

Preface

Two Grandfathers—Two Grandmothers

When I was a teenager in the late 1970s and 80s, I spent my summer holidays at Kibbutz Afikim with my grandfather, Moshe Belindman-Alroey, and my grandmother, Sarka Press-Alroey. Both of them were from small towns in Lithuania and had come to the land of Israel at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s. My grandparents were among the founders of Kibbutz Afikim. They were Zionists, socialists, tillers of the soil. My grandfather worked for many years in the fields of the Jordan Valley. When he grew old and no longer had the strength, he became responsible for the kibbutz's assets, traveling once a week in a blue pickup truck to Tel Aviv to buy whatever was needed to sustain the kibbutz. My grandmother worked in the cooperative kitchen or the laundry. In their activities and way of life, my grandfather and grandmother took part in the Zionist revolution and became the new Jews. They were pioneers.

During festival days I traveled to see my other grandfather and grandmother, who lived in Tel Aviv. Emil Tadger and Ernesta Farhi-Tadger had emigrated from Bulgaria (Sofia and Varna). Grandfather came at the beginning of the "third aliyah" when he was 16 years old, and grandmother came in the late 1930s with a tourist visa. There was an age difference of eleven years between them. Grandfather worked in the family-owned Avoda candy factory, and when it went bankrupt he became a plasterer. He spent all his life in the building industry, renovating and plastering the city of Tel Aviv. My grandmother was a housewife. My Tel Avivian grandparents were not the "new Jews" nor were they pioneers.

Zionist historiography stressed the pioneer ethos and regarded cooperative-agricultural settlement as the glory of the Zionist endeavor and the source of its success. The movement began in the years 1904–1914 when young socialist immigrants arrived in the land of Israel and settled in its peripheral areas to establish these cooperative settlements. Members of the group totaled about 2,000 to 3,000 persons out of the 35,000 immigrants who reached the country from the beginning of the twentieth century until the outbreak of World War I. It was from this group of pioneers that the Zionist leadership emerged. All the heads of the Israeli government until 1969 arrived during this period of time, which is known in Zionist historiography as the “second aliyah.” They laid the path and created the myth according to which my grandparents from Kibbutz Afikim immigrated to the land of Israel and became tillers of the soil. The focus of this book is not on this particular type of immigrant—but on immigrants like my Tel Aviv grandparents.

This book, *An Unpromising Land: Jewish Migration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century*, examines the majority population that arrived in Palestine (together with the pioneers) and settled in the cities and town settlements; this group became petite bourgeoisie in character. Since they were not part of the Zionist revolution and did not become the “New Jews,” historiography devoted very little to researching their contribution to the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine. Doubt has led me to reexamine the period of the second aliyah—the one that is considered to have been the most ideological of all the aliyot to Palestine and the State of Israel from the late nineteenth century up to the present. Seeing the Jewish immigration to Palestine at the beginning of the twentieth century in a wider historical context had allowed me to detach myself from the ideological image of that period and focus on the complete sector of Eastern European migrants who arrived in the country. Immigrants in this wave were primarily small merchants and artisans, and they constituted the greater majority of the second aliyah immigrants.

The skeleton of this book is my Hebrew publication *Imigrantim: Ha-bagirah ha-yehudit le Eretz Israel bereshit ha-meah ha-esrim* (Immigrants: The Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the Early Twentieth Century), which appeared in two editions in 2004. During the

ten years that have passed since that book's publication, I have published three other books that have deepened my knowledge of Eastern European Jewry in general and Jewish migration in particular. I found new sources and my perspective broadened, accompanied by development of a comparative viewpoint between migration to Palestine and migration to the United States. The present book is an expansion of the previous Hebrew editions. It includes a new introduction that attempts to examine how and why migration to Palestine became a unique and exceptional case in the history of Jewish migration in general and to the United States in particular. The first chapter examines the reasons for migration to Palestine in a much wider context and with a new conclusion. The other chapters have been updated and amplified, and they discuss new historical and sociological issues that were not dealt with in the Hebrew editions and are given expression in this new version.

A number of scholars and colleagues have assisted me and offered valuable advice. I would like to thank Steve Zipperstein for his help and support in publishing the book, and also Professor Hasia Diner, who read the manuscript and made important comments both on the content and structure. Special thanks are due to Philip Hollander, a friend and colleague who is thoroughly familiar with the period of the second aliyah and those who were active in it. Thanks also to the dean of the faculty of Humanities at the University of Haifa, Professor Reuven Snir, and also to the chair of the Department of Israel Studies, Dr. Yaron Perry, for their generous financial support. I wish to thank the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation that supported the book's translation, the translator, David Maisel, who translated selected parts of the manuscripts, and the staff members of the National and University Library in Jerusalem, the Central Zionist Archives (CZA), the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), and the Pinhas Lavon Institute for the Research of the Labor Movement. I want to express my gratitude to the editors with whom I worked at Stanford University Press in preparing this book for publication: Norris Pope, Stacey Wagner, Thein Lam, and Emily Smith.

The late Paula Hyman was one of the historians who most influenced me. As a bachelor's degree student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I read her researches and was exposed to the importance

of social history and the methodology that characterizes it. Professor Hyman was cognizant of the main thesis of migration in contrast to aliyah in the Palestine context and encouraged me to continue developing it, and she even drew my attention to gender issues. I owe her a great debt of gratitude. I dedicate this book to her.