

Call for Papers

THE IMMIGRANT AND HIS SHADOWS IN MODERN HISTORY

Interdisciplinary Research Seminar
University of Haifa



Leaving a homeland is always an extreme situation. Millions of people from different continents and cultures uprooted themselves from their homeland and went to new and unknown territories. These included slaves who were sent from Africa against their will to work in plantations in America and the Caribbean Islands; persecuted religious groups who sought refuge and freedom in a new world; Irishmen who deserted a stubborn land that refused to supply food for a hungry population; Italians whose sources of livelihood had failed; Jews who were surrounded by a hostile and intolerant society; women who were sent as prostitutes to penal colonies and brothels in Buenos Aires, New York, Cairo and Jaffa.

The migration of individuals and groups imprinted its mark on human history. Throughout the generations, from earliest times until today, historical sources are replete with evidences about the uprooting and wanderings of populations from various territories and their resettling in new ones. Many different and varied reasons have impelled ethnic groups to emigrate, whether geographical (climate), economical, political, psychological, or ideological. And yet, though the immigrant is certainly not a new historical figure, yet its massive presence in the last centuries engages new questions which we would to raise in this new research forum.

Migration seems to be a multifaceted phenomenon which accompanied each major historical change in the last centuries (state-building, religious reforms, nationalism, industrialization, colonization-decolonization, communism, fascism, neo-liberalism, global market and post-colonial reactions). Each change seems to produce its migrants, its way of rejecting or attracting people, its way of mobilizing ever greater populations – and this along with an always greater mobilization of resources, goods, capital, knowledge and representations. This process of mobilization (best conceptualized by the Heidegger's concept of Gestell – unframing - and its later elaborations) has begun before our last century – where it become invasive – and its progressive acceleration and globalization could be seen retrospectively as one of the central features of modern history. Seen this way, the immigrant is not only a negative product or a transitional figure of regime-changes and collapses, but a central character in the ever growing mobilization which defines modernity.

The proposed seminar will attempt to examine migration from a comparative perspective that crosses the boundaries of time and places and in the light of three main assumptions. The first is that migration is an individual experience (even if the emigrant is part of an ethnic group or a particular society). The second, deriving directly from the first, is that it is necessary to study it from a comparative viewpoint. Although the exiles, emigrants and outcasts were different in origin and cultural background, the process of contending with their uprooting and transition to a new country involved many points of similarity. If we can find the resemblances and the broadest possible common denominator we may better understand what is the new relationship to human, geographical and techno-political environment that the migrant is bringing to the fore. The third assumption is more concerned with philosophical, literary and artistic representations or implications of migration. By focusing on different historical experiences of migration and on their cultural elaborations, we would like to develop a conceptual approach in which the movement experienced by the migrant enables us to perceive the mobilization of societies, environment, knowledge, languages and representations.

The Seminar will deal with all types of emigration and its representation: voluntary, displaced persons, slavery, labor migration, refugees, and so on. It will review migration in all its aspects from the early modern period until the first decades of the decades of the post-colonial period. We invite scholars of different fields (history, philosophy, literature, history of art, geography, political science, sociology) to join this forum and to send us an abstract of their contribution to our monthly seminar. Applicants are invited to send their proposal to the following email: ccohensk@univ.haifa.ac.il

Deadline: 30th of June

Seminar conveners: Prof. Gur Alroey, Dr. Marcos Silber and Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli.