NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE Humanities

DIVISION OF **RESEARCH PROGRAMS**

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at http://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Emigration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World, 1889-1989

Institution: University of Chicago

Project Director: Tara Zahra

Grant Program: Fellowships

Emigration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World, 1889-1989
Tara Zahra

In the winter of 1889, a sensational trial in the small Galician town of Wadowice captivated the Austrian press and public. The principal defendants were travel agents from the nearby town of Oświecim- known to most of the world today as Auschwitz.

Auschwitz, located at the juncture of Prussian, Russian, and Austrian railway lines, had recently developed a booming emigration business. Since 1880, hundreds of thousands of East Europeans trekked toward the German ports of Hamburg and Bremen en route to America. The 65 defendants in the case were accused of seducing migrants into abandoning their homeland with false promises of an American el Dorado. In reality, prosecutors argued, East European peasants were delivered to slavery in American factories, mines, and brothels. The travel agents of Auschwitz stood trial for a host of unsavory crimes: human trafficking, bribery, assault, and generally fleecing emigrants of their last heller as they set out for America.

The Wadowice case, seemingly a tale of small town corruption, came to implicate much more than a group of shady travel agents. As the prosecuting attorney argued in his closing statement, the trial was a referendum on emigration itself, "one of the most important, burning problems of the day." In his view, emigration posed a grave threat to the basic principle of freedom. He argued that the defendants were guilty of no less than "introducing a slave trade into the free land of Austria."

Emigration became a burning social question for good reasons in late Imperial Austria. In the first decade of the twentieth century, five million people (or one in ten citizens) left the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Leopold Caro, a Polish economist, described villages that became ghost towns overnight. "Many houses stood empty, and in many others only old women and small children remained behind…Everyone believed that America was the Promised Land, a true paradise."

I am applying for NEH funding to write a history of emigration from East Central Europe from 1889-1989. I am particularly interested in how debates about and experiences of emigration shaped ideals of freedom in both Eastern Europe and "the West" over the course of 100 years. From the peasants of Austrian Galicia to the East Germans who reveled atop the Berlin Wall in 1989, migration from East to West has been symbolically linked to freedom. Those links were never uncontested, however. For over a century, anti-emigration activists in Eastern Europe insisted that "freedom" to emigrate delivered East Europeans to a new kind of slavery. In an age in which both American slavery and East European serfdom were living memories, this was more than empty rhetoric. The emigration question went to the heart of ongoing debates about the meaning of free labor.

Historians tend to view the mid to late nineteenth century as the golden age of open borders. Xenophobia in the West, the expansion of policing and border control during World War I, and economic crisis, in this story, brought the end of an era of free movement during and after World War I. Viewed from the other side of the Atlantic (and the other side of Europe), however, a different picture emerges. Well before America's quota system suppressed mass immigration to the United States in 1924, powerful forces in Europe and America conspired to limit mobility for their own reasons.

After the Second World War, the "captivity" of East Europeans behind the Iron Curtain came to be seen as a quintessential symbol of Communist oppression. In 1948 the United Nations included freedom to emigrate on its list of basic human rights. But in reality, the Iron Curtain was not built overnight in 1948 or 1961. Its foundation was

arguably laid before the First World War, when Austrian Imperial officials began a century-long campaign to curtail emigration.

My study will build on decades of important research on immigration and emigration, but I hope that *Exodus from the East* will offer a fresh perspective on migration in several ways. My linguistic and archival skills have enabled me to conduct research in archives in the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Poland, France, and the United States in five languages (German, Czech, French, Polish, English). I will therefore be able to bring the history of migration in Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States into a single analytic frame, historicizing the very division of Europe into "Eastern" and "Western" spheres. I also hope to integrate the histories of Jewish and non-Jewish emigration, which are typically written in isolation.

Exodus from the East also challenges two fundamental starting-points of many existing histories of migration. First, it departs from a longstanding tradition of writing about migration with ethnic groups in the starring role. We have many bi-polar histories of migration: Poles in Chicago, Italians in New York, Algerians in France, Turks in Germany, etc. By treating emigration from a larger region (roughly, the former lands of the Habsburg Empire) to multiple destinations, I hope to decenter the themes of ethnicity and "assimilation" from migration history. Second, popular and scholarly histories of migration are generally divided into histories of "voluntary" labor migration in the nineteenth century and "forced" refugee movements in the twentieth. By looking at a region that produced millions of migrant workers and refugees over the course of a century, my project seeks to historicize and challenge the distinction between "economic" and "political" migrants.

Exodus from the East will consist of six chapters, an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter charts escalating efforts of Austro-Hungarian authorities to close the empire's borders at the turn of the century, focusing on the criminal prosecution of Jewish travel agents. Placing anti-emigration reform in the context of growing anti-Semitic, nationalist, and socialist movements, Chapter One will demonstrates how the emigration debate was linked to debates about the nature of free labor, mobility, and capitalism at the turn of the century.

Emigration did not only inspire new forms of repression and border control, however. It also ignited transatlantic debates about social policy, gender, and the family. Chapter Two situates debates about emigration in the landscape of early twentieth century population politics. Emigration from Eastern Europe was key to the development of new social policies and theories on both sides of the Atlantic. These included foundational texts by University of Chicago sociologists Robert Park, Florian Znaniecki, and William I. Thomas. As the Austrian government and social reformers sought to stop the hemorrhaging of the Empire's population, they expanded consular services, created immigrant boarding homes, and sought to spur economic development at home.

After the First World War, the gates to the United States slammed shut. But the leaders of the new belt of nation-states that succeeded the Austro-Hungarian Empire were no less concerned about emigration. The first legal restrictions on emigration were introduced between the two world wars by parliamentary and democratic regimes, not fascists and Communists. A 1922 emigration law in Czechoslovakia empowered the government to restrict or ban emigration completely in the state's interest, or to protect the health, welfare, or morality of migrants themselves. In some districts, this meant that

all women were denied passports; in others, officials refused passports to anyone "who could find a job here, if he really made an effort." Similar restrictive legislation took effect in interwar Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania. Chapter Three traces ongoing efforts of new East European nation-states to curtail emigration and protect citizens abroad between the wars, through both repressive and progressive measures.

The Nazi assault on Eastern Europe produced a radically different kind of exodus from the East. Chapter Four will focus on the impact of wartime displacement and forced labor on the meaning and experience of emigration. The flight of victims of Nazi persecution from Hitler's expanding Empire precipitated the creation of new distinctions between economic migrants and political refugees. As a new regime of slave labor was constructed in the heart of Europe, meanwhile, the worst fears of anti-emigration activists were seemingly validated: Slavs had become the slaves of Europe's twentieth-century.

Chapter Five analyzes the postwar intersection of labor migration policies and humanitarian relief. The words "Arbeit macht frei," ("work will set you free"), emblazoned above the iron gates of Auschwitz, became a stark symbol of Nazi cynicism and cruelty after the Second World War. Western officials and humanitarian workers upheld the forced labor regimes of the Third Reich and the Socialist east as signature "totalitarian" abuses. And yet, the mantra "work will set you free" simultaneously became a central precept of postwar refugee relief. As East European refugees competed for resources, humanitarian sympathy, and visas, they were constantly reminded that hard labor would be their ticket to the "free world."

Chapter Six focuses on repatriation and amnesty campaigns in Cold War Europe. Even as East European governments expelled millions of Germans and other national minorities from their territories after World War II, they clung tenaciously to their own nationals, understood as a precious economic and biological resource. Restrictions on travel and emigration intensified even before the Communist consolidation of power. In the west, the "captivity" of East Europeans behind the Iron Curtain became a highly charged symbol of totalitarian oppression. In the east, Socialist governments continued to contest the link between freedom and mobility. At the same time, they sought to lure emigrés home with choice jobs, apartments, and promises of the Socialist "good life."

A short conclusion will take the story to 1989, looking at the ways in which mobility was linked to freedom in the context of Communism's collapse, and examining debates about East European migration to the West since 1989.

If I receive NEH funding, I will continue the research and writing of *Exodus from the East.* I have written drafts of three out of six planned chapters. My sources include government documents, court records, consular reports, the émigré press, memoirs, novels, recorded oral testimonies, and records of international humanitarian organizations such as the United Nations. I am eager to deepen my research, however. I hope to return to Prague to continue working with sources in the National Archive and Foreign Affairs Archive, to expand my understanding of Polish emigration with research in Warsaw and Stanford University's Hoover Archive, and to continue work on Jewish emigration in the archives of the Center for Jewish History in New York and the U.S. Holocaust Museum and Archive (Washington, DC). I have an advanced contract with W. W. Norton Press for the book's publication, which will facilitate the dissemination of my study to both scholars and a broader public. If I receive fellowship support and a sabbatical, I hope to complete a first draft of the manuscript by September 2014.

Ackermann, Volker. *Der 'echte' Flüchtling. Deutsche Vertriebene und Flüchtlinge aus der DDR, 1945-61.* Osnabrück: Rasch, 1995.
Brown, Wendy. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
Carruthers, Susan L. *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing*. Berkeley: University of CA Press, 2009.
Choate, Mark. *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008
Cohen, Gerard D. *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: Norton, 1998.
Gardner, Martha. *The Qualities of a Citizen: Women, Migration, and Citizenship, 1870-1965.* Princeton, 2005.
Glettler, Monica. *Pittsburg-Wien-Budapest: Programm und Praxis der Nationalitätenpolitik bei Auswanderung der Slowaken um 1900.* Vienna, 1980.
Green Nancy L. and Francois Weil, C*itizenship and Those Who Leave : The Politics of Emigration and Expatriation*. Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
Green, Nancy L. "The Politics of Exit: Reversing the Immigration Paradigm," *The Journal of Modern History* 77 (June 2005), 263-89.
Horvath, Traude, and Gerda Neyer, eds. *Auswanderungen aus Oesterreich von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zur Gegenwart*. Vienna: Bohlau, 1996.
Kobrin, Rebecca. *Jewish Bialystok and its Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
Kowalski, Grzegorz. *Przestępstwa emigracyne w Galicji, 1897-1918*. Krakow: Jagellonian University Press, 2003.
Major, Patrick. *The Rise and Fall of the Berlin Wall: A Concrete History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
Pollack, Martin. *Kaiser von Amerika*: *die grosse Flucht aus Galizien*. Wien: Paul Zsolny Verlag, 2010**.**
Puskas, Julianna. *Ties that Bind, Ties that Divide: 100 Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States.* Translated by Zora Ludwig. New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000
Reeder, Linda. *Widows in White: Migration and the Transformation of Rural Italian Women, 1880-1920.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
Rychlik, Jan. *Cestování do ciziny v habsburgské monarchii a v Československu*. Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny, 2007.
Salvatici, Silvia. "From Displaced Persons to Labourers: Allied Employment Policies in Postwar West Germany," in Jessica Rheinisch and Elizabeth White, eds. *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944-49.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 210-228.
Sheffer, Edith. *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain.* Oxford: New York, 2011.
Steidl, Annemarie, et. al. eds. *European Mobility: Internal, International, and Transatlantic Moves in the 19th and early 20th Centuries.* Goettingen: V&R University Press, 2009.

Wyman, Mark. *Round Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930*. I
Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.

GRANT11115965 -- Attachments-ATT2-1235-NEHbib.pdf