

Jewish Sub-Ethnic Groups in Transnational Spaces:
Encounters between Jews from Eastern Europe and the Jews of
Beirut between the Two World Wars, 1920–1940

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The article employs a micro historical approach to the monitoring of diverse encounters that took place between Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who went to the Land of Israel and Jewish immigrants from areas formerly dominated by the Ottoman Empire that occurred in transnational spaces under British and French Mandatory control. While hundreds of young Ashkenazi students enjoyed the local Jewish community's hospitality during their studies at Beirut's American University, Lebanon's tourism industry attracted many Eastern European vacationers to Lebanese resorts including Jewish-owned hotels. The Jewish sub-ethnic immigrant groups living in both transnational Mandatory spaces brought in a variety of individual resources (real capital, social capital and human capital, including professional and linguistic skills) that well served diverse business enterprises.

The most famous of them was a match factory established at the initiative of the Weizmann brothers in the Lebanese Maronite Christian village of Damour, near Beirut. This enterprise called "El-Bark" in Arabic meaning 'light' or 'fire' became burned into the collective memory of Lebanese Jews as the Lebanese branch of Weizmann's "Nur" match factory in Acre. Its loyal Jewish technical workforce whom the Weizmann brothers recruited from their places of origin in Eastern Europe were well integrated into the Jewish environment in Beirut. These immigrants' previous match production experience and their ability to recruit cheap local labor through their fellow Jewish networks made the Damour match factory a success.