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## ***Jewish Entrepreneurs, self-employed and professionals in Helsinki – the unchanged occupational structure 1915, 1930 and some ideas of the mid-1960s***

### ***Introduction and goals for this paper***

My ongoing doctoral dissertation is about the economic profile and entrepreneurship of the Jewish community in Helsinki from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1960s. The Jews did not dominate the clothing and textile markets in Finland; the number of Jewish families was so small that this would not have been possible; but it is safe to say that the clothing business dominated Finnish-Jewish life. Practically every family, excluding the rabbi and a few teachers invited by the congregation from abroad, had a link to business with textiles, ready-made clothes, fashion or furs. Jews in Finland were generally associated with business in these fields.

The Jewish community of Helsinki has always been of marginal size. Even in the interwar period, when the community was at its largest, it comprised little more than a thousand members. In a city of ca. 220 000 inhabitants the entire Jewish community could have fit to one city block. And yet ca. 20 % of the garment and clothing stores were owned by Jewish families in the 1920s and the 1930s. Why were the Jews so strongly associated with business in this field? Why was the garment industry so heavily dominated by Jews and other ethnic minorities here as well as in other countries? And what did this mean for the community? The focus of my study is *the relationship between occupational profile and a minority position*.

*The main questions of my research are:*

- 1) How has the business orientation been explained and represented by the different actors; the Jews in Helsinki, their non-Jewish competitors, in the literature and in to the late 1960s? → Whether or not Jews are categorized as Jews? And how did Jews regard themselves?
- 2) Has this change been related to their occupational structure?
- 3) *And finally, have the occupational choices been a necessity-driven consequence or rather personal decisions?*

Ethnic minorities and immigrants tend to have a biased economic structure and their share among entrepreneurs and business owners is high. The studies on first or second generation immigrants often take entrepreneurship as a necessity-driven consequence of social exclusion, limited contact to natives, and poor professional and language skills.

Not all trading minorities are in the margins of the society. Such historically and culturally different groups as Armenians in France, Old Believers in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, the Chinese in Southeast Asia and the Indians in Sub-Saharan Africa perform well and are in many cases exceptionally successful in business. Theoretically any such urban business-oriented Diaspora community could be a part of this study; despite their very different ethno-religious backgrounds and historical contexts, different cultural practices and social positions, they all have a recognizable group-cohesion which has been turned into an economic resource.<sup>1</sup> The co-ethnic networks form a source of social capital. As Alejandro Portes has put it: “*financial capital rests on people’s bank accounts, cultural capital is in their heads and social capital is derived from the structures of people’s social relations.*”<sup>2</sup> The studies on ethnic entrepreneurship have found certain mechanisms that benefit from the closed, business-oriented communities: a cheap and reliable labor force from the co-ethnic community, efficient credit rotation, and the sharing of relevant information. There are, however, few studies that would take into account the historical perspective.

The economic role of Jews was a widely debated subject in pre-Second World War Europe. Many contemporaries regarded it as the key question in European economic development. Also, in Finland, where the number of Jews was very small, persistent images of the cosmopolitan nature of the Jews, their international networks, their experience in the

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Portes 1998.

business life, and ability to compete against the ascending Finnish bourgeois, as well as their assumed predominance in the Socialist movement were widespread.

The recent studies on ethnicity have paid a lot of attention to labor-market experiences of the minorities, social capital derived from the ethnic networks and the occupational structures of the host-society. The debate contains two oppositional approaches to ethnic entrepreneurship. There are studies demonstrating that ethnic entrepreneurship is a necessity-driven consequence of social exclusion, limited contact to natives and poor professional and language skills. On the other hand, studies have shown that the ethnic businesses gain advantage from their networks in the forms of a cheap and reliable labor force and material resources in forms of co-ethnic credits.<sup>3</sup> The idea of how close ethnic networks function is exemplified by the oft-cited description of the New York City jewelry industry where extremely expensive diamonds are said to change hands without fear of fraud or theft. There is no need for complicated contracts or costly security because no one in the business can afford to cheat. They are all inter-connected by marriages and the families meet every Saturday at the same inner-city synagogues.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to be a part of a chapter on the occupational profile of the Jewish community in Helsinki from the First World War until the mid-1960s. In this paper I will draw a rough “reconstruction” of the occupational profiles among the Helsinki Jews in two periods: 1915, 1930.

I will first give a short overview of the Helsinki Jewish community and how the literature has lumped together all Jewish business with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century “Jewish” market place which has become to symbolize the poverty and ethnic exclusion of the community.

After a brief introduction of the data, three community-wide data bases, including basically the entire Jewish population in Helsinki on three different cross-section years (1915, 1930 and 1965), I will determine the number of entrepreneurs in the Jewish community. How many Jews were business owners? I will then give a preliminary presentation on what was the occupational profile like and how much it changed since the civil rights (1918) and removing of the old obstacles. The final section of this paper will estimate the number of

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<sup>3</sup> Portes, Sensenbrenner 1993, Portes 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Ben-Porath 1980.

Jews working in the own ethnic cluster in 1915 and 1930, and have some preliminary ideas of the situation in 1965.

### ***The Jewish Community of Helsinki***

The Jews of Helsinki provide a good case study for ethnic entrepreneurship. Because the community is so small, it is possible to work on the level of the entire community over a long period of time. It has never exceeded the number of 1200 individuals or ca. 200 households. An address catalogue from 1930 states, that there were 1132 individuals and 219 families in the community in 1929.<sup>5</sup>

There were originally three Jewish congregations in Finland of which Helsinki with a Jewish population of ca. 800–1 300 individuals has always been the largest. The two other communities in Turku and Viipuri combined were a little over half the size of the Helsinki community. The town of Viipuri was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1944. After that the Viipuri congregation operated in Tampere until 1981. A significant number of Viipuri Jews moved to Helsinki after the Second World War. The size of the Helsinki community was at its largest in the 1950s diminished thereafter because of steady emigration mainly to Sweden and to Israel.

It is thus possible to collect data over a long period and elaborate the material from different perspectives – changes taking place over time, including those who left the country or left Judaism. The Jewish congregation of Helsinki has, together with the National Archives of Finland, collected and organized the archives of the Jews in Finland. Supporting the archival material, there is a comprehensive, Israeli based digital genealogical database on the Jews in Finland. Meliza Amity has been conducting research on her own Finnish Jewish roots and the database now has information on more than 21 000 individuals. The database has been freely accessible on the Internet since 2004. It has proven of indispensable help for scholars not least when one tries to track the family members living outside Finland.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, the community is so small that none of the explanation can be “endogenous”. The community was not big enough to even theoretically to remain a closed, cohesive Jewish

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<sup>5</sup> Judisk Årsbok för Finland 1930, 9.

<sup>6</sup> Meliza Amity, *Meliza's Genealogy*, <[www.amitys.com](http://www.amitys.com)>

life without any contact and influence from the host society as well as to important Jewish centers.

This is not to say that there wasn't a strong and cohesive self-narration and understanding what is the history of the Finnish Jews. The Jewish communities in Finland were established in the Imperial era under special institutional frameworks which determined on what grounds a few Jews could stay in Finland. The origins of the Jewish communities in Finland are in the Post-Crimean war policies in the Imperial Russian army. The roots of the Finnish Jews were in the Orthodox Jewish communities in the Russian Pale of Settlement of what today comprises parts of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. Until 1918 Jews living in Finland were Russian subjects. The Jewish population living in Finland was mostly controlled separately from other Russian subjects and foreigners.

Finland was an autonomous part of Imperial Russia which had the largest Jewish population of the time in the Western borders of the Empire, yet it remained basically a forbidden territory for Jews. The Jewish communities in Finland were established under arbitrary rules and regulations which were a combination of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Swedish legislation that remained in force in autonomous Finland, Russian policy to control its large Jewish population living and Finnish protectionist attempts to forbade Jews to enter the Finnish economy. More so, special instructions from the 19<sup>th</sup> century decreed that Jews living in Finland with a special residence permit should earn their living in a selling of used clothes, cigars, fruits and other small-scale business. The restrictions on livelihood were never officially removed before the civil rights act in 1918.

This being the institutional setting, Jews could either earn their living in the small-scale trade or by working in the Russian military.<sup>7</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century most of this trade took place in a special "Jewish" market place called Narinken (derived from the Russian word Na Rynka, meaning literally on the market place). Narinken has a strong symbolic meaning both in the self-understanding of the Jewish community as well as in the way the Jews are set in the history of Helsinki. For the Jewish community it has become to symbolize the institutional discrimination and inequality of the Finland in the Imperial era; the poverty, scarcity and a marginal social position of the community.

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<sup>7</sup> In my doctoral dissertation (chapter 2) I will show, that the intense how these regulations was applied in reality varied from decade to decade and place to place.

The poor Jewish market traders, especially old Jewish widows who sold used clothes in the *Narinken*, have been used to depict the poor and ethnically diverse working-class faces of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Helsinki. According to an account of Helsinki from 1956, “Folks living around Kamppi between the Åbo garrisons and Sandviken offered through its strong presence of Russian soldiers and street peddlers, Jewish Narink-traders and Tatar carpet sellers a glimpse of a half-Oriental world.”<sup>8</sup> This image, similar to typical Eastern European Jewish petty-traders, can be found in novels and short stories describing the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Helsinki.

Against this background the occupational profile of the pre-1918 Jewish community in Helsinki does not require much attention: the Jews were self-employed in the field of retail because they had no access to the general labor market. The garment and clothing business became a Jewish concern because no other professional choices were available to them in Finnish society.<sup>9</sup> The general understanding has been that after the Jewish civil rights law (1918) there were new and diverse career choices for Jews, although strong family traditions kept many in business.<sup>10</sup> More and more Jewish youth took the matriculation examination and many continued their studies at the university level.

It is safe to say that all scholarly works on Finnish Jews have built upon the pioneering writings of Santeri Jacobsson (1883–1955). Jacobsson was a member of the Viipuri Jewish community, and engaged with the Jewish civil rights question in the 1900s. Until the 1980s Jacobsson’s work *Taistelu ihmisoikeuksista, ‘fight for the Civil rights’* (1951, in Finnish)<sup>11</sup> was the only published historical account on Finnish Jews. The book mostly documents the debate for and against the Jewish rights from 1870 until the law on Jewish civil rights in 1917. As it is also rich in details on the different regulations imposed on Jews as well as anecdotes on Jewish life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Finland, most of them from his home-town Viipuri, it is frequently used as source material. Jacobsson’s remarks on the economic character of the Jewish community in Helsinki have become standard citations found in almost every work on Jews in Helsinki.

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<sup>8</sup>Åström 1956, 39.

<sup>9</sup>Torvinen 1989, Jacobsson 1907, Jacobsson 1951.

<sup>10</sup>Torvinen 1989, 112-113.

<sup>11</sup>Jacobsson 1951.

For Jacobsson the reasons behind the occupation structure of the Jews were clear: it was a necessity-driven consequence of an age-old discrimination. The Jewish men who came to Finland as soldiers “*had no decent professions, at most they had gotten some practical training in the army.*”<sup>12</sup> “*Therefore*”, argues Jacobsson, “*they understandably chose the commercial field.*”<sup>13</sup> The above mentioned decree on means of livelihood restricted the trade to clothing. Narink-market place in Helsinki became the place where the Jewish commerce took place For Jacobsson Narinkka was “*(...) the arena of the Jewish struggle for material livelihood. It was there they brought the better part of their days and cared little of the foaming life around them. It therefore became initially their ghetto.*”<sup>14</sup>

These few lines on the commercial activity of the Helsinki Jews have affected substantially on the conceptions of the economic and social history of Helsinki Jews. There has meanwhile been less attention to Jacobsson’s own activity, his political standings and how his thoughts evolved through time. Jacobsson was a Social Democrat, a Socialist oriented Zionist and devoted to the Jewish civil right aspirations. After the 1905 political reformations Jacobsson organized several meetings around Finland on the topic of the lacking rights of the Finnish Jews.<sup>15</sup> In this context he published pamphlets on the “*Jewish question*”.<sup>16</sup>

The historical accounts written by the Jewish authors from the local community have supported the idea of Jewish business in Finland as a forced entrepreneurship. In the few works on the history of Finnish Jews the occupational profile has been discussed with certain ambivalence and disgrace. Ever since the pamphlets written by Jacobson in 1907 who then actively campaigned for the Jewish civil rights there have been arguments that the next generation aspire for a more diverse occupational structure and will no longer be interested in business.

Economic questions are inseparable part of modern antisemitism. The questions I am asking in my research – such as what was the number of Jewish business men in Helsinki and what was their share in the textile market – are similar to those represented in material of the campaigns of Finnish merchant associations who actively campaigned against the Jewish civil rights in 1908–1909.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore natural that this forms a sensitive part of the Jewish history. The strong emphasis on

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<sup>12</sup> Jacobsson 1951, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Jacobsson 1951, 101.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobsson 1951, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobsson 1951, 334.

<sup>16</sup> Jacobsson 1907.

<sup>17</sup> Juutalaisksysymyksestä, Kirjapaino Sana, 1908.

Zionism among the Helsinki Jews has affected the narrative and self-conceptions of Jewish occupational profile.

Most activities in Finland were characterized by non-socialist, modest direction but there was a fraction of revisionist Zionists in Helsinki and Viipuri. What is more, considering that we talk about Orthodox Jewish communities, there was astonishingly little opposing for the Zionist among the Jews in Finland; no matter that the tones and ideas of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Zionists were often outspokenly anti-religious. Zionism provided an acceptable tool to channel the reactions of negative experiences Jews faced in the Finnish society.

The young generation were in the 1930s highly inspired by the Zionist visions of “a new Jew”; a strong, earthy and practically-oriented counter-image of the Anti-Semitic stereotypes.<sup>18</sup> Many Zionist young men joined the voluntary Finnish civil guards whenever their ethnic background was not an obstacle. By and large Zionism proved to be a way to gain general acceptance among the bourgeois side of the inter-war Finnish society.<sup>19</sup> The Zionist activists avoided all association with the traditional, image of a Jewish business. Sometimes the tones given by the inter-war Zionists were not too far away from “light” economic Antisemitism. The Zionist Youth Organization Z. U. F. HATCHIJO in Helsinki took up the question of ethnical upbringing in the community in 1931.<sup>20</sup> Written in the midst of the great depression the Zionist Youth movement targets the problems of the community in a following way: “1) *If we consider the ethical state in our congregation, we notice evident failings and lapses. In the homes the children suffer of an unsound and poor upbringing. The parents do not strive to educate their children to truthful and fair man in adequate degree. Nor is the upbringing of children suited for a proper attitude towards life, even and anon is a strong craving for easy money noticed already among the youth in early age*<sup>21</sup>.

Interestingly ever since the early writings of Santeri Jacobsson all authors have assumed and suggested that the new, ascending Finnish-Jewish generation was more assimilated than the previous ones and thus about to enter the general labor market.<sup>22</sup> The tendency of each author from 1907 until 1986 to state that the more versatile occupational profile is something that has only recently taken place or was about to take place presently. Each writer has been

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<sup>18</sup> Ekholm & Muir 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Ekholm & Muir, 2011

<sup>20</sup> Z.U.F. Hachijo, 20.April.1931, SJA.

<sup>21</sup> Z.U.F. Hachijo, 20.April 1931, SJA.

<sup>22</sup> Jacobson 1907, Ohlström 1960, Burstein 1986.

emphasizing the assimilation process taking place in the community. The texts written after the Jewish civil rights do not interlink the occupational structure to social standing of the Jews. In fact the questions related to the social standing are not taken up in these texts.

The prevalent image of the Jewish business in the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century is that of a small-scale garment trade at the Narinken market place. *Family accounts describe the road from Narinken to the middle class as a modest rags-to-riches story.* A dominant narrative has developed which posits an assimilation process from a closed, traditional congregation with little native contacts to a completely socially integrated upper middle class community. Studies on linguistic choices made between Yiddish and the national languages, Swedish and Finnish<sup>23</sup>, living patterns<sup>24</sup> attitudes towards and number of inter-faith marriages<sup>25</sup> and a trend towards a more versatile occupational profile<sup>26</sup> have all supported the narrative. It has been generally assumed and as a new generation of Jews entered the workforce after the Second World War, they were represented in more professions. There are, however, no actual studies of the post-war situation. There is a danger of circular thinking because the same studies are often partly based on this same narrative and referring to it as a starting point.

## ***Research material***

The data on the Jewish occupational status from the pre-1918 era is easily available. There were detailed lists on each Jew living in Helsinki. As Jews could not be Finnish citizens prior to 1918, and as they stayed in the country as Russian subjects with special residential permits, there are complete lists of each and every Jew who lived in the country in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The police in Helsinki, County Administrative Board and Finnish Senate all collected information on Jews living in Finland. After the outburst of the First World War the Russian army had a special interest on Jewish men in the reserve. There are thus detailed data on Jewish families living in Helsinki, the occupational description of head of the family, a number of children, date of arrival to Finland, deportations of those who missed valid papers, complains for deportation decrees and emigration dates in the National Archives of Finland and in the Archives of the City of Helsinki.

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<sup>23</sup> Harvianen 1988, Muir 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Burstein 1988.

<sup>25</sup> Torvinen 1989.

<sup>26</sup> Torvinen, Jacobsson.

The 1915 data is based on the lists made by the governor of the Uusimaa county by request of the Russian army in the beginning of the First World War. There are 894 names in that list for the town of Helsinki, of which 546 were above the age of 16.<sup>27</sup>

In order to find out what kind of changes the civil rights brought to the occupational profile of the community, the second database was collected using the Helsinki city register books of 1931 (describing the situation in 1930, n=696, including only the population above the age 16).<sup>28</sup> By the early 1930's Jews in Helsinki had more than a decade's experience of full civil rights and Finnish citizenship. There were no longer any legal objections barring Jews from careers in state civil service. It was reasonable to assume that the older generation continued in the fields familiar to them from before, but that the new generation would have a more versatile occupational profile.

In the 1920's and the 1930's Jewish congregations had all the same rights and duties as other non-Lutheran religious communities. The Jews who had residential permit or were born in Finland could apply for Finnish citizenship. As Finnish citizens, their legal status was consistent with other Finns who were not members of the two state churches.

Nevertheless it is possible to collect data comparable to the first data base, because population registers marked Jews as "mosaiska trosbekännare" ("confession of Moses"), as well as Moslems and Catholics living in the town.<sup>29</sup> At least in some cases even persons who were not members of the Helsinki Jewish community were marked as Jews indicating an ethnic category rather than a religious commitment.

I have collected the data from the 1910's and the 1930's using the occupational titles as they appeared in the files. In the Post-Second World War period citizens were no longer categorized by their religious affiliation in the material produced by local authorities.<sup>30</sup> To the

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<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that these lists include all individuals with a Jewish background living in Finland, including some who did not have a residential permit but who for some reason or other stayed in the town and not all of them were necessary members of the local congregation. The list includes persons like hat seamstress *Fruma Rifka "Maria" Hellman*, born in 1881, who had been living and working in Finland since 1911 without permission. Hellman hardly had much to do with the Jewish community because she had converted to Christianity.

<sup>28</sup> I have collected this data from the Helsinki city register books, which in the 1930's included occupational titles as well as religious affiliations. Jews were categorized as "believers of Moses" ("mosaiska trosbekännare"). I have therefore been able to collect all the Jews from the city registration books and take the occupational titles given for the registration authorities. Helsingin kaupungin henkikirjat U599-U617.

<sup>29</sup> The population register books of the city of Helsinki 1930/Helsingin kaupungin henkikirjat 1930, U599-U618.

<sup>30</sup> The population register books of the city of Helsinki 1965 have a category for non-Lutherans but it has not been fulfilled by the authorities..

study of the situation in the 1960's, this is a methodological challenge because there is no longer any direct source, such as register books, where the employment and occupational titles of the Jews would appear.<sup>31</sup> I used a different strategy with the research material of the year 1965. First, I have collected the Jewish enterprises from the trade registers<sup>32</sup> and cross-referenced with information on the members of the Helsinki Jewish congregation in 1965 (n=848), including only individuals above the age of 16). In addition, I have gathered information from the degree-holder year books such as “medical doctors of Finland 1965”, which often include details on their alumni.

The last group of 1965 represents the generations that were either very young as they got the Finnish citizenship or grew up as full Finnish citizens. Many of them participated in the Second World War. At this point people who had emigrated from Finland had been removed from the congregation books. In the 1960s the Jewish congregation recognized that due to both to marriages between Jews and non-Jews and emigration it had become increasingly difficult to say who should actually be counted as members of the congregational level.

It has been possible together with the Jewish names from the congregation and from the databases from the earlier period, to use and combine several different sources, such as family announcements, birthday notices, and obituaries from the local newspapers. While data may be extrapolated from these various sources, the problem is that there is no single summarizing source of information regarding the means of making a living on the community level from the 1960s. The data bases from 1915 and 1930 include information on occupation (a “tailor”), status (“a businessman) or professional degree (“dentist”). The occupation titles from the 1965 are either entrepreneur if the person owns a business or is a significant shareholder in a company. The rest of the occupational titles contain some kind of information of a career or a position around 1965.

This means that it is difficult to find occupational titles for exactly those who indeed had found a “normal” job outside the Jewish community strengthening the idea of occupational structure being one of the factors that makes a minority “visible” in the town milieu.

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<sup>31</sup> In the 1960's the same city register books still have a joint category for those who are not Evangelic Lutherans, Greek Orthodox or members of the German congregation in Helsinki yet it has not been used in assorting the members of the Helsinki Jewish congregation.

<sup>32</sup> The main source for this has been the public Trade register by the National board of patents and registration of Finland (PRH).

As suggested in table 1, the population above the age of 16 grew constantly from 546 individuals in 1915 to 848 individuals in 1965. The first part shows the number of those individuals who have an occupational title or a job, and it is these occupational titles I will analyse in this paper.

In 1915 and in 1930 it is possible to find an occupation for almost all men (87 % in 1915 and 89 % in 1930) above the age of 16, whereas in 1965 there is such information covers only of 45 % of the men in the community.

Table 1 Occupational information of the members of the community in 1915 and 1930 (above the age of 16)

	1915		1930		1965	
Members with an occupational title	n	%	n	%	n	%
Men	232	87.5	324	89.5	186	45.7
Women	110	39.1	104	31.6	74	16.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>30.7</b>
Members without an occupational title						
Men	33	12.5	38	11.7	221	54.3
Women	171	60.9	225	68.4	367	83.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>37.4</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>588</b>	<b>69.3</b>
All members above the age of 16						
Men	265	48.5	362	52.4	407	48.0
Women	281	51.5	329	47.6	441	52.0
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>691</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Sources: Database 1915 , 1930 and 1965						

The data on occupational titles is strongly gender biased. The occupational information was normally only provided for heads of the households and women only appear in the material if they were unmarried or widowed. This does not mean that the women were not working.

Being a housewife indicates both status and certain economic position – the salary of the man was sufficient to provide a good living for his family with a middle class status or aspirations to gain such a status. Rita Bredefeldt has noted that in Sweden the women disappeared from working life as the economic and social position of the Jews improved.<sup>33</sup> A similar trend seem to have taken place in Helsinki as the number of women with a reference

<sup>33</sup> Bredefeldt 2008

to working life diminishes from 39.1 percent in 1915 to 31.6 in 1930 indicating a similar process taking place in Helsinki. It is good to remember that 1915 was a war year. According to the Governor's list 31 Jewish men were on the front with the Imperial Russian troops in the fall of 1915.<sup>34</sup> Table 1 also shows that there were more women in the congregation in 1915. There were some Jewish men who migrated to Denmark, Sweden or United States of America in order to avoid the draft to the Russian troops. They later returned to Helsinki after Finland's independence with new business ideas.

The role of housewife, of course, involved many tasks which required professional skills and were essential for the career of the man including organizing dinner parties and correspondence. While this is true for all upper middle class families, some Jewish women also kept kosher at home which involved extra work for them.<sup>35</sup> In many cases, however, the women in the Helsinki Jewish community worked and had an important role in providing income for their families although it does not appear in the sources. In practice, the women were often actively involved in the family business. It was not uncommon for women to shoulder the responsibility and make the important decisions concerning the business.

The occupational titles in the registers referred to many different aspects of working life mixing professions, ownership (owner of a firm or ownership in many companies), education (candidate of medicine, a person with a university degree in medicine), employee in someone else's firm in the private sector, or as a worker or an officer in the public sector, and titles such as tailor, hat maker, or dancer, or housewife, widow, or doctor's wife.

Title alone, such as businessman, singer, errand boy, or owner of a fruit store, does not in as such provide much information. However, when the same titles and descriptions were collected community-wide, including basically the entire Jewish population on different cross-section years, it is possible to find nuances and exceptions, to make typical descriptions and analyze how different terms inter-related.

In some cases the formal sources describe a person as a shop assistant yet we know from other sources that s/he was in fact a full-time musician or an athlete. There have always been people who have several over-lapping jobs, careers and professions, and the formal registers usually only contain information on one aspect given for a certain purpose and referring to a

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<sup>34</sup> Uudenmaan läänin kuvernööri N:o 144/29 II Os. 1915 (30.syyskuuta 1915), Hb1, Senaatin siviilitoimituskunnan juutalaisten maassa oleskelua koskevia asiakirjoja 1894-1915, Kansallisarkisto.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan 1991.

certain point in time. If it can be assumed that occupational descriptions can approximate the true information on the working life situation of the Jewish community of Helsinki, then we can use these descriptions to categorize the managers, business owners, the employed, and the self-employed.

### ***The Employment status in the Helsinki Jewish community in 1915 and 1930***

Table 2 illustrates the occupation titles grouped into three categories: entrepreneurs, business-owners or self-employed, employed wage-earners and finally those who could be either self-employed or a wage-earner. The first group includes the Narink traders, shop keepers, businessmen as well as independent artisans such as hat makers or shoe makers. The second group consists of all those who gained a living as wage-earners. The far most common occupational title in this group is shop assistant. The third group is a category for those whose status at the labor market does not come up from the title. This group includes mostly academic degree-holders but also musicians, etc. I have added to this category those few who worked for and were on the payroll of the congregation. The small congregation had one rabbi, one or two cantors, a secretary, and a few teachers who also kept private lessons.

Table 2 The “employment status” of the occupational titles in 1915 and 1930

Employment status	1915						1930					
	Men		Women		All		Men		Women		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Business-owners & self-employed	119	51.3	39	35.5	158	<b>46.2</b>	188	58.0	26	25.0	214	<b>50.0</b>
Employed	97	41.8	57	51.8	154	<b>45.0</b>	91	28.1	56	53.8	147	<b>34.3</b>
Employed or self-employed	16	6.9	14	12.7	30	<b>8.8</b>	45	13.9	22	21.2	67	<b>15.7</b>
<b>Total number of individuals</b>	232	100.0	110	100.0	342	<b>100.0</b>	324	100.0	104	100.0	428	<b>100.0</b>

Source: the database from the year 1915 and 1930

As table 2 illustrates, in 1930 half of the Jewish population in Helsinki gained a living as entrepreneurs or self-employed shop keepers and artisans. The number of entrepreneurs and self-employed business-owners did not change radically in the interwar period compared to 1915 when we look at both men and women. Yet against the contemporary Jewish assumptions and writings, the number of Jewish businessmen had increased after the Jewish civil rights from 51.3 % in 1915 to 58 % in 1930.

Table 2 also shows that the share of employed wage-earners diminished over ten percentage points in 15 years, and the share of the third category, involving mostly so called “free professions” increased to 15.7 percentage of all the working population in the Helsinki Jewish community in 1930. As this group consists mostly of academic degree-holders, the changes reflect the general rise of education level in the community in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The key question in terms of the wage earner group is whether they were employed by the general labor market or by the co-ethnic economy within the Jewish community? And further, whether the third group worked as free lancers and kept their own private appointment or were employed by the growing public sector?

### ***Business-owners and self-employed***

The literature usually makes a distinction between entrepreneurs and owners/managers on the one hand and between business-owners and the self-employed on the other. In the purposes of this paper I use them as synonymous; “an entrepreneur is an owner and operator of a business enterprise”.<sup>36</sup> None of these terms appeared in the research materials. The entrepreneurs figured in the material either as trader/shop keeper (handlande) or narink-traders (narink-handlande) or as businessmen (affärsman) or in some cases as managers. Although there are no clear distinctions the terms connote a certain hierarchy. A businessman appeared to be synonymous both with an executive and a shopkeeper, whereas a shopkeeper never appeared as a manager. A shop keeper usually referred to someone with a small store with a limited selection. None of these titles revealed the line of business, size, or possible employment and there was no clear distinction between shopkeepers and businessmen. Based on the various sources used in this research the term businessman is used to indicate a larger or more versatile line of business and often indicates that the person in question was involved in more than one enterprise. A manager or an executive runs a company of a remarkable size, has many employees and a leading role in the branch.

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<sup>36</sup> Aldrich & Waldinger 1990.

Table 3 Number of entrepreneurs and self-employed in 1915 and 1930

	1915			1930		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
	n	n	n	n	n	n
1. Manager-owners	0	0	0	15	0	15
2. Businessmen	0	3	3	98	3	101
3. Shop keepers	44	8	52	24	9	33
4. <i>Narink</i> traders	24	28	52	17	14	31
5. Agents, sales representants	13	0	13	18	0	18
6. Self-employed artisans	38	0	38	16	0	16
Total	<b>119</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>214</b>

Sources: The databases from the year 1915 and 1930

Whereas in 1915 the term used was simply shopkeeper, there was more variation in 1930. The 15 men with the title manager (“director”) had remarkably larger companies and were shareholders in a number of smaller firms.

Table 3 also shows that second hand clothing trade at the *Narinken* was a means of gaining a living for widowed women in the community. Seven out of ten women who had an occupational title in 1915 worked at the market place. In 1930, a year before the marketplace was closed, 14 women, which is over half of all the women with an occupational title in that year, were *Narink* traders.

Typically many Jewish artisans in Helsinki, such as tailors and hat makers, could just as well have been described as shopkeepers because they produced and sold their own small-scale manufactured production. The title of tailor in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century typically referred to status as skilled artisan. I have categorized these people as self-employed meaning those who worked for themselves but did not run a business. Needless to say the distinction between entrepreneurs and the self-employed was often quite arbitrary.

As long as their social status was about the same this does not present a problem for the interests of this research. The trend was to move from traditional artisan work such as that of a tailor towards a more professional business career in the garment industry as wholesalers and retailers.

Economic historian Rita Bredefeldt has studied the Jewish economy, identity and assimilation in Sweden and found similar trends. The Jews in Sweden gained full civil rights

in the 1880's yet over half a century later, in 1930 over half of the Jewish population in Sweden, 52,7 % gained a living in trade and over 30 per cent in industry and crafts.<sup>37</sup> These numbers prove that the Jews did not stay in the business because of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century legislation and there were more complex reasons for their business orientation.

### ***Wage-earners***

Table 4 The number of employed wage earners 1915 and 1930

	1915			1930		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
	n	n	n	n	n	n
7. Shop assistants	59	43	102	49	39	88
8. Office employees	4	4	8	21	10	31
9. Managers	2	3	5	1	2	3
10. Workers	32	7	39	20	5	25
Total	<b>97</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>147</b>

Sources: The databases from the year 1915 and 1930

The most common occupational title both in 1915 and in 1930 was a shop assistant (in Swedish *biträde*, *affärsbiträde* or *butiksbitråde*) or a salesperson. This was a typical entry-level job to working life for the youth in the community. The title alone reveals no information about what companies were employing these shop assistants and sales persons. In fact, it is not certain whether these young shop assistants were even paid for their jobs if they worked in a family business.

However many of the assistants of 1915 later ran a business in 1930 and assistants of the 1930 had a business of their own in 1965, which would indicate an apprentice or training system in the family business or in the firms run by relatives. The congregation tax books from the years of the great depression of the early 1930s provide some extra information on employment within the community compared to “normal times” noting who was employed and by what company within the community.<sup>38</sup>

The same apply to the occupational category of clerical employees. It is reasonable to assume that not all Jewish clerical employees worked for the Jewish companies but many did.

<sup>37</sup> Bredefeldt 2008, Bredefeldt 1997.

<sup>38</sup> SJA, Tax books 1930

The trade register documents reveal that a clerical employee often later had a managerial position (procura) in the (Jewish) company in which he or (in a few cases) she worked.<sup>39</sup>

The category of workers in 1915 included such jobs as filers, mechanics, turners and carpenters. Many of these Jews worked for the Russian military and were not actually members of the Helsinki Jewish community.

### ***Free professions***

Along with the entrepreneurs and business-owners there were a growing number of people who were neither formally employed nor did they not run a business. This group consisted of artists, musicians, artisans, and also degree-holders who worked as freelancers.

Compared to the number of shopkeepers, businessmen and their assistants, this group is small but in many ways they are the key in studying the ethnic boundaries because they typically represent professions where one can held a position in the public sector or maintain a practice of his/hers own (or to combine both). The distinction is problematic but proved to be relevant.

Table 5 The number of the "free professions" + uncategorized titles

	1915			1930		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
	n	n	n	n	n	n
11. Academic professions	10	1	11	28	4	32
12. Uncategorized	6	13	19	17	18	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>67</b>

Sources: The databases from the year 1915 and 1930

There has been an apparent lack of research on latent, everyday forms of antisemitism in different levels of the Finnish society.<sup>40</sup> There are several family accounts on situation of direct or indirect discrimination of the Jews in the years between the Two World Wars but only a few studies on the subject. The most debated case so far has been the faith of Israel-Jacob Schur at the university of Helsinki and Åbo Akademi in the 1930's. Muir has demonstrated how anti-Jewish sentiments led to the rejection of Schur's doctoral dissertation at the University of Helsinki in 1937. A year later, Schur submitted a new version of his study to the Åbo

<sup>39</sup> Public Trade register by the National board of patents and registration of Finland (PRH), "lakkautetut yritykset".

<sup>40</sup> Ekholm & Muir & Silvennoinen 2012 (forthcoming)

Akademi University, but this time he was not even granted a right to defend his work. Both cases are analyzed in Muir's article "Rejection of Israel-Jakob Schur's PhD Dissertation at the University of Helsinki (1937) and at the Åbo Akademi University (1938)".<sup>41</sup>

The image of business-oriented Jews was one of the basic elements in Anti-Semitic material and thus a sensitive issue for the Jewish community. It should come as no great surprise, then, that the Zionist organizations in Helsinki made a special effort to change this perception and to encourage young Jews to find other professions. There were funds that allocated scholarships for the education of the Jewish youth in all fields *but trade and business*.<sup>42</sup> One popular choice for the Jewish men was engineering. It seems however that in the 1930's and 1940's most engineers established a business of their own. And in 1965 many of those were either running a business or worked as managers in the Jewish companies.

### ***An ethnic cluster and the Post Second World War situation***

In the studies of present day ethnic entrepreneurship, ethnic enclave economies are often defined as "*immigrant's self-employment group, its employers, their co-ethnic employees, and their unpaid family workers*".<sup>43</sup> The Helsinki Jewish business enclave well meets the criteria: The stores of the entrepreneurs and self-employed shopkeepers I have introduced and grouped into different categories were in most cases little family-owned business side by side on certain streets around the commercial center of the town, connected to the garment and retail trade. Without some exceptions the stores are often registered in the name of the men, although their wives and often children worked there. The stores often employed relatives, who later established their own business. The difference to the definition given above is that the Jews of Helsinki were no recent immigrants in the interwar Helsinki. To the contrary, in the rapidly growing town like Helsinki was, few other families could have as long history in town. The Jewish families were linguistically assimilated to Swedish and Finnish. The young

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<sup>41</sup> Simo Muir, "Rejection Israel-Jakob Schur's PhD Dissertation at the Universty of Helsinki (1937) and at the Åbo Akademi University (1938)", *Scandinavian Journal of History* 2/2009, p. 135–161; "Israel-Jakob Schurin väitöskirjan hylkääminen Helsingin yliopistossa ja Åbo Akademiassa: Suomalaisen tiedeyhteisön antisemitismi 1930-luvulla", in Simo Muir & Ilona Salomaa (eds.), *Hyljättiin outouden vuoksi: Israel-Jakob Schur ja suomalainen tiedeyhteisö*, Suomen Itämaisen Seuran suomenkielisiä julkaisuja 37, Helsinki: Suomen Itämainen Seura (Helsinki 2009), p. 47–95.

<sup>42</sup> Ekholm 2005, XX.

<sup>43</sup> Volery 2007, 31.

growing up in the interwar period were the first generation that no longer automatically learned the native of their parents (that is Yiddish).<sup>44</sup>

In table 6, I have drawn together all the information given above now categorized. The question is how many of the people in the Helsinki Jewish community were *likely* to work in the co-ethnic cluster in 1915 and in 1930?

<b>Table 6 The proportion of those gaining a living in business in the Jewish community of Helsinki</b>													
		<b>1915</b>						<b>1930</b>					
		Men		Women		All		Men		Women		All	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>I</b>	<b>Gaining a living in the business</b>												
1.	Manager-owners	0		0		0		15		0		15	
2.	Businessmen	0		3		3		98		3		101	
3.	Shop keepers	44		8		52		24		9		33	
4.	<i>Narink</i> traders	24		28		52		17		14		31	
5.	Agents, sales representants	13		0		13		18		0		18	
6.	Self-employed artisans	38		0		38		16		0		16	
7.	Shop assistants	59		43		102		49		39		88	
8.	Office employees	4		4		8		21		10		31	
9.	Managers	2		3		5		1		2		3	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>79.3</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>80.9</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>78.5</b>
<b>II</b>	<b>Not involved in business</b>												
10.	Workers	32		7		39		20		5		25	
11.	Academic professions	10		1		11		28		4		32	
12.	Uncategorized occupations	6		13		19		17		18		35	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19.1</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>20.2</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>21.5</b>
	<b>Grand total</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Sources: The databases from the year 1915 and 1930

The number of the people within the realm of the “cluster” is remarkably stable. Both in 1915 and in 1930 nearly 80 % of the Helsinki Jewish population had an occupational title that refers to business or trade.

According to the data there were more people employed by the ethnic cluster in 1930 than that in 1915. A total of 80 % in 1930 were either entrepreneurs, business owners, or employed by them as assistants and clerks. What was the situation like in 1965?

<sup>44</sup> Muir 2004.

As was showed in table 1 (page12), I had been able to find an occupational title for 260 individuals making 30 % of the community members. According to my preliminary results there were 113 entrepreneurs running a family-owned business in the community at that time. The data compiled for the 1965 group shows a total of 113 entrepreneurs in the Jewish community. This means that the actual number of entrepreneurs was quite stable throughout the research period (compared to the numbers in the table 3: 158 in 1915; 214 in 1930).

There are many possible factors contributing to the persistence of entrepreneurship over the decades. Strong traditions in the family business could have accounted for such stability. Another factor could have been profitable market situations like the post-war economic booms.

After the Second World War *Ruben Jaari* developed his clothing business into a department store, Oy Pukeva Ab, the first in the country focusing on fashion. Jaari introduced in *Pukeva* new products such as plastic rain coats and new marketing methods.<sup>45</sup> Pukeva was the first retail trade company in the country offering payment in installments. Along with its escalators and open-to-everyone fashion shows Pukeva became the symbol of post-war economic recovery and development in Helsinki.<sup>46</sup> The Jewish companies operated also in export businesses. For example the fur-manufacturer and fashion house Grünstein, that had moved to Helsinki from St. Petersburg after the revolution in 1918 became a major exporter.

The business also became more versatile. For example the Nemes family, which used to run a textile wholesale business and a textile factory, expanded into the boat-building business, when in 1944 together with the Jaaris they bought a small Helsinki-based shipyard company *Vator* which had been established just before the outbreak of the war in 1938. With its new executive director Jussi Nemes Vator got a rapid new start. Vator built boats for the Soviet Union as a part of Finland's war reparations and exported fishing boats to Iceland.<sup>47</sup> Nemes was a sailor himself and realized the opportunities in the expanding yacht racing markets in the US which became an important part of Vator's production.

Another example of a new branch of business after the war was the Anglo-Nordic Company, a pioneer in many new products in post-war Finland including the building of the first Finnish combustion engine and the organizing of the first Finnish television broadcast in

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<sup>45</sup> Pukevan lehtileikearkisto (järjestämätön).

<sup>46</sup> "Jaarin tavaratalo" Suomen Kuvalehti, Vol. 77, 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Ala-Pöllänen Torvalds-Wiik & Torvalds-Westerlund 2005

1950. Its real success was the license for Reynolds Flyers ballpoint pens which the company produced in Finland. Anglo-Nordic was an international business from the beginning with its independent sister companies in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and England.<sup>48</sup>

## **Conclusion**

However, the focus was in the traditionally Jewish fields so that in the 1960's one could walk in the center of Helsinki and count Jewish clothing stores and boutiques and a number of smaller Jewish-owned shops for hats, children's clothes, furs and textiles just like in the interwar period.<sup>49</sup> The occupational structure seems to have been rather unchanged, contrary to the ideas given in the literature or the contemporary visions of the leaders in the community. The number of entrepreneurs continued to be high also in the Post-Second World War period. Business became more versatile and many of those who continued in the field became more professional. The real change, it seems at this point in the study, is that those who continued in the business were now accepted to the Finnish lobby organizations that had in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century campaigned against the Jews. Indeed, it would seem that in the long run entrepreneurship was more part of a successful strategy than a hindrance to assimilation.

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<sup>48</sup> Anglo-Nordic..

<sup>49</sup> HaKehila 1997.

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- Weinstein Jac, *Minneskrift till 50 –årsdagen av Judiska församlingens i Helsingfors synagogas invigning den 30 augusti 1956.* Utarbetat på församlingens uppdrag av Jac Weinstein Del I och del II (unpublished), 1956.

### ***Helsinki City Archives***

- Helsingin kaupunki, rahatoimisto, drätselkammars Gy:21 Narinkahyror 1918–1922, 1923–1926, 1927–1930.
- Pukevan lehtileikearkisto, järjestämätön

### ***The National Archives of Finland***

Helsingin kaupungin henkikirjat U599-U617 (1930), (1965).

***Helsingin poliilaitos HPL -Bk1 Passitoimisto, II piirin Mooseksenuskolaisten kirja 1890–1898, 1903, 1904, 1905.***

HPL Luettelo I sotilaiden perheistä ja avustuskasvuista ajalta 1/18/1914-

### ***Senaatin siviilitoimituskunta***

He1, 1909 karkotukset

HBI Juutalaisten maassa oleskelua koskevia asiakirjoja 1894–1915

N:0 144/29 II Os. 1915.

VSV 1/1869 Statssekretariatets för storfürstendömet Finland act ”vid ryska militären och deras hustrus och enkors rätt att utföra näringsgång”.

### ***The Archives of the Finnish Jews***

- A Telephone Catalogue from 1913 with underlined Jewish stores, file 13
- SJA/Kansio 62/Vuosikertomukset
- Statistik i anslutning till blandäktenskapfrågan, SJA kansio 67
- Protokoll 1930–1934.
- Muistio ja lisämuistio 20.4.1931, Sionistinen nuorisoyhdistys Z.U.F. Hatchijo, Suomen juutalaisten arkisto 319,

### ***The Central Archive of Finnish Business Record ELKA, Mikkeli***

Littoisten verkatehdas, Saapuneet asiakkaita koskevat luottotiedot; 1925-26, juutalaiset asiakkaat

### ***The Trade register***

Public Trade register by the National board of patents and registration of Finland (PRH).

### ***Finnish Literature Society, Foklore Archives***

Kaskuja juutalaisista (1855–)

### ***Brages Pressarkiv***

Biografiskt Samling

### ***Digital collections***

- Meliza Amity's geneology [www.amity.com](http://www.amity.com)
- Fenno-Judaica <http://fennojudaica.jchelsinki.fi/>
- SKS kansallisbiografiat

## *Interviews*

B. Rubanivtisch, January 2011.

## ***Disposition of my doctoral dissertation***

1. Introduction and research questions
  - The Jewish communities in Finland; an institutional frame
  - Key concepts: ethnic boundaries and Diaspora minorities
  - Research material and methods
2. The formation of the Jewish communities under conflicting regulations
  - The Cantonists and other Jewish soldiers
  - Strategies for getting residential rights
  - Means of gaining a living available for Jews in the late Imperial period
3. Conceptions on the Jewish occupational profile in literature
  - The tones of the Jewish authors: an ongoing assimilation
  - Non-Jewish scholars and ambivalent approaches to antisemitism
  - Zionists vision on Jewish occupational profile
4. Occupational profile of the community
  - The Employment status in the Helsinki Jewish community in 1915 and 1930
  - An ethnic cluster and the post Second World War situation
5. The Jewish “rag trade” in Helsinki
  - Narinken: the Jewish university of Helsinki
  - Confectionists of the inter-war period
  - A look into the 1960s
6. “How “ethnic” business turn into “normal” family business?”
  - The positions of trust in lobby organizations
7. Conclusions