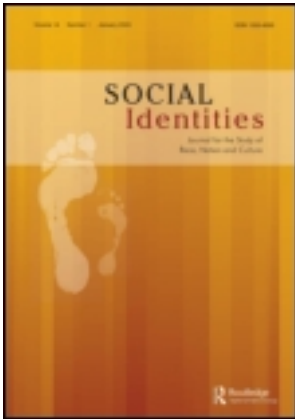


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The Phenomenology of Colonialism and the Politics of 'Difference': European Zionist Emissaries and Arab-Jews in Colonial Abadan

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines documents written by Jewish construction workers who won a public tender issued by the Anglo-Iranian Company in the early 1940s to build and maintain oil refining facilities next to the city of Abadan (on the Shatt al-Arab waterway). This group of 450 workers stayed in the region for more than three years and acted as the agent of the first concrete encounter between the Zionist movement and Arab-Jews at a time when the Jewish leadership was making serious plans to bring those Jews to Palestine. The emissaries' descriptions of their day-to-day life make it possible to introduce their voices and create a history of their experiences. This paper examines two main themes: (1) the colonial context of this encounter, and (2) the politics of difference that emerged on site. Zionist emissaries perceived themselves as integral organs of the British colonial state and described their presence in the region in colonial language. This essay furthers the analysis of Zionism as colonialism by adding a phenomenological dimension to its interpretation. One of the main objects of the Zionist emissaries' discourse was the Arabness of the local (Iraqi and Iranian) Jews. While the emissaries described their traits and customs as Arab, they simultaneously insisted on marking the 'difference' between the local Jews and the Arabs in order to recruit the former into the Zionist project. Thus, whereas they defined the Arab-Jews as part of the national collective they also left a colonial 'marker' (the difference) that later became an ethnic category within the Jewish nationhood. This paper concludes that a postcolonial theoretical framework, which is generally neglected in sociological and historical analyses, is essential for understanding the mobilisation of Arab-Jews into the Zionist project.

In 1942, a group of Jews settled on a piece of land next to the city of Abadan. At its peak, the group included about 450 men — skilled and unskilled workers, engineers, foremen, construction workers, engravers, mechanics, plumbers, accountants, and clerks. They established an infrastructure for day-to-day life, engaged in productive labour in the form of construction and maintenance, set up a labour council, organised sports activities, held cultural evenings, founded a library with a collection of about a thousand books, and published a bulletin in which they documented their experiences (see, e.g., Yad Tabenkin 25Ayin/2/8, 11 November 1944). Numerous settlements of this type

existed in Mandatory Palestine at the time. Yet this particular settlement had singular features. It was located far from Mandatory Palestine, some 1000 miles away from Tel Aviv on the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The group in question was a 'labour battalion' of the Solel Boneh construction company, which won a public tender issued by the Anglo-Iranian Company to build and maintain oil-refining facilities. The Solel Boneh personnel remained in the region for three years under the auspices of colonial Britain, for reasons beyond economic objectives. In addition to British colonial interests (such as fuel production during the Second World War), the project reflected national and colonial interests of the Zionist enterprise itself.

The labour battalion played a distinctive historical role: it was the agent of the first concrete encounter between the Zionist movement and Arab-Jews,¹ at a time when Jewish leadership was making serious plans to bring these Jews to Palestine. The presence of the Solel Boneh group in the region provided a cover for the illegal entry of Zionist emissaries into Baghdad, Tehran, Mosul, Khorramshahr, Basra, Kharkukh, and other cities where Jewish communities existed (see, e.g., Ha'apalah Project: Interview with Yisrael Sapir, 13.6 (98), 29 September 1980). This was not the first encounter between European-Zionist emissaries and Jews from Arab countries. Earlier encounters took place with the Jews of Yemen (Shafir, 1989/1996, pp. 92–96), Iraq (e.g., Meir, 1993; Shenhav, 1999), North Africa (e.g., Tsur, 2001), and other communities. However, there is a fundamental difference between those encounters and what transpired at Abadan in the early 1940s. Largely random in character, the pre-Abadan encounters were little more than a series of historical episodes, and they contrasted sharply with the keen interest that the Zionist movement showed in Middle Eastern Jewry (especially in Iraq) beginning in 1941–42; and to the continuous, systematic and intensive presence of the Solel Boneh personnel in and around Abadan. I argue that, for various reasons, this historic encounter at Abadan marks the 'zero point' of the relations between the Zionist movement and Arab-Jews.

The Abadan encounter was the first systematic interface between the Jewish leadership in Palestine and Arab-Jews following the formulation of a plan for the massive immigration of these Jews to Palestine. The so-called 'Plan of the Million' was presented by David Ben-Gurion to experts at a meeting in Rehovot in 1942 (Hacohen, 1994). Although the plan was not implemented immediately and contained some unfeasible provisions, it marked the start of a discourse and the initial spotlighting of Arab-Jews as potential candidates for immigration to Palestine.

Moreover, this encounter was facilitated by British colonialism, under the auspices of which the Zionist emissaries operated in the region. The colonial state supplied the social and material conditions for the Zionists' residence, creating clear and distinct lines of demarcation between the different ethnic groups in the region. In a discourse of self-definition that veiled their lifelines from the British colonial state, the Zionist emissaries constructed their activities in Abadan as a 'rescue operation' rather than one of establishing control or of restructuring the society and territory of another population. Zionist historiography does not address the importance of the colonial context in the encounter

between Zionism and Middle Eastern Jewry; the Abadan project reveals the colonial factor and throws it into sharper relief.

Furthermore, Abadan, was not only an important transit station in creating the conditions for Jewish immigration to Palestine, but also provided a space for drives to 'civilise' the so-called 'Arab-Jews'. The civilising mission was made possible by the emissaries' geographical proximity to their target communities and the fact that the work of the Solel Boneh personnel kept them in the region for an extended period, during which they established an impressive Zionist library and founded Zionist youth movements and organisations.

The encounter is also significant in terms of the way in which it shaped and defined the identities of the emissaries themselves as a result of the distance between Palestine and Abadan that created geographical proximity to an 'exilic' community. As we know from other colonial projects, not only do the objects of the civilising mission undergo a transformation in a process of this kind (e.g., Mitchell, 1988; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991), but the colonial agents themselves also undergo an identity formation process. Evincing this dynamic, the encounter with the Arab-Jews became a laboratory for the self-training of the Solel Boneh personnel as well as a site to examine the politics of identity and difference between the emissaries and the local 'Arab Jews'.

Solel Boneh ventured into the region holding 'two complementary passports'. One 'passport' identified it as a Jewish-Zionist company that symbolised the strength of the Jewish national project in Palestine. The second was its passport as an economic company in the service of British colonialism. This state of affairs reflects the inherent duality not only of the company but also of the entire Zionist movement. Solel Boneh operated by balancing the legitimacy it was given by Zionism and colonial Britain while speaking in several voices simultaneously. Striking the necessary balance to operate in the region was no simple matter, as the relations between Zionism and British colonialism did not always run smoothly, and because the Jewish workers at Abadan were not a monolithic group.

Other than a few superficial references, the story of this labour battalion and its encounter with the Arab-Jews, remains untold. Even the historians of Solel Boneh, such as Hillel Dan (1963), Eliahu Bieltsky (1974), Shlomo Shaba (1976), and David Hacoheh (1974) — they were either managers in the company or were commissioned by it — barely mention this group or the circumstances of its mission, its methods of operation, and its encounter with the Arab Jews, particularly the Jews of Iraq and Iran.²

I will turn next to a description of the historical and theoretical context of the Abadan Project (Section 1), and follow this with two empirical sections. Section 2 will elucidate what I will term the 'phenomenology of colonialism', referring to the way in which the colonial experience shaped the identity of the Zionist emissaries to the region. The phenomenology of colonialism accounts for the Zionist emissaries' own descriptions and experiences of the colonial situation.

Section 3 examines the encounter between two paradigms — the colonial and the national — within which the emissaries operated, and shows how they

forged and constructed the ethnic identity of the Arab-Jews. In the conjunction of the two paradigms, 'Arab Jews' are depicted contradictorily, both as the 'other' of Europe and as members of the homogeneous Jewish nationhood. This finds expression in what the emissaries themselves labelled as the 'difference' between Arabs and Jews. I will explore the notion of the 'difference' in relation to postcolonial theory, and show how this 'difference' became an object of colonial 'boundary dispute', to use Homi Bhabha's term (Bhabha, 1990). An elucidation of the broader background to Solel Boneh's activity in the region and the nature of the company's relations with the British Empire, under the auspices of which it operated, is important for understanding both the evolution of the hybrid consciousness (colonial and national) among the personnel and the politics of identity that transpired between them and the Jewish population they encountered.

1. The Historical and Theoretical Context of the Abadan Project

During the Second World War, as reports of the mass murder of Jews in Europe were increasingly confirmed, the Zionist movement turned its gaze upon the Jews in Islamic countries — who until then had been 'present absentees' in Zionist activity — as candidates for immigration. In 1942, David Ben-Gurion described at a meeting of experts and leaders of the Jewish establishment a plan for bringing a million Jews to Palestine. He singled out the Middle Eastern Jews as a target for Zionist immigration: 'Our Zionist policy must now pay special attention to the Jewish groups in the Arab countries' (Hacohen, 1994, p. 212). However fantastic, Ben-Gurion's programme for the immigration of a million Jews went into considerable detail about the routes to be taken, absorption services, clothing, medical treatment, shipments, vocational training for the new immigrants, and the food the new immigrants would receive based on caloric needs. The plan further included the architectural design for the immigrant camps, specifying the optimal size and style of the buildings, the type of lumber to be used for construction, and the provision of basic equipment and sanitation facilities. Information about the Jewish communities in the region used in developing the plan was gathered through impressions gleaned by emissaries who were stationed in Arab countries under the auspices of Solel Boneh or the British Army.

Beginning in the mid-1930s, the British Empire employed Solel Boneh to build roads, airfields, and military bases in the region. There is clear evidence that the British preferred the Jews to the Arabs in the tenders for these jobs (e.g., Hacohen, 1974, p. 73; Dan, 1963, pp. 174–75). The presence of Solel Boneh in the Arab space made it possible for senior figures in the Zionist leadership to travel in the Middle East in order to advance nationalist goals. The company opened branches in Beirut, Baghdad and Damascus, to which it sent architects, engineers, construction workers, and troops of the Palmach (the so called 'shock troops') in the guise of company staff. During the Second World War, the presence of the Solel Boneh group in the region facilitated the task of making contact with Jewish refugees from Poland who had reached the Iran-USSR border. The Solel Boneh mission to Abadan in 1942 fell within the

framework of this routine activity, and the company received assistance from the British Army not only with its economic undertakings, but also in executing tasks of a distinctly Zionist character. During their more than three-year stay in the region, the emissaries marked the 'Arab Jews' for the first time as objects of discourse and candidates for immigration.

Many others have addressed the connection between Zionism and colonialism (Shohat, 1997; Kimmerling, 1989; Kimmerling, 1983; Shafir, 1989; Pappe, 1997; Ram, 1993; Khazzoom, 1999; Shamir, 2000). This link is usually discussed in relation to the 'conquest of the land' or the 'conquest of labour' within the boundaries of Palestine. These interpretations of Zionism and colonialism often employ analytical categories that are abstracted from concrete historical situations. For example, Shafir (1989), following Fieldhouse (1966) and Fredrickson (1988), locates Zionist activity on a map that demarcates four types of colonies: military, mixed, plantation, and pure settlement. While there is no denying the importance of turning historiographic and sociological discussions on the subject toward more generalised conceptual frameworks, this paper contributes to the understanding of the connection between Zionism and colonialism in two respects. First, my aim is to disengage temporarily from the attempt to put forward a series of comparative analytical arguments concerning the colonialist model of Zionism, and instead to interrogate the voices of the participants themselves. Using voices and testimonies, it becomes possible to ascertain how the participation of the Zionist emissaries was mediated by a colonial consciousness and to clarify their views about colonialism as well as the question of colour. This phenomenological analysis of the colonialist consciousness reflects a reality rife with contradictions, ambiguity and conflicts.

Zionism is also tied to colonialism through its relationship with the British colonial state. As Shamir explains in the context of law,

Concrete governmental practices-embodiment the simple fact that the colonial state was 'there', not as a passive observer, but as an active player have been shunned in the history of Jewish nationalism and its state building project. (Shamir, 2000, p. 12)

In that respect, the British umbrella supplied the legitimation for the operations of Solel Boneh at Abadan as an organ of the colonial state. There is no doubt that the project was undertaken with the concurrence of the Jewish institutions in Palestine, such as the Actions Committee of the Histadrut federation of labour and the Jewish Agency, and with the encouragement of the British administration (LA IV-320-7, 23 April 1945). However, the Abadan project also reflects the duality of Zionist activity in its ties with the colonial state. Despite the advantages of cooperation with the Mandate authorities, the Jewish leadership was ambivalent toward the British administration. In some cases, it aimed trenchant criticism at both the Mandate government and in general at 'British imperialism', which according to Hillel Dan (Solel Boneh's first general manager) 'drew its strength from its oppression of the colonies' (Dan, 1963, p. 161). Likewise, the bulletin of Solel Boneh itself assailed the company's collaboration with British colonialism:

Industry [that is] subjugated to foreign monopolies cannot exploit its country's natural resources for the good of the people, because the foreign monopolies vehemently oppose this ... Subjugated industry cannot expand the basis of national independence — on the contrary, it intensifies the subjugation and dependence on the foreign power. (LA IV-320-12, August 1946)

This remark in support of the autonomy of national industry may be read as a critique of colonialism, and contravenes Solel Boneh's fruitful relations with the British colonial state. This ambivalence exemplifies precisely the complexity and the tense and adaptive relations between the national and colonialist paradigms within which Solel Boneh operated.

Moreover, even the 'national community' at Abadan was not homogeneous: the human map of the Solel Boneh personnel at the site represented multiple interests. Some of the workers were fully-fledged professionals. Others were impostors (for example, Enzo Sereni, who ran the company's office in Baghdad, devoted all his time to underground activity). Others in the group were sent to Abadan as professionals with no political goals but then discovered the possibilities for national activity, such as teaching Hebrew and forming youth movements. Still others in the group refused to go along with the national activity and indeed tried to undermine it, all the while castigating the Jewish political leadership. Finally, the group also included 'diasporic' Jews who had just arrived from Europe; at Abadan they tried to learn Hebrew and consolidate their own divided identity.

This whole complex array of interests and identities became sharply etched at Abadan, which acted as a kind of third space. In a third space, identities do not submit to logocentric binary logic, as evidenced by the conflicts that arose among members of the 'national' group, between them and the British, and with the local Jewish communities. Therefore, the case of the Abadan project is not only an important historical episode in itself, it is also a microcosm of the broader processes of Zionist colonial nationalism. It enables colonialism to be seen as an inseparable element in the relations between 'European Jews' and 'Arab Jews' at the moment of the 'discovery' of Arab-Jews in the Zionist project.

As John Comaroff argues, classic colonial projects are based on four major goals: discovery of the territory and conquest of the land, described in terms of redemption and their advancement through 'modernisation' projects; exploitation of industry and commerce, and materialisation of local resources for capitalist purposes; rationalisation of the administration and the state bureaucratic institutions; and finally, civilising the 'locals' and pacifying the 'natives' by creating and reproducing ethnic lines of demarcation (Comaroff, 1998). At least two of these goals are relevant to the case of the Abadan project: discovery of the territory and the reorganisation of its ethnic categorisations.

In his letters, Enzo Sereni describes how he succeeded, with the aid of the Solel Boneh personnel, in discovering the new territory that lay 'beyond the Sambatyon' (a mythical river beyond which the lost ten tribes of Israel were supposed to have been transported) and in conquering it for national purposes:

A few months ago, when we started to work in Iraq, it was like a land beyond the Sambatyon, about which we knew nothing and which knew nothing about us ... As a result, we found ourselves groping in the dark to find a foundation for initial work among people whose nature it was difficult to fathom and who were foreign to us and to our cause from a number of points of view. Today we have overcome these difficulties. We are 'like members of the family' in Baghdad. We are familiar with the people, with both their virtues and their shortcomings, and we are 'knowledgeable' about the relations between the different classes and groups. Now the conditions have been created for more intensive, rational, productive work. [Emphases added]. (Yad Tabenkin, 25Ayin/Container 1/File 12, 3 February 1943)

Sereni's remarks emphasise the importance of the zero point that was discussed above. He explains how, at the zero point, the emissaries arrived in a new space ('beyond the Sambatyon') and made it theirs ('like members of the family'), and how they met people who were 'foreign to us and our cause' and made them 'familiar'. In other words, the salient element marking the Abadan project as a 'zero point' is not only the massive scale of the Zionist-national delegation, but also the fact that the project was the generating encounter of a new colonial conception of space and time and of ethnic consciousness among the Jews themselves, as we see below.

The rest of this paper presents archival materials that reveal the phenomenological aspects of Zionist colonialism (Section 2) and shows how ethnic identities became targets of discourse and transformations (Section 3).

2. The Phenomenology of Colonialism

As I have argued, the Abadan case makes it possible to expand the framework of the postcolonial discussion and relocate it from the analytical sphere to the everyday practice of the colonial situation. The emissaries' descriptions of their day-to-day life make it possible to bring in their voices and create a history from below of the colonial experience. For example, one of the emissaries describes the work at the site in the following words:

The work is done in the English style, with coolies. The European worker there doesn't know what it is to lift a piece of iron or a sledgehammer. He stands and waits for the coolies to come over to him and do the dirty work. It is the same when you enter a hall — the coolie or 'boy' serves you. In the evening, after work, he shines the men's shoes, makes the bed, arranges the netting outside; in the morning he comes and removes the netting and brings it into the room. And so it goes. Life there is easy from this point of view. And the members of our group adjusted very quickly to this style of work and life. [Emphases added]. (LA IV-320-7, 23 April 1945)

The emissaries' lives at Abadan were thus shaped by reliance upon non-white unskilled labourers in the manner of British colonialism. Control of space through the agency of the British colonial state figured as another dimension of

the emissaries' experiences. One of the emissaries, Ben-Ari, talks about his perception of the colonial status entailed in taking up residence in the Abadan space and about the dual aspect of colonialism expressed in Solel Boneh's presence there. What the group would like, he says,

is for people to look not only at the work but beyond it, *and arouse the impression of a Hebrew [Jewish] colony, vis-à-vis the local Jews, the English, the Allied forces, and maybe even vis-à-vis the country we are in.* I doubt that it will be easy to influence a Persian in the first period, but over the years we will succeed. That was our way in the past, when we influenced whole nations by teaching the virtues. Our impact stems solely from spiritual effects and not from diplomatic influences — and therefore we want the group to appear in its proper form — among the local population. We will not see the fruit of our toil in one day, *and therefore it must be seen as an existing regime that is the first Hebrew colony,* and therefore we consider it so important. [Emphases added]. (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944)

The colony's task is linked to the presence of Jews in the colonial space (and it is defined in relation to British colonialism):

A large community of 120,000 Jews exists in Baghdad, and we also have to improve the situation of the Jews in Persia. We appear as renewers with the help of the English, who have different ways and a different approach. It is essential that we think about our way. *What role should this colony have in places like these?* I think the first thing is to choose the human material ... I would be pleased if those who are here would say explicitly what factors are needed to create a *first-class Land-of-Israel colony* ... When the British Empire sends people, it also tells them to behave in such-and-such a way. *I do not want to make us forget the etiquette of the English colonies, but we must set ground rules for a Jewish colony.* [Emphases added]. (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944)

The description of the Jewish emissaries' routine reveals also the complexity of Abadan as a colonial site. Both the workers and the Zionist emissaries describe incidents and encounters with superiors, locals, or their English colleagues that suggest a relationship of simultaneous attraction, desire, and rejection as far as awareness of colour is concerned. One of the most fascinating testimonies of the project's colonial context is supplied by Natan Belizhovsky, from Kibbutz Afeq, a Zionist emissary who was at Abadan in the guise of a Solel Boneh worker. The Polish-born Belizhovsky immigrated to Palestine in 1941, settling in Kibbutz Mishmar Yam. A few months later he was recruited to 'a group of emissaries that is going to be infiltrated into enemy countries'. After meeting with the Zionist activist leader Yitzhak Tabenkin, he joined a training course in which two of the instructors were Shaul Avigur and Moshe Carmel. Belizhovsky believed that he would be sent back to Eastern Europe, where he would prepare Jews to defend themselves. However, following the completion of the course, he was informed by Carmel that he was being sent to Abadan.

Belizhovsky describes how British colonialism manifested itself in the preferential treatment of the Jew as a white worker:

Only the chief foreman knew about us. The other foremen didn't know, and the next day we were assigned to work. We reported to the refineries at 4 A.M. I was put in charge of installing windows in the refineries and my job was to supervise [East] Indian craftsmen. Of course, from being a craftsman I became a person who held the ruler and the tools, as this was not my profession. Then *the responsible British official came by and could not bear the sight of a white man doing manual labour*, and he informed the manager of our company accordingly. The next day my assignment was changed and I was made supervisor of casting pillars. I knew something about that. I supervised the 'coolies' ... Persian coolies. *Here I discovered the terrible sight of the conditions in which the Iranian worker lives under the British colonial regime*. It was actually here, in this country, that I became a true socialist. Here I saw people dying of hunger. Here I saw a person receive four pitas and a teabag. That was his salary. Here I saw dying people lying in the streets. *Here I saw the humiliation, which the white man does not get involved with*. He travels by himself, there is no mixing together. Matter for deep thinking about the problems of the world and about ourselves ... [Emphases added]. (Natan Belizhovsky, Ha'apalah Archive (100) 13.6, 30 September 1980)

Ambivalence also appears in the attitude toward the 'place' and its definition. A central question that exercised the emissaries was whether their site at Abadan was 'Land of Israel territory' or foreign, and to what extent it was in fact a British or Zionist colony. The majority of them used the word 'colony' (*kolonia* rather than the Hebrew term *moshava*, for example) directly and without inhibition. Thus, according to an emissary named Flon, for example, 'If we want to create a Jewish colony here, we should just go ahead and do it'. Another emissary, Yisakharov, adds that some people 'look askance at our colony' (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944). Lieberman invokes similar terminology: 'I assume that there was a sufficient basis for creating this colony ...'. Kipnis objects to this line of thought: 'I reject the direction of the debate ... [We should] talk about a national mission. A colony has an imperialistic odour' (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944).

Kipnis's warning thrusts the discussion into its political context and compels the participants to consider more acutely their concepts and the attitudes toward reality that they represent. The remark by Kipnis was censored from the minutes that were later sent to the Histadrut Actions Committee in Tel Aviv, as was the elucidatory response of Yitzhak Finkelstein: 'Those who used the word colony are not imperialists, and there is no need to use irksome words'. Pleased with Finkelstein's reaction, Kipnis explains why Abadan is not a colony. Yet his clarification reinforces rather than weakens the perception of Abadan as a colonialist project: 'In the Land of Israel there is an English consul who conducts British cultural work and propaganda. We have limitations' (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944). In other words, Kipnis does not deny the

colonial potential of the group's presence at Abadan; indeed, his comment suggests that if that potential is not being realised, it is for lack of ability rather than lack of desire. The formal limitations on the emissaries' cultural work (rather than the absence of colonial objectives) deter him from defining Abadan as a Jewish colony, in contrast to the English consul in Palestine, which does not face similar restrictions in undertaking its cultural missions.

The neutralisation of the term 'colony' and its laundering by the use of the Hebrew term 'moshava' points indirectly to the colonial context of the speech. From Kipnis's point of view, it would appear, Abadan was a Jewish settlement project in a space with no borders and no territorial definitions. What made this spatial conception possible was largely the colonial British umbrella, which created an open, unbounded space. Although the emissaries justify their presence in terms of a national mission ('This is the first appearance of Eretz Yisrael people on a mission of the nation', one of them says), they emphasise the fact that realisation of the national goals is made possible within a space that was conquered by a colonial power ('We have limitations') (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944).

The differences in the emissaries' conceptions of the space are reflected also, as I will show immediately, in the way they perceive their mission and its goals, as well as in what they think about the quality of the group's members. Thus, contrary to the notion that colonialism and nationalism speak in a uniform voice, we find no coherent, unified point of departure among the emissaries. The autonomous national subjectivity dissolves into 'fragments' — into groups and speakers — precluding the formation of one centre of gravity vis-à-vis the 'other', the colonial subject. In this sense, the emissaries' definitions of the 'other' and their separation from him/her by means of the politics of difference (on which I will elaborate in the next section) do not produce one coherent definition of themselves (see Said, 1978).

One of the fascinating aspects of the discussions concerns the tension between the national mission and the economic mission. As one of the emissaries summed it up,

There is plenty of nice talk about sending people to the East to achieve influence, but when it comes down to the simple arithmetic, the calculation relates to a large number of people, and then the calculation is about how much money can be generated. Two forces converge here — on the one hand, the [Jewish leadership is] interested in sending select human material in order to represent them appropriately in the East, while on the other hand Solel Boneh, as a firm, takes no heed of this direction, of this problem and of our approach. No ideological connection exists between Solel Boneh and the Actions Committee, not even an organisational connection, and the main factor is the money issue. (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944)

This tension makes possible a space for the simultaneous existence of both economic-colonial and political-national justifications for the group's presence in the region. This tension demonstrates a few points concerning Solel Boneh's group dynamics and objectives. First, the labour battalion's original goals were

nebulous. Second, not all of the battalion's purposes of going to the region were defined beforehand, and some were conceived autonomously by the group's members. Third, even if some of the goals existed beforehand, they changed during the period of the group's stay in the region. Finally, each of the Jewish workers did not possess identical information about the goals of the project, and once these goals became known they fomented a fierce conflict within the group. This situation is reflected in the words of one of the group's members:

I think that Solel Boneh did not come here out of altruism. *There was a clear prior intention as to why they were coming here.* And when the offer from the company came, many meetings must have been held about whether to accept the offer based on commercial reasons or for another purpose. And if that is the case, they should have given thought at the time about what [human] material they were sending here and what its task would be. I find it strange that we are quarrelling over our influence now, as this can no longer be corrected, it is the result of a mistake that was made at the time. That is the situation today, unfortunately ... We have here both new immigrants and ordinary Jews who came here with a mathematical calculation, for a purely economic purpose, *and to concentrate this material today and become a colony with a lofty role is difficult today.* [Emphases added]. (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944)

This view was seconded by Hai Yisakharov:

We did not see ourselves as technical economic representatives of a Histadrut institution, but as representatives of the pioneering movement of the Jewish people in the Land and in the Diaspora. Otherwise we have no right to be here. (LA IV-210-28, 23 November 1944)

However, another emissary challenged this conception, criticising especially its implicit view that the land-settlement institutions recognised the national potential of Abadan even before the group set out:

I feel bound to say that I am amazed that the question of a special mission has even been raised, as to whether this place is so important to us from a national viewpoint; and if the [human] material has to represent the Histadrut appropriately, where was the Histadrut for the past 28 months? You knew about the [human] material you were sending here and you knew about the tasks that would be imposed on them, so why were you silent all this time? ... There was a lot to do in every area. If you had seen the presentation of the Jewish children in Abadan, how pleasant it was to hear the sounds of Land of Israel coming from the children in Abadan — but in this too, as in everything else, the possibilities were not exploited. You must provide the answer. You are the ones responsible and you are to blame. You neglected a large group of workers for such a long time. (LA IV-320-7, 23 November 1944)

Yisakharov levelled the accusation at the representatives of the Actions Committee in Abadan. The 'silence' he referred to was the vagueness and the ambiguity, the absence of a specific direction and the multiple contexts of the Abadan presence. In addition to illustrating the tension between the Zionist and economic aspects of the mission, the discussion also confirms that many of the tasks undertaken by the labour battalion were not predetermined but rather were decided after the group arrived in the Arab space and consolidated its presence there, and that in some cases Solel Boneh's duties were not known to all the emissaries before the group set out.

According to some emissaries, due to the 'ambiguity' of the goals underlying their move into the Arab space, some of those who were chosen for the project may have been technically qualified but lacked the tools to carry out appropriate Zionist activity and hence were not 'good human material' (LA IV-320-7, 24 November 1944). One of them explained the problem: there were

anti-Zionist elements who in no small measure were a factor that interfered with normal life. The group that is engaged in doing educational work with the children and Jews of the place and the surrounding area was compelled to ask the Solel Boneh management to remove a few members from the place because of serious disruptions of this important activity. (LA IV-210-28, 23 April 1945)

The discussion about the quality of the 'human material' gave rise to another interesting issue. Some of the workers had just arrived in Palestine from Europe and had not yet internalised the distinction between 'Diaspora' and 'Land'. As one speaker noted,

Many of those who are here today in Abadan became members of the Histadrut on the day they left for Abadan, and many of them had just arrived in the country and have no attachment to it, and for them Abadan is a springboard back to the Diaspora. (LA IV-210-28, 23 April 1945)

In other words, this emissary claimed that because the new arrivals were still imbued with a 'diasporic mentality' their presence in Abadan could not generate a Land of Israel-based centre of gravity vis-à-vis the local Jews. Worse, the 'new' immigrants were not yet sufficiently rooted in the 'Land of Israel' and therefore possessed a strong tendency to return to the Diaspora, so any influence they might have on the locals (the Arab Jews) would be negative. Shmarya Guttman explained that

these people brought the diasporic mentality with them to this place ... The human material is not only far-removed from anything to do with Judaism but also from anything to do with Zionism. Here the public is made up of various elements. There are some here on whom the Land of Israel has had no effect and here they mix in with the whole group, so sometimes we do not know whether we are part of a Land of Israel public here or whether we are among people who just got off the boat. We must tighten the ties

with the Histadrut, we must pay special attention to the public, more than at home, because here there are also tremendous difficulties. [Emphases added]. (LA IV-210-28, 24 November 1944)

The rejection of the Diaspora is a paradigm that defined the self-awareness of the Jews in Israel and shaped their conception of history and hence their collective memory (Raz-Karkotzkin, 1993, p. 23). By constituting 'the Diaspora' as one (negative) category, the Zionist historiographic narrative consigned to oblivion the history of separate Jewish communities and the different territories in which their history unfolded. The Diaspora was rejected, diagnosed as a deficient period, a dark interim time without political sovereignty, which therefore must be forgotten.

The case under discussion here undermines the hegemonic status of the thesis of 'Diaspora rejection'. The viability of that thesis in Zionist historiography is predicated upon the existence of a clear binary distinction between 'Diaspora' and 'Land of Israel'. However, that distinction is blurred at Abadan, where 'Diaspora' is perceived as an invented concept and a discursive category. Some of the emissaries who were considered to be from the 'Land' only attained that status in the sense that they underwent an instant baptism of belonging in the Zionist delegation to Abadan. As one speaker pointed out, 'Some of the people here arrived in the Land as refugees and went on to Abadan immediately from the boat' (LA IV-210-28, 11 November 1944). In other words, there were emissaries who arrived from the 'Diaspora', were 'validated as Israelis', and then returned to the Diaspora. As such, they perceived their presence in Abadan on the ostensible national mission as a 'rejection of the Diaspora', yet their presence at Abadan threatened the basic moral distinction between homeland and Diaspora. With its singular conditions, the Abadan experience underscores the fluidity and shifting nature of these categories, and the national-cultural disciplinary processes to which they are subjected. As a simultaneous Diaspora and 'Land of Israel' arena, Abadan was at once an object of rejection and desire, attraction and threat. There was a potential threat inherent in Abadan's element of 'Diaspora', as it was liable to undercut the identity of the emissaries, some of whom were in part 'Israelis' and in part 'diasporics'.

Along these lines Shmarya Guttman explained that the (diasporic) human material was not of a sufficiently high quality:

I do not think that everyone has to be the cream of the cream of the public, but as in every pioneer enterprise there must be a certain percentage of people who are suitable for these tasks abroad. Everything [at Abadan] was apparently done only on the basis of an accounting perspective, and Solel Boneh apparently did not consider all the necessary tasks. (LA IV-320-7, 24 November 1944)

Kapliun, on another occasion, explained that

educational activity among the children and youth [was needed] at the place, informative activity among the Jews there and in the surrounding

area. However, because of the human material that was sent to work at Abadan, this activity could not be carried out as required. Some people, and they are many, began their membership in the Histadrut on the day they left for Abadan ... (LA IV-320-7, 23 April 1945)

Kipnis, too, added his comments:

Solel Boneh was not permitted to choose the human material that was sent to Abadan and was compelled to take whatever it could find. The result is that today we have plenty of people here who came off the street ... people who just arrived in the country ... True, we have to remember that every Jew has the right to work. But here, to this place, which serves us as a place for the conquest of labour outside the borders of the homeland, it is essential to send people who are able to represent us and not those who are incapable ... (LA IV-320-7, 23 April 1945)

European colonial rule was in no small part driven and legitimised by a civilising mission that was nourished by Christian ideals and European ideas of culture and progress (Mitchell, 1988; Cohen, 1996). The local becomes a colonial subject through the creation of regimes of discipline and his construction as an 'other' (see, e.g., Mitchell, 1988). Classic colonialism defined the 'other' in contradistinction to the colonisers by invoking a series of binary categories such as race or colour (see, e.g., Fanon, 1963, 1967). Colonialism derived its power by constructing these distinctions as unbridgeable and unassailable. Hence the definition offered by whites for blacks, enlightened Europeans for primitive natives, missionaries for Africans (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991).

But as Comaroff and Comaroff (1991) have taught us, the locals are not the only objects of the civilising mission. It is always the case that the colonisers themselves construct their own identity in the process. This applies to the Abadan case as well. The emissaries themselves engaged in establishing their own identity, which turned out to be fluid and evolving in the face of the objects of their civilising mission. The coloniser's subjectivity takes shape vis-à-vis the imperial subject, the 'other'.

I turn now to discuss the flip side of the civilising mission, namely the fact that its objects were 'Arab Jews'. At the time, this concept engaged the emissaries extensively, and its treatment was also a product of the two paradigms I have considered: the nationalist and the colonialist. The Arab-Jews became ethnic subjects and possible candidates for integration into the national project. In our case, Zionist emissaries attempted to transform the hyphenated ethnic category of 'Arab-Jews' into binary categories: either 'Jews' or 'Arabs'. This was because 'Jews' and not 'Arabs' were perceived as eligible for immigration to Palestine. But this could not be accomplished easily. The empirical materials presented below show that ethnic identities were ruptured and developed in unexpected directions that did not accord with the national Zionist paradigm writ large.

3. 'A Jew knows he is a Jew and that he is different from an Arab': On the Politics of 'Difference'

The anthropology and sociology of colonialism examine the negotiation, construction, and investigation of 'difference' in the ethnic field (Comaroff, 1998). As Homi Bhabha observes,

It is there, in the colonial margin, that the culture of the west reveals its difference, its limit-text, as its practice of authority displays an ambivalence that is one of the most significant discursive and physical strategies of discriminatory power. (1990, p. 71)

In a context of this kind, a repertoire emerges of 'conflictual positions that constitute the subject in colonial discourse' (1990, p. 81). The 'difference', Bhabha says, produces the ambivalence and undermines the colonialist's authority.

The Arab-Jews were perceived in two different paradigmatic contexts by the Zionist consciousness. In one case they were seen within the colonial paradigm as part of the Arab world that was the 'other' of Europe and also of Zionism, which was the handiwork of European nationalism.³ In the other case they were imagined as an integral part of the Jewish national community. The union of the two paradigms creates a confused, conflicted reality. The Oriental Jews are perceived in the same instance as an Arab colonial object — an approach that engenders the use of distinctly Orientalist speech categories — and as an object of the Zionist national-religious discourse. They are perceived simultaneously as Arabs (hence inferior) and as ancient Jews (hence as exalted/holy).

To be sure, the colonialist and nationalist categories are not mutually exclusive. In the Indian context, for example, as Chatterjee explains, the Orientalist categories were subordinated to the ideology of nationalism in order to enhance the glorification of the national past and its ancient lineage (Chatterjee, 1986, 1993). Zionism, too, creates ethnicity within colonial nationalism. To constitute the Jewish community as a modern nation, Zionism seeks to reconstruct the community's 'organic roots', primordial lineage, and foundational theological narrative (for a discussion of the relationship of nationalism/religion/ethnicity — the three components of the Zionist ideological package — see Shenhav, forthcoming). Thus, for example, Zionism identified the Jews of the East (the Yemenites, for example) as part of the ten lost tribes and as an integral part of the national continuity. At the same time, however, it constituted them as inferior culturally, religiously, and nationally (see also Pieterberg, 1996).

Within the Zionist context, the question of the encounter between European-Jews and Arab-Jews becomes complicated because the encounter (which creates the 'otherness') does not end there, but seeks also to recruit the 'other' into its ranks. It is here that the European emissary positions himself in the face of the 'Arab' local and tries to define him simultaneously as 'other' (Arab) yet also as 'one of us' (Jew, proto-Zionist). It is here, in the interstice between the two categories, that the politics of 'difference' lies. Interestingly, while Zionism (like other colonial enterprises) created a politics of belonging

and of difference and spoke in a number of contradictory voices, it declined simultaneously to acknowledge the cultural and psychological ambivalence of its own creation, framing it instead within closed binary distinctions.

The European Jews' Orientalisation of the Jews of the East is not unique to Zionism. Its beginnings coincided with the Emancipation in Europe and it found expression in the transmutation of the 'Oriental' Jews into 'others' of Europe (hence into 'unmoderns'). The encounters with the Jews of the East sharpened Orientalist attitudes originating in conditions of colonial rule, which were shaped through the categories of East/West.

The reports filed by the Solel Boneh emissaries display a distinct use of Orientalist categories that were applied to (Arab) Jews by (European) Jews. Saul Meirov, who was sent on an advance mission to Iraq, came away with a clear impression of the local Jewish population: 'The cowardly, Oriental Jews who think one thing and say another ...' (Meir, 1993, p. 78); and, elsewhere,

Between me and you, between you and those from the Land of Israel there could be a more or less sharp argument. These Oriental people will not be quiet. A quarrel will erupt there. After all, the whole content of their lives is a constant quarrel. (Meir, 1993, p. 78)

Enzo Sereni took a similar view of non-European 'human material':

This material is not European material, it is material that is quick to become enthusiastic, but also quick to despair ... unable to keep a secret, unable to keep their word ... There are deep waters, and those waters are not bad ... but there is foam on the water and it is bad, it is of an Arab-Levantine sort ... Assimilation from a Levantine type into a culture that does not yet exist or is at a nadir ... They can be turned into 'human beings', but we will not be able to accomplish that task without the help of the people in the Land ... (Emphases added)⁴

If it is necessary to transform people into 'human beings', the use of the term 'material' becomes legitimate. Shmarya Guttman, who went with Sereni to the region, offers particularly colorful descriptions:

Their whole life is in cafes. There is no family culture. The man is not to be found with his wife and children, but sits in the café and plays at taula or cards for hours on end ... In every corner are brothels and arak ... There are clubs of the rich that are frequented by wealthy families. This is the center of matchmaking and gossip, but if they want a good time — they go to a café ... The theater has no culture. The talent develops according to the needs of the audience ... This culture is largely that of Jews, it is total assimilation in the Orient.⁵

Aryeh (Leibel) Avramovsky, a member of Kibbutz Mishmar Hayam (Afeq) and an immigration emissary who worked with Yehoshua Givoni in Iraq, commented on the inability of the locals to unite and act in concert:

Bribery everywhere you look ... a terrible ambition for money, obstructing each other, lies about the Land of Israel and false tales about bad

Ashkenazim, with no faith in anything, neither in religion nor in any other idea ... only in the power of money.⁶

Other discussions ranged between colonialist attitudes and national solidarity. For example, a representative of the company in Bahrain wrote to his kibbutz,

We are dealing here with the Jews of Persia and Babylon, who, unfortunately for us, are truly deficient in 'Hebrew', whose development is nil, and who are like innocent babes. (LA IV-320-7, 25 May 1945)

Another emissary to Abadan, Dov Adiv, related in a letter to the Youth Village at Ben Shemen that after an arduous effort the battalion's workers succeeded in collecting about two hundred boys in order to teach them Hebrew and 'educate them with a view toward life in the Land'. It was not an easy task, Adiv explained: 'One has to know and be quite familiar with the Jewish Arab-Persian type in order to find a criterion by which to measure our project' (LA IV-320-6, 7 February 1945). An emissary who was one of the founders of the Halutz movement in Abadan had this to say about the suspiciousness of the local Jews:

From the beginning the Jews did not believe that our only intention was to teach them Hebrew. To give, without expectation of payment or profit, is something an Oriental Jew will not be able to understand. (Ha'apalah 24.9, 8 May 1946)

Enzo Sereni also invoked Orientalist terminology to describe the Arab-Jews, though it must be said that he was aware of the colonial reality and its limitations. He reported on the singular traits of the Arab Jews in a lecture to a fascinated audience in July 1943 (see also KMA 25Ayin/1/12, 3 February 1943). Sereni emphasised the importance of the civilising mission that faces 'Western' emissaries who want to inject national awareness into the heart of the Levant:

The major problem of immigration from Iraq lies in the immigration of the young people. Because in the final analysis young people of 18 to 25 are [fully formed] people and they have to be turned into 'human beings'; that is not so simple. There are wonderful children in Iraq. It was only there that I understood the nature of this Oriental quality that at 16 a boy has charm and at 20 his charm is totally lost. These boys and girls of 15-16 are wonderful, idealists. They can be turned into 'human beings' if they are brought to surroundings that will make them 'human beings'. (KMA 25Ayin/1/12, July 1942)

Sereni emphasises the Arabness of the Jews in Iraq, though he does not adopt the Kiplingesque conception of 'East is East and West is West'. On the one hand, he describes the local Jews' traits and customs as 'Arab'. On the other, he insists on the 'difference', on the existence of a Jewish marker that will define these Jews as part of the Jewish nation while differentiating them from the Arab nation. It bears noting how the text skips back and forth between 'Arab' and 'difference'. On one side, the Jews of Iraq are Arabs:

The way of life of the Jews in Iraq is an Arab way of life. One does not find here, as in Egypt, a Jewish bourgeoisie that 'lives' in a European language and does not mix in the least with the Arab surroundings. The language of every Jew in Iraq is Arabic ... To understand the character of the Jews in Iraq, we should not forget that until 1917 Iraq ... was the only Arab country, with the exception of Arabia, that had no contact with Europe ... The Alliance school in Baghdad was at the time the first and only institution that shone a bit of cultural light in the darkness of Iraq. [Emphases added]. (KMA 25Ayin/1/12, July 1942)

On the other side, they are different from the Arabs:

Nevertheless, there are differences, both in the way of life and in the linguistic-cultural area, between Jews and Arabs. We, who come from the West, do not always understand these subtle differences. For us the Oriental world is a solid bloc, but the local people feel differently and that is decisive. [Emphases added]. (KMA 25Ayin/1/12, July 1942)

Sereni, unable to adjust to the Jews' Arab features, looked for the differentiating sign between 'Jews' and 'Arabs', a difference he assumes exists even if he cannot always put his finger on it:

Despite this assimilation in way of life and culture, the Jew feels that he is a Jew. The Jew lives like an Arab. His culture is Arab, he uses Arabic figures of speech, but nevertheless there is something that differentiates. A Jew knows that he is a Jew and that he is 'different' from an Arab. To say what makes him different is difficult. Even in the social sense, there is no vast difference. Certainly a Jew is different from a fellah and from a Bedouin, but he is not different from an Arab effendi (in Iraq, city dwellers are called effendis). Yet there is a difference nevertheless. [Emphases added]. (KMA 25Ayin/1/12, July 1942)

In other words, Sereni insists on the existence of the 'difference' but is unable to identify its substance.

Sereni's remarks cannot be read as a simplistic binary relationship between the speaker and the 'other'. The 'other' implicit in Sereni's observations is an ambivalent one that blurs the classic subject-object conception of the colonial relation. It corresponds to Bhabha's approach, which views the discourse of colonial power not as a finished product but 'as constructed around a 'boundary dispute''. Bhabha suggests that 'the construction of colonial subjects in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference' (Bhabha, 1990, p. 72). The 'difference' blurs the categorical distinctions and creates continual ambivalence. Sereni's remarks reflect an attempt to cope with an impossible trap. The 'other' is not the black person of classic colonialism but 'one of us', a necessary category within a homogeneous imagining of nationhood. At the same time, as Sereni discerns, this 'other' is not exactly 'like us'. Hence, neither of the categorical distinctions — 'us' versus 'other' — is wholly apposite in the situation he faced. Sereni moves along the seam. He marks Arabness and simultaneously erases it. He

defines the Arab-Jews as part of the national collective but leaves a 'marker' that afterwards becomes an ethnic category within 'Israeliness'.⁷ The 'difference' Sereni cites is the entry ticket of the Arab-Jews into nationalism.⁸ However, in this ambivalent praxis we find the cracks in the supposed concept of national unity and in the imagined homogeneous nationhood.

4. Conclusion

This article seeks to define the Abadan project of the Solel Boneh company as the 'degree-zero point' of the connection between the Zionist movement and the 'Arab Jews'. As I showed, this zero point is singular both historically and theoretically. The historical singularity of the Abadan case lies primarily in the fact that as the emissaries' activity in the region was guided by a grand plan to bring, for the first time, a massive number of Jews from Arab countries to Palestine. Furthermore, this plan was to be achieved with the help of the British colonial state and through the work of emissaries possessing colonial consciousness. The theoretical singularity of the Abadan case is found in the fact that its site can be defined as a 'third space' that is located 'in between' two polar territorial and epistemological categories: the 'Land of Israel' (Palestine at the time) and the 'Diaspora'. Defining the Abadan site as a 'third space' opens up possibilities of examining questions that usually remain hidden from view at each of these polar sites. The materials show that the encounter of Zionist nationalism with the ethnicity of Arab-Jews in the 'third space' engenders a conception of a Jew/Arab duality among both the emissaries and the members of the local Jewish community. True, this dichotomy was also perceived in Palestine, but it is more distinctly identifiable in the third space because it is less saddled with the binarism and logocentrism of nationalism. If the Zionist national voice finds cogent expression in binary categories — such as 'Jew' versus 'Arab' or 'religious' versus 'secular' — such distinctions become less sharp and more ambivalent in the third space. The third space is the place from which the zero point emerges, and so it is also the place from which it is possible to denote ambivalence as well as the mechanisms that cause its erasure in other contexts.

I emphasised that what stands out most in regard to the third space is the colonial context. The analysis within the colonial context makes it possible to reexamine the complex relations between the nationalist colonialist paradigms, together with the ambivalence attending the status of the Arab Jews as a result of the encounter between the two frameworks. On the one hand, the Arab Jews constitute an integral element in the imagined national community, while on the other hand they are created, through the Orientalist prism, as the 'others' of Europe. That ambivalence will also find expression afterwards, in the patterns of the simultaneous exclusion and inclusion of those Jews. They are perceived as an integral element of 'Israeliness' but also as a separate ethnic group ('Oriental communities').

Furthermore, the article adduces a new framework of theoretical and empirical thought in relation to Zionism as a colonial movement. In the analysis above I refrained from making use of analytical distinctions (important

though they may be) drawn by researchers based on elements of comparison between Zionism and other colonial situations in world history. Taking a phenomenological approach, I set out to examine the degree to which colonial awareness of colour and ethnicity was dominant among the participants themselves and to what extent it shaped their worldview and actions. The analysis makes perfectly clear that the emissaries were aware of the colonial context, enjoyed the umbrella provided by the British colonial state, and were simultaneously attracted to and repelled by the colonial reality.

Within this ambivalent situation, awareness of the 'Arab-Jews' took shape, but so too did the dichotomised identity of the emissaries themselves. What this dichotomy shows is that, contrary to the view that colonialism or nationalism speak in a uniform voice, no unifying anchor can be found among the emissaries. Autonomous national subjectivity dissolves into 'fragments' — into groups and spokesmen — rendering impossible the creation of one centre of gravity vis-à-vis the colonial subject. In this sense, the emissaries' definitions of the 'other' and distinction of themselves from him/her through the politics of 'difference' render it impossible for them to achieve one coherent self-definition, resulting in dichotomisation and multiplicity. By means of this analysis, then, it becomes possible to dismantle the (ostensibly coherent) basic assumptions of the national paradigm and to show it as imagined, heterogeneous, and formed of multiple voices, some of which were silenced within Zionist historiography and ideology.

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Notes

1. At the time, the term 'Arab-Jews' — which today lingers in the public discourse only as a literary category (see Shohat, 1988, for one of the earliest discussions on the subject) — was in use among Zionist emissaries who first met Jewish communities in Arab countries.
2. I am in possession of rich primary archival materials on this labour battalion. While in the region, its members documented their activity, kept minutes of meetings, sent letters to Palestine, and published impressions of

their encounter with the local Jews. Most of the materials can be found in the Labon Institute, which contains a rich archive on the Jewish labour movement (marked as LA in the bibliographical notes).

3. It is important to note that the Iraqi and Iranian Jews, whose voice is not heard in this paper, were themselves not indifferent to the question of British colonialism in the region and espoused different views on the subject. Yehezkel al-Kabir, who lived in Baghdad at the outset of the British occupation, maintained that the community was split on the subject. According to one group, the older generation, the Arabs and the Turks were 'kings of justice' who 'did not interfere in our religious life and did not harm our heritage. For 2,500 years we were merchants here without interference. A change of government in [Palestine] is liable to ruin our good situation'. On the other side was a group of young people who held that 'British justice is famous all over the world, and there is no doubt that we will get fair treatment. In addition, the country needs development and rehabilitation and is crying out for the repair of generations-long neglect. It is inconceivable that the British will leave the country in its sorry state, as development is consistent with their interests' (Qazzaz, 1991, p. 41). Moreover, a number of Iraqi Jews identified with Arab nationalism and adopted a split Jewish-Iraqi identity (for citations displaying this dichotomy, see Meir, 1989, pp. 416–17). These different and conflicting views — with regard to the British colonialist, the Turkish ruler, and the growing influence of Zionism in Iraq during the 1940s — preclude any possibility of describing the identity and objects of identification of Iraq's Jews in binary or unequivocal categories. Rather, the situation reflects constant ambiguity. This sense of ambiguity is the point of departure for a postcolonial analysis that views identity as ambivalent rather than as a finished product. The Zionist discourse, far from acknowledging this ambivalence, effectively expunges it with binary analyses that attempt to demarcate an unequivocal difference between Jews and Arabs.
4. Remarks by Sereni to the Committee for Aliyah Bet Affairs, July 2, 1942, LMA, Israel Galili Archive, File 8, p. 9 (cited in Meir, 1996, p. 62).
5. 'Passages about Jewry in Iraq', Feb. 4, 1943, KMA, Section 2 Overseas, Folder 17, File 87 (cited in Meir, 1996, p. 61).
6. From Avramosky to H.I. [the Mossad], May 29, 1944, Center for the Heritage of Babylonian Jewry, Archive of the Halutz Movement in Babylonia (cited in Meir, 1996, p. 63).
7. Raz-Karkotzkin, for example, also notes a process through which the principle of 'rejecting the Diaspora' makes possible the full appropriation of the history of the 'Jews of the Orient' and the transformation of the Oriental Jew from an 'Arab Jew' into a 'diasporic Jew' (Raz-Karkotzkin, 1993, 1994).
8. Elsewhere I have examined the role of Jewish religion in recruiting and mobilising the Arab-Jews into the Zionist project. This was possible since Judaism is an ambiguous category that serves as a religion and as an ethno-national definition of nationhood. In practice, Zionist emissaries have moved through a seam line, constantly blurring the distinction

between them, emphasising that religious practices are symbols of national belonging and vice versa.

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