ANGOLAN ZION

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Published online: 11 Feb 2015.

To cite this article: Gur Alroey (2015): ANGOLAN ZION, Journal of Modern Jewish Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14725886.2015.1006009

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14725886.2015.1006009

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ANGOLAN ZION
The Jewish Territorial Organization and the idea of a Jewish state in Western Africa, 1907–1913

This article traces the attempts in 1907–1913 by the Jewish Territorial Organization to set up an autonomous Jewish entity in West Africa. The Territorialists laid down three criteria for the choice of a territory: (1) A tract of land that must be large enough in size to allow for the absorption of mass Jewish migration. (2) A fertile territory that could provide a livelihood for the Jews who went there. (3) A sparsely populated territory so that no ethnic tensions would be created between the Jews settling there and the local residents. One likely territory was Angola, which at the beginning of the twentieth century was under the protection of the Portuguese government. The plan failed. However, the importance of the “Angola Plan” was to highlight the position of the Territorialists towards Africa in general and Angola in particular.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) tried to found a Jewish autonomous region on the Benguela plateau in Angola. This was a settlement initiative in which some of the prominent figures in the Jewish world participated and discussed with serious intent. Diplomatic contacts were established between the ITO and the Portuguese government, and a delegation was even sent out to investigate the designated territory.

The settlement plan was never realized and no Jewish autonomy was established in West Africa. Nevertheless, it had a great deal of importance not on the practical but, rather, on the conceptual level. The idea of turning Angola into the “promised land” for the Jewish people is an interesting one because this was not only a chapter in the history of Jewish nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, but constituted an inseparable part of European colonialism on the African continent on the eve of the First World War.

During the years 1903–1905, pogroms occurred in Southern Russia and over 3,000 Jews were murdered. Jewish migration to the USA increased from year to year and the living conditions of the Jews in Eastern Europe became more severe. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the solution to the Jewish problem was a burning issue, and in the Zionist Movement—with its aim to establish a homeland for the Jewish people in
Palestine—voices were heard that a swift territorial solution was needed in any territory that was available as long as it could save Eastern European Jewry.

The call for Jewish autonomy in any territory across the globe is interesting since contrary to the accepted Zionist narrative that stressed the centrality of Palestine, there were quite a few activists in the Zionist Movement who wanted to promote initiatives for Jewish settlement in countries outside Palestine. These people were called “Territorialists” by their opponents in the Zionist Organization. For a few years the “Territorialists” remained part of the Zionist Organization, but later on they resigned from it and established an alternative and rival organization which searched throughout the world for a piece of land where Jews could settle. In 1925, the Territorialist organization broke up and its members returned to the Zionist Organization to take part in advancing settlement projects in Palestine.

This article is divided into four parts. The first part attempts to plumb the depths of Territorialist ideology in Zionist thought. The importance of this ideology lies mainly in gaining an understanding of the system of reasons for the Territorialists’ choosing Angola (and not Palestine). Through it we learn not only about Jewish nationalism and the Zionist Movement at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also about the colonialist values held by the ITO and its attitude towards the peoples of Africa during that period. The second part will trace the diplomatic attempts of the ITO to negotiate with the Portuguese government in order to promote a broad and comprehensive settlement plan in Angola. The third part will focus on the delegation that set out to the Benguela plateau in Angola to establish whether the region was suitable for Jewish settlement, and on the conclusions of the report presented to Israel Zangwill, President of the ITO. The fourth and final part of the article will discuss the reasons for the failure of the negotiations and why, after all, Jewish autonomy was not established in West Africa.

The ITO

Territorialist ideology is simply the establishment of an autonomous entity or, alternatively, a state for the Jews in a territory outside Palestine (see Benjamini 1990; see also Alroey 2011, 1–32; Rovner 2014, 1–13). This ideology emerged together with Zionist ideology. From the moment that Judah Leib (Leon) Pinsker (1821–1891), the founder of the Zionist Movement, wrote in his formative and influential work *Auto-Emancipation* (1882) that “the goal of our present endeavours must be not the Holy Land, but a land of our own,” there were those in Jewish society who upheld the idea of “our land” and sought to establish a state or an autonomous entity in a territory that was not Palestine.

Pinsker was the first thinker who gave meaning to the Territorialist idea. He determined that the spiritual content of the Jewish people was more important than territory, and therefore the Jewish homeland could be established anywhere possible, not exclusively in Palestine. Since the effort to achieve a territory was liable to be a complex task, he thought that it was not necessary to

attach ourselves to the place where our political life was once violently interrupted and destroyed […] we need nothing but a large piece of land for our poor brothers;
a piece of land which shall remain our property, from which no foreign master can expel us. (Pinsker 1959, 194)

In his trail-blazing work, Pinsker broke the link between Palestine and the basic moral demand of the Jews for a land of their own. He claimed that the geographical location of Palestine was important only for what it symbolized for the Jewish people. He wrote that when we go to the designated land

we shall take with us the most sacred possessions which we have saved from the shipwreck of our former fatherland, the God-idea and the Bible. It is only these which have made our old fatherland the Holy Land, and not Jerusalem of the Jordan. (Pinsker 1959, 194)

Since Palestine did not seem to be obtainable, Pinsker was prepared to compromise over another territory that could give Jews who had to leave their countries of residence a safe haven that was undisputed and that could support those who owned it (Pinsker 1959, 194).

The Jewish State by Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), the first President of the Zionist Organization, which was published 14 years after the appearance of Auto-Emancipation, was another important link in the chain that led to the consolidation of Territorialist ideology and to the strengthening of the idea within the Zionist Movement that Palestine was a possible, but not a compulsory, territory for it. Just as in Auto-Emancipation, The Jewish State was also not decisive over the territorial issue, and instead of “our land” and “our Holy Land,” Herzl hesitated between Palestine and Argentina:

Is Palestine or Argentina preferable? […] Argentina is one of the most fertile countries in the world, extends over vast area, is sparsely populated, and has a temperate climate. It would be in its own highest interest for the Republic of Argentina to cede us a portion of its territory […] Palestine is our unforgettable historic homeland. The very name would be a marvelously effective rallying cry. If His Majesty the Sultan were to give us Palestine, we could in return undertake the complete management of the finances of Turkey. We should there form a part of a wall of defense for Europe in Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism. (Herzl 1959, 222)

The idea of settling Jews outside of Palestine as a general solution for the Jewish problem was therefore an integral part of the political ambience in the Zionist Movement from the time of Pinsker until Herzl’s death. Many Zionists did not see any contradiction between their membership in the Zionist Movement and their desire to establish a state for the Jews outside Palestine. Although the platform of the Zionist Organization that was formulated during the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 determined that “Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine,” this platform apparently became subject to change in later years (see Shimoni 1995; Vital 1982).

In 1902, Herzl tried to examine the possibility of setting up a Jewish state in El Arish. In February 1903, a delegation of seven men set out to explore the Sinai Peninsula. The delegation surveyed 598 square miles and collected data about the soil, water,
plant life, quarries, fishing and the climate in Sinai. In addition, they examined the possibility of an anchorage and transportation through the Red Sea. The El Arish plan was not carried out and a short while later it was dropped from the agenda. At the Sixth Congress assembled in Basel in 1903, Herzl presented the British proposal to establish a Jewish settlement on the Guas Ngishu plateau in East Africa (Weisbord 1968, 198–223; see also Heyman 1977; Saposnik 2008).

Herzl died at the height of the Uganda controversy and before the territorial question had been clarified and the final location of the Jewish state was decided upon. His death left behind a leadership vacuum, as well as an ideological crisis that led to a split in the Zionist Movement and the establishment of a rival organization. Two years after Herzl had presented his Uganda Plan to the delegates of the Congress, the Zionist Organization rejected it with a majority of votes, and an additional law was passed to forbid submitting any future plan for Jewish settlement that was not in Palestine. The two decisions made at the Seventh Congress in August 1905 caused the group of Zionists identified with Herzl’s views to resign from the Zionist Organization and to set up an alternative organization called the ITO.

The secessionists were an integral part of the Zionist Movement and were members of the Zionist Organization who took part in its leadership until their resignation from it. These individuals included Israel Zangwill, the President of the ITO, one of Herzl’s close associates, his right hand, and a prominent activist among British Zionists; David Eder, who resigned from the Zionist Organization but returned to it after the First World War, became a member of the Zionist Directorate in Jerusalem and was the Chairman of the Zionist Organization in England during the post-war years; the ophthalmologist Max Mandelstamm, a veteran Zionist and one of the Zionist leaders in Eastern Europe; Nahman Sirkin, founder of the Zionist-Socialist trend in the Zionist Organization; Judah Hazan, a prominent Zionist activist in Warsaw, and many others.

A short while after the official establishment of the ITO, the Territorialist manifesto was formulated and certain patterns of activity were determined. The aim of the ITO as defined in the manifesto was clear and simple: “To obtain a territory on an autonomous basis for those among the Jews who were unable or unwilling to remain in their countries of residence” (CZA, A36, file 1). It was also written in the manifesto that in order to achieve the desired goals, the organization would try to unite all the Jews who supported this goal, to enter into contacts with governments and with both private and public institutions, and finally to found financial and other institutions necessary for realizing its aims (CZA, A36, file 1). The term “autonomous basis” was defined as a territory that had to be obtainable and in which the Jews would be the overall majority. This manifesto was the “Basel Plan” of the Territorialists and served as the basis for ITO activities throughout the years of its existence.

The ITO began its activities during a period of catastrophe for the Jews in the Russian Empire. During 1905–1906, 657 pogroms occurred in the Pale of Settlement during which more than 3,000 Jews were murdered and the number of Jewish migrants increased from year to year (Klier and Lambroza 1992, 228). The slaughter of Jews in the Pale of Settlement and the mass migration to the USA convinced the Territorialists that it was necessary to work quickly and at any price towards the establishment of a “Jewish state” here and now, no matter where:
We say that the most important matter, under present circumstances, is the saving and revivifying of our people and our culture, and that a land exists for people and not a people for a land. It would be a sin to let our people go to the dogs in the meanwhile whilst we shout “Palestine and Palestine only.” If, as it appears, we shall be unable to obtain Palestine for generations, we have no right to fold our hands and do nothing or nibble at petty colonization, and be content to wait and wait. (CZA, A36, file 8)

The idea of “a land for the people and not a people for a land” was a cornerstone in Territorialist thought. Immediately after the establishment of the ITO, Israel Zangwill began his search for a territory for the Jews. He devoted nine years to this search for a designated land and never found it. It seems that there was not a single territory on the globe that was not raised for discussion and that was not examined for its advantages, disadvantages and chances of success if and when Jewish settlers went there.

The Territorialists examined possibilities in the continents of North and South America: in Canada (the Ontario province), the USA (Nevada, Idaho, and Galveston, Texas), Argentina, Bolivia and Colombia; on the Australian continent; they negotiated for the Northern territories and the Kimberley region; in Asia, the possibility arose for Jewish settlement in Mesopotamia (Iraq); and on the African continent, Rhodesia, Libya, East Africa and Angola were examined. Among all the search attempts mentioned above, the most significant and advanced negotiations that the ITO held for territory for the Jewish people was with the government of Portugal for Angola.

Angola—the promised land

Already the early twentieth century the Jews had begun to be interested in the possibility of settlement in the Portuguese colonies in Angola. The Jewish Colonization Association which was founded by Baron Hirsch in 1891 with its centre in Paris, searched for areas for Jewish agricultural settlements and showed interest in Angola. During 1900–1902, the management of this foundation applied to Dr Alfredo Bensaúde, the Jewish director of the Polytechnion in Lisbon, to find out whether it was possible to send migrants to the Portuguese colonies in Angola. Dr. Bensaúde sent this proposal to the Prime Minister, Jose Luciano de Castro, but the latter responded that because of the Queen’s religious tendencies, there was no chance that this proposal would be acceptable (CZA, September 30, 1913, A36, file 73.).

In 1907, the idea of settling Jews in Angola was raised once again. This time it was proposed by a member of the London branch of the ITO, Meyer Spielmann, after he had met with the engineer Norton Griffiths who held the contract to lay the rail line in the Benguela plateau. Griffiths was exposed to the Territorialist idea through Zangwill’s speeches that were published in the contemporary press, and thought that it would be possible to link his dealings on the African continent with the aims of the ITO.

From his familiarity with this region, its inhabitants, climate, and personalities in the Portuguese government, he was convinced that the ITO would receive a settlement license without any problems since it served both the interests of Portugal, who wanted white settlers in its colonies, and the interests of the ITO (CZA, December 25, 1907, A36, file 73/1). Zangwill, at that time, rejected the proposal because he thought that
Angola was not suitable for Jewish settlement, and was suspicious that the Griffiths’s motive of was purely business and not for the benefit of the ITO. He was also engrossed in negotiations regarding the Ontario province in Canada, and, in addition, he claimed that Angola was already inhabited by four million people—most of them black—who were liable to make it difficult to carry out the plan (CZA, December 12, 1907, A36, file 73/1). Even the assertion by Griffiths that there were no more than 200,000 inhabitants and that the designated portion of land was uninhabited, did not change Zangwill’s negative opinion regarding Angola because he was suspicious of his hidden motives (Report 1913, vii). The question of Angola was again raised in 1911 by Rabbi M. I. Cohen of Rhodesia who wrote to Zangwill and recommended Angola as a land of unusual potentialities for the white man:

During the last couple of years many co-religionists have gone up to the Congo territory, which is enormously rich. As the Rand opened up South Africa so the Congo will open up the heart of the continent and will be fed both from East and the West. The Lobito bay railway will be completed in a few years’ time, and the line will feed enormous market. Now, the Portuguese territory is a beautiful country, healthy, with considerable native population, but practically no whites, and with great agriculture potentialities. Lobito bay will be the route for passenger and trade to the Congo and to South Africa. The possibilities for white colonization are enormous. (Report 1913, vii)

After the failure of the negotiations over the Ontario province in Canada, and after six years of ceaseless searching for a territory for the Jewish people, Zangwill tended towards a more positive attitude to the Angola proposal, and it was discussed for the first time in the ITO Executive Committee. The political changes in Portugal also gave him some measure of optimism regarding the chances to set up Jewish settlements in Angola. In October 1910, a revolution broke out in Portugal that deposed the royal family and led to the establishment of a republic. As the first stage, the new government annulled the discriminatory laws and conducted a more liberal and tolerant regime. For the first time Catholic citizens were allowed to abandon their religion and adopt another one if they so wished; religious marriages were not the only valid ones, and church leaders were persecuted by republican loyalists. There was also a real change in diplomatic policy when the young government tried to prevent British and German domination over Angola, and, at the same time, to strengthen its hold over its overseas colonies. For this reason the government wanted to encourage the migration of European settlers to Angola and to set up colonies under their patronage.

Against this political and diplomatic background, two prominent Jews in Lisbon, Wolf Terló and Alfredo Bensaúde, raised the idea of offering Angola to the Jews. Terló was a Zionist from Russia who migrated to Palestine and trained himself in agricultural work in the Mikve Israel Agricultural School in Palestine, then settled in Lisbon and became a successful businessman. Bensaúde, on the other hand, was a Portuguese Jew by birth who was, as previously mentioned, the director of the Polytechnion in Lisbon. These two men had strong connections with government officials and their proposal—which was submitted without coordination and to different personalities—fell on receptive ears (Marmur 1946, 178). Terló drew the attention of the Portuguese economist, Jose Relvas, to the inherent possibilities of sending Jews to Angola.
Bensaúde, on the other hand, interested Jose d’Almada, the director of a department in the Portuguese Ministry of Colonies, in the importance of setting up a Jewish colony there that would serve and promote the interests of the Portuguese government (Marmur 1946, 179).

The Portuguese government did not reject the idea outright and considered it positively. Bensaúde, Terló and d’Almada began processing a proposed bill to be submitted to Parliament by the delegate Dr Manuel Bravo, and it was published in the official bulletin of the government at the beginning of February 1912. According to this bill, the government would grant land for settlement to Jewish migrants who would receive Portuguese citizenship, and migrants who were above the age of 10 at the time of their arrival in Angola would be exempt from military service. The bill was submitted for discussion on behalf of the Parliament to the Colonial Committee headed by the delegate Jose Barbosa.

As soon as the proposal got under way and significant parliamentary progress seemed to have begun, Terló invited the ITO leaders to Lisbon and introduced them to members of the government and the parliament. The ITO delegation included I. Rubinstein, the chairman of the ITO in Switzerland, the president of the Territorialist branch in Sweden, Dr Jochelman, chairman of the ITO in Russia, Judge Jacob Teitel also from Russia (who was not an ITO member), and Professor Nahum Slousch from Paris (Kruk 1970, 156; Teitel 1929, 122–134). On May 12, 1912, Zangwill arrived in Lisbon. Before his arrival he attended a meeting at the British Foreign Office and was furnished with an unofficial but supportive letter to the English Ambassador in Portugal, Arthur Hardinge (Report 1913, viii). In Lisbon, Zangwill met with the leaders of the Jewish community, with Jose d’Almada, with the Chairman of the Parliament, and with many government officials, and heard additional details from them about the plan and chances of its success. Zangwill’s main efforts were to try to persuade the Portuguese government to grant the ITO a settlement license that would allow it to manage the settlement initiative.

To his chagrin, the meetings with the government officials were unsuccessful and Zangwill did not receive what he had expected to from the Portuguese government. It became clear to him that the Portuguese government was interested in maintaining direct contact with the settlers through government officials and not through the mediation of the ITO. The main fear of the Portuguese politicians was that the transfer of authority to a licensed company was liable to create a state within a state which would be detrimental to the sovereignty of Portugal in Angola. In addition, since the main branch of the ITO was in London, suspicions were aroused that Jewish settlement might promote the imperialistic aims of the British government, which, as previously mentioned, had shown great interest in West Africa and wished, together with Germany, to control areas on the African continent that were under the control of Portugal.

However, in spite of the doubts of the Portuguese government, it was nevertheless decided to advance the idea of Jewish autonomy in Angola. On June 15, the House of Representatives accepted the law of Jewish settlement in Portugal with a majority vote and it was transferred to the Senate for approval. A study of the details of the law shows that the Government of Portugal wished to conduct the settlement enterprise in Angola by itself and refused to grant the ITO any managerial authority. In the law it was explicitly noted that the government held the power to grant the land license to the Jewish
settlements who would become Portuguese citizens according to the conditions of the law. The government also held the power to grant land to Jewish charity and migration companies “which were founded by law in Portugal or outside it after they proved that they possessed sufficient capital funds for agricultural or industrial utilization.” These companies would be allowed to set up schools, hospitals, and other public institutions in order to organize and plan the cities and urban centres in the designated area. A settlement license would allow the Jewish migrant to receive in the first instance a tract of land of 100–200 hectares, which could be doubled if the settler utilized three-quarters of it. In the schools, the children would be taught in Portuguese and all official documentation of the Jewish colony would be conducted in this language (CZA, A36, file 73/1, 104).

This was not the kind of law that Zangwill had expected. The ITO was not mentioned at all in the law, there was no reference to self-rule, and migration to the areas of Angola was Portugal’s responsibility. In his letter to Bensaúde, Zangwill noted that “in the law of Jewish settlement” it must be assured that the Portuguese government “will not interfere in our attempts to establish a land of refuge. This is the minimum for an autonomy without which the plan is without any value” (CZA, July 11, 1912, A36, file 73/5, 2).

Under such conditions, it was difficult for the President of the ITO to accept the offer, yet he hoped that this was not the final version of the law and that it would be possible to insert a number of changes in it. Filled with hope and optimism, Zangwill went to the annual World ITO Congress held in Vienna in June 27–30, 1912, with the participation of some of the ITO representatives in Europe. The idea of autonomy in Angola was at the centre of the discussions, and Zangwill updated the delegates to the Congress on the details of the negotiations with the Government of Portugal. He noted three main reasons that could, in his opinion, lead to the success of the plan:

(a) There was no large Jewish community in Portugal that could raise difficulties in realizing the settlement initiative. Zangwill thought that the Jewish community living under the protection of the state might oppose it for fear that if the ITO received autonomy and Jews from all over the world came to settle in Angola, the government was liable to force them to migrate to it against their will.

(b) Although a Jewish presence is not felt in Portugal, Jewish blood flows through it. The Jewish origins of many Portuguese have created a subconscious sympathy for the Jewish people. Zangwill also stressed the moral duty that Portugal owed the Jewish people because of the expulsion from Spain in 1496. The granting of Angola to the Jews was like the closing of a circle and atonement for past sins.

(c) The Angola initiative was primarily a business and not a sentimental one. The Government of Portugal was aware that “it had not effectively conquered Angola” and that the presence of Germans in the southwest of Africa constituted a threat to the Portuguese colony. For this reason Zangwill thought that Jewish settlement under a Portuguese flag would serve the interests of Portugal. (Report 1913, ix)

After the Congress had dealt with the main points of the law it rejected the Portuguese government’s settlement law, but gave Zangwill the authority to continue with the negotiations and to bring about the realization in principle of the Territorialist idea. In addition, besides the diplomatic efforts, it was decided to send an expedition to the Benguela plateau to investigate the designated area and to see whether it could absorb...
The scientific expedition to Angola

On July 26, 1912, about one month after the ITO Congress, an ITO expedition set out from the port of Southampton and reached Lobito in Angola on August 22 after a stop over in Lisbon. The expedition was headed by Professor John Walter Gregory (1864–1932), a geologist, surveyor and lecturer at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. In 1887, he was appointed as an assistant in the Geology Department of the British Museum, he taught at the universities of Melbourne and Victoria in Australia, and in 1904 he received the position in Glasgow which he held until his death. For his research work he went out on study expeditions to the Rocky Mountains, East Africa, the Arctic Circle, and Tibet. Zangwill’s choice of Professor Gregory as head of the expedition shows the great importance he attributed to the Angola Plan and his wish to receive precise and reliable information about the designated territory (Lovering 1983).

At the port of Lobito, Professor Gregory was welcomed by Edward Robins, the chief engineer of the Benguela Railway project and his team of assistants, and received considerable information from them. On August 24—two days after his arrival—he began to examine the interior of the country with the generous help of Robins who travelled with him in a motor car. Gregory noted in the report that motor travel—unlike the train—made it possible to learn about the country more closely. The daytime travel and the many stops that were made allowed him to photograph the plateau, to take samples, and to converse with the chief engineer who knew the advantages and disadvantages of this tract of land. In the city of Lepi, Gregory made preparations for a walking tour. He hired the services of 25 local porters and began his march towards the city of Huambo which was at a distance of about 40 km from Lepi. On his arrival at the city, Robins joined him again and took him on a motor survey to Caconda.

On September 29, Gregory left the port of Lobito and arrived at Southampton on October 17. He had spent altogether about five weeks in Benguela and surveyed 1,125 miles by car and 340 miles on foot (Report 1913, 7–10). On his return to England, Professor Gregory composed his report and submitted it to Zangwill. A Magen David appeared on the upper third of the front page of the report, the aims of the ITO were stressed, and the purpose of the report was noted in the centre: Report on the Work of the Commission sent out by the Jewish Territorial Organization under the auspices of the Portuguese Government to examine the Territory Proposed for the Purpose of A Jewish Settlement in Angola.

The report consisted of 10 parts: the condition of Angola at the time of the report; a description of the route taken by the expedition; a geographical description of Angola; geological explanations of the region designated for Jewish settlement; the quality of the soil; the clearing of forests; climate; the agricultural character of the region; trade; political issues; summary and conclusions. Two objectives were defined for the expedition. The first was to examine whether the climate was suitable for Europeans, and the second was to try to understand whether there was any connection between diseases and the dearth of population in the Benguela plateau:
The objects of our expedition to Angola, were, therefore, to inquire, firstly, whether the country is likely to contain a sufficient area of well-watered, fertile, unoccupied land for the ITO colony. Secondly, whether the reported depopulation of the Benguela plateau, if true, is due to diseases which would render the country unsuitable for European colonizazation. (Report 1913, 4)

This article does not intend to refer to every issue in the report but mainly to focus on the way in which the head of the expedition experienced Angola and his attitude to the local population. The task imposed on Gregory, as well as the negotiations conducted by Zangwill with the senior officials of the Portuguese government, are not only a chapter in Jewish national history in modern times but also an inseparable part of European colonialism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The report is an interesting test case that allows us to examine the exploitation of Africa by the European powers. The transference of the Benguela plateau to the ITO was supposed to serve both sides. On the one hand the Jews of Eastern Europe would receive a land of refuge and, on the other, Portugal would deepen its hold in Africa through white settlers loyal to its government (Figure 1).

Although the journey through the Benguela plateau did not take more than five weeks, it allowed Professor Gregory to conduct a first examination and to determine the settlement potentialities of the designated territory. He reached the conclusion that the climate was favourable and that there were no dangerous or harmful wild animals. Also, many areas were very fertile and the railway line that was being laid could contribute much towards the development of the region (Report 1913, 29).

With regard to diseases and the decrease in population, he asserted that

From the evidence available in London there seemed great reason to fear that the population of the Benguela plateau had been greatly reduced in recent

FIGURE 1 Ox transport waggons near Quingenge. Source: Report (1913, 28).
years by disease, and the district might therefore be unsuitable for a colony; but this fear has proved groundless. The Benguela plateau appears to be remarkably salubrious. Its climate is pleasant as well as healthy, and owing to the beauty of its scenery, the freedom from insect pests, dangerous animals and vermin, the condition of life there are attractive and should easily be made comfortable. (Report 1913, 29)

The population of the Benguela plateau was estimated by Professor Gregory to be about 1,000 Portuguese settlers, most of whom were storekeepers. The number of agricultural families was a few score and most of them were settled along the railway line. Besides the Portuguese, the government officials and missionaries, some Boer families had migrated there from the Transvaal after its annexation by the British in 1877 (Report 1913, 23–24). Gregory estimated the number of natives living on the Benguela plateau to be about 100,000. With regard to their status in a Jewish autonomy, Gregory determined that it would be only fair to the natives to insert in any concession provisions securing them the land they already occupy and a reasonable reserve; and that is probably all the natives would expect. (Report 1913, 5) (Figure 2)

Gregory did not anticipate any problems with the local population and thought that the ITO and the Jewish settlers could achieve coexistence with them without difficulty:

The natives in Angola would probably place no serious difficulty in the way of occupation of the unoccupied land. Small presents to the chiefs for permission to settle would probably satisfy them. In all probability the natives would retire gradually from the settled country. The Portuguese traders and Boers would very likely do

![Figure 2](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 2** A native bridge on the Balombo River. Source: Report (1913, 24).
the same, and thus leave the Jewish colonists to the almost continuous occupation of the area wherein they may settle. (Report 1913, 25)

However, Gregory noted that the possibilities for settlement by individuals in the designated land were not great, and therefore the involvement of wealthy supporters would be necessary to ease the burden on the settlers:

As the well-watered, healthy and fertile districts are high, the conditions are those characteristic of the warm temperate rather than of the tropical zone. It is doubtful whether the country would grow the usual tropical products, and its profitable agriculture development may not be easy. The chances of success for individual colonists, settling there separately, are not hopeful. (Report 1913, 29)

This assertion accorded with the decision taken at the Vienna Congress, which ruled out settlement by individuals. However, there is a basis for assuming that this sentence was inserted in the report at Zangwill’s request in order to pressure the Portuguese government to change the law and to allow the ITO to manage the settlement initiative on the Benguela plateau. Professor Gregory’s conclusions about the designated land for Jewish settlement was very positive and it was because of Portugal’s difficult financial situation that he thought the ITO had the chance of obtaining a license from the Portuguese government.

The Benguela plateau is not free from drawbacks, economic and political, but it is owing to them that the land is still vacant, and that a suitable concession might be obtained and developed on the lines desired, for it is owing to the moderate fertility of the land that it could be cheaply cleared and settled. The desert barrier, which must necessarily increase cost of export, has hitherto been an impassable obstacle to satisfactory progress; and that fact that the country belongs to a State which is not sufficiently wealthy to spend much on colonial development renders it possible to secure a concession on terms allowing of great freedom in local self-government. (Report 1913, 29)

Not everyone was in agreement with Professor Gregory’s conclusions. Harry Johnston, among the well-known researchers of Africa and one of the prominent figures of English colonialism on the continent, and Henry Nevinson, who had reviewed the Second Boer War and reported on the slave trade in Angola at the beginning of the twentieth century, thought that Angola was not suitable for white settlers in general and for East European Jews in particular. Johnston claimed that most of the areas on the plateau were not suitable for settlement and that only a small part of it which was free of diseases was already settled by Boers and Portuguese (CZA, A36, file 73/1). Nevinson, on the other hand, claimed that the Jewish settlers would find it difficult to get labourers to work in their fields and he regarded slavery in Angola as an evil that would affect the Jews living there and the attempt of the East European Jews to settle on the land:

There are great difficulties in obtaining voluntary labour. All the plantations without exception, are worked by slave labour under the nominal excuse of contract. The whole colony is rotten with slavery. A few mission stations work with free labour,
but not for profit. Angola not being a white man’s country, the natural tendency is to employ solely black labour for working in the fields. (CZA, A36, file 73/1)

Nevinson also anticipated a drift of Jews from the colony to the cities and towns of Angola and from there a mass return to Europe. He was very pessimistic about Jewish settlement in West Africa and recommended that Zangwill give up the entire idea.

Although Johnston and Nevison were critical with regard to the Benguela plateau and claimed that it was unsuitable for white settlement for reasons of climate, they, like Gregory, also disregarded the native population and did not give any consideration to the system of relations it was expected to have with the new settlers. This sensitive issue was not seriously dealt with in the Territorialist Organization when they discussed Angola and other territories, and it seems that the Territorialists thought it could be resolved without any special difficulties.

The tendencies of thought and basic position of the Territorialists in general and of Zangwill in particular towards the local population and the expected system of relations they would have with the Jewish settlers, can be derived from the negotiations that the Zionist Organization conducted with the British government over the Guas Ngishu plateau in East Africa. Even though at this period the ITO and Zangwill were still an inseparable part of the Zionist leadership, the Uganda affair was the big bang from which the ITO was created, and it was this that shaped Territorialist ideology and the position in principle towards the local population (Alroey 2011, 1–32).

Comparison, therefore, between the two territorialist initiatives in Africa is unavoidable. In April 1903, the head of the Zionist Organization, Theodor Herzl, met the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. In the conversation that ensued, Chamberlain mentioned that during his travels in East Africa he saw an area of land that he thought could be suitable for Jewish settlement. The idea began to take shape and form, and on July 13, 1903, Leopold Greenberg, Herzl’s senior Zionist representative in England, presented the draft plan for Jewish settlement in East Africa—the Jewish Colonization Scheme. This document, which the British government totally rejected, allows us to examine the basic position of the Zionist Organization towards the local population in general, and East Africa in particular.

The settlement of Jews in East Africa, according to the Zionist plan, was to be conducted in two stages. At the first stage, the British government was to confirm Jewish settlement in the territory in which “the management and control of the crown lands was to be transferred to the Jewish National Fund of the Zionist Organization or to the administrators of the said territory who would be appointed in accordance with the constitution.” The designated territory would be held in trust by the Jewish National Fund in order to allow it (the territory) to be used by Jews for the purpose of settlement and to encourage the Jewish national idea. At the second stage, which refers to the trust period, the Zionist Organization would be permitted—until December 31, 1909—to present to the government of His Royal Majesty the constitutional conditions for regulating the suitable control and government of the settlements.

The constitutional clauses can be divided into those concerning the structure and function of the government in the East African territory and those concerning the relationship between the Jewish colonists and the local population. The section on the nature of the Jewish colony affirms that the territory intended for colonization
would be Jewish and that His Majesty would appoint a Jewish governor to rule it. It further stipulates that the colonists would be granted the authority to enact laws and regulations for self-government to foster their well-being and public order and to levy taxes for various purposes, such as maintaining a police force and a school system. Judges and law-enforcement officers would be appointed and civil and criminal courts instituted. The colony would be named New Palestine, “or such other name as may be approved from time to time with the consent of His Majesty’s Secretary of State” (CZA, A87, File 365, 4). According to another important article that was to be included in the constitution, the Jewish colonists would have the right to expand the territory required for colonization. Subsection 15 of Paragraph 5, which deals with the terms of the concession, states:

For acquisition with the consent of his Majesty’s Secretary of State of any other lands and premises in British East Africa and elsewhere, whether abutting upon or contiguous to the said territory or not, and the enlargement of the boundaries of the said territory and the extension to any new or additional lands of the right powers and privileges vested in or exercised by the settlement. (CZA, A87, File 365, 4)

This subsection was of great significance for the supporters of the East Africa scheme, because the purpose of the Jewish colony was to provide the speediest possible refuge for the hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews who had begun migrating westward. If Jewish migration was to be channeled to the African continent instead of North America, an additional reserve of land had to be secured. This is why the terms of the concession included an explicit reference to the local population and their rights: “All settlers in and inhabitants of the territory [will] be free from molestation in respect to their persons and property and under the protection and control of his Majesty’s Government,” as long as they complied with the provisions and terms of the concession. These terms, as stated in Greenberg’s plan, granted the Jewish settlers the right to banish anyone who was likely to express opposition to the colony or violate its laws:

For granting to the settlement power to exclude from the said territory any person or persons proposing to enter or settle in the same, who shall or may be deemed to be opposed to the interests of the settlement or the government thereof, or the dignity of his Majesty the King, and the power, with the previous consent of His Majesty’s Secretary of State, to expel from the territory without being liable for compensation or otherwise any person not fully and completely abiding by the ordinances, rules, and regulations for the time being in force in the territory or committing or conniving at a breach of the Constitution of the settlement. (CZA, A87, File 365, 4)

Cecil Hurst, the legal advisor in the Foreign Office, received the Zionists’ proposal with great suspicion. In a letter to Chamberlain (July 13, 1903), Hurst wrote that the Zionist plan went far beyond the Jews’ needs. His greatest fear was that the plan would lead to the establishment of an autonomous protectorate with more privileges than enjoyed anywhere else in the Empire. He asked Chamberlain to weigh carefully the Zionists’ request concerning the name of the territory, the acquisition of land, and the plans for future
expansion. Hurst was also opposed to the subsection, which authorized the colony to expel anyone liable to pose a threat to it. There were legal grounds for banishing those disloyal to the Crown, but the expulsion of people who opposed the settlers was problematic. This clause, he asserted, would grant the Jews too much power, and the British Empire should not do so (CZA, A87, File 365, 4).

The British government rejected the Zionist draft and instead gave Herzl a letter that contained a commitment to establish a Jewish settlement in East Africa without going into the character of the settlement and the system of relations expected with the native population. At the same time, from the draft that was composed (even if it was not carried out) one may learn about the attitude of the Zionist Organization towards the natives in the designated territory. The Jewish entity in East Africa was not intended to integrate with the surrounding environment but rather to create a situation in which the Jewish settlers would have control over the natives, and where necessary even to expel them. If they should pose a danger, the Zionists would have the authority to send them away (Stähler 2013, 272; see also Bar-Yosef 2008, 75–100).

The Territorialists were an integral part of the Zionist Movement, and when they resigned from it and set up the ITO, the guiding principles that were laid down in the Zionist draft were part of the Territorialist agenda and found expression in the diplomatic negotiations over Angola. Zangwill’s attitude, towards the issue of the black man was, as the researcher Meri-Jane Rochelson regarded it, inexplicably ambivalent. On one hand he was one of the first Zionist leaders to claim that the Zionist Organization would find it difficult to realize its aims in Palestine because there were 600,000 Arabs living there. On the other hand he saw no problem in setting up a Jewish entity on the African continent alongside, or instead of, the local inhabitants (Rochelson 2008, 162–165).

Zangwill’s need to resolve the destitute condition of the Jews in Eastern Europe was stronger than the moral and ethical problem of European colonialism, and for this reason he accepted Gregory’s recommendation and tried to advance the negotiations with the Portuguese government even if this might harm the local population.

Failure of the negotiations

As long as the expedition was engaged in investigating the designated territory, Zangwill refrained from diplomatic activity vis-à-vis the Portuguese government. He waited patiently for its conclusions, but was mainly worried about the formulation of the law in its present form. In one of his many letters to Bensaúde, Zangwill wrote that only the common interest of Portugal and the ITO, and mutual trust, could lead to the success of the plan. To his sorrow, the law did not contain any paragraph that could prevent the Government of Portugal from stopping the migration to Angola a short while after the settlers began arriving there. “As a land of migration, Angola is inferior to America and many other countries,” Zangwill wrote to Bensaúde,

its only value to the Jews is that it provides for wide-ranging settlement. There is no need to speak about “autonomy” but we thought that we would receive guarantees
of the “land of refuge,” that it would have the chance to grow and develop, and that it would not be destroyed after the foundations were laid in it with such great toil. (CZA, July 26, 1912, A36, file 73/5, 2)

However, in spite of the criticism, Zangwill was convinced that there was a common interest that would eventually lead the Government of Portugal to reconsider its proposal since “Angola has much land and little money and the Jews have little land but much money” (CZA, July 26, 1912, A36, file 73/5, 3).

In order to accelerate the negotiations and bring about a change in the position of the Portuguese government, Zangwill began to persuade Jewish capitalists of the chances for success in the Angola settlement. He hung his hopes on the Rothschild family, one of whose representatives—Sir Matthew Nathan was a member of the JTO geographical committee. Rothschild was sceptical about the real intentions of Portugal and found it difficult to believe that it would give a piece of land to the Jews. He claimed that the good will that Portugal showed towards the ITO derived not from concern for the Jewish people but from its desire to receive a loan to cover its debts. Zangwill on the other hand tried to convince him that his imminent journey to Lisbon was important and that it could advance the negotiations with the Government of Portugal. Rothschild did not commit himself to supporting the Angola Plan but was prepared to finance Zangwill’s journey to Lisbon. Zangwill interpreted this as a blessing and perhaps even an agreement in principle by Lord Rothschild to reconsider the settlement plan with favour when and if it was realized (CZA, August 15, 1912, A36, file 73/5, 2–3).

In spite of all the efforts in persuasion by Zangwill and Bensaúde, the Government of Portugal not only refused to accept their proposals but voices began to be heard against the plan itself. Senator Bernardine Roque protested that the ITO committee had rejected the office of the Portuguese government and the law that was passed, and said that “no one could imagine that on our lands the ancient aspirations of Judaism to rebuild Zion would be realized […] settlement as Portuguese—yes, but not as national Jews” (Marmur 1946, 183). The support for Jewish settlement in Angola was replaced by doubts and fears that it was the first step towards the loss of the Portuguese colony for Portugal.

The law of Jewish settlement and the stormy debate over it in the Portuguese parliament and in the press opened the eyes of the Portuguese to the economic and strategic potentialities inherent in Angola. When the law was brought before the Senate in June 29, 1913, it appeared to the Senators that with all its restrictions the law was still dangerous to the sovereignty of Portugal in Angola. In the arguments and discussions fears were raised that the Jews might use the benefits that the law granted them to set up a state within a state. It was, therefore, decided to denude the law of its Jewish character and to turn it into a general settlement law. In the end, the law was transferred to the Colonial Committee on behalf of the Parliament for additional clarification and was buried there (Medina and Barromi 1991, 14–16; Rovner 2014, 110–111).

Zangwill also failed to raise the first settlement funds needed for the Angola Plan. He found himself chasing his own tail. No Jewish capitalist would agree to donate his money so long as the JTO was not given a promise of a piece of land; and the Portuguese government, on the other hand, wanted to see money guarantees before transferring the
territory to the JTO. In his letters to Bensaúde, Zangwill had thought that this was the least of his problems and the realization of the plan depended solely on the agreement of the Portuguese government, but found that this was the greatest of his problems and that the financial possibilities at the disposal of the ITO were extremely limited, and without them he could not do very much. Even Bensaúde drew his attention to this issue when he wrote that he had not thought money would have been an obstacle and recommended that the plan should be filed away (CZA, September 13, 1913,

**FIGURE 3** Source: Report (1913, 33).
A36, file 73/5, 2–3). The plan for settlement in Angola was taken off the public agenda both in Portugal and in the ITO (Figure 3).

**Conclusion**

This article has traced the attempts in 1907–1913 by the ITO to set up an autonomous Jewish entity in West Africa. Angola was supposed to have been the answer for the persecuted Jewish masses who wished to flee from their countries of origin to a new territory where they could begin a new and independent life. The Territorialists laid down three criteria for the choice of a territory: (1) a tract of land large enough to allow for the absorption of mass Jewish migration; (2) a fertile territory that could provide a livelihood for the Jews who went there; (3) a sparsely populated territory so that no ethnic tensions would be created between the Jews settling there and the local population.

From the Territorialist perspective, Palestine did not conform to these three standards and they therefore believed that an alternative territory should be sought. One of these was Angola, which at the beginning of the twentieth century was under the protection of the Portuguese government.

The plan to set up a Jewish autonomy in Angola failed. The Government of Portugal, which had at first supported the idea and regarded the migration of the Jews as a useful tool to deepen their hold on the areas in Africa under their protection, retreated from it for fear that a state within a state would develop and Portugal would lose its hold on West Africa. However, the importance of the “Angola Plan” was not only in its success or failure, but that through it one may better understand the basic position of the Territorialists towards Africa in general and Angola in particular. A number of insights can be derived from this article:

(1) At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the Zionist Movement and later, the Territorialist Organization, showed interest in the African continent. In 1902, Theodor Herzl, wanted to establish Jewish autonomy in El Arish under British protection, and even sent a delegation to investigate Sinai. A year later Herzl became interested in Mozambique; in that same year, 1903, he presented the delegates of the Zionist Congress with the proposal he had received from the British government to settle Jews in East Africa on the Guas Ngishu plateau. The ITO continued the Herzlian line and the Territorialists searched for a territory outside Palestine. Only after the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, when the British gave their imperial protection for the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine, did the voices for setting up a Jewish state outside the Land of Israel disappear. The ITO disbanded and some of its prominent members returned to the Zionist Organization.

(2) In order to set up Jewish autonomy in Angola, the Territorialists depended on the European colonial powers and tried to take advantage of their interests in territories under their control for the sake of Jewish interests. The Territorialists did not see any contradiction between Jewish migration to Angola and the rights of the native population there. This sensitive issue was given explicit reference in the report by Professor Gregory when he asserted that the natives of Angola were satisfied with little, and that through bribery of the tribal leaders it was possible to achieve good neighbourly relations and maintain the peace between both sides. However, it
should be noted that the main motive both of the Zionists (in relation to the El Arish and East Africa plans) and of the Territorialists, was not to dispossess the local population or to exploit the natural resources of Angola. It was an attempt to solve the Jewish problem in view of the increasing number of pogroms in Eastern Europe and the fear that the gates of the USA would close. It was a pragmatic attempt to solve a concrete problem for the downtrodden and persecuted East European Jewry.

(3) However, even if this was not an attempt to exploit the local population, the Territorial Organization did not think it was necessary to consider the native population’s needs and desires. The approach of Zangwill and his colleagues reflected the European interests and attitude towards Africa and its native population. It expressed the European consensus towards the non-European world in general and Africa in particular, and regarded the natives as failed nations and savages that should be reshaped in the Western spirit. According to this approach, the Jews would come and settle and bring progress and money with them and transform the savage African continent so distant from Western development into a better and more enlightened continent.

The Territorialists returned to the Zionist Organization after the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917. They regarded themselves as Zionists in every respect. In many senses, the ITO was the “alter ego” of the Zionist Movement, and those who wish to understand Zionist ideology in all its aspects can do so through Territorialist thought that emerged from within the Zionist Movement and was an inseparable part of it. In view of this, the question is asked whether one can also learn (or extrapolate) from the attitude of the Territorial Organization towards the African continent in general and the natives of Angola in particular, about the complex and many-sided system of relations between the Zionists who came to Palestine and settled in it and the native Arab population. In other words, is it possible to trace the roots of the Jewish-Arab dispute in Palestine, beginning from the time of the Angola Plan through the diplomatic negotiations between the ITO and the Portuguese government, and the attempt of the Territorialists to set up Jewish autonomy in Africa?

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