

## **Forming Zionist perceptions according to labor Zionists**

'Hebrew labour' (Avoda Ivrit) as a pivotal Zionist instrumental concept

Ideological teaching and social structuring in the labor Zionist youth movement

Reading the movement's official magazine *BaMaaleh* 1926–1935

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## Forming Zionist perceptions according to labor Zionists

The notion of **Hebrew labor** [*Avoda Ivrit*], was a core component of the Zionist Labour Movement's ideology and practice

In the labor Zionist ideology, the struggle for **Hebrew labor** is attached to the idea of establishing and solidifying a Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel or Palestine and the aspiration to radically alter the traditional socioeconomic structure of Jewish society. In practice, this struggle amounted to denying labor positions to indigenous Arab Palestinian workers. The concept '*Avoda Ivrit*' was skillfully used by the Zionist labor movement to enhance its political appeal and support its claim for the hegemony of the Zionist pre-state Jewish presence in Palestine.

This article follows the campaign propagating **Hebrew labor** for ten years (1926–1935) by a Hebrew language periodical that was the mouthpiece of the labor Zionists' youth movement organization. **BaMaaleh** [Up the hill], first launched in 1926, was the official publication of the Laboring Youth [*Ha'Noar Ha'Oved*].

Promoting the discourse of **Hebrew labor**, **BaMaaleh** created a consensus around the ideology of ethnic segregation. Elements of European-like disdain of 'natives', common to all settler-colonialist societies, were aggressively and successfully combined with traditional Jewish cultural norms that instruct the self-segregation of the community and ban '*mixing with the gentiles*'.

**BaMaaleh** offers a sample of '*colonial discourse*', which was '*crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization*'<sup>1</sup>.

Keywords: Zionism; Hebrew labor; Labor Zionism; Israel; Zionist revisionism

## Introduction

Few decades prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the Zionist labor movement, which was to become the hegemonic political group in the Jewish-Hebrew settlement in Palestine ('Yishuv'), had fixed the ideas of Hebrew labor and 'conquest of labor' as the basic principles of its ideology and praxis. It insisted that any labor for Jewish-owned enterprises and a relative proportion of government enterprises must be performed exclusively by Jews, most of whom were young immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Labor Zionism associated the struggle for Hebrew labor to the idea of establishing a sovereign Jewish political presence in Palestine (Eretz-Yisrael) and fundamentally reforming the socioeconomic making of Jewish society. In practice, this struggle materialized in blocking, preventing, and forbidding any Arab Palestinian laborers from participating in Jewish economic enterprises and limiting their work options in the (British mandate) government enterprises. Eduard Said made a point of describing Hebrew labor as one of the most important 'Zionist devices for alienating the land from the natives'.<sup>2</sup> Australian historian Patrick Wolfe identified the concept of Hebrew labor as a pivotal core component in the settler-colonial Zionist project. In his words:

[...] the conquest of labor was central both to the institutional imagining of a goyim-rein (gentile-free) zone and to the continued stigmatization of Jews who remained unredeemed in the galut (diaspora). The positive force that animated the Jewish nation and its individual new-Jewish subjects issued from the negative process of excluding Palestine's indigenous owners.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the aimed 'positive force' did not achieve its declared goal, and the Arab Palestinian workforce was not completely eliminated from the Jewish economy.<sup>4</sup> The notion of Hebrew labor was politically well-instrumentalized. The Zionist labor movement leveraged it to increase

its attractivity within the masses of Jewish immigrants and successfully used it in its struggle to achieve hegemony over the Jewish population before declaring a Jewish State in Palestine. Positioning it as a vital combination of national and socialist values enabled the idea of Hebrew labor to become a cornerstone in the insistence on an ethnic and religious separation of Jews from the natives of the land, leading to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.<sup>5</sup> An image of the indigenous population of the land as ‘foreign’, ‘alien’, and undesirable assimilated into the collective consciousness of the new settler population. The Zionist labor movement achieved the desired hegemony of the Zionist *Yishuv* before establishing the Jewish State and managed to preserve its leading position during its first 30 years of existence (up until 1977).

The idea of Hebrew labor was originally conceptualized during the period of the second Aliya (the second Jewish Immigration period, 1904–1914), primarily to facilitate jobs for Jewish immigrants who needed a source of livelihood and found it hard to compete against the local indigenous workforce. Historian Anita Shapira researched this campaign and published her findings in the book *Futile Struggle*.<sup>6</sup> As the concept represents a demand for segregation leading to Jewish supremacy, the current study follows its positioning as a positive ideal for the sake of social reform and national redemption. Radical Jewish nationalism in present-day Israel is usually identified with extreme right-wing political associations but has its origins in the ideology and education of the labor movement, still described as the Israeli ‘Zionist left’. This is an often-ignored aspect of Israeli politics.

This article is based on a doctoral dissertation that was submitted to the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. Its Hebrew translation is to be published in a book. It surveys 10 years of propagating Hebrew labor in the periodical *BaMaaleh* (‘uphill’), which was published by the labor movement's Laboring Youth association. The periodical was first

launched in 1926, four years after the establishment of the Labor Union for Hebrew Laborers ('*Histadrut*'). Following the publication of several brochures, *BaMaaleh* became a regular by-weekly as of January 1931, an integral part of the *Histadrut*'s system of ample publications. Headed by David Ben-Gurion, the most prominent Zionist labor leaders of the period such as Berle Katznelson, Yitzhak Tabenkin, and Israel Galily published articles, commentaries, and speeches in *BaMaaleh*. The canonized writers and poets of the time, including Asher Barash, Elieser Smoli, Yehuda Burla, Levin Kipnis, Avigdor Hameiri, A. Z. Rabinovits (AZAR), and Avraham Borides, contributed works<sup>i</sup> and often participated as editors. It should be noted that in spite of its past centrality for labor Zionist circles, *BaMaaleh* had so far not been the subject of any academic work in Israel or abroad.

Focusing on the first 10 years of the periodical's issues offers a perspective on the period that preceded the historical events that later became keystones of Zionist 'Hasbara'. The years 1926–1935 predate the horrors of World War II and the Shoah, often quoted as justifying the necessity of a Jewish State. The 1936 Arab Revolt, 1948 war, and Nakba, which are often described as generators (rather than outcomes) of the fervent Jewish aspiration for an ethnic-religious political entity, had not yet taken place. The notions of Hebrew labor and 'the conquest of labor' provided the original narrative for recognizing only Jews as worthy of consideration around 100 years ago.<sup>7</sup> They also laid the infrastructure for the 'Herren folk' mentality in the areas occupied by Israel since 1967. Many years before the establishment of the State of Israel and the expulsion of most of its Palestinian inhabitants, the Zionist labor movement vigorously promoted a policy of segregation, exclusion, and rejection of the indigenous population of

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<sup>i</sup> Surprisingly, the first two brochures of 1929 included poems by the extreme nationalist Uri Zvi Greenberg, who later became a renowned contrarian to labor Zionist politics.

Palestine. Self-described as socialist, secular, modern, democratic, and Zionist, it gained the hegemony of the Yishuv using nationalistic rhetoric based on archaic religious traditions<sup>8</sup> and a settler-colonial consensus based on the traditional European disposition of scorning all ‘natives’.<sup>9</sup> The aggressively championed discourse of Hebrew labor enabled the labor Zionist mainstream to distance itself from left-wing Zionist associations that believed in the coexistence of Jewish settlers and native Palestinian Arabs. Simultaneously, it supported its self-positioning as more loyal to the national primate than its rivals in the right-wing nationalistic Zionism, headed by the charismatic Zeev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky of the Revisionist Party.

The currently declining ‘Zionist left’, identified as the Israeli-Jewish Peace Camp, still (unfortunately) yearns for the ideological heritage of Labor Zionism. Adherence to the ‘Two States Solution’, parroted by most of the international community as ‘the solution to the Israeli Palestinian problem’, adopts the present apartheid regime<sup>ii</sup> established by Labor Zionism.

The issues of *BaMaaleh*, containing articles, editorials, speeches, and short literary pieces, many with autobiographical content, were written and published years before colonialist, orientalist, and racist expressions had become recognized as politically incorrect and ethically unacceptable. Writers often expressed a sense of ‘group superiority’, not very different from writers in other parts of the world, who in those years waxed lyrical over colonial and imperialistic enterprises while ‘ethnographically’ describing the natives.<sup>10</sup> These texts in the Zionist periodical correspond to Homie K. Bhabha’s definition of ‘colonial discourse’, which is ‘crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> <https://thisisapartheid.btselem.org/eng/#1>

As my focus here is on aspects of indoctrination and propaganda, a cultural studies analysis was used to enable an interdisciplinary approach. Narrative psychology states that the ‘narrative is central to how we conceive of ourselves and to our identity. It is through narrative that we not only construct a particular connectedness in our actions but also distinguish ourselves from others’<sup>iii</sup>.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, reading the narratives created for the benefit of young immigrants and children of immigrants reveals quite a bit about the way these youngsters were instructed to distinguish themselves from all ‘others’ and how the image of the newly created ‘imagined community’<sup>13</sup>, of which they were to become members, was constantly constructed and reaffirmed.

### **The vision**

*BaMaaleh* presented a well-defined vision with the clear aim of shaping the character of a new Jewish person. Itamar Even-Zohar, describing ‘The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine 1882–1948’,<sup>14</sup> asserted that ‘a schematic examination of the period in retrospect will reveal that the governing principle at work was “the creation of a new Jewish people and a new Jew in the land of Israel” with emphasis on the concept “new”’.<sup>15</sup>

*BaMaaleh*’s first brochure of 1926 opened with a poetic motto on the cover<sup>iv</sup> describing the periodical and its vision:

We wish to rise, step by step, isolated, hundreds of us meeting discreetly, till we convene.  
Facing the dawn we climb, hand in hand, embraced, our eyes to the sun. The climb is hard,  
harder is our deliberation, our suffering, our pain, and we wish to overcome them, to break

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<sup>iii</sup> Referencing Paul Ricoeur’s book *Time and Narrative* of 1984.

<sup>iv</sup> Brochure A, Elul TRPV, 1926, cover page.

through the darkness. Let Ba'Maaleh awake and encourage us, be what it should be—lifting us up. [...] (The editors) (original emphasis).

N. Behari<sup>v</sup> drafted *BaMaaleh*'s educational mission in the second brochure under the title 'Up Aspiration Way'.<sup>vi</sup> Referring to life prior to the immigration into Palestine, he contended that the 'former foundations' (meaning, life mode in the diaspora) had become 'rotted' and called on the youth to acquire 'modes' for the new life that must be initiated in a new society:

[...] In these short days, the boy must acquire the "ethical standards"—the values of life.  
[...] And indeed, aspiration is the center of life, it is faith [...] and in this generation of ours, the point of aspiration for all of us, of the entire collective, was the will to rebuild social life. The former foundations have become rotted; they are no longer trustworthy. However, building life is not an easy matter. [...] Indeed, not easy is the road of youth climbing up in aspiration and wishing to take part in the construction of renewed human society.

Luis Althusser, following Antonio Gramsci, aspired to understand the way states and institutions 'ensure subjection to the ruling ideology'.<sup>16</sup> Showing how such apparatuses succeeded in 'subjecting individuals to the political state ideology',<sup>17</sup> Althusser believed that 'all ideology has the function of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects',<sup>18</sup> adding that 'ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it "recruits" subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all) or "transforms" the individuals into subjects'.<sup>19</sup> Tal Almaliach, having researched Marxist-oriented segments of the labor Zionist movement, commented on how this movement regularly made use of cultural enterprises to spread its ideology and consolidate its political clout. It established a

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<sup>v</sup> Many of the entries are signed only partly, with initials, the first name, or just 'a comrade'. N. Benari can be identified as Nahum Benari Brodski (1883–1963), member of Kibbutz Ein Harod, an author and playwright who was active in the educational and cultural institutions of the *Histadrut* [source: Tidhar].

<sup>vi</sup> Brochure no. 2, 1927 pp. 4–6.

‘system of cultural agents’ that, besides different press organs, included publishing houses, theatres, and educational institutions.<sup>20</sup> *BaMaaleh* was an esteemed component of such a system and proudly announced the same occasionally.

### **The tough challenge: New habitus**

The demand of all manual labor demanding physical exertion being performed by young Jews presented a tough challenge for a major paradigmatic alteration in the socioeconomic makeup of the settlers’ community. In the words used by Pierre Bourdieu, Socialist Zionism aimed to radically modify the ‘habitus’ of the immigrating Jewish population. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is ‘the inertia of all the past experience that we have accumulated in our biological bodies’<sup>vii</sup>.<sup>21</sup> It represents ‘dispositions that are permanent lifestyles resulting from learning, training and incorporation’.<sup>22</sup>

For centuries, the unique combination of religion, tradition, and community values of the Jewish culture has prioritized investment in literacy and education. Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein<sup>23</sup> researched the way this investment afforded Jews a significant relative economic advantage over the surrounding illiterate agricultural environment throughout Europe and other areas. ‘The higher literacy of the Jewish people, coupled with a set of contract enforcement institutions (the Talmud, rabbinic courts, and responsa), gave the Jews a comparative advantage over non-Jews in crafts, trade, commerce, and moneylending’, trades that were in high demand during the growing process of urbanization<sup>viii</sup>.<sup>24</sup> From an anthropologist’s perspective, Yuri Slezkine compared Jews with other populations with corresponding modes of operation that he

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<sup>vii</sup> From a lecture on October 5, 1982.

<sup>viii</sup> The research refers to the years 70–1492, but the general observations are relevant to later periods.

had defined as 'service nomad' communities.<sup>25</sup> According to him, such communities exist in spaces populated by other demographic groups, mainly farming communities, and are characterized by 'mercuriality' as 'they were all transients and wanderers'<sup>ix</sup>. 'They were all chosen people', he remarked dryly, 'insofar as they worshiped themselves openly and separated themselves as a matter of principle'.<sup>26</sup> Those groups' relations with the 'host societies' tended to be strained, marked by 'mutual hostility, suspicion, and contempt'.<sup>27</sup> Slezkine saw Jews as 'extraordinarily accomplished Mercurians [...] specialized in an extremely wide range of traditional service occupations from peddling and smithing to medicine and finance'.<sup>28</sup>

The Marxist philosopher Karl Kautsky, Austrian Czech labor leader of Jewish origins, dedicated an entire book to describe Jews as an urban group distinct by specialization in trade and finances.<sup>29</sup> The image of Jewish distinction was often described in literary texts. In the Nobel Prize laureated historical novel *The Books of Jacob*, Olga Tokarczuk wrote how 'it was preferable to be a Jew than to be a peasant'<sup>x</sup>.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere in that novel, the antisemitic bishop Soltik Lekosovski declared:

When I wish to buy or sell something, I always summon a Jew. He, the Jew, has agreements with all the tradesmen in the country. He knows what it means to do business [...] There is no serious nobleman or estate owner who is not served by the people of Israel.<sup>31</sup>

For Theodor Herzl, one reason for 'rage and indignation among the anti-Semites,' seemed to be the phenomenon of the 'economic supremacy which Jews are already erroneously declared to possess'.<sup>32</sup> The economic success of Jews had always been a source of both pride and anxiety. A chilling episode in *KAPUTT* by the Italian journalist Curzio Malaparte describes Nazi soldiers in

מעוצב:מרווח בין שורות: בודד

<sup>ix</sup> Other 'mercurial' communities mentioned by Slezkine are the 'Gypsies', the Margi in the Sudan, the Jains and the Farsis in India, and a few others in Africa and Asia.

<sup>x</sup> This is a translation from the Hebrew translation of the Polish text.

Soviet Ukraine identifying prisoners of war as Jews because they were able to read a newspaper. They shot them all<sup>xi</sup>.<sup>33</sup>

The socioeconomic benefits enjoyed by urban Jews were almost completely wiped out during the 19th century. Urbanization, schooling, and the ascent of the local middle-class in the general population weakened the traditional hold of Jews in the segments of banking, trade, and brokerage. Across the Russian speaking ‘pile of settlement’, ‘to the most typical sources of livelihood of the Jews—commerce and craft—there was no longer demand in the cities’.<sup>34</sup> Simultaneously, ‘antisemitic propaganda, as well as the crowding out of the Jews from their traditional trades by the Polish and Ukrainian population, pushed many to starvation and imposed conditions of extreme hardship’.<sup>35</sup> Gur Alroey described the acute economic pressure that generated a stampede of Russian Jews to the United States in the years 1875–1924<sup>xii</sup>.<sup>36</sup> However, focusing on ‘the most typical sources of livelihood of the Jews’ turned out to be an advantage to those Jews who managed to extract themselves from the Eastern European regions of distress and settle in the New World. In his bestselling book *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Malcolm Gladwell described the economic ascent of a typical Jewish family that had emigrated to New York in 1889. He based his explanation on findings by sociologist Steven Steinberg, who observed: ‘those Jewish immigrants arrived at the perfect time, with the perfect skills’, as ‘The economy was desperate for the skills that they possessed.’<sup>37</sup> The present-day self-marveling at Israel’s success as a ‘start-up nation’ is directly attributed to the way in which ‘Israeli culture nurtures a unique mix of intensive innovativeness and entrepreneurship’<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>xi</sup> Translated from the Hebrew translation of the original Italian.

<sup>xii</sup> In 1924, the option for mass migration to the United States was blocked.

None of these eulogized qualifications were deemed useful by early prominent labor Zionist activists. Most of them identified the traditional socioeconomic structure of the Eastern European communities as problematic and unsuitable for the project of settling or colonizing Palestine or Eretz-Yisrael with Jews. Arthur Ruppin, who for many years headed the Eretz-Israel Bureau of the Zionist Organization, exasperatedly described this structure as a pyramid, where the wide base represents the traders, the middle comprises the craftsmen and industry people, and the narrow top involves those dealing with agriculture. 'But, on the contrary, Eretz Israel needs a pyramid whose wide base is made of farmers'<sup>xiii</sup>.<sup>39</sup>

This was unanimously accepted:

The Zionist movement from its very beginning tied its aspiration for a national-territorial solution for the problem of the Jewish people with an aspiration for an internal Jewish revolution, which should correct the distortion in the social structure, created as a result of economic realities and the psychosocial inclinations of the Jewish people in the diaspora.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, bookish habits, focusing on education and scholarship, as well as yearning for excellence and a high standard of living, which had characterized the economic and social culture of Jews for centuries, were now, in the new national ideology, defined as 'distortions in the social structure' and 'psychosocial inclinations' in need of correction and alteration.

Many Jewish settler-immigrants' ('pioneers') lack of enthusiasm for physical labor and their reluctance to adapt to the new required mode infuriated the canonized thinker (and agricultural laborer) Aaron David Gordon, known as 'the prophet of physical labor'.<sup>41</sup> In 1911, Gordon angrily wrote:

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<sup>xiii</sup> Quoting an article written by Ruppin in 1919.

For Jews, there is no thought for labor—and this is all! [...] and so, they work and produce everything by others, amass money by others, using the others, as far as the hand can reach [...] and these pioneers do not even see how ugly this is.<sup>42</sup>

He stated that national resurrection is impossible based ‘on such parasitism’.<sup>43</sup> David Ben-Gurion did not skimp words in the early 1930s when he asserted that there is no way to absorb the Jews in Eretz Israel:

As long as these masses do not change the modes of their economy and do not get used to labor to which they were not used and did not know in the diaspora. Lots of shopkeepers, brokers, speculators-idlers will not be able to integrate in this small, poor, and sparsely populated land<sup>xiv</sup>.<sup>44</sup>

The observations of Gordon and Ben-Gurion were correct. Most young Jewish settlers that landed in Palestine or Eretz Israel before and after the 1917 Balfour Declaration had a ‘habitus’ that was incompatible with the requirements to become farmhands. They possessed neither the inclination nor the ability to spend their entire life laboring in the fields, cowsheds, or orchards.

Israeli historian Boaz Neuman (1971–2015) identified the ‘pioneers’ as young people who ‘lacked any defined occupation or formal or professional training. They mostly had a traditional or informal general education, and their social consciousness was socialist’.<sup>45</sup> This did not necessarily turn them into efficient farmhands, but they very much desired to measure up to the ideological requirements of the movement, as is evident by their ‘multitude of pioneering texts and their waxing-lyrical tone’.<sup>46</sup> In his book *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Neuman described the ‘interaction with the ground through horticulture’ as a ‘formative moment in the pioneering passion for Eretz Israel’.<sup>47</sup> This (settler’s) passion led to ‘the pioneering obsession to

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<sup>xiv</sup> Transcript of a lecture in the party council titled ‘The Crisis in Zionism and the Labor Movement’, 1932, originally published in *Hapoel Hatzair* (pp. 34–40)

conquer Hebrew labor,' which was based, among other elements, on the 'exclusive channeling of Jewish sweat to the land. The pioneers really were anxious that the ground of Eretz Israel should not be wet by any foreign sweat, mainly Arab'.<sup>48</sup>

In spite of the passion and obsession, the reality of the early 20th century 'made clear [...] that the Hebrew laborer was unable to make a living out of agricultural work in the Moshavot', and eventually 'the failure of conquering labor in the early Moshavot was a failure from the Zionist perspective and a personal calamity of the conquerors'.<sup>49</sup> It was the failure of the 'aspiration to create a model Jewish society in the land of the Jews' described by Shapira as a core ideological issue for the Zionist movement.<sup>50</sup> Summarized by David Zait, the 'desperate struggle' of the Second *Aliya* 'for Hebrew labor ended in downfall, and most of its *Olim* [Jewish immigrants to Palestine] eventually emigrated out of the land'.<sup>51</sup>

A series of articles in *BaMaaleh* titled *Conquering Labor in the Hebrew Moshava* [Settlement]<sup>xv</sup> by Y. Bankover<sup>xvi</sup> echoed this sentiment in 1934:

[...] we knew that every doubt of our absolute right to the sovereignty of Hebrew labor in the Hebrew economy led to a denial of our Zionist-socialist trajectory and ended with leaving the Moshava, exiting labor and escaping this land.

Historian Anita Shapira described the solution to the failure of the 'aspiration to create a model Jewish society in the land of the Jews': the creation of the 'working settlement'<sup>52</sup> or collective

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<sup>xv</sup> Published in three instalments in *BaMaaleh* in 1934: Issue 3, January 31, p. 3; Issue 4, February 15, p. 3; and Issue 5, February 25, p. 8.

<sup>xvi</sup> Yosef Bankover (Futerman) (1901–1977) was born in Ukraine and was active in the 'Dror' youth movement in Ukraine and the 'Halutz' in Poland. He immigrated to Palestine in 1926 and was among the founders of the Kibbutz 'Kovesh' (*Ramat ha-Kovesh*). He served as the secretary of the Kibbutz ha-Meuhad (united kibbutz movement) and MAPAI in the years 1935–1936. Bankover joined the British Army in World War II. In 1944, he joined the establishment of the *Achdut Ha-Avoda* party with others who left MAPAI and joined the establishment of MAPAM as its secretary. (Source: The Israeli Labor Party Historical archive (Heb) <https://tnuathaavoda.info/people/home/people/1108716492.html>)

Jewish settlements, also described as the 'ethnically homogeneous settlement' secured by a 'constant physical presence on the ground in the form of agricultural cultivation'.<sup>53</sup>

Sociologist Gershon Shafir's analysis of the issue of Hebrew-labor-turned-collective-settlements is based on the models developed by Frank Parkin and Edna Bonacich. Following the situations in which one ethnic group acts to limit access of a competing ethnic group to the labor market or creates a 'split labor market', Parkin and Bonacich identified the creation of a 'closure', 'restricting access to resources and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles'<sup>xvii</sup>.<sup>54</sup> When it becomes difficult to sustain the model of a 'split labor market', it appears necessary to develop a new strategy: 'pure, that is, Jewish settlement came to be seen as feasible only through the bifurcation of the economy', thus creating the model of 'the new Jewish sector of the economy in which exclusive employment and collectivism went hand in hand'.<sup>55</sup> The Jewish settlers gained 'control over the markets of land and labor' through the unique 'communal and cooperative settlement mode' that they had adopted.<sup>56</sup> In the words of Lorenzo Veracini, paraphrasing Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism needs mostly 'indigenous land, not indigenous labor'.<sup>57</sup>

In the Zionist 'cooperative settlement mode', all branches of agricultural labor were performed purely by Hebrew labor. Non-Jews were not accepted as members of either Kibbutzim or *Moshavim* (the two main forms of cooperative settlements), built on 'national land' purchased by the national institutions, mainly the Jewish National Fund (JNF), and financially supported by Zionist funds. Quoting a 1914 article by Zionist activist Nachman Syrkin, Zeev Sternhell concluded that it was a cooperation that 'offered the solution to the question of Hebrew labor'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>xvii</sup> Quoting Parkin, 1979: 44.

*BaMaaleh*'s issues during the years 1925 to 1935 were packed with editorials and op-eds, commentaries, and literary texts, calling on the implementation of the Hebrew labor concept as a core national and social goal. In the name of this principle, young Jewish immigrants into Palestine were expected to become agricultural laborers even when more convenient and better paying employment opportunities were readily available in the land. Employers were required to ignore capitalistic principles of profit and loss and refrain from employing local well-qualified and meagerly remunerated Arabs. Simultaneously, socialists were expected to adhere to the 'unique synthesis of socialism and nationalism'.<sup>59</sup> Non-Jewish laborers were expected to stay away from the Jewish-Zionist economy, and the British mandate government was demanded to ignore the British legal regulations that forbade discrimination based on ethnicity or religion. *BaMaaleh* fully dedicated itself to preaching for Hebrew labor. In 1932, it carried the transcript of David Ben-Gurion's speech *The Hebrew Labor*<sup>xviii</sup>, which was carried out at the assembly of the Laboring Youth. He was the owner and publisher of *BaMaaleh*, but in his capacity as General Secretary of the Union of Hebrew Laborers (the *Histadrut*), the future founder of the State of Israel announced:

[...] the force active in the Jewish people is based, rooted, and mainly supported by Hebrew labor. **And its historical purpose is the establishing of Hebrew labor in Eretz Israel.** (original emphasis).

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<sup>xviii</sup> *BaMaaleh*, Issue 20, November 4, 1932, p. 3. The text was included in the 1955 collection of articles under the heading '**The Right to Labor/A Lecture in the Laboring Youth Camp**' (Ben-Gurion, 1955, p. 158). The article was not included in the 1974 collection (Ben-Gurion, 1974). Both collections, under the same title '**From Class to a Nation**' carry several more texts dedicated to the subject of **Hebrew labor**.

### **Socialism and nationality**

Already in the early stages of the Second Aliya (1904–1914), minority groups in the Jewish population voiced opposition to the ideology of Hebrew labor and the demand for ethnic-national (or ethnic-religious) segregation. The labor Zionist movement was criticized by some members of the Socialist International, who expected Jews and Arabs to join forces toward ‘class solidarity’. The Zionist response was that there was no room for a parlay with the Arab national movement ‘due to the class character of its effendi leaders’.<sup>60</sup> Even in the Zionist labor movement, not everyone felt comfortable with this position. For a certain period, the *Ahdut Ha’Avoda* party (later merged into MAPAI) adopted the position that a united workers’ organization should be established based on class<sup>61</sup> or at least that the movement would support the organizing of Arab laborers. David Ben-Gurion appeared to support the idea, agreeing ‘to offer the Arab laborer “a comrade’s hand, a proper and loyal hand”’. However, he also revealed racial prejudices, pompously warning that ‘the laborer of that nation is undermining our existence even while he has no evil intentions against us. It is his very inferior being that undermines our existence’<sup>xix, 62</sup>

*BaMaaleh*’s texts carry multiple calls for universal socialist ideas, displaying but not explaining the apparent contradiction between the repeated slogan ‘Workers of the World Unite’ and the insistence on the call for Hebrew labor and ethnic segregation at the workplace. Mayday issues traditionally displayed calls for class solidarity, with extensive reviews and commentary on the lives and ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and other major labor advocates.

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<sup>xix</sup> Quoted from Ben-Gurion’s article ‘The Hebrew Laborer and the Arab Laborer’ in ‘KUNTRESS’ 237, circa October 1925.

Staunch opposition to ethnic segregation based on ideological class solidarity was constantly voiced by activists of the communist party, which was deemed illegal by the British mandate government. In his autobiographical novel *Like a Juniper in the Prairie [KeAr'ar Ba'arava]*, writer Mordechai Tabib<sup>xx</sup> quoted a pamphlet distributed by communist activists: 'Do away with the dispossession of the Arab laborers from their land and their workplaces by the servants of imperialism, the Zionist gang, betraying the Jewish nation and the working class'.<sup>63</sup> In the biographical-historical novel *ZOSHA*, a meeting is described with the protagonist, who had joined the joint Arab-Jewish communist party PKP (Palestina Komunistische Partei)<sup>xxi</sup>:

When the issue of Hebrew labor was discussed, he heard her say angrily: 'What does it mean that the Arabs have no right to work and only we have? [...] is it because they are less hungry and need less money to buy bread?'<sup>64</sup>

**BaMaaleh** aggressively lashed out at the communists who founded the left-wing 'Frakzia' section within the *Histadrut* of Hebrew laborers. In a 1932 editorial titled 'Our eyes to the future'<sup>xxii</sup>, readers were reminded that 'the virulent incitement by the Frakzia goes on, and the ignorance and poverty of the Arab masses offer a fertile ground for all kinds of slander and defamation about us and our enterprise'. In a lengthy commentary titled 'The origins of the communist *Frakzia* in Eretz Israel'<sup>xxiii</sup> the author, publicist N. Benari, offered 'psychological factors' as an explanation to the seemingly disturbing success of the political opponents from the left. They represent 'the fall of rotten, dissociated intelligenzia', as 'the typical "Frakzioner" in

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<sup>xx</sup> Mordechai Tabib (1910–1979) was born in Palestine to parents who immigrated from Yemen.

<sup>xxi</sup> In 1943, a group of 'Hebrew communists' split from the PKP and started what later became the Israeli Communist Party. Their story was researched by Carmit Gai in *STANDING ALONE*, KETER, Ben Shemen, 2019 (Heb).

<sup>xxii</sup> Issue 16, August 19, 1932, front page.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Issue 19, October 14, 1932, p. 3

Eretz Israel' is someone using 'general criminal tactics', recruiting members to an organization that 'combats the Hebrew labor movement in the most barbaric manner', based on an 'internal lie' and 'double-faced propaganda'.

### **Hebrew labor for the sake of Jewish immigration**

During the years of the British mandate rule over Palestine (1919–1948), the Zionist leadership constantly campaigned to increase the government quotas for new Jewish immigrants. Aviva Halamish's book *A Dual Race Against Time*<sup>65</sup> is a detailed account of that campaign. From the British point of view, Halamish wrote, 'there was major interest for mandate land not to burden the British taxpayer'<sup>xxiv</sup>.<sup>66</sup> Following this logic, the 'scheduling' of entry certificates for Jewish immigrants as decreed by the British authorities was initially 'based solely on the economic capacity of the Jewish economy'.<sup>67</sup> A White Paper issued in 1922 by the Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill announced that 'Jewish immigration would be regulated by the number of jobs available in the country'.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, it was up to the Jewish institutions to prove that the land urgently needed Jewish laborers, which turned the demand to increase the number of Jewish agricultural laborers into a core issue in the struggle to increase the number of immigration certificates. 'The demand for Hebrew labor has turned into a demand for the sake of the Hebrew Ole who had not yet arrived in the land, that is, a demand for certificates'.<sup>69</sup> Against the backdrop of squabbles between the different political bodies in the Jewish *Yishuv* over the distribution of certificates to their members, it is understandable that, in the period under review, one conclusion was that 'more than being an instrument for the struggle over Hebrew labor, the

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Halamish quotes from *A Crown Colony or a National Home* by Gideon Bieger (1983), 42–64

struggle for increased Aliya was an instrument for punching the farmers'.<sup>70</sup> *BaMaaleh* bitterly criticized the farmers' association and its leaders for denying that more Jewish farm laborers were needed. For example, the furious editorial titled 'Uproot It All' stated<sup>xxv</sup>:

It is with a heavy hand that the government of the land intends to perform its malevolent design—to throttle Jewish Aliya and deprive the Jewish laborer of work in the Hebrew economy. [...] Tyrannic forces are up against us; they desire to annihilate us. The civic Yishuv—the farmers' association and those who are dragged along in its footsteps—warm up nicely by this devouring fire that they themselves have started.

The only salvation from this 'volcano under our feet' is for the youth 'to place themselves on the Zionist pyre'. The call for the 'total recruitment for the laborer and laboring youth' could not be described in a more horror-conjuring manner.

#### **Leverage against the right-wing Revisionist Party**

The raging struggles over the leadership of the Yishuv characterize the years surveyed here, as in other historical periods of the Zionist settlement in Palestine or Eretz-Yisrael. The labor Zionist movements received tough competition from other Zionist political associations. The Revisionist Party, under the charismatic leadership of Zeev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, was the most formidable and popular rival. Its positions on national issues were militaristic and can be described as ultranationalist, but the concept of Hebrew labor accorded the labor movement a leverage: the Revisionists could be described as failed nationalists, disloyal to the important maxim of ethnic purity in the workplaces. Jabotinsky adamantly opposed the demand that the *Histadrut* should have exclusive rights over labor, just like the orchard owners and most other employers, who

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<sup>xxv</sup> Issue 10, May 18, 1934, front page.

were not keen on the demand to employ Jews only. Consequently, the Revisionists could be accused of acquiescing with the employment of non-Jews in the Jewish economy.

The bitter rivalry reached a tragic pinnacle with the murder of the prominent labor activist Chaim Arlosoroff in the summer of 1933. The labor movement was unanimously convinced that the murderers were Revisionists, whereas its opponents deemed the accusations libelous<sup>xxvi</sup>. During the incessant confrontations that followed, disloyalty to the concept of Hebrew labor was often used as ammunition against the Revisionists, who were blamed for trying to 'break the organized labor. Fist fights also occurred, leading to police intervention'.<sup>71</sup> In the fall of 1934, the *Histadrut*-owned daily *Davar* described Revisionist workers as joining forces with 'Arab and Italian laborers'.<sup>72</sup>

Members of both adversary parties were stunned to discover that, while they fought vigorously and sometimes violently, an agreement leading to a compromise over labor issues had been secretly finalized between the chiefs of the two hostile political associations. Clandestine discussions had been held in London in the autumn of 1934, leading to the 'London Agreement' between Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky.<sup>73</sup> The furiously unconvinced members of the *Histadrut* managed to force a referendum as a condition for ratifying the agreement. The agreement was eventually rejected—a defeat for Ben-Gurion (on the Revisionist side, Jabotinsky had no problem receiving acceptance). In the months prior to the referendum, the *Histadrut*'s newspapers and periodicals, including *BaMaaleh*, were packed with 'pro' and 'con' articles concerning the suggested agreement. Both sides used arguments for Hebrew labor to prove their

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<sup>xxvi</sup> The mystery over who really killed Arlosoroff has never been cleared. Fifty years later, in 1982, Prime Minister Menahem Begin initiated a state-administered investigative committee to investigate the murder, but its research failed to reach definitive conclusions.

point. The opponents claimed that the suggested agreement would damage the Hebrew labor campaign, whereas supporters of the agreement maintained that without it, the struggle for Hebrew labor would be doomed.

### **Jewish tradition for ethnic-religious segregation**

Along with the call to perform a 'social reform' in the Jewish mode of community living, the call for Hebrew labor also corresponded with a concept familiar to all political currents of Zionism: the demand for full segregation between Jews and non-Jews and the establishment of a 'Jewish Eretz-Israel society separated from its environment in the national as well as cultural aspects'.<sup>74</sup>

The concept of segregating populations and preserving the ethnic purity of the immigrant settlers' sector while emphasizing a would-be built-in superiority of settlers regarding the native population is not a feature unique to Zionism. It characterized colonial settlers in several areas of the world over many periods.<sup>75</sup> A plethora of narratives supported the colonial policies of segregation and expulsions. In the Palestine or Eretz-Yisrael case, the regular colonial narrative, based on the concept of white or European supremacy, could be fortified and consolidated by elements of traditional Jewish culture. In fact, Judaism considers any cohabitation with non-Jews a national calamity and a peril of 'annihilation' [Shmad].

Socialist Zionism started as a secular political movement, vehemently opposed to the grip the religious establishment had over the Jewish orthodox communities. Nevertheless, it preserved a powerful linkage, both nostalgic-emotional and practical, to religious traditions. As Itamar Even-Zohar explained, the need to preserve social-cultural cohesion entails making use of 'tradition' [*patrimoine*], which serves to obtain human solidarity but is also a 'less expensive measure to achieve collective obedience'.<sup>76</sup>

Edward Said, explaining how religious norms provided a basis for orientalist dispositions in non-religious societies, wrote that although one notices some elements that

[...] represent a secularizing tendency, this is not to say that the old religious patterns of human history and destiny and the 'existential paradigms' were simply removed. Far from it, they were reconstituted, redeployed, and redistributed in the secular frameworks.<sup>77</sup>

Yehuda Shenhav highlighted the fact that 'modern nationality uses the everyday religious practice as an integral part of itself while denying its religious practice and presenting an imagined secular image'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, 'religion' and 'secularity' in Zionism are not antinomian mutually exclusive categories but a system of discursive practices with complex interrelations from a historical perspective'.<sup>79</sup>

Displaying loyalty to the Jewish tradition while adapting it to the new needs of the Zionist-socialist settlement were part of the effort and resources dedicated to the process that Althusser called 'interpellation or hailing'<sup>80</sup>, with the purpose of getting individuals to submit freely to the desired political ideology.<sup>81</sup> This process fixes the religion—in the Jewish case, the diasporic tradition—into 'a source of nostalgia, an integral part of one's identity, and even a role-model for literary fiction, the theater, TV, cinema and for art'.<sup>82</sup> Homi Bhabha mockingly commented that in order to claim a racial hierarchy, the 'agency of social control appeals in desperation to God instead of Nature to fix the colonized at that point in the social order'.<sup>83</sup>

Many entries in *BaMaaleh* express nostalgic emotions and deep identification with the national-religious traditions of Judaism. This measure efficiently convinced young Zionist socialists of the practical necessity of meticulously preserving national-religious segregation, following the nostalgic attachment to the core ancient command. Loyalty to the Hebrew labor maxim could then instinctively be adopted.

Memories of religious celebrations, tales of *Tzadiks* (just men, prominent Hassidic rabbis), accounts of magic occurrences, and legends of martyrdom were often published during the years 1926–1935 in *BaMaaleh*, contributing to the ideology of ‘necessary’ segregation.

### **Image of the Arabs of Palestine: ‘The other’ as different, primitive, and dangerous**

The appeal for Hebrew labor is a mirror image of the appeal to ban and reject Arab labor<sup>xxvii</sup> and a demand to exclude Arab workers from the Jewish economy. During the 10 years surveyed here, ‘The uncritical and common understanding [...] that the segregation of Arabs from Jews is a consequence of “the conflict”<sup>84</sup> had not yet been crystalized. In 1928, Ben-Gurion wrote:

We do not wish to combat the Arab laborer, and we will not allow the centers of Jewish settlement to become a killing field between the Hebrew and Arab laborer<sup>xxviii</sup>.<sup>85</sup>

Ben-Gurion held on to this position even after the 1929 riots that later settled in the Israeli national memory as ‘Year zero of the Jewish–Arab conflict’.<sup>86</sup> At the Zionist congress held in Berlin in 1931, Ben-Gurion made sure to describe the slaughter of Jews during the riots as:

the fruit of evil propaganda, religious incitement and political grudge by a gang of religious priests and greed mongers, who tried to salvage their crumbling control over the masses of the Arab people by blowing up racial and religious animosity and creating a war of one people against the other.

All this, Ben-Gurion declared,

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<sup>xxvii</sup> The concept of ‘Arab labor’ took root in modern Hebrew vocabulary as a synonym of ‘badly performed labor’. Writer and cinematographer Sayed Kashua created the Arab Israeli comic series ‘Arab Labor’ based on this concept (the series was successfully broadcast by the popular KESHET TV in the years 2007–2012).

<sup>xxviii</sup> In an article published in *Davar* daily, January 10, 1928.

did not tear from our heart the recognition of the partnership-destiny that connects the Jewish people, returning to its land, with its Arab neighbors, the indigenous of the land and its surroundings.<sup>87</sup>

During this period, describing the autochthon inhabitants of the land as ‘aliens’ was the popular manner of branding them; their labor was described as ‘foreign labor’<sup>xxx</sup>. Palestinian born author Mordechai Tabib (1910–1979), son of immigrants from Yemen, described the Arab laborers (with whom the Yemenites competed in the employment market) as ‘foreigners’. In his autobiographical novel, a Jewish farmer is portrayed as needing to ‘watch out over the savage foreign villagers, so that they do not cheat him or defraud him with their work’<sup>88</sup>; the secretary of the Labor Bureau complains that ‘a hundred score of foreigners make a living from the work in our Moshava’.<sup>89</sup>

Descriptions of seemingly deep cultural gaps between the two communities—a Jewish community self-perceived as progressive and liberal vis-à-vis what is to be perceived as a primitive and undeveloped Arab community—were used as explanations, or excuses, for the need to meticulously preserve the segregation between the communities. In present day, such a worldview would be labeled orientalist and colonialist. The seminal article (lecture transcript) by Ben-Gurion in *BaMaaleh* titled *The Hebrew Labor*<sup>xxx</sup> portrays Arab culture as ‘scant’<sup>xxxi</sup>.

According to Ben-Gurion:

We recognize the right of self-determination for all people. The Arab nation in Eretz Israel is entitled to its scant culture, just like the culture-rich German nation. However, the Arab population has no right **to impoverish the land, to its abjection, to its destitution**. This right—to leave the land in its destitution because this suits their culture—we will not accept.

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<sup>xxix</sup> ‘Avoda Zara’: Biblically, a definition of paganism.

<sup>xxx</sup> Issue 20 of *BaMaaleh*, November 4, 1932, p. 3. See also above.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The admiration simultaneously expressed to the ‘culture-rich German nation’ only two months before the Nazi ascension to power seems embarrassing in retrospect.

Every nation is entitled to take care not of its culture alone but also of its unlimited development. This right is given to all nations, ours included. (original emphasis).

The similarity to other cases of settler colonialism is an eye-opener. Patrick Wolfe first coined this concept,<sup>90</sup> and Lorenzo Veracini followed by dedicating some research to its Israeli-Zionist version. According to Wolfe, 'The primary object of settler-colonization is the land itself rather than the surplus value to be derived from mixing native labor with it.'<sup>91</sup> Therefore, presenting an image of a 'vicious savage' is necessary as this savage's 'wild version' is of 'a treacherous, anonymous, and warlike savagery' that can be 'counterposed to the steadfastness of resisting pioneers'.<sup>92</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre summed up this attitude in his introduction to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*: 'debasement of the colonized to exalt themselves' he explained, is a common mechanism that an 'elite of usurpers' utilizes 'to establish their privilege'.<sup>93</sup>

As Boaz Neuman put it, an 'ecstatic-symbiotic attitude is the base of the blindness or at least the ignoring by the pioneers of the local, autochthone population in Eretz Israel' and the reason they are regarded as 'an impediment, a proper ecological hazard'.<sup>94</sup> Wolfe stated, 'to get in the way, all the native has to do is stay at home'<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Nurit Peled-Elhanan highlighted the settlers' ideology: 'the ideology advocating our right to the "land"', as a mechanism that, 'like every ideology [...] sets clear borders to who "we" are and excludes from it all "others"'.<sup>95</sup> Following Teun Van-Dijk, she pointed out the binary division between 'them' and 'us' as the generator of '*superior racism*' that is manufactured and produced 'in newspapers, in schoolbooks, in academic discourse, in political speeches, and in parliamentary discussions'.<sup>96</sup> It is a mechanism that makes clear 'the polarization between (positive) us and (negative) them at all levels of the discourse structure and, hence, as a manifestation of underlying racist ideologies'.<sup>97</sup> This 'colonial identity that is played out, like all fantasies of originality and origination'<sup>98</sup> easily 'sets up a discursive form of racial and cultural

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Quoting Deborah Bird Rose's *Hidden Histories: Black Stories From Victoria River Downs, Humbert River, and Wave Hill Stations* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991), 46.

opposition'.<sup>99</sup> Displaying a hierarchical observation and 'creating a dichotomy between "myself" and "the other" " to gain control, oppression and exploitation' is indeed 'is 'appropriate for colonialist power conceptions '<sup>100</sup>. Franz Fanon put it simply: 'It is the racist who creates his inferior (original emphasis).'<sup>101</sup>

In the pages of *BaMaaleh*, local Palestinian Arabs were frequently described as cultureless savages, often full of admiration for the settling society that arrived to take their lands. Fanon sarcastically described the colonialists as being convinced that their 'coming was unconsciously expected—even desired—by the future subject peoples'<sup>xxxiii</sup>.<sup>102</sup> Writers, among them Miriam Singer, Pessach Bar-Adon (his pseudonym was mostly *Aziz Effendi*), and Moshe Mosenson, tended to use the technique of an 'omniscient writer' to report flattering (imaginary) thoughts of Arabs who encountered Jewish settlers.

### **The 'natural laborer' for the Hebrew labor: Yemenite Jews and other Mizrahim**

The desire for the 'conquest of labor' and the real difficulties labor actually presented for the newcomers generated the idea of employing Jews from communities in the Arab space, which included natives of Palestine from the old Sephardi communities and Jews from Yemen, as substitutes for the local Arab Palestinian workforce.

The idea of the 'natural laborer' began to form as a realistic plan when the laborers who came from Eastern Europe, although they were motivated idealistically and spirited with the desire to make sacrifices, were unable to conquer labor in the Moshavot.<sup>103</sup>

Jews from Yemen were considered 'best suited to compete with Arab workers in the labor market',<sup>104</sup> and when Arthur Ruppin dispatched Shmuel Yavne'eli in 1911 to get *Olim* from

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<sup>xxxiii</sup> Quoting from the book by Octav Manoni.

Yemen,

it was not the hardship in Yemen that induced him to bring over Jews from there as Olim but the role he assigned to them in Eretz-Israel—to successfully compete with the Arab laborers in the struggle for Hebrew labor in the Moshavot<sup>xxxiv</sup>.<sup>105</sup>

Nitza Druyan detailed:

A solution was proposed for the problem of Hebrew labor in the land: The Yemenites would conquer it! For a major part of the Yishuv, the Olim from Yemen seemed the best ‘natural laborers’ because they arrived from a backward land but had a tradition of labor [...] they ‘make do with little’ based on their life experience in their country of origin.<sup>106</sup>

The idea seemed particularly promising because

their wives, too, would be able to work as domestic help, and even their children would join the workforce, particularly in harvest seasons. So, apparently, an easy solution was found to the problem of Hebrew labor.<sup>107</sup>

However, the hierarchical-dichotomous division of Jews-versus-Arabs, so fundamental to Zionism, became an ongoing problem as the hegemonic, establishing sector in Zionism—the one identified with the ‘Yiddishland’ of Eastern Europe—encountered a population that was both Jewish and Arab. These included the natives of Palestine or Eretz-Yisrael, children of the veteran ‘Sephardis’, and immigrants from other Arab lands, which included Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa. In Israel, they were named by the collective brand ‘Mizrahim’ [of the orient].

Honaida Ghanim chose the concept of ‘liminality’ to describe

those situated between different and contradictory fields without being really included in them and, at the same time, not completely removed from them, and consequently, they are

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> Based on Ruppin’s autobiographical book.

included in the social patterns [...] solely against the background of their aberration and their incomplete affinity<sup>xxxv</sup>.<sup>108</sup>

Following Victor Turner, Ghanim clarified that ‘in classic anthropology, liminality points to every transfer from one well-defined predicament to another, either at the micro or macro level’.<sup>109</sup> Ghanim’s choice to use ‘liminality’ to describe a liminal section of the population seems suitable for the *Mizrahi* Jews as a liminal group. Owing to their characteristics, similar to those of the native Arab population, they belonged to categories that ‘habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure’.<sup>110</sup> Simultaneously, they were and are identified with the hegemonic group that segregates itself from the native population by virtue of the common religious affiliation with the settlers’ group. They were called upon to assist in the struggle for separation and were most willing to oblige as a group. Unlike the temporary and ceremonial liminality described by Turner, this liminality was permanent and undynamic. The Lebanese author Amin Maalouf dedicated his book *Les Identités Meurtrières (In the Name of Identity)* to ‘people who carry within them affiliations that [...] sharply collide with one another’ and calls them ‘people who are in a certain way borderline, split by ethnic, religious, or otherwise fractured boundaries’.<sup>111</sup> Ella Shohat considered the Arab Jews of Israel as the ones ‘occupying the actantial slot of both dominated and dominators, simultaneously disempowered as “Orientals” or “Blacks” vis-à-vis “White” Euro-Israelis and empowered as Jews in a Jewish state vis-à-vis Palestinians’.<sup>112</sup>

The trend of identifying Yemenites and other Mizrahim as ‘natural laborers’ exposed some inner contradictions in the socialist Zionist ideology. Currently, in Israel, there is nothing new in the affirmation that ‘native Arab Jews were relegated to inferiority in the Central and East

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Ghanim used the concept of liminality to analyze the state of Palestinian intellectuals in Israel.

European Zionist establishment<sup>xxxvi</sup>.<sup>113</sup> Part of the problem was that the immigrants from Yemen did not easily accept their designated positioning at the bottom of the Jewish economic scale and did not really wish to ‘make do with little’. ‘In fact, the myth about the Yemenite who is content with little and is happy with his lot had already been disproved in those early days, but as myths go, this one too persisted for many more years.’<sup>114</sup>

Haviva Pedaya believed that ‘the acceptance of the Yemenites had always been the “softest” one’<sup>115</sup> and that ‘the Yemenite had been the ultimate outsider and, therefore, the likable and the non-threatening’.<sup>116</sup> This was perhaps in accordance with the ‘colonial phantasy’ that Homi Bhabha described,<sup>117</sup> which sees the ‘black’ as ‘both savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food)’.<sup>118</sup> However, upon their arrival, Yemenites seemed to have already expressed bitterness over the way they were tracked into the role of laborers, while the newcomers from Eastern Europe were allocated lands. The ‘habitus’ of most Yemenite Jews was based on the same basic (religious) education that insisted on literacy and enabled them to concentrate on income-lucrative professions in their land of origin. It was not much different from the basic ‘habitus’ of the Jews from Eastern Europe.

The reality that the Yemenites met in the growing Hebrew *Yishuv* was disappointing to them. The Eastern European Jews ‘categorized non-European Jews as backward and primitive’.<sup>119</sup> Cotemporary German researcher-traveler Carl Rathjens, well-acquainted with Yemen and its Jews, was shocked to discover immigrants from Yemen in Eretz Israel who had been tracked to become ‘the proletariat of the Zionist society at the lowest level’ as he complained in a letter to the prominent Zionist leader Otto Warburg.<sup>120</sup> ‘They are not given equal

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<sup>xxxvi</sup> Present-day Israeli culture is rich with literary and filmographic works that deal with this issue, but their focus is almost exclusively on the post-1948 reality.

rights, but they are treated like second class citizens,' Rathjens protested in his letter to Warburg.<sup>121</sup>

However, it must be noted that while being victimized and mistreated by the Eastern European settler's society, the great majority of Mizrahim were attracted to its radically nationalist political groupings. They followed a pattern that Albert Memmi identified in other settler societies. The 'small colonizer', in Memmi's terminology, 'defends the colonial system so vigorously [...] because he benefits from it to some extent [...] though dupe and victim, he also gets his share'.<sup>122</sup>

All the Yemenites depicted or writing for *BaMaaleh* during the period under consideration expressed perfect identification with the settler Zionist society, whether distinguished figures, like Israel Yeshayahu<sup>xxxvii</sup> and Mordechai Tabib, or fictional young home servants. The very existence of Mizrahi (Arab-Jewish) intellectuals such as writers Nisim Mallul and Shimon Moyal or the affluent like the Cheloush family<sup>xxxviii</sup> was not mentioned in *BaMaaleh*. By contrast, there are ample observations of miserable, ill-used Mizrahi youth, followed by considerable empathy. Protests against injustice and social gaps were regularly accompanied with pledges for 'drops of comfort' that were offered to young and suffering Hebrew laborers. The editorial *The Nest of my Forsaken Prayers*<sup>xxxix</sup> (the title is a quote from a popular poem by the national poet Bialik) celebrated 10 years of the Laboring Youth *Histadrut*:

Dozens and hundreds of hardship's children are burdened with pain and sorrow, humiliated and removed from the society of their peers, from the springtime of life. The Histadrut is gathering them all with much compassion, pouring drops of comfort, with sounds of faith all

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<sup>xxxvii</sup> Israel Yeshayahu (1908 -1979) was an Israeli politician, minister and the fifth Speaker of the Knesset ([Knesset website](#)).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, *Reminiscences of My Life (1870–1930)* (Tel Aviv: Bavel Publishers, 2005 [1931]) (Heb).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Issue 19, September 23, 1934, front page.

over them, giving them back their abused childhood, and planting in their hearts the song of the future.

### **Conclusions**

The ideological and conceptual implications of the struggle for Hebrew labor in the Hebrew Zionist settlement were far reaching, and its practical outcome was disastrous, observed from a civic-liberal perspective. Immediately following the Nakba of 1948, the newly founded Hebrew State legislated a series of apartheid-inspired laws and regulations (citizenship laws, present-absentee regulations, and JNF regulations), which did not generate any meaningful resistance in the Jewish Yishuv. In 1967, more parts of Palestine were occupied, which entailed another set of rules against the native residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, next to an ever-increasing growth of colonial settlements in those areas. Many Israeli Jews and their supporters in other countries, who wished to see an end to the bloody continuous war situation, must realize that the 1967 occupation was not the generator of the conflict but merely one of its ignominious outcomes and that the original cause was the very 'framework of the national Jewish state',<sup>123</sup> with its positions and 'Zionist policies toward the Arabs', as was observed many years before the state was established.<sup>124</sup>

These policies were aggressively promoted by the Zionist labor movement, which is correctly credited with the establishment of the Jewish State. *BaMaaleh* was one of its most prominent official mouthpieces. The sophistication of the 'cluster of myths',<sup>125</sup> which 'offered policies of disinformation and distortion',<sup>126</sup> did not start with the ascension of ultrareligious fascists or the personality of a particularly cunning politician who became the Prime Minister of Israel several years ago. Discussing the 'exclusionary narrative propagated by ultranationalist

settlers',<sup>127</sup> one must bear in mind that this is not a post-1967 phenomenon. Reading *BaMaaleh*, this educational organ of labor Zionism (modeled on 'national socialism', as defined by Zeev Sternhell<sup>128</sup>), displays, through the concept of Hebrew labor, how preaching a fake 'ethnic purity' efficiently 'legitimized' striving for Jewish supremacy to the immigrating settler population.

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My research data are based solely on articles published in the periodical *BaMaaleh* between 1926 and 1935. The issues (in Hebrew) are fully available to the public in several public libraries and institutions, including the National Library (available in microfilm), Givat Haviva, Tabenkin Centre, and Lavon Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> Homie K. Bhabha, *The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism*. (Black British Cultural Studies, University of Chicago Press, 1996), 72.

<sup>2</sup> Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4) (2006): 390.

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- <sup>4</sup> Anita Shapira, *Futile Struggle: The Jewish Labor Controversy 1929–1939* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1977); Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906–1948* (University of California Press, 1996).
- <sup>5</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld Publications Limited, 2007).
- <sup>6</sup> Shapira, *Futile Struggle: The Jewish Labor Controversy*.
- <sup>7</sup> Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 15.
- <sup>8</sup> Israel Shahak, *Jewish History Jewish Religion. The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (London: Pluto Press, 1994).
- <sup>9</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London & Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006); Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London & New York: Cassel, 1999); Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4) (2006).
- <sup>10</sup> Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*.
- <sup>11</sup> Homie K. Bhabha, *The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism*, 72.
- <sup>12</sup> Michael Murray, ‘Narrative Psychology’, in *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, ed. Theodore Sarbin (CA, Praeger: 1986), 113.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303961269\\_Narrative\\_psychology](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303961269_Narrative_psychology)
- <sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New Left Books, 1983; London: Verso, 1991).
- <sup>14</sup> Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine 1882–1948’, *Studies in Zionism: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Intellectual History* 4 (1981).
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.
- <sup>16</sup> Louis Althusser, trans. Ben Brewster, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’, in *“Lenin and Philosophy” and Other Essays* (New York: La Pensée, 1970; Monthly Review Press, 1971), 6. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm> (accessed May 2, 2022).
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

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- <sup>20</sup> Tal Almaliach, *The People of Yesterday, The Kibbutz HaArtzi – HaShomer HaTzair and MAPAM 1956–1977* (Open University and the Ben-Gurion Institute, 2018), 52.
- <sup>21</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, trans. Peter Collier, ‘Habitus and Field’, *General Sociology 2* (lectures) (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020 [1981–1983]), 21.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>23</sup> Maristela Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, *The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History* (Princeton University Press, 2012).
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.
- <sup>25</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton University Press, 2004), 18.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.
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