Sociological Papers

Immigrant Scholars Write about Identity and Integration

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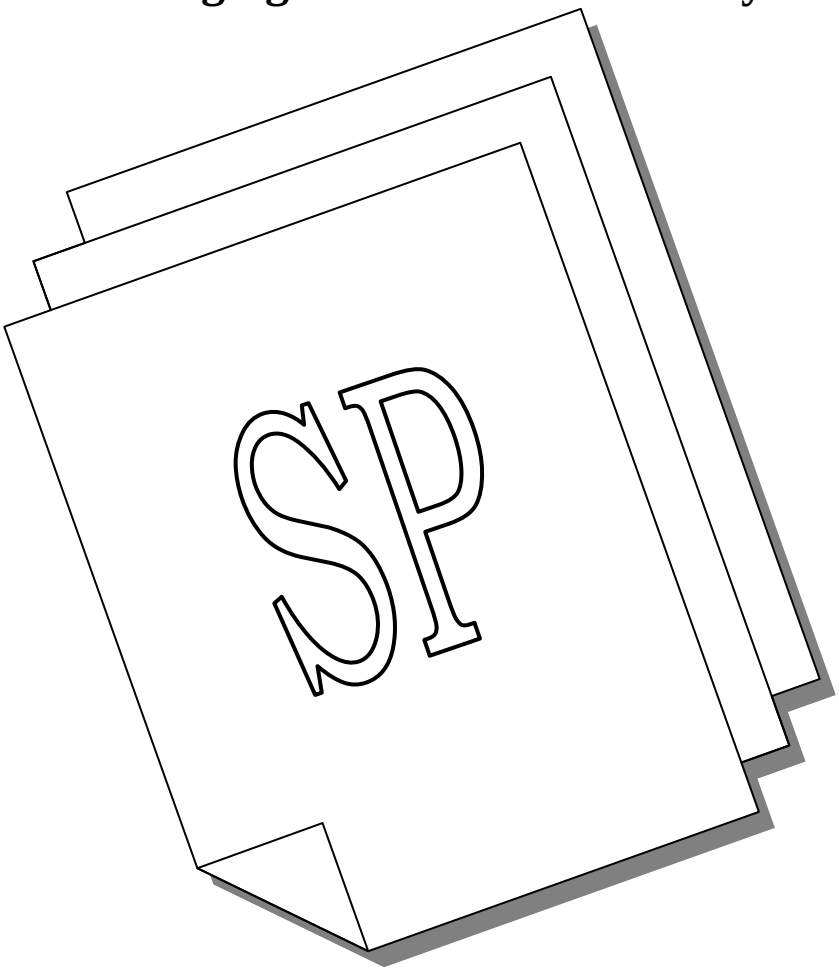

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Former Soviet Jews in Israel and in the West: Integration, Exclusion and Transnationalism[1]

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Abstract

Theoretical focus of the paper is the relationship between transnationalism and immigrant incorporation in the host country's labor market and social system. It is shown that due to its timing and composition, Russian immigration of the 1990s was readily transnational at the outset, but the expression of diasporic interests and activities depends both on geographic location and modes of integration in the new homelands. Russian Jews in Israel and Germany display stronger diasporic tendencies than those who resettled in the USA and Canada. Across the New Diaspora, transnational activities among Russian Jews grow 'from below' (i.e. from individual initiative rather than institutional action) and are largely limited to the socio-cultural domain. The reliance on co-ethnic networks within and outside of the host country may be a mixed blessing, both empowering the weaker segments of the immigrants and thwarting their integration by creating an alternative social space.

Introduction: Transnational immigrant communities

The concept of *transnationalism*, described as an integral part of the globalization process, is becoming increasingly popular in social and political sciences (Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Portes et al., 1999; Faist, 2000). Originally coined in international economics to describe flows of capital and labor across national borders in the second half of the 20th century, this concept was later applied to the study of migrations and ethnic diasporas. The lens of transnationalism became increasingly useful for exploring such issues as immigrant economic integration, identity, citizenship and cultural retention.

Some authors argue that transnationalism may actually be a new name for an old phenomenon, in the sense that most big immigration waves of the past were typified by ethno-cultural retention and contacts with co-ethnics abroad (Van Hear, 1998; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). Indeed, historic studies of ethnic diasporas show that immigrants never fully severed their links with the homeland. Yet, due to technical

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and financial limitations of the time, for most migrants these links remained mainly in the sentimental and cultural realm, and were seldom expressed in active shuttle movement or communication across borders. Economic ties with countries of origin were typically limited to monetary remittances to family members. Although up to one-quarter of transatlantic migrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries eventually returned to their homelands, the decision to repatriate was in fact another critical and irreversible choice to be made. Hence, for the majority of historic migrants, resettlement was an irreversible process always involving a dichotomy: stay or emigrate, or else stay or return (Jacobson, 1995; Van Hear, 1998).

In the late 20th century efficient and relatively cheap means of communication and transportation (time- and space-compressing technologies) made this old dichotomy largely irrelevant. As Castells (1996) has pointed out in his book "*The Rise of the Network Society*," new technologies have virtually created new patterns of social relations, or at lest strongly reinforced pre-existing tendencies. They allowed numerous diasporic immigrants to live in two or more countries at a time, via maintaining close physical and social links with their places of origin. Transnational activities and lifestyles became widely spread, embracing large numbers of people and playing a significant role in economy, politics and social life of both sending and receiving countries. Guarnizo & Smith (1998) have introduced a useful distinction between *the two types of transnationalism -- 'from above' and 'from below'*. The former refers to institutionalized economic and political activities of multinational corporations and organizations such as UN, Amnesty International or Greenpeace, which set in motion large-scale global exchange of financial and human capital. On the other hand, the increasing role in these networks belongs to ordinary migrants -- grassroots agents of transnationalism who run small businesses in their home countries, organize exchange of material (e.g., ethnic food) and cultural (e.g., tours of folk artists) goods within the diaspora, pay regular visits to their birthplace, receive co-ethnic guests, and so on.

Migration experience in the context of global society, where constant exchange of people, products and ideas is reinforced by transnational media networks, has attained a whole new quality. The full-time loyalty to one country and one culture is no longer self-evident: people may actually divide their physical pastime, effort and identity between several societies. Citizenship and political participation are also becoming bi-focal or even multi-focal, since some sending countries allow their expatriates to remain citizens, vote in national elections and establish political movements. In this context, international migrants are becoming *transmigrants*, developing economic activities, enjoying cultural life and keeping dense informal networks not only with their home country, but also with other national branches of their diaspora. The split of economic, social and political loyalties among migrants, and gradual attenuation of loyalty to the nation-state as such, is seen as problematic by some receiving countries (Glick Schiller, 1995; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).

Most transnational networks in business, politics, communications and culture organize along ethnic lines, i.e. include members of the same ethnic community spread between different locales on the map. Common language and cultural heritage are the key cementing factors for the transnational diasporas (Jacobson, 1995; Van Hear, 1998). In most cases, transnationals become bi-lingual and bi-cultural, but different communities may exhibit various extent of cultural separatism versus integration in the host society. Specific expressions and forms of transnational living vary by the host country and ethnic group in questions and are closely intertwined

with the issues of multiculturalism (Joppke and Lukes, 1999). Over time, many immigrant groups develop cultural hybridism – the mix of the elements of their ethnic language and lifestyles with those adopted from the host culture. Most common expression of this trend is the formation of hybrid immigrant lingoes – Mexican English, Algerian French, Turkish German, etc. (Glick Schiller, 1995; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998; Van Hear, 1998).

While much of the current writings on transnationalism are concerned with long-distance economic activities and financial flows across the borders, the focus of this paper is on its socio-cultural dimension and implications for immigrant identity and integration. It stems from a theoretical perspective regarding the assimilation process as non-linear and segmented, whereby seemingly assimilated second and third generations may come to reclaim their ethnic roots (Portes and Zhou Min, 1993; Alba and Nee, 1997). In psychosocial terms, immigrant/transnational identity and personality become increasingly 'elastic,' if not 'fluid,' being constantly shaped and re-shaped by multiple influences of different societies migrants actually live in. Transnationals of today experience the increasing difficulty answering the question, 'What are you? Where do you belong?' In that sense, transmigrant identity emerges as epitome of postmodern identity (Giddens, 1991; Guarniso and Smith, 1998).

However exiting, transnational lifestyle has its underside. While for many immigrants it may be a blessing, enabling them to enjoy the best of two (or more) worlds, for some others it virtually means living in the limbo, or in the state of permanent uprooting. As I will show below, in some cases transnationalism is conducive to social and cultural alienation from the host society and poor chances for integration and success.

Russian Jewish immigrants of the 1990s:

Pathways to transnationalism

Most recent studies of transnationalism focused on the immigrants who moved from the economically disadvantaged countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America to the west, mainly US, Canada and Western Europe (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998; Portes et al., 1999; Faist, 2000). In this paper, I am trying to apply this concept to another stream of the late-20th century migrations: those from the socialist Eastern Europe to western or westernized countries. Although during the 1990s several ethnic groups were involved in mass emigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) - Germans, Armenians, Greeks, as well as Russians and other Slavs - Soviet Jews formed the bulk of the émigrés. An estimated 1.6 million of former Soviet citizens of Jewish ancestry left the deteriorating USSR and its successor states after 1987, drastically depleting their aging Jewish communities, as well as sending countries' human capital. Jews were the single most educated ethnic group among all Soviet nations, with over 60% having post-secondary education and mostly professional or white-collar occupations (Tolts, 2004; Remennick, 2007). Over 60% of these émigrés moved to Israel, the rest are scattered between the US and Canada (25%), Germany (12%), Australia and other Western countries (the remaining 3%). In the early 1990s, Israeli social anthropologist Fran Markowitz (1995) suggested that Russian Jews in the FSU and abroad were developing transnational ties. Yet, few researchers tried to explore these tendencies in more concrete terms and in specific host countries (Remennick, 2002, Darieva, 2004, Morawska, 2004; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). This article is an attempt at comparative

analysis of diasporic and transnational trends among Russian Jews who live in the four main host countries of post-communist migrations. To contextualize my analysis, I will start from the general socio-economic portrait of this migration wave to Israel, Europe and North America.

The Israeli context

Israel is a country of 'ethnic return migration' whose very *reason d'etre* is offering shelter and symbolic home to scattered groups of diasporic Jews. About 950,000 Soviet Jews arrived in Israel after 1989 (CBS, 2006), increasing Israeli Jewish population by 20%. The total number of Russian-speakers (including the immigrants of the 1970s) has exceeded one million; this 'critical mass' of same-origin immigrants has made a significant impact on the Israeli society, economy and politics. By the virtue of its size and timing, the Great Russian *Aliyah*[2] of the 1990s carried in it all the necessary conditions for the development of transnational tendencies. To begin with, Israeli Law of Return does not impose any eligibility criteria (e.g., age and health status) for Jewish immigrants, and, therefore, *Aliyah* of the 1990s was a mass, unselected family movement across borders. Younger families immigrated together, or in chain, along with their parents and other relatives. As a result, the advanced age structure of Soviet Jewry has been 'transplanted' to Israel: middle-aged and elderly immigrants comprise a high percentage of the total (about 40% are over age 45 and 15% over 65, vs. 30% and 11%, respectively, in the Israeli Jewish population) (CBS, 2006). Older immigrants are more prone to ethnic and cultural retention and have a lower potential for occupational, social and cultural integration.

Second, due to intense assimilation and intermarriage among Soviet Jews, about one-third of the immigrants are partly Jewish or non-Jewish (i.e., spouses and children of immigrants recognized by the state as Jews[3]). After seven decades of atheist indoctrination in the USSR, over 90% are non-religious; their Jewish identity is tenuous and mainly ethnic. Non-Jewish and assimilated immigrants are less likely to develop strong Israeli identity and may have lower motivation for studying Hebrew, mandatory military service, and general assimilation in the host society. It is important to bear in mind that the latest immigration wave from the FSU was set in motion mainly by the 'push factors' (economic crisis, political instability, growing nationalism and antisemitism in post-socialist countries). Positive identification with Judaism, Zionism and other Israeli values among last-wave emigrants was rather weak. For many of them, Israel was a less desirable destination than America or other western countries, which introduced strict refugee quotas for Soviet citizens in the late 1980s. Thus, for most, making *Aliyah* was a pragmatic rather than ideological choice. In this sense, the mental state of Russian immigrants of the 1990s is markedly different from that of the smaller Zionist *Aliyah* from the USSR of the 1970s (some 130,000), which had opted for Israel in the period when all western countries welcomed Jewish refugees (Remennick, 2007:36).

Third, the Russian language and Russian-Soviet culture play the crucial role in the formation of Russian-Jewish ethnicity and the Israeli Russian community. In fact, it is

[2] Aliyah is a Hebrew word for repatriation of Jews to Israel, literally meaning 'ascent' to historic homeland and to Jerusalem as the Jewish capital. Jewish repatriates are called in Hebrew Olim, or 'ascending.' These ideologically loaded terms signify the national Zionist aspirations.

[3] By Jewish common law (Halacha), only a child of a Jewish mother is a Jew, regardless of father's descent. Half-Jews on paternal side are not considered Jews. Yet, by the Law of Return, children and grandchildren of Jews on any side, and their immediate families, have a right for Israeli citizenship.

the main common ground for the otherwise diverse groups of former Soviet immigrants, including Jews of various ethnic origins (European, Caucasian and Asian) coming from the whole array of places and social backgrounds. Across the multi-ethnic USSR, the Russian language was dominant as both official and everyday language for most urban residents, especially for educated professionals and white-collar workers. In the last Soviet census of 1989, 95% of Jews named Russian as their mother tongue, compared to 30-60% among other non-Russians. Soviet Jews counted in their ranks many prominent writers, poets, journalists, actors, theater and film directors, media and show business people, i.e. they belonged to the core of Russian *intelligentsia* and took active part in the very creation of Russian-Soviet culture of the 20th century. While most Russian Jewish immigrants tell in surveys and ethnographic studies that they have no sentiment for their former homelands as such, they often miss the Russian language and rich cultural life that draws on it (Remennick, 2007: 363; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2007:239). Many would repeat after renowned Russian Jewish émigré poet Joseph Brodsky: "*Wherever I live, my homeland is the Russian language."*

Last but not least, the post-communist wave of emigration caused a split and broad dispersal of families and social groups across the globe; as a result, many Israeli Russians have extensive networks of relatives and friends in North America and in Europe, thus forming a transnational social space. In addition, 6-8% of immigrants of the 1990s wave (i.e. 60-80 thousand) subsequently left Israel, either returning to the FSU or moving to the West (Tolts, 2004). These Russian Jews with Israeli experience usually keep ties with their kin and friends remaining in Israel, come to visit, and some have property there. As more Russian immigrants can afford long-distance phone calls and periodic air trips to these destinations (let alone on-line connections), these networks are becoming more dense and sustainable. This further facilitates travel, social and business activities of the immigrants in the post-Soviet states and in other host countries.

Next, let me briefly outline the resettlement context of former Soviet Jews in the West (for more see Ben-Rafael et al., 2006 and Remennick, 2007). To begin with, both USA and Germany opened their doors before the Jews as *refugees* fleeing discrimination and antisemitism, with the ensuing legal and economic benefits vis-à-vis other immigrants in these countries. In both countries, Jewish newcomers were entitled for a more or less generous welfare aid package (subsidized housing and health care, old-age benefits, supplemental social insurance - SSI, etc.) and their initial adjustment was managed by the local Jewish communities. Additional channels of legal entry to the US (used by Jews and non-Jews alike) have been job visas for professionals, marriage to American citizens, and winning in the Green Card Lottery. By contrast, Canada granted 'landed immigrant' status to former Soviet citizens (direct applicants from the FSU and re-migrants from Israel) based on its universal 'point system' (whereby applicants gain score based on their education, occupation, age, and language proficiency rather than ethnicity or religion) and made no distinction between them and other independent economic migrants. The analysis of the socio-demographic profile and economic adjustment of the Jewish immigrants from USSR/FSU between 1970 and 2000 (Cohen, 2007) suggests that émigrés who were younger, more educated and had better adjustment potential in the western economies typically left for North America, while their older counterparts endowed with fewer marketable skills opted for Israel (and Germany, I can add). As a result of this self-selection, Russian Jews in the US (and to a lesser extent in Canada) have

experienced more expedient earnings assimilation and upward economic mobility than their co-ethnics in Israel and Germany. Additional predicament in Israel was its small and saturated skilled labor market, while in Germany barriers to immigrants' professional employment included bureaucratic regulation of public sector jobs, high unemployment rates among both Germans and immigrants, and requirements of German language proficiency (Remennick, 2007:313; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006: 93). In Canada, the main 'bottle neck' has been the need for local licensure for most 'regulated occupations' in education, human services, and engineering, which effectively banned re-entry to professional practice for many immigrants (Remennick, 2007:279). The comparative context of economic and social integration in the four main receiving countries is summarized in Table 1.

Mechanisms of social integration in the host countries

In my earlier work (Remennick, 2003a, 2007:69) I reflected on the specific venues and measurable expressions of the integration process under conditions of mass influx of same-origin immigrants, especially when it is framed as ' return' or 'ethnically privileged' migration (which is mostly the case with Russian Jews). Available Israeli and Western research on former Soviet immigrants points at the central role of 1) *employment in the mainstream economy (rather than in the ethnic sector) in par with one's skills and training,* 2) *inclusion of the 'natives' in migrants' personal social networks, and* 3) *the hegemonic majority's attitudes towards the immigrant groups in question.* More open and inclusive disposition of the hosts is conducive to mutual tolerance and greater participation of the newcomers in the host social institutions. Successful integration usually emerges in a form of biculturalism, based on bilingualism. Integrative strategy implies a double cultural competence, flexibility and an effective situational switch between the two cultures (Berry, 1990; Nauck, 2001). Immigrants' ability to integrate in the new society hinges on the human capital they are endowed with (education, professional and linguistic skills), as well as the amount of social support (from both personal and institutional sources) available to them during the initial difficult years of re-adjustment. On the individual level, age and facility with the host languages are of paramount importance: younger migrants are usually prone to faster social learning and greater adaptability, while better language command improves the chances for successful employment, informal networking with the locals, and an easier shift to mainstream cultural products (Remennick, 2004; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2007:239).

Employment in par with one's skills and qualifications has been shown to be the major gateway for the newcomers to both economic well-being and gradual social insertion in the mainstream. Multiple structural and cultural barriers experienced by the immigrants on professional labor markets (proving foreign credentials, skill incompatibility, blocked access to public sector jobs, etc.) resulted in occupational downgrading of former professionals in all receiving countries. In the wealthy social democracy of Germany this meant chronic dependence on social aid, in all the other countries the need to seek retraining and new paths to economic survival. For younger and more dynamic immigrants this meant taking a fresh start (often for the better!) but for middle-aged professionals, especially men, the inability to get back to their original line of work meant severe damage to self-esteem and further estrangement from the host society. Across post-Soviet Jewish diaspora, the share of professionals who could regain their original occupations probably lies between 15% in Germany and 30% in the U.S. and Israel. Occupational adjustment was especially hard for

members of humanistic and culturally-dependent occupations (highly prestigious in the FSU but often useless in the West) who could not make a living as educators or journalists in the new cultural milieu. Sometimes they found an outlet for their talents in various educational and cultural ventures targeting Russian immigrant youth (e.g. after-school Russian language and art classes). On the other end of the scale were computing and IT specialists, whose skills were easily convertible and universally demanded (Remenick, 2003b).

Significant numbers of the dropouts from the mainstream labor market found shelter in the ethnic economic sector, giving a strong push to the mushrooming of Russian groceries, car dealerships, garages, travel agencies, book/music/video stores, and other small businesses forming together the thriving "Russian Street" of New York, Tel Aviv, Berlin, and Toronto. The share of self-employed among former Soviet immigrants is hard to measure due to different legal definitions in the four countries, but the estimates vary between 8% in Israel and 35% in some U.S. cities (Light and Isralowitz, 1997). Some members of the free professions (e.g., lawyers, accountants, physicians and dentists) who managed to obtain local licenses opened their offices catering mainly for the Russian-speaking clientele. Yet the majority of former professionals and current ‘no ones’ had to toil in manual or semi-skilled labor force in industry and services, hardly making ends meet. The older segment of educated Russian Jews had to rely on their pre-migration reputation and achievements as a basis for identity and self-esteem; thus all the former "senior engineers" and "chief constructors" (everyone turned to be "senior" in their old life) were frozen in time and psychologically dwelled on their solid past rather than shaky present and unclear future. A minority of well-adjusted bicultural and bilingual immigrants is found mainly among those who found their place in the mainstream organizations and companies.

The workplace is also the meeting ground between the immigrants and their local peers, giving rise to new social relationships and personal friendships that over time may transcend the boundaries of the ethnic community. Gradual inclusion of the members of the hegemonic majority into immigrants' personal networks is a potent signifier of the ongoing integration. Given their limited contact with the mainstream institutions and low proficiency in the host languages, the expansion of immigrants' social networks has been slow in all the four countries. Personal narratives collected in my fieldwork (Remennick, 2007) largely point to the explicit co-ethnic preference in private/informal communications manifested by Russian-speakers in all the major hubs of immigrant life. Between 65% and 85% of adult immigrants state in interviews that most or all of their personal friends, dates and potential spouses are other Russian immigrants. The tendency of many immigrants, especially older ones, to settle in Russian residential enclaves (such as Bat-Yam in Israel, sections of Brookline in New York, Charlottenburg in Berlin or North Bathurst area in Toronto) additionally hampers their chances to befriend native neighbors. The ability to bridge the social gap to the majority is stronger among ‘return migrants’ in Israel than among Russian Jews living in the West, probably due to immigrant origins of most Israelis, remnants of Zionist solidarity, and informal interpersonal style typical for the natives. Few adult Russian immigrants in other countries could say that they count non-immigrant Americans, Canadians or Germans among their personal friends, although this tendency is usually stronger among younger immigrants. Similar findings on co-ethnic social preferences and “distancing from Others” among Russian Jews in

diaspora communities have been found in comparative study by Ben-Rafael et al. (2006:191).

The co-ethnic social preferences of Russian Jews reflect their feelings of cultural superiority over other immigrants, and often the natives too, drawing on the proverbial cultural legacy of the Great Russian Literature, philosophy, and the arts. Many educated Soviet Jews (especially intellectuals) are embittered by the lack of appreciation of their finesse by the host society. Without actually knowing much about the mainstream cultural life (due to the language barrier and social alienation), they often judge the local media and cultural scene as inferior and unworthy of the attempt to learn it better. This sense of cultural superiority is especially typical for Russian Jews in Israel (Lissak and Leshem, 1995; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2007: 89). To ensure cultural continuity, these immigrants have established thriving ethnic cultural and educational institutions, such as Russian libraries, amateur drama, literary and music societies, after-school enrichment activities for the children, multiple printed and electronic media channels in Russian. Although over time these Russian-language institutions incorporate more local elements (e.g., drama groups stage not only Russian classics but also local plays or perform in the host language), their style, management, and membership remain largely Russian (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006:109). Some unique forms of cultural production dating back to the Soviet times – amateur song festivals (KSP), humor contests between student teams (KVN), and brain-ring games (*Chto-Gde-Kogda*) – have all found their way into the lives of Russian cultural diasporas in Israel and in the West.

The split Russian-Jewish identity of the immigrants plays out in paradoxical ways in different national contexts of their new homelands. While former Soviet Jews in Israel often underscore their secular Russian-based cultural identity and typically have little interest in Jewish religious life, in Western countries they often re-discover their Jewish-ness and willingly partake in the social networks and cultural events sponsored by the established local Jewry. This reflects both the need for support and services offered by the Jewish community to the newcomers and the search for their own place in the multicultural mosaic of the host countries. Reflecting mass migrations and abundance of minority groups, both North America and Western Europe have become playgrounds of identities and 'identity politics,' whereby individuals seek belonging to a well-defined ethnic, religious or cultural group offering support and "place under sun.' This is especially evident in the US context, were many Russian Jews chose to be affiliated with social institutions of 'cultural Judaism' – Reform synagogues, Jewish cultural societies, political groups that support Israel, etc. Thus, in the American sample of the comparative study among Russian Jewish immigrants, most respondents reported their similar involvement in Russian and Jewish cultural life, with 'American cultural involvement' significantly lagging behind (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006: 151).

The last component of my model, which sets the tone for the integration process, is the feedback received by the immigrant community from the hegemonic majority. It would be fair to say that even in Israel, where every fifth Jew today speaks Russian, the Hebrew mainstream is largely indifferent to the life of the so-called 'Russian Street' and not really interested in its alleged cultural riches. Although most Jewish Israelis give a lip service to the contributions of the Great Russian *Aliya* to Israeli economy and society, fewer Israelis express personal interest in befriending Russian immigrants, learning Russian or visiting Russian cultural events (Leshem, 1998; Remennick, 2003a). The ongoing process of cultural production in Russian (new

books, literary almanacs, etc.) goes unnoticed by the Hebrew-speaking educated public, even where translations are offered. Although explicit institutional discrimination of Russian immigrants is uncommon, negative attitudes towards their professional competence (e.g. as doctors or educators) and their alleged 'soviet mentality' often lead to practices of exclusion and stifled promotion (Remennick, 2007:153). In the US and Canada, Russian Jews try to build their primary social networks within the established Jewish communities and are often perceived by the mainstream as their integral part. In Germany, the position of 'New Russian Jews' vis-à-vis local Jewry, other immigrants, and native German majority is still contested and vague. In all host countries, the Russian component of their dual social identity implicates these immigrants in the negative media discourse on 'Russian mafia,' 'Russian ethnic violence,' and 'Russian sex workers' (Lemish, 2000; Darieva, 2004; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006:261). These general trends do not undermine multiple personal stories of warm welcome and generous aid that the newcomers had received from Israelis, Americans, and Germans, Jewish or not, during their initial harsh years of resettlement (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2007: 89).

Although former Soviet immigrants are prone to social apathy and mistrust of any establishment, their political participation in the host countries usually increases with receiving citizenship and full voting rights. In Israel, their immediate access to citizenship and high demographic weight in the electorate led to rapid ethnic mobilization for lobbying of the mutual interests and the formation of "Russian" parties (Al-Haj, 2002). In the Western countries, where they comprise a small minority, Russian immigrants have a weaker sense of political power and seldom participate in the mainstream democratic institutions. Yet, they are usually quite active in both local and national elections, voting for the candidates whose policies they deem as beneficial for the immigrants like themselves. They often manifest poor understanding of the local political scene, and their choices are strongly influenced by the local Russian media and their immigrant friends (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006: 261). With other variables kept constant, former Soviets typically lean towards conservative, republican, and right-wing politicians, whom they construe as consistent, reliable, and fighting with social evils such as crime, terrorism, ethnic conflict, and declining morals, e.g., gay marriage (Kliger, 2004). Despite their dislike of formal organizations, over time most Russian immigrant communities have built their own voluntary associations catering for their cultural and social needs, providing self-help and legal advice, and, more rarely, expressing a specific political agenda (e.g., *Russian Jews of America for Israel* recently formed in New York). Yet, the share of Russian-speakers who actively participate in any community organizations remains insignificant, the way it was in the mid-1980s when Fran Markowitz conducted her research in Brooklyn. They still prefer the grapevine of informal social connections as a tool for solving their problems and meeting personal goals, remaining a "community in spite of itself" (Markowitz, 1993).

Given the diversity of Russian immigrant experiences, it is hard to draw a universal bottom line as to the extent of social integration of former Soviets in Israel and in the West. On the macro-level, the first post-Soviet immigrant generation has manifested faster upward mobility than most other minorities, often entering local middle class in a matter of 5-10 years. In a cross-country comparison, Russian-Jewish immigrants in the U.S. probably achieved the highest and fastest socio-economic mobility in comparison to both other U.S. minorities and Russian-speakers in other countries (Chiswick and Wenz, 2004). It is estimated that in terms of average annual income,

Russian Jews in the U.S. recently surpassed Indian immigrants – another highly educated and dynamic minority – and became number one. As a community, Russian Jews on all three continents display socio-cultural continuity verging on self-isolation coupled with successful instrumental insertion into Western economies and lifestyles. A significant fraction of Russian-speakers became in fact bilingual and can effectively function in both cultural domains – old and new.

The emerging transnationalism 'from below'

Reflecting their firm roots in the Russian language and culture, former Soviet immigrants dispersed between three continents are gradually weaving the web of a transnational community spanning all Soviet successor states and their new homelands. As opposed to the Soviet times when émigrés had to burn all the bridges to their past, in the 1990s Russia, Ukraine, and other newly independent states now construed their co-ethnics abroad as a valuable economic and political resource. Significant shares of ex-Soviet immigrants (estimated at 25% in Israel and 60% in Germany) keep their Russian, Ukrainian, and other former Soviet passports, and some have residential property in their former homelands. Fortified by time- and space compressing technologies – modern communications, easy travel, and omnipotent Internet – Russian speaking immigrants can stay in touch with their friends and relatives in the FSU and other branches of the post-Soviet diaspora, run joint businesses with their compatriots, and vote in their national elections. Global Russian press and TV networks (represented by the *RTVi* channel in New York, *Europe Express* newspaper in Berlin, and *Inostranetz* (Foreigner) magazine in Moscow) further reinforce the interest in the former homelands and the life of the 'Russian Street' in other countries. Celebrities of the Russian theater, music, and show business regularly tour the main Russian hubs of Israel, Europe, and America, becoming household icons in Haifa and Los-Angeles, Munich and Toronto. KVN and *Chto-Gde-Kogda* teams from Kiev, Jerusalem, and San Francisco come to Moscow for their global league contests, broadcast by the Russian satellite TV networks in at least twenty countries. Thus, the human links in the Russian speaking global community are both physical (enacted in visits and activities transcending national borders) and virtual (multiple Internet contacts via Russian websites, featuring dating, file sharing, topical forums, intellectual games, and more). So far, most transnational ties among former Soviets living in different countries have emerged from below, i.e. as individual initiative rather than institutional effort, and it embraced mainly social and cultural rather than economic or political domains. One can envision further expansion of economic and institutional forms of Russian transnationalism with the growing prosperity and investment capacity of the former Soviets abroad, pending political stability and predictable financial environment in the FSU (Remennick, 2002).

The extent of transnational involvement of former Soviet immigrants with co-ethics in former homelands and in other countries differs, being most prominent in Israel and Germany and much weaker in the US and Canada. This is partly explained by geographic proximity: Israel and Germany are only 4-6 hour flight away from the major urban centers of the European FSU, with available night bus rides between, say Munich and Lviv in West Ukraine, while transatlantic flights such as New York – Kiev are much longer and costlier. Yet, besides mere distances and travel costs, immigrants in Europe and Israel are more motivated to keep diasporic ties than are their counterparts in North America. This reflects limited economic mobility and poor

social integration of Russian Jews in Israel and in Germany compelling them to seek economic opportunities, social support and intellectual stimulation in their ties with co-ethnics across the world. While co-ethnic transnational interests of 'Russians' living in Germany and Israel are mainly directed towards Russia and other FSU countries, Russian-Jewish Americans (and to a lesser extent Canadians) are more inclined to invest their time and dollars in Israel. This reflects both pro-Israeli orientations of the mainstream American and Canadian Jewry, to which they strive to belong, and tangible human ties to Israel, as many 'New Americans' have relatives and friends living here (Ben-Rafael et al, 2006:301). Due to novelty and paucity of research on the global Russian-Jewish disapora, there is little solid data to describe transnational orientations of these immigrants in comparative context. Below I offer two case studies of transnational orientations among former Soviets in Israel and in the US.

Israel

Transnational tendencies surface in more than one aspect of Israeli Russians' lifestyle. To begin with, personal contacts between them and their co-ethnics in the FSU and in other branches of Russian Jewish diaspora are rather intense. Below I report some findings of the national face-to-face survey among Russian Israelis aged 18 and over conducted in 2001 (Remennick, 2002; 2003a); the sample included over 800 respondents whose mean age was 46 and social profile corresponded to the general population of adult ex-Soviet immigrants (including 53% with higher education and only 26% of these working in their original occupation in Israel). About one half of all respondents reported on regularly keeping in touch with their relatives and 25% with friends staying in the FSU; another 23% and 43%, respectively, described these contacts as 'periodic.' As for the relatives and friends living in the West, 25% and 31%, respectively, described their contacts with them as regular or periodic. Among those who maintained intense contact with their friends and relatives in the West, about 41% also had intense communication networks in the FSU, i.e. there is a subgroup of immigrants who are especially active in transnational exchange with their co-ethnics.

Cross-tabulations and cluster analysis have shown that these individuals are typified by a number of features: they usually come from the largest cities of the FSU (often from Moscow and St. Petersburg); are highly educated, have better command of both English and Hebrew, have higher than average income, and work in their pre-emigration profession. Thus, the most advanced and successful part of the immigrants, comprising about 18-20% of the sample, seemed to be most prone to grass root transnationalism. Another group of immigrants with strong ties both with their home cities in the FSU (where they often spend hot summer months) and co-ethnics in the West were retired immigrants not bound to a workplace in Israel and hence able to spend time abroad. Finally, immigrants who were ethnically non-Jewish and had close relatives remaining in the FSU also manifested multiple physical and emotional ties to their places of origin (Remennick, 2002).

As for the means of communication within the diaspora, Russian immigrants look rather old-fashioned: telephone calls were mentioned by 90%, followed by regular mail (35%) and e-mail (12%). Around half call their relatives and friends in the FSU, US, Germany and other diaspora countries at least once a month. About three-quarters have received in their homes relatives and other co-ethnic guests from various countries at least once during their life in Israel. Regular trips to Western countries to

visit friends and families have been mentioned by 3%, visits every few years by 12%, one or two visits after immigration by 34%. In the subgroup of respondents most prone to transnational networking, annual visits to friends in different Western countries were reported by 15% of respondents, and visits every few years by 48%.

Similar frequency typifies visits to the home places in the FSU (2.2% annual or more frequent; 9% a few times after emigration; 15% once after emigration). Almost half of respondents said that they wished to visit their home cities, but could not do so, mainly for financial reasons. About 10% of the immigrants (especially those from Moscow and St. Petersburg) still have apartments and/or country cottages in the FSU and return there for several months every year to escape hot Israeli summer. Typically, these activities start after the initial resettlement period is over, i.e. two-four years after arrival, and reach their peak after five-seven years in Israel. It is too early to know if transnational trends have reached saturation: their intensity may level off, grow or fall along with the increasing tenure of 'Russians' in Israel.

Russian television, watched via cable or satellite in 95% of Russian-speaking homes, plays a special role in the formation of transnational consciousness among Russian immigrants. Being permanently exposed to the information flow from their home country – watching daily news, talk shows, cultural programs, old and new movies, following all the turns and twists of dynamic Russian politics -- creates the effect of mental presence, sympathy and virtual participation in modern history happening in the 'post-Soviet space.' Fifty-seven percent of my respondents said they closely follow the developments in Russia and other CIS countries, and another 32% get updated every now and then. Since many immigrants, especially older ones, do not understand Hebrew well enough to watch local channels, they are sometimes more updated on Russian news than on Israeli ones. For some, this creates a weird situation of physically living in one country while mentally belonging to another one.

Economic links and business exchange with co-ethnics abroad were less impressive than personal exchange, but not negligible. Given permanent economic troubles in most CIS countries, it is understandable that over two-thirds of respondents, who have close relatives there, send them money several times a year or more often. About 7% said they have been involved in commercial ventures or joint projects with FSU countries or with Western countries, usually via co-ethnic partners there. Another 12% said that if socio-economic situation in the FSU improved and allowed for more cooperation, they would be willing to engage in such projects. About 25% of respondents (usually holders of Russian or Ukrainian passport) participated in national elections in these countries, voting in the embassies. Overall, Russian immigrants in Israel can be described as significantly involved in the lives of the former homelands and co-ethnics in other countries.

USA

There is no available survey data on transnational behaviors among former Soviets living in the US. The recent comparative research project on Russian Jewish immigrants in Israel, Germany and U.S.A. (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) centered on the issues of identity transformation and community building within the host countries and did not include questions on transnational orientations. The only qualitative study I could find was conducted by Morawska (2004); it offered comparative analysis of assimilation and transnationalism among Polish and Russian Jewish immigrants in Philadelphia who arrived during the last 20 years, but no later than 1995. The Polish 'colony' of the city counts about 12,000, while the Russian Jewish population is much

more spread and is in the range of 30-35,000 immigrants. Each sample included 30 informants (15 women and 15 men) recruited by snowballing and interviewed in their homes in their native language. A majority of the Russian sample was middle aged and older; over 80% had higher education; most of those still working were in managerial and professional occupations and had higher than average income. The author found a high degree of assimilation among Russian Jews into American middle class, expressed in their economic success, good working knowledge of English, high naturalization rate (80%), respect of American civic and political values, and pride in educational and occupational success of their children. By contrast, Polish immigrants were assimilating via what Morawska calls ethnic-adhesive path, i.e. working mainly within their co-ethnic economy and identifying as Poles rather than Americans; 90% kept Polish passports regardless of naturalization in the U.S., and many expressed the hope of eventual return to their homeland. For both immigrant communities, the primary social circles have been co-ethnic, with an addition of some American Jewish friends for the younger Russian informants. Explaining this pattern, both Russian Jews and Poles referred to a familiar argument of sharing a common frame of mind with their own kind, while having little in common with native Americans. Many older informants from the FSU stressed their satisfaction in rediscovering their Jewish-ness, albeit in a new American framing. Coming from the former Socialist block with its forced collectivism, both Poles and Russian Jews shunned away from formal organizations and expressed their social engagements via personal networks and informal exchange of information and support.

In relation to the transnational engagements with their homelands, Morawska found striking differences between the two immigrant groups. While the Poles manifested strong commitments to Poland, made a point of maintaining the Polish language and traditions at home, were closely updated on the current events in Poland, made regular remittances to their families and friends, traveled to Poland at least once a year, and received guests from Poland in their homes, few Russian Jews pursued any of these activities regularly or often enough to become an important part of their life. While the majority of the Poles, regardless of age and socioeconomic status, said that their true emotional and spiritual home is Poland, none of the former Soviets said the same about Russia or Ukraine. Despite their active engagement with all things Russian while living in America (attending cultural venues, shopping in Russian groceries or having parties in Russian restaurants), none of that had to do with their nostalgia for Russia itself, but with habit and convenience of socializing in their native language. The economic activities and lifestyles of the Russian Jews were strongly oriented towards success and integration in their new homeland – America; few informants visited the FSU more than once after emigration and none felt obliged to Russia in any way, let alone wished to return there. If they had any nostalgia at all, it was about their youth and friends they left behind rather than the country itself. Most informants did not express any serious interest or attachment to Israel, except for those few who had close relatives living there; yet many informants supported Israel by making regular donations to the Jewish charities.

In her analysis, Morawska explains this ‘America-centered ethnic-path adaptation’ for the former Soviets by the "group's outcast minority status in the home country," with the ensuing lack of positive sentiment or obligations to Russia and its people. She also notes that for a large part of former Soviets (especially émigrés of the 1970s) their reasons for emigration were civic-political, while most Poles emigrated in search of better economic fortunes. The reception of the two groups in the U.S. was also rather

different: while Soviet Jews were supported by their wealthy American co-religionists, the Poles had to adapt by themselves and had a much harder time gaining a new foothold. Finally, upward socioeconomic mobility experienced in the U.S. by most Russian Jews and/or their children reinforced their positive identification with their new home and pride in being American. Other factors that discouraged transnational engagements of the former Soviets include the migration of full families and having few significant others still living in Russia or Ukraine. Finally, the newly acquired sense of security and opportunity in America (that is achievable neither in Russia nor in Israel) reinforced inwardly oriented rather than external interests and pursuits (Morawska, 2004).

While generally agreeing with Morawska's findings and explanations, I would like to add a few observations of my own. Indeed, transnational interests and activities of the former Soviets are often defined by whether or not they have significant others living outside America – in Russia, Israel or elsewhere. While many extended families immigrated to the U.S. together, many others could not exit at the same time or preferred other countries of emigration, and as a result quite a number of families are scattered between different hosting countries and the FSU itself. This is especially true of mixed or non-Jewish families that moved to the U.S. via work or study visas and whose residence here gradually turned from temporary to permanent. Many of them had not intended to stay in the U.S. to begin with, and hence kept their apartments, summer homes, and other property in the big Russian cities. Their parents, siblings and friends are still living in the FSU, creating many reasons to travel there. Those having this current human link to the former Soviet countries travel there quite often, and support their relatives by direct remittances, expensive gifts, and inviting them for prolonged periods to their American homes (Remennick, 2007:236).

Transnationalism and the integration process

After describing the expressions of transnationalism and cultural separatism among Russian immigrants, let me turn now to the implications of these tendencies for the process of their integration in the host countries. The Israeli case is most interesting in this respect, due to the special place of the Russian-speaking community and its dense transnational involvements. Does reliance on co-ethnic networks, within and outside Israel, serve as a source of empowerment, attenuating their dependency on the host society? Or, conversely, does the lack of successful integration into the host society compel Russian immigrants to turn to local and global co-ethnic networks in search of security, meaning and self-actualization they lack? Probably both assertions are true to some extent: transnationalism and cultural separatism feed on each other, or, rather, comprise two sides of the same medal.

Indeed, linguistic and cultural self-reliance of the immigrants became possible due to the mere size of the Russian community, comprising some 20% of the Jewish population nationally and in some towns (e.g., Ashdod, Haifa) reaching 30-50% of the local population. The above-mentioned educational strength of Russian Jews and their sense of cultural superiority further enhance these isolationist trends. Yet, linguistic and cultural arrogance make severe disservice to Russian immigrants, discouraging them from learning more about the ways of their new homeland, understanding its social dynamics and political life, and becoming, gradually, full-fledged citizens. On the other hand, blatant cultural proselytism of the Israeli institutions and strong

pressure on the immigrants to switch to Hebrew has been counterproductive, only enhancing silent resistance (Lissak and Leshem, 1995; Leshem, 1998).

Low involvement with the host culture may affect the lives of Russian Israelis in a dual way. On one hand, the availability of co-ethnic cultural life, social and economic networks (e.g., shopping in Russian stores, using services provided by co-ethnics and staying in touch with their former homes) comprise an important safety net during the initial resettlement period, strongly ameliorating the adjustment process and improving immigrants' mental health. Over 60% of respondents in the survey, and over 95% in age group 60+, said that the existence of the thriving Russian subculture is the main advantage of life in Israel, compared to other migrant destinations. In my other recent study among Russian immigrant women, who often carried a triple burden as breadwinners and family caretakers for the young and for the old, reliance on co-ethnic networks has emerged as an important source of social support, especially for older and less adjusted women (Remennick, 2005). In yet another study, the accounts of immigrant engineers pointed to the significant role of their co-ethnic colleagues as peer support group in the difficult process of re-adjustment in the new, and often unfriendly, professional environment (Remennick, 2003a). Similar stories of reliance on co-ethnic social support were told by Russian immigrant doctors and teachers (Remennick, 2007; 80, 85). Regardless of their actual career success in Israel, co-ethnic networking within and outside Israel enables immigrants to transplant their old identity to the new soil, which is an important asset at the face of many losses they have to cope with. For instance, a senior Russian physician remains a respected specialist in the eyes of other Russians, even if he failed to get local license or is unemployed. Since profession is very central to personal identity of most members of former Soviet *intelligentsia*, their social status among the co-ethnics helps many educated immigrants to keep their self-respect in the face of unfriendly economic environment.

However, there is a price to be paid for the luxury of keeping one's old identity in a new country. The tendency of Russian immigrants to 'ghettoization' (Lissak and Leshem, 1995) may hinder their occupational success and social insertion, as well as heighten cultural conflict between the newcomers and the host society. Since one million of Russian-speakers in a country of six million Jews (and 1.2 million Arabs) present a 'critical mass,' the expansion of Russian subculture and its apparent resistance to assimilation are perceived by Israeli institutions and the broad public as a potential threat to the fragile national unity[4]. In the country of immigrants founded only 60 years ago, surrounded by hostile neighbors and still striving at nation building, the group that fails to comply with this cause may come to be seen as a 'fifth column.' Former Soviets, in turn, are disappointed to see that they have 'traded' one type of ideological pressure (Socialism) to another (Zionism). They try to escape any obliging tenets and to focus on their private lives: professional and economic mobility, wellbeing of the children, and other personal issues. In the everyday life, this implicit conflict between the hosts and the newcomers is expressed in mutual

[4]This unity is increasingly challenged by the tension (and at times open conflict) between the religious and the secular, the political right and left, and Jews coming from Europe/America versus Arab countries. Ever deepening 'tribalization' of the Israeli society puts under question the very notion of the 'mainstream.' Yet, some pillars of the Israeli identity (including Zionism, Jewish tradition and military service) still comprise a common denominator for most old-timers, and loyalty to them is expected of all newcomers.

negative stereotyping, immigrants' social isolation, their discrimination on the job market, and in other forms (Leshem, 1998; Remennick, 2003a).

Thus, in the unique context of the Israeli society, cultural retention among Russian immigrants (significantly enhanced by new transnational opportunities) implies, in fact, cultural isolation from the mainstream. To be sure, explicit or implicit exclusion of immigrants by the mainstream is common in many receiving countries. Yet, in our case, Russian speakers themselves contributed to this exclusion coming in response to their apparent reluctance to cross the bridge to the host society. Israel differs from other countries receiving immigrants not only in that it grants them full citizenship right upon arrival, but also in the strong expectation of their loyalty to the national causes. Immigrants who move to Israel for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons and show little national sentiment are a disappointment.

The above-said is true at least for the first generation of adult migrants, although not solely. The trend to cultural retention and keeping transnational links with the co-ethnics seems to transcend age groups of Russian Israelis. Young people, who immigrated at high school age and above, are almost as determined to remain 'Russians' as are their parents. Although they master Hebrew rather quickly and, generally, do well at school and in college, their informal social networks remain mainly co-ethnic. Among my 2001 survey's respondents under age 25, 82% have defined themselves as Russian Israelis and described their personal circle of communication as mainly or solely Russian. Although young immigrants' interest in Russia, and actual social ties with their former homeland, are usually weaker than in older generations, they still display some of the transnational tendencies discussed above. Future will show whether these trends will fade or thrive in the second generation of Russian Israelis (Remennick, 2007:138).

Concluding remarks

Reader can legitimately ask: how long would the global 'Russian Street' outside Russia last in its current forms? No one can pretend to know the answer, but it apparently has to do with the social and cultural dispositions of the young immigrants – the 1.5 and 2nd generation. Will children of Russian-speaking families enact their ethnicity in a practical or purely symbolic way, like descendants of Armenian refugees in the U.S. (Bakalian, 1992), who gradually drifted from *being* to *feeling* Armenian? Will they still speak Russian between themselves and with their own children another 15-20 years down the road? Current literature on immigrant ethnicity suggests that processes of integration and assimilation of subsequent migrant generations are hard to predict (Faist, 2000; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Few contemporary scholars endorse the linear model of assimilation that was popular in the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the light of apparent revival of ethnicity and fortification of ethnic diasporas in all pluralist modern societies. The available research on the incorporation of young Russian Jewish immigrants in Israel, U.S., and Germany points to a combination of good instrumental integration in the host country's institutions with a definite preference for co-ethnics in informal social networking and continued interest in Russian cultural products (Zeltser-Zubida, 2000; Steinbach, 2001; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). Many immigrant children manifest social mimicry at the outset seeking acceptance by their local peers, only to discover later their unique cultural baggage as an asset. It is not uncommon for the young immigrants who grew up in large American cities or in Israeli kibbutzim to suddenly

rediscover Russian literature and cinema, or travel to the cities in the FSU their parents came from. Some will eventually opt for a transnational lifestyle, splitting their time and interests between Moscow, New York, and Jerusalem. Influenced by the core values espoused by their parents and co-ethnic milieu, many young Russian Jews of today feel alienation from their local peers. Yet, among children born to Russian immigrants abroad the gravity center of interests and values clearly shifts towards the mainstream peer culture, despite conscientious efforts of the parents to preserve their Russian-ness (e.g., by sending them to Russian kindergartens, hiring Russian teachers, etc.). It goes without saying that the extent of cultural continuity among young Russian immigrants depends on their parents' background and attitudes towards host societies, as well as their own educational and occupational mobility and experiences with local peers. The bottom line is that the thriving cultural and economic life on the 'Russian Street' will surely persist during the lifespan of the current adult generation of former Soviets, and will perhaps linger for several decades among their children. I would not dare to make a longer forecast, but 50 years seem quite enough for a follow-up study of one of the most diverse, energetic, and upwardly mobile ethnic diasporas of today's world.

Table 1. Macro-characteristics of the post-Soviet Jewish immigration in the main host countries

Characteristics	Israel	Germany	USA	Canada
Official framing of Jewish immigration	Ethnic return, Zionist nation building	Religious refugee, paying historic dues to Soviet Jewry	Religious refugee, saving from antisemitism	Independent economic migrants & small number of refugees
Access to citizenship	Immediate for the Jews	Pending 6-8 years of residence	Pending 5 year residence and exam	Pending 3 year residence and exam
Size of the Soviet Jewish group among: ** general population* ***Jewish population*	Large * 14% ** 20% (1.1 mln among 5.8 mln Jews)	Small in general * 0.05 ** 85% of JG, 100% in some towns	Small in general * 0.05 ** 13% (700,000 in 5.9 million)	Very small *0.025 ** 10% (80,000 among 800,000)
Resettlement package & welfare aid	Modest, short-term but comprehensive, incl. occupational adjustment & health care	Generous and long-term, incl. housing & health care	Refugee rights: short-term for working age, life-long for seniors	None: economic self-reliance, welfare like all Canadians
Access to skilled occupations	Licensure needed for regulated occupations; labor market small but dynamic & flexible	Foreign credentials seldom accepted; labor market regulated & unionized	Licensure required for few occupations; labor market large, liberal & flexible	Barriers to foreign credentials; public sector unionized & regulated
Host expectations toward immigrants	Rapid assimilation in the Jewish mainstream	No specific expectations	Participation in Jewish life, economic self-reliance	Economic self-reliance
Economic success in 10-15 Years	Moderate; Occupational downgrading, but middle-class lifestyle	Low by local standards: high unemployment and reliance on welfare	High income & rapid accent to middle-class & prosperity	Moderate: occupational downgrading
Political power	High: large size, voting rights, political parties	Low: small group of non-voters	Moderate, as part of U.S. Jewry	Moderate, as part of Canadian Jewry

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