

National Minority, National Mentality, and Communal Ethnicity: Changes in Ethnic Identity of Former Soviet Union Jewish Emigrants on the Israeli Kibbutz

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we examine and compare the ethnic identity of the Jews *in* the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the process of change in ethnic identity among the new immigrants *from* the FSU. This analysis considers the role of the kibbutz as the first experience of Jewish community in their lives, as well as the location of the first phase of their process of absorption and resocialization into new and unfamiliar surroundings. The data are drawn through a longitudinal research design, with a pre- and post-analysis of changes in the ethnicity of migrants studied from their arrival on the Israeli kibbutz until the completion of the five-month kibbutz programme. We found that pre-migration Soviet Jews defined their ethnicity as a discriminated *national minority* with a *weak symbolic ethnicity* content. The ambivalent nature of the ethnicity of Jews while in the FSU was expressed in the fact that although a majority were deculturized from traditional dimensions of Jewish life, they nevertheless felt they belonged to a specific ethnic group.

Post-migration ethnicity was found to be remarkably altered; the former ambivalence was dissolved. On the macro-level, membership in the economically and politically successful Russian-speaking group of Israeli society is a source of self esteem, rather than a sign of shameful otherness. On the micro-level of ethnicity, the encounter in the initial phase of absorption in Israel, within the kibbutz Jewish community, often demands a re-examination of their private concept of Jewishness, serving as a first step in resolving their ambivalent ethnic identity. Consequently, their new ethnic

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identity may now well have *weaker* boundaries, but a more positive (non-alienating) content than that left behind.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we examine and compare the ethnic identity of the Jews *in* the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the process of change of ethnic identity among the new immigrants *from* the former Soviet Union in Israel. Our analysis examines the role of the kibbutz, which is the first experience of Jewish community in the lives of Jews from the FSU, as well as the site of the first phase of their process of absorption and resocialization into new and unfamiliar surroundings. The two axes of analysis are the strictly comparative and the longitudinal. The first compares pre-migration ethnicity through an analysis of contextual material describing Jewish ethnicity in the FSU with subsequent post-migration ethnicity in Israel. The second axis resides in the longitudinal research design. It is a longitudinal analysis in two ways. We discuss Russian ethnicity both in the FSU and in Israel. This is done in order to understand the different macro concepts of ethnicity in both countries with a pre- and post-analysis of changes in the migrants' ethnicity. They are under study from the day they arrive on the Israeli kibbutz until the completion of their five-month programme. The Israeli kibbutz is a collective, self-governing, egalitarian, intentional community, which is characterized by the communal ownership of the means of production, education, housing, and consumption. There are 270 kibbutzim in Israel today with a population of 125,000, which approximates 3 per cent of the Jewish population of Israel. The role of the kibbutz in the absorption of foreign guests and new immigrants will be discussed below.

For many years the ethnic identity of Soviet Jews has been the focus of interest of many Western and Israeli scholars (see for example Gitelman, 1982, 1991; Gitelman et al., 1994; Pinkus, 1988; Zaslavskiy, 1983; Horowitz, 1989). The recent rise of ethnic conflicts in the FSU and the mass immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel considerably revitalized the interest in the culture of contemporary Soviet Jewry and the dynamic changes in different aspects of their ethnicity.

In the 1970s and 1980s the process of assimilation of Soviet Jews in the Soviet Union has been referred to in terms of the loss of religious traditions, customs, national language, and so forth, applying the term "national identity crisis". Scholars have concentrated their analysis on non-traditional aspects of Jewish identity; "...Soviet Jewish identity has been gradually shifting from an emphasis on overt religious and cultural criteria to a more subjective conception of distinctiveness" (Karklins, 1987: 29). Karklins specifically analysed indicators of ethnic identity of the Jewish immigrants from the FSU in the United States, such as

aversion toward mixed marriages and the role of passport identification in ethnic self-identification. There remain many other aspects of national identity that make an ethnic group different in the host society's view, as well as in the opinion of the group itself, which is analysed below.

THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

The existence and ongoing nature of ethnic groups has been studied from both macro and micro approaches. In the macro approach theorists have looked at the historical and geographical determination of ethnic groups, the content of the cultures and traits which comprise the group, and the nature of power relations in societies which put groups in a position higher or lower in the hierarchy. The micro approach has been concerned with the dynamics of ethnic identity and identification; with the process of boundary maintenance and movement across boundaries; and with the question of how individuals make decisions about the salience of their ethnicity, about which of various ethnic options they choose in their own identities, and about whether to invoke ethnicity and ethnic identities in political mobilizations and everyday personal encounters.

Manifestation of ethnicity is partly in the contact between groups because without it ethnicity cannot exist. Hence, ethnicity occurs at the boundary between "us" and "them" (Jenkins, 1994: 175). This boundary serves as a demarcation of group membership and reifies group identification on both sides of the boundary. Thus, a thorough analysis of ethnicity must take into consideration both the internal group definition, which takes place *inside* the ethnic boundary and the external classification, which occurs *outside* or across the ethnic boundary. External group definition(s) or categorizations are generally negative in content, based solely on arbitrary factors such as physical traits, language, or cultural differences, and are usually imposed by a dominant ethnic group. It is these two definitions taken together which form a group's ethnic identity (Jenkins, 1994: 199). But how does this formation take place? Or, to put it another way, what constitutes the process of ethnogenesis?

Mittelberg and Waters (1992) identify three social actors in the dynamic of identity formation following migration. Two are familiar to theories on this subject and one is a relatively new addition. First, there is the individual immigrant. He or she uses elements to determine his or her own identity and also to attach a positive or negative valence to that identity. The second social actor is society at large, which uses elements to determine the immigrant identity and also to attach a positive or negative valence to that identity. Finally, there is also the collection of people we call the "proximal host", the group to which the receiving society would assign the immigrant. This group is viewed as the waiting

category in the minds of the individuals in the receiving society. In other words, the proximal host is the group that the wider society would define as the immigrants' co-ethnics.

In our view, the outcome of the immigrant's identity will be a result of the assignment by the receiving society, the cognitive map of the immigrants themselves, and the conceptions of the proximal hosts.

The typology of ethnogenesis proposed here includes the dimensions or building blocks of ethnicity and the different interpretations and reactions to those dimensions among the different aspects of the host society and the society of origin. The dimensions of ethnicity include race, religion, shared history and origins, language, national ancestry, and class.

We identify four types of ethnic identity among FSU immigrants to Israel, beginning with the group of people whose ethnicity is labelled "symbolic". Symbolic ethnics identify with a shared history and origin and a national ancestry such as Moroccan Sephardim or Polish Ashkenazim. There is a large degree of choice involved in the particular categories these people choose to invoke. The groups have no organizational basis and it is only in terms of affective ties and leisure and voluntary activities that they display their ethnic identities (for a detailed description of symbolic ethnics in case of the United States, see Waters, 1990). The next category is the ethnic group. Individuals who are members of ethnic groups have an ethnic identity, which does not hinder their full participation in Israeli society, yet it has more than just a symbolic component to it. For instance, their ethnic identity still influences their choice of marriage partners to some degree. The third, more intrusive type of ethnic identity is what we call an immigrant group, the subjects of this study. This is an identity which is still a very salient and intrusive identity in terms of national loyalty, everyday life, and feeling apart from the host society. In general, immigrant groups are characterized by a high degree of separation from the host society and external categorization by the dominant group. With regard to residential dispersion or concentration, immigrant groups are likely to live either in ethnic ghettos or rural communities.

The fourth group, we label minority, following Wirth, "A group of people distinguished by physical or cultural characteristics subject to different and unequal treatment by the society in which they live and who regard themselves as victims of collective discrimination" (Stone, 1985: 42). An example of such a minority group defined by language is the Israeli Arabs or the Hispanics in the United States. In our case the minority status is legally prescribed by way of passport, therefore it may properly be called a "national minority". Minority

groups are the least integrated into the wider society and have the least amount of choice in terms of self-identification.

Gans (1994: 578) has recently supplemented his theory on symbolic ethnicity with the parallel concept of symbolic *religiosity* which develops, in his view, primarily among immigrants and their descendants. Symbolic religiosity refers to “a form of religiosity detached from religious affiliation and observance”. Gans distinguishes between the patterns of acculturation in America for “religio-ethnic” groups such as the Jews and “ethno-religious” groups such as Russian, Greek, and other Orthodox Catholics. Jews are a religious group with ethnic secular characteristics and like the Jews, Russian, Greek, and Orthodox Catholic immigrants brought with them their own “national” religions consisting of distinct beliefs and practices which remain an enduring aspect of their ethnic and religious identity.

In our view, the ethnicity of Russian Jews in the FSU shared the structural characteristics of a *national minority*, but its content recalls the notion of *symbolic ethnicity*. This is the special case of the Russian Jewry who were “subject to different and unequal treatment by the society in which they live and who regard themselves as victims of collective discrimination” (Stone, 1985: 42); yet, in the FSU the content of their ethnicity was substantively weak. This paper examines the outcome of the post-migration encounter of Soviet Jews (who share a macro ethnicity of an alienated national minority sharing weak patterns of micro symbolic ethnicity) with Israel kibbutz society; this encounter transpires within a radically different ethnic paradigm, resulting in the emigrants’ subsequent emergent ethnic renewal.

JEWISH ETHNICITY IN THE FSU

According to the traditional Soviet socio-ethnographical nomenclature, the Jews were classified as “a common name of different *narodnost*’s” (the term is translated as ethnicity) (Bolshaya Sovetskaya Encyclopedia, 1952: v.15: 377). In Marxist-Leninist sociological theory the term *narodnost* denoted a certain stage of societal development, e.g. “historically developed community of people preceding the emergence of nation” (Bolshaya Sovetskaya Encyclopedia, 1952: v.29: 155). Thus, Jews were defined by the Soviet ideologists as a *narodnost* – a community which is historically inferior to the more advanced stages of society development, as well as a group of different communities with only one unifying factor – “common descent from ancient Jews” (Bolshaya Sovetskaya Encyclopedia, 1952: v.15: 377). It was constantly emphasized that the Jews do not hold a common language, territory, economic life, or culture. This approach,

officially proclaimed as early as the 1930s, was supported and protected by many Soviet ethno-sociologists until the end of the 1980s. For example, in 1974 a well-known ethnographer, Kozlov, argued against the role of Judaism as a unifying factor:

Judaism could not maintain the ethnic unity of the Jews. Even in the Middle Ages they were divided into two main streams – the Sephardim speaking Ladino and the Ashkenazim speaking Yiddish. The Jews have long ceased to be a single people (*narod*), and many of them have nothing more in common than an identical self-name and certain, often vague ideas about a common origin and history (1974: 86).

These speculations may be considered a theoretical basis for practical implementation of the state policy against different traditional aspects of Jewish ethnicity comprising Jewish community (synagogues, Jewish schools, and so on).

Only in the 1990s, with the publication of sociological surveys among the Soviet Jews, did it become possible to show quantitatively the outcome of this policy. According to one sociological poll conducted in St. Petersburg in 1991, only 12 per cent of respondents mentioned religion as a factor of ethnic integration (Kogan, 1993a). It is also important to note the disappearance of another factor of ethnic identity, namely national language. In 1995, only 2 per cent of Russian Jews reported that they knew Yiddish well, while 77 per cent reported that they did not know it at all (Ryvkina, 1996b: 211). Traditional Jewish culture (religious and popular: holidays, rites, rituals, food, etc.) also played a lesser role in the life of the Soviet Jews. In the above mentioned poll conducted in St. Petersburg less than 19 per cent mentioned “culture” (rites, traditions, rituals) or expressions of symbolic religiosity as a factor of ethnic identification (Kogan, 1993b: 140).

Yet, despite the acculturation policy of the Soviet regime toward the Jews, they were not allowed to vanish as “*natsionalnost*” (an administrative category in the Soviet internal passport designating an ethnic origin of an individual). The “Jew” became a discriminative and administrative category. Being Jewish in the FSU meant to be different, to be alien, to be inferior. This external classification imposed by the Soviet Government did not fail to have a powerful effect on the self-definition of Soviet Jews.

Being Jewish in the FSU was a rather negative experience, both objectively and subjectively. Even the circumstances under which a child learned about his Jewishness were traumatic as illustrated by the following statements:

My Jewish mother did her best to prevent me from feeling, God forbid, Jewish. There were so many anti-Semites around us, she did not want me to know Yiddish and be

interested in Jewishness. In my family Jewishness was always a subject of shame (Goldstein, 1992: 12).

All my life I could not forget, even for a moment, that I was a Jew. Yes, I could not manage to forget it. They had never let me forget it (Rubinov, 1993: 3).

...all my life I lived in a country, where anti-Semitism was considered to be “natural”. I created around me a very fragile glass shell. Anyone and anywhere could easily break it. Every Jew here lives in a shell like this (Gomberg, 1992: 18).

These confessions belong to actors, writers, and journalists, that is, people who live in Russian culture. They appeared to be assimilated into Russian/Soviet culture yet the childhood trauma and the pressure of an anti-Semitic environment was so strong that they still feel “Jewish”, as though they didn’t belong. In these cases, Jewish ethnicity had virtually no positive content.

According to the survey conducted by Gitelman and others in the beginning of the 1990s, in response to the question “Which circumstances made you feel Jewish?”, more than 40 per cent of the respondents aged 30 to 59 responded that such circumstances were *emotionally negative*, more than 30 per cent responded that they were emotionally neutral, and only about 10 per cent reported the positive emotions (Gitelman et al., 1994: 131).

There were several ways of enduring such negative aspects of one’s own identity. Complete assimilation, that is, formal or informal rejections of Jewish roots. This choice was almost impossible due to the external reasons already mentioned. Affirmative attempts at living a Jewish life in the FSU were, if not too dangerous, at least fraught with serious consequences for the same reasons. In reality this meant that for an average person the only way to cope with this unnatural situation was through a self-analysis that could give a Soviet Jew some positive content to his or her Jewish identity. However, such an individual in search of one’s identity went this way quite alone. Each person’s typification of identity had to be based on the “material at hand”, i.e. family, relatives, and Jewish friends. However, it lacked the most important point of reference from the point of view of traditional Jewish identity, namely, *Jewish community*. The Soviet Jew was a self-oriented, introspective individual who, very often, had to build a “shell”.

As a result, Soviet Jews have been forced to construct their own image of their larger community, an “imagined community”. Benedict Anderson describes nations as “imagined communities” because most members of a modern nation will come in contact with only a small number of its inhabitants, yet “in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983: 15). Soviet

Jewry found itself in a similar state as the communities of the pre-industrial era who formulated their vision of the extended community based solely on their own imagination and whatever information was readily available.

Thus, Soviet Jews have constructed their own views about the Jewish community at large as reflected by the results of the St. Petersburg survey which described the general belief among Soviet Jews in the existence of an intrinsic Jewish mentality that includes: (1) a specifically Jewish intellect (flexibility of mind, inclination toward critical and rational thinking, live imagination, ingenuity); (2) a specifically Jewish activity (enterprise, craving for activity); (3) specific psycho-emotional traits (responsiveness, cordiality, benevolence, humanness, tolerance, sincerity); (4) a particular attitude toward family life (responsibility toward the family, intense parental love); (5) an attitude toward profession (loyal to their jobs, workaholics, readiness for self-sacrifice for work) (Kantor, 1992: 45).

The importance of this unifying factor (Jewish national character) was confirmed by the St. Petersburg survey where 40 per cent of respondents ranked highly “specific traits of character” and “psychological traits” as characteristics that unite them with other Jews (Kogan, 1993a).

It seems, however, that “national character” or “mentality” as a strong unifying factor is characteristic in the FSU mostly for Jews. By way of comparison, the sociological research conducted in 1987 through 1989 among the Armenians living in Moscow revealed the following results. In answer to the question “What unites you with Armenian people?”, respondents replied: 52 per cent culture, customs, traditions; 32 per cent Armenian language; 32 per cent historical destiny; 16 per cent mentality (Arutyunyan, 1991: 12).

During the last decade many revolutionary changes have affected the fate of the Soviet Jewry. The process of mild liberalization under strict state control, as well as the totalitarian communist regime, the rise of nationalistic movements, and the emergence of new independent states resulted in the downfall of the Soviet Union. The abolition of the former Communist state policy toward Jewish social life, and the new rules concerning emigration from the FSU and later independent republics, resulted in two parallel processes in the Soviet Jewry. One was the mass emigration during which more than 1.2 million Jews left the country in the last 12 years. The other was a revival of different forms of Jewish communal life – Jewish cultural societies, Jewish schools and universities, new synagogues, and so forth. More and more Jews (losing the adjective Soviet and acquiring “Russian”, “Ukrainian”, etc.) started gradually participating in communal activities. At the beginning of the 1990s, it seemed that most of the

Jews living in large cities believed that Jewish community exists in the FSU (77%), but at the same time only 23 per cent regarded themselves as belonging to the Jewish community (Ryvkina, 1993: 18). Two years later according to a 1993 survey in Moscow, St Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg, about 9 per cent of the Jews actively participated in Jewish organizations, while 28 per cent and 13 per cent participated from time to time. All in all about 50 per cent of the Jewish population was involved in local communal activities (Gitelman et al., 1994: 127). Ryvkina (1996b: 215) reported that only 12 per cent of Russian Jews considered themselves belonging to any Jewish organization (cultural, religious, political, etc.), while 85 per cent did not belong at all.

The new social environment could not fail to cause major changes in individual self-identity. Some sociologists report the new forms of national identity that are emerging under new circumstances when it is no longer dangerous to be a Jew or lead a Jewish traditional life. Thus, Ryvkina (1996a) offers a new set of criteria for classification based on several parameters, such as (1) attitude to national identity, (2) attitude to Russia, (3) attitude to emigration from Russia, (4) attitude to Jewish culture (language, history, traditions), and (5) attitude to Jewish religion. According to this classification, Ryvkina suggests four types of Jews. The first Jewish social type consists of “new Jews” who identify themselves as Jews, are interested in Jewish culture, want their children to be Jewish, but who feel quite comfortable in Russia and are not going to emigrate. According to the results of Ryvkina’s survey, this type constitutes 55 per cent of current Russian Jews. The other three types are: (1) assimilated Jews uninterested in Judaism and Jewish culture and not going to emigrate (23%), (2) potential immigrants who are beginning to strengthen their Jewish identity because of emigration intentions (23%), and (3) traditional religious Jews (2%) (Ryvkina, 1996). Thus, we suggest that the negative content of being a Soviet Jew, which was so typical only ten years ago, is not predominant anymore. We may assume that the very popular notion of Jewish mentality as one of the central elements of self-identity that was so popular in the 1960s through the 1980s is being gradually replaced by re-emerging traditional elements of Jewish ethnic identity – religion, traditions, and language.

The revival of Jewish cultural and communal life within the FSU has coincided with the biggest wave of emigration to Israel, which began in 1989. Most observers argue that this emigration stream was the result of the economic, political, and social crisis of the FSU. From 1990 to 1992, the years of massive immigration from the FSU when almost 400,000 Jews arrived to Israel, Jewish communal organizations were rather weak and did not operate on a massive scale. Nevertheless, some results of the activities of these organizations are now clear: immigrants arriving from 1996 to 1998 know more about “Judaica” than

the immigrants of 1991. All in all, the level of Jewish education of contemporary new immigrants to Israel, as well as their knowledge about life in contemporary Israel, is very low. Hence, the kibbutz ulpan plays a potentially important role in the social and cultural absorption of young immigrants into Israeli society by minimizing the difficulties they face in the process of their resocialization.

IMMIGRANTS TO ISRAEL FROM THE FSU: BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

The empirical source of our data is an ongoing current longitudinal study on young immigrants from the FSU participating in the “ulpan” programme on kibbutzim in Israel. The participants in the study reported here (N=410) constitute a representative sample of all young ulpan students (about 4,000 per annum from 1991 to 1993). From 1991 to 1994, the respondents were administered closed Likert-type questionnaires at the beginning and end of the five-month kibbutz programme. We collected the data from the entire Russian-speaking population of all ulpan classes in six kibbutzim representing the entire Kibbutz movement – five kibbutzim from the General Kibbutz Movement as well as one religious kibbutz. The students were disciplined in responding to the questionnaires; however, it turned out that they did not all comply with our request to place their name on an extra page so we could later do analysis over time. Yet, it is clear that this refusal rate, which was quite understandable post hoc given the culture of origin, did not affect our analysis. In comparing data of the whole sample of 410 with data of the merged file, where common IDs did exist (N=247), no significant differences on any variable were found. Moreover, the patterns that changed over time revealed identical patterns of responses both when conducting paired samples t-tests (N=247) and independent sample t-tests (N=410).

The stage one questionnaire included items on demographic background, Jewish ethnic identity, and motivations for emigration. The second instrument, administered at the close of ulpan, repeated core measures of ethnic identity to allow for the assessment of change in ethnic identity over the length of the programme, as well as questions designed to assess the structure and content of the guest host encounter in the kibbutz.

Three-quarters of the subjects of this study (76%) are 18 to 27 years old (the mean age is 22). Thus, they belong to the third and the fourth generations of Jews raised during the Soviet regime. In addition, the majority of respondents (67%) are men. This unbalanced gender ratio which is typical for all kibbutz

ulpanim in Israel requires some explanation. First, Russian Jewish culture is more accepting of young men leaving home, both in working prior to university as well as living outside the home before marriage, while women generally stay home until marriage unless they attend university in another city. A second explanation is that unlike participants in the kibbutz ulpanim who are tourists from Western countries, the Russians are immigrants to Israel and many have close family, parents, or siblings with whom they arrived in Israel. Under these circumstances a Russian migrant family in Israel is more likely to allow its young men to go to kibbutz ulpan to learn Hebrew and thus immediately lighten the economic burden on the family as a whole, while the daughters would study in an urban ulpan in the city of residence. By extension, the young women who do participate in the kibbutz ulpan are for the most part young migrants whose parents have remained in the FSU.

A majority of the new immigrants (75% to 80%) came from contemporary centres of concentrated Jewish population: Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Moldavia (mostly territories under the Soviet regime since 1917 to 1920). Thirty-three per cent of the students worked prior to immigration, 24 per cent worked and studied, and 36 per cent studied. Those who worked were either occupied in professional fields that demand university degrees (16%) or as technicians, nurses, factory workers, etc. (76%). The ulpan students revealed a characteristic feature of Soviet Jews, namely their middle class socio-economic status reflected in their high rate of educational attainment; 47 per cent of ulpan students had studied for four or more years in higher education institutions. It should be noted that the percentage of the higher education institutes' graduates could be even higher if some of the students had not had to interrupt their studies due to emigration (for example, 77% of Moscow Jews had studied for four or more years (Belyaeva, 1993: 140)).

As Figure 1 shows, the vast majority of the ulpan students report a weak Jewish background. Twenty-four per cent wrote that the atmosphere at home was not Jewish and 75 per cent said it was "Jewish but not religious". Only 1 per cent (out of 410 respondents) reported they were raised in a religious Jewish family.

When asked what "a Jewish, but not religious atmosphere" meant, the students usually mentioned the Yiddish language spoken by their grandparents, sometimes celebration of Jewish holidays (such as Passover or Simkhat Torah), infrequent visits to synagogue, and very often an interest in Jewish culture (music, poetry, literature) and Jewish history. They virtually never mention stricter rituals like observation of dietary laws (*kashrut*) or observation of Sabbath customs in their homes (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1
ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS FROM THE FSU

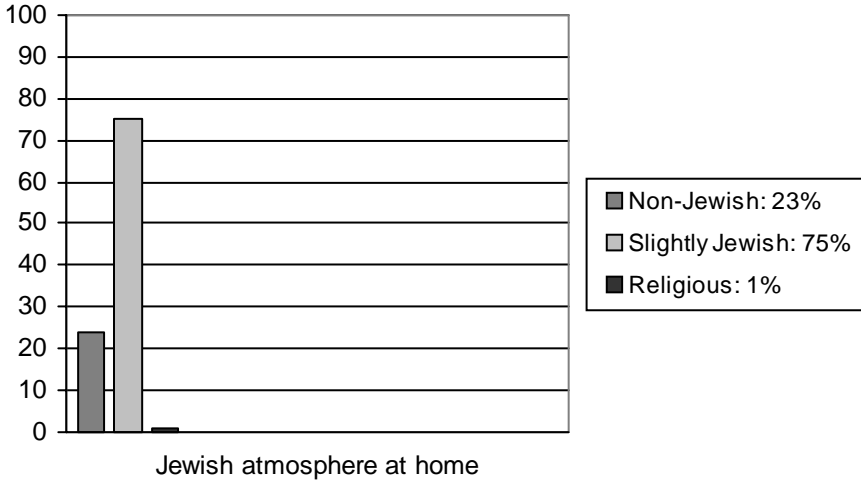
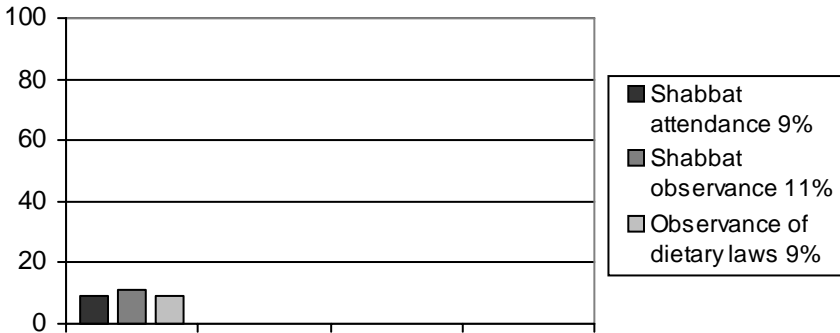


FIGURE 2
TRADITIONAL MEASURES OF JEWISH IDENTITY
OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FSU



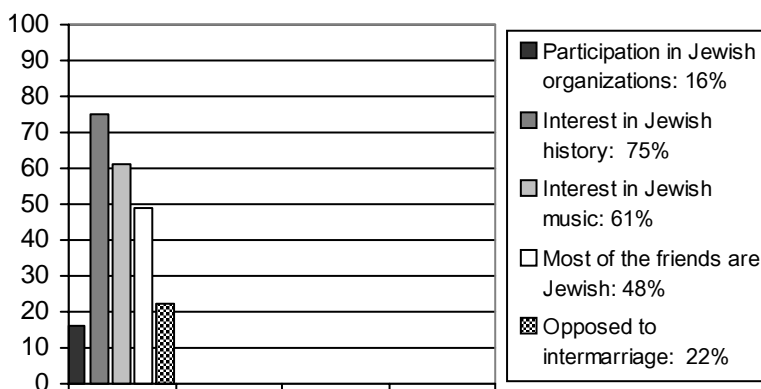
Most of these immigrants came from non-religious families where religious traditions were almost eradicated, yet when they were asked to describe what characterized contemporary Soviet Jews, 32 per cent mentioned the importance of synagogue attendance, 23 per cent the importance of Kosher observance, and 41 per cent the importance of circumcision.

This discrepancy between the students' personal attitudes toward religious traditions and their stereotyped view about the Soviet Jews may be explained, once

again, by their *lack of experience with life in a Jewish community*. This is a reflection of the situation reported in the beginning of the 1990s in the FSU where 77 per cent of the Jews said they believe in the existence of the Jewish community, while only 23 per cent felt that *they actually belong to it*. Even among Yiddish speakers, who usually belong to an older and less deculturized generation, only 1 per cent attended synagogue often and 32 per cent attended sometimes (Ryvkina, 1993: 18).

In response to additional questions regarding the character of Jewish life in Russia, we can see in Figure 3 that respondents gave high scores to the following secular cultural characteristics of Russian Jewish life: interest in Jewish music (61%) and interest in Jewish history (75%), which are primarily measures of “individual rather than collective identity”. In addition, while a reasonably high percentage characterize Russian Jews as having mostly Jewish friends (48%), only 22 per cent reported that they considered Russian Jews to be opposed to intermarriage with non-Jews and a very low 16 per cent reported their fellow Jews as participating in Jewish organizational life.

FIGURE 3
SOCIAL MEASURES OF JEWISH ETHNICITY IN THE FSU



How salient is being Jewish for these young immigrants from the FSU? On the one hand, 46 per cent believe that it is “important for me to be a Jew”, while 54 per cent said it is not a very important aspect of their identity. On the other hand, 69 per cent of Russian-speaking students reported that they were proud of their Jewishness. However, since their Jewishness had very often been a source of serious problems, self-identity was very ambivalent. This ambivalent

attitude is reflected in their answers about anti-Semitism in the FSU. Many of the students report that they had *never* experienced anti-Semitism, yet 55 per cent mentioned anti-Semitism as a push factor for their emigration, while 53 per cent admitted that their Jewishness would negatively affect their career in the FSU. These data illustrate that before emigration a young Jewish person from the FSU was a “lone” Jew, deculturized and living beyond the frame of Jewish community with a very limited, secular, and one-sided Jewish experience. Nevertheless, the emigrant Russian Jew of the early 1990s strongly felt his or her Jewishness (as something that alienated from the surrounding society) and, therefore, held a very contradictory and conflicting attitude toward that same Jewishness.

THE ROLE OF THE KIBBUTZ “PROXIMAL HOST”: THE INFLUENCE OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE KIBBUTZ AS A JEWISH COMMUNITY

Immigration has been, and still remains, one of the main sources of population increase in Israel. The current wave of immigration from the FSU, which began at the end of 1989, represents the largest immigration to arrive in Israel. From 1989 to 2001, about 1 million immigrants arrived in the country, most of them from the FSU, increasing Israel’s total population by 15 per cent (Damian and Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1996).

The Israeli kibbutz has been engaged for 50 years in the absorption of visitors, volunteers, and new immigrants in the kibbutz ulpan programme. A kibbutz ulpan is a place where immigrants can learn the Hebrew language. Interaction between ulpan students and kibbutz society occurs in various areas: the workplace, in the classroom, and during leisure time (Mittelberg, 1988). The kibbutz inhabitants make up about 3 per cent of the total Jewish population in Israel and the number of Russian immigrants who participated in the several kibbutz programmes also equalled 3 per cent of the total number of Russian immigrants during 1990 and 1992 (Hulati and Porat, 1991).

The kibbutz symbolizes the central values of the founding generations of Israeli society and incorporates Jewish values into the everyday lifestyle of the community. This modern Jewish approach to daily life is manifest through celebration of the Jewish calendar, including festivals based on the agricultural cycle of the year, life cycle events, and traditional Jewish holidays, as well as through the emphasis on social equality and the collective community. Therefore, the encounter with the kibbutz social community is often perceived as an encounter with part of the essential past of Israeli society (Shkedi, 1994b).

For almost all Russian-speaking immigrants a stay on the kibbutz is a first encounter with Jewish-Israeli community as well as the first phase in the process of absorption into Israeli-Jewish society. It should be taken into consideration that a Russian ulpan group is a kind of small ethno-cultural community (environmental bubble) inside the big ethno-cultural community (kibbutz), and for many young people from the FSU it is a rather new experience to live in a predominantly Jewish community subculture. These factors play a very important role in the immigrants' perception of their new social reality.

In Mittelberg's 1988 study of the kibbutz ulpan conducted long before the advent of the Russian migrant stream, it was pointed out that the environmental bubble serves to both preserve some familiarity within a strange environment and to familiarize the actor with strangeness (Mittelberg, 1988: 28-29).

This encounter, occurring as it does at the cross-cultural interface, requires its participants to cope with a new language, customs, norms, and so forth. Typically, the guest has to generate simultaneously new interpersonal relationships both with fellow guests as well as with the hosts. This is accomplished quickly within the guest subculture, while more slowly vis-à-vis the kibbutznik hosts. Thus, the guest needs to cope with the cognitive questions of communication or language, as well as the adaptation to a way of life different from home both in its structure and content.

This problem has been described as the impermeability of the institutionalized environmental bubble in which the guests live. In the final analysis, much of the social activity in this sphere of life is carried on within the environmental bubble so guests can either accommodate themselves to this state of affairs or devise strategies for crossing over to the host-world. One such strategy, albeit an institutionalized one at that, is the adopted family.

Ulpan students have an opportunity to meet Israelis/kibbutznikim in different areas of kibbutz life such as in the ulpan (mostly ulpan staff), in workplaces, in the communal dining room, in the homes of kibbutznikim, and during celebrations of communal holidays. The most intensive interaction between the students and kibbutz members happens in workplaces (kibbutz industry, agriculture, different services, etc.). After work, the intensity of interaction drops drastically: 54 per cent of students reported frequent social ties with kibbutznikim during working hours, while only 6 per cent felt the same after work.

New immigrants from the FSU communicate most often with adults (50%), usually with their adopted families and ulpan-teachers, while communication with the younger population of kibbutz is quite insignificant. For example,

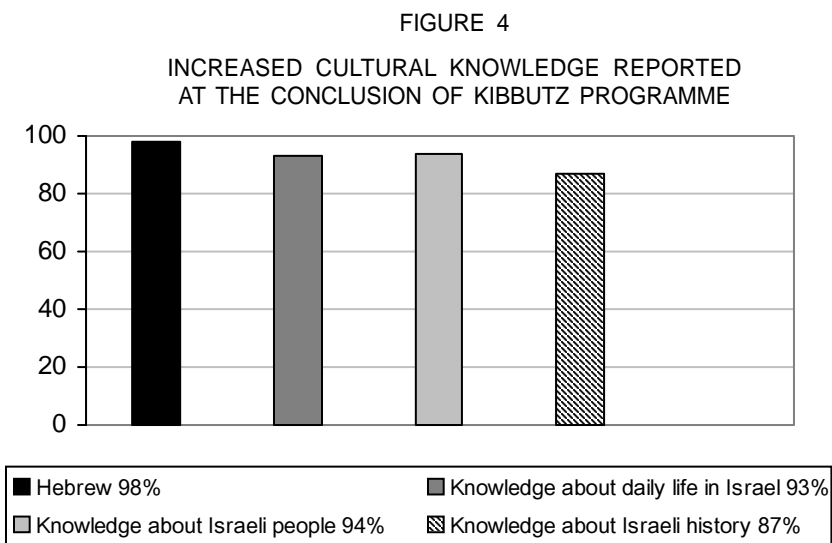
70 per cent of respondents answered that they communicated “never” or “very seldom” with young single kibbutznikim, 80 per cent with young married couples, and 86 per cent with high-school pupils.

The tendency to have little contact between young kibbutznikim and immigrants or the relative impermeability of the environmental bubble may also be explained by the following factors: the lack of common language, Hebrew or English, and the fact that both parties have little opportunity to meet each other because the majority of young kibbutznikim aged 18 to 25 are in the Army or study in the city.

How do these young adults from the FSU perceive the goals of their hosts in the Israeli kibbutz? The participants gave the following answers in separately evaluating each of the following goals of kibbutzim in Israel. The majority (57%) of ulpan students believe that the goal of kibbutz is “to institute a life of communal living”, while 39 per cent reported it is “to develop an economic enterprise that will guarantee a high standard of living for its members”, and 39 per cent reported it is about the “realization of Zionist Socialist values”. Less important goals, according to the ulpan students, are the “realization of Jewish values” (31%) and “to be instrumental in fulfilling national goals”, for example, defence, settlement (33%).

These data show that the students from the FSU, in their evaluation of kibbutz, emphasize its socialist and communal aspects rather than the national or Jewish aspects. For them, the kibbutz is first a closed community or organization for which the most important goal is economic prosperity in order to give its members a high standard of living. They also see in the kibbutz a “socialist community”, and according to their personal experience of life in a “socialist” state, propaganda and ideological education are an intrinsic part of any such state or social system. They view kibbutz through these familiar, but misplaced stereotypes, which reinforce their view that while on the one hand the kibbutz needs the ulpan as an additional labour force, the kibbutz also “fulfils an educational Zionist role”.

At the conclusion of the ulpan, the students were asked to evaluate how their stay on the kibbutz increased their knowledge of different aspects of Israeli life. As Figure 4 shows, most (98%) reported that as a result of their studies they learned “more” and “much more” Hebrew and “more” and “much more” about “daily life in Israel” (93%), “Israelis as a people” (94%), “Israeli and Zionist history” (87%), “possibilities for religious life in Israel” (94%), and “the Jewish people” (90%).



At the same time, a low 26 per cent of ulpanists felt that their stay on the kibbutz resulted in Jewish fulfilment, and 19 per cent reported that it had helped them “not at all”. Thirty per cent reported a “strengthening of the feeling of affiliation with Israeli society” to a “high” and “very high degree” and 39 per cent “to some degree”.

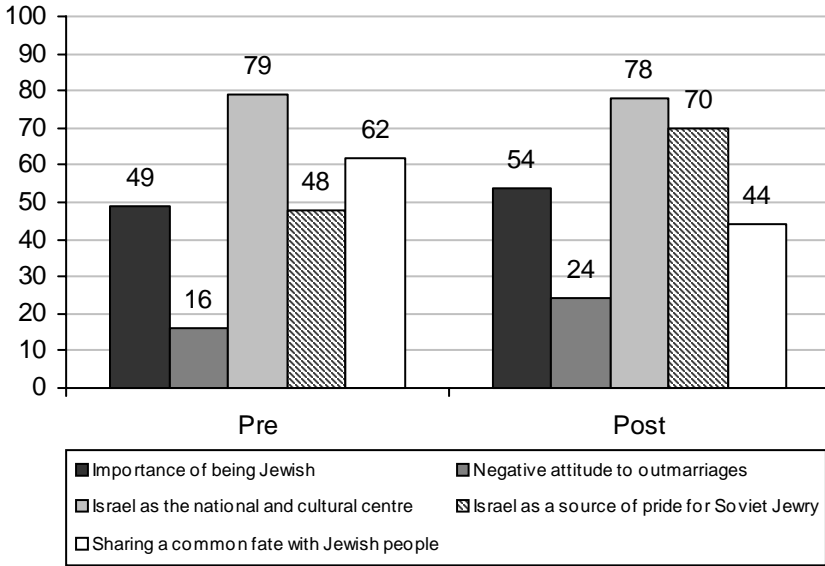
LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS: PRE- AND POST-PROGRAMME CHANGES IN MEASURES OF JEWISH ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ATTACHMENT TO ISRAEL

In the analysis that follows we compared the pre and post scores of identical participants, measuring the change over time on measures of Jewish identity and attachment to Israel (from the beginning of the Ulpan programme to its conclusion in Israel).

As can be seen from both Figure 5 and Table 1, the Israel kibbutz experience did make a difference, however the change was *not* uniform across all dimensions. Thus, the two variables (“being Jewish important to me” and “fate and future bound up with those of Jewish people”), that measure components of Jewish ethnic identity of FSU participants, did not report positive change over time. Indeed, the first of these two showed a slight increase of six percentage points but was not statistically significant, while in the latter there was actually a statistic-

ally significant decline in the degree to which these FSU immigrants to Israel saw themselves sharing a common fate with the Jewish people.

FIGURE 5
CHANGE IN JEWISH ETHNICITY OVER TIME



We believe that this decline may be explained by the fact that for the respondents the expression “Jewish fate”, especially from 1991 to 1995, the years of mass migration from the FSU, was associated primarily with their own emigration, i.e. it was their Jewish fate to leave their home land and come to Israel. Five months later, following the initial period of integration they feel much more “Israeli” rather than Jewish and many of them may believe that now since becoming citizens of their new State they may leave behind this “traumatic” fate.

At the same time there was reported a small but significant increase in the number of participants whose degree of opposition to outmarriage had increased (16% to 24%), thus strengthening their sense of ethnic boundary.

With reference to attachment to Israel, a quite different picture emerges with these very same respondents. First there is a high score maintained over time on the degree to which Israel is seen as the national and cultural centre of the Jewish people, (79% to 78%), while there is found a sharp increase in the perceived degree to which Israel serves as a source of pride for Soviet Jewry (48% to 71%).

TABLE 1
PRE-PROGRAMME AND POST-PROGRAMME CHANGES IN JEWISH
ETHNIC IDENTITY, AND ATTACHMENT TOWARD ISRAEL, N=247
(paired samples t-test)*

Identity and attitudes	Pre-programme	Post-programme	t-value	Probability
Being Jewish plays an important part in my life	3.42	3.40	1.055	N.S.
My fate and future bound up with that of the Jewish people	3.89	3.09	-5.552	0.000
Israel serves as a national, cultural centre of the Jewish people	4.06	4.02	0.634	N.S.
Israel as a source of pride for Soviet Jewry	4.14	3.96	3.27	0.001
Opposition to out-marriage	2.22	2.44	-4.406	0.000

Note: *Independent samples t-test (N=410) yielded identical significant outcomes.
Key: 1 to 5 scale; 1 = low degree, 5 = high degree.

It may be asked to what extent are these observed changes a reflection of pre-migration home background? This is not easy to determine because of the monotonous homogeneity of the students' backgrounds or lack of it, however an indication can be found in Figure 6.

Here we attempt to control the effect of the kibbutz experience on one measure of ethnic change by the degree of Jewishness of pre-migration home. What can be seen are identical patterns of change even though the benchmark of those from *more* Jewish homes is higher than those of *less* Jewish homes; moreover the increment for the latter less Jewish homes is 27 percentage points, while for the former it is only 22 percentage points.

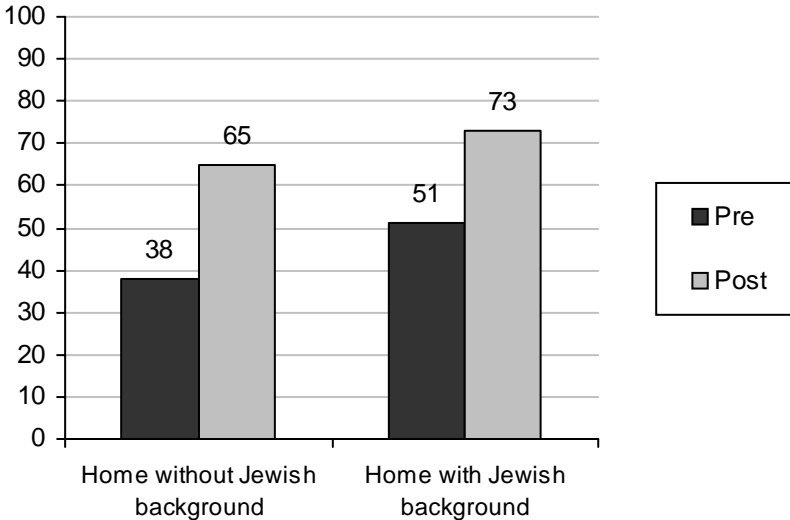
We would argue that this change in their attitude toward Israel as a source of pride and self respect of Soviet Jewry occurs at least in part as an outcome of their personal positive experience during their stay on the kibbutz as well as consequence of their newly acquired knowledge about Jewish history and contemporary Israel. Hence their initial theoretical belief in Israel as a cultural and national centre was "translated" into personal pride of becoming citizens of their adopted society.

Thus, we can see that for a large number of new immigrants from the FSU, the first period of absorption into Israeli society through the stay on kibbutz re-

sulted primarily in strengthening their affiliation with the State of Israel. This rise in the identification with Israel, rather than the dimension of being bound to the fate of the Jewish people, would appear to suggest that the immigrants are looking for something they lacked in Russia – an unproblematic sense of national identification.

FIGURE 6

JEWISH ATMOSPHERE AT PRE-MIGRATION HOME BY ISRAEL AS A SOURCE OF PRIDE AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PROGRAMME



Being Jewish, from the point of view of many students, is just the first step. It is an opportunity to leave Russia and come to Israel. During the discussion on “Who is a Jew?”, a student said to the educational facilitator, “Why is it so important to talk about who is a Jew, or what it means to be Jewish? I came here to forget that I am a Jew.” Apparently for him being Jewish in Russia and being Jewish in Israel had such different content that he wanted to be considered first as an Israeli citizen, and only then Jewish, if at all.

CONCLUSION

Ethnicity is dynamic. In the case of immigrants at least, it is an outcome of the negotiation of a collective identity at the interface between two cultures in the biography of immigrants, lived through the history of immigrant communities.

Ethnicity and its emergence can best be studied by taking advantage of both macro- and micro-sociology. In this study we have identified the difference between the macro categories of ethnicity in the society of origin and the society of destination as well as the micro-sociological role of the proximal group in working out a new definition of “us” that has been made necessary by the fact of migration.

Thus, we have attempted to illustrate the utility of the open typological approach to ethnicity in general and to Jewish ethnicity in the FSU in particular. In accordance with this typology we have identified the pre-migration ethnicity of the Soviet Jews as having the sharply defined character of a discriminated *national minority* with the content of *weak symbolic ethnicity*. The ambivalent nature of the ethnicity of the Jews while in the FSU was expressed in the fact that although the majority were deculturized from the point of view of traditional dimensions of Jewish life, they nevertheless felt belonging to a certain ethnic group. At the same time, under these conditions the traditional Jewish elements of ethnicity were replaced by other elements of ethnic identity such as “national character or national mentality” that were salient for contemporary Soviet Jews.

Dramatic changes in the FSU which resulted in the downfall of the communist regime and disintegration of the Soviet Union were followed by the emergence of national movements including the revival of Jewish traditional cultural and religious activities. Due to the activities of new Jewish communities on the territory of the FSU one can begin to see the changes in their ethnicity. Historically, traditional parameters of Jewish identity (religion, tradition, language) become more salient, the identity of the FSU Jew was gradually transformed from a *national minority* with the content of symbolic ethnicity to that of an *ethnic group*.

A decade after the beginning of mass immigration from the FSU to Israel we can recall the process of resocialization of this migrant stream into Israeli society and the subsequent changes in ethnic identity of the Jews from Russia. The last wave of mass immigration from the FSU to Israel (1989-2002) was a unique phenomenon in several respects. Its vastness (more than 900,000) during a very short period of time resulted in a very high concentration of new immigrants within specific Israeli urban areas.

The social consequence of this residential concentration was not long coming, so that a large segment of the Russian-speaking population decided to mobilize what has been called instrumental ethnicity – through political mobilization. Thus, in 1995 emerged a new predominantly Russian-speaking political party Israel Be Aliya which never proclaimed itself as an ideologically ethnic party and always

stressed its mainstream Zionist and national ideology. After the elections in 1996 the party won seven seats in the country's 120 seats parliament Knesset. Currently there are nine Russian-speaking Knesset members, as well as two government ministers born in the FSU, who represent not only "Russian Parties", but other parties as well.

As a result, we can see that the latest Jewish immigrants from the FSU aspired to be citizens of Israel with full rights and at the same time to retain their familiar cultural heritage, rather than to create a more or less traditional Jewish community that was strange to them and did not represent their pre-migration home. Therefore, they started with the formation of organizations, which were familiar in their previous "Russian" life, such as the Union of the Veterans of World War II, and quite logically ended with emergence of a new political party. Actually "ethnic" parties are not a new phenomenon in the political life of Israel. The "Russian" party was preceded by a political party SHAS, supported mainly by the immigrants from the Northern African countries who came to Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. In this respect the Jews from the FSU were mimicking the Israeli political culture, which for many of them was familiar to what they had known.

How will all these dynamic changes affect the national identity of Russian Jews living in Israel? We believe that it may result in the emergence of a multi-segmented new identity of new Israel citizens, which includes three major elements of self-definition: Russian, Jewish, and Israeli. We anticipate that in the foreseeable future, a large part of these immigrants will consider themselves as belonging to a certain social group, but with no negative feelings about the fact. Therefore, on the macro-level the membership in the economically and politically successful Russian-speaking group of Israeli society will be more of a source of self esteem, not a sign of shameful otherness.

Our conclusions have been corroborated by the results of the survey conducted in 1999 by Majid Al-Haj who wrote: "... As a whole the ethnic identification of immigrants from the former the FSU in Israel is not a reactive identity, which is mainly generated by alienation. It is rather based on group connectedness and pride in their Russian cultural roots" (Al Haj, 2002).

On the micro-level of ethnicity, we have seen that the encounter with Israel as a Jewish state and the kibbutz as a Jewish community very often demands a re-examination of their private ambivalent concept of Jewishness. Our research has indicated that the short period of stay on kibbutz usually results in cultural enrichment of young immigrants in Hebrew, Judaica, etc., rather than in a drastic re-evaluation of their personal self-identification. On the other hand, this

initial phase of absorption within a unique form of life in a contemporary Jewish community may be the first step in resolving the ambivalent ethnic identity of the Jews from the FSU. Compared with their former lives, their current ethnic identity may now have weaker boundaries, but a richer and more positive (non-alienating) content than the world they had grown up in.

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MINORITE NATIONALE, MENTALITE NATIONALE ET APPARTENANCE
COMMUNAUTAIRE: LE CHANGEMENT D'IDENTITE ETHNIQUE
DES JUIFS DE L'EX-UNION SOVIETIQUE DANS
LES KIBBOUTZ ISRAELIENS

Dans cet article, nous examinons et comparons l'identité ethnique des Juifs dans l'ex-Union soviétique et le processus de changement d'identité ethnique parmi les nouveaux immigrants en provenance de l'ex-union soviétique. Cette analyse considère le rôle du kibboutz comme la première expérience de communauté juive dans leur existence, ainsi que le lieu de la première étape de leur processus d'absorption et de resocialisation dans un environnement nouveau et non familial. Les données utilisées sont tirées d'une recherche longitudinale, avec une pré- et une post-analyse des changements au niveau de l'appartenance ethnique des migrants, étudiés à partir de leur arrivée dans le kibboutz israélien jusqu'à l'achèvement du programme de six mois dans le même kibboutz. Nous avons constaté que les Juifs soviétiques d'avant la migration définissaient leur origine ethnique comme une minorité nationale discriminée, avec un faible contenu symbolique d'appartenance ethnique. La nature ambivalente de l'origine ethnique des Juifs durant leur présence en Union Soviétique s'est révélée par le fait que, tandis qu'une majorité d'entre eux étaient déculturisés par rapport à la réalité juive dans ses aspects traditionnels, ils considéraient néanmoins qu'ils appartenaient à un groupe ethnique spécifique.

Le sentiment d'appartenance ethnique après la migration est apparu considérablement modifié; l'ambivalence dont il était question plus haut avait disparu. Dans une perspective d'ensemble, le fait d'appartenir à un groupe russophone ayant réussi sur les plans économique et politique au sein de la société israélienne est une source de confiance de sa propre valeur, plutôt qu'un signe d'altérité honteuse. Du simple point de vue de l'appartenance ethnique, en revanche, la rencontre avec la communauté juive du kibboutz dans la phase initiale d'absorption en Israël exige souvent un réexamen des concepts privés de judéité, devant constituer la première étape dans un processus conduisant à l'effacement de cette ambivalence identitaire. En conséquence, leur nouvelle identité ethnique pourrait très bien présenter à présent des frontières plus minces, même si elles sont faites d'un matériau plus positif (non aliénant) que celles qu'ils connaissaient autrefois.

MINORÍA NACIONAL, MENTALIDAD NACIONAL Y COMUNIDAD
ÉTNICA: EL CAMBIO DE LA IDENTIDAD ÉTNICA DE LOS
JUDÍOS PROVENIENTES DE LA EX UNIÓN SOVIÉTICA
EN UN KIBUTZ ISRAELÍ

En este artículo se examina y compara la identidad étnica de los judíos en la ex Unión Soviética y el proceso de cambio de la identidad étnica entre estos nuevos inmigrantes. Este análisis examina el papel del kibutz como primera experiencia comunitaria judía en sus vidas, así como la localización de la primera etapa de su proceso de integración y resocialización en un entorno nuevo y desconocido. Los datos, extraídos gracias a un estudio longitudinal con un análisis previo y consecutivo de los cambios étnicos de los migrantes, abarcan el periodo comprendido desde su llegada a kibutz hasta seis meses después cuando concluye el programa. Se pudo determinar que antes de emigrar los judíos soviéticos definían su afiliación étnica como una minoría nacional discriminada con poco contenido étnico simbólico. El carácter ambivalente de esta afiliación étnica de los judíos mientras estaban en la Unión Soviética se manifestó porque la mayoría estaba desculturizada de las dimensiones tradicionales de la vida judía, sin embargo sentía que pertenecía a un grupo étnico específico.

La afiliación étnica posmigratoria sufrió enormes cambios; la antigua ambivalencia desapareció. A nivel macro, la adhesión al grupo de habla rusa de la sociedad israelí, con éxito económico y político, es una fuente de autoestima, en lugar de vergüenza por la diferencia. A nivel micro, el encuentro en la etapa inicial de integración en Israel, dentro de la comunidad judía del kibutz, a menudo exige una reevaluación del concepto personal del judaísmo, y sirve de primer paso para resolver la ambivalencia de la identidad étnica. Por consiguiente, su nueva identidad étnica quizás tenga pocos vínculos, pero tiene un contenido más positivo (no enajenante) del que dejaron tras de sí.