

PHD RESEARCH

PASCALE FALEK-ALHADEFF

A Precarious Life. East European Female Jewish Students in Interwar Belgium

European University, Florence, History and Civilization Department, 2011. Supervisor : Philipp Ther.

This thesis takes a variety of approaches from different research fields : social history, gender studies, Jewish studies, the history of higher education, and migration studies. Combining macro- and micro-level perspectives, the narrative follows the life story of a thousand female students. This global picture is complemented by individual case studies, providing both personal details and general narratives. In order to assess the experience of these female migrants, they have been systematically compared with local students, with male Jewish students, and with Eastern European female university graduates who studied in France, Germany, and Switzerland. This thesis demonstrates that precariousness was the price these women had to pay to climb the social ladder. They took major risks : they left their homeland, and with it the secure, comfortable middle-class environment in which most of them grew up. They consciously made the choice to challenge their condition and they took the gamble that they would improve their lives and achieve their dreams by taking such a chance. They were full of fighting spirit and had real ambitions to succeed.

VIRGINIE JOURDAIN