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Managing mass migration. Jewish philanthropic organizations and Jewish mass migration from Eastern Europe, 1868/1869-1914

Tobias Brinkmann

Between the 1870s and the Great War more than two million Jews left Eastern Europe for the United States, while smaller groups settled in Britain, France and at other destinations such as Palestine, South Africa and Argentina. Few Jewish, Polish and other migrants from Eastern Europe were permitted to stay in Imperial Germany before 1914. But hundreds of thousands – most likely the large majority of the migrants – crossed through Germany on their way from the Eastern border to the big port cities Hamburg and Bremen, and to a lesser extent to Rotterdam, Antwerp and Le Havre. Until the mid-1920s, when the restrictive American legislation reduced the migration from Eastern Europe to a trickle, Germany was the most important transit country for migrants from the ‘East’, and the United States was the preferred destination for most migrants.

The following article seeks to explore a little studied aspect of this mass migration, which distinguishes the Jewish from the Polish and other transatlantic migrations: the role of Jewish philanthropic organisations in different countries, in particular in Germany but also in the United States, Great Britain, France, the Habsburg monarchy and the Russian Empire. Several Jewish organizations specifically supported migrants in need, negotiated with governments, officials and shipping companies, thus coordinating and to a limited degree even managing the migration. Important organizations were: The German chapters of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) and of the Independent Order of the B’nai B’rith, after the turn of the century, the Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden (HV), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the American Jewish Committee, and later the JOINT, the Berlin-based Emigdirect and other Jewish associations such as the Baron de Hirsch Fund and the Jewish Colonization Society. The motives of the organisations and their donors were far from uniform. Apart from genuine compassion, the self-interest of established

‘German Jewries’, concepts of ‘civilizing’ Jews in the East, and different political agendas – not least Zionism – played a role.¹

The relationships between Jewish philanthropy and the Jewish mass migration transcended national frameworks. That is one reason why detailed research in this field has been forthcoming only recently.² The focus so far, however, has been on Jewish ‘development policies’ towards distressed Jews in the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire and Palestine, as well as after the First World War in the Soviet Union – but not on the mass migration prior to World War One.³ Historians who have covered transnational Jewish philanthropic organisations tend to place them within their respective national framework.⁴

The expansion of the international Jewish philanthropy network in the second half of the nineteenth century raises the question how the Jews involved reconciled their national and transnational affiliations. Studying Jewish philanthropy beyond the nation state also provides a unique perspective on coordinated efforts that drew in state agencies and policy makers in different countries, commercial interests and private philanthropic initiatives – at the very time, when the international system underwent significant transformations. More importantly, several philanthropic Jewish organisations can be considered as trailblazers for the globally organized ‘non-governmental organisations’ (NGO’s) of the late twentieth century.

¹ The best overview remains: Mark Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety. The Story of Jewish Migration since 1800* (Philadelphia 1948).

² One exception is the Galveston project, attempts by leading American Jews to disperse arriving Jewish immigrants beyond New York, especially through the port of Galveston in Texas: Bernard Marinbach, *Galveston: Ellis Island of the West* (Albany, NY 1983).

³ Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington, IN 1990); Eli Bar Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen. Internationale jüdische Organisationen und die Europäisierung ‘rückständiger’ Juden* (Würzburg 2005); Jonathan L. Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land. Jewish Agriculture Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941* (New Haven 2005).

⁴ Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley 1998), 77-90; Michael Graetz, *The Jews in Nineteenth-Century France: From the French Revolution to the Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Stanford 1996).

Established Jews in the West and Jewish mass migration from the East

Why did Jews in the West generously support Jewish migrants from the East? And what was their agenda? In the second half of the nineteenth century most Western Jews were migrants from rural communities themselves, often in East Central Europe, who had only moved to growing cities in Western and Central Europe and in the United States shortly before and after the middle of the nineteenth century. Especially in the German states and in North America, these Jews displayed a high social mobility literally rising as a group from poverty to modest wealth in one generation and overcoming social marginality. This remarkable *Verbürgerlichung* or embourgeoisement has been traced to the specific concept of emancipation more imposed on than offered to Jews in the German states. The exchange of traditional Judaism for *Bildung* – the universal and inclusive Enlightenment ideal of constant self-education – and modern Judaism in one generation, also led to an increasing estrangement from Jews in Eastern Europe.⁵ Emancipated Jews regarded Jewishness increasingly as a religious identity perceiving Jews from the East as ‘Ostjuden’, as traditional, uneducated, ethnic and visible Jews – as the antithesis of modern and educated ‘German Jews’ in Central Europe, the United States, and to some extent even in Britain.⁶ In this period the term ‘German Jews’ did not refer primarily to geographic origin but more to a specific modern Jewish *cultural* identity that was closely connected to social mobility and universal principles. The term has also a related but distinctive layer, especially in the United States, which reflects the perspective of arriving Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. For them German Jews represented social status: overly assimilated and established Jews who were embarrassed by the encounter with the Jewish immigrant masses and tried to shape them in their mould.⁷

⁵ George L. Mosse, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati/Bloomington 1985); Simone Lässig, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum: Kulturelles Kapital und sozialer Aufstieg im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2004).

⁶ Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1800-1923* (Madison 1982) 5.

⁷ Tobias Brinkmann, ‘Jews, Germans, or Americans? German-Jewish Immigrants in the nineteenth-century United States’ in: Krista O’Donnell *et al* eds, *The Heimat Abroad. The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor 2005) 111-140.

In numerical terms modernizing Jews in the West constituted small groups, in their home states but also in relation to the dispersed Jewish populations across Eastern Europe and in the Ottoman Empire (including the Maghreb), the two leading centres of the Jewish Diaspora. The 'rediscovery' in a different light of these 'other' Jews whose legal and social status was insecure, was part of the Western Jewish modernisation process in mid-nineteenth century Europe. Modern Western Jews felt responsible for the fate of Jews in the East. They wanted to protect them against discrimination and persecution, not least by turning poor and traditional Eastern and Oriental Jews into modern and productive model citizens of their respective home states. The rise of a transnational Jewish public sphere around 1840 played an important role in this rediscovery process. In Jewish weekly newspapers published across the West, Jewish leaders debated how they could best support and transform the distressed and (in their perspective) 'backward' Jews in the East. This approach towards 'other' Jews had without a doubt a strong paternalistic bend.⁸

Jewish emancipation and modernisation, the attainment of full citizenship of nation states, the rise of a Jewish public sphere, and the rediscovery of 'other' Jews provided the background for the establishment of transnational Jewish philanthropic organisations. These were founded in the second half of the nineteenth century by Jews in France (Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860), Britain (Anglo-Jewish Association, 1871), and Germany (Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden, 1901). These organisations supported not Jews at home, but in Eastern Europe and the Orient who overwhelmingly did not enjoy full civil rights and were economically deprived. The Israelitische Allianz in the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1873), and several American-Jewish organisations such as the Independent Order of the B'nai B'rith (1843) or the National Council of Jewish Women (1893) also supported 'other' Jews but within the borders of their respective states, i.e. bourgeois Jews in Vienna supported poor Jews in the Eastern parts of the Empire, established American Jews did that for recent immigrants from Europe.⁹

⁸ Bar-Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen*; Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair. 'Ritual Murder', Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, UK 1990).

⁹ Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children. Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley 2001) 195-203; Faith Rogow, *Gone to Another Meeting: The National Council of Jewish Women 1893-1993* (Tuscaloosa 1993); Deborah Dash Moore, *B'nai B'rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany 1981).

The organisations focused especially on two areas: 1) the education and ‘Westernisation’ of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, primarily through a network of schools. Spreading of British or French ‘Civilisation’ or German ‘Kultur’ was often partly aligned with colonial and political interests, depending on the organisation; 2) the building of considerable support networks for Jews who were leaving Eastern Europe.

Up to 1890 the sources corroborate the still dominant view of philanthropy organized by established Jews on behalf of Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe: Western Jews pursued an ambivalent strategy characterised by self-interest and compassion. They regarded migrating ‘Ostjuden’ as an acute embarrassment and threat to their own recently gained status.¹⁰ After the middle of the nineteenth century caring for Jewish strangers ceased to be a local matter. Jewish emancipation in Central and Western Europe was only one facet of the expanding sphere of the (nation-) state. With the emancipation local Jewish residents became citizens of nation-states. Non-resident Jewish strangers on the other hand who wanted to settle down were (at least in the German case) categorized as unwanted aliens facing expulsion and rough treatment – if they were not transmigrants. And indeed, in Imperial Germany and to a lesser extent also in other Western countries anti-Semitic agitators instrumentalized negative and distorted images of Eastern European Jews massively to attack established Jews themselves as ‘strangers’ (or worse).¹¹ This was one reason why apart from genuine compassion Western Jews did their utmost to prevent Jewish migrants from accepting support from non-Jewish philanthropic associations, and they publicly accepted their responsibility for taking care of poor Jewish strangers.

Jewish philanthropy towards Jews from Eastern Europe in the West was aimed at their visibility. Jews in Eastern Europe were discouraged from leaving in the first place. Had they already crossed the land or sea border and were asking for support, Jewish philanthropies sent them further West or back home as quickly as possible. Did these options not apply (especially in the United States), migrants were shaped according to the self-image of the established Jews. Male migrants were to become productive artisans and

¹⁰ Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers. East European Jews in Imperial Germany*, New York (Oxford 1987); Bar-Chen, *Weder Asiaten noch Orientalen*; Tobias Brinkmann, *Von der Gemeinde zur Community: Jüdische Einwanderer in Chicago 1840-1900* (Osnabrück 2002) 347-379.

¹¹ Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers*, 58-79.

farmers, and women efficient household managers or housemaids. Americanisation and productivisation targeted visibility and public perception. The conditions the established Jewish sponsors attached to support were frequently neither acceptable nor intelligible for the recipients. Yet distressed Jews often had little choice and – to use an extreme example from America – had to move to a farm colony in North Dakota. Most of these colonies lasted only for a short time and Jewish farming schemes did not correspond with the needs of labour markets. But for Jewish sponsors the sheer existence of a few sturdy Jewish immigrant farmers was a strong argument against anti-Semitic agitation that denied Jews as such any claim to ‘normality’.¹²

Poor Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe were not an entirely new phenomenon in Central and Western Europe. Since the seventeenth century Western Jewish communities from Amsterdam to Hamburg and Frankfurt had cared for but also occasionally rejected poor Jewish strangers and refugees from the East. But their numbers remained limited. At the very moment when Jews in Western and Central Europe were emancipated, became full citizens of their respective states, and rose on the social ladder around the middle of the nineteenth century, the economic and social situation for Jewish populations in the Russian Empire, in Southeastern Europe, and in Austrian ruled Galicia worsened considerably. In 1868/69 the first Jewish migration crisis ensued. Following widespread starvation and the outbreak of disease in the Kovno and Suwalki provinces hundreds of distressed Jews crossed the border to Germany seeking the support of Jewish communities in the Prussian cities Königsberg, Memel and Stettin. The wave of many distressed migrants overwhelmed these communities and they appealed for help through the Jewish press. Other Jewish communities in the German states quickly responded, collecting funds and organising local support committees. In the leading German-Jewish newspaper, the weekly *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (AZ), different solutions were discussed. Some authors of letters to the editor called for an emancipation of Jews in the Russian Empire and for simultaneous economic development schemes. Others were more pessimistic and saw ‘America’ as the only way

¹² Brinkmann, *Von der Gemeinde zur Community*, 367-368; Sanford Rikoon, ‘Jewish Farm Settlements in America’s Heartland’ in: idem ed., *Rachel Calof’s Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains* (Bloomington, IN 1995) 105-134.

out.¹³ Ludwig Phillipson, the *AZ* editor and a respected rabbi, coordinated the support. In October 1869 he convened a conference in Berlin and invited the leadership of the Paris based Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU). The AIU, founded only a few years earlier, was the first major Jewish aid organisation representing Jewish philanthropy and interests on a translocal level. In the 1868/69 migration crisis the AIU helped with the coordination linking the Jewish communities in Prussia with American Jewish representatives. Eventually a few hundred Jews were dispatched across the Atlantic. Most migrants however were judged to be not ‘worthy,’ i.e. not able to support themselves in America and probably returned to their home villages and towns. The situational coordination strategy involving different Jewish aid organisations across borders to support Jewish migrants in times of crisis was resurrected in 1881/1882. After a wave of pogroms in Ukraine and a rumour campaign that promised untold riches to migrants after arrival in America thousands of Jews were stranded in the Austro-Russian border town of Brody. Again the AIU coordinated the support, networking dozens of local, national and transnational Jewish aid committees and organisations. This time many more Jews were sent to America.¹⁴

During the 1880s the out-migration of Jews but also Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenians, Hungarians, ethnic Germans and others from Eastern Europe steadily increased. Large numbers of Jews left for the United States and to a much lesser extent for Western countries. In addition many Jews – this is often overlooked – were internal migrants, moving from the Russian Pale of Settlement to the Polish provinces, especially to growing cities such as Warsaw and Łódz, and from Austrian ruled Galicia to Vienna, Budapest and Prague. Very poor Jews usually could not afford to leave the wider vicinity of their home towns. Others did not make it across the border. The terms poverty and wealth of course betray a wide spectrum, depending on the social position of the viewer. Even a little could be a lot: specific knowledge, contacts and skills represented sufficient cultural capital for high social mobility. Most transatlantic migrants from Eastern Europe (Jewish and non-Jewish) had sparse but sufficient funds, relatively precise information, belonged to small networks, and did neither ask for nor require support by private aid organisations. Yet after 1890 against the

¹³ *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* (Leipzig) [hereafter: *AZ*], (2 February 1869) 90-91; *AZ*, (1 June 1869) 425-427.

¹⁴ *AZ* (12 October 1869) 820; for an overview see: Wischnitzer, *To Dwell in Safety*, 3-97.

background of strongly rising migration across the Atlantic these transmigrants faced much more thorough checks than before and aid organisations who acted on the behalf of Jewish migrants had to rethink their strategies.

Mass migration and restrictions

During the 1880s Germany, long a huge net-exporter of migrants, especially to the United States, became a country of immigration. While Germans and Poles from within Germany found work in the rapidly growing industrial centres on the Ruhr, in Upper Silesia and in Berlin, especially Poles from the Russian Empire were seeking seasonal employment as agricultural labourers. It was relatively easy to walk across the long green border from the Russian and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire into Germany, but only very few were able to obtain a legal right to permanent residence (and only in rare cases citizenship). The German state, especially Prussia, explicitly refused to accept immigrants. During the 1880s the Prussian government expelled more than 30.000 ‘Poles’ (probably half of them were Jewish). These mass expulsions reflect the strong influence of anti-immigrant forces with strong anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic undertones.¹⁵ The distinction between Germans and (unwanted) aliens – both relatively new categories – however was also connected with the emerging German welfare state. Non-German aliens were seen as a threat to the welfare state.¹⁶ Germany devised a thorough work permit and rotation scheme for labour migrants from Poland. Thus it was hard for illegal migrants to find work or remain undetected.¹⁷ With such measures Germany ‘successfully’ contained large-scale immigration before 1914. Transmigrants, however, were more

¹⁵ Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers*, 60-63; see also: Klaus J. Bade, *Migration in European History* (Oxford 2003); Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen. Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen 2001).

¹⁶ This point requires more research; see: Leo Lucassen, ‘A Many-Headed Monster: The Evolution of the Passport System in the Netherlands and Germany in the Long Nineteenth Century’ in: John Torpey and Jane Capland eds, *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices in the Modern World* (Princeton 2001) 235-255, esp. 253.; Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen*, 225-227.

¹⁷ Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland* (München 2001) 14-44.

welcome – not only because they did not stay but also because the business of transmigration yielded huge profits for German transport companies.



Picture 1: Former Auswandererbahnhof (emigrant train station) Ruhleben.

In 1890 the United States implemented stricter control measures which led to the creation of a federal immigration bureaucracy and reception (or screening) facilities in port cities. In the following years, ‘unwanted’ migrants, mostly poor and ill persons, were returned in increasing numbers. Consequently the large steamship companies, which had to cover the passage costs for such involuntary return migrants, refused to take ‘certain’ people on board. The Russian authorities often declined to readmit ‘their’ subjects. In November 1891 the German authorities opened a control station for transmigrants in Ruhleben, a small train station in a Western suburb of Berlin, only a few weeks before Ellis Island went into operation. This was hardly a coincidence. After 1891 German border officials turned back ‘suspicious’ migrants at the Eastern border, or before they reached the ports on the North Sea. The severe controls in Germany formed part of an American system of ‘remote control’, designed to keep unwanted migrants away from America’s shores.¹⁸ The United States were not alone in pursuing such policies. In the second half of the nineteenth century long distance

¹⁸ Aristide R. Zolberg, ‘The Great Wall Against China: Responses to the First Immigration Crisis, 1885-1925’ in: Leo and Jan Lucassen eds, *Migration, Migration History, History* (Berne 1997) 291-315, here 308; Richard Evans, *Death in Hamburg. Society and Politics in the Cholera Years 1830-1910* (Oxford 1987).

migration increased around the globe largely as a consequence of integrating markets and cheaper and more efficient modes of transportation.¹⁹ The arrival of large numbers of racially and culturally ‘strange’ migrants in the West led to calls for immigration restrictions. In Britain discussions leading to the 1905 Alien’s Act can be traced back to the early 1890s.²⁰

This increasingly dense control network deprived Eastern European (and also Southern European and Asian) migrants of agency. Sometimes they were able to literally circumvent this system, especially in the early days after 1890. But the closer they came to America, the fewer loopholes were available and usually unwanted migrants could not appeal a decision over their rejection at any point of the journey. In contrast to migrants from most European states, Poles, Jews, ethnic Germans and other migrants from the Russian Empire could expect little if any protection from their government in St. Petersburg. Most did not have a clearly defined citizen status and had to leave illegally without identity papers because it was impossible or too expensive to obtain passports. The same applied to Jews from Rumania. Jews and Poles who hailed from the Austro-Hungarian Empire were in a more advantageous position. The Vienna government did protest against maltreatment of its citizens in Germany. Consequently they were not subjected to arbitrary mass expulsions but not exempt from controls along the German border – if they crossed legally.²¹ Nevertheless, at the very moment most Eastern (and Southern) Europeans left their home village, they entered an extra-legal space where state authorities, corrupt officials, criminals in various guises, and the private steamship companies had enormous leverage over their fate. They could be returned without any explanation at any time, or worse. Only when the migrants reached France or Britain, or left Ellis Island and arrived in Manhattan or New Jersey, they had firm ground under their feet in a legal sense.

The outbreak of cholera in Central Russia, Hamburg, and in New York in 1892 led to even more stringent controls. For a few weeks the United States interrupted the transatlantic migration almost completely,

¹⁹ Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham, NC 2002) 331-405.

²⁰ Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines. The Politics of Immigration Control in America* (Princeton 2002) 87-149; Colin Holmes, *John Bull’s Island. Immigration and British Society* (London 1988).

²¹ Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers*, 62-63.

stranding thousands of migrants.²² In the mid-1890s the Prussian authorities build a network of control stations along the Eastern border and at or near large railway hubs. These control stations were operated and fully financed by the two German steamship companies, the North German Lloyd and the HAPAG. The companies also covered the costs of the German border officials, usually local policemen. The hugely profitable business of migration formed the basis of this public-private partnership. The managers of the steamship lines had a genuine interest in channelling unsuspecting migrants as efficiently as possible from border to port. They guaranteed to cover all costs for migrants who were rejected by the Americans. In return the German authorities made it more difficult for migrants with tickets for non-German steamship companies to cross the border. If they could not prove sufficient funds for a potential return journey, transmigrants could not enter Germany. On the one hand this practice unfairly favoured the German steamship companies, with devastating consequences for migrants who were judged to have the 'wrong' ticket. On the other hand, not all foreign steamship companies did provide the German authorities with guarantees to cover for the cost of an eventual return journey.²³ Nevertheless, it remained often unclear why migrants were rejected on the Eastern border. There can be little doubt that Lloyd and HAPAG tried to increase their already dominant market share, and Jewish aid organisations could not ignore the often nebulous practices on the Eastern border.

The *Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden* and transmigration

Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe differed in several respects from other migrants. They belonged to a non-territorial Diaspora, originating in regions and states far apart across Eastern and southeastern Europe. Jewish

²² Howard Markel, *Quarantine! East European Jewish Immigrants and the New York City Epidemics of 1892* (Baltimore 1997) 28-74; Evans, *Death in Hamburg*.

²³ Michael Just, *Ost- und südosteuropäische Amerikawanderung: 1881-1914. Transitprobleme in Deutschland und Aufnahme in den Vereinigten Staaten* (Stuttgart 1988) 79; for a rare description of the arbitrary practices on the German-Russian border from the migrant's perspective see: Mary Antin, *From Plotzke to Boston*. With a Foreword by Israel Zangwill (Boston 1899) 41-43.

remigration rates were relatively low (although not negligible).²⁴ In several Eastern European states, especially in Rumania and in the Russian Empire, the legal and social status of Jews was precarious. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Jews faced violent persecution, especially in the Ukraine. Detailed studies by John Klier and others have revealed only scant evidence for a direct connection between the Jewish ‘Emigration Mania’ and the Ukrainian pogroms in the early 1880s; even between 1903 and 1905 when the violence increased the main causes driving the mass migration remained socio-economic. Yet at the time, Jews and the general public in the West did not question the connection between anti-Jewish violence and strong migration.²⁵ More important was that Jews played no (or almost no) role in the plans of movements in Eastern Europe striving for national independence, except as the opposing ‘other.’ Several leading figures of national movements in Eastern Europe openly promoted anti-Semitic ideas. And although leading Western Jews had successfully tied Rumanian independence in 1878 to a promise of full emancipation of Rumanian Jews, the Bukarest government ignored such commitments, explicitly pursuing anti-Jewish policies. After 1878 the situation of Jews in Rumania worsened considerably.²⁶ In other words, the situation for many Jews in the Empires was already difficult, but the spectre of independent nation states was even more worrying. Rising Jewish support for Socialism, autonomy and Zionism across Eastern Europe – and mass out-migration shortly before the turn of the century reflect this crisis.²⁷

Around the turn of the century, Jewish migration from Eastern Europe was reaching record levels, the long term outlook for Jews in Eastern Europe was bleak, and especially in Britain and the United States immigration restrictions were discussed. Up to this point the AIU had played the leading role in coordinating aid for Jews in the East. But

²⁴ Jonathan Sarna, ‘The Myth of No Return. The History of Jewish Return Migration to Eastern Europe 1881–1914’, *American Jewish History* 71 (1981) 256–268.

²⁵ John D. Klier, ‘Emigration Mania in Late-Imperial Russia: Legend and Reality’ in: Aubrey Newman and Stephen W. Massil eds, *Patterns of Emigration, 1850-1914* (London 1996) 21–30; John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza eds, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, UK 1992).

²⁶ Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge, UK 2004) 5–38.

²⁷ David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe 1789-1939* (Oxford 1999) 346–475; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton 2004) 204–216.

compared with Germany and the United States the Jewish populations of France and Britain were relatively small (albeit growing as a result of Eastern European immigration) and concentrated in Paris and London. Throughout the 1880s American Jews had warned Jews in Europe not to send Jewish migrants across the Atlantic. Local American Jewish communities did care for distressed immigrants, but in a few cases during the early 1880s they sent poor Jewish migrants back to Europe.²⁸ By 1900, however, leading American Jews publicly accepted America's key role as a safe haven for Eastern European Jews and their responsibility for the immigrants acknowledging that the post-1880-immigrants (who already outnumbered the Jews who had lived in the United States up to 1880) would determine the future of Jewish life in America.²⁹ Since the majority of Jewish immigrants settled in New York and to a lesser extent in Chicago and Philadelphia, established American Jews promoted ambitious dispersion schemes, directing some immigrants to the Texas entrepôt Galveston.³⁰

Like their established American brethren and sisters, Jews in Germany had not yet organized a central philanthropic association on the national level. Compared with Jews in Britain, France and the United States their social status was more fragile; they had been emancipated much later, and were a visible minority. Jews in Germany were also more dispersed, had strong regional and local bonds, and belonged to several large local Jewish communities which made the establishment of a national organisation difficult. The power of strong local communities also explains why American Jews established national organisations relatively late and why the influence of New York based Jewish associations remained limited. Interestingly, Jews in Germany made up the bulk of the AIU membership but without being involved in decision making by the Paris leaders.³¹

By 1900 a long term strategy ensuring the protection of Jews in the East had become a matter of urgency for established Western Jews. Instead of coordinating support in critical moments like 1868/1869 or 1881/1882, professional institutions were needed, which could act quickly to protect very large numbers of migrants. The expansion of the nation-state, its

²⁸ Brinkmann, *Von der Gemeinde zur Community*, 347-382.

²⁹ Esther Panitz, 'In Defense of the Jewish Immigrant (1891-1924)', *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 55 (1965) 57-97; Harry Barnard, *The Forging of an American Jew. The Life and Times of Judge Julian Mack* (New York 1974) 82.

³⁰ Marinbach, *Galveston*.

³¹ Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*, 115-135.

presence on national borders and its definition authority over who constituted an unwanted alien complicated the situation for Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe and at the same time for Western Jews. Supporting ‘other’ potentially threatening Jews and closely collaborating with Jews in other potentially ‘suspicious’ countries required a fine balance act to avoid doubts over compromising national loyalties. In this situation, German Jews had a special responsibility given their relative size and wealth, apart from Germany’s crucial role as the major transit country.

The establishment of the Hilfsverein der Deutschen Juden (Aid Association of the German Jews – HV) in 1901 symbolizes a turning point. The HV and large American Jewish organisations moved into the central position that the AIU had occupied in earlier decades, reflecting the increasing weight and influence of these large and relatively wealthy Jewish communities. While American Jews obviously devoted much of their efforts to arriving Jewish migrants, several leaders like Jacob Schiff looked across the Atlantic already during the 1890s to assess how they could support Jews in Eastern Europe.³²

The HV leaders did indeed cautiously balance their national loyalties with their transnational activities, following in the footsteps of the AIU. Like the AIU the HV combined (German) colonial interests with its work on behalf of poor Jews in Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire and the Levant.³³ However, more important and hardly researched is the role of the HV in the coordination of Jewish transmigration. The HV leaders did not have much time to plan a comprehensive strategy. In April 1903, one of the most notorious anti-Jewish pogroms occurred in Kischinow which made headlines around the world. Anti-Jewish violence culminated again in late 1905 when Russia was in the midst of political turmoil. In this year the British parliament passed the Aliens Act. Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe was a major factor behind the bill. When bringing the Aliens Act to the floor in 1904 Prime Minister Arthur James Balfour stressed that ‘the’ Jews ‘remained a people apart, and not merely held a religion differing from the vast majority of their fellow countrymen, but only intermarried among themselves.’ The Liberal opposition managed to mitigate the restrictions envisioned by the Conservative government, and eventually the act was not

³² Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 51.

³³ Moshe Rinott, ‘Capitulations: The Case of the German-Jewish Hilfsverein schools in Palestine, 1901-1914’ in: D. Kushner ed., *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation* (Leiden/Jerusalem 1986) 294-301.

strictly enforced before the First World War. Nevertheless, the Aliens Act made it possible to exclude (poor Jewish) immigrants.³⁴ Thus it constituted an alarming precedent for the leaders of Jewish aid organisations. Between 1904 and 1906 the Prussian government expelled thousands of Russian Jews from Berlin, returning them across the Russian border without paying any attention to the political chaos and the persecution of Jews in the Russian Empire.³⁵

Following Kischinow the HV convened a conference in Berlin in June 1903. The representatives of Jewish philanthropic associations from France, Britain, the United States and the Austro-Hungarian Empire resolved 'not only not to support emigration (of Jews from the Russian Empire), but to repel it with all means.'³⁶ All delegates knew that Jewish out-migration would hardly decrease following the pogrom and against the background of the difficult political and socio-economic circumstances in the Russian Empire. And of course they could not stem the tide but at best improve the conditions for the migrants. Nevertheless, the explicit statement of what the organisations did not do – repel the migrants – astonishes. The reason was quite simple. The American authorities were increasingly suspicious of groups of poor migrants who were 'dumped' on its shores rather than moving on their own account. Thus the Jewish aid organisations had to take a cautious approach in their public statements. It was perfectly legal to improve the conditions for migrants and act on their behalf, but providing direct material support to relatively poor migrants was an awkward matter.³⁷

The activities of the HV in one year illustrate a new approach. In 1904 alone at least 100.000 Jews migrated to the United States, most via Germany. The HV annual report for 1903 carried extensive and illustrated reports of the Kischinow pogrom – hardly an indication of repelling Jewish migrants, nor of lacking empathy with Eastern European Jews but rather an indication for the existential threat for Jewish life in the Russian Empire.³⁸ The direct support of Jewish migrants, as it had been practiced in earlier

³⁴ Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1650 to 2000* (Berkeley 2002) 160; Charles Glass, 'The Mandate Years. Colonialism and the Creation of Israel', *The Guardian* (31 May 2001).

³⁵ Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers*, 48, 61; *AZ*, (13 April 1906) 170.

³⁶ *AZ*, (3 July 1903) 325.

³⁷ 9. *Geschäftsbericht (1910) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1911) 140.

³⁸ 2. *Geschäftsbericht (1903) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1904).

decades, was now of secondary interest. The number of migrants was far too high. Much more relevant was the provision of legal *protection* to Jewish migrants outlined above.

In 1904 the HV deputy leader, author and philanthropist Paul Nathan, travelled to Russia. He visited a number of Jewish communities and met with representatives of Russian Jewish organisations, even with several government officials. Nathan then undertook a separate trip along the German-Russian border. Upon his return he 'leaked' some revealing observations to the general press. He singled out the powerful owner of the HAPAG steamship company, Albert Ballin, making him personally responsible for the arbitrary treatment of migrants in the border control stations. Ballin was one of the most successful businessmen in Imperial Germany; he had built the HAPAG into the world's largest steamship company. But Ballin was also Jewish and had occasionally faced anti-Semitic abuse. Not surprisingly the attack by a Jewish philanthropic organisation on a Jewish businessman in the general public had an immediate effect. An AIU representative had already negotiated with the HAPAG regarding the border control stations – without reaching any concessions. But now Ballin caved in. He immediately arranged a meeting with Nathan and HV president James Simon. The HAPAG director gave accreditation to the HV aid committees on the Eastern border, allowing them access to the control stations; and he promised to end the arbitrary practice of rejecting migrants who had tickets by Dutch or British steamship companies. The HAPAG also began to provide Kosher meals to passengers on its transatlantic steamships.³⁹ Suffice to say, non-Jewish migrants also profited from the more transparent handling procedures on the border.

The press campaign illustrates a new more aggressive and clever strategy to improve the situation of the migrants. In 1904 the HV convened another large international conference in Frankfurt to draw up the principles of its protection work:

³⁹ 3. *Geschäftsbericht (1904) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1905) 30-32, 41; *AZ*, (28 October 1904) 529; *Im Deutschen Reich (Berlin)* (November 1904) 616-617; on anti-Semitic attacks against Ballin: *Im Deutschen Reich* (August 1899) 448; for further criticism of Ballin and the handling of transmigrants on the Eastern border see *Vorwärts (Berlin)* (1 May 1905), (19 August 1905).

- reliable and continuous information of (potential) migrants before departure – through the Jewish press and specific pamphlets in Yiddish and Russian;
- language courses before departure;
- protection of migrants at sensitive points of the journey (border, train stations, ports) against authorities, transport companies and criminals – through the constant and visible presence of Jewish aid organisations;
- negotiations with transport companies to reduce the cost of passage;
- negotiations with governments of the ‘transit countries’ (especially Germany) to achieve ‘firm and tolerant norms’ regarding the treatment of migrants;
- networking with Jewish aid organisations in the destination countries to guarantee a social net for migrants;
- researching new potential destination countries;
- and the establishment of a ‘kind of Jewish emigration office’, with branches in the countries of origin, transit and destination.⁴⁰

In 1904 the HV established the Central Bureau for Jewish Emigration under its wings which emerged as a prominent clearing house for issues connected with the Jewish mass migration from Eastern Europe before the First World War.

Beyond 1904

In its first annual report the ‘Central Bureau’ outlined its role. Jews in the Russian Empire and Rumania were described as de facto stateless because they could not resort to any form of state ‘protection.’ Therefore, the transnational ‘Jewish collectivity’ represented by the Jewish aid associations had ‘to do what usually is the task of the state’.⁴¹ This remarkable assessment demonstrates the transformation of Western Jewish philanthropy on behalf of Jewish migrants from and Jewish residents in Eastern Europe. Direct material support, productivisation and the efficient handling of transmigration were still relevant. But soon after the turn of the century transnational Jewish associations, in particular the HV, regarded themselves as guardians of de facto stateless Jewish migrants, and indirectly

⁴⁰ 3. *Geschäftsbericht (1904) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1905) 34-35.

⁴¹ 4. *Geschäftsbericht (1905) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1906) 79.

of the threatened Jewish populations of the East. A specifically Jewish 'problem' was transforming into a question of guaranteeing human rights and protecting persecuted minorities.

The representatives of Jewish aid organisations negotiated with and (if necessary) publicly criticized governments and transport companies, collected and published information in different languages, advised Jewish migrants, provided shelters and kitchens at train stations, offered financial assistance, and networked with local Jewish aid organisations. Especially after 1900, transnational Jewish aid organisations linked the specific interests of Jews in need with universal humanitarian principles. They put much emphasis on transparency and publicity. They had to raise funds from private donors and to publicly explain and justify their expenditures. In short, transnational Jewish aid organisations were important forerunners of contemporary transnational NGOs.

The annual reports of the 'Central Bureau' before 1914 are not – as one could reasonably expect – filled with assessments on the situation of Jews in Eastern Europe, but rather pessimistic reports on the immigration debate in the United States. In 1910 the HV described the scenario of America closing its doors to Jewish immigrants as 'such a terrible catastrophe, that it will overshadow the persecutions and pogroms (in Russia).'⁴² The First World War and the post-1918 military conflicts throughout Eastern and Central Europe interrupted the East-West migration. Just when Jewish migration to the West was increasing again, the United States did close its doors to almost all citizens of Eastern European states in 1921 (access was restricted even more in 1924). The American restrictions were indeed a very decisive factor in bringing the Jewish mass migration from Eastern Europe to an end – as the HV had feared before 1914. Other countries such as Argentina and even Britain also restricted immigration in or after 1918, albeit not as severely as the United States.⁴³

In this situation the HV but also several Eastern European and American Jewish organisations attempted to help tens of thousands of stranded and unwanted Jewish refugees and migrants. However, the loss of the 'American option' but more generally the crisis of the international system limited their possibilities. Post-war Berlin was of particular importance because of its location. It was a centre of activities to support

⁴² 9. *Geschäftsbericht (1910) des Hilfsvereins der deutschen Juden* (Berlin 1911) 140.

⁴³ Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted – European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York/Oxford 1985) 52-80.

Jewish migrants. It was no coincidence that a number of pioneering proto-scholars in the field of migration studies, most with an Eastern European Jewish background lived and worked in Berlin during the 1920s: Alexander and Eugen Kulischer, Joseph Schechtmann, Mark Wischnitzer, Jacob Lestschinsky, Arthur Ruppin, Joseph Roth, Leo Motzkin und Simon Dubnow. Wischnitzer, who wrote what is still the best overview of Jewish migrations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and was himself a migrant from the Russian Empires, acted as one of the leading HV managers during the 1920s.⁴⁴

The nation-state paradigm but also accepted periodisations overshadow the history of Jewish transmigrants, who crossed or were stranded in between national borders – before 1914 but also and in particular after 1914. With the collapse of the large Eastern European Empires Jews became officially stateless in huge numbers. Obtaining the citizenship of one of the successor states of the Empires could be difficult or impossible. The restrictive American legislation did not reserve a quota for stateless persons. The post-1918 borders which literally divided Europe fenced out Jews as a trans-territorial people. Years before 1933, Jewish migrants and refugees in Europe increasingly faced borders which they could not cross. The story of stateless Jewish migrants – and attempts by Jewish aid organisations to support them – did not end in 1933 but rather with the Holocaust and its aftermath. After 1933 Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe without papers had hardly a chance of escaping Nazi persecution in Central and Western Europe. The migration of the few Jewish survivors after 1945 to Palestine/Israel, the United States, Australia and other countries constituted the sad epilogue of the Eastern European Jewish mass migration to the West.

⁴⁴ Karl Schlögel, *Berlin Ostbahnhof Europas: Russen und Deutsche in ihrem Jahrhundert* (Berlin 1998); Tobias Brinkmann, 'Topographien der Migration – Jüdische Durchwanderung in Berlin nach 1918' in: Dan Diner ed., *Synchrone Welten – Zeitenräume jüdischer Geschichte* (Göttingen 2005) 175-198.