Wandering Jews
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A long-standing topic of research, the study of Jewish migration, has recently revealed new levels of growth and innovation. The increased visibility of diverse forms of migration on a global scale—from refugees and labor migrants to transnational entrepreneurs—has contributed to enhanced interest in the subject.

This book brings attention to compelling examples of new scholarship in this field. While available space precludes an exhaustive evaluation of the reasons underlying this development, this introduction reviews three fundamental factors that have contributed to the growth and intellectual expansion in the study of Jewish migration. First is the expansion and broadening of migration studies in general that has occurred in recent decades. Second is the increase in financial and institutional support for Jewish studies. Finally, a third reason for the field’s growth is ongoing instances of Jewish migration—both within and across national borders—that compel immigrant-aid organizations and migration scholars to learn about and assist their peripatetic landsmen.

A number of leading scholars have reflected on the transformation of migration studies, noting that the topic is currently examined by a wider range of academic disciplines than ever before.1 The creation of diverse and innovative approaches to the topic has been widely celebrated.2 As a case in point, the authors of a recent article devoted to mapping migration studies conclude that the field has finally “come of age.”3

Observers of migration studies assert that even as the field has expanded and diversified, it has managed to become more rigorous, more international
in focus, and more firmly grounded in theory. Moreover, this scholarly endeavor has maintained a significant degree of integration and continuity across disciplines, nations, and world regions. As a consequence, its methods and findings are increasingly applied to a broad range of concerns. Migration research informs policy making by governments, NGOs and immigrant-aid organizations. It also counters the assertions of anti-immigrant movements.\(^4\)

Given the recent upturn in interest and support for studies of migration, a variety of disciplinary associations have established sections, committees, publications, conferences, awards, and other endeavors devoted to the study of migration. This reflects a significant transformation in the field's foci over a relatively short time. As the authors of *What Is Migration History?* point out,\(^5\) until the 1970s, the study of migration was fixed almost exclusively on Western Europe and the US, was androcentric, elitist, overwhelmingly devoted to workforce issues, and indifferent to migrants' interpretations of their own experiences. Subjects such as stratification, slavery, refugees, forced migration, and re-migration were rejected as suitable topics for migration research.

The fact that a significant fraction of contemporary migration scholars are themselves migrants, has helped move migration studies from a narrowly framed undertaking to one now much more ambitious and wider in scope. By and large, scholars who have a personal or familial connection to migration are much better equipped to understand the complex realities encountered by migrants than those with little immediate connection to the process. As a consequence of historical and social factors, Jews have been very well represented among those who have developed the ways through which migration research has been conducted and how knowledge resulting from this examination is put to use.\(^6\)

Historian Tobias Brinkmann\(^7\) has advanced our understanding of how Jewish scholars and activists have fashioned the study of migration. Drawing on his research on the Jewish population of Chicago during the nineteenth century, Brinkmann demonstrated how Jewish communal organizations' efforts to assist recently arrived co-ethnics led to the development of many of the frameworks and methods that are now used in ethnic, migration and community studies.

Arriving in Chicago in the 1840s, Jews from Bavaria recognized the social and economic needs encountered by members of their community as they sought to adjust to life in the US. Drawing upon pre-migration traditions, they formed self-help associations like the United Hebrew Relief Association (UHRA) to provide struggling co-religionists with social support.
Through a detailed examination of UHRA’s annual reports, Brinkmann discovered that in order to accomplish its goals more efficiently, the organization shifted its structure from that of a voluntary association to a professional body. “By the 1880s, professional social workers and administrators were replacing volunteers. The communal representatives visited immigrant families in their homes to study poverty and offer advice about hygiene and education.” Such a change, Brinkmann asserts, “correlated with a shift from stereotypical perceptions of migrants to more differentiated assessments of social problems.” In so doing, Jewish immigrant organizations involved in communal self-help developed the approaches that are used by a wide range of migration scholars today. As Brinkman notes:

The first detailed studies about immigrants in industrializing cities, so-called social surveys, were compiled by social workers in settlements in London, New York, and Chicago after 1880. When pioneering urban sociologists like Louis Wirth and other students of the Chicago school . . . began to conduct field research in Chicago’s immigrant neighborhoods in the 1920s, they acknowledged the work of communal organizations in representing different immigrant groups and social settlements.

In order to record, document and apply practical information about Jewish immigrants and their resettlement, Jewish communal organizations, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), commissioned the writing of detailed studies about the experience of migrant Jews. For example, in 1943, the American Jewish Committee commissioned Mark Wischnitzer, himself a German Jewish immigrant with decades of experience assisting migrants in both Europe and the US, to compile a survey of Jewish migration as a reference to inform the resettlement of Jews in the US after WWII. According to Brinkmann, Wischnitzer’s book To Dwell in Safety remains the most comprehensive study of Jewish migration between 1800 and 1948.

Following Brinkmann’s description of the Jewish communal origins of migration studies, we see how an array of Jewish scholars and aid workers contributed in important ways to the growth, conceptual richness, and methodological advancement of the interdisciplinary study of migration.

At the same time, Brinkmann reminds us to recognize the significant contributions of members of other groups who documented the experience of their own and other migrant populations. Among these are Florian Znaniecki, Tamotsu Shibutani, Kian Kwan, W. E. B. DuBois, Alain Locke, Arthur Huff
Fauvet and Hanna Arendt. Immigrant scholars’ research on a broad range of communities laid the groundwork for contemporary inquiry in migration studies.

Aware of the enhanced interest in and endorsement of studies of migration, a growing number of scholars and students began to produce works in migration, Jewish studies, ethnic studies, and related topics. As E. Cohen, Brinkmann, and others contend, the growth in migration studies has yielded a productive exchange and cross fertilization of concepts, terminology, analytic models and methods between researchers concerned with a variety of groups. Finally, scholars interested in the application of recently developed approaches in migration scholarship have chosen to revisit established concepts and works in the field. Their systematic re-evaluation of classic studies helps contemporary scholars understand the origins of their fields’ approaches to research and analysis. In this way, scholars are able to apply contemporary perspectives to the investigation of historical communities and concerns.

A second significant reason for the expansion of Jewish migration studies is the availability of increased levels of financial and institutional support. Philanthropists, institutions of higher learning, academic associations, publishers, students, and audiences interested in works on migration have contributed much to the growth of Jewish migration studies. A sizeable fraction of this programming has been driven by the largess of Jewish donors. However, as Judith Baskin contends in her article “Jewish Studies in North American Colleges and Universities: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” “it is important to point out that there are positions and programs at institutions, both private and public, where external funding has not played a role.” Among these are University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the University at Albany, State University of New York and several other state-supported institutions. The allocation of funding directly from college and university budgets demonstrates that such institutions regard the field to be a fundamental component of higher learning.

This increase in resources has generated opportunities for training, employment and publication for scholars involved in Jewish studies generally and Jewish migration research in particular. The Association of Jewish Studies, which began in 1969 with forty-seven members, now has 1,800. The association’s website lists more than two hundred Jewish studies programs or departments and 230 endowed positions at North American colleges and universities. Data from the 2000–2001 National Jewish Population Study indicate that 40% of Jewish students take a Jewish studies course during their academic career. Reflecting the field’s broad appeal, a significant number of
students taking Jewish studies courses and majoring or minoring in Jewish studies are not Jewish.19

A third reason for the continued activity of scholars of Jewish migration is that Jewish communities persist in migrating—both within and across national borders. The documentation and analysis of on-going patterns of Jewish migration is important for both practical and scholarly reasons. Indicating Jews’ high level of recent involvement with international migration, Pew20 notes that while only 5% of Christians and 3% of Muslims globally have moved internationally during their lifetime, some 25% of all living Jews no longer reside in their country of birth.

Since the 1950s, Jewish migrants have continued their long record of migration to the US and other countries. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the largest migrant population was Russian-speaking Jews. They settled in Israel, the US, Canada, Australia, and Germany.21 Since the 1990s, Jewish migrants from France, Israel, Iran, Latin America, the Maghreb, Syria, Yemen, South Africa and Central Asia have settled in Israel, North America, Europe and other locations.22

As recent arrivals and bearers of cultural traditions relatively uncommon in their points of settlement, the ability (and for some, the level of interest) of these new migrants in integrating into the host population (Americanized Eastern European Jews) has been limited. Making matters even more complex, recent Jewish migrants’ arrival occurred during a time of increasing segmentation and diversity within local Jewish communities. New synagogues, Jewish associations and economic niches maintain disparate ways of life, forms of religious practice, cultural orientations, expressions of nationality, sexuality, politics, and other aspects of being.23 Faced with such challenges, Jewish, secular and public community agencies, youth programs, synagogues, and immigrant-aid organizations like HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) whose work has been informed by Jewish migration research, have aided in the resettlement of thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants in Israel, Europe, Australia, and North and South America.

In addition to documenting the needs, values and concerns of recent migrant populations, scholars devoted to Jewish migrants have created a significant body of research that affirms, contradicts and otherwise elaborates on customary understandings of Jewish migration and adaptation recorded in earlier studies.

In sum, the recent growth and diversity in studies of Jewish migration can be traced to transformations in the way that migration scholarship is
conducted, to increases in funding and institutional support for Jewish migration scholarship, and to the on-going migrations of Jewish people throughout the world.

The authors featured in *Wandering Jews* are leaders in the development of inventive scholarship on Jewish migration. The works of these seven scholars are divided into two categories. The first set of chapters addresses the experience of various Jewish groups settling in the United States and other countries. Laura Lamonic compares the experiences of Post-WWII Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Latin America and Israel living in the United States. Nahid Pirnazar examines the story of Iranian Jewish migration and subsequent acculturation to the United States.

Nir Cohen explores the experience of another contemporary Jewish migrant group—Israeli high-tech migrants—as he evaluates actions pursued by both the Israeli governmental and private sector organizations to encourage their re-migration. Lilach Lev Ari concludes the section by exploring the contexts encountered by three groups of Jewish migrants (Israelis, North Africans, and members of an Orthodox community) who have settled in lucrative but increasingly anti-Semitic Western European locations.

The second set of chapters explore Jewish responses to societal changes imposed by migration. Historian Gil Ribak presents a poignant analysis rooted in the historical perspective of the twenty-first century to reconstruct the evolution of Eastern European Jewish migrants’ views of Germans—from admiration to foreboding—during their travel from The Pale of Settlement to the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Libby Garland discusses Jewish Americans’ efforts to resettle Jewish refugees after WWII. Finally, Kirsten Fermaglich examines the experiences of Jewish academics and their families building lives and communities in East Lansing, Michigan, from the late 1960s to the present.

The topics of these seven chapters reflect considerable diversity in terms of location, historical period, theoretical and methodological approach, scale of analysis, population characteristics and academic discipline. At the same time, each embodies the energy and excitement that underlies the recent growth and creativity generated in this field. Drawing upon innovative and varied approaches, the volume’s authors advance the study of Jewish migration, and migration studies more generally.


5. Harzig and Hoerder with Gabaccia, What Is Migration History?


8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


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