

# MASS MIGRATION AND LOCAL POLITICS IN CHICAGO AND VIENNA, 1850–1938: SOME QUESTIONS, SOME HYPOTHESES

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American urbanization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has always been described as a unique experience. Migrants from the peasant villages and small towns of Europe, Central America, and Asia, as well as African Americans from the southern states, converged on the metropolises. The American city resembled a patchwork, and its ethnic divisions were simultaneously a source of dynamism and conflict. “When there are added to one American city more Italians than there are Italians in Rome, we have something new in history,” remarked sociologists Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller in 1925.<sup>1</sup>

Yet from a comparative perspective the assumption of an American urban exceptionalism may be questioned: Urbanization in Central Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was no less the result of mass migration, mostly from rural areas. Most but not all migrants had the same ethnic background as the old-stock city-dwellers. Some German cities, however, especially in the Ruhr area and in Silesia, and to a lesser extent Berlin, experienced an influx of Polish peasants. Even more interesting, in most of the big cities in the Hapsburg empire, especially Vienna and Prague, urbanization and migration were divided along lines of ethnicity: Prague was split between Germans and Czechs, and a considerable part of the population of Vienna came from Bohemia, Moravia, and Galicia. In 1880, 65 percent of the Viennese population had been born outside the city, and the migration from the surrounding Kronländer to Vienna was heavier than the migration from Austria to the United States. In 1900, 491,295 people in the United States had Austrian citizenship, while 900,852 people in Vienna had not been born in that city.<sup>2</sup> While none of the Central European cities had an ethnic makeup that resembled those of American cities, the experience of mass migration—both mono- and multiethnic—had a crucial impact on urban governance in both Central Europe and the United States.

The aim of this ongoing research project on Chicago and Vienna is to examine the impact of migration in a comparative perspective, asking questions such as: How did mass migration change the local political regimes and their administrative capacity? How did the degree of de-

mocratization and the processes of naturalization and local party traditions influence a political and social inclusion or exclusion of migrants? What role did corruption, patronage, and a local politics of image play in the real as well as the symbolic integration of migrants? And how did symbolic attempts to unify a fragmented city correlate with the local politics of inclusion or exclusion?

This project is clearly inspired by some of the contemporary debates about an ethnic “parallel society” [*Parallelgesellschaft*] that some consider to be developing in European cities and that they perceive as a threat (or at least a barrier) to democracy. This “parallel society” of migrants seems to be a result of two converging tendencies: The first comes out of a national/local politics that slowly acknowledges the fact that most (Western) European countries are countries of immigration, and which because of this background are reluctant to engage in politics of inclusion and integration. The second comes out of a seemingly self-made retreat of some migrants into their own ethnic (and religious) community. The current characterization of these migrants as examples of a “transnationality without opportunities”<sup>3</sup> [*chancenlose Transnationalität*] can be used as a tool of historical analysis: Is the so-called “parallel society” really a threat to democracy? Or is it a social prerequisite for democratization—in the sense that this “parallel society” can be seen as a training ground for finding out about one’s own political interests, thus allowing for the rise of ethnic politicians (mostly but not necessarily from the second generation) who then connect their “parallel society” to the world of multiethnic local politics? Is it possible to describe the security of an ethnically defined social milieu as a prerequisite for a successful participation in the matrix of a non-ethnically defined field of municipal politics and administration? Or is that a somewhat naive perspective that overlooks the fact that a parallel society will always act politically, but not necessarily in a democratic way and not necessarily in municipal politics, i.e. a politics focused on the city as such?

Questions regarding inclusion and exclusion as well as the incentives for ethnic or “native” politicians to engage in municipal politics may seem typical—even a bit old-fashioned—research topics for American urban history. Why this comparison? Does it not seem odd to compare Chicago and Vienna, two cities that at first seem rather “incomparable”? On the one side there is the big boom-town in the American Midwest, increasing from zero to three million inhabitants in the century between 1830 and 1930 and described by John Dewey as “sheer Matter with no standards at all.”<sup>4</sup> On the other side, there is the old imperial town, the political center of a monarchy and a bulwark of traditional high culture—nothing but “sheer standard.”

A comparison is certainly possible between two dissimilar cases. Any comparison works within the field of differences and similarities; in order to grasp the eminent differences, however, a comparative view needs to start out with some similarities. And it seems that this basic similarity is not restricted to a characterization of Vienna as a multiethnic “melting pot”; an even more striking similarity consists in what may be called “the physiognomy of municipal politics.”<sup>5</sup> In Vienna, the decline and fall of liberal politics *Honoratioren*-style in the last third of the nineteenth century gave room to the rise of Karl Lueger to the position of mayor in 1897 and the hegemony of his Christian Social Party in the following two decades. Some contemporary observers as well as historians considered Lueger’s regime to represent an American-style mix of machine politics, bossism, patronage, and clientelism—a political regime of the kind prominent in Chicago.<sup>6</sup> (Such levels of “Americanism” certainly distinguished Vienna from municipal political regimes in nearly all of the cities in the German Empire. Before the revolution of 1918/19 these cities were based on a restricted franchise that allowed an undisturbed bourgeois rule. The project implicitly uses German municipal political regimes as a *tertium comparationis* for Vienna and Chicago.)

The project analyzes Vienna and Chicago as local variations of a political phenomenon described by Max Weber: the interaction of mass politics and charismatic leadership. (At least some of the Chicago city bosses must be considered to have been charismatic leaders.) In both cities, urbanization was a mix of population growth (based primarily on migration from rural areas) and democratization: Vienna did not elect a city council [*Gemeinderat*] on the basis of a general male franchise. The old census-based, restricted franchise was successfully reformed, and in 1885, the *Fünfguldenmänner* (those who paid at least five Gulden in taxes) had the right to vote. This petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and landlords served as Lueger’s and his “machine’s” power-base. In order to develop more general answers to questions of mass migration and local democracy, the project will analyze the connection between mass migration and the municipal political regime, between (partial) democratization and the politics of inclusion and exclusion of ethnic groups in the “real” as well as in the symbolic areas of local politics. It is important to understand the obvious connection between population growth and democratization, a connection certainly akin to a “superstructure,” a structure that rests on other interactions that are easy to postulate but difficult to grasp.

In Vienna, the lawful criteria to distinguish in-group and out-group among the city population were threefold: the *Gemeindestatut*, which decided who belonged to the city in the sense of “*Gemeindeangehörigkeit*”; the *Gemeindewahlordnung*, which explained who could vote; and the *Heimatgesetz* (as a state law), which defined the group of city inhabitants who

were entitled to local public welfare. All three criteria (as well as the more symbolic "*Bürgerrecht*" of the City of Vienna) were connected in a way that made it difficult even for lawyers to understand. This web of inclusion and exclusion based on financial status and length of stay remained opaque, and local political elites used the somewhat mysterious distinction between "*Staatsbürger*" (citizens of the state), "*Gemeindeangehörige*" (members of the community), "*Gemeindebürger*" (citizens of the community), and so on as a set of instruments to divide and rule.<sup>7</sup>

The American city in general and the Midwestern city in particular never had a system of municipal citizenship. Home rule in a European sense was unknown: Political scientist Albert Lepawsky pointed out in 1935 that even a large city like Chicago was legally "an infant."<sup>8</sup> The Illinois General Assembly in Springfield acted as a supra-local government, and this parliament (with a majority of representatives and senators from rural areas) decided many issues of local municipal concern. The less developed possibilities of Chicago's legal system did not allow for any strict *municipal* distinction between "citizens of the city" and "aliens." The prevailing general male franchise and the mostly generous process of naturalizing immigrants created a mass political market that made questions of inclusion and exclusion an issue for political parties.

It is the role and function of political parties within their respective election systems that distinguished Vienna and Chicago. In the latter city (as elsewhere in the United States), both traditional parties, the Democratic and the Republican Party, remained without a clear-cut class basis and without any kind of *weltanschauung*. (They lacked a definite ethos—they were "*gesinnungslos*" in Max Weber's depiction). The necessity of organizing a political majority on the mass market of male voters encouraged an inclusive attitude rather than any kind of pronounced exclusion of an ethnic or racially defined group. (The inclusive appeal of the American party system certainly allowed some to toy with racist slurs and permitted a somewhat preposterous ethnic pride). The Viennese party system, on the other hand—Liberals, German Nationalists, the Christian Social Party, and Social Democrats—was much more linked, in terms of both class and ideology, to particular socio-political urban milieus. It was also the product of the partially democratized but nevertheless still restricted electoral system, which allowed for a "coalition" between the petty bourgeoisie (or even a larger *Mittelstand*) and the Christian Social Party. At the same time, this system made it more difficult for the upper and upper-middle class as well as the working class and their natural political representatives (Liberals and Social Democrats) to secure electoral success and political influence.

The Viennese party system was limited by its inherent exclusion on the basis of property and length of stay. It therefore does not seem sur-

prising that suppressed minorities, especially the Czechs, started to build their own political organizations and ethnic parties in Vienna rather than in the more inclusive political arena of Chicago. It is ironic that the full democratization of the Viennese voting system in 1919 allowed the Czech party and the Jewish-National Party to be successful and equal competitors, and that both parties went out of business at the same time: The Social Democrats became the dominant political force in democratic Vienna, and they preferred not to have other parties compete for working-class votes. Since most of the voters for the Czech and the Jewish party came from the working class and because these voters tended naturally to side with social democracy, it was not difficult for the Social Democrats to incorporate or co-opt the ethnic vote. The Social Democrats already had a considerable number of Jewish members among their city councilors [*Gemeinderäte*], and from the 1923 election on they usually reserved two seats for Czech Social Democrats. For that reason, the short era of ethnic party-building came to an end in 1923. Social Democrats could henceforth count on the Czech and Jewish vote to help them build and preserve the social democratic hegemony in "Red Vienna." It will be one of the intriguing questions of this research project to ask whether the Social Democrats, the heirs to the Lueger political machine, need to be considered to be another (much more powerful) kind of political machine: a machine with an inclusive appeal (among the working class), with less corruption and more ideology, but with other features characteristic of a centralized political machine (of the European type). If this turns out to be so, this machine in the 1920s made Vienna one of the best-governed cities in Central Europe. (At its peak, the party had about 400,000 card-carrying members among a city population of 1.9 million—a degree of political organization of which most German Social Democrats could only dream.)

From the perspective of the political system, it might make sense to characterize the political regime in Vienna (until 1918) as the "plateau type"<sup>9</sup> and the one in Chicago (since the "invention" of machine politics in the last third of the nineteenth century) as the "pyramid type." To speak of a "plateau type" implies a sharp distinction between the in-group on top of the "plateau" and the out-group in the surrounding "valley." To speak of a "pyramid type" implies a distinction between "top" and "bottom." The "pyramid type" of political regime is inclusive but with its distinction between "top" and "bottom" certainly not a well-balanced "house for all peoples."<sup>10</sup> Vienna switched from the "plateau type" to the "pyramid type" during the revolution of 1918, when a complete democratization of the voting system came along as a rigid form of working-class politics. This overwhelmed the old Lueger-style politics that played on ethnic pride and fear.

One of the problems of any analysis of ethnic politics is this: How can one be sure that members of a certain ethnic group make their political decisions as members of that group rather than for reasons having to do with social class and/or gender? The project does not try to analyze municipal political regimes from the point of view of ethnic political organizations but rather as a point of interaction between the various actors in municipal politics. The main sources, therefore, are the proceedings of the city councils in both cities. These were written in a rather lean and even a bit sterile fashion in the case of Chicago, which will allow for an analysis of the more symbolic aspects of aldermanic politics. In the case of Vienna, the documents contain verbatim minutes, including insults and the occasional slur. The project uses other sources as well, including contemporary commentaries inside and outside local politics.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert E. Park and Herbert A. Miller, *Old World Traits Transplanted* (Chicago, 1925), 259. For the original authorship of William I. Thomas see Dietrich Herrmann, "Be an American!" *Amerikanisierungsbewegung und Theorien zur Einwandererintegration* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 299.

<sup>2</sup> Michael John, "Migration, Ethnizität und Urbanität. Zur Haltung der österreichischen Arbeiterbewegung in der Habsburgermonarchie," in *Die Bewegung: Hundert Jahre Sozialdemokratie in Österreich*, ed. Erich Fröschl et al. (Vienna, 1990), 165–185, 167.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, "Laboratorium einer alternden Gesellschaft? Das Ruhrgebiet vor den Herausforderungen von Demographie und Migration," in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (international edition), June, 25, 2004, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, 1991), 83.

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Jaszi, "Why Austria Perished," *Social Research: An International Quarterly of Political and Social Science* 5 (1938): 304–327, 306.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Boyer, *Culture and Political Crisis in Vienna: Christian Socialism in Power, 1897–1918* (Chicago, 1995), 13, 239–244. Of course, Boyer also points to a lot of dissimilarities between Chicago and Vienna. For the classic analysis of machine politics in Chicago see Charles E. Merriam, *Chicago: A More Intimate View of Politics* (New York, 1929) and Harold F. Gosnell, *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (Chicago, 1937).

<sup>7</sup> Maren Seliger and Karl Ucakar, *Wien: Politische Geschichte 1740–1934. Entwicklung und Bestimmungskräfte grossstädtischer Politik, Teil 2: 1896–1934* (Vienna, 1985), 753–766.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Lepawsky, *Home Rule for Metropolitan Chicago* (Chicago, 1935), 1.

<sup>9</sup> For the juxtaposition of plateau and pyramid, see: Monika Glettler, *Die Wiener Tschechen: Die Strukturanalyse einer nationalen Minderheit in der Großstadt* (Munich/Vienna, 1972), 286.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Allswang, *A House for all Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago, 1890–1936* (Lexington, 1971).