THE JEWISH IMMIGRATION FROM EASTERN EUROPE TO MEXICO AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL 1924-1931: A DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

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In memory of Alejandro Safir, a brave and humble immigrant from Poland to Mexico

Resumen

Este artículo trata sobre la composición de la población de inmigrantes judíos de Europa oriental a México y a la Tierra de Israel entre 1924 y 1931. Esta inmigración cambió la faz de la comunidad askenazí en México. La descripción del perfil demográfico de los inmigrantes se llevó a cabo por medio del análisis de variables tales como sexo, edad, estado civil y ocupación. Los resultados permiten figurar la imagen y características de los inmigrantes judíos provenientes de los principales países de origen del Este de Europa Oriental en los primeros años después del período de la gran migración, tras el cierre de fronteras de Estados Unidos. Finalmente se realizará una comparación entre ambas poblaciones de inmigrantes, lo cual permitirá ubicar a la inmigración judía a México en el amplio contexto histórico de la migración judía mundial.

*Palabras clave***:** México, migración judía, perfil demográfico, cuarta *aliah*, Tierra de Israel

Background: The Great Migration Period

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jewish families emigrated from the continent to destinations across the ocean. In their countries of origin, Jews had experienced violent persecutions, and discrimination by law under hostile regimes. In addition, many of them had often suffered economic distress in common with much of the rest of the non-privileged classes in the population. During the period of the "Great Migration", as it has frequently been dubbed, a significant proportion of the Jewish population relocated from Eastern Europe to the American continent, particularly to the United States.[1]

During 1900-1914, the peak years of the Great Migration, only an estimated 50 to 100 Jewish families from Eastern Europe immigrated to Mexico. That small figure reflects the availability of the United States as a preferred destination during that period. But that trend would change once the United States limited entrance to the country by enacting annual immigration quotas. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, there were also approximately 1,000 Jews who immigrated to Mexico from Arab countries and the Balkans, escaping the declining Ottoman Empire.[2] In addition, from 1876 to 1910, the years of the Porfirian regime (known as the *Porfiriato* in Spanish), several hundred wealthy Jews from Central Europe immigrated to Mexico. Upon arrival, they received generous benefits and grants, an initiative of President Porfirio Díaz, who hoped that Mexico would profit from the assets and economic skills they brought with them.[3] These three linguistic-cultural groups – Eastern European, Central

1 Arie Gartner, "The Mass Migration of European Jews 1881-1914", in: Avigdor Shinan (ed.), *Migration and Settlement among Jews and Gentiles*, Jerusalem 1982, p. 346 [Hebrew]. For a wider review on the Great Migration period beyond its Jewish aspect, see: Dudley Baines, *Emigration from Europe, 1815-1930*, Cambridge 1995. Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World*, New York 2016.

2 Bella Sutton Attie, Sofia Tawil Betech, Gloria Carreño, *Estudio histórico demográfico de la migración judía a México 1900-1950*, México 2005.

3 Jacob Levitz, "The Jewish Community in Mexico: Its Life and Education 1900-

European ("German"), and Mediterranean (Sephardi) Jews from Arab countries and the Balkans – are generally considered as distinct sub-ethnic clusters within the overall category of Jewish immigrants.

After 1920, and especially in the early 1930's, the volume of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe, particularly from Poland, increased. Over a twenty-year period, the Eastern Europeans came to represent the largest group of Jews in Mexico.[4]

In this article, I will examine their demographic profile. In addition, I will compare the Jewish migration to Mexico with a much larger wave of their contemporaries who immigrated to the Land of Israel between 1924 and 1931 (known in Israeli parlance as the "Fourth Aliyah") in the largest immigration wave from the establishment of the Zionist movement until then. Despite the differences between these destinations and what they had to offer to immigrants at that time, they also had something in common: The Jewish immigration to these countries from Eastern Europe in these years was mainly affected by the legislation of the United States government toward immigration from Eastern Europe. Comparing the composition of Eastern European Jewish immigrants that arrived in Mexico to those who arrived in Israel, will enable us to find the commonalities and to emphasize the uniqueness between them. In order to obtain a complete picture of the immigrant group's composition, I utilized two databases. The first[5] was constructed specifically for this research and contains the details of 3,950 immigrants from Poland, Russia and Lithuania, including variables customarily used in immigration research e.g., sex, age, marital status and

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1954", PhD Dissertation, Dropsie College, Philadelphia 1954, p. 4.

4 Corinne Azen Krause, "Mexico - Another Promised Land? A review of projects for Jewish colonization in Mexico, 1925-1881", *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61/4 (1972):327-326.

5 The database was assembled for the purposes of this paper, and draws on the details of 3,950 Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe (2,210 from Poland, 1,288 from Russia, and 452 from Lithuania), who migrated to Mexico in 1900-1939, as appearing in certificates granted them by the Mexican Migration Service, and scanned as part of the project. The database is cited from this point on as "Database 3,950." The entry certificates are part of the *Estudio histórico demográfico de la migración judía a México 1900-1950* (see note 2)

occupation.[6] The second was created by the Jewish Agency for Palestine and contains the same variables as the first.[7]

Jewish Immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico 1900-1923

Data from the entry certificates of 269 Jews who immigrated to Mexico from the Russian Empire and its successor states between 1900 and 1923 show that all but 18 arrived in Mexico in the final four years. Mexico in the early 1900s had very little to offer immigrants in terms of economic opportunity, although it did represent an asylum located far away from anti-Jewish persecution.[8] Mexico's situation did not encourage immigration; its society was divided by decades of civil war, and its poor economic situation kept it off the list of major destinations. However, that changed in 1921, when the United States imposed the first restrictive quota based on national origin. In that year, 50 Jewish immigrants entered Mexico, as did a similar number a year later. In 1923, those figures increased to 141.[9] Some of the immigrants did not consider Mexico their new home, seeing it as a temporary transit station on the way to the United States. Under the 1921 U.S. immigration restrictions, an immigrant applicant whose immigration was rejected could resubmit immigration request for entry after spending a year in Mexico. In 1922, this was amended to require the immigrant to wait five years before applying.[10]

6 For a review of the existing concepts, theories, and models on the issue of migration, see: Elizabeth Fussell, "Space, Time, and Volition: Dimensions of Migration Theory" in *The Oxford Handbook of the Politics of International Migration*, New York 2012, pp. 25-52.

7 David Gurevich and Aaron Gertz, *Statistical Handbook of Jewish Palestine,* Jerusalem 1947.

8 Database 3,950.

9 Other sources dealing with Jewish immigration in that period, may indicate different numbers. For example, in the American Jewish Year Book it is mentioned that in 1922-1923, 68 Jews entered Mexico. The numbers that are mentioned in this article are based on documents issued by the Mexican government. Hence, they are more accurate. For further reading see: *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 26 (1924-25): 597.

10 Levitz (see note 3), pp. 7-8.

During a visit to the United States in 1922, President of Mexico Álvaro Obregón met with leaders of Jewish organizations there and declared that his country would gladly receive Jewish immigrants. News of the president's promise to welcome Jews to his country was published in The Washington Post.[11] Without underestimating Obregón's declaration and the recovery of Mexico's society and economy after 11 years of revolution which ended in 1921, the main factor that accounted for the significant growth in the immigration of Eastern European Jews to Mexico was not Mexican, but U.S. policy. Many immigrants who entered Mexico in the years 1921 to 1923 did so only because they considered it a station en route to the U.S, and by 1923 the Eastern European Jewish population in Mexico was estimated to be 300.[12]

Jewish Immigration to Mexico 1924-1931

Beginning in 1924, while Jewish immigration from Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey remained unchanged, the volume of immigration from Eastern Europe grew rapidly. From the Mexican government's point of view, restrictionist U.S. policies vis-à-vis southern and eastern Europeans presented an unexpected opportunity to absorb Eastern European immigrants, many of whom, until then, had not considered Mexico as a preferred destination. In its post-revolutionary attempts at economic rehabilitation, Mexico was primed to absorb more European immigrants. This, combined with lobbying efforts made by Jewish American organizations, led to a renewed presidential declaration in favor of Jewish immigration. President Plutarco Elías Calles, in an interview for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), emphasized the empathy he felt for the harsh conditions facing Eastern European Jews, as described to him by Jewish organizations. He announced his government's interest in

11 "Mexico will welcome Jews: Obregon offers refuge to half million from Europe", *The Washington Post*, 6.1.1922.

12 Database 3,950.

welcoming Jewish immigrants.[13] Calles's attitude toward potential Jewish immigrants wasn't unique, as he too welcomed and insured the rights of other groups of immigrants. He tended to see them as potential human capital to the development of the Mexican economy and in addition, hoped that through this liberal immigration policy, Mexico will be portrayed as an enlightened country.[14]

In late October 1924, *The New York Times* reported on a group of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who entered Mexico after being denied entry to the U.S., following Calles's declaration. The report went on to describe a second group of Jewish immigrants who had reached Ellis Island, and who also intended to continue on to Mexico. The report in the *Times* noted the immigrants' hope to eventually enter the U.S. as legal immigrants and mentioned that their stay in Mexico would be funded by one of the synagogues in New York, until their legal entry to the U.S. could be arranged.[15] Following the rapid growth in immigration figures, and due to the fact that not all European incomers were necessarily assets, an economic filter seemed to be required. In 1926, the Mexican government legislated the "Immigration Law of Mexico", that conditioned entrance to the country on presentation of proof of basic economic viability.[16] This condition wasn't rare during the first three decades of the 20th century, as other destinations across the American continent such as Canada and Chile also integrated it in their migration policies.[17]

The fact that 1926 to 1929 were peak years for Jewish immigration to Mexico, coupled with the fact that some of the immigrants had limited financial abilities, illustrates that the law wasn't enforced until April 1929, when the labor unions in Mexico expressed concern, fearing that Mexican workers might lose jobs to immigrants. Under the unions' pressure, the

13 "10,000 Jews plan to go to Mexico", *The New York Times*, 8.18.1924.

14 David Cook-Martin, David FitzGerald, *Culling the Masses: The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas*, London 2014, p. 230.

15 "Jews enter Mexico", *The New York Times*, 10.25.1924.

16 Daniela Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism 1933-1945*, Boston 2014, pp. 141-142.

17 Cook-Martin and FitzGerald (see note 14), pp. 153-155, 355.

Mexican Ministry of Interior temporarily forbade the entrance of labor immigrants to the country. The labor unions' concern wasn't a result of Jewish immigration to the country. This issue arose due to the much larger influx on non-Jewish Europeans, and the Jews thus became entangled in the policy argument that would occur without them.

Three months later, it was decided to limit entry into the country to those who were in possession of a minimum sum of currency equivalent to 5,000 Mexican Pesos or 2,400 U.S. dollars**.** Another way of obtaining an immigration visa to Mexico was by proving the existence of relatives already present in the country.[18] Following the data that will be presented on the scope of immigration, it seems that this process of regulation led to a major decrease in Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico. While in 1930 alone, 401 Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe entered Mexico, during the three years from 1931 to 1934, only 419 did so. This phenomenon wasn't unique for Jewish immigrants, since during that period Mexico closed its gates towards almost everyone hoping to settle in the country. The main reason for that action was the Mexican government's difficulty in coping with the return of 350,000 of its citizens who had been living and working in the U.S. and lost their jobs after the economic crisis of 1929.[19] In addition to the significant decline in the scope of immigration, that action also ended the paradoxical situation that took place in the years prior to the crisis,in which from the one hand the Mexican government encouraged the arrival of immigrants that was to assist in reviving the post-revolutionary economy and on the other hand so many of its own citizens had to seek for livelihood in the U.S.[20] In her study of the immigration of Polish Jews to Mexico during the first half of the twentieth century, Alicia Gojman points out that of 8,000 Jews who immigrated from Europe to Mexico during that period, 4,000 came from Poland. The Polish Jews were

18 Harriet Sara Lesser, "A History of the Jewish Community of Mexico City 1912-1970", PhD Dissertation, New York University 1972, pp. 17-18.

19 Gleizer (see note 16), p. 28.

20 Pablo Yankelevich, "Undesirable Foreigners: The Dilemmas of Immigration Policy in Revolutionary Mexico", inside: *Deportation in the Americas: Histories of Exclusion and Resistance*, College Station 2018, p. 105.

not only the largest group among the Jewish immigrants, but were also the largest cohort by far among all Polish immigrants to Mexico. In 1929, the Polish consul in Mexico reported to his government that 96 percent of the Polish immigrants were Jews.[21] Based on this report and considering the fact that 1,240 Jews[22] immigrated to Mexico from Poland in the years 1924-1931, it is reasonable to use this group as the main representative sample when drawing the demographic profile of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico during that period.

As for Jewish immigration from Soviet Russia to Mexico, Celia Zukerman's study of Russian-Mexican relations and their impact on Jewish immigration to Mexico, finds that 1,200 Jews immigrated to Mexico from Russia in the 1920's.[23] The 1930's were characterized by a decrease in immigration, until it declined to only several individual immigrants in the late 1930's. At first glance, it seems that the source of that drop in the number of immigrants lies in the restrictions imposed by the Mexican government; however, the fact that over 1931-1939, 878 Jews immigrated to Mexico from Poland, while only 77 did so from Russia, implies that there was a different reason.[24]

In August 1924, Mexico became the first country in Latin America to establish diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Those relations lasted only five years, after the Mexican government accused the Soviets of intervening in its internal affairs and disseminating Communist propaganda. As a result, the Mexican government refused to honor the vast majority of Mexican visas that had been issued at consulates in Russia, and rejected already submitted requests.[25]

21 Alicia Gojman de Backal, "Inmigración de judíos polacos a México en el siglo XX", in: AMILAT (ed.), *Judaica Latinoamericana III*, Jerusalem 1997, p. 64.

22 Database 3,950.

23 Celia Z. Zukerman, "Influencia de las relaciones internacionales en la llegada de inmigrantes judíos rusos a México 1929, estudio de caso", in: J. Bokser Liwerant and A. Gojman de Backal (eds.), *Encuentro y alteridad: vida y cultura judía en América Latina*, Jerusalem & Mexico 1999, pp. 142-155.

24 Database 3,950.

25 Zukerman (see note 23), pp. 148-152.

Jewish Immigration to the Land of Israel during the Great Migration

During the Great Migration, over 2.7 million Jews from Eastern Europe immigrated to liberal nations overseas, the vast majority of them to the United States. That mass departure, which in aggregate was the equivalent of over one-third of the Eastern European Jewish population around the turn of the century, decisively changed the demographic features of the world Jewish population in the modern era.[26] Nonetheless, this very large stream of Jewish migrants was paralleled by a much smaller trend of immigration to the Land of Israel. From 1881 to 1914, that stream amounted to about 60,000. Despite the ideological significance that seemingly would have attached to resettlement in the Land of Israel, there was a significant re-emigration trend, so that in the 35 years before the First World War only some 45,000 of the immigrants remained as permanent residents.[27] Despite the situation that existed at the end of the war, immigration resumed, chiefly from Eastern Europe, bringing close to 35,000 new Jewish immigrants into the country from 1919 to 1923. This influx, which was similar in scope to the net-immigration of the decade before the war, took place in the wider context of a renewed mass migration of Jews overseas, chiefly to the West, as 290,000 Jewish immigrants entered the U.S. in 1919-1924.[28] There was no change in the countries of origin - the majority of the postwar immigrants came from war-torn Russia and Poland. Like their prewar predecessors, the majority had belonged to the ranks of the lower middle-class in their countries of origin and made a living from manual and handicraft labor or small-scale trade. Indeed, the majority of them settled in towns, where they could pursue similar occupations.[29]

26 Gur Alroey, *The Quiet Revolution: The Jewish Emigration from the Russian Empire in the Early Twentieth Century*, Jerusalem 2008, p. 9.

27 Gartner, *The Mass Migration of European Jews*. pp. 343-344.

28 Hersch Liebman, "The Jewish Immigration to the United States 1899-1924. A Demographic Analysis", inside: Arie Goren, Yosef Vankart (eds.), *The Great Migration and the Crystallization of American Jewry*, Jerusalem 1977, p. 28 [Hebrew].

29 Dan Giladi and Mordechai Naor, *Eretz Israel in the 20th Century: From Yishuv to*

Jewish Immigration to the Land of Israel 1924-1931

From 1924 to 1931[30] 82,000 immigrants arrived in the Land of Israel[31] and for the first time the Land of Israel became the chief destination for Jewish immigrants.[32] The inclination of the Land of Israel in Jewish immigration can be illustrated by comparing it to the decline in the numbers Jews who immigrated to the U.S. In 1922, a year in which the first quota on immigration to the U.S. from Eastern Europe went into effect, 53,524 Jews entered the U.S. and 7,844 to the Land of Israel. Three years later, when a stricter quota came into effect the numbers of Jews which entered the U.S. declined to 10,292 and to the Land of Israel increased to 33,801.[33] It constituted a new phase not only in the history of Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel, but in the trends of global Jewish migration that had existed until then. With the gradually narrowing gates of the United States to Eastern European immigrants, the Great Migration ended. Along with Jews and due to the developments that the region went through under the British Mandate, with an emphasis on agricultural and economic opportunities that became available after swamps that were drained in areas such as the Sharon, made more lands fertile for cultivating and suitable for the expansion of the already existing non-Jewish settlements, Arabs from all over the Middle East also immigrated to the Land of Israel, in a scope that is estimated in

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Statehood, 1900–1950, Tel Aviv 1990, pp. 14-16, 123-26 [Hebrew].

30 This article addresses the validation of the Fourth Aliyah as it appears in the historiographic date of Gertz and Gurevich, and the research of Shmuel Eisenstadt, Chaim Adler, and Reuven Kahane, *Israel – A Developing Society: A Sociological Analysis of Sources*. Jerusalem, 1972. [Hebrew]. On the other hand, in the research of Dan Giladi and Meir Margalit (see notes 29 and 30), the authors compare the periods 1924-1929 and 1924-1930, although they lack a wide-ranging sociological and historical analysis of the chronicles and crystallization of the Jewish migrant society in the Land of Israel in the relevant years.

31 Gertz and Gurevich (see note 7), p. 90.

32 Alroey (see note 26), p. 69.

33 Eli Lederhendler, "The Interrupted Chain: Traditional Receiver Countries, Migration Regimes, and the East European Jewish Diaspora, 1918–39" in: *East European Jewish Affairs 44* (2014): 179.

60,000 immigrants in 1922-1931.[34] The vast majority of them originated in Eastern Europe with Poland being the country of origin of half of all the immigrants. In Poland, they had suffered disproportionately from the series of tax measures implemented by the government, with the aim of reviving the economy; as part of this, taxes on merchants in the cities were raised and the free market that had prevailed was adversely affected. With the situation of Poland's Jewish middle-class becoming more precarious, and with other destinations for immigration significantly restricted, an unprecedentedly large flow of immigration started to the Land of Israel.[35] The initial years of this migration were characterized by positive growth trends, chiefly due to the capital that some immigrants brought with them. It also helped the country's economy to extricate itself from the recession it had suffered before the immigrants' arrival. That growth showed signs of instability beginning in mid-1925, however, by which time the proportion of new immigrants in the Jewish population reached 28%, a significant portion of whom did not possess any capital.[36] The reversal of earlier positive growth became so substantial that in 1927 unemployment figures among all Jewish salaried employees was 35%, and this in addition to self-employed traders who had lost their livelihood and were not included in that calculation.[37] The economic crisis led many of the immigrants to leave the country. The Jewish economy was unable in such a short time to absorb a great number of immigrants who lacked the capital and knowledge needed to establish themselves properly.[38] Another factor that took part in the reduction in Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel were the Riots of 1929, a series of attacks on Jews by Arabs, that

34 Maayan Hess-Ashkenazi, "The Arab Migration to the Sharon during the Mandate Period" in: *Cathedra, Periodical of the History the Land of Israel* 104 (2002): 105-109 [Hebrew]

35 Dan Giladi, *The Yishuv in the Period of the Fourth Aliyah*, Tel Aviv 1973, pp. 41-44. [Hebrew]

36 Meir Margalit, "Jewish Emigration from Palestine in the 1920's," *Cathedra* (2008): 81-2 [Hebrew].

37 Dan Giladi, "The Economic Crisis During the Fourth Aliyah, 1926-1927," *Zionism* vol. 2, Tel Aviv 1971, p. 128 [Hebrew].

38 Ibid. p. 123.

were followed by a British committee that recommended limiting Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel. As a result, a year later the Mandate Government issued the "Passfield White Paper" ("The Second White Paper") that restricted Jewish Immigration and the acquisition of lands.[39]

Composition of the Immigrants

Of the many studies devoted to various aspects of the immigration to the Land of Israel from the late nineteenth-century to the end of the 1930's, only a few relate to the immigrants' demographic profile.[40] The more detailed of them, which analyze the structure of the migrant population in terms of the variables normally used in migration research, are Gur Alroey's studies of the pre-war and interwar Jewish migration patterns[41] and the study done by Doron Niederland on German Jews' migration patterns between the two world wars.[42] In addition, Giladi's research on immigrants to Palestine from the mid-1920s to late 1920s directly addresses their social profile, but does not elaborate extensively beyond establishing the fact that over 50% of the immigrants were laborers, another quarter belonged to the lower-middle-class and were traders and craftsmen or worked in small industry, and that there were very few industrialists or affluent entrepreneurs among them not address the immigrants' ages or their marital status.[43] Thus, the extant research on Jewish immigration to British Mandatory Palestine, chiefly summarized

39 Netanel Katzburg, "The Riots of 1929, Pogroms or Mutiny?" *Cathedra, Periodical of the History of the Land Israel* 47 (1988): 162-163 [Hebrew]

40 See note 6.

41 See Alroey (note 26), pp. 116-131. For a separate article devoted solely to the composition of the migrant population, see: Gur Alroey, "Jewish Immigration to Palestine and the United States 1905-1925: A Socio-Demographic Analysis" in: Eli Lederhandler, Uzi Rebhun (eds.), *Research in Jewish Demography and Identity,* Brookline 2015.

42 See: Doron Niederland, *The Jews of Germany - Migrants or Refugees? An Analysis of Migration Patterns between the World Wars*, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 134-196 [Hebrew].

43 Giladi (see note 35), pp. 37-8.

and reported in studies published since the 1970s, appears to require additional analysis. In particular, I argue that contextualization, as well as comparative perspectives can help us to understand the nature and significance of Jewish migration trends in the early interwar period.

Jewish Immigration to Mexico

Studies on Mexico's Jews and their immigration history during the time frame defined in this article offer a finely detailed picture of the Mexican government's migration policy, and they highlight U.S. immigration restrictions as the pivotal factor that accounted for the consolidation of the Mexican Jewish community as an Eastern European-dominated ethnic community. They allow us to understand how those immigrants established their own schools, how they became subdivided in accordance with various political ideologies, and in general why the Jews were motivated to move to Mexico. At the same time — like the lacunae in immigration research on Palestine, indicated above — those studies pay far less attention to the immigrant population's demographic structure.[44] An exception in this regard is Alicia Gojman's research on the immigration of Polish Jews to Mexico during the twentieth century, where she notes that most Jewish immigrants originated in Poland and Russia, usually from small villages in rural areas far from big cities, and that in their country of origin they engaged in small industry – tailors, shoemakers, and bakers. Upon resettling in Mexico, most of them turned to peddling.[45] What follows is a juxtaposition of these two Jewish immigrant streams, both

44 For further reading see: Corinne Azen Krause, "The Jews in Mexico: A History with Special Emphasis on the Period from 1857 to 1930", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh 1970; Paulette Kershenovich Schuster, *The Syrian Jewish Community in Mexico City in a Comparative Context*, Saarbrucken Germany 2012; Jacob Levitz, "The Jewish Community in Mexico: Its Life and Education 1900-1954", PhD Dissertation, Dropsie College, Philadelphia 1954; Harriet Sara Lesser (see note 18); Efraim Zadoff, "Conceptual Currents in Jewish Education in Argentina and Mexico 1935-1955", M.A Thesis [Hebrew], The Hebrew University, 1980.

45 Gojman de Backal (see note 21).

originating simultaneously from Eastern Europe during the early interwar period, in the context of the post-1921 American immigration restrictions. In the course of my analysis, I will seek a) to establish the immigrants' demographic characteristics, seen comparatively, and b) to highlight the unique attributes of each respective cohort, as well as the points that they had in common with each other. The model being proposed here, with reference to these two case histories, envisages an even larger, transnational perspective on the history of modern Jewish migration history.

Mexico and the Land of Israel: Distribution of the Immigrants by Gender

An analysis by gender of the distribution of immigrants to the Land of Israel and Mexico over the years 1924 to 1931, elicits a strong similarity between the proportion of men and women in both immigrant populations, and also shows that in both groups the proportion of men was only slightly higher than that of women. That figure raises the

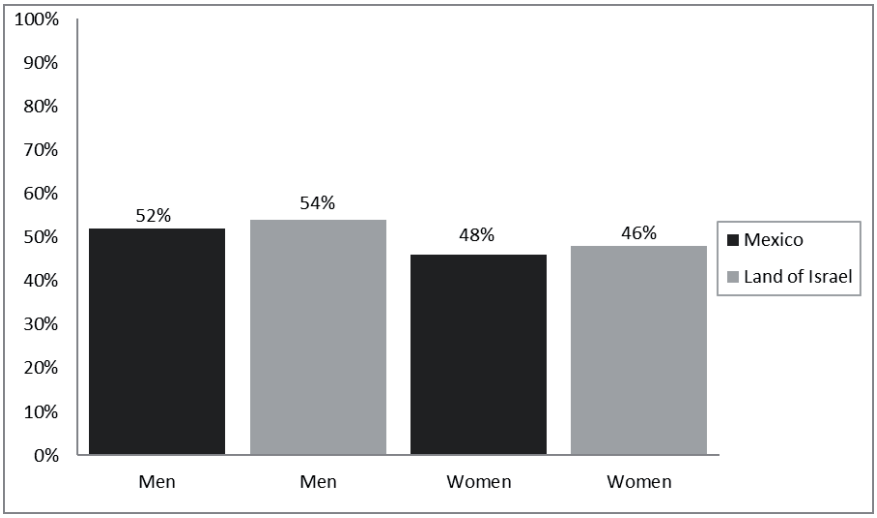


Figure 1: Distribution of Immigrants to the Land of Israel and to Mexico during 1924-1931, by Gender

Sources: Database 3,950. Statistical Handbook, p. 98

assumption that the Jewish immigration stream tended to be based on family units, including both genders. Unlike the analysis of immigration to Mexico and the Land of Israel at the start of the twentieth century, when a larger divide is noticeable between the proportion of men and women, illustrating the custom according to which the head of the family was a sort of pioneer who assumed the task of testing the conditions of the objective country and earning the money needed to bring the rest of the family or, alternatively, it reflects a higher rate of young bachelors among the immigrants. Of the Jewish immigrants who sailed from Odessa from 1905 to 1914, the proportion of men was 60% compared to 40% women.[46] Among Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to Mexico in 1900-1923, the difference is larger, since of the 222 immigrants who arrived in Mexico over the period, 64% were men and 36% were women.[47] The change in immigration patterns of Jewish immigrants according to their distribution by gender, is also illustrated from the data regarding Jewish immigration to the U.S., of which 56% men and 44% women in 1899-1920, turned to 46% men and 54% women in 1921-1924, the years between the quotas that were enacted on immigration from Eastern Europe to the U.S.

Distribution of the Immigrants by Age

Figure 2 examines the distribution by age of immigrants to the Land of Israel and Mexico, and addresses only two age groups, due to the fact that in the Statistical Yearbook of Gertz and Gurevich, segmentation of the immigrants by age in 1924-1931 is divided only to immigrants above and under 16, as oppose the more detailed segmentation in 1928-1931, that includes approximately 12,000 out of 82,000 immigrants, which is not sufficient to use as a representative sample. On the other hand, and despite the limited segmentation of immigrants by age, it is still noticeable that the differences between the two groups of immigrants, as the rate of

46 Alroey (see note 26)**,** p. 11.

47 Database 3,950.

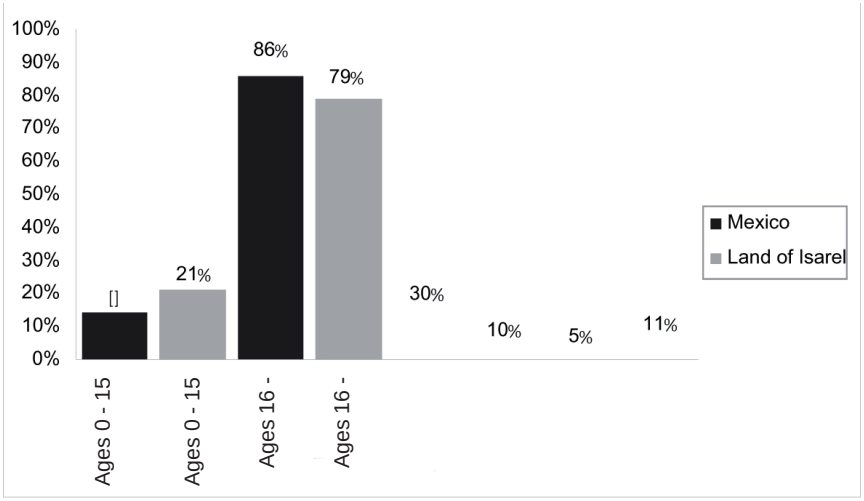


Figure 2: Distribution of immigrants to the Land of Israel and Mexico during 1924-1931, by age

Sources: Database 3,950. Statistical Handbook, p. 99

immigrants under 16 to the Land of Israel was higher by one third than the ones who immigrated to Mexico. In addition, when addressing both groups of immigrants as one representative sample to Jewish migration in 1924-1931, and to compare it the equivalent age segmentations among Jewish immigrants to the U.S. in 1921-1924 during which despite the narrowing gates, 272,000 Jewish landed on its shores, while 30% of them were under 16, a significantly higher rate than their proportion among Jewish immigrants to Mexico and the Land of Israel. This high ratio of Jewish immigrants to the U.S. in their early years wasn't common also to the non-Jewish population of immigrants that in 1921-1924, 18.5% of them were under 16. Hence, the ratio of immigrants to Mexico and the Land of Israel in 1924-1931 that were under 16, was similar to the one of 2,345,000 non-Jewish immigrants to the U.S.[48]

48 Liebman (see note 28), pp 40-42.

Distribution of the Immigrants by Marital Status

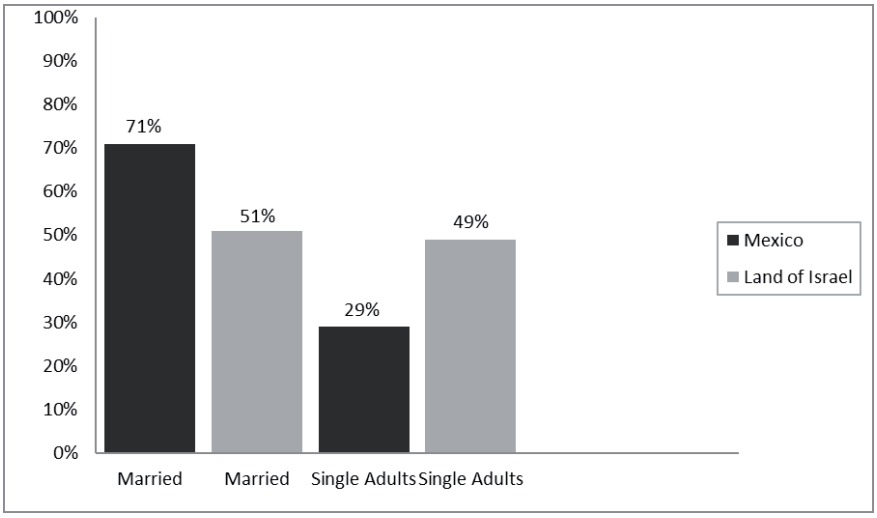


Figure 3: Distribution of Immigrants to the Land of Israel and to Mexico during 1924-1931, by their Marital Status.[49]

Sources: Database 3,950. Statistical Yearbook, p. 98

Figure 3 shows that the majority of the adult immigrants from Eastern Europe to the Land of Israel and Mexico in 1924-1931 were married. This corresponds closely with the nearly equal gender balance among the immigrants and adds support to the argument that Jewish migration to both destinations had a pronounced familial character. Alongside a higher rate of marriage among immigrants to Mexico, we must take into account that the immigrants' certificates were issued a few years after they arrived, a fact liable to create a false representation, since they could have married and established a family after arriving in Mexico. Therefore, to examine the immigrants' marital situation, we included only immigrants aged at least 19 upon arrival in Mexico. That division derives from the

49 In the certificates of immigrants to Mexico, 59 of them were registered as widowers and 13 as divorced, and they are included here among the "Married". In the Statistical Yearbook there is no reference to these categories.

conception according to which Eastern European Jews tended to marry in their late teens and early twenties, at lower ages and in a relatively higher proportion to the non-Jewish population.[50]

Distribution of Immigrants by Occupation

The immigrants' occupations were recorded in the entry certificates which were used to construct my database, thus allowing for a fairly good estimate of their socio-economic profile. At the same time, one must take into account the differences between the year when they arrived in Mexico and the years when the certificates were issued, a process that in most cases took from five to ten years, and in isolated cases was even 15 years. It is thus highly likely that during that period, the livelihoods of some immigrants changed. The reason for that gap is that it was only in 1930, when Mexico founded its office for registering foreigners and immigrants, that proper registration began, including those who had come to Mexico before the office was opened. To overcome that gap and present a reliable picture as possible, this research distinguished between 1,431 certificates

Table 1: Distribution of immigrants to the Land of Israel and Mexico in 1924-1931, by stated occupation

Occupation	Documents Issued at Mexican Consulates	Documents Issued in Mexico	Immigrants to the Land of Israel, According to Gertz and Gurevich
Crafts	24%	45%	9%
Liberal Professions	9%	4%	9%
Commerce and Industry	48%	33%	34%

50 Shaul Stampfer, "Aspects of Population Growth and Migration in Polish-Lithuanian Jewry in the Modern Period," in *Polish Jewry Through the Ages*, Israel Bartal and Israel Gutman (eds.), Jerusalem 1997, p. 278 [Hebrew].

Occupation	Documents Issued at Mexican Consulates	Documents Issued in Mexico	Immigrants to the Land of Israel, According to Gertz and Gurevich
Laborers	16%	12%	27%
Teachers and Officials			1%
Students	3%	6%	
Agriculture			20%
Total	100%	100%	100%

issued in Mexico and stated the immigrant's professions and 279 certificates that were issued in its consular offices abroad, where the profession and country of origin are stated for each prospective immigrant.

Table 1 shows that almost a quarter of the immigrants who received immigration visas at Mexican diplomatic offices listed their occupations as craftsmen, and that a significant growth occurred in that category when occupations were listed after having resettled in Mexico. This contrasts with a relatively low proportion of craftsmen among immigrants to the Land of Israel. Among immigrants in Mexico, one sees a significant drop in the proportion engaged in liberal professions, relative to the occupational distribution reflected in the consular documents. This can be explained as follows: engaging in liberal professions such as medicine, law, accountancy, or teaching required orientation in the local law and fluency in the local language, skills requiring substantial time and becoming well acculturated. Furthermore, as immigration to Mexico intensified so did the pressures that professional associations exerted on the government to prohibit immigrants from engaging in professions that might endanger the locals' livelihood.[51]

Regarding the trade and industry category, one can see that among prospective immigrants to Mexico almost half were employed (or self-employed) in these occupations. However, among immigrants who had

51 Alicia Gojman de Backal, "Minorities, State, and National Movements in Mexico's Middle-class – The Anti- Chinese and Anti-Jewish League." In: AMILAT (ed.), *Latin America: Essays in honor of Haim Avni*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 143 [Hebrew].

already resettled and had lived several years in Mexico, and also among immigrants to the Land of Israel, the employment or self-employment in trade and industry represented only about one-third of the working population. The definition of the term "trade" is slightly elusive, since although certificates issued to immigrants anticipating moving to Mexico defined someone engaged in trade as a "trader," and only a few were listed as "peddlers" it would be more accurate to define many of the people engaged in petty trade, and who had already been in the country for some years, as "peddlers"[52] and not as owners of businesses or stores. Frequently, the peddlers' wares were no more than some rolls of sewing thread, simple textiles, handkerchiefs, and needles, all stored in a pack with which they wandered in residential areas. The principal customers of the peddlers were servants and the poorest laborers, with whom they communicated in basic Spanish they had acquired – often limited to counting from one to ten.[53] In his research on "The Jewish Diaspora", demographer and economist Jacob Lestschinsky examined the economic development of Latin American Jews. His study elicits that the dominance of peddling was a phenomenon which encompassed all Jewish immigrants on the American continent at that period:

> The immigrant from Eastern Europe, particularly in the first stages of the mass migration, underwent almost without exception the tough school of peddling, of wandering with a pack on his shoulder and in the best case – with a hand-cart. From peddling the former craftsmen moved on to production work if he was aware of the local conditions, at first in a shop and later in a factory...[54]

As for the immigrants in the Land of Israel whose occupations were tabulated under "trade," apparently they too were most frequently petty tradesmen rather than business owners or entrepreneurs. Only a very few were considered affluent traders or industrialists. Regarding the number of laborers among Jewish immigrants in Mexico, there is a

52 Maurice Hexter, "The Jews in Mexico", *Jewish Social Quarterly*, March-June 1926, p. 7.

53 Tovya Maisel, "General Statistical and Demographic Data: The Jews in Mexico and Central America," in: *Jewish Diasporas***,** Jerusalem 1978, pp. 20-1 [Hebrew].

54 Jacob Lestschinsky, *The Jewish Diaspora*, Jerusalem 1961, p. 155 [Hebrew].

slight discrepancy between the figures tabulated from certificates issued at representative offices overseas, and those that reflect the immigrants' status after spending some years in the country. There is no conclusive explanation for that gap, but we can assume that unlike engaging in peddling or petty trade, which might eventually lead toward a career in small business but would still be characterized as "commerce," a laborer who immigrated to Mexico could very well aspire to move up to a higher status occupation. As for immigrants to the Land of Israel, the proportion of laborers was over a quarter, significantly higher than the corresponding proportion among immigrants to Mexico. The chief reason for this appears to be that the Zionist administration in the Land of Israel encouraged the immigration of laborers, granted them Aliyah certifications, and promised to provide them with work for at least a year.[55]

There is a palpable difference between the two destination countries with regard to immigrant students. We have no data on their numbers among immigrants to the Land of Israel; but, as the figures in the table demonstrate, immigrants to Mexico who had spent some time in the country were more likely to seek higher learning. Part of the growth in this category may reflect the somewhat older age profile of the immigrants when eventually registered as residents, as opposed to their younger age at the time of their immigration. Some proportion among the immigrant youth, in the course of several years, might have reached university age. Moreover, higher education was associated with upward social mobility, and this may reflect the experiences undergone by some of the immigrants and the aspirations of immigrant parents for the younger generation.

Regarding those who claimed they were farmers, it is notable that they constituted close to a fifth of all immigrants to the Land of Israel, while among immigrants to Mexico there were none.[56] One must address this phenomenon with caution, however, particularly in the case of the Land of Israel. Some of the immigrants there may have been wary about popular

55 Giladi (see note 35), pp. 40-41.

56 There is evidence of several initiatives to establish agricultural colonies in Mexico, inspired by those founded by Baron Hirsch in Argentina, but they did not come to fruition; for further reading, see Krause (note 4).

prejudice against certain professions, chiefly targeting those engaged in petty trade or small-scale businesses, while farming enjoyed cachet as a respectable calling, endowed with greater prestige in the eyes of Zionist officials and the wider public. As a result, some immigrants may well have made false declarations about their occupational status, thereby inflating the figures for agriculturists.[57] A figure that supports this argument is the percentage of agriculturists among the Jewish population in Poland, according to the 1921 census held there, when it stood at 6%.[58] Possibly the pioneering nature of some immigrants to the Land of Israel slightly raised the proportion of agriculturists among them, but not by such a large gap.[59]

Varying Migration Patterns

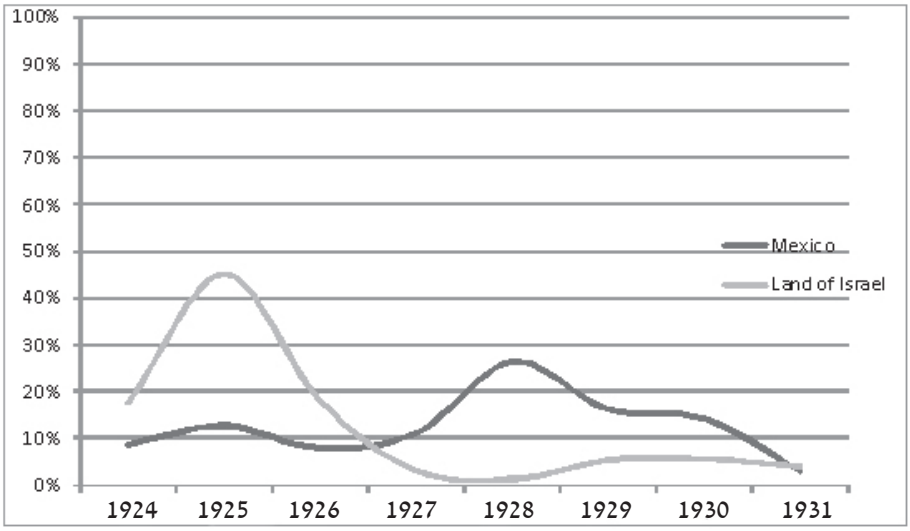
Graph 1 displays the respective patterns of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico and to the Land of Israel from 1924 to 1931. A comparison of these simultaneous immigration patterns shows that the years 1924-1925 were characterized by intensifying immigration to both countries. At the same time, there is a distinct difference in the way that immigration waxed and waned over time, for these two destinations. In Mexico, although there was an appreciable increase, the overall curve is more moderate. Some immigrants arrived in the country hoping to try and continue from there to the U.S., even if by migrating illegally.[60] Among other immigrants, some responded to the call of President Calles. In the Land of Israel, 1925 was the peak year for immigration, and looking

57 Giladi (see note 35), p. 43.

58 Raphael Mahler, *The Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars: A Social-Economic History in the light of Statistics*, Tel-Aviv, 1968, p. 61 [Hebrew].

59 The comparison with Mahler's research is given here only as regards farmers among the migrants, since the population census in Poland analyzed professions according to this division: trade and insurance (41%), laborers, industry, and craftsmen (34%), liberal professions and civil service (6%), transport and shipment (4%), agriculture (6%), other/unknown (9%).

60 Martin Zielonka, "The Jew in Mexico", central conference of *American Rabbis Yearbook*, Richmond VA, 1923, pp. 8-9.



Graph 1: Fluctuations in Jewish Migration from Eastern Europe to the Land of Israel and to Mexico, During 1924-1931

Sources: Database 3,950. Statistical Yearbook, p. 102

broadly at the first three decades of the twentieth century, 33,801 Jewish immigrants arrived there.[61] In Mexico, too, 1925 was characterized by a larger flow of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe in comparison with the previous one — from 242 immigrants in 1924 to 337 immigrants in 1925, an increase by over 50% in a single year.[62]

We see that from 1926 to 1928 there was a contrary trend in these parallel immigration waves, so that while in the Land of Israel there was a steep decline in the rate and scope of immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe, in Mexico those were peak years. The chief factor for the significant fall in the numbers of immigrants to the Land of Israel was the worsening economic crisis there, and the economy's inability to take in such a large number of immigrants and provide them with work.[63] The crisis was in fact so severe that it led to the departure of many immigrants already

61 Gurevich and Gertz (see note 7), p. 103.

62 Database 3,950.

63 Giladi (see note 37), p. 128 [Hebrew].

living in the Land of Israel, including some who had come there in the previous immigration spurt. Indeed, examination of the data shows that the Land of Israel experienced a negative net immigration by Jews over 1926-1928, with 19,067 arrivals, mostly from Eastern Europe, in comparison with 24,967 departures. In contrast, during 1924-1925, 48,278 immigrants arrived in the Land of Israel, as compared with just 4,188 who left.[64]

Examination of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico during 1926-1928, shows that in those years, contrasting with the situation regarding the Land of Israel, 2,574 Jews from Poland, Russia and Lithuania immigrated to Mexico as compared with just 463 in 1924-1925.[65]

The two immigration streams again displayed mutually opposing trends several years later, in 1929-1931, when for the first time in three years, the number of arrivals in and the Land of Israel exceeded the number of departures, while there was a fall-off for arrivals in Mexico.[66]As opposed to that revival, a significant decrease began in immigration to Mexico in the same period. In comparison with 1928, during which 741 immigrants arrived in Mexico, in 1929 the number was 456, in the following year it was 401, while in 1931 there were only 85.[67] The chief factor for the decline was Mexico's Immigration Law, which made entry by foreign immigrants conditional upon submission of proof of basic economic means.[68] Although it was initially enacted in 1926, it was first enforced in April 1929, due to concerns of Mexican labor unions that their members could lose their jobs[69] (Hence, we can understand how 1926-1928 were peak years in Jewish migration, taking into consideration that some of the immigrants were

64 Meir Margalit, "Jewish Emigration from Palestine in the 1920's", *Cathedra* 125 (2-8): p. 81 [Hebrew].

65 Database 3,950.

66 Margalit (see note 64), p. 81.

67 Database 3,950.

68 Gojman (see note 51), pp. 141-2.

69 The law wasn't aimed specifically at reducing the influx of Jews from Eastern Europe, given the very small number of Jews within the larger immigration flow into enforcement. The first time that Jews were specifically mentioned in a Mexican migration law that aimed to limit their entrance, was in April 1934. See: Gleizer (note 16), pp. 29-30.

lacking basic economic means). Under the influence of this pressure, the Interior Ministry ordered a temporary ban on the entrance of laborers to the country. Three months later, it was decided to condition the entrance of skilled professionals to the country on presenting funds of at least 5000 pesos (2400 U.S. dollars). Another form of obtaining immigration visas to Mexico was by proving that relatives were already present in the nation. One can therefore assume that most Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who entered Mexico at the end of the decade and on into the 1930s or later succeeded in proving their relatedness to people living in Mexico.[70] The social and economic pressure on the government to crack down on further immigration from abroad grew worse, in fact, as Mexico began to reabsorb some 350,000 nationals who left the United States in the throes of the economic crisis that began in the fall of 1929.[71] Although their return to Mexico wasn't a result of public policy, the economic crisis led patriotic groups to demand from the government to "repatriate" some areas. Together with the inclining unemployment rate, the grievance of groups such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, influenced the decision of the American President Hoover in 1929 to increase the control over entry visas from Mexico. As for the Mexicans who left the US during the crisis, they may not have been deported by special laws, but were likely to be driven by xenophobia.[72] Yet, another factor that resulted in a decrease in Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to Mexico was the severing of relations with Soviet Russia. In August 1924, Mexico had become the first Latin American country to establish official relations with the Soviet Union, but only five years later the Mexican government accused the Russian diplomatic mission of intervening in the political affairs of the state, disseminating Communist propaganda, and leveling criticism

70 Lesser (see note 18), pp.17-18.

71 Gleizer (see note 16), p. 28.

72 Jaime Aguila y Brian Gratton, "Mirando Atrás: Mexican Immigration from 1876-2000," in: *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America: Cross- Border Lives, Labor Markets, and Politics*, Dirk Hoerder, Helen Faires (eds.), London 2011, pp. 63-64.

at the government.[73] As a result of the severance of diplomatic relations, the Mexican government revoked the majority of immigration visas from Russia that have already been issued, and rejected most of the applications that had been filed.[74]

Conclusion

In her autobiographical novel, 'The Family Tree,' the Mexican-Jewish author Margo Glantz quotes the words of her father Yaakov (Jacobo) Glantz, a teacher of Yiddish and literature from Odessa who landed in the port of Veracruz on May 15, 1925:

"I went to Cuba in 1924, but they brought in new regulations about immigration quotas, so I couldn't go on to the United States… I went to Mexico later, because otherwise I'd have ended up drowned in the Bay of Havana."[75]

Like many Jews who left Eastern Europe, fleeing economic and religious edicts, Yaakov and Elizabeth (Lucia) Glantz, had hoped to emigrate to the United States. When their ship anchored in the port of Havana, they were told they couldn't continue on their journey northward, since the U.S. government had tightened its immigration laws in general, particularly as regards Eastern European migrants. This individual case illustrates the circumstances in which the majority of Eastern European Jewish migrants arrived in Mexico. They would change the face of that country's Jewish community, which until then chiefly consisted of Jewish immigrants from Arab and Balkan lands. As in the case of Mexico, the Land of Israel, too, experienced a new and unprecedented influx of Jewish immigrants during that period. In the course of the ensuing years, prior to 1938, the closed gates of the U.S. made the Land of Israel, for the first time the principal migration destination for Eastern European Jews. During the mid- to late-

73 Daniela Spencer, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia and the United States in the 1920s*, London 1999, pp. 182-184.

74 Zukerman (see note 23), pp. 148-152.

75 Margo Glantz, *The Family Tree*, London 1991. pp. 41.

1920s, the inadequacy of the local economy in Palestine triggered a severe economic crisis as well as the departure of many migrants from the country. And yet, the so-called Fourth Aliyah (1924-1931) is considered the first mass migration to the Land of Israel, when seen in historical perspective. Because of the ideological importance that the Zionist movement attached to the promotion of Jewish settlement, some of that migration may be described as recruited, and was therefore unconnected to considerations that might have obtained in alternative destinations. However, as in the Mexican case, analyzing migration statistics allows us to propose a causal connection between the significant growth in the scope of Palestine/Land of Israel immigration and the closing of the United States' gates.

The impact of the two groups of migrants on the Jewish communities in the Land of Israel and in Mexico is undoubted. But who were those migrants? Zionist historiography does pay attention to the economic and social characteristics of the Palestine's Jewish Yishuv in the period under discussion, but is comparatively less interested in seeing those characteristics in a comparative perspective. Likewise, current research on Mexico's Jewish community has not paid close attention to such questions. The objective of this paper was to examine the composition of both populations, to discover what was distinctive to each one, and to highlight the differences by applying the methodological tools accepted in migration research, and by drawing on statistical databases, one of which was constructed for the purpose of this research. The demographic profile reveals that the principal lines of difference between the two groups are the proportion of older migrants, their marital situation on their arrival, and the large number of migrants to the Land of Israel who engaged in farming. The second of these distinguishing features remains somewhat in dispute due to irregularities in the source documents. Particularly notable regarding the migration patterns is the fact that the sharp rise in migration figures to the Land of Israel occurred immediately after the United States barred its doors to immigrants, while the peak years of Jewish migration from Eastern Europe to Mexico occurred rather in the mid- to late-1920's. On the other hand, there is a clear similarity in the distribution of migrants by age and gender, as well as occupational profile: those who came in their

twenties and thirties formed the most significant age-group in both groups, and since the most common professions were trade and industry. Another line of similarity that unites the two migrant populations, and in fact is this work's pivotal assumption, is that relative to their numerically peripheral place in the course of mass Jewish migration from the 1880s to 1921, the changes that occurred afterward were most evident in the Land of Israel and Mexico.