

# JEWISH MIGRATION TO THE METROPOLISES OF EUROPE, 1848-1918

## A Comparative Perspective

Institute for Economic and Social History, University of Vienna (Vienna)

Date: t.b.a., December 2009.

Location: Institute for Economic and Social History, University of Vienna.

Deadline: February 15, 2009.

Please send abstracts of 500-700 words to [ingo.haar@univie.ac.at](mailto:ingo.haar@univie.ac.at).

The organisers will assume travel and conference costs; the publication of the results is planned.

Since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and increasingly after 1880/90, several million Jews migrated from the formerly divided Poland, from Rumania and Russia to Western Europe or, alternatively, to North and South America. Today, Jewish migration and integration history is regarded as trans-national and European history with global implications.

In recent years, terms such as ›acculturation‹ and ›assimilation‹ have increasingly been recognised as political-historical constructs based on certain social-technical premises. The migrants are attributed *per se* with a need to adapt to the ›majority society‹ without any claim on free spaces that could provide for their own socio-cultural differences. Thus Jewish migration history has frequently been written in two different ways: On the one hand, as a history of consecutive practices of exclusion and expulsion, against which particularly Jewish organisations resisted with greater or lesser degrees of success, and, on the other, as a history of successful integration. The relevant literature treats both aspects, whose interactions have rarely been examined, as being typical of the Jewish experience. This detachment from general migration studies has led to a situation where new concepts such as disintegration and exclusion, segregation, acquisition and defiance have remained almost entirely unexamined and unused. The complex field of interlocking inclusion and exclusion mechanisms – directed against migrants in general and against specific socially, ethnically and religiously defined groups – has rarely been illuminated.

At the same time, the conference will build upon sociological reflections on the ambivalence of modernity (Zygmunt Baumann/Michel Foucault) and on the dialectics of social justice and recognition (Nancy Fraser/Judith Butler/Seyla Benhabib). It will give credence to the impulses emerging from this corner and develop them further. After all, modernity holds out not only the promise of inclusion but also risks and exclusionary practices. This aspect plays an important role in the topic under discussion here since migration from East to West also represents a transfer from societies that were still under the sway of the ancien régime, and thus still in the throes of modernisation, into a part of Europe that was already divided into modern nation-states that regarded themselves as more or less ethnically homogeneous entities. In addition, modernism has in more recent times been understood as a process of continuous ›de-placement‹, which has been intersected by constant attempts at ›re-placement‹. These processes were largely focussed on the cities in the wake of a secular internal migration process. But at the same time, cities were places where the overwhelming majority of Jewish (and most other) migrants congregated. The contributions should thus examine the history of Jewish migration to the West as a multi-perspectival history of urban societies and their dynamic transformation within the give and take of exclusion and inclusion, integration and segregation, attribution and identity.

In the process, it will be necessary to challenge a dichotomy that is frequently implicit in Jewish historiography: On the one hand, European Jews *per se* have been regarded as a mobile, educated, socially climbing population group that was linked to the rise of capitalism and was deeply involved in the urbanisation process. This directly contradicts the notion that the new nation-states more or less excluded Jews emigrating from ›the East‹ by integrating them into homogenisation and/or assimilation processes. As cultures transformed, these practices were increasingly interpreted from an essentialist or race biology perspective. In fact, after Jews began migrating to the metropolises of Central Europe starting in 1848 and particularly after 1880/90, the ›New Nationalism‹ of the 1880s increasingly began attributing them with a role as outsiders, regardless of whether they migrated internally from the crisis areas on the periphery of Eastern Europe or arrived in the West due to pogroms.

The contributions should examine the following themes. Suggestions for papers that compare or relate Jewish migration experiences to those of other groups are particularly welcome:

1. How did the respective national constructs in the European metropolises impact Jewish migration and integration after 1860? This concerns not only the reactions of the

proponents of national community-building in politics and the public sphere to Jewish migration, but also the interaction between the already ›assimilated‹ communities and the new migrants from the ›East‹. The focus is not only on the formation of associations in the field of Jewish sociable and welfare organisations along with educational, colonisation and settlement associations, but also conflicts and conflict management throughout all social groups.

2. How did Jewish self-organisation function in labour and educational associations as well as in emigration agencies when, starting in 1880, the European nation-states were confronted by mass emigration from Eastern and Southeastern Europe before they had developed their own government instruments for the humanitarian regulation and cushioning of economic and forced migration? Who came together in these organisations and how was policy developed there? This refers to the Alliance Israélite and its trans-national fields of activity from a post-colonial perspective.
3. What defiance strategies did Jewish migrants from East-Central and Southeastern Europe develop in order to carve out their own urban spaces in the European cities? This refers to the formation of networks through associations and prayer houses. How did these institutions correspond to gender-specific opportunities for work, social mobility and political participation?
4. Did ›parallel‹ societies exist in the European metropolises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? If so, how and by whom were they constituted? How did specific residential areas, such as the ›Grätzl‹ or ›Pletzl‹, impact the inclusion and exclusion of migrants? Were these merely transit points or were they also places of lasting interest?
5. How did societies and milieus in the metropolises react to migration? This refers to the various practices of inclusion and exclusion across the spectrum of migration and immigration bans, all the way to the construction of a ›Jewish question‹. This simultaneously includes the reactive response in the form of Jewish nationalism.