Two Historiographies: Israeli Historiography and the Mass Jewish Migration to the United States, 1881–1914

GUR ALROEY

The New Pumbedita,
by Nathan Alterman

_The role and mission of American Jewry is as a second national center, outside the State of Israel, like the Babylonian exile in its day._ — US Zionist credo

Perhaps—as God is my witness!—
two centers
are necessary.

In the prosperous State of Israel
the sages of Morocco, Tiberias and Tunis
will dwell.

While the rest of the learned
In Cincinnati
are settled.

And in Brooklyn your people will enjoy la dolce vita,
as subjects of the New Pumbedita.

A few years ago, a student in a course I taught about the mass Jewish immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1914 complained that the syllabus was entirely in English. He said he would also like to consult Hebrew scholarship on the reasons for the immigration, life in the Lower East Side, the cultural and intellectual life of the first generation of immigrants in New York and their assimilation into the host society. I searched for articles on the subject and, to my astonishment, found none. It turned out that almost nothing has been written in Hebrew about the period of mass immigration. I would like to thank that student for his complaint, which led me to research this subject.
Without losing citizenship or traveling rights, they will, as in Babylon, their own Talmud inscribe

and their tractates complete.
Isn't it great?

This happened once (it's a reincarnation)—and the people didn't suffer debilitation.

The nation will develop so beautifully if we promise it two centers and a chapter.

—Perhaps. Especially with philosophical-historical backing that's pseudo-profound.

In any case it's good that the American Zionists are so unbound!

Their brains are awake, for them it's never too late for new ideas to cogitate.

It's just strange that their thinking in only one direction is moving:

They strive to advocate why they shouldn't immigrate.

(Translated from the Hebrew by Lása Katz)

The mass Jewish migration from Eastern Europe (1881–1914) was one of the seminal events in the life of the Jewish people in modern times. During this period, more than 2.5 million Jews migrated across the sea. In most of their new homes, the immigrants changed the face of Jewish society beyond recognition in demographic, economic, social, and cultural terms. The Jewish migrants who reached their various target countries integrated into the society around them relatively quickly. Gradually but persistently, they made their way up the socioeconomic ladder. The Jewish immigrants also caused new Jewish centers to spring
up out of nowhere, while the old centers gradually began losing their importance and influence until they were eradicated during the Second World War.

The two most prominent and important centers that emerged in the Jewish world as a result of the mass emigration from Eastern Europe were the state of Israel and North America. For both of these communities, 1881–1914 was a decisive period in which the foundations for their future growth and consolidation were laid. In both countries, new social elites formed and replaced the old religious and economic elites. Despite similar reasons for the development of the Jewish collectives in the United States and Israel, two completely different historiographies have emerged over the years. One focuses on Jewish immigration to the United States (and other target countries), whereas the other deals with the successive waves of ‘aliyah1 to Palestine.

The two historiographies have not to date recognized each other and have evolved independently. Although many immigrants who reached the United States and Palestine at the start of the twentieth century left the same countries of origin, spoke the same language, and shared the same culture, the two historiographies have collectively emphasized differences: the immigrants to Palestine chose that destination for ideological reasons, whereas the immigrants to the United States came there for economic and other prosaic reasons. The immigrants to Palestine established a model society and laid the infrastructure for the Jewish state in the making, whereas those in the United States simply wanted to better their economic situation and to adapt and integrate into the society around them. Irving Howe’s monumental World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made does not describe the same world as that of the Jewish immigrants who came to Palestine to start a new life. Not only did Zionist historiography accept the assumption that there were two different “fathers”; it rarely dealt with the history of American Jewry and almost completely ignored the period of mass immigration to the West—the topic was pushed to the sidelines in historical research and discourse conducted in Israeli universities. Almost nothing has been written in Hebrew—nor even in translation from English—about the great journey by the Jews of Eastern Europe to the West, about Jewish life on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, about the sweatshops, about the social and cultural life of the Jewish immigrants in the United States, and about other major aspects of this subject.

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1. Literally meaning “going up,” ‘aliyah (pl., ‘aliyot) is a term conventionally used for Jewish immigration to Israel. Here, it is anglicized to “aliyah.” ‘Oleh (pl. ‘olim) is the equivalent term for a Jewish immigrant to Israel.
Just as Zionist historiography has ignored the mass immigration to the West from Eastern Europe, it has focused attention on the waves of aliyah to Palestine. In Jewish historiography in the diaspora, the years 1881 to 1924 are designated "the period of the mass immigration"; Zionist historiography, meanwhile, has divided this period into two subperiods: the so-called First Aliyah (1881–1903) and the Second Aliyah (1904–14).  

The emphasis on what was unique about the immigration to Palestine served Zionist ideology. Critical to this approach was quality, not quantity. The small number of immigrants who preferred Palestine to America signaled the exceptional nature of this immigration—immigration to Palestine has thus long been severed from its broad historical context and rendered independent of time and space.

This essay investigates how the Zionist narrative about the Jewish immigration to Palestine from 1881 to 1914 was constructed. How did the pioneers of sociological and demographic research portray those who came to Palestine during the First Aliyah, and why did they remove this immigration from the wider historical context of the period and focus on the narrow and limited boundaries of the Zionist milieu in Palestine? My intent is not to examine migration to Palestine from the quantitative aspect and to compare it with Jewish migration to the United States but rather to understand the attitude of Zionist historiography toward the first waves of immigration to Palestine and why it ignored the large Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the United States. The essay is divided into three sections. The first sketches the general lineaments of the first two waves of immigration/aliyah to Palestine within the wider historical context of the period of the mass migration, and examines the extent to which the profile of these immigrants and the reasons for their arrival in Palestine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries coincide with the way they are described in Zionist historiography. The second section investigates the impact of the terms "aliyah" and "immigration" on Zionist historiography. I maintain that not only do these terms distinguish between 'olim (to Palestine) and immigrants (to the United States); they also caused the former to be studied according to different criteria from those conventionally employed in studies of migration. This section also attempts to identify the moment when the

first waves of immigration to Palestine were severed from the wider historical context and turned into a unique and distinctive phenomenon. The third and last section looks at the extent to which Zionist terminology has influenced historical studies of immigration to Palestine.

IMMIGRATION TO PALESTINE, 1881–1914

Between 1881 and 1914, some 60,000 immigrants came to Palestine. Of them, 25,000 came during the First Aliyah (1881–1903), including 5,000 who became farmers and established the first agricultural colonies—Rishon Le-Tsiyon, Zikhron Ya’akov, Petaḥ Tikvah, Rosh Pinah, Mazkeret Batyah, and others. This group was affiliated with the Ḥibat Tsiyon movement, which sought to put Leon Pinsker’s notion of auto-emancipation into practice. Another 35,000 came during the so-called Second Aliyah (1904–14), of whom only about 3,000 were pioneers who laid the foundations of the Israeli labor movement and the communal settlements. They had a socialist worldview and were responsible for establishing the Deganyah and Kineret settlements, the Ha-Shomer self-defense organization, and the two workers’ parties, Ha-Po’el Ha-Tsa’ir and Po’ale Tsiyon.

Alongside the 8,000 ideological immigrants who came to Palestine with the goal of becoming the new Jew who tills the soil, another 52,000 came for reasons that were not necessarily related to Zionist ideology. These were immigrants who came to Palestine not because of its power to draw them but mainly due to factors that pushed them out of their countries of origin. For most of them, Palestine was a last resort. They were small businessmen and tradesmen who continued their old ways of life in Palestine. The profile of most of those who came to Palestine from the late nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War was similar to that of the immigrants who came to the United States during those years; it is therefore illogical to isolate the immigration to Palestine from the broader historical context of the period of mass immigration as a whole, and Jewish immigration to the United States in particular.

1. The First Wave of Migration (1881–1903)

Unfortunately, we do not have the demographic and economic data that would allow us to produce a reliable or precise statistical breakdown of the first wave of immigrants to Palestine. Nonetheless, newspapers and memoirs of the time do include references to the characteristics of the immigrants who arrived in Palestine in the late nineteenth century. A significant portion of them were wretchedly poor and had come with their
families to Palestine to find work. As the newspaper *Ha-havatselet* wrote, “Many convoys come each week from Russia and other countries to the Holy Land through our city of Jaffa.” Most of those who came were destitute, people who had exhausted opportunities in their hometowns and came to Palestine in the hope that the Hoveve Tsiyon association would provide them with a respectable living or find them work on one of the agricultural settlements.” Somewhat later, the newspaper reported, “Every ship that comes to Jaffa from Odessa brings with it family after family of our Jewish brethren, and most of them are destitute, with empty hands, coming in the vain hope of feasting on the delicacies of the land. A few of them have already become public charges and been added to the indigent in our city [Jerusalem], whose number keeps growing even without them.” Moshe Smilansky, one of the most prominent and important figures of the First Aliyah period, described the immigrants who came to Palestine as follows:

Every ship discharged hundreds. These people were divided into various groups. A small number were rich, well-to-do people . . . Most of them were poor people who had nothing. Some were typical immigrants who had reached Jaffa only by mistake, and some were passing through Jaffa on their way to New York. Those who had some money continued on their way or returned to their beloved Russia. Those who had no money remained in the country with nothing and became laborers against their will. These became a burden on the Executive.

This early wave of immigrants included a high percentage of children. These immigrants settled in the main towns of Palestine and continued their old way of life in the new country. They were far from the Zionist ideal of returning to the soil and tilling it; their life story was different from that of the farmers in the colonies. Because their actions did not really conform to the image of an exalted Zionist ethos, almost nothing was written about them and they were marginalized in historical research.

2. The Second Wave of Migration (1904–14)

Attempts to produce a demographic breakdown of the immigrants in the second wave—those who left for Palestine from the port of Odessa between 1905 and 1914—show a gender breakdown strikingly similar to

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4. “Yerushalayim,” *Ha-havatselet* 44 (2 Elul 5650 [1890]).
what we see at Ellis Island and other ports of entry during those same years. Of those who entered Palestine, 60 percent were men and 40 percent were women; of the Jewish immigrants to the United States during that period: 56 percent were men and 44 percent women. This immigration appears to have been one of families, not individuals. The age distribution of the immigrants supports this assumption. A quarter of the immigrants who left Odessa for Palestine were children aged 0 to 15 (similar to the percentage of children among the Jewish immigrants to the United States), and it can be assumed that these children did not come on their own but were accompanied by their parents. Thus, the data refute the claim that the immigrants to Palestine were young singles, as do the figures on their gender breakdown. Fifty-three percent of the immigrants to Palestine were aged 16–50; by comparison, 70 percent of those who immigrated to the United States were 16–44.

The greater and more significant difference between Palestine and the United States was in the oldest age group. Of the immigrants to Palestine, 22 percent were 50 or older, whereas only 6 percent of those to the United States were 44 or older. As for the internal distribution of this age cohort among those who came to Palestine, almost two-thirds were affiliated with the Old Yishuv, who lived off of charity and came to Palestine to study Torah and be buried there. The remaining were immigrants who came for other reasons. The letters sent to the Palestine Information Offices indicate that some of the immigrants in the over-50 category wanted to come to Palestine for fear that their children would abandon religious observance in the United States. Some mistakenly believed that they could acquire land in Palestine cheaply and make a living by farming; others were simply fleeing for their lives from pogroms and economic duress. Nothing is known about the demography of the 6 percent of immigrants to the United States who were over 44. Apparently, these were the parents of the migrants who came to the United States in order to live near their children who were already there. The high percentage of adults aged 50 and over and of children below 15 indicates that those who came to Palestine were not necessarily the young single men referred to in Zionist historiography as halutim, (pioneers) but family men, similar to their counterparts in other ports.

A comparison of the percentages of the employed and unemployed


7. I would like to thank the anonymous reader who raised this logical assumption.
finds significant differences between the two streams. In Palestine, the unemployed have been estimated at 65 percent; in the United States, only 43 percent. These percentages represent the highest of any immigrant group to the United States in the early twentieth century. The reason has to do primarily with the number of women and children among them. In Palestine, the number of those over the age of 50 may explain the larger proportion of immigrants to Palestine without occupation as compared to the United States. An analysis of the two groups by occupation shows that 19 percent of the skilled workers and professionals among the immigrants to Palestine practiced liberal professions. This shows that many more educated persons came to Palestine as compared to their proportion in the Russian empire (only 5 percent), and among the immigrants to the United States (1.3 percent). However, if we look at the percentage of liberal professionals among all immigrants to Palestine, the figure drops to 7 percent. In addition, the statistical data indicate that a majority of those with occupations did not imagine themselves tilling the soil. This is compatible with their distribution by place of residence. Some 38 percent noted that they were planning to settle in Jerusalem or Hebron, 36 percent in Jaffa, 16 percent in the agricultural colonies of Judea and the Galilee, and the balance in Haifa, Safed, Tiberias, Beirut, and other locations adjacent to Palestine.

The press and memoirs of those days depict an impoverished lot. Here are several examples:

a. “The stream of immigrants brings us for the most part only poor people, because those with property stay in [Russia] or go to America. To Palestine, by contrast, there come those with empty pockets, or the elderly, who, if they have any property, bury it in some bank, or lend it to some impecunious institution, so that commerce gains absolutely no benefit from it.”

b. Two years later, Menahem Sheinkin, writing to Otto Warburg, a member of the Zionist Executive, depicted the new arrivals as “downtrodden, patched up, with bundles of tattered clothes, the poorest of the poor, who cannot possibly be a blessing to the country.” He added that, as an official of the Information Office, he could issue such reports every week.

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9. Menahem Sheinkin to Otto Warburg (1908?), Central Zionist Archives (hereafter, CZA), A24, file 54.
c. In the weekly *Der Jüdischer Emigrant*, the ICA's Information Office published the following dispatch: "Immigration from our area has increased recently. The great majority of the immigrants go to Argentina or Palestine. The hasty departure for Palestine, which has recently passed through a revolution [the Young Turk uprising] is interesting. Many [of the immigrants] point out that Palestine is closer. Most of them are very poor, and they cannot travel far, and they have to choose a place that is closer."\(^{10}\)

d. "For the past three months, the number of our Jewish brethren coming here has been increasing steadily. Most of the new arrivals are dreadfully poor and come alone or with their families. A minority are people of means. They all came on the basis of rumors plucked from the air, with no plans, but relying on the idea that as soon as they land the committees will help them find work or turn them into farmers as colonists. But when they get here they find themselves in a bad way and blame the country and its people."\(^{11}\)

Several press reports indicate that many of the poor were afflicted with eye diseases. Because immigrants had to undergo strict medical exams at Ellis Island and those with eye (and other) ailments were not admitted to the United States, Palestine was the only option open to this group:

a. "Most of the immigrants come here without any means of support, without any skill, and without any talent for any kind of business . . . and we see here amongst us a large group of wretched immigrants who have no chance of settling in Jaffa and have no means to go to another country and seek a livelihood . . . Eye diseases are prevalent here among the poorer residents, as sanitary conditions in the towns in the Turkish domains are beneath criticism. So you can imagine the terrible situation of the great mass of poor immigrants here."\(^{12}\)

b. "Now that the sailors' strike in Odessa has ended, the Russian ships have begun to come in as before. New immigrants arrive, many from the Polish provinces . . . There has been a great increase in poverty among the immigrants, there are eye diseases among the children, and they have no one to support them or to help them."

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11. Merkaz Ha-Knesiyah Ha-Yisre'elit Be-Erets Yisra'el, CZA, A24, file 49/1.
Generally the last two months of summer, 'summer's end,' are the most difficult for new people with families. This week we will open a soup kitchen for poor migrants. The soup kitchen is at present able to provide meals for fifty immigrants.\textsuperscript{13}

Zionist historiography almost totally ignores the majority of these newcomers who do not reflect well on the Zionist mythos.\textsuperscript{14} Despite the similar economic and social circumstance driving Jewish immigration to the United States and Palestine alike, two completely different historiographies emerged: one concerned "immigration"—the other "aliyah."\textsuperscript{15}

Paradoxically, the dichotomy between aliyah to Palestine and migration to the United States was adopted not only by conservative ideologues

\textsuperscript{13} Ben-Horin, "Mikhtavim me-erets Yisra'el" Ha-zman 166 (22 Av 1906): 2.

\textsuperscript{14} For an unexceptional case, see Joel Geffen, "Whither: To Palestine or to America in the Pages of the Russian Hebrew Press Ha-melits and Ha-yom (1880–1890)," American Jewish Historical Quarterly 59.2 (December 1969): 139–78. Geffen examined the way in which the Jewish mass migration was reflected in two East European Hebrew newspapers (Ha-melits and Ha-yom). He found that Ha-melits gave greater emphasis to Palestine while Ha-yom stressed the United States. Through making this comparison he situated the migration to Palestine as part of the wider historical context of the period of mass migration.

\textsuperscript{15} An exceptional and atypical case was that of Lloyd Aryeh Gartner. In a collection of articles edited by Avigdor Shinan, Emigration and Settlement in Jewish and General History (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1982), Shmuel Ettinger's introduction emphasized the central place of immigration in the history of various nations in general and in that of the Jewish people in particular. The articles in the collection include one on the great Jewish migration of 1881–1914—the only one in Hebrew dealing with the great Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to the West. Moreover, although he taught at Tel Aviv University, Gartner had great difficulty getting his study of immigration to the United States published in Hebrew. See also Eli Lederhandler, Jonathan Frankel, and Abraham Nowersztern, Le'an? Zeramim hadashim be-kerev yehude mizrah europah (Tel Aviv, 2007), on Jewish migration. These scholars' involvement with Jewish migration may have been due to the fact that neither of them grew up with the pioneering Israeli experience of the 1950s and 1960s. Perhaps it was precisely because they were the children of Jewish immigrants to the United States that they were drawn to this field of research. On the other hand, a number of books by American scholars have been translated into Hebrew. See Salo Baron, Steeled by Adversity: Essays and Addresses on American Jewish Life (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1977); Arthur Hertzberg, The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1994); Aryeh Gartner and Jonathan Sarna, eds., The Jews of the United States (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1992); and also Paula Hyman, Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representations of Women (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1997). While all of these scholars deal with immigration, it is not the main subject of research for any of them.
but by the "critical sociologists" and "new historians," among them Gershon Shafir, Yoav Peled, Baruch Kimmerling, Uri Ram, and Ilan Pappé. These scholars broke through the accepted borderlines of "Zionist discourse" and undermined the primary ideological presuppositions on which the State of Israel and Zionist historiography had been founded. In an article from 2005, "Post-Zionist Studies of Israel: The First Decade," Uri Ram distinguished four prominent post-Zionist theories that have shaped academic and public discourse since the Oslo agreements: Post-National; Post-Modern; Post-Colonial; and Post-Marxist. I do not intend here to examine each of these theories and whether the Post-Zionists were right or wrong in their controversial assertions, but rather to note how they have paradoxically adopted Zionist discourse even in criticizing the Zionist enterprise that was coming into existence in Palestine. Like more traditional "old historians," they focused on aliyah and the 'olim—that minority of newcomers who consciously participated in Zionist ideals. In Post-Zionist discourse, colonists and pioneers who arrived in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were perceived as the key actors. By making use of colonialist discourse and applying a comparative method, these scholars examined Zionist settlement in the colonialist context of the late nineteenth century. According to them, in spite of the difference between the settlements in Palestine and the European colonies in Africa and Asia, there were certain lines of resemblance. Akin to the old historians, they also focused on the colonies and the cooperative settlements, as well as on the "conquest of work" and the "conquest of guarding" (focused on Jewish workers and Jewish guards rather than Arabs). At the same time, many Jewish migrants were far away from these ideological struggles; they had settled in large cities and were not considered to be among the people of the Old Yishuv. The wider historical context that framed the mass migration westward by millions of Europeans (including many Jews) was replaced by a somewhat narrower colonial context that lent itself to a restricted examination of the


Zionist enterprise in Palestine that ignored the East European migrant population.

**ALIYA AND IMMIGRATION**

The sweeping and uncritical use of the two terms, “aliyah” and “immigration,” is one of the major factors in the emergence of the divergent treatment of similar data. In the Zionist ethos, aliyah has nothing in common with the migration of other peoples. Zionist historiography takes it as axiomatic that the Jews who came to the country as part of the pioneering early waves were “olim” and not simply “immigrants.” The latent ideological charge of the term “aliyah” is so deeply rooted in the Hebrew language that it is almost impossible to distinguish between Jews who “merely” immigrated to Palestine and those who made aliyah to the Land of Israel.

Jewish social scientists of the early twentieth century were the first to distinguish aliyah from general Jewish migration. The use of “aliyah” as a typological phenomenon came into vogue with the publication of Arthur Ruppin’s *Soziologie der Juden* in 1930 (English: *The Jews in the Modern World*, 1934). This volume was intended to expand on his earlier *Die Juden der Gegenwart: Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Studie* (1904; English, 1913). In light of the changes in Jewish society that took place in the two and half decades that intervened between the two works, Ruppin reexamined the social structure of the Jews as he knew it in 1930. In his preface to the later work, he noted that he felt it was important to lay down a scientific foundation for the sociology of the Jews.18 All the same, in the eighth chapter, which looks at migration, Ruppin seems to have found it difficult to free himself of the Zionist terminology that was dominant in that period. Whereas Jewish immigration to the United States was propelled by economic hardship and pogroms, the olim (not immigrants) came to Palestine with the support of the Hoveve Tsiyon, with whom they felt a high degree of ideological conformity.19

If not for the fact that Ruppin headed the Palestine Office and coordinated Zionist activity in Palestine in the early twentieth century, we might argue that this was merely a conventional usage and that the words associated with aliyah are not ideologically laden. But Ruppin was intimately familiar with the motives of those who came to Palestine in the early twentieth century. Thus it is precisely in light of his Zionist endeavors and his focus on migration in the early twentieth century that his

employment of the term is significant. In his official capacity he received hundreds of inquiries every month from Jews in Eastern Europe who were contemplating immigration. They laid out their destitution to him, described their economic plight, and begged him for any item of information about the Jewish settlement in Palestine and their hopes of finding their place in it. Because of the huge volume of appeals to the Office, it was necessary to define an immigration policy that would provide a solution. In the fierce debate that raged within the Zionist movement, weighing “what’s good for the people” against “what’s good for the country,” Ruppin favored the latter and rejected most of the applications. Yet, as we have seen above, despite his recommendations and his warnings about the country’s limited absorptive capacity, immigrants came ashore whose socioeconomic profile was very close to that of those who went to America. As a sociologist and Zionist leader who dealt with settlement and aliya, Ruppin was well aware of the characteristics of the immigrants to Palestine, which were not essentially different from those of the immigrants to the United States. The declaration by Ruppin, the dean of Jewish sociologists, that one “makes aliya” to the Land of Israel but “immigrates” to the United States laid the terminological and scholarly foundations for turning immigration to Palestine into a unique variety of Jewish migration.

During the 1940s and 1950s, demographers and sociologists, including Jacob Lestschinsky, Arieh Tartakower, David Gurevich, Roberto Bachi, and Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, followed the trail blazed by Ruppin in the 1930s, spinning a Zionist narrative that both created and presumed the unique traits of aliya and the Zionist enterprise.

The research by the demographer Jacob Lestschinsky represents an interesting case of an expert on immigration who adopted Zionist terminology in the 1940s, even though he devoted most of his life to a struggle—mainly intellectual—against the Zionist movement. Lestschinsky wrote many books and articles on Jewish society in general and on immigration in particular, in which he tried to understand the core problems of the Jewish people in his time. He began his scholarly career as a Zionist, with the publication of “Statistics of One Town” in the Hebrew journal Ha-ḥiloah. In the wake of the Uganda affair, he left the Zionist

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movement and, together with Jacob Latzky-Bertholdi and others, founded in January 1905 the Zionist Socialist Workers' Party (S.S.), which followed a Territorialist line. After the First World War he emigrated to Berlin, where, together with Boris Brutzkus and Jacob Segall, he edited the Yiddish journal *Bletter far yidische demografye, statistik, un ekonomik*. Five issues were published in Berlin, including many articles on various subjects concerning the Jewish people: the development of Jewish communities throughout the world, Jewish population movements, the number of Jews in the world, the economic situation of Eastern European Jewry, and others. In 1925, he assisted in the founding of YIVO and organized its economic and statistical section.

From the mid-1920s until his death in 1966, Lestschinsky published many books and dozens of essays on various aspects of Jewish migration. In 1927, he published *Die yidische wanderung far di lezte 25 yor*. A year later, the first volume of *Shriften far ekonomik un statistik*, which was a continuation of the *Bletter*, appeared. In the early 1930s, he published another book on Jewish migration, *Di onboyben fun der emigratsye un kolonizatsye bay yiden in 19-tn vorhundert*. After the Second World War, he published *Vobin geben mir? Yidische wanderung amol un beynt*. In 1959, Lestschinsky settled in Israel. Before he came, he donated his library, which contained thousands of titles and the archives amassed during his many years of research, to the Hebrew University. 

An examination of his research through the years shows that the closer Lestschinsky drew to the Zionist idea, the harder he found it to investigate immigration to Palestine with the same criteria he used for studying Jewish migration as a whole. The quantitative and qualitative methods that characterized his earlier work are absent from these later studies. Questions about the demographic properties of the *'olim*, an inseparable part of his research into Jewish immigration, were not asked at all. He seems to have adopted Zionist terminology wholesale. In *Nehuke Yura’el* he wrote that aliyah to Palestine was a type of human migration that had no counterpart in human history:

Aliyah to Palestine is a small current in the huge, broad sea of migration; a pure, clean current rooted in elevated national and social goals; an organized, planned current that is all idea and vision, and therefore is limited in scope and has never attracted people who are fanatical about making money and getting rich; a current that has never thrilled

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the hearts of those who need to earn a living but rather self-controlled people who can see the future, the vanguard of the people and lovers of the homeland.22

Lestschinsky, who devoted his entire life to the investigation of Jewish society at the juncture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did not bring his critical method to immigration to Palestine: “elevated . . . goals,” “idea and vision,” “seeing the future,” “vanguard of the people,” “lovers of the homeland.” Lestschinsky’s position is significant because he was one of the outstanding figures (perhaps the outstanding) in the discipline of Jewish demography and economics. His work still serves as the basis of all investigations into the changes that have taken place in Jewish society over the last two hundred years.

The second generation of Zionist demographers in Palestine continued Lestschinsky’s line. This generation made its appearance during the Mandate, when the Zionist movement began to recognize the importance of quantitative statistical research for building the national home. The leading demographer of the Yishuv was David Gurevich, who headed the statistical department of the Jewish Agency from its founding in 1924 until his death in 1947. Gurevich, who came from Latvia, emigrated to the United States and studied science and statistics. He settled in Palestine in 1921 and became secretary to the Mandatory government’s Department of Trade and Industry.23 His quantitative research on the Yishuv during his twenty years of activity made him a leader of demographic studies in the country. He left behind a large number of books, pamphlets, and research papers covering all aspects of the Yishuv and its economy, including immigration.

Gurevich’s 1944 book The Jewish Population of Palestine: Immigration, Demographic Structure and Natural Growth (in Hebrew) examined immigration to Palestine from a local and Zionist standpoint. Like Ruppin and Lestschinsky, Gurevich stressed the magnetic pull of the country and especially Zionist ideology as the main factors motivating immigration to Palestine in the years 1881 to 1914. He described the First Aliyah as the aliyah of the Bilu’im and saw the pioneering agricultural workers of the Second Aliyah as representative of that aliyah as a whole, because they left their mark on the Yishuv at the beginning of the twentieth century.24

22. Jacob Lestschinsky, Nedude Yira’el (Tel Aviv, 1945), 62.
"The path of the first 'olim was not strewn with roses," Gurevich wrote, "but in the country's book of life they will be recorded as pioneers who went before the camp, paved the path for those who came after them, and prepared the soil for the great aliyah that began after the war."\(^{25}\)

In his work, Gurevich divided the immigration to Palestine into five separate waves, although he was not the first to do so. He dated the First Aliyah to 1881-1903 and the Second Aliyah to 1904-14—a periodization that became accepted in the historiography of the Yishuv; few questioned it. Although, as a demographer and statistician, Gurevich had the tools to examine aliyah to Palestine as immigration and to focus on the majority of those who entered the country, he chose to highlight the ideologically-inclined minority who were unrepresentative of the immigrants as a whole.

Roberto Bachi continued on Gurevich's scholarly path and accepted the same interpretations. Two years after the appearance of their joint book on aliyah and the Yishuv, he published an article in the newspaper *Aḥdut ha-avodah*, in which he wrote:

> In the series of departures of the people of Israel with the ambition of building a new society in the land to which the people was morally and historically linked, its attraction to the land was not due to its lack of economic equilibrium . . . In the case of the waves of aliyah, unlike migration, their values and their composition were not dependent on the economic situation in Palestine but on the social and political situation in the lands of exile.\(^{26}\)

From the way that they cast the first waves of immigration to Palestine, it becomes clear that a succession of leading scholars avoided a careful demographic analysis of the immigrants. The point of view represented in their approach to the Palestinian immigration contravened the usual methods of demographic research. Instead of applying a deductive approach, the demographers took an inductive approach, treating the ideologically motivated handful who came to the country as the particular case that represented the whole.

The demographers' approach undoubtedly influenced the Jewish sociologists of the generation after Ruppin. Arieh Tartakower is an example of a sociologist who adopted the axiomatic distinction between aliyah

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25. Ibid., 21.
and migration introduced by Ruppin and reinforced by the demographers Lestschinsky, Gurevich, and Bachi. Tartakower was born in Brody in Galicia in 1897. With the outbreak of the First World War, his family left for Vienna, where he finished high school and was admitted to the law faculty of the University of Vienna. At the end of 1916 he was conscripted into the Austrian army and served in it until the end of the war. In 1920, he received the degree of doctor of law, but instead of continuing his academic career Tartakower chose to undergo agricultural training and emigrate to Palestine. In September 1920, he settled in Palestine, where he worked on road construction and drained marshes; but he had to leave the country after contracting malaria. He did not return until 1946, when he was appointed lecturer in Jewish sociology at the Hebrew University, in place of Arthur Ruppin, who had died three years earlier.

Like his predecessors, in his early work Tartakower believed that aliyah to Palestine was “a unique phenomenon in the history of Jewish migration.” According to him, the force that drove the Jews to Palestine came “from their desire to build a Jewish national home in the country. In the past, this national desire was almost the only cause of aliyah. In recent years, other factors, political and economic, have been added, but these did not succeed in changing the essential character of aliyah to Palestine in the doctrine of the national movement.”27 His conclusion was that “one cannot compare the immigration to Palestine before the war, with its modest scale, to the three million Jews from Eastern Europe who during the same period found a resting place and livelihood in countries overseas.”28 In the 1950s, though, Tartakower completely revised his assumptions. He retracted his earlier claim that “aliyah is a phenomenon unique of its kind in the history of Jewish immigration” and asserted that it had parallels both in the Jewish world and in the world at large. In Ha-adam ha-noded Tartakower discussed a number of basic concepts related to immigration and its influence on human society; one of these concepts is aliyah. The challenging definition he offered created new research possibilities that divested the case of Palestine of its unique status. Aliyah, he writes, was “immigration for the good of the community based on a certain idea, and involving a certain program and a certain organizational framework, as well as training for a new life.”29 This definition significantly does not make Palestine a precondition for aliyah. Aliyah does not

28. Ibid., 21.
have to be by Jews to Palestine—it can be by any people in any country if the right conditions exist: namely, an idea, an action plan, and an organization to carry it out.\footnote{30}

This claim received support in a 1957 article in \textit{Sura: Israeli-American Annual}. In “Yehudim ba-hityashvut ha-utopit be-artsot ha-brit” (Jewish utopian settlement in the United States), Tartakower claimed that utopian settlement is an attempt to realize a certain idea (usually religious or social) and to create cells of a new society that would influence the general system of social life in the world. Tartakower examined Jewish agriculture in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century in comparison with that of the Mennonites and the Mormons, as well as with regard to the Zionist enterprise in Palestine. According to him, the history of Jewish utopian settlement in the United States was a very short one, lasting no more than a few years, and arose much later than non-Jewish utopian settlements. It began in the 1890s and had two characteristics that differed from each other, although it was not always easy to determine the exact line of division between them. On one hand, settlements were established mainly in order to provide agricultural work for Jewish migrants. On the other hand, there were settlements (mainly established by ‘Am ’Olam members) of a utopian-socialist nature. Tartakower pointed out the similarity between this second model and the Bilu movement, which was aimed at settlement in Palestine: “These two movements were closely allied ideologically and to some extent also in the composition of their membership, since there was a large number of intellectuals in both of them . . . They were also similar in size, because both of them found supporters in many places in Russia; and in their fundamental endeavors, both of them being directed towards settlement.” Nevertheless, Tartakower asserted, there was a difference between agricultural settlement in Palestine and agricultural settlement in the United States.

\footnote{30. Tartakower gave the Puritans’ immigration to America in the 1630s as an example of non-Jewish aliyah. Their relocation to America was due primarily to a desire to create a new society there, different from the one they knew in Europe. Tartakower claimed that they had a concept and a plan of action that was carried out and that the move was made for the good of the community. In addition to the Puritans, Tartakower noted the attempts by various European groups to set up socialist villages in the United States. They saw America as a free and open land in which a more just and egalitarian society than the one they left behind in Europe could be created (ibid., 99–100). See also M. Tugan Baranovsky, \textit{Mosbahat ve-o’tot li-sve’Iyut} (n.p., 1946), 57–72. On the question of whether there could be Jewish aliyah to a place other than Palestine, see Gur Alroey, “Aliya to America? A Comparative Look at Jewish Mass Migration, 1881–1914,” \textit{Modern Judaism} 28.2 (2008): 109–33.}
“While the activities of the Bilu people were crowned with the historical outcome of the establishment of a national home in the Land of Israel, the attempts at settlement by the ‘Am ‘Olam people came to nothing.” Tartakower’s suggestion was a lone voice.

The Holocaust, the founding of the state of Israel, and the mass aliyah of Jews from North Africa completely changed the face of the Jewish people and Israeli society; new sociological questions dominated the country’s academic agenda. In view of the challenges posed for Israeli society by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of new immigrants, different questions began to be asked, with the accent on internal Israeli issues relating to the early formative stages of Israeli society. In 1954/55, during the wave of immigration from North Africa, the sociologist Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt published an article in Hebrew titled “‘Aliyah ve-hagirah: Kavim le-tipologiyah sotsiyologit” (Aliya and migration: Toward a sociological typology). The timing of the article’s appearance was no accident. In the five years from independence to 1953, some 670,000 persons had arrived in Israel, totally remaking the face of Israeli society. The article summarized the views about aliyah that were current among social scientists. The arrival of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in such a short time led Eisenstadt to compare aliyah before the founding of the state and after. As a starting point, he declared that an ‘oleh is a person who moves from one place to another for ideological or national reasons, whereas an immigrant “relocates from a need to improve his economic situation.” At the same time, Eisenstadt suggested that although one should not be satisfied with seeing economic necessity as the chief cause of immigration, “the distinction between aliyah and immigration must necessarily begin with a comparison between the sociological reasons for each type of migration.” He asserted that the situation that drove the ‘oleh to Israel was totally different from that experienced by immigrants. According to him, immigration develops in societies that are experiencing processes that undermine the family structure and the social fabric. Natural increase, resulting in fierce competition for jobs, together with “the increased pressures of young men who do not find it possible to play their customary social roles,” rupture the societies of origin. Accordingly, immigration is a means of improving the family’s economic status, which...


33. Eisenstadt, “‘Aliyah ve-hagirah,” 84.
seeks "to continue its old way of life in the new country." In other words, the social crisis driving immigration "does not undermine the values pertaining to the immigrants’ initial identities and does not impel them to form pioneering groups in the process of immigration. The immigrant carries his former way of life with him and continues it; from his point of view, his new environment must be suited to this purpose."34

By contrast, he claimed, the type of crisis leading to aliyah was different from that which led to immigration. Pioneering aliyah was not born in the impoverished socioeconomic strata of Eastern European society and was not a solution to the demographic pressures on the Jews there. Many of the pioneering olim came from Jewish families that were prospering and were still close to the traditional society.35 "The tension between the two poles—the pole of traditional life on the one hand, and the rise in economic and political status in society as a whole, on the other—is what caused the awakening of the movement of aliyah to Palestine." The motivation behind aliyah, according to Eisenstadt, was not the weakening of the economic base but the weakening of the fundamental identity values of Jewish society. Another difference between the olib and the immigrant was his relationship to his society of origin. The olib rejected the social values and institutional structure of the society he came from: "Whereas the immigrant is interested only in improving or changing functional details of the existing society, the olib comes to build a new society with new values."36 These differences, said Eisenstadt, determine the nature of the absorption of the olib and the immigrant in the new country. In the case of the immigrant, his previous connection to his land of origin, its values and people, remains evident for a long period in the new country as well. For this reason, the immigrant has a strong

34. Ibid., 85.
35. This assertion is in agreement with the conclusions of Yosef Gorni, who investigated the changes in the social structure of the pioneers of the Second Aliyah. See Gorni, "Changes in the Social and Political Structure of the Second Aliyah (1904-1914)" (Hebrew), Ha-tziyonut 1(1970): 204–46.
36. Eisenstadt, "Aliyah ve-hagirah," 86. See also Bachi, "Mah ben hagirah ve-aliyah?" 269–71. Bachi thought that aliyah to Palestine was different from other kinds of immigration, because the immigrants to Palestine were not motivated by economic necessity but were spurred by social changes in the countries of origin. Another distinction that Bachi made between aliyah and immigration was that the purpose of immigration was to restore an economic and demographic balance that had been upset in the country of origin. The waves of aliyah, on the other hand, had the opposite effect: they upset the economic equilibrium in Palestine. Therefore, after every wave of aliyah, an economic revolution must take place to adapt the economy to the new situation (ibid., 271).
tendency to live among his former countrymen, whereas the *oleb* has scarcely any tie to his country of origin and its values. Eisenstadt concluded that, until the establishment of the state, those who came to Palestine could be described as *‘olim*, but from that moment on, mass immigration turned the newcomers into immigrants.37

The importance of the article does not necessarily lie in the typological definition of *‘oleb* versus immigrant but in Eisenstadt’s statement that not every move by Jews to the Land of Israel is aliyah. This was the first time that a sociologist proposed studying immigration to the Land of Israel in terms of immigration. No longer were the newcomers “a pure, clean current rooted in elevated national and social goals,” in the words of Lestschinsky, but immigrants who wanted to preserve their old culture in the new country. Although Eisenstadt applied these observations only to the mass immigration from North Africa, the precedent he established was relevant for 1881–1914 as well. If North African Jews were immigrants, not *‘olim*, the same may be said of at least some of those who came to Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At the same time, Eisenstadt’s assertion that the immigration from Eastern Europe was aliyah while that from North Africa was immigration continued the main line of the early sociologists and demographers. It was their studies of Jewish migration to Palestine and elsewhere that gave an academic imprimatur to the idea that the case of Palestine was special. The axiom propounded by Ruppin, Lestschinsky, Tartakower, Bachi, and Eisenstadt seems to have influenced historians when they began studying the first waves of immigration to Palestine. They uncritically accepted the social scientists’ definition and quite naturally focused on the ideological nucleus that came to Palestine as part of the First and Second Aliyot. Thus, the Palestinian case was detached from the broad historical context of the mass migration and there was no comparative perspective.

HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND THE STUDY OF JEWISH MIGRATION

One of the great black boxes of Israeli historiography is the attitude toward the mass emigration from Eastern Europe of 1881–1914. This seminal episode in Jewish history is scarcely mentioned by Israeli historians. Whereas Jewish migration was a prominent area of research for the pioneers of sociology and demography in Israel, historians were nearly

oblivious to it—only a very few studies have been published in Hebrew on the topic by Israeli researchers. In 1991 an annotated and comprehensive bibliography was published of Hebrew publications dealing with United States Jewry. In the preface to the book, Jonathan Sarna quoted Getzel Kressel, one of the leading bibliographers of the land of Israel and the modern Hebrew press, who said in 1951:

It is difficult to say, from all the talk recently held amongst us about American Jewry, and even more so in the press, that there is any recognizable—even to the smallest degree—background knowledge about this diaspora . . . This ignorance, which is so prevalent among us . . . cannot be forgiven, since this Jewry is expected to have such a decisive influence during these fateful years of ours.38

Sarna notes that there has been noticeable improvement since 1951. At the disposal of the Hebrew reader is a selection of books and articles from which one can derive much information about American Jewry. But the material is scattered. Those who look up the entry "migration" in the index of the annotated bibliography will find seventy-six items that deal with migration to the United States. However, most of them are memoirs in Hebrew of Jews who migrated to the United States or short articles in popular periodicals that deal with a narrow aspect of Jewish migration to the United States. Another interesting conclusion that emerges from the bibliography is that the few in-depth studies that were written in Hebrew about Jewish migration are mostly those of American Jewish scholars (some of them Israelis) who were not educated at Israeli universities: Henry Feingold, Lloyd Gartner, Robert Rockaway, Jonathan Sarna, and Salo Baron. The bibliographical findings suggest that Jewish migration was relegated to the margins of Israeli academic research. An exception is Jacob Kellner, who published a series of comparative studies on migration to Palestine and the United States during the 1880s. Unfortunately, this important scholar died before he could develop and deepen the field of his research. Kellner's important 1982 work, Ha-‘aliyot ba-rišonot: Mitvor u-meto‘i‘ut, was published posthumously. Kellner's particular contribution lay in illuminating the problems involved in establishing a new society in Palestine from the unique viewpoint of his specialisation—social work. In his various articles, Kellner compared migrants to

Palestine with those to the United States and claimed that, in spite of the striking resemblance, there was a significant difference. He based this assertion on the fact that the typical migrant to the United States, after having received initial assistance for his absorption, was required to stand on his own and was not expected to serve as a vehicle for the realization of a collective goal. On the other hand, the immigrant (‘oleh) to the land of Israel was expected to fulfill a well-defined social function and to adapt his behavior to norms of the collective.39

Mass Jewish migration as a field of research was studied at the Hebrew University and later at Tel Aviv University, but despite growing interest, the paradigm did not depart from the standard ‘oleh/immigrant dichotomy.40 The historian Ben-Zion Dinur (the third minister of education of the State of Israel) continued the tradition of a separate historiography about the great migration. In a lecture delivered at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1955, he stressed the difference, both in essence and in principle, between ‘olim and immigrants. In this talk, to an audience of descendants of immigrants to the United States, he distinguished between the ideology-driven ‘olim, who did not come to Palestine in order to improve their situation, and the immigrants, who moved to America to better their lot. “The enormous human effort invested in this process [aliyah] was possible only because the individuals were to a large extent filled with a sense of mission on behalf of the nation as a whole,” explained Dinur.41 For this reason, “we stress the fact that the country was a country of aliyah and not a country of immigration, a country to which one ‘goes up’ and does not immigrate.”42 Dinur accepted the claims of the demographers and sociologists of his generation and did not present an alternative historical interpretation.

Speaking to an American Jewish audience, Dinur did not focus on the similarity between the first waves of aliyah to Palestine and the immigration to the United States. “Aliyah,” he said, “meant that the people went

40. In the 1960s, Shmuel Ettinger taught a course on Jewish migration and addressed key issues, such as the causes of migration, its characteristics, the authorities’ attitude to the phenomenon, how German Jews saw the Jews from the East, the various organizations established to help the Jewish migrants, the Am Olam movement, and Baron Hirsch’s settlement enterprise in Argentina. Moshe Mishkinsky, too, taught a course on the subject at Tel Aviv University and even produced a reader of relevant texts.
42. Ibid., 5.
to Palestine and were taken by it. Each person bore Jewish society and the Jewish State in his heart when he was still in exile. Immigration, on the other hand, had no national purpose; its moral level was undoubtedly lower than that of aliyah to Palestine. Dinur’s position is especially interesting in view of the fact that in his lecture he emphasized the far-reaching demographic changes in the Yishuv from the beginning of the First Aliyah to the founding of the state, and especially the impressive increase in the number of Jews in the country between 1881 and 1948.

His statement that the Jewish community in Palestine grew significantly as a result of “aliyah” was correct, of course, but he did not offer an explanation. It was not Zionist ideology and the attraction of Palestine that brought tens of thousands of Jews there but unrelated external factors. Mass emigration to Palestine began only when the United States imposed immigration quotas, closing its gates to Eastern European immigrants in general and to Jews in particular. Despite the symbolic importance of each wave of immigration to Palestine for the development of the Yishuv, 1925 seems to mark the dramatic demographic turning point in the history of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv—in essence, the point of no return. In that year, for the first time, the number of Jews who arrived in Palestine exceeded the number of Jews who entered the United States. In 1919, there were 60,000 Jews in Palestine; ten years later the number had grown to 175,000, and to 450,000 by 1939. It is no exaggeration to say that the American immigration quotas gave the Zionist movement an unexpected boost and led to the creation of a new demographic reality in Palestine.

It is striking that in a lecture given only seven years after the founding of the state, the Israeli minister of education could not see past Zionist ideology in his analysis of immigration to Palestine. Once again we see how the conclusions of the sociologists and demographers Lestschinsky, Gurevich, Bachi, Tartakower, and Eisenstadt served as the scholarly infrastructure for later historical studies of the mass immigration to the New World and aliyah to Palestine between 1881 and 1914.

Shmuel Ettinger, too, adopted the Zionist periodization. In his *Toldot Yisrael ba-et ha-hadashah*, he wrote that the Jewish migration from Eastern Europe was an episode of decisive importance in the life of the Jewish people, pointing out that it led to the creation of new centers, the Jews’ concentration in big cities, and a major change in their economic situation and occupations. At the same time, he saw aliyah to Palestine

43. Ibid., 6.
44. Ibid., 2.
in those years as a special phenomenon totally unconnected to the great Jewish migration. According to Ettinger, the *'olim* of the First Aliyah were few in number, but they came to the country with a specific national purpose: "to found agricultural colonies that would serve as a basis for the rooting of the Jewish people in its historical homeland." In the ten years of the Second Aliyah, on the other hand, about 35,000 *'olim* arrived in the country, the vast majority of whom, according to Ettinger, were young. When they reached the country, "they renewed the pioneering legacy of the initial members of the First Aliyah, the members of Bilu, who were close to them in spirit."

Even as data emerged to discredit it—many of those who came to Palestine, for example, did not engage in farming or cherish the ideal of communal life—this principle became a commonplace of Israeli historiography. Ettinger's own statement that the vast majority of the immigrants of the Second Aliyah were young proved to be incorrect. For these reasons, Yehuda Slutsky, in his 1973 *Mavo' le-toldot tenu'at ba-'avodah ba-yûre'elit*, assigned two different senses to the concept "Second Aliyah." The first was chronological: it referred to all the *'olim* who came to Palestine in the years from 1904 to 1914. But the second meaning was sociological and ideological: it referred to a particular stratum of immigrants who were motivated by a particular national and social outlook. In this way, Israeli historiography absolved itself from having to treat the *'olim* as a group and focused on the First Aliyah founders of the agricultural colonies and on the Second Aliyah pioneers who built the land.

The person who best expressed the Israeli social position toward United States Jewry (especially in comparison to Zionist immigration to the Land of Israel) was the poet Nathan Alterman. For many Israelis, Alterman was one of the most fluent articulators of the norms of Israeli society. In his factual style of writing, Alterman dealt with current problems, and many of his poems referred to immigration to the state of Israel, which he regarded as a practical necessity. He thought that the Jews of North Africa should abandon the diaspora without delay, immigrate to Israel, and take part in the Zionist enterprise. Alterman often expressed criticism of American Jewry, which regarded itself as immune to the claims of Israel, and whose loyalty toward the state was thin. In 1954, his second collection of "Ha-tur ha-shvi'i" (The Seventh Column) was published containing a new section called "New Pumbedita" that

46. Ibid., 203.
47. Yehudah Slutsky, *Mavo' le-toldot tenu'at ba-'avodah ba-yûre'elit*, (Tel Aviv, 1973), 146.
included ten poems composed in mockery of American Jewry and their attempt to turn America into a permanent Diaspora. He attacked those who regarded the American Jewish community as a second Babylon.48

Analyzing the way in which the story of the several waves of aliyah to Palestine has been told raises a number of questions about how the state of Israel (with the help of Zionist historiography) "marketed" the Zionist narrative of pioneering, settlement, and self-sacrifice to the Jews of the diaspora in general and to the Jews of the United States in particular: glorifying the pioneer who drained the marshes and made the desert bloom, and ignoring the ordinary Jewish immigrant. Generations of Jews were raised on this "heroic" Zionist narrative, and this narrative was accepted without question by thousands of Jews all over the world, becoming an effective tool employed by the Zionist movement and the Israeli leadership to win world Jewry's moral and financial support for the state of Israel. The state of Israel took good advantage of this for its needs—both in equating the interests of the kibbutzim with those of the country at large and as a rationale to raise funds for the welfare of the immigrants and their descendants in Israel.

In this context, it is worth noting that American Jewish historians who studied the mass immigration from Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted the Zionist narrative without challenge. They, too, viewed immigration to Palestine as unique and exceptional and avoided critical analysis and comparisons. Even the American case, then, was part of the Zionist story, severed from its historical setting and examined through a Zionist lens.49

If we free ourselves from the Zionist narrative, we find points of similarity between the two groups of migrants. As noted above, this resemblance emerges from a comparison of those who came to Palestine in the early twentieth century and those who passed through Ellis Island and other ports of entry. But it also exists if we compare the 'olim to Palestine during the First and Second Aliyot (colonists and pioneers) to the ideological core of the immigrants to the United States in the 1880s and to Argentina in the early 1890s. In this case, Tartakower's old definition of "aliyah," which dates to 1954, remains useful and allows us to examine both aliyah and immigration from a much broader perspective.

48. On Nathan Alterman and his attitude toward American Jewry, see Dan Laor, Nathan Alterman, A Biography (Tel Aviv, 2013), 384, 741.
The Jewish agricultural colonies in the United States, established in the 1880s by Jews from Eastern Europe, are a good fit with Tartakower’s definition. Theirs was an ideology-driven immigration whose goal was to better the condition of the Jewish people, and it was implemented through an organizational framework that aspired to create a different form of life from that which the Jews knew in Eastern Europe. Through communal farms in the United States, the founders of Sicily Island, Bethlehem-Yehudah, Hebron, Beer-sheba, Gilead, Carmel, New Odessa, and Palestine sought to turn the Jewish people into farmers; but they were also interested in establishing an autonomous Jewish district in the United States. This was a national idea that was compatible with the socialist Zionist worldview. Their reasons for immigrating to the United States were no different from the motives of the ‘olim. The two groups came from similar backgrounds and opted for a similar solution to the “Jewish question” in czarist Russia. What is more, if we compare how Zionist historiography related to the Bilu with how American Jewish historians have treated the ‘Am ‘Olam movement, we see that both tiny groups have been assigned an honorable place in the collective memories of the two most important Jewish communities in the world, those of Israel and the United States.

The same holds true for the agricultural colonies in Argentina and in Palestine. It is true that no general and comprehensive study has been undertaken to compare the Jewish farmer in Palestine with his counterpart in Argentina, but what does exist certainly shows many similarities. A comparison of two literary works allows us to see some of these. Ben-zion Epstein’s Yiddish novel Zongen oyfn vint (Sheaves in the wind) was published in 1961 (a Hebrew translation appeared in 1966). In one of its chapters, the author, the son of a Jewish colonist in Moisésville, describes the farmer Lyuma Lipman’s first encounter with the soil of Argentina: “With a powerful gaze and inner trembling, Lyuma Lipman studied the primeval landscape. Here in this wild district, he would insert the first pickaxe and begin a new life. Here, with his own hands, he would blaze a new path for himself—and not only for himself, but also for the future generations to continue after him.” The atmosphere in Epstein’s novel is one in which people are uniting with nature and labor. For Epstein, there is no way back to the shtetl for the pioneer who subdues the soil of Argentina. And a new life does indeed rise on the pampas. His description is not very different from how Moshe Smilansky described the founding of Rishon Lezion and the primal landscape the first settlers beheld:

One fateful night, Z. D. Levontin and his comrades went up to spend their first night on their land, under the open sky. They didn’t sleep at
all . . . The next morning, when their first day on their land dawned, they selected a hill on which to pitch their first tents. Above this hill they saw a fabulous sight . . . barren fields that had been waiting two thousand years for their redeemers to arrive.50

It was Arieh Tartakower who perceived the similarity between Palestine and Argentina, in the foreword he wrote to the translation of Epstein’s novel:

The framework of the novel is quite familiar to those with a certain knowledge of the history of Jewish settlement in Argentina and its travails. Quite familiar is the figure of the Jewish pioneer, a man in the prime of life, with a wife and children, who is repelled by the purposeless life of a middleman in Russia and immigrates to Argentina to build up its wasteland, which has never before known the touch of a human being, with his ten fingers, new positions for himself and the nation, because he dreams of a Jewish village that will be created by his own hands and those of others . . . Here we have a fine book, good for every reader, and even more so for readers in Israel, whose atmosphere is similar to that of Argentina in many ways, and particularly the atmosphere of pioneering Argentina.51

Despite this, Israeli historiography about Jewish migration in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is hard pressed to detect the similarities between aliyah to Palestine and immigration to the Americas.

SUMMARY

The years between 1881 and 1914 were a formative era both for the Zionist movement and American Jewry. Immigrants came both to Palestine and America, where they built the infrastructure on which the two most important Jewish communities in the world later developed. Even though the migrants came from the same countries of origin and often left them for the same motives, two very different approaches developed in historiography. Zionist scholarship tended to see aliyah as without parallel in the annals of migration anywhere in the world. This attitude was

50. Moshe Smilansky, Prakim be-toldot ba-yishuv (Tel Aviv, 1960), 1:26–27.
developed in the 1930s and 1940s by Zionist sociologists and demographers, who found it difficult to study aliyah using the standard criteria of migration studies. In practice, they created the Zionist narrative, which saw everyone who came to Palestine in those years of the First and Second Aliyot as ideologically motivated ‘olim who wanted to build up the land and be rebuilt by it.

Historians adopted the social scientists’ narrative, though unlike the sociologists and demographers, for whom the mass immigration was an important object of research, Israeli historians paid scant attention to the topic. My survey reveals the poverty of Israeli historiography’s treatment of the mass emigration to the West, in the 1950s and 1960s. There is still no study in Hebrew that focuses on Jewish immigration to the United States and the emergence of the Jewish community there. It is not clear why Israeli historians have failed to address the age of the mass migration. The question becomes more acute if we consider the volume of research about Eastern European Jewry during those same years. The many trailblazing works have been written about it also tend to relegate migration to the background.

Why has Israeli historiography ignored the Jewish immigration to the United States? It is hard to answer this question, given that the answer is not to be found in the archives and cannot be pinned down using the standard methods of empirical historical research. I can only propose an interpretation based on my acquaintance with the historical literature and the trends described above. There seem to be two independent causes.

First, after the Holocaust, it was clear that the immigration of more than two million Jews to the New World had proved to be just as good a solution for the Jewish people as that proposed by Zionism. The decision by hundreds of thousands of Jews in Eastern Europe to exchange the shtetl for Manhattan, despite all the difficulties and dangers, proved to be a wise decision both for the individual and the collective. The mass migration created two strong and prominent Jewish communities with complex and ambivalent relations between them. For Zionists, the murder of six million Jews was tragic proof of the validity of their rejection of the Diaspora. And yet, if the rejection of the Diaspora was the right answer for some, it certainly was not appropriate for the thriving Jews of America. Thanks to the successful assimilation of millions of Jews in the United States, the story of their migration became a dramatic and fascinating tale, much like that of the ‘olim to Palestine. It was hard for the Zionist movement to assert its rejection of the Diaspora in the face of a strong and confident American Jewish community.

What is more, all Zionists agreed that the realization of the Zionist
idea depended on aliyah and settlement, without which there could have been no change in the demographic situation in the country. All shades of the Zionist leadership recognized this fact and did all they could to bring more ‘olim and buy more land. Concomitantly, aliyah assumed a central and prominent place in Zionist historiography. Five separate waves of aliyah were demarcated, each of which made its specific contribution to the development and consolidation of the Yishuv. But there were waves of immigration to other countries as well, where communities of Eastern European Jewish immigrants took root and flourished at the end of the nineteenth century. This made it difficult, in the 1940s and 1950s, to write a serious and broad study of migration and the diaspora (especially the American community), because it posed an alternative—and threat—to Zionist teleology. For example, Shmuel Ettinger’s History of the Jewish People in Modern Times gives American Jewry scant attention, despite its centrality and great contribution to the Jewish people and the State of Israel. As mentioned, Ettinger taught a course about Jewish migration and discussed the ‘Am ‘Olam society and its place in the Jewish world with his students; he even compared its colonists in America with the Bilu pioneers. However, he elected not to share with his Israeli readers the story of the consolidation of American Jewry in the very same years that the New Yishuv was taking shape in Palestine. As the historian Jacob Barnai has noted, Ettinger made sure to place the Land of Israel at the center and to steer his writing by the star of the Zionist idea. In this way, the Palestinocentric approach shunted Jewish migration to the margins of research while emphasizing the unique status of aliyah. Because no appropriate research infrastructure was established for this topic, it was difficult for scholarship to develop in other directions. The topic faded away and became irrelevant in the academic discourse and research community.

A second and more prosaic factor has to do with American Jewish historians. Although, as noted, many studies of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe have been written, none of them has been translated into Hebrew for the benefit of Israeli readers. It seems that even Jewish historians in the United States accepted the axiom that aliyah and immigration to the United States are two very different phenomena that cannot be compared. What is more, had the two communities of historians

52. Jacob Barnai, “‘The Jews of Muslim Countries in Modern Times and the ‘Jerusalem School’ of History’” (Hebrew), Pe'amim 92 (2002): 115–83. Barnai noted there that not only American Jews are overlooked in the book but also those of Islamic lands and the Orthodox.
(Israeli and American) viewed the period of mass migration as a single time period, there might have been extensive and serious scholarly collaboration about various issues related to Jewish migration to both Palestine and the Americas.

A direct result of the paucity of studies about Jewish migration is that the Israeli public, including university students, has not been exposed to the tale of the epic migration westward and the stories of hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews who crossed the Atlantic in search of a secure refuge. Hebrew readers are unaware of the thousands of Jews who worked in the sweatshops of Manhattan and their difficult integration into American society. In the absence of a rich and comparative research literature, Jewish migration has gradually become a field of research that is irrelevant for Israeli scholars. By contrast, the study of the first two aliyot has seen a revival and, both in Israel and America, those migrations are still regarded as a seminal episode in the history of the reborn Jewish community in the land of Israel.