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“WE ARE HERE TO BRING THE WEST,  
NOT ONLY TO OURSELVES”: ZIONIST  
OCCIDENTALISM AND THE DISCOURSE  
OF HYGIENE IN MANDATE PALESTINE

During the British Mandate period Zionist health organizations and professional groups made an extensive effort to educate the Jewish public in health and hygiene. This article analyzes the Hebrew popular-scientific discourse of hygiene. It looks at the inculcation of hygienic models of conduct as part of a project of modernization and Westernization. As the analysis demonstrates, Zionist identity was constructed as modern and Western in opposition to the Orient and Oriental ways of life. At the same time, “Occidental” and “Oriental” were unstable and sometimes ambivalent categories in the hygienic discourse. Not only the value of the categories sometimes differ (as Jews were depicted both as European settlers and as natives of the Orient), but also East European Jews appeared both as objects and as subjects of a “civilizing mission.” As a consequence, the construction of difference between European Jews and Orientals was not always grounded in *different* practices attributed to each of these groups but sometimes in the different value attached to the *same* practices when performed by members of different groups.