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The Wandering Jew: Emigrants, Refugees, and *Olim* in the Twentieth Century

Abstract: The article seeks to provide a comparative perspective on Jewish emigration to the United States and to Mandatory Palestine during the period spanning World War I and the civil war in Ukraine through the closing of the United States borders to immigrants in 1924. The study consists of three sections. The first offers a typological explication of the concepts of emigration, *aliyah*, and refugeehood. The second part utilizes this typological discussion to characterize Jewish emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The third section considers the attitudes exhibited by absorbing societies towards newcomers. The article furnishes a detailed account of the socio-political forces shaping Jewish emigration patterns and their implications for identity and absorption. In addition to a critical examination of the ideological, economic, and social context of Jewish migration, it discusses the hardships of displacement and absorption and traces the characteristics inherent to Jewish emigration.

Keywords: *aliyah*; Jewish emigration; refugeehood; absorption; displacement; Zionist thought; Great Migration.

Słowa kluczowe: alija; emigracja żydowska; uchodźctwo; asymilacja; przemieszczanie; myśl syjonistyczna; Wielka Migracja.

We wander, we wander,
from one country to another,
through hunger and through cold,
confused, embittered,
We, foreigners of the world!

Lost in the crowd
Born without home and country,
without house and without tent,
struck by it all,
Carried by the storm wind
We, foreigners of the world!

Forbidden at borders
Like dust from the road,
Without power, without help, without money –
Where, where are we floating?
What goals are you striving for?
We, foreigners of the world!

Shloyme Zanvl Rappoport, "Mir Wanderer," in Jacob Lestschinsky, *Nedudei Israel* (Jerusalem, 1945), translated from the Yiddish by Hilla Klor.

Introduction

Norbert and Clementine Seitelbach, along with their young son Harry, emigrated from Germany to Palestine in 1936. They arrived as a wealthy family, but soon lost all their property. Their financial decline was accompanied by a social and professional one. Norbert, who had owned a respectable business in Berlin, now resorted to selling goods in the marketplace. His son Harry—who would later change his name to Natan Zach and become one of Israel's greatest poets—recalled that his father sold rotten eggs at Tel Aviv's Carmel Market. Women would come by every week and complain that eggs he had sold them were bad. To which "that *Yekke*," meaning his father, would reply, "Rotten? An egg that I sold?" He then bought a lamp with which one could see the inside of eggs and determine if they were fresh or not, so that no one could accuse him again of selling spoiled goods.

In moving to Palestine, Zach's father lost his entire world and he struggled to create a new one for himself in his new home. Big merchants who moved from Germany to Palestine became the owners of much smaller

businesses; former industrialists had to make do with modest workshops or tiny factories; senior clerks turned into junior clerks; professors became schoolteachers. The displacement, the loss of social status, the difficulties of assimilating into a new place, and a deep disdain towards the society around them caused an irreparable rupture within the Seitelbach family. Their home became cold and alienated. When his father came home at the end of a day in the market, Zach recalled, the radio would be turned off, silence would reign, life would be extinguished. Unable to accept the new life that had been forced on him, his father finally committed suicide.

The realities experienced by the Seitelbach family mirrored those of numerous Jews who had emigrated to Palestine or to other destinations, especially those who came from Eastern and Central Europe. Assimilation into the society and culture of their new country was fraught with difficulty. Although German society had rejected and ostracized them, they continued to cling to its language and culture. And tensions between them and the absorbing society were exacerbated by the fact that the German-born immigrants considered their own culture superior to that of the broader Hebrew *Yishuv* and refused to adopt the Levantine lifestyle.

This was, as Leah Goldberg described it, a generation of two homelands. But for the Jews who came from Germany, there was only one homeland, and not necessarily the one in which they had arrived. Responding to Goldberg's claim, Zach said: "Two homelands isn't better than any other multiplication. Or rather, it's much worse. These people are disconnected and torn and bitter."[1]

It was in this atmosphere of disconnection that the boy Harry—Natan—grew up. As the son of two disconnected parents, for whom life in Palestine seemed bleak, he struggled to develop his own identity, which he described as made up of scraps. "You won't develop an identity. No. No. Scraps," he said in a revealing television interview with Kobi Meidan. "It's like, someone comes to me [asking], 'How many languages do you speak?' And I say, 'I speak six languages fluently.' 'Wow… [you must be a] genius?' And I said: 'No… no… *A person who speaks six languages is simply a refugee*'."[2]

The Seitelbachs' story captures the experience of many Jews who emigrated from their countries of origin to the various destination countries

[1] An interview by Kobi Meidan with the poet Nathan Zach, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jra5HzjXKWg [retrieved: 25 Nov. 2024].

[2] Ibid.

that were open to Jewish immigration from the late 1800s through the first half of the twentieth century.

Jewish migration took place during a period of demographic, social, and political upheavals in Eastern and Western Europe: demographic growth, accelerated economic development in Eastern Europe in general and the Russian Empire in particular, pogroms, antisemitism, World War I, the civil war in Ukraine, economic crises, and the rise to power of Nazism and fascism. In such a historical context, the definitional boundaries between a migrant, refugee, and immigrant are not always clear. Yet, examining the experience of refuge and migration from a macro perspective calls for these categories that provide outlines to discuss migration in general and Jewish migration in particular.

This article is comprised of three parts. The first offers a typological discussion of the concepts of emigration, *aliyah*, and refugeehood. The second part utilizes the aforementioned typological explication to characterize Jewish emigration during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The third section considers the attitudes exhibited by absorbing societies in destination countries towards the arriving refugees, emigrants, and *olim*. Considering these three facets will help us to better understand not merely the motivations and characteristics inherent to Jewish emigration in this period, but also the history of the Jewish people throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Aliyah, emigration, and refugeehood: An outline of a sociological typology

Within the Zionist ethos, *aliyah* to Eretz Israel has been perceived as fundamentally different from immigration; the *oleh* is not an imigrant. This distinction is rooted in the assumption that the *oleh* relocates out of national-ideological consciousness, while the emigrant is driven by a wish for economic advancement and aims to resume his or her old way of life in the new country. The *oleh*, by contrast, does not come from the depleted socioeconomic ranks of Jewish society, and the *aliyah* is not intended as a solution for a personal predicament. Many of the *olim* actually came from Jewish families that, while still maintaining an affinity to traditional Jewish society, were also on the rise financially. What caused them to leave for Palestine was not weakening finances, but rather the weakening of core elements of identification within Jewish society. Another difference

between the *oleh* and the emigrant in Zionist thought lies in their attitude towards the society of origin. The *oleh* rejects the social values of his country of origin and seeks to build a new society upholding different values. The emigrant, by contrast, identifies with the society of origin and is not necessarily interested in changing or improving the existing social arrangements. Naturally, these differences influence the absorption of both the *oleh* and the emigrant in their new countries. Emigrants maintain an enduring primary connection to their country of origin, which is why they tend to live near their compatriots. *Olim*, on the other hand, cut off ties to their country of origin and are more easily absorbed into their new society, which they wish to help shape. As a result of these distinctions, Zionism saw the *oleh* as ethically superior to the emigrant.[3]

Sociologist Aryeh Tartakower defined *aliyah* as "emigration for the common good, rooted in a particular idea and fulfilled out of a particular plan and in a particular organizational framework, and also in preparation for a new life."[4] This definition led him to the far-reaching conclusion that the term "*aliyah*" was not limited to Jews coming to Palestine, but could be implemented in any country and in any society, provided that the following conditions are met: an idea, a plan of action, and an organization aiming to carry the plan out. The fact that the term "*aliyah*" does not exist in other languages and societies does not mean that the *phenomenon* was nonexistent elsewhere. Based on this definition, Tartakower argued that the Puritans' arrival in America should be seen as a kind of "*aliyah*" and that the same term describes historical phenomena such as the Dukhobors and the establishment of the American Socialist colonies, as well as the *Am Oylam* movement, whose members came to the United States in the early 1880s and established agricultural communities in such places as Louisiana or South Dakota.

Tartakower's definition of a refugee proves more intricate than that of the emigrant and the *oleh*: "A refugee is a person who leaves his place of residence not of his own free will but because he is driven to do so by fear of persecution, or by actual persecution, on account of his race, religion, or political convictions."[5] Population displacement occurs in the following three different patterns.

[3] Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, "Aliya ve-hagira: Kavim le-tipologya sotsiologit," *Metzuda* 7 (1953–1954), 83.

[4] Aryeh Tartakower, *Ha-adam ha-noded: Al ha-hagira ve-al ha-aliya ba-avar uve-ya-meinu* (Tel Aviv, 1954), 79–81.

[5] Aryeh Tartakower, Kurt Grossman, *The Jewish Refugee* (New York, 1944), 1–12.

a) Emigration: Emigration is essentially a voluntary movement. It involves people who, mainly for economic reasons, decide to change their place of residence. They are free to leave whenever they choose.

b) War refugees: War refugees leave their homes before an enemy arrives to occupy the area in which they have lived. Economic reasons play a minor role, if any, in their displacement. People take flight not because they are dissatisfied with their economic standing, but rather because they fear for their personal safety. There is an element of choice involved, but it is far more constrained than in the case of emigration.

c) Deportees: These are people compelled by physical force to leave their home and relocate elsewhere. They are free neither to choose the time of their departure nor destination.

These three categories—emigrants, war refugees, deportees—primarily help us note differences in displacement motivations and in the challenges involved in coping with it. Refugees leave their homes due to political persecution or fear thereof and are not afforded protection by their state of origin or by any other state. But this definition is itself a little too narrow, as it does not take into account tens of millions of people (Jews included) who were driven out of their homes and deprived of their civic status without ever leaving their countries of origin, who failed to receive the protection of their state but also could not be helped by any other. In discussing refugeehood, therefore, we must pay attention to two necessary conditions: that the departure be caused by the persecution of the ethnic group; and that refugeehood be always collective, rather than individual. Individuals are made vulnerable not due to any personal failing or vice, but rather due to their ethnic, religious, national, or ideological affiliations. By contrast, in emigration, the experience is usually a personal one, largely dependent on the individual's freely made decision of whether to emigrate.

Refugees in general, and Jewish refugees in particular, exhibit four prominent characteristics:

a) Refugeehood is usually a movement of families and can also involve the movement (displacement?) of entire communities.

b) Refugees originate from all socioeconomic strata; they include not merely the poor, but the wealthier segments of society as well. The persecutors make no distinction between rich and poor, or between the illiterate and the educated.

c) The adjustment of refugees to their new countries is more difficult and complicated than that of emigrants. Refugees usually encounter

greater emotional difficulty. Securing employment in their former profession is more challenging, and they often have to settle for jobs that are beneath their qualifications—as exemplified in the above-mentioned case of Norbert Seitelbach, who went from running a business to selling eggs in the marketplace.

d) Refugeehood causes a drop in social status and a serious injury to the identity of refugees who were part of the social elite in their countries of origin. In contrast, for emigrants, social status remains unchanged by relocation, and they can climb up the majority society's socioeconomic ladder. We might cautiously argue that persecuted Jews from lower socioeconomic strata had historically accepted their refugee status and overcame the difficulties of displacement more readily than refugees of higher social standing who suddenly found themselves on the margins of a majority society.

The above definitions are not uniquely relevant to Jewish migration experiences. However, in the specific context of modern Jewish history, realities were more complex and thus the boundaries between the three categories have not always been clear.[6] In Jewish history, the distinction between ordinary emigrants and refugees are of little practical value. Jews did not become a classic example of a migrant people because they have a special inclination for wandering: they have been driven from country to country either by actual violence or by fear of violence.

Emigration, refugeehood, and *aliyah*, 1881–1939

Jewish emigration from the end of the nineteenth century until World War II can be broken down into three main phases. The first is between 1881 and 1914, when some 2.5 million Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to various destinations overseas. This migration wave transformed the Jewish world. New Jewish centers formed where none had been before, while others shrunk and weakened. The United States was the main destination country, but smaller numbers of Jews also arrived in Argentina, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and Palestine. The outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 halted the westward movement of Eastern Europeans. Naval routes shut down, trains transported troops

[6] On complexity of definitions in case of Jewish migration, see, for example: Marion Kaplan, *Hitler's Jewish Refugees: Hope and Anxiety in Portugal* (New Haven, 2022).

to battlefields instead of migrants to ports of embarkation, ships were nationalized, and national borders closed.

The second phase of Jewish emigration unfolded between 1919 and the closing of the U.S. borders in 1924. After World War I, emigration resumed and soon reached its previous dimensions. This phase is the focus of the present article, which seeks to offer a comparative perspective on Jewish emigration to the United States and to Palestine from World War I and the civil war in Ukraine to the closing of the United States borders to immigrants in 1924. In some ways, the emigration of the 1920s can be seen as extending the pre-war phase; yet it also constitutes a distinct and unique moment in the history of Jewish emigration. Although Jews relocated from the same countries of origin to the same destination countries, Jewish emigration in this period had unique characteristics. The surrounding geopolitical realities had changed beyond recognition, affecting both the size of the emigration wave and its demographic makeup. The Russian empire had collapsed; the U.S. passed laws that set immigration quotas; some 100,000 Jews were murdered and wounded in the civil war in Ukraine between 1917 and 1920; Palestine gradually became a preferred destination for immigrants.

During the third phase, from 1925 to the beginning of World War II, all of Europe—and not just its Eastern parts—could be considered as a "country" of origin for Jewish emigration.

Table 1. A hundred years of Jewish migration, 1840–1942

Years	Total Jewish emigration		United States		Argentina & Canada		Palestine		Other countries	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1840–1900	985,000	100	875,000	88.5	39,000	4.1	35,000	3.7	36,000	3.7
1901–1925	2,119,000	100	1,703,000	80.4	250,000	11.8	76,000	3.6	90,000	4.2
1926–1942	813,000	100	224,000	28.5	88,000	10.8	268,000	33.0	233,000	28.7
1840–1942	3,917,000	100	2,802,000	71.5	377,000	9.6	379,000	9.7	359,000	9.2

Source: Jacob Lestschinsky, *Nedudei Israel* (Jerusalem, 1945), 65.

Some 4 million Jews emigrated between 1840 and 1942 (see Table 1). About 70 percent of them arrived in the United States and the remaining 30 percent were divided just about equally between other destinations. The peak of Jewish emigration occurred in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when more than 2 million Jews left Eastern Europe,

most of them relocating to the United States and the rest to Argentina, Palestine, Canada, and other destinations. Throughout the century of Jewish emigration, the wanderers included emigrants, refugees, and *olim*, with the three sociological types frequently interwoven and inseparable. Jewish emigration was part of a broader wave of general migration, but also had its own distinctive characteristics:

a) The percentage of Jewish emigration out of the overall number of Jews worldwide was considerably higher than that of any other migrating ethnic group. The 4 million Jews who left their countries between 1840 and 1942 constituted 6 percent of the overall migrant population worldwide, while the Jewish people accounted for just 1.5 percent of the world's population. Moreover, it is estimated that the number of Jews worldwide in the early twentieth century was around 10 million. Some 2.5 million of them—20 percent of total world Jewry—left their countries of origin and moved to new countries during this period. There is no other example in which one-fifth of a people or ethnic group have migrated in such a short time.[7]

b) Jewish emigration was distinctly family-based. The percentage of women and children was particularly high, with women accounting for 44 percent of migrants and children under 14 comprising 25 percent. Jews emigrated as families because they had no intention of ever returning to their countries of origin. After World War I, the percentage of migrating women rose even further, crossing the 50-percent mark. In contrast, the share of women among emigrants to the United States was only 18 percent in the case of Italian emigrants, 14 percent for Russians and 13 percent for Romanians. This demographic makeup had far-reaching implications that are reflected clearly in letters written by emigrants, which will be discussed below.[8]

c) Because of its family-based nature, Jewish emigration involved an especially large number of dependents. A relatively high rate of Jewish women and children arrived in the United States without the means to support themselves. During the period 1899–1914, the rate of dependents among Jewish immigrants in the United States was estimated at 43 percent,

[7] Liebman Hersch, "International Migration of the Jews," in Walter F. Wilcox (ed.), *International Migrations* (New York, 1931), 474. See also: Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975), 223–254.

[8] Ibid.

compared to 26 percent in the overall immigrant population. After World War I, the rate of Jewish dependents rose further, to 54 percent.[9]

d) The professional makeup of Jewish emigrants differed from the overall emigrant population. Over two-thirds of gainfully employed persons practiced a skilled trade and less than one-third practiced sundry other trades; among immigrants as a whole, only one-fifth of gainfully employed persons practiced a skilled trade while almost four-fifths practiced miscellaneous trades. The main reason for this difference is that non-Jewish emigrants tended to come from rural areas and were farmers by trade. Jews, on the other hand, came from cities or towns and had been craftsmen back in their countries of origin. This professional makeup also had a profound effect on the patterns of absorption into the surrounding societies.[10] The predominance of skilled labor among Jewish emigrants was a distinctive characteristic that shaped their economic and social trajectories after emigration.

e) Jews emigrated without intending to return and, consequently, their rate of return to their countries of origin was low. Between 1908 and 1924, the overall rate of emigrants returning from the United States to their countries of origin was estimated at 33 percent, while, among Jews, it was only 5 percent. The reason for such a low rate of returning emigrants was that Jews did not have a homeland to go back to. By contrast, among other emigrant groups, emigration was frequently a short-term strategy, with emigrants intending to make money and then quickly return home.[11]

The distinction between "*aliyah*," "emigration," and "refugeehood" is a cornerstone of Zionist thought, which from the late nineteenth century to our own day has considered Jews arriving in Palestine as *olim*. The ideological weight with which the word "*aliyah*" is freighted is so deeply rooted in Hebrew that it became impossible to separate the Jews who emigrated to Palestine from those who made *aliyah*. Zionist historiography took it for granted that Jews who arrived in Eretz Israel in the first three major immigration waves (1881–1923) were *halutzim*, i.e., "pioneers": *olim*, rather than emigrants. The Zionist narrative set itself apart from the general history of Jewish migration, making *aliyah* into a unique and unusual phenomenon, unparalleled in Jewish and world history.[12]

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Gur Alroey, "Two Historiographies: Israeli Historiography and the Mass Jewish Migration to the United States, 1881–1914," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 105 (2015), 99–129.

Historical research, however, shows otherwise. During the great emigration wave of 1881–1914, some 60,000 Jews emigrated to Eretz Israel; but only about 7,000 of them were farmers who founded the first *moshavot* and young socialist pioneers. All the rest were Jews who fit the typical profile of the emigrant better than that of the *oleh*. Menahem Sheinkin, who headed the Hibbat Zion movement's information bureau in Jaffa, vividly described the Jews arriving in Eretz Israel in the early 1900s:

> As long as you, the directors, don't attempt to attract capital by the million to Palestine, we are not worth a thing. Our position will not be strengthened by the poor people coming to Palestine on their own initiative. I say, quite the opposite, for our reputation is getting worse from day to day in the eyes of the officials and the general public because of this immigration. What they see is people who are down and out, downtrodden, patched up, with bundles of tattered clothes, the poorest of the poor, who cannot possibly be a blessing to the country, and it gives us a bad name. And if wealthy, respected people, well-groomed and well-regarded, don't come ashore, in the language of the port the term "Jew" will be synonymous with weak and poor, of little value, the dregs of society, and from there the idea will spread to the other sections of the people. This is the naked truth I have to convey to you as the representative of the information bureau, and every week I could say the same. Everything is static, nothing changes, and nothing is going to change until Palestine receives an injection of capital.[13]

By contrast, Jews who moved to the United States and Argentina during the great emigration wave included not only emigrants but *olim* as well, who, like the farmers of Palestine, set up agricultural communities. In the course of the 1880s, the *Am Oylem* movement—an American analogue of the Bilu ("*Beit Ya'akov lekhu ve-nelkha*") movement of Jewish immigrants in Palestine—set up the following colonies: Sicily Island, Louisiana; New Odessa, Oregon; Cremieux, South Dakota; Bethlehem Yehudah, South Dakota; Palestine, Michigan; Cotopaxi, Colorado; and Newport, Arkansas.[14]

The colonies in the United States did not last and disintegrated after just a few years. However, in Palestine, the colonies also failed in the first years. The one who came to their aid was Baron Rothschild, who supported them and took them under his patronage for eighteen years. In the

[13] Gur Alroey, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century* (Stanford, 2014), 124. See also: Avraham Menes, "Am olam bavegung," in Elias Tcherikower (ed.), *Geshikhte fun der yidisher arbeter-bavegung in di fareynikte shtatn* (New York, 1945), 2:203–238.

[14] Uri D. Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910* (Detroit, 1981).

United States, no philanthropist was found. Not the ideology was the key to the colonies' success in the Unites States and Palestine, but rather the extent of moral and financial assistance that the settlers received when they arrived to the new country.

In 1890s, agricultural settlements were established in Argentina as well, including Palacios, Moisés Ville, Mauricia, San Antonio, Villa Clara, and many others. Mordechai Alperson, a Jewish settler in Mauricia, described his migration experience in his memoirs. Were we to swap his name for that of a Jewish farmer in Palestine, we would not be able to tell that what we are reading are in fact the words of an Argentinian farmer:

> A pleasant, spectacular ray of light illuminated our vision. Full of magical images, we dreamt: a homeland . . . a Jewish state! To this day old Leibele's fervent preaching to a group of immigrants when the soldiers marched past rings in my ears: The Land of Israel is destined to spread throughout the world; my brothers, the Land of Israel will be here. A real country of Jews with our own soldiers, living by our Torah and our tradition. And even when our righteous Messiah comes, we must not go there! One way or another, our ancient ancestral land is too small to contain us all . . . Furthermore, Uncle Yishmael will still be living there . . . and he is just as much of a wild man as he used to be . . . But here, in this country, we will live in peace and unity with the Argentineans . . . After all, they are of our race! Some people believe they are descended from the ten tribes . . . Such dreams were our sustenance. The dream of a new, loyal, safe homeland gave us added strength so that we could bear all our suffering and overcome it.[15]

The emigration of the World War I years is easy enough to categorize. Hundreds of thousands of Jews became refugees or war deportees, choosing to leave the areas of fighting before the enemy arrived or else were forced to leave their homes. By contrast, the 1920s pose more challenges to the typology of emigrant, *oleh*, and refugee. During the period 1917–1920, a bloody civil war broke out in Ukraine, during which some 100,000 Jews were wounded and murdered.[16] Tens of thousands fled the fighting and became refugees. In many ways, they were not different from the refugees of World War I; but since the war in Ukraine broke out after the world war was already over, national borders had meanwhile reopened. The Jews who arrived in Palestine included refugees, emigrants, and *olim*,

[15] Mordechai Alperson, *30 shnot ha-hityashvut ha-Yehudit be-Argentina* (Tel Aviv 1930), 60.

[16] Oleg Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917–1920* (Philadelphia, 2012). See also: Jeffery Vedlinger, *In the Midst of Civilized Europe: The Pogroms of 1918–1921 and the Onset of the Holocaust* (London, 2021).

though the latter group was a minority: only a few of the arriving Jews were motivated by Zionist ideology.[17] The United States received mainly refugees and emigrants. The end of the civil war in Ukraine was followed by mass Jewish migration into Russia; the mid-1920s brought a financial crisis in Poland. The United States closed its borders again, and some 60,000 Jews entered Palestine. These were more compatible with the emigrant type than with that of the refugee or *oleh*.[18]

Jewish emigration from Germany during the 1930s can be broken into four periods. Until 1933, emigration was voluntary, driven mainly by distinctly economic factors that had a selective population. When the economic situation in Germany became especially dire, the tendency to migrate spread through larger parts of Jewish society. The economic crises of the Weimar years came hand in hand with political crises, which likewise intensified the inclination to leave.

Between 1933 and 1937, Jewish emigration was "incentivized" or semi-forced. The Nazi rise to power spurred Jewish emigration out of Germany. Nevertheless, until 1938, most of Germany's Jews did not choose to leave, and those who did, did not leave all at once. The particular characteristics of emigrants during these years proves that those who left were not refugees; still, this was not willing emigration, which is why Niederland defines it as "incentivized" or "semi-forced."

The year 1938 marked the shift from semi-forced to forced emigration; during this year, the number of emigrants rose and their characteristics became less specific. The push factors became dominant, marginalizing any other consideration. Then, from *Kristallnacht* (November 1938) on, emigration from Germany became forced.[19]

[17] Magdalena M. Wrobel Bloom, *Social Networks and the Jewish Migration between Poland and Palestine, 1924–1928* (Frankfurt, 2016); Jacob Metzer, *Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Long 1920s: An Exploratory Examination* (Jerusalem, 2007).

[18] Gur Alroey, *Land of Refuge: Jewish Immigration to Palestine, 1919–1927* (Bloomington, 2024).

[19] Doron Niederland, *German Jews: Emigrants or Refugees? Emigration Patterns between the Two World Wars* (Jerusalem, 1996) [in Hebrew]. See also: Hagit Lavsky, *The Creation of the German-Jewish Diaspora: Interwar German-Jewish Immigration to Palestine, the USA, and England* (Berlin, 2017).

Jewish emigration and absorbing societies

The American quota laws of 1921 and 1924 significantly reduced the influx of immigrants to the United States.[20] During the 1880s, it had been Chinese immigrants who worried American society and the exclusionary legislation had targeted them; forty years later, however, the effort shifted to Jewish and Italian immigrants. From 1907 to 1910, a commission formed by the United States Congress and led by Senator William Dillingham investigated the effect of immigration on American society. The commission's 42-volume report, published in 1911, was a thorough examination of a range of issues, including the connection between immigration and crime; the assimilation of immigrants into the large industrial cities; immigrants' English literacy; and their living conditions and occupations.[21] The authors of the report cautioned the American government against allowing immigration from Europe to continue unabated and recommended limiting it through the use of quotas.

The conclusions presented in the report, which was published before World War I, were the main reason for the passing of the immigration quota laws a decade later. Congress passed quota legislation that changed the direction of Jewish emigration and sent tens of thousands of emigrants to other destinations. The arguments presented by the senators who proposed the bill were tinged with antisemitism, xenophobia, and anti-European sentiment. They expressed the attitude of large parts of American society towards the immigrants that had begun pouring into the United States in ever-growing numbers after World War I. Fearing that immigrants would endanger and destabilize the majority society, the proponents of the bill claimed that immigrants in general, and Jews and Italians in particular, failed to assimilate into American society, creating threatening ethnic enclaves. Senator Arthur Capper, a Republican from Kansas, said that "the experience of the last quarter century warns us that the capacity of the 'melting pot' is sadly over taxed, and that the fusing has all but ceased," while Representative Samuel McReynolds, a Democrat from Tennessee, declared, "This country can no longer be the melting pot for

[20] Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921–1965* (Chicago, 2014).

[21] On the work of the Dillingham Commission, see: Joel Perlmann, *America Classifies the Immigrants: From Ellis Island to the 2020 Census* (Cambridge, 2018), 104–132.

foreign nations."[22] Senator Albert Johnson of Washington quoted Wilbur S. Carr, the head of the United States Consular Service, who called Jews filthy, dangerous, and lacking any conception of patriotism or national spirit.[23] Senator Johnson further claimed that the United States was "in danger of being swamped by 'abnormally twisted' and 'unassimilable' Jews, 'filthy, un-American and often dangerous in their habits'."[24] The use of the term Senator Johnson employed, "un-American," evolved over the years. Initially, it was used to describe those opposed to immigration, who defied the American ethos of an immigrant nation open to all; but, in the mid-1920s, the same term became a derogatory epithet for the immigrants themselves, who were "un-American" and would likely never be Americans.

In the absence of an alternative, the many thousands of Jews who wished to emigrate to America chose Palestine instead as their destination country. Over a single decade, the Jewish population of Palestine tripled, from 60,000 in 1919 to 180,000 in 1929. The year 1925 marked a turning point in the history of Jewish emigration. It was the first year in which more Jews emigrated to Palestine than to the United States. What Zionist propaganda had failed to do in four decades of emigration was accomplished by two antisemitic American senators, who locked the gates of the United States and turned Palestine into the main destination for Jewish emigrants.

And how did the Zionist movement react to the *olim*/emigrants/refugees who started arriving in Palestine from 1881 on? In some ways, the response of the Zionist Organization was not that different from the policy of the American government. One might even claim that the first quota law of the twentieth century was initiated by the Zionist Organization. Immigration policy to Palestine from 1881 to 1939 was dictated by the demographic makeup of the arriving immigrants. Since most of the Jews entering the country in those years could be categorized as emigrants and refugees, with only a minority of ideologically motivated *olim*, the crafters of *aliyah* policy found themselves deliberating what kind of Jews they

[22] Robert L. Fleegler, *Ellis Island Nation: Immigration Policy and American Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia, 2013), 17.

[23] Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York, 1989), 239.

[24] Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882* (New York, 2004), 47–48; Perlmann, *America Classifies the Immigrants*, 201–228.

wanted to build the country with, given that Palestine could only take in a limited number of Jews.[25]

In light of this dilemma, the Zionist Organization developed a selective immigration policy, preferring wealthy immigrants and young, able-bodied ones over the elderly and the poor. Palestine's limited capacity for absorbing immigrants became the focus of a philosophical debate within the Zionist movement: what should take priority, *the good of the people* or *the good of the land*? *The good of the people* meant allowing masses of Jews to come to Eretz Israel, which would offer them physical and spiritual salvation; *the good of the land* called for selectivity, as the country could not immediately take in masses of potential immigrants. It was argued, therefore, that preference should be given to wealthy Jews and those able to work, at the expense of the poor or disabled, whose contribution to the Jewish community would be limited. Until the mid-1930s, the leaders of the Zionist movement privileged the good of the land over the good of the people.

In the early immigration waves (1881–1914), Zionist leaders urged poor Jewish emigrants to choose other destination over Palestine. In his article "Derekh la'avor golim" [The Path of Exiles], written in the early days of the First *Aliyah*, Moshe Leib Lilienblum wrote: "When rousing people to settle the country, we think only of the wealthy, who can pay in full for property and prepare all the instruments at their own expense. The poor, however, have no place in Palestine."[26] Menahem Sheinkin, the Hibbat Zion official, and Arthur Ruppin, director of the Palestine Office, begged Jews not to come to Palestine unless they had sufficient means to support themselves.[27]

During the 1920s, the Zionist movement did not change its fundamental policy of privileging the good of the land over the good of the people; by this point, however, it also had the means to enforce the policy. The great influx of immigrants that followed the civil war in Ukraine seemed, from a Zionist point of view, to jeopardize the Zionist project. This difficult

[25] Margalit Shilo, "Tovat ha-am o tovat ha-Aretz: Yahasah shel ha-tenua ha-Tsiyonit la aliya bi-tekufat ha-aliya ha-sheniya," *Cathedra* 46 (1987), 109–122; and also: Aviva Halamish, "Aliya lefi yekholet ha-kelita ha-kalkalit: Ha-ekronot ha-manhim, darke i ha-bitsua veha-hashlakhot ha-demografiot shel Mediniut ha-aliya bein milhemot ha-olam," in Avi Bareli, Nahum Karlinsky (eds.), *Kalkala ve-hevra bi-yemei ha-Mandat, 1918–1948* (Sede Boqer, 2003), 179–216.

[26] Moshe Leib Lilienblum, *Ketavim otobiografiyim* (Jerusalem, 1970), 14.

[27] Alroey, *An Unpromising Land*, 96–102.

time was a test for the Zionist movement, which had to make a decision: would it open the gates and allow entry to all Jewish immigrants, or else close them and accept only young, able-bodied pioneers? Up until May 1921, the British Mandate's Immigration Ordinance allowed up to 85,000 Jews to enter Palestine each year. Chaim Weizmann, then president of the World Zionist Organization, was the one who limited the influx of Jews, setting the quota at a mere 1,000 Jews a year and barring the refugees of the Ukrainian pogroms from entering the country.[28] Weizmann thus acted even before the U.S. Congress did and was the first twentieth-century official to enact a Jewish immigration quota, all while the Jews of Ukraine were being savagely massacred. Zionist policy would change towards the end of the 1930s and after World War II, whereas the British policy would become more stringent.

Conclusion

Aryeh Gartner, a historian of Jewish migration, wrote in one of his articles that "Migration is not part of Jewish history, it is Jewish history itself. Voluntary or compulsory migration from one land to another was integral to the Jewish experience in past ages of oppression and limited opportunity."[29] Gartner's accurate claim found full expression at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth.

One of the methodological difficulties that challenges scholars studying migration in general, and Jewish immigration to Palestine in particular, involves tracking the diverse motives that drove people to leave their homes and choose specific destinations. In other words, what role did economic or ideological considerations play in such decisions? Because the decision to move to a new country is complex and difficult, it goes without saying that there is no single factor at work. Multiple considerations are interwoven and it is not always possible to isolate one element and dismiss the others. It is precisely for this reason that terminology has great power and significance for understanding the diverse reasons that impelled Jewish immigrants/*olim*/refugees to seek out their various

[28] Moshe Mossek, "Herbert Samuel ve-itsuv ha-defusim shel Mediniut ha-aliya," in Yehuda Bauer, Moshe Davis, Israel Kolatt (eds.), *Pirkei mehkar be-toldot ha-Tsiyonut* (Jerusalem, 1976), 286–310.

[29] Lloyd P. Gartner, "The Great Jewish Migration – Its East European Background," *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 27 (1998), 107.

destinations. Jewish emigration at the end of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century teaches us that distinguishing between categories like "economic migrants," prompted by financial hardship, and "ideological pioneers," motivated by Zionist visions of nation-building, becomes challenging when individual cases blend material and philosophical drivers. Jewish poverty has generally been the result of persecution rather than of typical economic causes. Hence, in most cases, it is impossible to determine whether a Jew leaves his country for purely economic reasons or under the pressures of persecution. Thus, in the great Jewish emigration from Czarist Russia before World War I, political motives were almost as pronounced as economic ones.

In the context of Jewish emigration, the typology discussed above is particularly important. As this article has shown, Jewish emigrants came to Palestine alongside *olim*, and people who could be categorized as *olim* moved to the United States and Argentina alongside emigrants. Jewish farmers motivated by a national ideology settled in all three destination countries, which also took in emigrants and refugees. Emigrants, refugees, and *olim* also resembled one another in the ways they were received by the surrounding societies. Refugees and emigrants were unwelcome in all of these destinations, Palestine included, and local societies feared them. Attitudes towards Jewish refugees in Palestine were even more extreme after Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization, barred them from entering the country.

Some four million Jews emigrated from Europe to the United States and other destination countries between the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. New Jewish communities formed where none had existed before, while older communities dwindled, and some vanished in the course of World War II. Emigration in general and Jewish emigration in particular falls into three types: emigration, refugeehood, and ideological emigration, which, in the Jewish context, is called *aliyah*. These three categories encapsulate a long series of reasons and causes for emigration; using them makes it easier to understand the motives and true weight of both push factors in origin countries and pull factors in the available destinations for Jewish emigration.

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