdelaziz A. Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism and the Palestinians: 1850-1939* (PASSIA, 1999), 54-55.
- 20 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 54.
- 21 Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism*, 54
- 22 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 55.
- 23 Ayyad, *Arab Nationalism*, 55.
- 24 *Falastin*, 30.7.1914, p. 1.
- 25 Neville J. Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 202.
- 26 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 56-57; Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 175-176.
- 27 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 52; Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 139-140.
- 28 During the intermission a pamphlet which contained one article, an editorial, was published instead of the suspended newspaper. Mandel quotes at length from this circular published on 27 April 1914 or earlier. Mandel,

The Arabs and Zionism, 180-181. Rashid Khalidi writes that “a special issue of *Falastin*, dated 7 Nisan 1330/May 1914 (remainder of date erased on extant copy)” which comprised only an editorial, was published. Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 247, n. 71. After comparing the quotations from the circular in Mandel’s (p. 181) and Khalidi’s books (p. 94) it seems that they both refer to the same document. Since Khalidi writes that the date is only partially visible it is possible that the complete date on

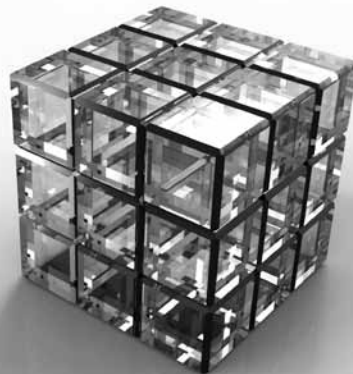
the pamphlet was [2]7 Nisan – which would be 27 April.

- 29 ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Muzghar, *Falastin*, May 19, 1914, p. 1.
- 30 Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 217-218.
- 31 Mandel, *The Arabs and Zionism*, 209; Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 95.
- 32 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 103 n. 11, 13 and 104 n. 46.
- 33 Bracy, *Printing Class*, 26, 28, 59, 65.



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