

A Home Away from Home? *Israel Shelanu* and the Self-Perceptions of Israeli Migrants

IN THE LAST THREE DECADES, the question of Israeli migration to the U.S. has been intensively discussed by Israeli media, and it has become the subject of many scholarly works. The fact that the phenomenon of migration from Israel is known as *yerida* [descending] while migration to Israel is described as *aliyah* [ascending] reveals the profound nature of the emotional and ideological factors in the relations between the migrants and their fellow countrymen who stayed in Israel. Moreover, when, in 1976, Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's prime minister, defined migrants as "the leftovers of weaklings,"¹ his phrase clearly reflected their stigmatization in Israeli society. These attitudes were prevalent not only among Israelis living in Israel, but also among those who migrated from the country, so most early studies portrayed the Israeli migrants as individuals subject to constant internal conflict.

The media created by migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere has long interested scholars. This is because, as Sally M. Miller puts it, "the [migrant] press is the best source for an understanding of the world of non-English-speaking groups in the United States, their experience and concerns, their background and evolution as individual communities."² In a sense, the migrant media provide a vantage point from which researchers can learn about the inner dynamics that characterize an ethnic or national group; for instance, the migrant press can reflect migrants' attempts to preserve their old language and culture, while at the same time revealing their attempts to assimilate into American society.³ Furthermore, migrant media can supply the means through which "fragile" groups constitute their identity, or recreate it under new circumstances.⁴

An investigation of the Israeli migrant media can deepen our understanding of this unique community. Studying the media organizations

that serve a community that declines to define itself as a community—or at least declined to do so in the past—can reveal the mechanisms through which the migrants deal with the inherent conflicts in which they exist. Furthermore, a chronological investigation of the themes that appear in these media can enhance our understanding of the major changes in migrants' self-perception over time, and of Israeli attitudes toward them. In a larger sense, a study of the way Israeli migrants perceive themselves and their relations with Israel over a period of time can illuminate broader phenomena within Israeli society.⁵ The extent to which Israeli migrants are viewed as a challenge or even a threat to the existence of the Jewish State exposes some of the inner tensions and instabilities that shape Israeli reality. The ways in which Israeli migrants position themselves within the context of the meta-Zionist narrative are unique signifiers of the centrality and potency of this interpretive scheme and its role in molding Israeli identity.

Today, the Hebrew-reading population in the U.S. is offered a variety of sources of information. Hard copy issues of *Ha'aretz*, *Ma'ariv*, *Yedi'ot Aharonoth*, and several Israeli magazines are available in all of North America's large cities, while the Internet offers access to Israeli news sites, radio stations, and the sites of some of the dailies. In terms of Hebrew news sources that are written and edited in the U.S., the selection is more limited: *Ma'ariv* and *Yedi'ot Aharonoth* attach modest local supplements (*Ma'ariv America* and *Yedi'ot America*) to their weekend supplements. Each of those supplements usually contains one or two feature stories, several regular columns (shopping, health, American sports, Israeli music, etc.), and a detailed New York City events guide. There are also a few weekly Hebrew radio shows aired in the New York and Los Angeles areas.

The weekly *Israel Shelanu* [Our Israel], the first Israeli migrants' newspaper in the U.S., was established in September 1979 and ceased to appear in August 1998. *Israel Shelanu* was closed due to financial difficulties, most likely caused by the increasing availability of hard copy Israeli dailies in the U.S. and Israeli news web sites.⁶ Since *Israel Shelanu* folded, *Shalom L.A.*, a West Coast weekly, is the only Israeli migrants' newspaper published in the U.S. that is not affiliated with an Israeli-based newspaper.⁷ Shmuel Shmueli, the founder of *Israel Shelanu*, was the weekly's publisher through its 20 years of existence. He also used to write most of the weekly's editorials, many of which reflected his right-wing political beliefs supporting *Likud* governments, denouncing the Oslo accords, and so on. Although, at some stages, the issues of *Israel Shelanu* contained around 80 pages, the editorial staff of the Brooklyn-based newspaper usually included

only 8–10 reporters,⁸ and so, at times, *Israel Shelanu* would republish items that had already appeared in Israeli newspapers, mainly articles dealing with political events occurring in Israel.⁹ At the same time, *Israel Shelanu* employed well-known Israeli reporters and editors, such as Eli Tavor, Uri Dan, Ofer Taler, and others, at certain stages. Through the years, many high-ranking American and Israeli diplomats and politicians, from Yitzhak Mordechai to Dennis Ross, also granted interviews to *Israel Shelanu*.

I have chosen to focus on *Israel Shelanu*, since its relative longevity enabled me to analyze it over three distinct time periods. Another reason for choosing the weekly was its relatively high readership: estimates for various periods range from 25,000 to around 100,000 copies.¹⁰ In any event, it seems that, through all its years of existence, *Israel Shelanu* was the most popular Hebrew-language newspaper published in the U.S. that was not a supplement of an Israeli-based newspaper. Finally, I chose *Israel Shelanu* since several studies have identified its consumption as a characteristic of the migrants' patterns of social behavior.¹¹

This paper includes four sections: first, a discussion of studies of Israeli migration that offers relevant theoretical framework for this project; second, the operationalization of these theoretical concepts into detailed research questions; third, an analysis of three samples of *Israel Shelanu*—its first, eighth,¹² and final (20th) years of publication—focusing on the ways in which the newspaper addressed Israeli migration to the U.S., Israeli and Jewish-American migration (back) to Israel, and the development of an institutional migrants' community; and finally, a discussion of findings in view of the ways in which *Israel Shelanu* served its readers by offering them a means of appeasing the inner tension they were experiencing.

STUDYING ISRAELI MIGRATION AND MIGRANTS

Since the status of a migrant can be defined using a variety of parameters, estimates of the number of Israelis living outside of Israel range from around 250,000 to more than 450,000.¹³ The majority of those who migrated from Israel reside in the U.S., mainly in the New York City and Los Angeles areas. Other migrants can be found, in smaller numbers, in Canada, Western Europe, and other countries.

Several researchers have investigated the reasons leading to migration from Israel. Some of these studies emphasize the importance of the economic factor.¹⁴ At the same time, the evidence regarding the influence of Israel's security problems on the decision to migrate is less conclusive.¹⁵

Ideological motivations for migration have also been investigated, and several researchers have studied possible connections between migration from Israel and the decline in the belief in Zionist or other values. Sabar,¹⁶ for example, suggests that an ignorance of Jewish heritage combined with a declining belief in socialist ideals is a major factor contributing to the migration of young Kibbutz members to the U.S.

Another group of studies investigates the characteristics of the migrants' lives in the Diaspora. Cohen¹⁷ compares Israeli migrants, European migrants, and Americans and concludes that the Israeli migrants' level of education and the percentage employed in technical and professional occupations is higher than that of the other two groups. Other researchers who studied the economic aspects of migrants' lives¹⁸ concluded that both Israeli men and women suffered a decline in professional status as a result of migration.

Among the salient aspects addressed by studies of Israeli migrants are the migrants' ethnic and national self-perceptions and the nature of the communities they form. The majority of these studies ascertain that most Israeli migrants residing in the U.S., including those who have acquired American citizenship or a "green card" (Permanent Resident Card), define themselves as Israelis. Beyond this fundamental point of agreement, the works tend to differ in their analyses of the migrants' self-perceptions and patterns of association.

Shokeid's 1986 research¹⁹ is a representative example of one perception that is usually found in studies conducted in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰ Shokeid, an Israeli anthropologist, spent two years (1982–1984) in New York City, during which he studied Israeli migrants residing in Queens. According to his findings, the most important factor defining the migrants' identity and their patterns of social organization was the inherent conflict between Israeli migration and Zionist ideology. It was this very conflict that created the state's hostile attitude toward its migrating citizens, to the point that the migrants were stigmatized and treated as losers, if not outright deserters. This complex ideological and emotional impetus led to the migrants' self-definition as Israelis and their total refusal to define themselves as Americans, claiming that they planned to return to Israel even when they had no specific plans for doing so. They therefore did not establish any kind of community-based institutions, since these would suggest that their stay in the U.S. was permanent. The only patterns of association that characterized the migrants were occasional, short-term, non-official relations, manifested in such activities as communal singing of Israeli folk songs, reading *Israel Shelanu*, and so on. Shokeid concludes from this that the migrants were generally practicing "low-profile ethnicity."²¹

A later study of Israeli migrants supplies a somewhat different perspective. For two years at the beginning of the 1990s, Uriely²² studied a group of Israeli migrants from the Chicago area, categorizing the group into three distinctive subgroups according to the members' orientation toward their place of residence. Members of the "settlers" group did not arrive in the U.S. with any fixed time limit and did not have a definite idea of how long they would stay. Most of them acquired American citizenship or a green card and did not claim they were planning to return to Israel. Their vision of permanent residence in the U.S. was accompanied by a readiness to assimilate into the Jewish-American community. The two other groups of Israelis—those who had "sojourner" or "permanent sojourner" orientations²³—had anticipated the duration of their stay in the U.S. upon their arrival. The initial stage of the sojourn experience ended with the termination of the originally-planned period of residence, as they completed the studies or work obligations that had brought them to the U.S. Although the migrants could choose at this stage to become "settlers," most of them claimed an intention to go back, despite having no specific plans to carry out their intentions. According to Uriely, the "permanent sojourner" experience caused psychological discomfort, since this group feared being perceived as *yordim*, a term they saw as bearing a negative stigma. Their form of practiced ethnicity, as defined by Uriely, resembles that of Shokeid's migrants: "[It] involves a strong commitment to the country of origin at the symbolic level, but with almost no manifestation of ethnicity in terms of community activities, membership in ethnic organizations, and ethnic neighborhoods."²⁴

A third series of studies was conducted by Gold at the beginning of the 1990s and focused on Israeli migrants residing in Los Angeles.²⁵ Gold argues that many of the previous studies of Israeli migrants are outdated, or at least do not reflect recent developments. Although Gold also found that the majority of migrants still define themselves as Israelis, he argues that earlier descriptions of the migrants' community as alienated, fragmented, and unorganized is no longer accurate, since, in the last few years Israeli migrants have created a pro-Israeli political lobby, networks for Israeli business people, Hebrew language schools, branches of the *Tzofim* [Israeli scouts], and the like. Also, assumptions of an absence of links between Israeli migrants and the Jewish-American community are no longer accurate.

According to Gold, the difference between previous studies on Israeli migrants and his research is due to changes in the relations between the migrants' community and Israel. Beginning in the late 1980s, the attitude of Israeli officials has begun to shift from one of public hostility to a policy

of outreach. This change may be attributed to the decline in the prominence of Zionist ideology in Israel, or to the realization that insulting migrants will not encourage their return. At any rate, the practical consequences of this attitudinal shift have been the opening of channels of communication between Israeli officials and the migrants through the establishment of “Israeli open houses” sponsored by Israel’s delegations, and the development of such programs as *Chetz Vakeshe*, in which children of migrants spend the summer in Israel in *Gadna* [a paramilitary youth organization] camps.²⁶

Finally, the growing institutionalization of the Israeli community can also be attributed to the dilemmas the migrants are facing with regard to the upbringing of their children. While the migrants themselves grew up in Israel and thus feel a direct and natural connection with the country, their children, who are growing up in the U.S., generally define themselves as Americans. The fear that those children would completely assimilate into American society led to a demand for the creation of new educational systems that would strengthen their Jewish and Israeli values.

STUDYING *ISRAEL SHELANU*: MAJOR THEMES

The fundamental goal of this study is to explore the ways in which *Israel Shelanu* reflected and shaped the self-perceptions of Israeli migrants residing in the U.S. It is evident from earlier studies that the key to understanding the migrants’ self-perceptions lies in their definition of their relations with Israel and the Zionist ethos. It is also clear that these self-perceptions developed through an ongoing negotiation, or rather struggle, with official Israeli policies. Finally, the studies show us that these processes have evolved over time, influencing different sectors of the migrants’ community in varied ways.

In order to understand how the self-perceptions of migrants were manifested and discussed in *Israel Shelanu*, it is necessary to investigate the ways in which the newspaper addressed the question of Israeli migration to the U.S, the migrants’ national and ethnic identity, and the development of the migrants’ community. In order to operationalize these large-scale questions, I focused my research on those journalistic items that refer to Israelis migrating to the U.S., Israeli migrants returning to Israel, and Jewish-Americans migrating to Israel. The detailed analysis of this data dwells on the main themes of the items, their depiction of the phenomenon of migration to and from the U.S., the manner in which the items describe

the people who migrate to and from the U.S., the main metaphors used in reference to the U.S. and Israel, and all the references to the Israeli community in the U.S.—its importance, its character, and its institutions. In order to investigate the changes in references to these themes over the years, I sampled *Israel Shelanu's* issues at three points in time: the newspaper's first year (September 1979 to September 1980), its eighth year (January 1986 to January 1987), and the final year of its existence (July 1997 to July 1998).

FIRST YEAR'S ISSUES

In its first year of publication (1979–1980), *Israel Shelanu* usually contained around 40 pages, and its price was 50 cents per issue. A typical issue included the following sections: hard news stories that mostly dealt with events taking place in Israel; commentaries about those events; an editorial; a weekly interview (usually with an Israeli official); feature stories (usually depicting Israeli migrants); a social column; a review of stories that appeared in Israeli newspapers; a housekeeping column; a youth section; a sports section, (mainly devoted to Israeli sports); and a classified ads section.

MIGRATION TO THE U.S.

The most salient feature of *Israel Shelanu's* coverage of Israeli migration during its first year of existence is its intensity and volume. All of the 1979–1980 issues include at least one reference to the subject, which appeared in one of the following ways: quoting official reports or statistics—e.g., “140 *yordim* in the Last Five Years” (4 April 1980, 7), “A Sharp Increase in the Number of Requests for American Visas” (20 June 1980, 4); references to specific migrants, mainly celebrities—e.g., “The Goalkeeper Manu Schwartz Is Now Living in New York” (21 March 1980, 1), “Asher Yadlin²⁷ *yarad* [descended] to New York” (15 August 1980, 1); quoting Israeli officials—e.g., “Dultzin²⁸: The *yordim* Are Slandering Israel (20 June 1980, 4); and the like.

References to the subject of migration are not limited to the hard news section, however. The following paragraph, for instance, appears in the newspaper's editorial:

A shocking news story appeared in last week's *Yedi'ot Aharonoth*. The story reports on a survey that was conducted by Haifa University and included 1,000 high school students from northern Israel. One of the sentences which the students were asked to comment upon was “when I grow up I would like

to live and work abroad.” The three possible answers were absolutely yes, maybe, absolutely no. The result of the survey showed that 45% of the boys and 30% of the girls answered “absolutely yes”! (11 July 1980, 6).

In other cases, references to the question of Israeli migration appear in articles that do not seem to be directly related to the subject; for instance, most of the feature stories about Israeli migrants include questions about the reasons that motivated them to come to the U.S. and their plans to return. Thus, Yitzhak Agami, an Israeli taxi driver, delivers the following monologue:

You ask me if the term “*yored*” insults me? What do you mean by insult? Jacob, one of our forefathers also went down to Egypt to make a living. “*Yored*” is just a word, and if you want to call me a *yored* you can do that, but what does it exactly mean? . . . You ask me if I’m planning to go back to Israel? Well, I have stopped planning, I’m taking it day by day . . . I believe that I will return, but I don’t know when . . . I just don’t want to make promises and later not fulfill them (10 September 1980, 14).

The first year issues of *Israel Shelanu* use various terms to describe the Israeli migrants, such as “Israeli public,” “Israelis residing in the U.S.,” “Israelis who are living in the Diaspora,” “Israelis who are spending time in the U.S.,” etc. In many cases, however, the newspaper adopts the common Zionist terminology of *olim* vs. *yordim*. In some cases, the term *yored* or *yordim* appear inside inverted commas, but even when the “charged” term is used with this reservation, the decision to choose it is, in my view, significant.

MIGRATION FROM THE U.S.

Several articles address the issue of Jewish-American migration to Israel: “Why Aren’t Jewish-Americans Making *Aliya* to Israel?” (30 May 1980, 20), “The Number of *Olim* from North America is Expected to Drop by 25%” (8 August 1980, 1), etc. A typical feature story depicts a young Jewish-American “millionaire’s son” who migrated to Israel:

Gary Lee-Hayman is an atypical figure in the Israeli human landscape. He is not only young, good-looking, rich, and successful, but he is also an idealist who decided to leave all of America’s indulgences and live in Arad. And this is in spite of the discouraging voices heard all over, even in north Tel Aviv (23 May 1980, 11).

Although many of *Israel Shelanu's* first-year articles emphasize the need to encourage Israeli migrants to return to Israel, I could locate only one feature story depicting an Israeli who actually did so. In this case, the description of the returning Israeli is very similar to the description of the Jewish-American migrant:

A Rabbi once argued that a Jew is not someone whose grandfather was Jewish, but rather a person whose grandchildren will be Jewish. When Yochanan Rosenhaim is asked, "why are you returning to Israel?" a question which nowadays could be considered a provocative one, he answers "because of him" and points toward Asaf, his one year old son who is crawling on the floor (14 September 1979, 17–18)

THE ISRAELI MIGRANTS' COMMUNITY

Israel Shelanu's first year issues include reports of "Israeli life" in the U.S., primarily in the social column, which usually address non-formal events such as performances of visiting Israeli singers, or programs organized by Israeli officials. There is very little mention of institutional activities initiated by the migrants. Most of the articles and feature stories that depict Israelis living in the U.S. refer to them as individuals frequently struggling with the anonymity and isolation of American society. One typical item of this kind is a feature story (28 March 1980, 30) that borrows its title from the well-known question appearing in the Passover *Hagadah*, "How is this night different from all other nights?" In the article, four young Israelis, "who are now living in the U.S. and thus are forced to celebrate Passover far away from their immediate families," are asked about their holiday plans. In another article (8 August 1980, 22–23), which bears the title "What is a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a 'Bad' City Like New York?" three young, single Israeli women talk about living alone and dating in New York.

As mentioned, when Israeli migrants are defined as a group, it is usually through references to their absence from Israel. In one interesting case, an article (14 September 1979, 9) discussing the relations between Israeli migrants and American Jewry, defines the migrants as "the 13th tribe." This is a clear reference to the ancient biblical story about the ten lost tribes, and the writer warns that, unless the young children of the migrants learn about their Jewish heritage, "a whole Israeli tribe may vanish beyond the American Sambatyon."²⁹

In sum, the overall perception of the Israeli migration phenomenon in *Israel Shelanu's* first year fits the official Israeli perception; that is, that migration from Israel is a national problem that threatens the existence of

the Jewish State. This is reinforced through the weekly's presentation of Israel and the U.S. as two contrasting ways of life: while the U.S. represents "materialism," Israel represents "spirituality"; while the U.S. is "body," Israel is "soul"; while the U.S. is "atomism" and "individualism," Israel is "community" and "family"; and while the U.S. is "detachment," Israel is "belonging."

These findings suggest that *Israel Shelanu*, at least in its first year of publication, constructed images of migrants and migration that stigmatized its own readers, denied their moral right to live in the U.S., and thus, by extension, also denied the newspaper's right to exist. I argue that this inherent paradox can be resolved by considering some tactics used by *Israel Shelanu* to ease this tension; that is, the newspaper employed several practices that enabled it to fulfill the seemingly impossible task of serving a community that denies its own right to exist.

The first tactic to resolve this tension was to broaden the definition of "Israeliness." As explained earlier, although Israeli migrants were residing in the U.S., many of them declined then (and still do) to define themselves as Americans, or even as migrants. There was thus a need to formulate new definitions that reintroduced the migrants into the Israeli collective. So, for instance, the suggested solution to the problem caused by the absence of Israeli migrants from the Israeli political sphere was to change the current law and give migrants the right to vote in Israeli elections. The public dispute surrounding this initiative of *Israel Shelanu* reveals the migrants' need to distinguish among subcultures within the Israeli Diaspora. Hence the newspaper suggested that only those who still held Israeli passports be allowed to vote. The headline (16 January 1981, 2) that reported this initiative declared that the migrants were "Citizens without the Right to Choose," and an editorial (20 February 1981, 3) declared that "Temporary Stay is not *Yerida*." Thus, the migrants were broken into subgroups: those who still cared about Israel (i.e., who still carried a passport and declared an intention to go back) were still an integral part of Israeli society, while the others were to be labeled *yordim*.

The second tactic for resolving the identity paradox may be defined as sharing the guilt. In most cases, the guilt was to be shared mainly with American Jewry. Thus several articles appearing in *Israel Shelanu's* first year claimed that the Israeli government was applying a double moral standard when it demanded that Israeli migrants return home while not requiring the same from American Jews—for example, an article (4 April 1980, 13) that bears the title "Jews are Following the Sun to California" concluded that "while the [American] Jews who are looking for the sun, are not willing

to do that in the Middle East, Israelis such as Shlomo Karni prefer the sun in California rather than Tel-Aviv's sun." Another method of sharing the guilt was practiced when reporting about Israeli officials—especially those sent to the U.S. to promote *aliyah*—who chose to stay in America. For instance, this kind of criticism, which attempted to reveal official hypocrisy, was targeted at Shlomo Goren, Israel's Chief Rabbi at the time, who declined to meet *yordim* while visiting in New York, but stayed at his daughter's house in Queens, where she had been living for many years since she left Israel (21 March 1980, 16).

The final tactic used by the newspaper was a systematic distinction between the private and public aspects of the migration phenomenon; that is, the "denial situation" was reflected in *Israel Shelanu's* first year through a distinction between migration as a national problem and migrants as individuals. While, on the political-declarative level, the newspaper denounced the phenomenon in accordance with the official Israeli line, it did not condemn individual immigrants, but rather identified or sympathized with them. For instance, while *Israel Shelanu's* first year issues repeatedly described Israeli migration to the U.S. as a Zionist failure, they also described, mainly through feature stories, migration narratives of Israelis who were striving to succeed in America: an Israeli school headmaster in New Mexico (28 March 1980, 17), a former pop group member living in Texas (28 March 1980, 9), and an aspiring singer hoping to record her first album in New York (29 August 1980, 32–33). Although most of the Israelis interviewed talked about their longings for Israel and about the superficiality of American life, the portrayal of their hopes of achieving the American dream provided the readers with images they could identify with. Other areas through which this "private sphere" was constructed were columns that assisted migrants with practical problems, such as getting a "green card," withdrawing their money from Israeli banks, and the personal ads that reflected and served the "Israeli economy" in the U.S.

One representative example that was related to the last two tactics described above appeared in an article about *Kinneret*, a Jewish-Israeli elementary school in New York. The reporter described the unique situation in this school in which Israeli migrants and American Jewish pupils studied together without any problems, and added:

The question of the *yordim* is not an essential problem in *Kinneret*, and the subject is discussed in class every time a student mentions it. The Jewish students openly ask the Israeli students why they are here [New York] and the Israeli students wonder why the Jewish students haven't yet made *aliyah*

to Israel. Both sides discuss the issue and in the end come to the logical conclusion that every one of them has personal reasons for living here (11 July 1980, 25).

This revealing segment manifested both the need to share the guilt with American Jews, and the claim that immigration was due to “personal reasons.” And as such reasons are always personal, the migrants could appease their public objection to the phenomenon by identifying with the individual circumstances.

EIGHTH YEAR'S ISSUES

In 1986–1987, its eighth year of publication, *Israel Shelanu* contained around 70 pages, plus a West Coast supplement, and its price per issue was 75 cents in New York, one dollar in California, and 1.25 dollars in all other states. A typical issue included: a news section dealing mainly with events taking place in Israel; an editorial; feature stories, usually depicting Israeli migrants; a social column; a commentary column dealing with varied American issues; a youth column; a review of articles that appeared in Israeli newspapers; a review of TV shows that were aired on Israeli TV; and a classified ads section.

MIGRATING TO THE U.S.

The question of Israeli migration to the U.S. was widely discussed in the issues published in *Israel Shelanu's* eighth year. Many references to the subject appear in the form of hard news coverage of official reports or statistics; i.e., “1985 Was Record Low Year in *Aliyah* and Record High in *Yerida*” (10 January 1986, 1); “The Big Mystery: How Many *Yordim* Are Living in the U.S.?” (31 January 1986, 31); “Yitzhak Rabin: ‘I still strongly believe that the *yordim* are ‘the leftovers of weaklings’” (30 May 1986, 1); “The Kibbutzniks Don’t Want to Return [to Israel] (14 November 1986, 27).

In general, the 1986 issues continued to reflect the official Israeli attitude toward migration, but examples of a different view also began to emerge. To begin with, there was some acknowledgment that Israeli attitudes toward the migrants were beginning to change. For instance, one editorial claimed:

It seems as though there has been a dramatic shift in the feelings in Israel toward the subject of *yerida* in the last decade. Things that were once completely unacceptable are becoming more acceptable, and you can sometimes

hear Israelis talking about this shift in public. Others are still too afraid to express those views out loud, but they also believe that there is a need to accept *yerida* as a part of reality . . . the Israeli attitude toward the migrants has to change so it becomes similar to the attitude of other countries toward their [migrating] citizens. No more cutting off and denunciation, but rather a strengthening of ties (19 December 1986, 3).

A similar tendency may be seen in articles that criticized discriminatory Israeli policies toward migrants. While the first year's issues also featured critical articles, these were targeted at the Israeli government's unsuccessful attempts to lure the migrants back home. By contrast, the issues from the paper's eighth year presented new kinds of criticisms that did not assume an identity of interests between the migrants and the state of Israel. For instance, *Israel Shelanu* extensively covered a precedent-setting lawsuit filed by an Israeli migrant who was fired from her job in the World Zionist Federation because of her migrant status. "The trial," argues the writer, "created a historical precedent: for the first time, an American-Zionist organization which is de facto a branch of an Israeli organization was put on trial" (6 June 1986, 31).

Another sign of the changing perceptions regarding migration to the U.S. may be seen in *Israel Shelanu's* extensive coverage of migrant success stories. While the typical portrayal of migrants in the *Israel Shelanu's* first year depicted them as struggling and striving, the eighth-year issues presented several examples of migrants who had achieved the American dream, such as an Israeli architect who played a key role in the planning of Manhattan's landscape (14 February 1986, 31) and a successful Israeli real estate dealer (27 June 1986, 14). The most symbolic article, however, featured an Israeli engineer who was responsible for renovations to the Statue of Liberty:

Did the original builders of the statue ever dream that an Israeli-born engineer would take care of their "lady"? It's hard to believe. But it is no secret that this nation of migrants absorbed a lot of Israelis, and just like tens of millions of other migrants there are a lot of Israelis who belong to the huge group of "Lady Liberty's" admirers (4 November 1986, 34).

MIGRATION FROM THE U.S.

The 1986 issues included extensive coverage of the migration of Jewish Americans to Israel and the return of Israeli migrants. The subject of

Jewish-American migration was addressed primarily by emphasizing the failure to increase the number of *olim*. A typical article reported on a speech given by Benjamin Netanyahu at Yeshiva University:

Netanyahu told the audience that only 10% of the university graduates made *aliya* and that more of them should do so. The speech was received by the audience with warm applause, and many of the students who came to the ceremony with their parents turned to them and said: “you see, we need to make *aliya*!” Many of the parents blushed with shame (13 June 1986, 8).

THE MIGRANTS’ COMMUNITY

Most of the articles about the migrant community in the U.S. continued to address informal events. An interesting exception is an article about a Brooklyn-based psychological help center that specialized in dealing with mental problems caused by migration from Israel (5 December 1986, 27). The problems described by the specialists who worked in the center seem to match those of the “permanent sojourner” who suffers from feelings of shame and guilt. To assuage their feeling that they fled the battlefield in the middle of a war, these migrants refused to acknowledge the fact of their migration.

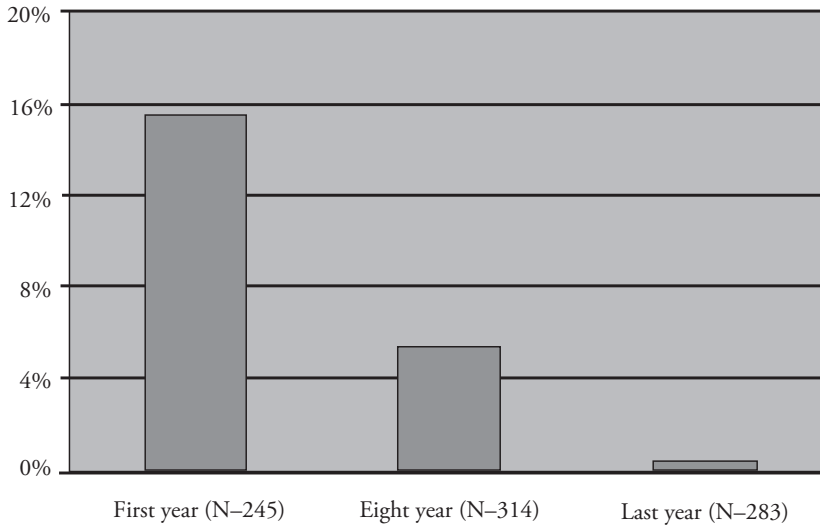
In conclusion, the 1986 issues reflected continuation and change. On one hand, *Israel Shelanu* continued to discuss the phenomenon of Israeli migration and framed the subject through a distinctly Zionist perspective. On the other hand, there were indications of a growing acknowledgment by the migrants of their status as migrants, of the existence of a migrant community, and of the special needs of that community.

TWENTIETH YEAR’S ISSUES

In its final year of publication (1997–1998), *Israel Shelanu* appeared in two parts—a news section, typically containing some 50 pages, and a supplement containing another 40 or so pages. The price per issue was one dollar in New York and California and two dollars in all other states. The newspaper included the following sections: a news section, dealing mainly with events taking place in Israel, plus some coverage of American events; an editorial; feature stories, usually depicting Israeli migrants; a social column; a column on American taxes; a column about the American stock exchange; an American TV column; a column commenting upon the coverage of Israel by the American media; and a classified ads section.

MIGRATING TO THE U.S.

The most salient finding in this category was the almost complete absence of any discussion of the subject of migration. The following graph presents the percentage of front-page items addressing migration from or to Israel out of the total number of front-page items in each of the three sampled years. Items were counted as relevant if they addressed the phenomenon of migration from/to Israel, or mentioned the fact that an individual or group of people immigrated from/to Israel.³⁰



Percentage of front-page items dealing with migration from/to Israel.

As can be seen in the graph, the front-pages of *Israel Shelanu's* last year issues included only one reference (0.04% of the total number of front page items) to migration from/to Israel in comparison to the extensive coverage of the topic in its first and eighth year. The newspaper did, of course cover Israelis who were residing in the U.S., but I found few references to the phenomenon of migration, or to the act of migration. Also, the terms *yored* and *yerida* were seldom mentioned in the final year's issues. Migrants were typically called "Israelis," "Israelis living in the U.S.," etc., while there is no use of the term "Israeli-Americans." Thus, the migrants were still defined through their absence from Israel, but in a way that neutralized any possible stigma. Feature stories that depicted migrants, such as "Hillary Clinton's Favorite Fashion Designer" (20 November 1997, 4–5), described

the circumstances that brought the migrant to the U.S., but did not include questions about his or her return to Israel. Fashion designer Eli Tahari's migration was described as follows:

After his discharge from the army he [Tahari] worked for some time in the Sinai desert . . . but he had always thought that there is a place in the world where life could be better, a place where he could pursue his dreams.

This description was very different from the classic Zionist perception of migrants as deserters. It even differed from the narratives, common in the newspaper's earlier years, that portrayed the migrants arriving in the U.S. almost by accident and with no intention of remaining. The portrayal of the migrant who dreams of a better life far away from his home seems to fit traditional migration narratives more than the Israeli case.

The only consistent reference to the issue of migration in the twentieth-year issues was made in a weekly column written by an Israeli lawyer who advised fellow migrants on legal issues. The column was entitled *Hagira*,³¹ a neutral and unmarked term for migration, and focused on such issues as changes in the migration laws and how to dress for interviews with immigration officials. The addition of such features as a weekly report on the American stock exchange and an American TV column similarly symbolized the shift in the newspaper's orientation. While *Israel Shelanu's* first and eighth-year issues also included TV columns, these reviewed only shows airing in Israel.

MIGRATION FROM THE U.S.

There were few references to the subject of migration to Israel in *Israel Shelanu's* final year. A two-part article (2 January 1998, 4; 9 January 1998, 13), entitled "*Dash* [regards] from Israel," advised returning and visiting migrants on issues such as renewing their Israeli driver's license, renting apartments in Israel, and so on.

THE ISRAELI MIGRANTS' COMMUNITY

In its final year, *Israel Shelanu* featured extensive coverage of institutional events. One such article described an "Israeli Weekend" (2 May 1998, 4–5) sponsored by *Israel Shelanu*, an annual event at which hundreds of migrant families gathered in a hotel, watched Israeli artists perform, participated in social activities, and heard lectures dealing with the dangers of assimilation and the importance of Jewish education. The Israeli consul was a guest speaker at the 1998 event, and throughout the weekend the migrants were

asked to donate money to promote Jewish education. Another article (13 November 1997, 4–5) described a meeting between representatives of *The Israeli Spirit*, an Israeli philanthropic organization, and members of “the Israeli community” in the U.S. The Israeli guests urged the migrants to donate money to Israeli causes, but also to support the needy members of their community in the U.S. They did not challenge the migrants to return to Israel; on the contrary, one of the Israeli speakers told the migrants, “you decided to live here and it is your right to do so.”

In conclusion, the final year’s issues of *Israel Shelanu* reflected a vision of a community that had ceased to share the burdens of guilt and shame. Indeed, as noted earlier, the most salient finding was the absence of such references in these issues. In its twentieth and last year of publication, *Israel Shelanu* did not treat migration as a moral problem, but rather as a functional complication caused by migration laws. There were no discussions of the need to return to Israel, and there was no reference to the implications of migration for Israel’s future. There were, on the other hand, indications of the strengthened institutional aspects of the migrant community, along with a growing acceptance of this institutionalization by Israeli officials. This shift was accompanied by an increasing convergence between the migrants’ community and the Jewish-American community, since both faced the same problems of endowing Jewish (or Israeli) values to future generations and expressed their identification with Israel through moral and financial support rather than through migration or return to Israel.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that, in its first year of publication, *Israel Shelanu*’s coverage of migration to and from the U.S. accorded with official Israeli attitudes toward migration. At the same time that *Israel Shelanu* criticized the phenomenon of migration, however, it also used several tactics to legitimize migrants as individuals. In order to decode this duality, we should consider the aforementioned concept of the “permanent sojourner,” which delineates the coexistence of declarative intentions of going back to Israel with day-to-day activities that contradict these intentions. I would argue that *Israel Shelanu*’s first year issues reflect the public dimension of the personal “permanent sojourner” rift; that is, the newspaper mirrored the migrants’ inner conflicts, while at the same time provided a mechanism through which the community and its individual members could come to

terms with the crisis. By creating a separation between the personal and the declarative levels, the newspaper offered migrants a feasible solution to their conflicted state of existence.

The eighth and final years of publication show a gradual decline in the treatment of migration as a problem coupled with a gradual increase in the coverage of successful migrants and institutional activities. This change reflects the collective shift of the migrant community from “permanent sojourner” to “settler” status—or rather, a shift from a community in denial to a “normal” migrant community. By offering new themes and interpretive approaches, *Israel Shelanu* again reflected social changes and offered its readers images that helped them to construct this new reality.

In the larger context of migration studies, the case study of *Israel Shelanu* can expand our understanding of the functions that migrants’ media fulfill, because the example of *Israel Shelanu* stretches the experience of serving contrasting functions to its limits. Israel, the homeland of the migrants, defines itself through the “negation of the Diaspora.” By constructing an image of the Israeli migrant that could serve its readers, *Israel Shelanu* fulfilled a contradictory function: it strengthened the migrants’ sense of belonging to a collective that rejected them both as individual members and as a group.

NOTES

*I wish to thank Tamar Katriel, Barbie Zelizer, and Joseph Turow for their comments on previous versions of this article. An earlier version of the article was presented at the Association for Israel Studies, Washington DC, May 2001. Research for the article was conducted at the Middle Eastern reading room of the Library of Congress.

1. Moshe Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances: Israeli Emigrants in New York* (Ithaca, NY, 1988) 6.

2. Sally M. Miller, “Introduction,” in Sally M. Miller (ed), *The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook* (New York, 1987) xi–xxii.

3. Robert E. Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (New York, 1922).

4. Daniel Dayan, “Particularistic Media and Diasporic Communications,” in Tamar Liebes and James Curran (eds), *Media, Ritual and Identity* (London, 1998) 103–13.

5. Tamar Katriel, “Between the Promised Land and the Land of Promise: Israeli Emigration and Israeli Identity,” in Ian S. Lustick and Barry Rubin (eds), *Critical Essays on Israeli Society, Religion, and Government* (Albany, NY, 1991) 93–108.

6. Both a former reporter for the newspaper and the chairperson of *Yedi'ot Abaronoth's* enterprises in North America attributed the closing of *Israel Shelanu* to the growing availability of Israeli-based newspapers, mainly *Yedi'ot Abaronoth* in the U.S. In the last few years, all Israeli-based dailies have drastically improved their availability through more efficient distribution systems and by printing in the U.S. some or all of the journalistic material sent from Israel.

7. *HaDoar*, another veteran Hebrew-written U.S.-based publication (established in 1924) deals mainly with literary issues.

8. See p. 139 in Benny Avni, "Keeping in Touch," in Ya'acov Haelyon (ed), *Yearbook of the Association of Tel-Aviv Journalists* (Tel-Aviv, 1993) 138–44.

9. In 1995, Shmueli was ordered by an Israeli court to pay NIS 300,000 to the *Itim* news agency because of *Israel Shelanu's* unauthorized use of the agency's reports. In 2000, Shmueli was ordered by an American court to compensate *Ha'aretz* and *Ma'ariv* because of *Israel Shelanu's* unauthorized use of their reports. I would argue that this does not compromise my research, since most of those stolen articles dealt with Israeli political events, and thus were not discussed in this paper. In cases where a few of the sample articles were not originally written by *Israel Shelanu's* reporters, I would claim that those articles should be addressed as the equivalents of wire-service items published in newspapers; this is to say, that the selection and presentation of these items by the newspaper still reflect meaningful journalistic practices.

10. See "Leaving the Land of Zion," *Time* (30 June 1980) 32; Sheldon Teitelbaum, "Ethnic Weeklies Grow Stronger with News from Homeland," *Los Angeles Times* (20 August 1987) 28; Avni, "Keeping in Touch," 141.

11. See, e.g., Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances*, 207; p. 206 in Arthur A. Goren, "The Jewish Press," in Miller (ed), *The Ethnic Press in the United States*, 203–28.

12. I was unable to analyze the issues of *Israel Shelanu's* tenth (median) year due to missing data.

13. Yinon Cohen and Yitchak Haberfeld, "The Number of Israeli Immigrants in the United States in 1990," *Demography*, 34(2) (1997) 199–213.

14. See, e.g., Deborah Kass and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1967 to the Present: Israelis and Others," in Marshall Sklare (ed), *Understanding American Jewry* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1982) 272–94; Zvi Sobel, *Migrants from the Promised Land* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986).

15. Yinon Cohen, *War and Social Integration: The Effects of the Israeli-Arab Conflict on Jewish Emigration from Israel* (Tel-Aviv, Golda Meir Institute for Social and Labor Research, 1987).

16. Naama Sabar, *Kibbutzniks in the Diaspora* (Albany, NY, 2000).

17. Yinon Cohen, "Education, Occupation and Income—Israeli and European Immigrants in the United States," *Sociology and Social Research*, 72 (1988) 173–6.

18. Mirra Rosental and Charles Auerbach, "Cultural and Social Assimilation of Israeli Immigrants in the United States," *International Migration Review*, 99 (1992) 982–91.

19. Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances*.

20. See, e.g., Josef Korazim, "Raising Children in Ambivalent Immigrant Families: Israelis in New York," *Children and Youth Service Review*, 7 (1985) 353–62; Sobel, *Migrants From the Promised Land*; Kass and Lipset, *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1967 to the Present*.

21. Shokeid, *Children of Circumstances*, 10.

22. Natan Uriely, "Rhetorical Ethnicity of Permanent Sojourners: The Case of Israeli Immigrants in the Chicago Area," *International Sociology*, 9 (1994) 431–45.

23. Uriely based this terminology on Paul Chan Pang's study of the patterns of an association of Chinese laundrymen in Chicago; see "The Sojourner," *American Journal of Sociology*, July (1952) 34–44.

24. Uriely, "Rhetorical Ethnicity of Permanent Sojourners," 441.

25. Steve Gold, "Israeli Immigrants in the United States: The Question of Community," *Qualitative Sociology*, 17 (1994) 325–63; Steve Gold, "Patterns of Economic Cooperation among Israeli Immigrants in Los Angeles," *International Migration Review*, 28 (1994) 111–35; Steve Gold, "Israelis Settle in Los Angeles," *Society*, 34 (1997) 66–7; Steve Gold, "Transnationalism and Vocabularies of Motive in International Migration: The Case of Israelis in the United States," *Sociological Perspectives*, 40 (1997) 409–19.

26. Tanchum Gourevitch, the publisher of *Yedi'ot Aharonoth's* weekly American supplement addressed the consequences of these changes in the following way: "before I came here [the U.S.] *Yedi'ot* resented the idea of developing an anchor for the *yordim*. The change in this approach was caused by the change in the atmosphere in Israel . . . Once the migrants were no longer viewed as 'the leftovers of weaklings' the competition over their readership began"; in Avni, "Keeping in Touch," 139. Similar references to the changing relations between Israeli immigrants and the Israeli establishment could be found in *Yedi'ot Aharonoth's* journalistic project entitled "Not Leftovers, Not Weaklings" (4 October 1998) 16–23.

27. A former minister in the Labor cabinet who was tried and convicted for white-collar offenses.

28. The Chairman of the Jewish Agency at the time.

29. The mythical river beyond which the ten tribes disappeared.

30. In the first year, I added the later 1980 issues (from October onward) and the first 6 issues of 1981 in order to compensate for missing 1979 issues.

31. Similarly, *Yedi'ot Aharonoth's* American supplement currently features a weekly column entitled "One migrant per week" that details the life story of one Israeli migrant residing in the U.S.