

# Unlikely Identities: Abu Ibrahim and the Politics of Possibility in Late Ottoman Palestine<sup>1</sup>

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In May of 1911 an Ottoman deputy from Thessaloniki, Dimitar Vlahov, interjected himself in a parliamentary debate about Zionism in Palestine with a question: “Are Arab peasants opposed to the Jews?”<sup>2</sup> Answering himself, he declared that there was no enmity between Arab and Jewish peasants since, in his estimation, “They are brothers [*onlar kardeştir*], and like brothers they are trying to live.” Noting that in the past few weeks “anti-Semitism” had appeared on the pages of newspapers, he reiterated his message of familial bonds: “Whatever happens, the truth is in the open. Among Jewish, Arab, and Turkish peasants, there is nothing that will cause conflict. They are brothers.”

Vlahov Efendi’s somewhat simplistic message of coexistence was not popular, appearing as it did in the midst of a charged debate about Zionist land acquisitions in Palestine.<sup>3</sup> Other deputies in parliament pressed him about the source of his information on these apparent familial ties between peasants. He had mentioned “Arab newspapers,” but ‘Abd al-Mehdi Bey of Karbala wanted to know which ones he had consulted to support his claims. “In Jaffa there is a newspaper that appears named ‘Palestine,’” Vlahov replied. Commotion in the hall interrupted his speech at this point, but Vlahov continued, explaining how the paper suggested Hadera [Khdeira], south of Haifa, had been “nothing but wild animals” thirty years before but had recently become economically prosperous through Zionist settlement. Rishon LeZion, one of the first Zionist colonies, was another engine of development, as its tax revenue had increased a hundred-fold in the previous three decades, he claimed. And even if these were cases

of Zionist development, Vlahov argued that Arab peasants were not left out; on the contrary, they benefitted, he argued, from increased work opportunities and exposure to modern agricultural techniques. It was on this basis that he articulated his idea of kinship between the peasants of Palestine and the Ottoman Empire as a whole.

If the political sentiments of Vlahov Efendi, an Ottoman socialist, should not be entirely surprising, his stated source for information should be. After all, Vlahov received his information not from his perusal of Arabic newspapers, but rather from top Zionist officials.<sup>4</sup> Why, then, did he cite the Jaffa-based *Filastin*, widely recognized as one of the first and most important Arabic newspapers to oppose Zionist encroachment in Palestine? Clearly such a citation would bolster his claims' legitimacy. But mentioning *Filastin* was not simply a fabricated footnote. Indeed, a very similar message advocating for Palestine's economic development and cross-confessional peasant familial ties appeared in a series of seventeen columns entitled "Rasàil Fallah" (Peasant Letters) that appeared in *Filastin* over the course of 1911 and 1912.<sup>5</sup>

In these columns, Abu Ibrahim, the self-described Arab Muslim peasant author of the series, claimed that the 1908 reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution at the urging of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) had awakened his interest in the politics that linked the soil he tilled with the empire in which he lived. In a column that would seem to be an almost unprecedented account of daily life in late Ottoman Palestine from a peasant perspective, he described the profound impact of this event on his life. The constitution had turned him into, in his words, "another Abu Ibrahim," so consumed by politics that he was forced to say "adieu oh verdant fields, adieu my dear plow, adieu my cows and my sheep."<sup>6</sup> Abu Ibrahim may have said a grandiose goodbye, but he never really left behind these subjects. His column remained centered on them, providing vivid accounts of peasant life as a way of making demands on the Ottoman state for better services that would improve the lives of Ottoman citizens. Very much like Vlahov's speech in parliament, Abu Ibrahim emphasized economic development – whether supported by the state or Jewish migrants – as the most significant force for improving peasant lives. Thus, it would seem very possible that writing by an apparent Palestinian peasant made its way into the Ottoman parliament in Istanbul by way of a deputy from Thessaloniki being fed information by Zionist authorities.

But the story is more complicated still, because Abu Ibrahim was, in fact, a pseudonym for Menashe Meirovitch, a Jewish agronomist who emigrated from the Russian Empire to Palestine in 1883 to help establish one of the first Zionist colonies, Rishon LeZion, the very same place whose rapid economic growth Vlahov cited in his parliamentary speech.<sup>7</sup> Meirovitch's son was named Avraham, but in reality Abu Ibrahim was not Arab, Muslim, or poor. Yet the story is also more complicated than simple Zionist ventriloquism. Meirovitch knew French, German, Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish. But with Arabic he needed help. And 'Isa al-'Isa, the Rum-Orthodox Arab owner and co-editor of *Filastin*, appears to have given it to him. Not only did al-'Isa solicit the columns in the first place, it also seems that he translated them himself, turning Meirovitch's French and Arabic transliterated into French (for example, "*Alla ihréb betum*," or "may God destroy their house") into acceptable prose for print ("*Alla*

*ihréb betum*,” for example, did not make it past the editor).<sup>8</sup> In other words, the column that had perhaps prompted Vlahov to declare Arab and Jewish peasants to be siblings was itself a product of a kind of brotherhood between Meirovitch and al-‘Isa. But why might two men – neither of whom were peasants – work together as a fictive peasant? And what might this assumed identity tell us about broader assumptions concerning identity and citizenship in late Ottoman Palestine?

We suggest that the secret relationship between Meirovitch and al-‘Isa coalesced in the figure of a peasant due to their shared commitment to modernism in an age of changing conceptions of political legitimacy. The column’s calls for better roads, well-trained veterinarians, modern agricultural machinery, and state-sponsored forestry in the name of strengthening the Ottoman Empire fits neatly with James Scott’s definition of modernism as “a supreme self-confidence about continued progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge ... and, not least, an increasing control over nature.”<sup>9</sup> Of course, Abu Ibrahim’s column was not unique in advocating such measures within the Ottoman domains. These calls for reform in many ways echoed the calls of the doctors-turned-revolutionaries of the CUP for improved access to rural credit, better infrastructure, and more advanced machines in order to create healthy, well-educated citizens able to capitalize on their land.<sup>10</sup> Articulating these demands in a peasant’s voice perhaps set the Abu Ibrahim columns apart from more straightforward demands of elites. But in other ways this act of class ventriloquy was perhaps to be expected in an age in which peasants increasingly functioned as symbols of both cultural authenticity and backwardness.<sup>11</sup> The representations of these marginalized yet central figures could generate legitimacy in new ways that both echoed and foreshadowed the valorization of peasants by nationalist movements all around the world, with Zionist and Palestinian nationalism no exception.<sup>12</sup>

This story of partnership complicates conventional narratives of nationalism’s emergence in Palestine. Telling the story of nationalist differentiation without adopting nationalism’s own narrative is always fraught, and it is perhaps especially so in Palestine, where conflict in the present has both informed and been informed by simplified visions of the past.<sup>13</sup> In other words, could a Zionist and a Palestinian Arab work together without being considered collaborators?<sup>14</sup> We believe the Abu Ibrahim column constitutes a case in which the answer is yes, but it would still be difficult to discern precisely how based on the existing literature. Rashid Khalidi, for example, conceives of both al-‘Isa and *Filastin* as crucial forces in the construction of modern Palestinian nationalism.<sup>15</sup> Khalidi even cites the column “Rasâil Fallah” as an example of the newspaper’s compassionate depiction of rural people.<sup>16</sup> All of these claims are indisputable, but what we suggest is that something more complicated was also at work that brought together one of the “pioneers of an unwavering Palestinian and pan-Arab opposition to Zionism,” with the Zionist Ottoman citizen from Russia, Menashe Meirovitch.<sup>17</sup> Put differently, this story demonstrates how political imagination in the late Ottoman period was more flexible than retrospective nationalism allows it to be.

This partnership builds on existing accounts of imperial citizenship in Ottoman Palestine also. One of the most formidable studies of this period is Michelle Campos’s

*Ottoman Brothers*, in which she argues that the Ottoman reinstatement of the constitution enabled linkages across confessional lines, most ably embodied by public marches in the streets of Palestinian cities in celebration of the promise of reform.<sup>18</sup> Meirovitch and al-‘Isa themselves likely attended some of those marches, yet their relationship appears to have taken place almost entirely behind closed doors. For Campos, Ottoman brotherhood took place primarily in public, but for Meirovitch and al-‘Isa evidence of their brotherhood was erased from public view. No doubt a part of this secrecy had to do with the fact that in an empire that was overwhelmingly Muslim, peasant, and poor, Meirovitch and al-‘Isa were none of these. Their textual metamorphosis into Abu Ibrahim enabled a degree of legitimacy neither an urbane educated Christian nor a Zionist settler from the Russian Empire could have achieved on his own. In short, the last years of the empire produced complicated political possibilities. On the one hand, commitment to modernism brought Meirovitch and al-‘Isa together more than religion or ethnicity pulled them apart; on the other hand, their converging visions had to remain concealed behind the pseudonym of Abu Ibrahim.

## **Modern Ottomans Coming Together**

Both men took somewhat circuitous routes to their partnership in Palestine. Al-‘Isa, born to a Rum Orthodox family in Jaffa in 1878, studied in Beirut, worked as a translator in Jerusalem, and later for a tobacco company in Egypt before returning to Palestine in the wake of the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution.<sup>19</sup> He became engaged in the struggle for equality in the Orthodox church before finally starting the newspaper *Filastin* with his cousin Yusuf al-‘Isa in early 1911.<sup>20</sup> Meirovitch hailed from the Russian Empire, and was born in what is now Ukraine in 1860.<sup>21</sup> He trained as an agronomist, writing his dissertation on wool, before fleeing Russia after a wave of pogroms in 1881 and 1882.<sup>22</sup> He came to Palestine as part of the settler group known as the Bilu, arriving in 1883.<sup>23</sup> He secured entry and Ottoman citizenship only because of his credentials as an agriculture expert and he established himself in Rishon LeZion, where he became a prolific writer and involved community member over the next several decades.<sup>24</sup>

It is within this context that their lives intersected under the banner of Ottoman modernism. This banner was Ottoman because they both made claims upon the Sublime Porte and called for unity among the Ottoman Empire’s different communities, utilizing the freedom of the press enabled by the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution in 1908. Meirovitch wrote frequently about imperial citizenship in this period, calling upon Jewish immigrants to Palestine to become Ottoman citizens. “What right do we have to complain about the government, if we ourselves do nothing?” he asked in a column in the Hebrew-language daily newspaper *ha-Or* (The Light) in 1912.<sup>25</sup> Meirovitch furthermore compared the Jewish Yishuv to a small cog in the large Ottoman machine, and warned that if the community did not assert influence beyond its actual size, then its demise was certain.<sup>26</sup> Delineating al-‘Isa’s ideas on Ottomanism is more difficult, for he rarely wrote in *Filastin*, or at least did not sign the articles he authored.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless,

it is clear that al-‘Isa made a similar effort to work within the Ottoman system for change.<sup>28</sup> While Meirovitch and al-‘Isa may have disagreed about the most effective way to reform the empire, their affiliations underscore an openness to intercommunal cooperation in the name of change within the Ottoman system.

The second aspect of their convergence was modernism, rooted in disbelief in clericalism and faith in progress based on economic development. Meirovitch called for changes to rabbinical structures while al-Isa’s initial political involvement stemmed from anticlerical activism within the Rumi Orthodox Church.<sup>29</sup> Each also saw economic growth as the key to Palestine’s future. Meirovitch viewed foreign capital as crucial to this process, and believed it would benefit Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike.<sup>30</sup> Al-‘Isa, meanwhile, brought the business acumen he developed while working in Egypt to his views on politics, it would seem, as he became a steady advocate for economic efficiency and development. In two columns he penned on Gaza in 1912 he lamented that the Gaza region consisted of “scorched sands” rather than “flourishing paradises.”<sup>31</sup> Although he attributed his vision of Gaza’s timeless decay to the area being “abandoned by government, cut off from the world, and ignored by God,” he – much like Meirovitch – argued that better roads and governance could ameliorate the situation and, in a parallel to Zionist visions, make the desert bloom.<sup>32</sup>

The reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution and the freedom of the press created the political conditions for Meirovitch and al-‘Isa to come together. Some journalists used this opening to oppose Zionist encroachment in Palestine.<sup>33</sup> Al-‘Isa characterized his own activities in this way, too. In his memoir, composed between 1938 and 1950, al-‘Isa was every bit the nationalist that the devastating decade demanded. When explaining the pressing issues of the time in retrospect, al-‘Isa described Zionism as the main issue he intended for his newspaper to address. In al-‘Isa’s recounting, “the Jews” – he used this term interchangeably with “Zionists” – “considered me one of their greatest enemies.”<sup>34</sup> With these battle lines drawn, al-‘Isa detailed Zionist efforts to influence his anti-Zionist stance. “Their means were varied,” al-‘Isa wrote, “the most important were money and beauty,” which al-‘Isa specified was of the “feminine” sort. He also added that “all of their efforts were in vain.”<sup>35</sup>

Al-‘Isa may have never been bribed by Zionists, but it would be difficult to believe that he did not know the true identity of Abu Ibrahim. This claim could be made based on inference. In the relatively small educated circles of late Ottoman Palestine, it is inconceivable that al-‘Isa would not have known the true identity of a folksy and lyrical front-page columnist, and, moreover, one who insisted upon writing positively about the Jewish immigrants to Palestine. Moreover, it seems that the social circles of these Ottoman brothers intersected in the meeting place of the most secret brotherhood of all: the Masonic lodge. Yusuf al-‘Isa – ‘Isa’s cousin and the co-editor of *Filastin* – had become an ordained member of the Barkai Masonic lodge in 1906. Though Meirovitch himself was not a member of the temple, many of his comrades from Rishon LeZion were.<sup>36</sup>

But the case for their partnership can be made on grounds more solid than mere conjecture and masonic allusions. Unfortunately, we could not find any account of the initial meeting from al-‘Isa’s perspective, nor any evidence of the encounter that dates to

the time of the column's publication. Meirovitch, however, did write about the topic at least four times between 1935 and 1946 in press articles, all in Hebrew. The nature of the evidence, therefore, echoes a colonial pattern of Zionist narrative and Palestinian Arab silence all too familiar to the modern history of Palestine.<sup>37</sup> It also ensures that the exact nature of the relationship between the men will remain difficult to discern. The details of these stories differ slightly but all involve al-'Isa approaching a reluctant Meirovitch and pitching the columns on the basis of Meirovitch's knowledge of the land. In 1935, Meirovitch described the first meeting between the two men, which apparently occurred in 1911 in Jaffa:

"I heard," he [al-'Isa] said, "that you write in various newspapers and I ask that you would contribute to my newspaper as well. You know the nature of this land, the conditions of its inhabitants, etc. Now it is our duty to work hand-in-hand for the good of the homeland." "But, you know," I answered him, "first of all, I live in a colony, far from politics, and besides, I do not have a command of the Arabic language. And third, as a Jew, it would be impossible for me not to touch upon our conditions and what we were able to do in this land for the thirty years of our existence."

"As for the language, write in the language which is easiest for you, and I will translate it, and especially because you are a son of the colony and far from politics, write whatever you can to describe our condition, both as a farmer and as a Jew," answered the editor. I promised him to think about his proposal and return to him with an answer.<sup>38</sup>

Meirovitch did not explain why a Jew and a Christian decided to make their literary persona a Muslim.

A second account of the meeting, written in 1941 with a prominent Zionist Orientalist, Menachem Kapeliouk, does not shed light on this question either. But, similar to the first account, it suggests that Meirovitch's knowledge of agriculture helped al-'Isa overcome any doubts he may have had about his new columnist's Zionist convictions. The second account stated that al-'Isa came to visit Meirovitch in his home in Rishon LeZion, which contrasts with the assertion in the 1935 article that the meeting took place in Jaffa. Al-'Isa flattered Meirovitch on his previous writing and, in Meirovitch's words, declared he "would like to open his newspaper to an established writer such as myself." Meirovitch wondered what he might write about since he was merely a "fellaḥ," using the Arabic term for peasant to convey self-deprecatingly his lack of qualification for newspaper writing. Al-'Isa alleviated his concerns, responding, "Well, even better! Write on the matters of the fellaḥ."<sup>39</sup>

## Zionist Propaganda?

Planting articles in the Arabic press is an old Zionist tactic.<sup>40</sup> But Meirovitch appears to have received little institutional support and only cursory recognition from Zionist leaders for his initiative in *Filastin* (though given the Vlahov story with which this article began, it seems the column may well have been used for propaganda purposes). For example, Meirovitch attended a February 1911 meeting on the topic of opposition to Zionism in Palestine, headed by none other than Arthur Ruppin, head of the Palestine Office of the Zionist organization in Jaffa.<sup>41</sup> Attendees advocated for everything from a greater embrace of Ottoman citizenship to purchasing Arabic newspaper subscriptions as a bribe for more positive coverage. If Meirovitch had the idea of the Abu Ibrahim column at this time, he said nothing of it at the meeting.

Even when Meirovitch began to write as Abu Ibrahim, Ruppin showed little enthusiasm for his work, though he was aware of both the columns and Meirovitch's role in their production. In October and November of 1911, Meirovitch on no less than three occasions sought sums of money from Ruppin to purchase, he claimed, subscriptions to both *al-Nafir* and *Filastin*.<sup>42</sup> Whether these subscriptions constituted bribery or simply the business model of these newspapers is unclear; so too is the question of whether Ruppin ever responded. In any case, the head of the Palestine Office of the Zionist Organization seems to have been reluctant, a dynamic that continued to color his relationship with Meirovitch. From October of 1911 until March of 1912, Meirovitch repeatedly requested funding from Ruppin for publication of a pamphlet containing all of his columns, yet the only response Meirovitch seems to have received was a letter from one of Ruppin's staffers offering to cover a portion of the pamphlet's costs.<sup>43</sup> By April of 1912, Meirovitch was sufficiently frustrated with Ruppin that his tone became quite similar to that of Abu Ibrahim's. He noted that "it is quite funny that I work – 20 of my articles were already published – and for what? What is the benefit of all that, I do not know."<sup>44</sup> All of this seems distant from the reception that a heroic Zionist propagandist might expect, although perhaps this apparently strained relationship should be expected given that on multiple occasions Meirovitch criticized the Jewish community leadership in the press.<sup>45</sup>

## The Columns of Abu Ibrahim

Thus far we have focused on the figures behind the production of Abu Ibrahim. In this section we turn to the product itself, the distinctive voice of Abu Ibrahim exhibited in the "Rasa'il Fallah" series. The tone was often exasperated. In one column, he complained, "why did I promise to write?" He admitted, "I don't know. But what I do know is that living is no longer pleasant, and work is no longer to my liking."<sup>46</sup> He yearned for the peaceful days before he began to write, when, he recalled, "nothing concerned me except my plow, my land, and my donkey, and like the other peasants a little wheat was enough for my family, and if I did not find wheat to fulfill my need, some corn or barley

would do.”<sup>47</sup> For Abu Ibrahim, at least in these moments of despair, the examined life was not worth living. Before “opening the door of writing in newspapers,” he recalled, “we ate and drank in peace without asking why we were present on earth.”<sup>48</sup> Writing, he claimed, had made him “the most miserable human on the face of the earth.”<sup>49</sup>

Yet for all these displays of melodramatic frustration, Abu Ibrahim was also committed. “It’s true that I am a peasant,” he warned, “but I am no longer an ignorant idiot [*gābīyan jāhīlan*] like in the past ... my love for my nation is not less than the love of anyone else for it.”<sup>50</sup> In his writing he maintained this persona, a figure connected to both the earth and the nation and a man who never flinched from describing the details of peasant life, ranging from jackals scavenging animals’ corpses outside of the village to sand dunes overtaking farmland.<sup>51</sup> In the realistic encounters with neighbors and friends that he described in the columns, Abu Ibrahim conveyed a message of loyalty to an Ottoman imperial nation. But he also called for reform from within this framework, whether in the realm of infrastructure, rural credit, farm mechanization, land reform, or economic development. He anchored his critiques in the kinds of inequality both between regions in the empire and between communities in Palestine itself. Though some columns presented Zionist settlements in a positive light as technologically advanced engines of economic growth, other columns neglected to mention Jewish immigrants at all.

This was the case in Abu Ibrahim’s treatment of the question of infrastructure, which occupied an important and regular place in his advocacy. Even as he criticized the government for its neglect of Palestine, he did so, as usual, while also asserting his loyalty to the Ottoman reform project. He phrased one such argument on this theme in terms of what deputies in the Ottoman parliament ought to be doing. He clarified that he considered this question on two levels, in terms of what “we, Ottomans, in general and people of this province, more specifically,” ought to expect from the representative body, invoking, therefore, his membership in the broader Ottoman project to make more particular claims about his small part of the empire.<sup>52</sup> Abu Ibrahim strung this message of Ottoman unity throughout the column, noting that Ottoman “progress” marched on even in the face of “the revolutions of the Kurds, Albanians, Druze, and Yemenis, as well as the heinous Italian assault,” a reference to the Italian invasion of Libya.

But while casting himself as a loyal Ottoman amidst these attacks on the state from within and without, Abu Ibrahim also highlighted the inequality that plagued the development of the empire. He read in newspapers, he complained, of electric tram concessions in Istanbul districts like Üsküdar and Kadıköy and appropriations of over a million *quruş* for infrastructural improvements in Anatolian provinces like Bursa and Konya.<sup>53</sup> The roads of Palestine, in contrast, were the same as they had been “in the time of the Prophet Khalil [Abraham], peace be upon him,” he wrote, emphasizing the backward state of transportation. To remedy these shortcomings, Abu Ibrahim commanded the deputies to think of “the people of Palestine” as being on the same level as “the people of Macedonia and Anatolia.” All were loyal citizens, he contended. “We are prepared like them,” he explained, “to sacrifice everything for the sake of the nation [*watan*] so why this favoritism?” He also warned that “if the demand of reform



by us is considered a crime, then the right to do so is granted in the constitution,” again underlining his commitment to the principles of the state at the same time as criticizing the inequality within it.

In addition to emphasizing inequality between different provinces of the empire, Abu Ibrahim used comparisons between the city and the countryside more generally to make his calls for reform. Abu Ibrahim’s sixth column appeared in September of 1911, and while welcoming the harvest season as a time of rejoicing for “all of the peasants of the world,” he noted that “as for us, the peasants of the Ottoman lands, the situation is the opposite, since this season is one of losses and disappointment.”<sup>54</sup> Abu Ibrahim’s friend ‘Abd al-Qadir explained the reason for this state of affairs. Without any seed for the year in the first place, he had borrowed from a merchant in the city, agreeing to some 50 percent interest on the loan. Then his cows fell sick, and though he tried to inoculate them himself, they quickly died, forcing him to take another loan to buy two new cows to finish the harvest. After paying back all of his loans, ‘Abd al-Qadir complained that he was left with “zero in his hands,” and this was even before he had paid all of his taxes. “After that will you ask me why I am sad?” he sarcastically said to Abu Ibrahim after concluding his tale. Abu Ibrahim, for his part, found himself wondering whether “humans are of two kinds, the residents of the cities and the residents of the villages.” After all, he reasoned there were police in cities, markets that were cleaned every day, and banks that “ease the worries of the people.” “But as for us, the peasants,” Abu Ibrahim wrote, “there is no one who thinks of us.” This degree of neglect, he reasoned, exposed the emptiness of Ottoman claims to reform. Invoking one of the buzzwords of the CUP period, he snarled, “So tell me, sir, where is this freedom?” For peasants, these promises of reform remained unfulfilled.

Indeed, Ottoman efforts at providing needed services to peasants often went terribly wrong. One day, for example, Abu Ibrahim explained that his friend Haj Muhammad Zaki came to him “like a hurricane” and handed him a telegram to inspect. But before Abu Ibrahim could read it, his friend, Abu Ibrahim narrated, “yelled at me like a lunatic,” urging Abu Ibrahim to return to his village and pick “all of the tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, squash, figs, and anything like that that you planted.” Abu Ibrahim’s friend also implored him to “cut down your apricot trees and sell them as firewood.” With Abu Ibrahim confused, Muhammad Zaki explained that Beirut had banned the import of fruit and vegetables from Palestine, owing to an outbreak of the vine aphid phylloxera. Abu Ibrahim misheard the term, though, and asked, “What is this...*māsūra*?” having mistaken the word phylloxera for the word for “pipe.” Muhammad Zaki, impatient, said, “I do not have time to explain to you what phylloxera is,” correcting Abu Ibrahim’s mishearing. He had an appointment with the chamber of commerce, he claimed, and had to leave. But before doing so he sneered at Abu Ibrahim’s newspaper columns, “Go and put your time in inking columns for the newspaper *Filastin*,” he said, “and let me know later what came of it.” In the end, Palestine’s orchards had been free of phylloxera. But though the authorities attempted to lift the ban on importation of fruit from Palestine, it was little solace to peasants who had lost their harvest. “Who will indemnify our losses, we the peasants?” Abu Ibrahim wondered, with little hope of an answer. The state whose

intervention he had so often called for had finally intervened, but the result was not what he had expected. “They closed the ports of our country in the face of the products of our land,” he bemoaned.

Abu Ibrahim highlighted both unevenness between Palestine and the rest of the empire and between the city and the countryside as a way of arguing for rural mechanization in his seventh column. He started by grumbling that residents of cities had begun writing to him, hoping he might convey their struggles in his columns. Little did they know, Abu Ibrahim wryly noted, that “my language is weaker than theirs and it is only the calamities of fate that educated me.” One such urban reader reportedly protested Abu Ibrahim’s critiques of the government, explaining that “it is beyond the capacity of a peasant like you to understand its [the government’s] ideas.” To rectify this misunderstanding, the reader included an excerpt from the Ottoman Turkish newspaper *Tanin* (The Resounding) announcing a program aimed at promoting farm mechanization. The article underscored the fact that “the government had taken interest in the matter” of farmers, and accordingly arranged for the distribution of “modern agricultural machines” across twelve depots in different areas of the empire. The goal of the program, the article asserted, was to “allow Ottoman peasants to obtain modern” farm implements, and along these lines they would be able to buy the machines on installment plans at wholesale prices. Upon reading these details, Abu Ibrahim wrote, “I jumped for joy.” He then undertook a hunt for these warehouses in Palestine, first in Jaffa and then in Jerusalem. In Jaffa, according to Abu Ibrahim, people “started laughing at me thinking that insanity had struck me.” But he guessed the warehouses had not made their way to such a small city. There was “no doubt” in his mind, however, that he would find the promised agricultural machines in Jerusalem. But there, too, Abu Ibrahim’s inquiries about the location of the warehouse resulted in suspicions of insanity. “One of them,” he narrated, “said to another, ‘His mind is lost.’” In Abu Ibrahim’s world, belief in Ottoman promises of development amounted to madness.

Finally, Abu Ibrahim encountered a friend of his, who, upon hearing of Abu Ibrahim’s hunt, “turned frigidly” to his possibly insane friend, and explained Palestine’s lack with reference to the plenty in other Ottoman provinces. “You want agricultural machines on installment, ya Shaykh Abu Ibrahim?” the friend asked, before suggesting that Abu Ibrahim “ride a boat and head for Burgas, Kirkilesse, or Dedeğaç,” towns in the Ottoman agricultural heartlands now divided between Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece. “But as for Jerusalem, Nablus, Jaffa, or Gaza,” he inveighed, “you will open these warehouses and there will be apricots.” Whether or not his word choice referred to the Arabic response to an unrealistic hope – “tomorrow in apricot [season]” (*bukra fi-l-mishmish*) – is unclear, but in any case apricots were no solace for Abu Ibrahim. He wrote, “I was shocked by this response.” He became sadder, still, when he compared his meager agricultural tools with the more technologically advanced ones of his Jewish and Ottoman neighbors. “I will take several weeks on [the harvest] with my boys, women, and girls, while my Israelite neighbors,” he wrote, “complete their harvest in a day or two by means of modern machines.” In short, Abu Ibrahim criticized inequality that persisted not only within the empire as a whole but also within Palestine.

In addition to blaming imperial neglect, Abu Ibrahim argued that prevailing land ownership structures defeated any chance for progress in Palestine, and again he emphasized the kind of inequality between communities that these structures produced. In a November 1911 column, he broached a topic that might have seemed far away from the peasantry: the recent Italian invasion of Libya.<sup>55</sup> He bemoaned how the Italian invasion was just another example of European perfidy in the Ottoman domains. Although these foreigners had been welcomed warmly, these Europeans, Abu Ibrahim fumed with the force of any aggrieved local, “forced concessions upon us ... and they began to profit from us” while all the while “we made way for their intellectual and religious missions and we protected their homes and schools.” Thinking of this legacy of imperialism made Abu Ibrahim’s “chest feel constricted.” Abu Ibrahim and his compatriots responded to the invasion with more than panic attacks, however. He wrote that his own son Ibrahim had volunteered, “to avenge the blood of his homeland.” Many Christians and Israelites – “sons of this Ottoman nation” – had done so, too, he added.<sup>56</sup> According to Abu Ibrahim, one peasant had even sold his donkey and donated the proceeds to the war effort.

And although Abu Ibrahim wrote that he himself was “a weak old man” who could not “take revenge with [his] hand for [his] nation and homeland” with all the other denominations, he argued that there was another means of achieving security: economic development through land reform. A rich country, he argued, could better repel and even preempt assaults like those of Italy. But a national “malady” undermined these efforts and this malady was the property system (*musha'*) by which village land was owned communally and redistributed at the conclusion of each year.<sup>57</sup> Of all of the “calamities” he had covered in his previous columns, Abu Ibrahim described this property system as the “greatest and most damaging of them.” As he explained, this system dictated that what he owned one year became “Mustafa’s or Hasan’s” the next year, an arrangement that was nothing short of “the source of our hardship, the cause of our misery, and the destruction of our existence.” Because of the constant shuffling of land, making intensive capital improvements of the sort he saw on his Jewish neighbors’ farms proved irrational. And the absence of these economic incentives for growth accounted for much of the pain he described in his column. An end to communal land holding would end the “plague of our agriculture,” as he termed it. And with integration into world markets with a railroad, he envisioned a stronger nation, reasoning that at that point “the sinews of the nation would become strong, because wealth does to countries just what it does to men.” He continued with this metaphor of bodily and political strength, contending that “the nation [*watan*] is not strong except in our strength, we, the peasants, and its wounds are not healed until our wounds are healed. So let them divide our land,” he concluded.

Whether as a means to strengthen the sinews of the nation or heal the wounds of the peasants, the abolition of collective land holding would seem to be a strange position, particularly for a column in *Filastin*. The end of this practice, according to many, hastened Zionist colonization of Palestine.<sup>58</sup> But such calls were actually quite common in the Arabic press at the time.<sup>59</sup> One candidate for the 1912 Ottoman parliamentary elections from Gaza advocated for an end to communal land holdings.<sup>60</sup> He secured

*Filastin*'s endorsement.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, in the summer of 1913 *Filastin* published a number of articles that bemoaned peasant backwardness. Much like Abu Ibrahim, the author invoked Arab peasants' use of tools that dated the times of Noah as justification for the establishment of private property. These articles were endorsed by none other than Yusuf al-'Isa.<sup>62</sup> In retrospect, the role of the dissolution of communal land holding on Zionist colonization is clear, but in the Ottoman period many – Abu Ibrahim included – saw this measure as a means to economic efficiency and Ottoman development.

## Parting Ways

In August of 1912 Abu Ibrahim penned what would be his final column in *Filastin* in the form of a petition to the governor of Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup> When it came to the various realms of reform he had discussed in his column, he wrote, “a friend once told me that the French enthusiastically say that the word ‘impossible’ is not French. So let us Ottomans say that the word ‘impossible’ is not Ottoman.” But some things were just impossible. Indeed, shortly after the publication of Abu Ibrahim's petition, this convergence of Ottoman modernism and, it seems, the relationship between Meirovitch and al-'Isa, disintegrated. A year after Abu Ibrahim's petition, “*Rasâil Fallah*” began to appear in another Arabic newspaper, *al-Nafir*.

Meirovitch had written a series of columns in this newspaper with the title “*Rasâil Tajir*” (Merchant Letters) and the penname “an Ottoman Merchant” since October 1911.<sup>64</sup> Any feeling of camaraderie with *al-Nafir*'s editor, Eliya Zakka, seemed to have been founded less on friendship than on money. *Al-Nafir* received regular payments from Zionist organizations.<sup>65</sup> If the column in *Filastin* had been subtly positive about Jewish immigration, the column in *al-Nafir* actively encouraged it. One column began with the narrator writing, “I will not return to talking about the benefit of the Israelites to our country in a general sense, with the *Alliance* schools and what have you, and with commerce and industry, and especially with agriculture, which advanced brilliantly in the past thirty years.”<sup>66</sup> But this Ottoman merchant wanted the readers to know, “I cannot imagine our country without the Israelite peasants standing here and there among the vineyards and other diverse trees.” Most of *al-Nafir*'s readers would have agreed, considering that – in stark contrast to *Filastin* – the newspaper's small readership was largely Jewish.<sup>67</sup>

Whether he published through payment or not, Meirovitch used a note beside his first Abu Ibrahim column in *al-Nafir* to explain Abu Ibrahim's breakup with *Filastin*.<sup>68</sup> “In the life of men, it is possible even for soul mates, linked to one another with fierce love, to disagree for various reasons,” he wrote.<sup>69</sup> Abu Ibrahim further explained that, as a good Muslim, he had performed hajj and, upon return, he had been surprised to note the strident tone adopted in *Filastin*. “Why all this poison that he [al-'Isa] inserts in the hearts of the people instead of advising them to come closer and unite?” Abu Ibrahim asked.<sup>70</sup> He especially found *Filastin*'s treatment of unspecified “neighbors” distressing. The Ottoman authorities agreed with this assessment, and closed the paper down several times between 1912 and 1914 on charges of spreading libel against Jewish communities.<sup>71</sup>

Thus as political possibilities narrowed, the assumed identity of Abu Ibrahim as a product of the partnership of ‘Isa al-‘Isa and Menashe Meirovitch unraveled, too.

If their paths diverged in terms of their work together, they nevertheless had similar experiences in World War I and its aftermath. During World War I, the Ottomans exiled al-‘Isa to Anatolia, a trip he referred to in retrospect as “a long walk.”<sup>72</sup> After a brief stint in Damascus during Faysal’s short-lived pan-Arab kingdom, al-‘Isa returned to Palestine and to journalism. There he became – in Khalidi’s words – “without any doubt the greatest Palestinian journalist of the 20th century and one of the most eminent Arab intellectuals of his generation.”<sup>73</sup> Meirovitch, too, experienced displacement during the war. Although he had Ottoman citizenship, he was exiled to Tiberias in 1915 and in 1917 he spent time in an Ottoman prison in Jerusalem with other prominent Zionist leaders who were citizens of countries at war with the Ottoman Empire. With the end of Ottoman rule in Palestine, Meirovitch joined various commissions and assemblies set up by the imperial power that had recently taken control of Palestine – Britain.<sup>74</sup> In sum, both men embarked on public lives devoted to constructing the communities they had worked toward together under the guise of Abu Ibrahim.

Yet even if Abu Ibrahim no longer existed as a product of their shared labor, Meirovitch still apparently hoped to use the literary persona to support his political goals. In Meirovitch’s papers at the Central Zionist Archives is a handwritten column in French, under the familiar Arabic title transliterated as “Rassail-el-Felah.”<sup>75</sup> The undated column, written from the perspective of a man named Abu Halil, explained how Abu Ibrahim had died in Salt during World War I. Abu Halil vowed to assume Abu Ibrahim’s mantle. “I will speak the pure truth of life,” he promised, before unleashing a lengthy critique of Palestinian Arab nationalist leadership and violence, likely referring to the 1929 killing of Jews in Hebron. It is unclear if the column was ever published, and it seems unlikely that any newspaper not taking Zionist money would have done so.

Abu Ibrahim appeared again in 1936, when the fortunes of Palestine had pulled Palestinian Arabs and Jews even further apart. In the midst of the 1936 General Strike, Meirovitch submitted a letter to the Palestine Royal Commission (better known as the Peel Commission), which had been charged with investigating the reasons for the uprising. Meirovitch explained that he had long been friendly with local residents, and he promised to circulate a letter among his Arab neighbors explaining to them how beneficial Jewish settlement had been for Palestine.<sup>76</sup> He concluded his lengthy critique of the ungratefulness of the Arabs in Palestine to the Jews – echoing the standard Zionist narrative about the 1936 uprising to say nothing of Abu Ibrahim’s columns – with a telling conclusion: He signed the letter “Abu Ibrahim,” but left no doubt as to his true identity, adding “an elder of a Jewish village.”

The time for assumed identities had passed, and the unfolding of the conflict ensured the two men involved in the construction of Abu Ibrahim died apart both ideologically and geographically. Al-‘Isa was forced to leave Palestine in 1938 at the insistence of the British in response to death threats leveled at him by rival Palestinian Arab political groups.<sup>77</sup> He settled in Beirut, where, having witnessed the nakba of 1948, he died in 1950. Meirovitch remained in Palestine. In 1948 when the state of Israel was established,

he was the last surviving member of the Bilu settlers who had arrived in Palestine in the late nineteenth century. He died a year later. Meanwhile, Dimitar Vlahov, the man who spoke of Arab-Jewish peasant family ties possibly based on the concealed brotherhood of Meirovitch and al-‘Isa, died not long after, passing away in 1953 in Belgrade. Men whose lives had briefly intersected in the name of Ottoman modernism died in a very different world, modern, perhaps, but not in the way that any of them had once imagined it would be.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 This article contains excerpts from earlier published work, as well as considerable supplementary material. For more details of the argument and story, please 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 (2015): 241-262.
- 2 *Meclis-i Mebusan Zabıt Cerideleri* (Proceedings of the Ottoman Parliament), 4 May 1327 (17 May 1911), p. 612.
- 3 More information on these debates can be found in Louis Fishman, “Understanding the 1911 Ottoman Parliament Debate on Zionism in the Light of the Emergence of a ‘Jewish Question,’” in *Late Ottoman Palestine: the Period of Young Turk Rule*, eds. Yuval Ben-Basat and Eyal Ginio (London: Tauris, 2011), 103-123. Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997).
- 4 Arthur Ruppin, head of the Zionist Office in Palestine, arranged via Victor Jacobson, head of the Anglo-Palestine Bank in Istanbul, to provide Vlahov with the information he then proceeded to assert. Aharon Cohen, *Yisra‘el Ve-Ha-Olam Ha-Aravi* (Mirhavia: Sifrit Po‘alim, 1964), 84. Yet it would be a mistake to attribute Vlahov’s assertions to this advocacy. When mocked before his speech by some Arab delegates of the parliament for defending Zionists, he claimed that he was speaking on his principles as a socialist. Ishai, Moshe, *Tsir musmakh : zikhronot me-reshit ha-sherut ha-diplomaṭi* (Tel-Aviv: Masadah, 1963), 101.
- 5 Twenty columns were written but only seventeen were published in *Filastin*. Of these seventeen, we accessed twelve. The fifteenth column is missing or subsequent columns are misnumbered. We were unable to locate any copies of *Filastin* for the first six months of 1911, in which the first four columns appear.
- 6 *Filastin*, 19 May 1912, no. 141.
- 7 Neville Mandel, *Arabs and Zionism before World War I* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1980), 128n52.
- 8 The draft column is in the Central Zionist Archives (CZA) A32/31. The ninth column is in *Filastin*, 24 December 1911, no. 101.
- 9 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), 88-89.
- 10 M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 10-23.
- 11 Salim Tamari, “Lepers, Lunatics, and Saints: the Nativist Ethnography of Tawfiq Canaan and His Circle,” in *Mountain Against the Sea: Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), 97. Beth Baron, *The Woman’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 44. Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Michael Gasper, *The*

- Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants, and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- 12 Given Meirovitch's background, there is no doubt also a Russian lineage to the representation of Abu Ibrahim as a fatalistic yet good-natured peasant.
  - 13 Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), 366-67.
  - 14 Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917-1948* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009).
  - 15 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 28, 243.
  - 16 Khalidi. *Palestinian Identity*, 126n21; Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 103n106.
  - 17 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 127.
  - 18 Campos's book is part of a series of recent works aimed at exploring the complexity of the late Ottoman period in Palestine. Yuval Ben-Bassat and Eyal Genio, eds., *Late Ottoman Palestine: the Period of Young Turk Rule* (London: Tauris, 2011). Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth Century Palestine* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010), 29-32. Jonathan Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014). Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2011).
  - 19 'Isa al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," in *Les mémoires de 'Issa Al-'Issa: Journaliste et intellectuel Palestinien (1878-1950)*, trans. and ed. Noha Tadros Khalaf (Saint-Denis: Institut Maghreb-Europe, 2009), 123, 127.
  - 20 Al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," 134.
  - 21 David Tidhar, *Entsiklopediyah le-Halutse ha-Yishuv u-Vonav* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Rishonim, 1947), 823-25.
  - 22 Tidhar, *Entsiklopediyah le-Halutse ha-Yishuv u-Vonav*, 823-25; Meirovitch, "Tsiyonim ve-Tsiyon," in a Russian Zionist newspaper, 1902, reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah: Kovets Ma'amarim Nivharim bi-She' elot ha-Yishuv ha-'Ivri be-Erets Yisra'el mi-Lifney 50 Shanah ye-ad Perots Milhemet ha-'Olam*, ed. Yizhak Avineri and Menashe Meirovitch. (Tel Aviv: Hevrat Mishar ve-Ta'asiyah, 1931).
  - 23 Hillel I. Yanovskii, "Menashe Meirovitch – mi Zikney ha-Yishuv: Netivot Hayav," in *Minhat 'Erev: Zikhronot, Mikhtavim u-Te'udot le-Toldot Hibat Tsiyon ve-ha-Tsiyonut, Ma'amarim u-Reshimot be-She' elot Kalkaliyot ve-Tarbutiyot shel ha-Yishuv*, ed. Menashe Meirovitch and Hillel I. Yanovskii (Rishon LeZion: Hotsaat Yedidim ve-Haverim, 1941), 4.
  - 24 Meirovitch, "Dalim ve-Reikim Anahnu," *ha-Or*, 1913, reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah*, ed. Avineri and Meirovitch, 111.
  - 25 Meirovitch, "Ma'seh Yashan, aval Tamid Hadash," *ha-Or*, 1912, reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah*, ed. Avineri and Meirovitch, 104.
  - 26 Meirovitch, "Ma'seh Yashan ,103-5.
  - 27 Qustandi Shumali lists only 5 articles under 'Isa al-'Isa's name before 1927. *Fihris al-Nusus al-Adabiyya fi Jaridat Filastin 1911-1967*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Jam'iyat al-Dirasat al-'Arabiyya, 1992), 338-39.
  - 28 Al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," 132. Though al-'Isa opposed the CUP, his cousin Yusuf was a staunch supporter, and other associates demonstrated an aptitude for cooperation with other groups within Ottoman political structures. Tadros Khalaf, *Les mémoires de 'Issa al-'Issa*, 67. Neville Mandel, "Attempts at an Arab-Zionist Entente: 1913-1914," *Middle Eastern Studies* 1 (April 1965): 243.
  - 29 Menashe Meirovitch, "'Ad Matai Nahasheh," *ha-Tsvi*, 1909, reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah*, ed. Avineri and Meirovitch, 96-98. Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2012), 34-35.
  - 30 Menashe Meirovitch, "Le-Harim Mikhshol mi-Derekh 'Ami," *Knesset Yisra'el* (Warsaw), 1887, reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah*, ed. Avineri and Meirovitch, 10-16.
  - 31 *Filastin*, 18 August 1912, no. 167.
  - 32 *Filastin*, 25 August 1912, no. 169.
  - 33 'Ayida al-Najjar, *Sihafat Filastin wa-l-Haraka al-Wataniyya fi Nisf Qarn, 1900-1948* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Nashr, 2005), 41-51.
  - 34 Al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," 135.
  - 35 Al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," 135.
  - 36 One of Menashe Meirovitch's sons, Bar-Kokhba, was also a member of Barkai, but according to their register he was only ordained in 1927. David Tidhar, *Sefer He-Ahim: 60 Shanah Le-Hiyasdah Shel Ha-Lishkah, 1906-1966* (Tel Aviv: Lishkat Barkai mis. 17 shel bana'im hofshiyim kadmonim u-mekubalim, 1966), 16, 26.
  - 37 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 89-93.
  - 38 Menashe Meirovitch, "Hishtatfuti be-'Itonim 'Arviyim," *Doar ha-Yom*, 19 April 1935; Menashe Meirovitch, *Meha-Shevil El ha-Derekh: Kovets Ma'amarim u-Mikhtavim bi-*

- She'elot ha-Yishuv ha-Ivri be-Erets Yisra'el* (Tel Aviv: be-Hotsaat Hevrat Shtibel ve-Hever Yedide ha-Mehaber, 1936), 61-63.
- 39 Menachem Kapeliouk and Menashe Meirovitch, "Biluyi ba-'Itonut ha-'Arvit lifney 30 Shanah," [unknown publication], clipped in CZA A32/28.
- 40 Nissim Malul and Shim'on Moyal contributed columns to Arabic newspapers (including *Filastin*) and also established their own Arabic newspaper. Abigail Jacobson, *From Empire to Empire: Jerusalem Between Ottoman and British Rule* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 114-16.
- 41 A protocol of the representatives of the Judea colonies and the Jaffa politicians from 6 February 1911, in CZA L2/44.
- 42 Meirovitch to Ruppin, 16 October 1911; Meirovitch to Ruppin, 27 October 1911; Meirovitch to Ruppin, 14 November 1911 in CZA L2/167.
- 43 Meirovitch to Ruppin, 16 October 1911; Meirovitch to Ruppin, 27 October 1911; Meirovitch to Ruppin, 29 February 1912; Letter to Meirovitch, 25 February 1912; Meirovitch to Ruppin, 12 March 1912 in CZA L2/167.
- 44 Meirovitch to Ruppin, 16 April 1912 in CZA L2/167.
- 45 See numerous examples in Meirovitch's oppositional writing reprinted in *Hevley Tehiyah*, ed. Avineri and Meirovitch
- 46 *Filastin*, 19 May 1912, no. 141.
- 47 *Filastin*, 19 May 1912, no. 141.
- 48 *Filastin*, 23 July 1911, no. 57.
- 49 *Filastin*, 23 July 1911, no. 57.
- 50 *Filastin*, 21 January 1912, no. 108.
- 51 *Filastin*, 23 July 1911, no. 57. *Filastin*, 21 January 1912, no. 108.
- 52 *Filastin*, 19 May 1912, no. 141.
- 53 *Filastin*, 19 May 1912, no. 141.
- 54 *Filastin*, 10 September 1911, no. 71.
- 55 *Filastin*, 5 November 1911, no. 89.
- 56 There is no evidence to suggest that Meirovitch's son volunteered in the Ottoman army.
- 57 It is unclear what al-'Isa thought about *musha'*. Tadros Khalaf writes somewhat cryptically that al-'Isa "seems to have not missed an occasion to apply his gifts as an administrator, whether it was in the distribution of communal lands or familial lands." Tadros Khalaf, *Les mémoires de 'Issa al-'Issa*, 116.
- 58 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 95-96; Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24-25; Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), 24, 40-41.
- 59 Munir Fakhr Eldin, "Communities of Owners: Land Law, Governance, and Politics in Palestine, 1858-1948" (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 70.
- 60 Michelle Campos, "Making Citizens, Contesting Citizenship in Late Ottoman Palestine," in *Late Ottoman Palestine: The Period of Young Turk Rule*, eds. Yuval Ben-Basat and Eyal Ginio (London: Tauris, 2011), 24-25.
- 61 Campos, "Making Citizens," 24.
- 62 Fakhr Eldin, "Communities of Owners," 71.
- 63 *Filastin*, 11 August 1912, no. 165.
- 64 In a letter to Ruppin from October 1911 Meirovitch explained that in *Filastin* "articles that speak energetically about the Jewish question are making some trouble so for Jewish questions I approached the editor of *al-Nafir* with an offer to work together." The editor of *Filastin* allegedly had trouble discussing whether there was an anti-Semitic club in Jaffa. Meirovitch to Ruppin, 16 October 1911, in CZA L2/167.
- 65 Yaacov Roi, "Nisyonoteyhem shel ha-Mosadot ha-Tsioniyim le-ha-Shpi'a 'al ha-'Itonut ha-'Arvit be-Erets Yisra'el ba-Shanim 1908-1914," *Zion* 3-4 (1967), 224.; Jacob Yehoshua, *Tarikh al-Sihafa al-'Arabiyya fi Filastin* (Jerusalem: J. Yehoshua, 1974), 52.
- 66 *Al-Nafir*, 12 March 1912, in CZA A32/32.
- 67 Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 83, 162; Yehoshua, *Tarikh al-Sihafa al-'Arabiyya*, 53.
- 68 Zakka thanked Meirovitch for sending over a column and promised to publish additional articles. Zakka to Meirovitch, [Date unclear] in CZA L2/167.
- 69 Meirovitch, "Likhvod 'Orekh 'Iton ha-Nafir," Letter from Abu Ibrahim to Zakka, circa 1912, reprinted in *Minhat 'Erev: Zikhronot, Mikhtavim u-Te'udot le-Toldot Hibat Tsiyon ye-ha-Tsiyonut, Ma'amaram u-Reshimot be-She'elot Kalkaliyot ve-Tarbutiyot shel ha-Yishuv*, ed. Menashe Meirovitch and Hillel I. Yanovski (Rishon LeZion: Hotsaat Yedidim ve-Haverim, 1941), 26.
- 70 Meirovitch, "Likhvod 'Orekh 'Iton ha-Nafir," 27.
- 71 Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 161-62.
- 72 Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 162.
- 73 Rashid Khalidi, preface to *Les mémoires de 'Issa al-'Issa: Journaliste et intellectuel Palestinien (1878-1950)*, by Noha Tadros Khalaf (Saint-Denis: Institut Maghreb-Europe, 2009), 5.
- 74 Khalidi, preface to *Les mémoires*, 9-12.
- 75 "Rassail-el-Felah" handwritten draft column, undated, in CZA A32/32.
- 76 Meirovitch, "Likhvod ha-Va'ada ha-Malkhutit, Yerushalayim," Meirovitch to the Royal Commission, 28 December 1936, reprinted in *Minhat 'Erev*, ed. Meirovitch and Yanovski, 57.
- 77 Al-'Isa, "Le texte: Min dhikrayat al-madi – souvenirs," 227.