Lilach Lev Ari

Contemporary Jewish Communities in Three European Cities
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Challenges of Integration, Acculturation and Ethnic Identity
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Preface

The majority of contemporary world Jewry resides in western countries, due to the West’s rather hospitable socioeconomic and political circumstances vis-à-vis Jewish presence. Jews in western nations constitute a privileged ethnic minority group. Culturally, professionally and economically they integrate well, even if they remain a distinct ethno-cultural group. However, as such, they are particularly vulnerable to attacks from the underprivileged, who direct their resentment against mainstream society towards Jews.

In the last few decades most European Jews can be defined as ‘native-born’ that perceive themselves as a distinct national group, which became a minority due to political and social changes in their homeland. Jewish immigrants in Europe comprise more than a quarter of the Jewish population. Jews world-wide prefer to live in large cities that provide opportunities for economic, social and cultural mobility. Within these cities many Jews tend to concentrate in neighborhoods that are appropriate to their socioeconomic status, provide nearby employment opportunities, facilitate social mobility and offer religious services and Jewish organizations.

More than half of French Jewry reside in Paris and almost all Belgian Jews dwell equally in the two largest cities in Belgium, Brussels and Antwerp. The three cities were chosen for study since they are geographically adjacent and can be considered as Francophone western countries. The cities are characterized by their ethnically diverse Jewish communities: Secular, religious, ultra-Orthodox, Ashkenazi (parents’ origin is from Europe or America), Sephardi (parents’ origin is from Africa or Asia), native-born and immigrant. Furthermore, Paris is a metropolis and a ‘world city,’ i.e. a global center of business, politics, culture and technology that has attracted for decades many Jewish migrants, particularly from the Middle East. Brussels is also a world city and serves as the center of the European Union. Due to lack of one homogeneous national Belgian population in the city, Brussels, as the center of the European Union, with its EU institutions is considered cosmopolitan, and attracts many migrants from all over the world, including Israel. Antwerp is unique due to its changing scope and structure of Jewish population, mainly owing to the growing ultra-Orthodox population. Antwerp is also internationally known for its diamond trade, a sector that has been dominated by the large Orthodox Jewish community in the city.

The three cities are somewhat similar in their culture (the usage of French is common, particularly in two of them), but also unique, as they belong to different nation states. They are also characterized by long standing Jewish history of dynamic interactions with local non-Jewish populations, both native-born

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and migrant, until the present day. All three cities have large and vibrant Jewish communities.

Whereas numerous studies focus upon Jews of the United States, both native-born and migrants, few studies have explored contemporary Jews in Europe. This book contributes to research by focusing on Jewish ethnic identity, integration and acculturation of both native-born and immigrants in three European cities. The need for research on West European Jews has become even more urgent today in view of the current wave of antisemitism, accompanied by numerous violent incidents, including barbaric murders. Evidently, Europe is facing an overall rise in racism and xenophobia. Jews in France and Belgium express increasing interest in immigrating to Israel or to other destinations.

The main contribution of the book is manifest in elaborating on theoretical terms such as minorities and their socio-cultural integration within the majority, community organizations, both formal and informal, religious or secular, ethnic identity and identification. In addition, the book presents analyses of challenges, strengths, vitality, dynamics and continuity of these three Jewish communities, including their native-born, short and long-term immigrants. Common traits as well as differences among the three communities are discussed according to three themes: 1) Integration, segregation and assimilation into the non-Jewish majority; 2) Jewish communal continuity and vitality; 3) Multiple ethnic identity and identification, as well as acculturation.

Furthermore, the usage of mixed methods analysis, quantitative and qualitative, enables the elaboration and explanation of several sociological terms that enhance the reader’s understanding of lives of minorities and immigrants in contemporary Western Europe. These terms are related to various dimensions of ethnic identity: Local (assimilative), transnational (with homeland) and diasporic. The book delineates patterns of social integration and acculturation versus segregation, as each group lives in a nation state with different cultures, languages and policies towards minorities and immigrants.

This comprehensive study in two geographically adjacent nation states, necessitated by rising antisemitism and the urge for a thorough, updated study of Jewish identity currently emerging in Europe, may therefore contribute to and enrich ongoing scientific and public discourse regarding similarity and difference between diversified Jewish communities. It will also promote further understanding of Jewish continuity and vitality as well as of social structures which maintain them within the larger non-Jewish host societies.

Accordingly, the potential audience for this book includes scholars of European Jewry in particular and in general, people interested in ethnic identity, integration and acculturation among minorities – both native-born and immigrants –
particularly in large cities. This book also provides data for policy makers regarding: 1) Europe-Israel relationship, from the Israeli and European-Jewish points of view; 2) Minority and majority relationship as well as native-born and immigrants’ integration from non-Jewish local or even national aspects; 3) Local community policy and possible cooperation of the three, aimed to strengthen the communities and increase their resilience. It may also serve as a textbook for the many Jewish studies programs in universities in Europe and around the world. The study also targets casual readers, especially Jews, concerned about contemporary Jewish communities, their resilience and strengths vis-à-vis new waves of antisemitism in general, and in Europe, in particular.

The empirical basis for this study includes data collected via closed-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews which were conducted during 2017 in the three cities in West Europe. In the course of research, I received assistance in contacting the research population from the Israeli Ministry of Absorption and from its representative organization (The Israeli House) in each city, as well as from local Jewish organizations. I requested local people involved in the community to distribute questionnaires to their Jewish relatives, friends and people in their social networks. The in-depth interviews were conducted primarily by me.

I would like to thank the Kantor Center at Tel Aviv University for enabling me to pursue this study and Oranim College, my home base for years, for its constant and significant support. I am grateful to my wonderful editor, Dr. Naomi Belotserkovsky for her great help throughout the writing process. Special thanks to my research assistants in each city, particularly to Dr. Efrat Tzadik, who helped me collect the questionnaires and translate some of the interviews. Special appreciation is due to the editorial team of De Gruyter Publishers for their patience and willingness to publish this book. Finally, and most importantly, my gratitude is extended to all the participants in this study, who spent their time either completing the questionnaires or participating in the interviews, thus giving me the opportunity to learn about their life experiences in their home cities in contemporary France and Belgium.
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Chapter 1
Introduction: Social Migration, Ethnic Identity, Socio-Cultural Integration and Acculturation of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

1.1 Social Migration: Definition and Theories

Human beings have been migrating since the dawn of history. People moved from place to place for different reasons: Economic, social and political (Castles and Miller, 2009). Migration and its socio-cultural ethnic and racial consequences are extremely influential regarding contemporary politics world-wide: “Never before have political leaders accorded such priority to migration concerns” (Castles et al., 2014: 317).

The United Nations defines international migrants as “persons who are either living in a country other than their country of birth or in a country other than their country of citizenship” (United Nations, 2020: 5). Furthermore, an international migrant has been defined as any person who has changed his or her country of usual residence, distinguishing between ‘short-term migrants’ (those who have changed their countries of usual residence for at least three months, but less than one year) and ‘long-term migrants’ (those who have done so for at least one year) (United Nations, 1998: 9–10). In this book I will refer to those who reside in the country less than 15 years as ‘short-term’ immigrants, whereas ‘long-term’ immigrants will be those who reside in host country more than 15 years. Terms of immigration were defined on the basis of Chiswick’s (1978) dichotomy. In addition, between 13 to 15 years after immigration, large portion of immigrants, particularly those who attained medium to high socio-economic status in their country of origin, achieve a socio-economic status similar both to their previous one and to that of a native-born. These findings are also confirmed in more recent studies among Israelis in the United States (Lev Ari, 2008; Rebhun and Lev Ari, 2010). Indeed, migration has been growing (Koser, 2010; Urry, 2007) to the point of becoming a major social problem, as is the case with many thousands of migrants seeking to enter Europe today. The United Nations’ figures point to a significant increase in the number of migrants each year.

Although preliminary estimates suggest that the pandemic (COVID-19) may have slowed down growth in numbers of international migrants by around two million by mid-2020, 27% less than the growth expected since mid-2019, still, in 2020, there were 281 million people living outside their country of origin. In comparison, two decades ago, in 2000, 173 million people emigrated

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world-wide. Currently, international migrants represent about 3.6% of world population. The largest number of international migrants resided in Europe, with a total of 87 million, whereas northern America hosted the second largest number of migrants, with almost 59 million. Northern Africa and western Asia followed, with a total of nearly 50 million. Nearly half of all international migrants world-wide were women or girls. In 2020, the number of female migrants slightly exceeded male migrants in Europe. Finally, 73% of all international migrants were between the ages of 20 and 64, compared to 57% for the total population (United Nations, 2021).

Technological, political and cultural factors make migration easier today than in the past. Communication and transportation technologies have become more advanced and their costs are continually dropping. Western nations that currently have low birth rates and aging populations have eased the restrictions for migrants to enter and even offer benefits to those with the required attributes. In addition, people’s increased level of education today and their openness to the outside world motivate them to try living in another country. Due to all these factors along with the significant growth in migration world-wide, the current era beginning in the 1980s has been dubbed “the age of migration” (Castles and Miller, 2009). Migration is practically unavoidable, forced by the need to flee war, violence, political repression, religious persecution or poverty (United Nations, 2016). It can also be voluntary, as in the case of brain drain, a type of migration that occurs mainly as a result of economic opportunities, including the possibility of job promotion or career change. In this type of migration people seek a better quality of life for themselves and their families in the form of a wider range of economic opportunities, professional advancement, and more opportunities for economic and social mobility than in their country of origin (Favell et al., 2007; Lev Ari, 2008).

Classical theories of migration motivations referred to geographical differences in income, employment and other, mainly economic opportunities. However, in the last few decades, better access to education and information, as well as social capital, have increased people’s aspirations and capabilities to migrate. Migration is very complex and motives to migrate are often manifold: It is difficult to separate economic from social, cultural and political incentives for migration. Thus, migration should be seen as the result of interacting macro and micro social structures, such as the world market or interstate relationships versus family ties. The macro and micro levels are linked by ‘meso-structures’ such as migrant networks, immigrant communities and ‘migration industry.’ Migration theories can be grouped into two main paradigms of Social Sciences: The functionalist push-pull models and historical-structural, or neo-Marxist theories that perceive migration as a result of capitalism. Today, migration is
not just a passive and predictable response to poverty; development processes tend to reinforce migration by increasing capabilities and aspirations to move from one geographical area to another (Castles et al., 2014; Hollifield and Wong, 2015).

In recent decades international migration has also been referred to as 'transnational migration.' This approach places emphasis on the differences between migration in the past and contemporary migration. Transnational migration is a process in which migrants maintain network ties to their past and forge new ties that connect between their society of origin and the place in which they resettle (Basch et al., 1994). The social space of transnational migrants is dynamic and changes, frequently by means of a set of connections and commitments to more than one place (Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004). Moreover, these social spaces have more branches and the migrants remain in contact with their national group in different places across the globe as well as with longtime local residents from their ethno-religious group (Levitt and Jaworsky, 2007). Thus, it is not only the migrants themselves who are affected by transnational migration, but also native-born residents are influenced by the flow of people, money and social patterns of norms, values, ideas and identities through spaces. Migrants act simultaneously in different transnational spaces, creating a diverging set of mutual social, economic, cultural and political ties. This process has major influence on the patterns of their integration in the host society and sometimes generates dual loyalty to two countries (Rebhun and Lev Ari, 2010).

In light of this view, migrants are actors in transnational spaces. Their behavior affects not only the patterns of absorption and integration in the host societies, but also relations with the country of origin. This concept of transnationalism poses an alternative to the older bifocal model (departure and arrival) and suggests instead, dual orientation to both host and origin societies. Structural and personal motives for migration may thus be examined as part of a dynamic process where migration is not a final step, but rather an additional move, and a migrant's return to the country of origin or emigrate to a third country is always possible (Lev Ari, 2015; Vertovec, 2010).

Transnational communities used to be called Diaspora, which is a term often used for people displaced or dispersed by force (e.g. Jews), but can be also applied to trading groups or labor migrants. Recently, Diaspora has been used to denote almost any migrant community (Castles et al., 2014). In light of the transnational theory, the term trans-migrant can be used to identify people who participate in transnational communities based on migration (Glick-Schiller, 1999). However, not all migrant communities fit transnational patterns: Some are temporary labor migrants with very few connections with the host society while
others are permanent migrants who retain very loose contacts with their homeland (Castles et al., 2014).

Some migrant groups, after their initial integration in a host country or city, develop their own sub-communities or ethnic group, as well as social, cultural and economic organizations: Places of worship, formal and informal educational institutions for their children, media channels and other services. These sub-communities and institutions reflect on their ethnic identity and identification (Castle and Miller, 2009; Castles et al., 2014; Gold, 2016). Ethnic minorities, ethnic identity and identification will be the focus of the next section.

1.2 Ethnic Identity and Identification

Finding a common definition of the concept of minorities is very complex. Nevertheless, until a few years ago, a sort of “soft” consensus on the notion of minority prevailed in Europe. A minority was considered a group of citizens of a state, constituting a numerical minority and holding a non-dominant position in that state, endowed with ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the majority. However, among the members of ‘new minorities’ some are citizens of their new home country and are in the process of integration, while others are neither citizens nor assimilated. These differences call for policies regarding their integration and inter-relations with the majority (Plasseraud, 2010). Thus, Jews, for example, constitute mainly an ethnic, native-born minority group in Europe, i.e., a group whose culture and religion is differentiated from that of the majority and thus, liable to experience relative discrimination (Macionis, 1999; Yiftachel, 2001).

Ethnic identity is a concept formed by dynamic day-to-day interactions between migrants and minority groups and the majority group (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Although ethnicity is usually seen as an attribute of minority groups, sociologists define ethnicity which everyone has – to some degree. Ethnic identity has a number of components: Sense of group belonging based on ideas of common origin, history and culture (Castles et al., 2014). Ethnic identity is defined as beliefs, values and feelings toward an ethnic group (Rebhun, 2001; Lev Ari, 2013): It is constructed dynamically and continues to develop following changes in the location of the group and the individual and changes according to the social structure of the destination nation or community. Ethnic boundaries are defined and redefined by constant negotiation and are restructured through reciprocal relations between various groups (Lev Ari, 2013). Identity is not constant and can change over time, following psychological changes and diverse situations (Sheffer, 2003). In an era in which people live in the global village, ethnic identity