

Eastern Europe Abroad: Exploring Actor-Networks in Transnational Movements and Migration History, The Case of the Bund

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SUMMARY: The “transnational turn” is one of the most discussed topics in historiography, yet it has inspired more theoretical tension than empirically saturated studies. This article combines both aspects by examining the transnational network formation of one of the most important social movements in late imperial Russia, the Jewish Labour Bund. It furthermore introduces into historiography one of the most fruitful theories in recent social sciences, “actor-network theory”. This opens the view on the steady recreation of a social movement and reveals how closely the history of the Bund in eastern Europe was interwoven with large socialist organizations in the New World. Based on a large number of sources, this contribution to migration and movement history captures the creation and the limits of global socialist networks. As a result, it shows that globalization did not only create economic or political networks but that it impacted the everyday lives of authors and journalists as well as those of tailors and shoemakers.

Repeatedly, the Russian Revolutions have attracted the world’s interest. But the emergence of this revolutionary movement was by no means only a Russian matter. Even before Red October, it had a great impact on movements and societies around the globe. Moreover, the Russian movement itself relied on actors who lived and worked far from Russian itself. In the “age of the great migrations”, even the formation of a movement against a very specific political system depended on transnational transfers and global communication. Yet, histories of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917 barely acknowledge this fact.¹ The reasons

1. This holds for the most different approaches. See, for instance, Manfred Hildermeier, *Die Russische Revolution, 1905–1921* (Frankfurt, 1989); Orlando Figes, *A People’s Tragedy: The Russian Revolution, 1891–1924* (London, 1996); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 3rd edn (Oxford [etc.], 2008); and also for comparative studies: Arno J. Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); Stephen A. Smith, *Revolution and the People in Russia and China: A Comparative History* (Cambridge, 2008).

for this lack of attention lie in these historians' limited focus on one society, leading them to neglect the relevance of exchange and migration. Here I argue for taking these transfers and these migrants' histories into account by introducing "actor-network theory" into the history of social movements. This will allow us to leave behind simplified understandings of emigration and immigration and rather shift focus to migrants' transnational network building.

ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY AND HISTORY

This shift has its foundation in new theoretical questions that arise from the new perspectives on the modes and matters of the formation of associations, collectives, and also institutions. By this I refer to the theoretical question of how actor-network theory (ANT) can contribute to our understanding of the history of societies. Why is this a question worth asking? In the last few years ANT has developed into one of the most influential and most controversial approaches in social science, but it has, however, only rarely been accepted in historiography.² In the following reflections I shall start by a brief sketch of the theory itself. I shall present it "in action" and demonstrate how far ANT allows us to change perspectives and rethink the relationship between issues, both local and global, in history and in historiography.³

I will not focus on the controversial debates centring on ANT's claim of the relevance of the "agency of objects", which for historians should be less of a challenge than it is for sociologists.⁴ To put it simply, ANT values

2. Jonathan Murdoch, "The Spaces of Actor-Network Theory", *Geoforum*, 29 (1998), pp. 357–374; Michel Callon, "Actor-Network Theory: The Market Test", in John Law and John Hassard (eds), *Actor-Network Theory and After* (Malden, MA [etc.], 2004), pp. 181–195; Barbara Czarniawska, "On Time, Space, and Action Nets", *Organization*, 11 (2004), pp. 773–791; Uwe Schimank, "Die unmögliche Trennung von Natur und Gesellschaft – Bruno Latours Diagnose der Selbsttäuschung der Moderne", in *idem* and Ute Volkmann (eds), *Soziologische Gegenwartsdiagnosen*, I, 2nd edn (Wiesbaden, 2007), pp. 157–169; Georg Kneer, Markus Schroer, and Erhard Schüttpelz (eds), *Bruno Latours Kollektive. Kontroversen zur Entgrenzung des Sozialen* (Frankfurt, 2008). Historiographical approaches are mostly from the history of science; for instance, Andrew Pickering (ed.), *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago, IL [etc.], 1992); Simon Thode, "Bones and Words in 1870s New Zealand", *British Journal for the History of Science*, 42 (2009), pp. 225–244.

3. For a concise introduction, see Andréa Belliger and David J. Krieger, "Einführung in die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie," in *idem* (eds), *ANThropolgy. Ein einführendes Handbuch zur Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie* (Bielefeld, 2006), pp. 13–50.

4. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (New York [etc.], 1993); *idem*, "Une sociologie sans objet? Remarques sur l'interobjectivité", in Octave Debary and Laurier Turgeon (eds), *Objets & Mémoires* (Laval, Québec, 2007), pp. 37–58; for the most prominent critique, see: David Bloor, "Anti-Latour", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 30 (1999), pp. 81–112; Georg Kneer, "Hybridität, zirkulierende Referenz, Amoderne? Eine Kritik an Bruno Latours Soziologie der Assoziationen", in Kneer, Schroer, and Schüttpelz, *Bruno Latours Kollektive*, pp. 261–305.

not only human agency but also the possible agency of “microbes, scallops, rocks, and ships”.⁵ No historian will deny that ships, inventions, and landscapes have massively changed the course of history, so they are naturally part of our considerations, but it is much harder for sociologists to include them in their primary field of concern: human society.⁶

However, ANT’s second claim also proves to be a challenge for historians, especially for social historians. ANT posits that analysis of actors in the modern world often argues in terms of “social categories”, which serve as background and explanation for motivations and mobilizations on the part of those actors.⁷ But in the last two decades, ANT-inspired studies have shown time and again that this “social” often functions as an explanatory black box, a pseudo-entity that refers to the stabilization of arguments and not the uncovering of actors’ behaviour. If the “social” is to receive explanatory power, it must be explored as a network of networks, held together by actions and associations. According to this, neither the “social” nor the actors who constitute it are well-defined units, but rather loose and ever-changing networks and associations of other actor-networks.⁸ Hence the hyphen in actor-network theory. According to ANT, one cannot simply “tell” the history of an actor, such as a person, a party, or any other “unit” under consideration. It is necessary to examine the formation of the agency involved which can only potentially lead to the creation of associations – and maybe a “social”. With good reason, ANT therefore demands that research should not start with events taking place *in* societies but rather with its base, the formation of groups, networks, and societies.⁹ In short, the “social” is the *explanandum*, not the *explanans*.

5. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford [etc.], 2007), p. 10.

6. Markus Schroer, “Vermischen, Vermitteln, Vernetzen. Bruno Latours Soziologie der Gemenge und Gemische im Kontext”, in Kneer, Schroer, and Schüttpeitz *Bruno Latours Kollektive*, pp. 361–398.

7. This is most frequent in Pierre Bourdieu’s “capitals”, which tend to explain behaviour and relationships, but in the end refer to some inherited background; Pierre Bourdieu, *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 97–121; on the conflict, see Willem Schinkel, “Sociological Discourse of the Relational: The Case of Bourdieu & Latour”, *Sociological Review*, 55 (2007), pp. 707–729.

8. The “social” is only an imagined entity which I signal by quotation marks; see Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, pp. 21–25; it is stronger accentuated in *idem*, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

9. Bruno Latour’s usage of the concept of “society” is contradictory. On the one hand he rejects the necessity of the concept at all and refers only to collectives (in his sense of the word) and networks instead: Bruno Latour, *Die Hoffnung der Pandora. Untersuchungen zur Wirklichkeit der Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt, 2002), pp. 236f. On the other hand he admits that “society” must be considered an actor when its agency is relevant for an event or actions taken by an actor; *ibid.*, pp. 181f. However, it would be absurd to expect the absence of “societies” as actors in the

Aside from the polemics surrounding ANT, it in fact merges refined versions of praxeology with network analysis. ANT centres on events, and the agencies of networks that were involved in their becoming. Therefore it sees no “context”, only “text” as interactions of collectives shaped by relations (or impacted by their interruption).¹⁰ These collectives are connected to various settings (or constellations) and thereby transcend common conceptualizations of the micro/macro or local/global divide.¹¹ This distinct definition of collectives as actor-networks allows the development of a social historical perspective towards a close relation between the old antagonists, “structure” and “agency.” This, of course, is an enormous challenge for scholars working on the history of modern societies. But it also reduces the controversial potential that the first generation of ANT researchers created: from a historian’s standpoint, in fact, ANT should not be considered a fully-fledged theory but rather a new perspective that will help to substantiate the recent turn towards practices in history, also combining it with the other turn towards transnationalism and transfers by stressing the importance of omnipresent change and re-orientation, group formation, interactions, and the relevance of agency in both local and trans-local networks. The key features of ANT are a new “flat” and relational perspective and a set of terms that allow thinking and observation.¹² Without engaging in “science wars”, we can use it to derive a very practical perspective on transnational history as a set of relations shaped by actor-networks, consisting of collectives engaged in local and global interactions.¹³ This calls for both grassroots studies and comparative analysis.¹⁴

modern world at all and, of course, “society” always plays a crucial role for political actors and movements with which this paper is concerned. Therefore, I will reject neither the term nor the concept, but rather understand it as an evolving social structure and as one actor-network among many relevant for an event.

10. Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, “A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Non-Human Assemblies”, in Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (eds), *Shaping Technology, Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 1992), pp. 259–264; Gustav Roßler, “Kleine Gallerie neuer Dingbegriffe: Hybriden, Quasi-Objekte, Grenzobjekte, epistemische Dinge”, in Kneer, Schroer, and Schützpeltz, *Bruno Latours Kollektive*, pp. 76–107.

11. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, pp. 173–204.

12. For an extensive example, see Latour, *Pandora’s Hope*, pp. 1–79.

13. Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals’ Abuse of Science* (New York, 1998); Michel Callon, “Whose Imposture? Physicists at War with the Third Person”, *Social Studies of Science*, 29 (1999), pp. 261–286; James R. Brown, *Who Rules in Science? An Opinionated Guide to the Wars* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, pp. 100f.

14. ANT is by no means the only recent approach trying to bridge this gap. See especially Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge [etc.], 1985); Uwe Schimank, *Theorien gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung*, 3rd edn (Wiesbaden, 2007); Schroer, “Vermischen, Vermitteln, Vernetzen”, pp. 371–373.

Using ANT as an analytical perspective and not as an interpretative “frame” should make it still more welcome for historians. It opens the door for a demonstrative case study that connects local and global histories and follows these new perspectives in order to overcome the “methodological nationalism” which for decades has limited our perspective on the history of modern societies.¹⁵ I will demonstrate this by focusing on the formation and the agency of Russian¹⁶ actor-networks in the process of globalization and modern Jewish diaspora life which from 1897 onwards crystallized into a major political, social, and cultural movement: the General Jewish Labour Bund. The Bund is a striking example of the revealing power of ANT in historiography, since until now it has been understood as a party limited to a certain time and place. However, it became one of the strongest and most successful “modernizers” of Jewish life in eastern Europe and – as I will demonstrate – in Jewish emigration. This case study will therefore start with the formation of the Bund as a history of practices which eventually created a Bundist “social” and identity. From there it will lead up to a history of how radical activism, emerging from Russian revolutionary circles, influenced the development of a self-confident and secular Jewish diaspora life. This will transcend the nationalized reading of the “old” social movements by focusing on migration history and exploring networks spanning oceans and political systems.

THE BUNDIST *DOIKEYT*: FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

The Bund, after its foundation in Vilna 1897, received broad support in the “*yidische gas*”, the east European Jewish street, as a revolutionary social-democratic, anti-traditional, and anti-tsarist force.¹⁷ The Bundist

15. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, “Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences”, *Global Networks*, 2 (2002), pp. 301–334; Daniel Chernilo, “Methodological Nationalism and its Critique”, in Gerard Delanty (ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalism* (London [etc.], 2006), pp. 129–140; Nina Glick Schiller, “A Global Perspective on Transnational Migration: Theorising Migration without Methodological Nationalism”, in Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (eds), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* (Amsterdam, 2010), pp. 109–129.

16. The term “Russian” as the translation of “*rossiiskii*” can easily be misunderstood. It literally means “from the Russian lands”, and refers to Russia as a multi-ethnic empire not only to ethnic Russians. On the ethnic composition of the empire, see Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung – Geschichte – Zerfall* (Munich, 1992).

17. Among the many books on the Bund, the following are essential: Grigori Aronson, Jacob S. Hertz, et al. (eds), *Di geshikhte fun Bund*, 5 vols (New York, 1960); Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers’ Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge, 1970); Henry J. Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia from its Origins to 1905* (Palo Alto, CA, 1972); Gertrud Pickhan, *Gegen den Strom. Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund “Bund” in Polen 1918–1939* (Munich, 2001); David Simon Slucki, *The International Jewish*

approach of “making history happen” marks a turning point in the history of east European Jewry. The Bund spread rapidly across the Pale of Settlement because it could rely on a huge bandwidth of worker activism. Springing originally from the east European *shtetlekh*, the Bund reassembled itself in places of Jewish immigration. Best known are the Bundist organizations in the United States, such as the Tsentral Farband fun di Bundistische Organizatsyonen in Amerika (1903), the Jewish Agitation Office (1908), and the Bund Club in New York, founded in 1923.¹⁸ Bundist groups also emerged in Argentina, Mexico, Australia, South Africa – even Cuba.¹⁹ For emigrants, the transfer of Bundist thought was natural as it belonged to their activist identities, but the formation of new Bundist organizations was more problematic because Bundism itself was not designed for a transnational transfer and the formation of new associations in societies entirely different from Russia or independent Poland.

Bundism first had to deal with an inherent paradox: it relied on Marx’s dictum that “[t]hough not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”²⁰ Bundist unions aggressively attacked factory owners and whomever they considered the Jewish bourgeoisie, but nevertheless neither Judaism, nor Russia, nor the transnational Bund in emigration matched Marx’s fundamental unit: the nation-state. In another multi-ethnic empire, the Austro-Marxist movement faced similar problems.²¹

Labor Bund after 1945: Toward a Global History (New Brunswick, NJ, 2012). For a general survey, see Frank Wolff, “Historiography on the General Jewish Labor Bund: Traditions, Tendencies and Expectations”, *Medaon*, 4 (2009), http://www.medaon.de/pdf/M_Wolff-4-2009.pdf, p. (accessed 19 February 2010).

18. Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, ME-18, #4; Ab. Cahan, “Kremer in amerike,” in *Arkadi. Zamlbukh tsum ondenk fun Arkadi Kremer* (New York, 1942), pp. 229–231; Bundisher Klub in Nyu York (ed.), *Zamlheft fun bundishn klub in Nyu York. Aroysgegebn lekboved dem 15 yoriken yubiley* (New York, 1938); Franz Kursky, “Der ‘Bund’ un di yidishe arbeter-bavegung in Amerike. Tsum 60. geburtstog fun khaver Khanin”, in *Gezamelte shriftn* (New York, 1952), pp. 260–268; Y. Sh. Herts, *Di yidishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in Amerike. 70 yor sotsyalistishe tetigkayt. 30 yor yidisher sotsyalistisher farband* (New York, 1954), pp. 99f.; Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 2005), p. 161.

19. Pinie Vald, “Yidishe sotsyalistishe und arbeter-bavegung in argentine biz 1910”, *Argentinier IWO shrift*, 2 (1942), pp. 96–126; Judith Laikin Elkin, *Jews of the Latin American Republics* (New York, 1980), p. 113; Israel Laubstein, *Bund. Historia del Movimiento Obrero Judío* (Buenos Aires, 1997), pp. 169–203; David Slucki, “The Bund Abroad in the Postwar Jewish World”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 16 (2009), pp. 111–144.

20. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1998), p. 64.

21. This eventually led to the foundation of a “Galician Bund” in 1905; Rick Kuhn, “Organizing Yiddish-Speaking Workers in Pre-World War Galicia: The Jewish Socialist Democratic Party”, *Studies in Jewish Civilization*, 9 (1998), pp. 37–63.

The Bund gladly shared its concept of national-cultural autonomy and developed it into the non-Zionist, Yiddish-based, cultural, and activist concept of *doikoyt* (literally “here-ness”, from Yiddish *do*, “here”), a positive notion of Jewish diaspora life by means of high-risk activism as well as collective solidarity among workers and/or Jews.²²

Doikoyt in fact was the conceptual and practical foundation of the Bundist movement. It emphasized the necessity of class war as well as a cultural programme based on the assumption that Jewish life, identity, and experience did not stem from the Jewish religion but rather from a collective cultural experience that found its daily expression in the Yiddish language. It was this experience that had created a twofold “class problem” of Jewish life in tsarist Russia because, as the Bund put it, the Jewish workers were subject to a twofold oppression: by the “capitalist” and autocratic state, and by the traditional religious Jewish elites. Bundists rejected both obedience and emigration to Palestine (*aliyah*) as solutions, and favoured a socialist revolution right “here”, in the place of living; they no longer waited for the advent of a Messiah. This concept of “making history happen” triggered a huge variety of actions, through to the famous formation of Bundist self-defence groups against pogroms.

This was not only a qualitative shift: the Bund quickly became a mass movement with tens of thousands of illegal members who vociferously challenged state and Jewish leaders. More importantly, they undermined traditional authority by changing the pejorative notion of the Hebrew *galut*, exile as punishment, into “home”. This employed a positive understanding of diaspora life which inseparably merged with Marxist expectations of an “exodus via revolution”, also requiring the secular genesis of a new society, a society literally “made” by socialist activists.²³ Life in the diaspora, to speak in ANT’s terminology, was not a punishment, nor a problem; it was a setting which allowed the Bundist to combine Marxist thought with Jewish problems in Russia, and to develop new collectives engaged in a fight for a better tomorrow. This, of course, was not exclusive to the Bund, but its strict insistence on Jewish culture and the crucial role of the Yiddish language always linked it with the “Jewish street”, where it became the most successful social movement before World War II.

22. Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and the Jewish Question After Marx* (New York, 1993); Roni Gechtman, *Yidisher Sotsializm: The Origin and Contexts of the Jewish Labor Bund’s National Program* (unpublished dissertation, New York University, 2005). On the specific conditions of high-risk activism, see Verta Taylor and Nella van Dyke, “‘Get Up, Stand Up’: Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements”, in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, MA [etc.], 2004), pp. 270f., 277, 23; Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York, 1986); Michael Löwy, *Erlösung und Utopie. Jüdischer Messianismus und libertäres Denken. Eine Wahlverwandschaft* (Berlin, 1997).

The Bund, I argue, was a transnational network of socialist activism that finally led to a culturally confident workers' movement.²⁴ This places practices before ideology and identification, a notion supported not only by workers' own depictions, but also by Vladimir Medem, the epitome of the Bundist *intelligencija*. In his widely cited reminiscences, Medem recaptures activism for the movement as a precondition to what he only later learned to be a "Bundist identity". In his first political exile in Switzerland he thought about this for the first time:

During my very first days in Berne I remember how [comrade] Teumin would point to one another individual on the street and say to me: "That's a 'Bundist'." I was still green at that time and, at first, didn't know what he meant. The term Bundist was strange to me; we never used it in Russia. Within the movement proper, in a place like Minsk, for example, or Vilnius, people were said to work *in* the Bund; this was self-evident. But what precisely did it mean to be a "Bundist" in Berne, in Switzerland, where there was no Jewish Labour movement?²⁵

Only in exile in Switzerland before 1905 did he realize that one could not only be active for the Bund, one could also develop an identity and become (and be depicted as) a "Bundist".²⁶ Medem thereby underlines that the decisive point for becoming a Bundist was not membership status but simply working in the Bund. Similar positions can be found in workers' autobiographies, such as those of Layb Berman, Hersh Mendel, or Yoel Novikov.²⁷

The subsequent emergence of a mass movement was closely observed by journalists and workers worldwide, which actually raised the importance of Bundism in Jewish life.²⁸ This led to the creation of numerous

24. I analysed a large quantity of first-hand accounts by workers, *yeshiva-bokherim*, and intellectuals. Only the latter sometimes challenge this remark by stressing debates and personal articles instead of organizational work. Nevertheless this is rare, an expression of individual positions and challenged by the several hundred biographical questionnaires that the Bund archives circulated. Whereas only a few entered data on publications, the majority try to be very precise with imprisonments, offices, and events like demonstrations and meetings; Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, MG 2, 429.

25. Samuel A. Portnoy (ed.), *Vladimir Medem: The Life and the Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist* (New York, 1979), p. 223.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 221f.

27. This is reflected in hundreds of workers' autobiographies, including (in chronological order): Beynish Mikhalevitch, *Zikhroynes fun a yidishen sotsyalist* (Warsaw, 1921); Layb [Leybetshke] Berman, *In loyf fun yorn. Zikhroynes fun a yidishn arbeter* (Warsaw, 1936); Hersh Mendel, *Zikhroynes fun a yidishn revolutsyoner* (Tel Aviv, 1959); Yoel Novikov, *Zikhroynes fun a yidishn arbeter* (Tel Aviv, 1967); Hersh Metalovits, *A veg in lebn. Fragmente fun an oytobiografie*, 2 vols (Tel Aviv, 1982).

28. For instance, Ab. Cahan, "Faterland un 'bund'", in *Der fraynd fun bund. Gevidmet tsu di franyd fun "bund"*, *voz velen bezukhen dem ball in grand tsentral peles* (2 April 1904), 1, 3; Esther Schneersohn, "Der allgemeine jüdische Arbeitbund (Bund) in Russland, Polen und Littauen", *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden [Alte Folge]*, 1:2, pp. 4-11; Liliput, "Di S.L.P., di S.P. un der 'Bund'", *Der arbeyter* (1909); Zivion, "Di bundisten un di S.L.P.",

institutions which Bundist labour migrants sought to transfer to the New World. With the advent of thousands of Bundists into Jewish communities overseas from 1900–1901 and later, a new socialist mobilization emerged which caused multiple alliances and severe conflicts with surrounding movements and parties in countries such as Argentina and the United States – just as it did in Russia.²⁹

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF “HERE”: BUNDISM IN MIGRATION

When we understand *doikoyt* as the crucial element of Bundism, we need to set aside debates about ideology and the relationship of the Bund leaders to Lenin or others, and first approach the history of the Bund as a history of practices within Bundist networks.³⁰ Only practices enabled activists to develop their own Jewish identity via “being Bundist”.³¹ This identity was based on the collective experience of the anti-tsarist struggle in Russia and centred on the “heroic” years 1901–1905.³² During

Der arbeyter (1909); Ahron Kohn, “Di bundisten un di amerikaner sotsyalistishe parteyn. An entfer tsu genosn Zivion”, *Der yidische arbeyter*, 8 October 1909. This conflict in cooperation persisted until World War II; Jack Jacobs, “Ab Cahan and the Polish Bund” (presented at the conference “Abraham Cahan and the Forverts”, CUNY, New York, 15 April 2007); see especially Bundisher Klub in Nyu York (ed.), *Der “forverts” un der “bund”* (New York, 1935); Dovid Mayer, “Der ‘bund’ un Ab. Kahan”, *Unzer tsayt* [New York], 10 (1951), pp. 29–31.

29. Khayim Solomon Kazdan, “Der ‘bund’ un der gedank vegn a yidish-veltlekher shul”, *Unzer tsayt*, 7 (1945), pp. 39–41; Kursky, “Der ‘Bund’ un di yidische arbeter-bavegung in Amerike”; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, pp. 158f.; Laubstein, *Bund. Historia del Movimiento Obreiro Judío*, pp. 169–203; Roni Gechtman, “Socialist Mass Politics through Sport: The Bund’s Morgenshtern in Poland, 1926–1939”, *Journal of Sport History*, 26 (1999), pp. 326–352; Jack Jacobs, “Creating a Bundist Counter-Culture: Morgnshtern and the Significance of Cultural Hegemony”, in *idem* (ed.), *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Bund at 100* (New York, 2001), pp. 59–68.

30. This debate has been spinning around the same arguments and figures for more than sixty years: Koppel S. Pinson, “Arkady Kremer, Vladimir Medem, and the Ideology of the Jewish ‘Bund’”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 7 (1945), pp. 233–264; Bernard K. Johnpoll, *The Politics of Futility: The General Jewish Workers Bund of Poland 1917–1943* (Ithaca, NY, 1967); Yosef Gorny, *Converging Alternatives: The Bund and the Zionist Labor-Movement* (Albany, NY, 2006); Viktor Gusev, “V. Kossovskij i V. Medem protiv V. Lenina. Mogut li Evrei nazyvat’sja naciej i imet’ sobstvennuju gosudarstvennost’?”, in K. Ju. Burminstrov (ed.), *Materialy Trinadcatoj Ezegodnoj Mezdunarodnoj Mezdisciplinarnoj konferencii po iudaike* (Moscow, 2006).

31. Portnoy, *Vladimir Medem*, p. 223; Wolff, “Historiography on the General Jewish Labor Bund”; *idem*, “Kollektive Identität als praktizierte Verheißung. Selbstzuschreibung und Gruppenkonstitution in der transnationalen sozialen Bewegung ‘Allgemeiner Jüdischer Arbeiterbund’”, in Helke Stadtland and Jürgen Mittag (eds), *Theoretische Ansätze und Konzepte der Forschung über soziale Bewegungen in den Geschichtswissenschaften* (Essen, 2012), pp. 139–167.

32. See [Noakh Portnoy] Noakh, “Forvort”, in Layb [Leybetshke] Berman, *In loyf fun yorn*, pp. 5f.

these years, Bundist activism exploded, leading to many local and illegally printed periodicals, illegal libraries, self-organized circles, and union branches, the foundation of cultural centres, self-defence groups, and many other initiatives.³³ These were not the spontaneous acts that Lenin considered them to be; they belonged to the Bundist creation of “a completely new way of life, a new framework in which to live and work”, and thereby deeply influenced the self-perception of activists.³⁴

This became transnational when, in the age of great migrations, many of them travelled overseas. Simultaneously in the centres of immigration, New York and Buenos Aires, strikes, meetings, and demonstrations emerged. This time saw the creation and uprising of many new institutions: the Arbeter-ring, the ILGWU, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, the Jewish Socialist Federation (Yidishe Sotsyalistishe Federatsye), the Jewish Socialist Farband, and later even the YIVO were all inspired by immigrated Bundists and subject to “Bund-type radical activism”, as Françoise Basch has described it.³⁵ This means that the concept of *doikayt* must have somehow “migrated” with the Bundists. But how? How could well-known but entirely localized practices be applied far from “*di alte heym*” – the old home – and be brought to the New World, where, as Eli Lederhendler has recently reminded us, the conditions of life and labour were so different?³⁶

Bundist groups were well equipped for this transfer. Because of their fervent activism they enjoyed, as Jonathan Frankel stated, a “head start”. It was precisely the acceptance of local situations, which divided Bundism from Zionism and communism, that propelled agency in new societies. It also enabled them to sponsor the Bund financially in the old country where the “[r]evolutionary organizations depended to an extraordinary extent on the ebb and flow of fundraising”.³⁷ To understand this connection, we must first remember that between 1899 and 1915 approximately 1.5 million Jews

33. For some examples, see “Di bundishe prese biz oktober 1905”, *Di hofnung* [Vilnius], 14 (1907), p. 5; Leybitshe [Layb Berman], “Der Dvinkser ‘Boyevoy otrvod’ – B.O. (Kamf-druzshine). Zikhroynes fun yor 1905”, *Arbeter luakh*, 5 (1924), pp. 61–80; Yokhnis [Peysi], “Vegn der drukerey fun ts. k. fun ‘bund’ un vegn dem tayerb khaver Yoyne (Fishl Kogan)”, in *1905 yor in Barditshev* (Kiev, 1925), pp. 76–80; Novikov, *Zikhroynes fun a yidishn arbeter*, pp. 28f., 42; Tobias, *The Jewish Bund in Russia*, pp. 83–97.

34. V.I. Lenin, “What Is to Be Done?”, ch. 3, section 3; Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, p. 153.

35. Françoise Basch, “The Shirtwaist Strike in History and Myth”, introductory essay to Theresa Serber Malkiel, *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* (Ithaca, NY, 1998, 1st publ. 1910), p. 52.

36. Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880–1920: From Caste to Class* (Cambridge, 2009).

37. Jonathan Frankel, “Jewish Politics and the Russian Revolution of 1905”, in *idem, Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 63, 68.

migrated to the United States alone, almost half of whom arrived between 1903 and 1907, and that they included a significant proportion of migrants who had prior experience with revolutionary movements, particularly Bundist activism.³⁸ The transnational exchange between the American and Russian Yiddish-speaking revolutionaries was based in the “eastward influence” that American intellectuals exercised before the foundation of the Bund.³⁹ But with mass migration a strong westward influence emerged, this time based more on worker activism than solely on the intellectual export of socialism.

Secondly, migration did not cut off roots. Even though Jewish immigrants to America encountered a completely new economic system, which heavily influenced their political self-perception, the Old and New Worlds were still deeply linked;⁴⁰ transfers were much more important than a simple Old World/New World antagonism can capture.⁴¹ Despite immigration into new economic systems, the 1,000 personal documents of Bundist activists that I have examined reveal that Bundists remained Bundists even in the absence of the movement, and recreated the movement because of this very absence.⁴² Even a large number of those who abandoned socialism after emigration refashioned their specific Bundist self-perception not as revolutionaries, but as Yiddishist cultural activists with strong Bundist roots.⁴³ This cultural activism consisted of the same three major pillars as *doikeyt*: the relevance of a “national” language (*folksprakh*), personal participation in the creation of a better society (*gezelschaftlekhe tuer*), and the experience of self-organization.

38. Simon Kuznets, “Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure”, *Perspectives in American History*, 9 (1975), pp. 63, 69.

39. See the enlightening article, Tony Michels, “Exporting Yiddish Socialism: New York’s Role in the Russian Workers’ Movement”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 16 (2009), pp. 1–26.

40. Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism*.

41. See John S. MacDonald and Leatrice MacDonald, “Chain Migration, Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks,” in Charles Tilly (ed.), *An Urban World* (Boston, MA [etc.], 1974), pp. 226–236; John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN, 1987); John S. MacDonald, “Chain Migration Reconsidered”, *Bolletino di Demografia Histórica*, (1992); Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, (eds), *Migration, Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives* (Berne, 2005); Steven Vervotec, “Migrant Transnationalism and Modes of Transformation”, in Alejandro Portes and Josh DeWind (eds), *Rethinking Migration: New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives* (New York [etc.], 2007), pp. 146–180 and many more.

42. For very early reports on these formations, see: Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, ME-18, 2, “Referat fun der driter yehrlikker konventshon fun di bundistishe organisatsyonen in amerika”, 1906, pp. 8–17, 42ff.; Zivion, “Di yidishe arbeyter in Paris”, *Di hofnung* [Vilnius], 14 (1907), p. 1.

43. This also becomes evident in the YIVO autobiographical contest of 1942, see the Bundist participants in: YIVO, New York, RG 102, 28, 44, 47, 55, 76, 81, 83, 107, 108, 115, 142, 157, 158, 160, 171, 173, 178, 180, 189, 191, 193, 196, 200, 209.

This fundamentally challenges the regionalist and surprisingly static bias that dominates the historiography of the Bund. And this becomes evident when we note that migration had always been a crucial element in the formation of the Bund. Apart from the special case of Holocaust migration, there were three types of migration that constantly influenced the creation of the “Bundist social”: internal, external, and distant long-term.

Internal migration from one *shtetl* to another was common to everyday Jewish life in tsarist Russia. Nevertheless, the workers’ movement spurred this migration by the paths of agitation, organization, and political persecution. The strict persecution of any oppositional movement in Russia brought economic activism close to political conspiracy, which only strengthened the experience of group belonging between travellers and locals. Political activism sought recognition, trust, and *khavershaft* (literally: comradeship and/or friendship). Even though Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement experienced dramatic social downward mobility, workers could achieve internal upward mobility by travelling and organizing groups of workers throughout the territory.⁴⁴

External refuge was a result of the illegal status of the Russian Bund. This migration was conceptualized as temporary and frequent from the very first days of Bund until 1917. In the beginning, it was mainly intellectual leaders who went into exile in Belgium, Switzerland, France, or London; many workers later followed.⁴⁵ The Bund therefore had a dual leadership: the Central Committee hidden in Russia and the Foreign Committee in Switzerland.⁴⁶ Apart from these central institutions, many local groups emerged which tried to maintain ties with Russia. In 1907 the leading Bundist Benzion Hofman (Zivion) was impressed by a meeting of 1,000 Bundists in Paris who were, as he depicted in a Russian Yiddish journal, “already half Frenchmen” but still convinced Bundists and deeply devoted to Russian matters. Zivion understood the importance of supporting these

44. Statistically, higher education, exile to Siberia, and the transfer of prisoners also caused internal migration. The patterns of this migration and specific Jewish experience still lack research; Anke Hilbrenner, “Jüdische Wanderungen nach den Teilungen Polens. Migration zwischen Topos und Vertreibungserfahrungen”, in Dittmar Dahlmann and Mathias Beer (eds), *Über die trockene Grenze und Über das offene Meer: Binneneuropäische und transatlantische Migrationen im Vergleich* (Essen, 2004), pp. 107–118; for revealing accounts of Bundist mobility, see Israel Pressman, “Roads that Passed: Russia My Old Home”, [original: “Der durkhgengener veg, 1950”], *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences*, 22 (1995), pp. 1–80; Berman, *In loyf fun yorn*; Mendel, *Zikhroynes fun a yidishn revolutsyoner*.

45. On the systematic differences of their experiences, see Frank Wolff, “Heimat und Freiheit bei den Bundisten Vladimir Medem und Hersch Mendel”, in Julia Herzberg and Christoph Schmidt (eds), *Vom Wir zum Ich. Individuum und Autobiographie im Zarenreich* (Cologne, 2007), pp. 301–323.

46. Franz Kursky, “Di oyslendishe organisatsye fun ‘bund’”, in *Gezamelte sbriftn* (New York, 1952), pp. 202–249.

workers and prompted the Bund to create foreign clubs as official Bundist places in the emigrant community.⁴⁷ Such groups were not implanted colonies of the Bund; they were created at the grass roots by emigrants who considered Bundism fundamental to their self-perception and created actor-networks that associated local settings with the Bundism they knew from Russia. Most importantly, their fundraising brought the two sides together and led to intensive transnational exchange via a broad bandwidth of activities, ranging from individual campaigns through visits of leading Bundists to the organization of many fundraising institutions. As a result, these small clubs and groups were the source for the transnationalization of the Bund.

On the other side of the Atlantic, similar associations emerged from the earliest years through distant and long-term emigration. As in Europe, these groups were created by migrating Bundists and partially supported by the Russian Bund itself. At the third annual convention of American Bundist organizations, held in New York in 1906, the National Secretary, Israel Bergman, proudly declared the existence of approximately twenty local Bundist organizations in the US alone, accompanied by clubs all over the world, from Montreal to Cape Town. This was flanked by a global smuggling network that, for instance, even reached Jewish prisoners-of-war in Japan.⁴⁸ Furthermore there were many Bundist groups and organizations not officially associated with the Foreign Committee, among them early groups in Germany and, most importantly, the Avangard in Buenos Aires.

Structurally, the clubs in the Americas differed from their European counterparts. Unlike the exile of politically motivated European emigration, chain and network migration made overseas assemblages subject to long-term transfers, increasing membership and personal ties. These groups also had a much lower fluctuation in membership and alliances.⁴⁹ Bundists knew that they would stay, and that these countries were in the process of providing a new “here”, a new “do”. But they were still strongly attached practically and emotionally to Russia, where they hoped that the revolution would finally succeed. When it did so in October 1917, Bundists experienced an internal division; within a few months almost all Bundist organization overseas split into socialist and communist factions that from now on not only interpreted events in Russia differently, but also the necessary forms of local work. For these

47. Zivion, “Di yidishe arbeyter in Paris”, p. 1.

48. Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 2, Referat (1906), pp. 8–14.

49. In European centres of immigration (for instance, Liverpool, London, and Manchester in Britain as well as Berlin in Germany), Bundist clubs also emerged, see Susanne Marten-Finnis, *Sprachinseln* (Cologne [etc.], 1999); Stefan Braun, “Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund in Deutschland”, *Kalonymos*, 4 (2008), pp. 15f.



Figure 1. Poster of a commemorative evening on Vladimir Medem (b. 1879) held in Berlin in 1927. In 1923 Medem had died in New York from the long-term effects of the nephritis that he had contracted in a tsarist prison. As in this case, commemorative events all over the world provided an occasion for local Bundist reunions, propaganda by recent Bundist leaders, and for reintegration of emigrated and deceased activists as virtual actors in the network of the Bund. *Collection IISH*

transnational collectives, local problems had the same importance as Russian ones. But this attachment to Russia and its “need” for a revolution was not mirrored in re-emigration after 1917. Most of these activists remained overseas in 1917 and even those who went back, like the famous Bundist Abraham Litvak, often quickly returned. The disillusion that Alexander Berkman described in his diary was not a uniquely anarchist experience, it struck many Bundists as well.⁵⁰ But they did not re-emigrate to independent Poland where the Bund was a legal party and successful cultural actor; America already had become a new “home”, though naturally still a problematic one in the eyes of socialists.

50. Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth* (New York, 1925).

ACTIVISM IN MIGRATION: USA

The establishment of Bundism in the United States was facilitated by experienced Bundists, who quickly gathered around self-created centres of activism. Even before the foundation of an American umbrella organization in 1903, Bundists had nine local organizations and eight *landsmanshaftn*. These were all created by self-organizing, Yiddish-speaking workers. Moreover, many Bundists also affiliated themselves with the newly emerging Socialist Party and deployed their Bundism within the party. To merge Bundism with American socialism required the formation of new actor networks, which materialized in new organizations: first of all the Jewish Agitation Office, and from 1912 the much more successful Jewish Socialist Federation, agitated strongly among Jewish workers and received recognition as the Yiddish-language branch of the rising Socialist Party. The famous and influential Abraham Cahan cooperated to some extent with the *Federatsye*, though he also voiced the suspicion that it wanted to create a “Bund in America”.⁵¹ His claim was certainly not unsubstantiated: the leadership of the *Federatsye* consisted largely of the same persons as the American Bundist groups. Moreover, the publication of its own periodicals was both a contribution to American socialism and a challenge to the omnipresent *Forverts*.

Bundists also had an enormous influence on the most prominent associations in the American Jewish workers’ milieu, the ILGWU and the Arbeter-ring.⁵² Such institutions assembled themselves by merging the agency of the American “setting” with Bundist practices and Bundist identities.⁵³ They were hence closely connected to the Russian “social” in the emigrant community, but even if they never became a Bund, they were, as the Bundist and long-term general secretary of the Arbeter-ring, Joseph Baskin, stated in 1927, “undoubtedly a direct outgrowth of the Bund and its position on general Jewish and cultural issues”.⁵⁴ That is why I refer to them as institutions of a *secondary Bundism*, which transferred Bundist thought and action into the functionally highly differentiated American society.

Secondary Bundism adopted Bundist activism without its organizational framework and therefore developed its own kind of secular Jewish modernity in America. This adaptation was a very successful mobilizer.

51. Cited in Nora Levin, *While Messias Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871–1917* (New York, 1977), p. 167.

52. This cannot be explored here; see Wolff, “Kollektive Identität als praktizierte Verheißung”.

53. “Setting” thereby is no passive background to actions but rather something that actively alters possibilities and probabilities. For a definition, see Akrich and Latour, “A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human and Non-Human Assemblies”.

54. Cited in Isaiah Trunk, “The Cultural Dimension of the American Jewish Labor Movement”, *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences*, 16 (1976), p. 364.

With the shift of the Arbeter-ring from a marginal health insurance association towards a political and cultural one, secondary Bundist organizational membership rocketed up to 80,000; the ILWGU rose from a few hundred members before 1909 to a mighty union of some 50,000 members after the shirtwaistmakers' strike,⁵⁵ a walkout driven by "Bund-type radical activism".⁵⁶ This transfer to secondary Bundism was highly necessary: the establishment of an independent Bundist journal in 1905 – the New York *Kemfer* – failed after poor sales of the 15,000 printed copies.⁵⁷ A distinct "Bundist" organ would not appear until 1941, when newly arrived immigrants founded *Unzer tsayt* in New York. Secondary Bundist papers like the *Der yiddisher sotsyalist* and its successor *Der veker*, by contrast, existed for decades and influenced both Yiddish and socialist culture in the United States.

Whilst Bundist organizations themselves did not have a strong impact on American Jewish history, secondary Bundist groups were of crucial importance for the local adaptation of a modern Bundist life in the Jewish diaspora. Secondary Bundism relied on major ideas of Bundism, like *doikeyt* and *yidishkayt*, whereas the Bund as a general association seemed unsuited to political and economic conditions in the USA. There were still, however, hundreds of Bundist groups all over the country. They existed because American Bundist organizations were of great importance to eastern European Jewish socialism – a transnational influence that secondary Bundist organizations barely achieved.⁵⁸

Actors, I argue, were absolutely aware of this functional differentiation, making active use of it and creating associations and institutions accordingly. That is why branches of the Arbeter-ring actively founded Bundist groups in the US: fourteen such groups were created in 1905 alone – and Bundist branches, on the other hand, "agitated" the Arbeter-ring

55. The strike involved about 50,000 workers of nine locals officially affiliated with the New York Cloak, Suit and Skirt Makers' Joint Board. The ILWGU soon numbered over 50,000 members, more than 90 per cent of the trade. These included: Operators' Union: 13,324 members, Finishers' Tailors Local 9: 15,627; Presser Local 35: 8,602, Skirt Makers' Local 23: 7,685 (the Italian Local 48 was not yet in existence). Thanks to the cloak makers, the ILWGU became the fifth largest union in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and by 1914 the third largest, as the result of increasing numbers of women joining. See Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in the USA 1914–1952: An Industrial, Political and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement*, II (New York, 1953), p. 11.

56. Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, ME-18, 2, Referat (1906), p. 4; Yefim Yeshurin, *Arbeter ring in ranglenishn un dergreykbungen (1914–1964)* (New York 1964), p. 226; Trunk, "Cultural Dimension of the American Jewish Labor Movement", p. 364; Judah Joseph Shapiro, *The Friendly Society: A History of the Workmen's Circle* (New York, 1970), p. 33; Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, pp. 189f.

57. Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, ME-18, 2, Referat (1906), p. 10.

58. One might add the Arbeter-ring in the interwar period as an exception, but by then the Bund and east European socialism had dramatically changed.



Figure 2. Barukh Charney Vladeck (1886–1938), active leader of the Yiddish workers' movement in America. Although he is much better known for his work for the Forverts, Yiddish unions, and on New York's City Council, with a special interest in social politics and public housing on the Lower East Side, he remained a devoted Bundist and strongly supported the Bund's work in New York.

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for Bundist purposes, including both politics and fundraising.⁵⁹ Their transnationalism was double-sided: on the one hand it inspired the formation and institutionalization of new collectives which were deeply embedded in the setting of the workers' movement in America, while on the other hand these organizations contributed to the increasing transfer of Bundism to the United States as well as to a transnational Yiddish culture. Unlike for the *Forverts* and Abraham Cahan, for these groups Yiddish culture was not a means of Americanization, but of the creation of an "east European social" abroad.⁶⁰

Bundist fundraising campaigns utilized anti-tsarist language and radical socialist rhetoric that was new to the American Jewish labour movement while, on the other hand, Bundist authors brought the new language of resistance and *yidishkayt* even to the *Forverts*. The success of this campaign enabled American activists to sponsor the Russian Bund to a large extent.⁶¹ In 1905, for example, the Russian Bund paid US\$10,000 to smuggle literature into Russia, almost every cent of which the Foreign Central Committee collected abroad. Before World War I, American Bundists wired up to \$40,000 per annum to the Foreign Committee, a sum that must be valued even higher as it was solely collected among Jewish workers. The Bundist fundraising of these years was in general campaign-oriented and consisted of small donations, mostly ranging between \$0.50 and \$2.00, collected from large numbers of Jewish workers. Such collections employed and constituted the Bund's network formation overseas by explicit reference to activism for eastern Europe. Owing to the wide outreach of the Bund, individual contributions added together to become large sums, which grew further in the 1920s and 1930s. However, fundraising campaigns were linked to the Bund in Russia and faced severe problems in the years 1907–1910 when the Bund suffered from persecution after the failed 1905 revolution.⁶²

59. Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, ME-18, 2, Referat (1906), p. 10; see especially the initiatives of the Bundist Dvinkser branch 75, *Arbeter-ring: Zamelbukh. Sovénir tsum 5-joriken yoresfest* ([New York] 1909); *Zamelbukh: Aroysgegebn tsum tsehtn yahres-fest* (New York 1914); *Dvinsker bundisher brentsh 75 arbeter ring. 35-joriker yubiley-zshurnal. 1904-1939*, (New York 1939).

60. The ideal of Americanization is best developed in his autobiographical novel: Abraham Cahan, *The Rise of David Levinsky* (New York, 1917); See also Ethel S. Beer, "The Americanization of Manhattan's Lower East Side", *Social Forces*, 15, (1937), pp. 411–416; Mayer, "Der 'bund' un Ab. Kahan"; Nina Warnke, "Immigrant Popular Culture as Contested Sphere: Yiddish Music Halls, the Yiddish Press, and the Process of Americanization, 1900–1910", *Theatre Journal*, 48, (1996), pp. 321–335.

61. In only a few days in February 1905, US \$1,000 was raised as immediate aid for the revolution that had just broken out; Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 3, Letter "Friends of the Bund", February 1905.

62. Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 4, Referat (1906), p. 8; *Ibd.* 3, various flyers, posters, and the letter "Tsentral farband fun bundistishe organizatsyonen in Amerika" [1910/1911].

In its heyday around 1905 the American Bund even created “self-defence groups” in the USA – not because of immediate local anti-Semitic pressure, but rather as offshoots of self-defence groups in Russia.⁶³ Their main activity, of course, was collecting money for Russia.⁶⁴ American Bundist groups were crucial for the expensive operations the Bund conducted in Russia – while at the same time they mediated Russian concerns and mobilized with great success for the transnational aim of fundraising for revolutionary Russia. Bundist groups in the US completely focused on such matters and received immense support even from Abraham Cahan, who praised the *Bund* and this Bundist ability to put on a fight as typically modern, and was in no way as suspicious as he was when it came to secondary Bundism.⁶⁵

In evaluating Bundism in the United States we must thus differentiate between Bundists and the Bund. Bundists were extremely important, first of all in the creation of the American strike movement and the new spirit of activism that emerged in New York with the 1909–1910 shirtwaist-makers’ strike. Bundists also staged cultural events, such as balls, lectures, and concerts, often co-organized by secondary Bundist organizations that were run in turn by Bundists.⁶⁶ At the same time, however, the Bund itself largely focused on fundraising and, apart from Russian issues, did not engage in the labour struggle in the US.

Nevertheless, and this is crucial, both trends were intrinsically linked: in strikes, Bundists were at the forefront of local struggles, but they also “used” these strikes to collect for the Bund.⁶⁷ This double transfer has been overlooked by historians of both American and east European Jewish history. Whereas the Bund in Russia, in Ezra Mendelsohn’s words, offered its members “a new world in which to live and work”, in the US it encountered a secular Yiddish world already in the making – to which it added a large measure of Russian-style agency and thus Russian “social”.⁶⁸

ACTIVISM IN MIGRATION: ARGENTINA

Bundist activism in Argentina offers a telling counter-example to the history of American Bundism we have just explored. Bundists came to

63. In this matter also the Central Committee of the Bund directly addressed “all Americans”; Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 2, “Di pogromen in Rusland un di zelfstferteydigung” (1905).

64. Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 2; *Ibid.*, 4, Referat (1906), pp. 10ff.

65. Cahan, “Faterland un ‘bund’”.

66. Bund Archives, RG 1400, ME-18, 3, “Vos feyern mir? Vos vilen mir?”, *Di Rotsbester tsaytung. Aroysgegebn fun “bund” brentsh S.P. un S.L. klub* (Dezember 1907), p. 2.

67. Bund Archives, New York, ME-18, 2, Referat (1906), p. 11.

68. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, p. 153.

Argentina in two major waves, the first after 1905 when “*ruso*” became a synonym for “eastern European Jewish worker-immigrant” and the second in the 1920s. Even though some patterns of Bundism were similar to those in the US, such as the fact that Bundist groups temporarily became Yiddish-speaking branches of the Partido Socialista, the differences dominate. Exploring these differences will highlight the development of a distinctly foreign, but transnational Bundist organization.

Bundism in Argentina was (re)born in the *barrio* of Once, especially on Plaza Lavalle, a square in the middle of the growing Jewish quarter in Buenos Aires. Here, Jewish immigrants met in a *birzshe* – what in Russia had been a collective and conspiratorial “walking” on the *shtetl* streets that had allowed collusion by hiding the cabal in public motion. In Argentina, this served as an institution of orientation, and offered integration by the means of a “social grammar” that was well-known to “green” immigrants but had now lost its conspiratorial character. It was a transitional stage that led immigrants into Yiddish unions and provided community and jobs.⁶⁹ These unions, in a very unique fashion, combined the whole political immigrant experience. The leading Argentinian Bundist, Pinie Vald, captured this in a single picture: a union room in 1906. The room’s walls were decorated with a Yiddish banner saying “The liberation of the working class is the act of the workers alone”, overlooked by three portraits: Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, and the “Liberator of Spanish South America”, José San Martín.⁷⁰ It is impossible to draw a better picture of the early twentieth-century fusion of socialism, anarchism, Latin American pride, and Yiddish culture in Argentina – and the energetic drive for “action” which dominated Bundist community building in Argentina.

Yiddish became important amongst Russian immigrants as a tool not only for workers’ self-organization, but also for their mobilization into established Argentinian movements. Even the highly influential anarchist periodical *La Protesta*, for instance, featured a Yiddish page in the 1900s. However, the most important institution grew out of the immigrants’ actions themselves: the *Biblioteca Rusa*. Despite its Russian name, the library mainly consisted of radical Yiddish publications, imported from Russia, from global Russian emigré circles, the United States, and even from the “Galician Bund”.

The library was also a platform for assemblage: out of the *Biblioteca Rusa* emerged the group Avangard, the founders of the highly innovative journal, *Der avangard*. Avangard was clearly a Bundist group, and *Der avangard* a Bundist journal from Rio de la Plata which, in contrast to the

69. Evidence for Yiddish unions in IWO, Buenos Aires, RG Sindicatos.

70. Pinie Vald, *Bletlekh [Hojas. Semblanzas de mi ambiente]* (Buenos Aires, 1929), p. 8.

failure of the *Kemfer* in New York, was a high-quality and influential periodical for Yiddish-speaking workers in Argentina.⁷¹ The formation of the group also required a recreation of the “social” of the Russian Bund: *avangardistas* did not consider themselves as Bundists, but they transferred practical Bundism to the Southern Hemisphere. As a result, they played a founding role for Yiddish trade unions, theatres, and educational initiatives. The Avangard also actively supported and organized the Jewish strike movement, as well as anti-Semitic action.⁷² This was *doikeyt* in action.

Of course, this also reproduced debates about the relevance of Yiddish – with Spanish as an equivalent for Russian or English – and about a distinct Jewish workers’ movement, conflicts that arose with the newspaper *Iskra* in Russia as well as with *Shtime fun avangard* in Argentina.⁷³ As in Russia, Bundists ultimately gained more support among Jewish workers. Moreover, when Red October dissociated Bundist unity in eastern Europe and led to harsh fights between supporters and opponents of the “Bolshevik way”, the Argentinian movement quickly followed suit.⁷⁴ The Russian-inspired urge for more violent and conspiratorial action caused dissent in the mass-based workers’ movement; young activists understood this as a generational shift that finally caused the dissolution of the group.⁷⁵ The Avangard survived persecution by the Argentinian police, the destruction of the *Biblioteca Rusa* in 1910 and the repression of socialist groups during World War I, even a major pogrom in Buenos Aires, the *semana trágica* which was mainly driven by anti-socialist violence – but it could not withstand the pressure

71. “Vos vilen mir?,” *Der avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 1 (1908), pp. 1f.

72. IWO, Buenos Aires, 1114; Pinie Vald, “Di geshikhte fun di yidishe sotsyal demokratishe arbeyter organisatsye in argentine (avangard), vol. 1”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 1 (1908), pp. 12–15; *idem*, “Di geshikhte fun di yidishe sotsyal demokratishe arbeyter organisatsye in argentine (avangard), vol. 2”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 2 (1908), pp. 21–23; P. Libman, “Tsu der taktik fun dem proletarishn kamf”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 5 (1908), pp. 4–11; Pinie Vald, “Der algemeyner shtreyk. Fun 1-ten biz dem 8ten may in argentina”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires* 2, no. 4 (June 1909), pp. 14–18; “Di royte vokh”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires* 2, no. 4 (1909), pp. 1–4; “Der ershter may fun 1917”, *Der avangard, Buenos Aires*, 2, 2te epokhe, no. 16–17 (1917), pp. 129–135; Vald, “Yidish sotsyalistische un arbeter-bavegung in Argentine biz 1910”, pp. 92–126.

73. “Fun redaktsye”, *Di shtime fun avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 1 (1909), p. 1; “Vikhtig fir arbeyter”, *Di shtime fun avangard, Buenos Aires*, 1, no. 2 (1909), p. 22; Jacob S. Hertz, “The Bund’s Nationality Program and Its Critics in the Russian, Polish and Austrian Socialist Movements”, *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Sciences*, 14 (1969), pp. 53–67; Mario Kessler, “Parteiorganisation und nationale Frage – Lenin und der jüdische Arbeiterbund 1903–1914”, in Theodor Bergmann (ed.), *Lenin: Theorie und Praxis in historischer Perspektive* (Mainz, 1994), pp. 219–231; Gusev, “V. Kossovskij i V. Medem protiv V. Lenina”.

74. Abraham Brumberg, “The Bund: History of a Schism”, in Jacobs, *Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe*, pp. 81–89.

75. IWO, Buenos Aires, 1114, Letters Veber/Kohn.

that emerged from changes in the Russian “social” to which it was intrinsically tied.⁷⁶

This was a dramatic contrast to the American situation, where the secondary Bundist Arbeter-ring proved to be far more stable. It certainly underwent changes, but avoided a split between socialist and communist factions until 1926. The Jewish Socialists’ Federation suffered a communist split but it was directly converted into the even stronger Jewish socialist Farband. Bundist groups in Argentina, by contrast, were smashed and scattered; they only gained new strength with the formation of new transnational networks, based in the new wave of Polish immigration after 1924.

The Avangard was certainly as Bundist as it was possible to be outside of Russia – but it was formed to create a specific Argentinian Jewish workers’ movement. Still, Russia was part of these associations, as reflected not only in the institutionalizations of the movement but also on an intellectual level. The weekly lectures organized by the Avangard attracted listeners from different parties, but they mostly remained restricted to Russian immigrants by simple structural parameters: they were held only in Yiddish, Polish, or Russian, and mainly discussed Russian topics. These were no lectures about a distant land of the past: topics on Russia were never perceived as isolated from Argentina. Russia was a month-long passage away but its issues were discussed as global topics that were closely related to Argentinian themes.⁷⁷

Why was such a direct transfer of the Bundist *doikeyt* and even major parts of its organizational framework possible only for Bundists in South America? First there is a structural, economic fact: Argentina was still a frontier state, and within Argentina the *barrios* of Once and Villa Crespo were particular internal Jewish frontiers.⁷⁸ There was no noteworthy Yiddish life before mass immigration; the quarters literally grew with immigration and urban reconstruction using economic structures that were fairly similar to those in Polish Russia.⁷⁹ This was fundamental for the Bundist practice of creating a Jewish modernity. Other, negative experiences were also re-experienced in

76. For a first-hand account see Pinie Vald’s extraordinary depiction of the tragic week in Pinie Wald, *Pesadilla. Novela-crónica de la semana trágica (1919)* (Rosario, 1998).

77. See IWO, Buenos Aires, 1114, various tickets; and many reports in *Der avangard* as well as in Vald, *Bletlekh*.

78. Daniel J. Elazar and Peter Medding, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies: Argentina, Australia, and South Africa* (New York [etc.], 1983).

79. Eugene F. Sofer, *From Pale to Pampa: A Social History of the Jews of Buenos Aires* (New York, 1982), pp. 66–79; Marcelo Dimentstein, “The Building of ‘Once’: Immigrant Bourgeoisie, ‘Ethnic’ Architects and Jewish Elites (1900–1930)”, *Perush* 2, no. 1 (2010), <http://perush.cjs.ucla.edu/index.php/volume-2/jewish-urban-history-in-comparative-perspective-jewish-buenos-aires-and-jewish-los-angeles/3-marcelo-dimentstein-the-building-of-the-once-neighborhood-in-buenos-aires-immigrant-bourgeoisie-ethnic-architects-and-jewish-elites-1900-1930> (accessed 11 May 2010).

Argentina, from police persecution to an unstable political system and even the 1919 pogrom. To sum up, in Argentina the Bundist counter-culture still functioned as anti-system activism.

Secondly, there is an internal argument to be made: the Avangard, even though it bore a different name and developed a specific Argentinian constitution, was a Bund in Argentina, precisely because it was only marginally connected to the Bund in Russia. Activists could only remain Bundist when working *in* and *for* Argentina – and that meant that they had to create their own actor-networks in the Argentinian situation in order to ensure the persistence of a Bundist identity. The Avangard was deeply Bundist *because* it was transnational and Argentinian at the same time. This organizational distance from the Foreign Committee and the persistent political closeness to its aims allowed workers – intellectuals were far more marginal than in Russia – to assemble a “social” in the Russian fashion, but for Argentinian purposes.

CONCLUSION

The Bund and Bundist identities re-constituted themselves time and again because the Bund was, in Bruno Latour’s terms, neither unit nor party, it was a group formation “enacted” by activists.⁸⁰ The internationalist rhetoric of the Bund was actively interwoven with transnational practices and local issues. Bundism in migration therefore constantly worked on the possibilities for a culture and a Jewish identity in Bundist terms, a secular modernization of Jewish life that, in large parts, never lost touch with its revolutionary past.

Even though it goes well beyond the scope of this article, a short comparison of the Bund with its neighbouring movements, Zionism and communism, allows us to understand that the Bundist formation of collectives in the age of great migrations was specific in its shape, but not in its substance. The Zionist movement was also based on relations that bridged the oceans and connected distant points for a utopian aim. Yet, the function of the past and its inclusion into the patterns of the movement’s activism differed. Zionist self-perception did not centre on certain revolutions or heroic moments of activism, it searched for a “usable past”, and therefore Zionist immigrants in Palestine wanted “to cast the revolutionary past in stone and elevate it to a new status”.⁸¹ For the Bundists it was different: motivated by historical materialism, they engaged in their “historical fight” and tried to “make” history happen. In the US the early Bundist groups

80. Bruno Latour, “The Powers of Association”, in John Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (London, 1986), pp. 264–280.

81. David G. Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington, IN, 1999), p. 136.

“used” strikes mainly for fundraising on behalf of Russian revolutionaries, and in Argentina the Avangard acted as an Argentinian Bund. It actively fostered general strikes and uprisings – in such a radical fashion that it even went on strike against its own printer, leading to the first interruption of the journal in February and March 1909.

In this radicalism the Bundist and communist movements were not only related, they were deeply entangled, especially in Argentina, in terms of the individuals involved. In 1921, the Avangard split into a communist and a socialist branch, one joining the Comintern, the other founding the Bund Club in 1924.⁸² The young Soviet state also tried to win over Bundists to their cause and succeeded with a certain delay.⁸³ But for the two movements the split in 1917 led to different interpretations of the function of transnationalism. Communists engaged in internationalist arguments and practices, and in the construction and support of the “world party of revolution”, the Comintern.⁸⁴ The past was refashioned as a result of this new constellation and the point of no return that was October 1917.⁸⁵ The Bundist past still centred on 1905, and in their actions Bundists focused on local groups, on their support for the Bund in independent Poland, and – most importantly – on the creation of a global secular Jewish culture. Yet the national settings were formative. The social space of Yiddish culture in Argentina was completely open for Bundist socialism; in the US, Bundists had to “relocalize” their practices owing to the existing conditions and structures of Yiddish life, and associate their objectives with collectives already in existence.

On this basis we can see that social movements do not migrate with their members, nor is there a structural “logic” that leads to the creation of such movements. Assumptions that actors simply transplanted their “well-developed socialist tradition and social consciousness” to “Milwaukee, New York and elsewhere” are far too simplified.⁸⁶ Moreover, this was an

82. IWO, Buenos Aires, #1114; Viktor L. Kheifets and Lazar Kheifets, “Die Komintern und Argentinien in den Jahren 1919–1922. Die Kommunistische Partei Argentiniens gegen die ‘argentinischen Lenins’”, *International Newsletter of Communist Studies*, 22 (2009), pp. 140f. 83; Kenneth B. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA [etc.], 2009).

84. On the structure of the Comintern, see Bernhard H. Bayerlein, “Das neue Babylon: Strukturen und Netzwerke der Kommunistischen Internationale und ihre Klassifizierung”, *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung*, (2004), pp. 181–270; on practices and international relations, see Aldo Agosti, “The Concept of World Revolution and the ‘World Party for the Revolution’ (1919–1943)”, *The International Newsletter of Historical Studies on Comintern, Communism and Stalinism* 4/5, no. 9–13 (1997), pp. 73–83; Gleb J. Albert, “‘German October is Approaching’: Internationalism, Activists, and the Soviet State in 1923”, *Revolutionary Russia*, 24 (2011), pp. 111–142.

85. Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, NY [etc.], 2004).

86. Bodnar, *The Transplanted*, pp. 105f.

enormous challenge and a matter of constant exchange between the old and the new country. That is why the creation of the Bundist “social” far from Russia reveals unique insights into local Jewish life, as well as into what actors considered as important parts of a Russian “social”. Migrants often re-organized as a result of prior experiences, and so even revolutionary and “modernizing” movements partially relied on structural conservatism. Bundist associations abroad were not remote from Russia; they constituted a part of a Russian “social”. Thus, a Russian revolutionary “social” cannot be depicted without a close observation of its emigré groups.

Undoubtedly, the Bund created a new way of life and assembled a distinct “social” in Russia.⁸⁷ But this depended not on the Bund’s “orthodox” ideology but rather on Bundist practices that were a workers’ “daily plebiscite”, thus by no means restricted to eastern Europe. It was a transnational, yet partially a global phenomenon because it tended to create diasporic “homes” everywhere Bundists migrated to.⁸⁸ These “homes” were then places for local activism and transnational exchange, from the creation of schools to commemorative reunions and pro-active union work. The emerging associations, of course, were anything but isolated islands; they were actors for the continual recreation of a transnational Bundist sphere in which Bundist activists wove the “social fabric”, as Bruno Latour put it, in order to reassociate a social movement that set out to revise Jewish life generally.

As a result, in migration studies the “exchange between poles” deserves far more attention. Half a century ago, the historian of migration, Frank Thistlewaite, diagnosed a “saltwater curtain” that he held responsible for the practical and empirical separation between emigration and immigration history.⁸⁹ This curtain still dominates perspectives on the history of “east European” Jews, wherever they lived. ANT is an appropriate way finally to overcome this artificial barrier, because it cannot be applied without broadening the perspective to networks as well as to interruptions of contact on various levels of transfer and community building. In ANT nothing is self-explanatory any more. Even fundraising, for example, the “lightest” version of anti-tsarist activism, is by no means a “natural” action for political emigrants. Bundists in the US devoted much energy to it, but they did not in Argentina. Furthermore, fundraising neither starts nor ends with cash flow. Picking up the receiver does not equal the complexity of a phone call, and wiring money does not equal the multiplicity of activism necessary for the emergence of actor-networks.

87. Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, pp. 158f.

88. Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, in Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (eds), *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York [etc.], 1996), pp. 52f.

89. Frank Thistlewaite, “Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries”, *XI Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Rapports*, 5 (1960), pp. 32–60.

Bundists certainly forged their networks by a certain notion of war: class war. But patterns of the way in which this struggle was enforced shifted dramatically from situation to situation, and finally the “culturalized” *doikeyt* led to the creation of a multi-faceted, self-confident, and globally applicable concept of secular Jewish diaspora life.⁹⁰ On this basis, we can understand the “paradox” that Bundism in Argentina was far more in the Russian style than was Bundism in New York, where Bundists had much closer contact with Russia but never created a Bund of the Russian kind. In Argentina, on the other hand, the Bund was of crucial importance for the creation of the local Jewish community even until after World War II. The Bund never became an important actor in North American society, but Bundists who steadily reclaimed their Bundist identity and the relevance of Bundist practices are to be found in the highest ranks of the once so important Yiddish-speaking part of America.⁹¹

But this also refers to the limits of this transfer: Social movements do not “run” by themselves, they need an on-going “power supply” from the activists of the movement. Besides the focus on Yiddish, it was exactly the transnational aspect, the vivid relationship between “here” and “there”, between individual perceptions of “past” and “now”, that tied the *Bund* to the first generation of migrants.⁹² A second generation could barely experience such a strong presence of “*di alte heyim*” and the relevance of its fights and struggles in everyday life. For those who lost touch, socialism became “just a happier way of keeping us together”. Socialism was no longer associated with heated meetings, strikes, or prison experiences; for them “Socialism [was] one long Friday evening around the Samovar and the cut-glass bowl laden with nuts and fruits, all of us singing *Tsuzamen, tsuzamen, ale tsuzamen*” – the Bundist anthem, which referred to nothing but “that beautiful Russian country of the mind”.⁹³

Despite all the progress in aviation and communications, for them the Atlantic Ocean was much wider than for the migrant generation who used to travel back and forth throughout the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Historians have long perpetuated this belief and

90. This again refers to the concept that movements, like any actors, lose agency when they are no longer “enacted”. Activism therefore naturally has many structurally conservative components; see Latour, “Powers of Association”.

91. See for instance the leading figures in *Forverts* and the American union movement: N. Khanin, “Eyn mol a bundist – ale mol a bundist”, *Der veker* [New York], 528 (1934), pp. 16f.; Khanine Kromorski, “17 yor a poylisher bundist in amerike”, in *Zamlheft fun bundishn klub in Nyu York. Aroytsgegebn lekhoved dem 15 yoriken yubiley* (New York 1938), pp. 8–11; B[arukh Tsharney] Vladek, “Fir yor in ‘bund’ un geblibn oyf stendik”, *Unzer tsayt* [New York], 3–4 (1947), pp. 83f.

92. Bund Archives, New York, RG 1400, Workmen’s Circle Collection, 1317, 6, Report to the Annual Meeting of the National Organization Committee, Workmen’s Circle, 13 July 1941.

93. Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City* (Orlando, FL, 1979, 1st publ. 1946), p. 62.

thereby reconstructed – and surprisingly often still reconstruct – the “saltwater curtain” that separates research on the new American communities and their communities of origin in Europe.⁹⁴ The history of the Bund reveals the inability of this approach to capture the larger picture. So long as the Bund was understood as an entity, an east European party, things were easy to separate. But given the importance of transatlantic exchange and influence – which can only be seen by valuing collective agency and the dynamics of the formation Bundist actor-networks – we need to reconnect what once was one in order to understand the internal processes of the Bund as well as its influence on the outside world. In this way we can understand that migration was much more than emigration- or immigration history can see – it was a dynamic and ongoing process of global exchange by which Bundists *de facto* enacted their vision of a secular Jewish diaspora. Thus globalization not only created economic or political networks, it also impacted the everyday lives of authors and journalists as well as those of tailors and shoemakers.

94. Thistlewaite, “Migration from Europe Overseas”.