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# Germany's Russian-speaking Jews

Between Original, Present and Affective Homelands

## A Three-branch National Identification

An important segment of the Jewish exodus from the Former Soviet Union settled in Germany in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Russian-speaking Jews who integrated into Israel's Jewish national society formed a new ethnocultural entity; those who immigrated to the United States joined the existing Jewish community becoming a new component of American Jewry's position as a major minority culture in the American mosaic. The circumstances of Russian-speaking Jewish émigrés who settled in Germany was diametrically different: There was, in essence, genuine Jewish community of any kind in Germany when Russian Jews began arriving in Germany, and today they constitute the overwhelming majority (90 percent) of the Jewish population of the country. One could say that on the ashes of Germany's notorious Nazi years, Russian Jews built a renewed Jewish community, although prior to their arrival during decades under a Marxist-Leninist political and social system they themselves had lost most of their Jewish heritage, arriving with no experience in Jewish communal life, but nevertheless clinging to 'Jewishness by identification.'<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the reasons they choose Germany as their destination, once established there they constitute, a population torn between three very different poles of national identification: One pole is, of course, Germany where they now live, to whose language and culture they have progressively acculturated, eventually becoming full-fledge German citizens. A second pole is the 'old country' – Russia, the Ukraine or another former Soviet republic where they may still have friends or relatives whose language and culture they carry and continue as cultural baggage. A third pole is Israel, which many view as the genuine 'land of the Jew' and where the largest Russian-speaking Jewish population in the world now resides; as a result, Israel engenders strong feelings of affinity and a source of solidarity.

The purpose of this paper is to examine, based on empirical research, how each of these poles is viewed and related to by Germany's Russian-speaking Jews

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1 Ben-Rafael / Lyubansky / Glöckner / Harris / Israel / Jasper / Schoeps (eds.), *Building a Diaspora*, 2006; Remennick, *Idealists Headed to Israel*, 2005.

2 Gitelman (ed.), *Jewish Life after the USSR*, 2003.

and how this impacts on their lives as Jews and shapes the nature of this present-day Diaspora community.

## Migration, Transnationalism and Russian-speaking Jews

Russian-speaking Jews constitute but one example of a larger phenomenon: how globalization as a worldwide phenomenon is reshaping immigrant communities<sup>3</sup> that has been marked by the formation of transnational diasporas.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, in many contemporary societies – especially in the West, one now speaks of ‘insertion’ instead of ‘integration’; the change in terminology reflects new realities, where many migrating groups no longer seek to integrate the dominant culture, but to enter new societies without abandoning allegiance to their native cultures and motherlands.

Such developments beg the question: How then do people define their collective allegiance or allegiances to the collective when the components that formulate or give substance to the allegiance(s) are not necessarily uniform, and do not appeal to everyone to the same degree?<sup>5</sup> The pluralistic nature of contemporary Jewishness is a good example of such divergences in identity formulation. What seems to still hold such varied forms together as a ‘collective’ rests primarily on the fact that Jews worldwide still roughly refer to the same people when they speak of ‘Jews’ and the diverse forms they have developed-chosen to adopt as signifying their Jewishness in terms of identification and practice, draw many of their symbols from the same reservoir or repertoires, notwithstanding different interpretations that often are, to a large degree, ‘situational’ – reflecting the particular community, class, or the social milieu where Jews happen to reside. Members of the world Jewish community nowadays, indeed, live in very different cultural contexts and are subject to an immense variety of influences. In many Western societies, Jewish life has evolved and been shaped in environments driven by individualism where the density of community life is often tenuous. As a result, their collective identity as Jews is grounded primarily on personal choice while meaning and practice vary from person-to-person.

This is especially true of Russian-speaking Jews in Germany, whose experience under Communist regimes has left few anchors to cling to as signifiers

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<sup>3</sup> Castles, *Migration and Community Formation*, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Soysal, *Citizenship and identity*, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Ben-Rafael, *Ethnicity*, *Sociology of*, 2002.

of their Jewishness. What they found in Germany, moreover, could not entirely structure their new existence as a Jewish community. Only a small cohort of less than 15,000 old-timers who had remained in the country after 1945 or had previously migrated to Germany welcomed them.<sup>6</sup> Some of this small Jewish population had settled in East Germany (German Democratic Republic) driven by empathy for Communism while the others formed the entity that was referred to by Jewish institutions, officially-recognized by the State.<sup>7</sup> The sudden collapse of the USSR followed by the reunification of Germany, sparked an unexpected mass immigration of Russian-speaking Jews into Germany in the 1990s – a migration that was welcome by German authorities. As a consequence, Russian-speaking Jews became *the* Judaism of Germany: The number of Jews in Germany rose to approximately 200,000 (from 15,000) and the number of Jewish communities jumped from a handful to 130. Germany's Jews became one of Europe's largest Jewish communities – third in size after France and Britain. Assistance from a host of Jewish organizations outside Germany – ultra-orthodox, orthodox, non-orthodox, liberal, or secular (each with its own agenda to shape the face of the emerging Jewish community still in its formative years) provided fresh stimulus for communal growth.<sup>8</sup>

The research discussed in the following asked about the internal dynamics of this German Jewish community: Can and do these new Jews in Germany hold the keys to the resurgence of Germany's historic Jewish community? As immigrants in an era of globalization, how do they look back on their native homelands? How involved or concerned with Israel are they – the place that they probably have always perceived as 'the land of the Jews,' irrespective of their own personal choice to settle elsewhere?

In brief, the research investigated to what extent and along what lines Russian-speaking Jews in Germany are creating a new Jewish community with its own unique Jewish *problématique*.

## The Nature of the Research Sample

The research was conducted in 2008–2009, based on a questionnaire designed to poll a representative sample of Jews living in Germany. The sample population was comprised of 1,200 subjects – 90 percent (1,018 respondents) Russian-speaking Jews, and

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<sup>6</sup> Gidal, *Jews in Germany*, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Schoeps (ed.), *Neues Lexikon des Judentums*, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Hasidic Chabad, the Lauder Foundation, the World Union for Progressive Judaism among many others.

10 percent ‘veteran’ German Jews. The Russian-speaking Jews who are the subject of this chapter, were located initially by contacting individuals on lists of the parents of Jewish schoolchildren, members of Jewish clubs and student organizations; snowballing techniques were then used to expand the sample. While the sampling procedure was not random, we believe that the large size of the sample population (and the wide distribution found among the actual participants on a host of indexes that indicate our sample reflects the nature of the community) adequately compensate for this shortcoming. Indeed, respondents encompass registered members of community bodies and non-members, participants in Jewish frameworks and unaffiliated persons, and age cohorts were representative. Geographically, the researchers ensured that participants would be recruited from a large number of cities throughout Germany. The sample was also gender-balanced. The 20-to-25 minute-long questionnaire was written in both German and Russian, and respondents could choose their preferred language. The questionnaire polled attitudes toward significant issues – such as satisfaction with life in Germany, attitudes toward different collective identities, and concerns regarding their children’s future. The input was statistically analyzed to reveal attitudinal patterns and significant correlations with sociological variables (socioeconomic status, education, religiosity, age, gender, place of residence). This chapter discusses only the most interesting findings that clearly reflect the character and mindset of the Russian-speaking Jews in Germany.

At the outset, it is important to be cognizant of the special demographic make up of Russian-speaking Jews in Germany: 60 percent immigrated after the age of eight had resided in Germany for less than ten years at the time the questionnaires were gathered. 29 percent arrived after the age of eight, and had been in Germany between eleven and fifteen years, and 11 percent had been in Germany for more than 15 years. On the other hand, the German Jewish community is relatively old. 42 percent are over the age of sixty; 26 percent are between 41 and 60 years of age, and only 32 percent are under 40. In addition, 60 percent live with a spouse or a partner and two-thirds of the couples (66.3 percent) have children. Interestingly enough, a full 63 percent have post-secondary academic education.

## Insertion in Society

Before addressing the issues of allegiances, it is important to clarify briefly the issue of social insertion of Russian-speaking Jews in German society. We speak here of ‘insertion’ since ‘integration’ generally assumes that a given group has become a part of society by acculturation and assimilation, and is thus perceived by others. Insertion, by contrast, hinges on differing degrees of commitment to

the host society set by the immigrants themselves, and the manner and degree of engagement of the host society on the newcomers' own terms.

Yet, the degree of engagement for Russian-speaking Jews is surely affected by their status in the workplace, or marked absence as the case may be. Responses to the questionnaire show that nearly a fifth (18.6 percent) are students and 12.6 percent are salaried laborers or employees, and only 9.7 percent are professionals or business people. A most salient feature of Russian-speaking Jews is that over a third (34.1 percent) are unemployed and live on social welfare, and another 25 percent are retired. This pattern – where nearly 60 percent of the community is outside the labor market places is not only indicative of the difficulty of converting human capital acquired elsewhere into locally-relevant job qualifications. Such a state of affairs places most of this population on the margins of society – both in terms of isolation from mainstream society and standard of living. Hence, a majority (59 percent) estimates that one's income is below the national average, an additional barrier to being 'seduced' by the new society. Less than half (45.3 percent) describe their insertion in society as 'very satisfactory' or 'just satisfactory' and only a half feel genuinely 'at home.'

Another relevant aspect to collective identification is religiosity: Only a small minority (13.2 percent) of the respondents feel close to orthodoxy while a fifth (22.3 percent) is closer to liberal (Reform or Conservative) Judaism. One of every three respondents defines themselves as 'somehow traditional' and another third as 'secular.' It is significant to note that 25 percent of the respondents come from families where one parent is not Jewish, and 38 percent of those who have a family of their own live with a spouse or partner who is not Jewish according to Orthodox standards of Jewish law (*Halakha*).

As is characteristic among migrant group, differences exist among respondents according to age and length of residence in Germany. Age impacts on a variety of counts – but especially language mastery. Three quarters of the subjects under age 40, for example, evaluate their German as 'good' or 'quite good' while such responses among seniors (above age 61) is much lower. In the family or among friends (who often are Russian-speaking Jews themselves) the language of discourse remains Russian.

Length of stay is a decisive factor in linguistic engagement: Among those who have been in Germany longer, German is used more extensively in a variety of situations, and nearly 60 percent of the sample evaluate their command of the language as 'good' or 'quite good' while the figure for those who are less years in the country drops to 25 percent. Moreover, longer residence is also linked to more positive attitudes toward society, in their evaluation of their social integration and the degree to which they 'feel at home' in Germany. Not surprisingly, the use of German, in all areas of activity investigated, gains ground among the young,

and they are more attached to German society and describe their integration in society as more satisfactory than their elders. Furthermore, in contrast with older immigrants, they report that the memory of the Holocaust does not seriously impede their engagement with German society.

The levels and types of religiosity among Jews create divisions when related to the question of social insertion.

Responses in Table 1 reveal that command of German is an indicator of the respondents' readiness to invest efforts into social integration. The degree to which Holocaust memory plays a role and is perceived as 'problematic' for living as a Jew in Germany, is a function of acculturation, access to and appreciation of German culture. Awareness of this possible relation led us to ask respondents about their aspirations for their children and perceptions of their chances to achieve and succeed in society, as indicators of how far Germany is viewed as open and fair by respondents.

**Table 1:** Russian-speaking Jews' Integration into German society\*

Secular	Traditional	Liberal	Orthodox	
<b>1.1 Knowledge of German (N=861)</b>				
36.9	29.6	30.1	18.3	Poor
32.2	36.5	37.7	29.8	Somewhat
14.3	19.6	21.3	32.7	Quite good
16.6	14.2	10.9	19.2	Good
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>1.2 In the context of the past, is living as a Jew in Germany (N=878)</b>				
10.5	3.4	5.9	9.1	Very problematic
31.4	44.5	39.4	50.0	Problematic
58.1	52.1	54.8	40.9	Not problematic
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>1.3 Importance of children's adopting German culture (N=718 ;%; <math>\chi^2=0</math>)</b>				
11.5	10.2	11.5	27.9	Not at all
6.7	14.4	9.1	20.9	A little
49.6	49.3	46.1	27.9	Moderately
32.1	26.0	33.3	23.3	Very much so
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total

We divided respondents into four categories of religiosity: *orthodox religiosity* (modern orthodox and ultra-orthodox), *non-orthodox religiosity* or liberal

Judaism (Reform or Conservative approaches), *traditional orientation* (meaning observance of some customs out of collective solidarity and respect for the Jewish heritage) and *secular Jewishness* (i.e., freedom from any religious or traditional obligation).

The data indicates that mastery of German is still difficult for respondents; that mixed feelings prevail regarding the problematic character of living as Jews in post-Holocaust Germany, and acculturating to German culture is only moderately endorsed. Yet, a large majority is convinced that growing up in Germany holds out promise for their children. This reflects an 'instrumental' perspective towards German society but also hopes for children.

Interesting enough, in terms of religiosity of the participant, orthodox respondents' evaluation of their mastery of German is higher than secular Jews (with moderately-observant participants falling between the two). On the other hand, the data shows that orthodox Russian-speaking Jews tend to be younger than secular Jews – and probably the dependent variable for German mastery is age-related exposure to the language at an early age, not religiosity. The same variable – age – probably explains the fact that half the orthodox respondents' friends are not Russian-speaking, while the corresponding figure for secular Jews is 25 percent. Thus, it appears that religiosity has no direct effect on language-learning or integration in society. At the same time, the secular appear to attach less importance to the memory of the Holocaust in their insertion in society and assigned more importance to their children acculturating to German culture. Put succinctly, religiosity or secularism has no significant impact on individuals' ambitions regarding their new national society.

It is also reasonable to hypothesize that intermarriage (endogamous vs. exogamous couples) would influence how individuals integrate, or insert themselves in society – that is, mixed couples would tend to be less insular than families where both spouses are Jews. The differences were less marked than expected. The main finding regarded social relations of mixed couples involved friendship patterns: Among those whose marriage partners are Jewish 41 percent have close friends who are exclusively Jewish, but this is also true of a full 25 percent of those living with a non-Jewish partner. Thus, exogamy does lead to more openness to contact with non-Jews, but distinctively different patterns were not found: Whether assimilated or not, the majority of Russian-speaking Jews do not seem to involve themselves in German society – at least at this stage.

## Building Community

To what extent are the newcomers joining the Jewish community in Germany and participating in building community?

Most respondents are members of local Jewish communities (see Table 2) but only a quarter describe contacts with these communities as continuous. The vast majority attends synagogue services only occasionally. Yet, many respondents have either only Jewish friends (Russian-speaking Jews as a rule) or both Jewish and non-Jewish ones. A few have only non-Jewish friends. Hence, one can speak of a pattern of both ‘Jewish’ and ‘mixed milieus.’

**Table 2:** Attitudes toward the Community by Religiosity

Secular	Traditional	Liberal Judaism	Orthodox	
<b>2.1 Synagogue attendance (N=881)</b>				
23.3	4.9	7.5	1.8	Never
49.4	31.6	38.5	26.4	Rarely
19.5	33	25.1	24.5	Several times a year
7.9	29.3	28.9	47.3	Frequently
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>2.2 Closest friends in Germany (mostly) (N=877)</b>				
29.1	38.5	31.9	50.0	Jewish
0.9	1.1	2.1	2.8	Non-Jewish
69.9	60.4	66.0	47.2	Both
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>2.3 Russian-speaking friends (mostly) (N=881)</b>				
31.3	42.3	34.6	50.0	Jewish
0.6	0.4	2.1	3.6	Non-Jewish
68.0	57.3	63.3	46.4	Both
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total

Religiosity was found to be a significant factor in the intensity of synagogue attendance. Not surprisingly, Orthodox respondents demonstrated stronger ties to the synagogue than others. They are also more exposed to Jewish media and socialize more with Jews in general and Russian-speaking Jews in particular. Hence, orthodox Jews – although they are a small minority among Russian-speaking Jews – are actually the most active segment of the Jewish community. The liberal



and the traditional segments of the Jewish community are less involved, and the secular appear to be the least involved. On the other hand, age is a strongly-significant factor in community involvement, as well: It is the *youngest* age group (under 40) that shows the strongest involvement in the community: three quarters attend synagogue at least several times a year (i.e. the figure for those over 60 is also high, nearly 60 percent). Similarly, length of time in Germany is also a significant factor: Attachment to Jews and Jewry is stronger among longer-term residents (more than 16 years in Germany): This seems to indicate that many Russian-speaking Jews – who did not have any experience in Jewish community life in their countries of origin – find conditions in Germany favorable for building a Jewish community environment.

Nevertheless, degree of religiosity, age, and length of residence in Germany only reveal half the story of community building: An additional factor is intermarriage. As could be expected, indeed, respondents in mixed marriages (and offspring of mixed marriages) show weaker attachment to the Jewish community, are less often affiliated with Jewish organizations, and attend synagogue in smaller numbers. Hence three-fourth of the respondents where both spouses are Jewish are affiliated with Jewish organizations in Germany, compared to 52 percent among respondents in mixed marriages (and offspring of mixed marriages). In short, Russian-speaking Jews who live with a non-Jewish partner are less attached to Jewry than those living with a Jewish partner – both in terms of their contacts with Jewish institutions and patterns of socializing among others. Yet, intermarriage and being raised in a mixed family does not necessarily lead to a rupture of ties with Jewish life and community.

Thus the research shows that communities in Germany to which Russian-speaking Jews have greatly contributed or have played a role in their renewal in recent years still revolve around the synagogue – that is – ‘community’ rests on a religious institution above all. At the same time, Russian-speaking Jews also form Jewish milieus that include religious and non-religious people and people who are Jewish under Jewish law and those who are not. This is a community that is by no means an enclave, let alone a ghetto, yet still has its own distinct structure.

## Collective and National Identifications

The above traits serve as the backdrop to the main bulk of our data and the core questions we sought to investigate: Respondents’ national identifications.

Russian-speaking Jews have many options for self-definition: Russian-speaking Jews were classified as Jews under the Soviet system whether they identified with the ascription or not, and regardless of what form, if any, this Jewishness took. In fact, expressing solidarity with Israel was often seen by Soviet Jews as an act of defiance – an ‘unauthorized’ expression of Jewishness, liberated from state-sponsored ascription imposed by the dominating regime. In Germany, Russian-speaking Jews could also define themselves culturally and linguistically as a mixture of Jewishness and Russianness. They even could perceive themselves as Jews whose allegiance to their Jewishness had been colored by their presence in Germany – a ‘German Jewishness’ that in the subtext expressed aspirations to ‘normalize’ their status as an ethnic sub-grouping in their new society. The option to consider themselves mainly as Russian-speakers existed, however. It would express solidarity with non-Jewish ethnic Germans who resettled in Germany in large number and who, like them, carry with them the cultural baggage of the Russian language and culture. Table 3 shows how respondents related to the variety of options open to them – orientations none of which was found to be irrelevant or mutually exclusive.

**Table 3:** Feeling Part of/Solidarity with/Give Collective Allegiances to (%)

Feeling part of	Much	Some	A Little	Not at all	Index*	Total	N
The Jewish people	47	35	14	4	0.37	100	867
Israel	62	23	10	5	0.36	100	957
The Russian-speaking Jewish community	29	39	24	8	0.32	100	930
Russian-speaking community	17	40	23	20	0.30	100	854
Nation of origin	12	32	28	28	0.25	100	932
German nation**	3	20	31	46	0.16	100	946

\*Index calculated by giving numerical increasing values to each answer (the smaller the numerical value, the smaller the strength of solidarity expressed in respondents’ answers), multiplying by the number of respondents who choose this value and dividing the sum obtained by the general number of respondents in the given category:  $(A*4+B*3+C*2+D)/N$ .

\*\*On this count, there may be a positive skew since in the original sample, no differentiation was made between Russian-speaking Jews and veteran non-Russian-speaking Jews.

Affinity with the Jewish people is undeniably the strongest allegiance among Russian-speaking Jews and it is closely followed by solidarity with Israel and then by Russian-speaking Jews relating to themselves as a community – reflecting a collective consciousness as a distinct entity. By contrast, feelings of belong-

ing to Russian-speakers in Germany ranks only fourth place, above the sense of belonging to their country of origin. German nation engenders the weakest sense of self-ascription.

## What Defines 'Jewishness' for Russian-speaking Jews in Germany?

By what terms do Russian-speaking Jews define their 'Jewishness'? The data show clearly that religion is the primary axis of Jewishness for a slight majority (51 percent). This is followed by culture which was cited by a very significant minority (43 percent). Ethnicity ranked third place (30 percent), and group solidarity fourth with only a quarter of the respondents citing this component. Thus, religious affiliation remains the primary defining principle – despite the fact that the majority of Russian-speaking Jews in Germany are not observant: Only a minority feels close to orthodox Judaism and the same holds for adherents to more liberal streams of Jewish observance.

Not surprisingly, Orthodox respondents show stronger attachment to Judaism and the Jewish people than secular respondents. This is further confirmed by levels of aspirations to give children a Jewish education and exposure to Jewish media. Table 4 also shows that a majority of those who describe themselves as secular Jews have no objection to their offspring marrying a non-Jew. Less clear is why a substantial minority of the Orthodox shares the same attitude; this may reflect the impact of the open and liberal atmosphere that prevails in German society. On the other hand, as expected, many orthodox respondents conceive of Judaism and 'who is a Jew' in terms of Jewish law, contrary to the secular who emphasize cultural and educational practices as defining factors.

Despite high identification with Israel as a component in their Jewishness, other data show low membership in Zionist or pro-Israel organizations: Even membership of the Orthodox in Zionist or pro-Israel organizations (17 percent) is low, although substantially higher than that of the secular's (5.6 percent). Also noteworthy is that while respondents under 40 years of age express a desire to offer the children a Jewish education, this is even stronger among those over 60 years of age – a cohort that also scores highest in a sense of belonging to the Jewish people and membership in Jewish organizations and Russian-speaking Jews frameworks.

A closer review of trends reflected in Table 4 shows that Russian-speaking Jews are nearly unanimous in their attachment to Jewishness and solidarity with Israel, despite fluctuations correlated to age, duration living in Germany, and even

religiosity. By contrast there is less unanimity in attitudes toward their country of origin and, even less so, regarding their new homeland – Germany. Here, let us add, age again plays a role: the over-60 respondents maintain stronger contacts than the younger generation with their former country and visit family and friends more frequently. In a same vein, Russian-speaking Jews who have resided in Germany for 16 years or more, also retain less contacts with their country of origin than those who came later: half of those who have lived in Germany ten years or less visit their country of origin twice as frequently (i.e. at least once every two years) than those who have lived in Germany for 16 or more years.

**Table 4:** Kind of Religiosity and Attitudes toward Markers of Jewish identities

Secular	Somewhat traditional	Liberal Judaism	Orthodox Ultra-Orthodox	
<b>4.1 Importance of children receiving a Jewish education (n=760 ;%; <math>\chi^2=0</math>)</b>				
44.9	19.7	22.3	7.5	Not at all
30.8	23.1	24.6	20.4	A little
19.0	29.7	34.3	15.1	Moderately
5.3	27.5	18.9	57.0	Very much so
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>4.2 Feeling about child marrying a non-Jew (n=814; %; <math>\chi^2=0</math>)</b>				
8.0	18.5	14.3	43.3	Opposed
33.4	45.2	43.4	32.0	Not enthusiastic but supports
58.5	36.3	42.3	24.7	No opposition at all
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>4.3 Child of non-Jewish man and Jewish woman (n=873 ;%; <math>\chi^2=0</math>)</b>				
27.5	39.5	42.6	67.9	A regular Jew
19.2	17.1	11.2	10.1	Like a Jew
3.5	4.2	4.3	2.8	A regular non-Jew
49.8	39.2	42.0	19.3	Depends on home
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total
<b>4.4 Child of non-Jewish woman and Jewish man (n=871 ;%; <math>\chi^2=0</math>)</b>				
11.0	6.0	4.8	7.3	A regular Jew
18.2	15.8	19.6	11.0	Like a Jew
14.0	23.8	25.4	54.1	A regular non-Jew
56.8	54.3	50.3	27.5	Depends on home
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	Total

One should also underscore here that, as shown in Table 6 (below, discussed in detail) respondents from heterogeneous families refrain from cutting off their relations with relatives or friends who remained in their country of birth and continue to share feelings for the country from which they came to Germany. This complements the findings of Table 4, which show that Russian-speaking Jews feel a sense of belonging as a particular population, but not in an exclusive manner. Multiple allegiances are not particular only to Russian-speaking Jews; like other groups, they constitute a 'transnational diaspora' – possessing a strong allegiance to the Jewish world, but at the same time not alienated from other intersecting identities.

## The Allegiances of Jewish Couples and Mixed Couples

At this point, investigation of the behavior and feelings of individuals who originate from mixed parentage where only one parent is Jewish is of particular interest. Where do they stand in this intermingling of allegiances, when compared with Jews who grew up in homogeneous Jewish families?

Table 5 shows that individuals from ethnically mixed families feel less a part of the Jewish people, feel less solidarity with Israel, and relate more strongly to their nations of origin (Russia, Ukraine or other ex-Soviet republics). Yet, the data in the table also indicates that to be of heterogeneous family origin does not, necessarily, cut off individuals from Jewishness and relating to Israel: only small minorities are insensitive to Jewishness or Israel, and the difference compared to respondents of homogeneous families is by no means drastic. Nevertheless, it is also undeniable that such individuals are more attached to the former country's nation. Yet, this is not sharply in contrast to respondents of homogeneous origin, who may also retain some feelings for the 'old country.'

**Table 5: Jewish Identity and Mixed Family Origin**

	Family of origin of respondent*	
	Heterogeneous (N=267)	Homogeneous (N=683)
<b>5.1 Feeling part of the Jewish people (%)</b>		
Not at all	12.0	1.5
A little	24.4	10.9
Moderately	38.0	35.3
Much so	25.6	52.3
Total	100.0	100.0
<b>5.2 Feeling solidarity with Israel (%)</b>		
Not at all	4.5	2.3
A little	14.8	6.8
Moderately	33.3	24.4
Much so	47.3	66.5
Total	100.0	100
<b>5.3 Feeling part of former country's nation (%)</b>		
Not at all	20.9	31.3
A little	25.6	28.3
Moderately	36.2	30.8
Much so	17.3	9.6
Total	100	100

\*The N values represent the average number of respondents to the diverse questions.

To complete the analysis, Table 6 examined three important criteria and compared responses among participants brought up in homogeneous and heterogeneous families, and whether their own marriage partners are Jewish or not. The data shows that both homogeneous Jewish origin and practice of endogamy ('marrying within the faith') are strongly associated with considering Jewish education as at least moderately important; respondents who are of heterogeneous origin or have non-Jewish partners are markedly less concerned in this respect. Nevertheless, a good third of those raised in mixed marriages and married to non-Jewish partners still assigned some importance to Jewish education and a majority supported Jewish education at least 'a little.' A similar gap between 'Jewish households' and 'mixed households' appears with respect to the feelings of respondents regarding the possibility that their child would marry a non-Jew. Yet, as with the previous data, again, we find that a significant minority – a third – of 'mixed households' do not embrace this possibility with unanimity.

**Table 6:** Exogamy and Jewishness – Selected Items

	Family of origin of respondent		Respondent's partner	
	Heterogeneous (N=267)	Homogeneous (N=683)	Non-Jewish (N=259)	Jewish (N=670)
<b>6.1 Importance that children get Jewish education (%)</b>				
not at all	39.3	26.9	42.6	24.1
a little	22.2	26.4	24.3	25.4
Moderately	20.9	25.2	18.7	28.5
much so	17.6	21.6	14.5	22.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>6.2 Feeling about child marrying a non-Jew (%)</b>				
Opposed	10.4	17.5	6.1	21.1
Unenthusiastic support	25.7	43.0	31.7	43.5
No opposition	63.9	39.6	62.2	35.4
Total	100	100	100	100
<b>6.3 Synagogue attendance (%)</b>				
Never	23.5	8.0	19.5	8.6
Rarely	35.1	41.3	41.4	40.6
Several times a year	21.6	27.3	22.6	28.6
Frequently	19.8	23.5	16.5	22.2
Total	100	100	100	100

The differences between 'Jewish households' and 'mixed households' tend to fade away when it comes to synagogue attendance: in all categories, the 'never' and the 'rarely' attend constitute a majority or near-majority of all the answers. On the other hand, the data show that the number of 'mixed households' who 'never' attend synagogue is triple the (low) non-attendance of more Jewish households. In brief, we find large percentages of individuals of mixed backgrounds (including current marital status) who even though they are still a minority, contribute to a fluidity of the meanings of attachment to Judaism among Russian-speaking Jews but by no means stand on the sidelines or cross the line where Jewishness is totally irrelevant to their lives.

Deeper investigation of the most crucial of those three criteria for Jewish continuity – attitudes towards Jewish education for children – reveals quite unexpected findings when the variables religiosity, age, and length of residence in Germany are examined. The favorable majority among the secular is smaller, increasing substantially in all other religiosity categories, but on the whole, for

most of respondents, Jewish education is important. On the other hand, besides the Orthodox, the strongest support for Jewish education was registered by younger cohorts: 80 percent of respondents below age 40 and 62 percent among those ages 41+. Length of stay in Germany also emerged as a dependent variable: more veteran Russian-speaking Jewish residents (77 percent among those residing in Germany 11 years or more, compared to 67 percent among more recent arrivals) support Jewish education. Hence, notwithstanding the differences of opinions over what 'Jewishness' means and how it should be expressed, and despite the fact that respondents had no opportunity for such an education when growing up in the Soviet Union, Russian-speaking Jews – especially the younger generation –, are most anxious to provide such an education.

Thus the findings indicate that settling in Germany strengthens allegiance to Judaism and the feeling that Jewish education for children is a 'must.' Secondly, the data indicates that the younger Russian-speaking Jews who received at least a part of their education in Germany are more sensitive than their fathers or elder brothers and sisters to the importance of Jewishness for their children. This, we may conclude, indicates that they feel this importance for themselves, as well.

## Conclusion

We have seen that Russian-speaking Jews insert themselves in the German society with undeniable difficulties, but that this process becomes smoother with the passing of time and the emergence of young generations. At the same time, Russian-speaking Jews are also attached to the building of a community and formation of milieus where they recognize themselves. What fuels these dynamics is the feeling of belonging to the Jewish people that goes hand in hand with solidarity with Israel. These two components of identification are most marked, nay even *the* most prominent allegiances among our respondents. Allegiance to Jewishness is primarily linked to religious principles, despite the fact that most respondents do not identify with Orthodox Judaism and quite a few define themselves as 'secular.' While a majority do attend synagogue from time to time, respondents seem to mix designations based on Jewish law, and educational criteria when defining Jewish identity, while displaying a markedly permissive outlook and inclusive attitude toward exogamy.

It appears that for many Russian-speaking Jews Germany provides the conditions to re-attach themselves to Jewishness – and as a corollary to Israel as a focus of all-Jewish solidarity – even among the sons or daughters of mixed families and



those who live with non-Jewish partners (although attachments are, not surprisingly, more ambiguous among them).

Furthermore, our research reveals additional features singular to Russian-speaking Jews' collective and national allegiances. It reveals a population that has entered the Jewish world without abandoning use of its native tongue and culture. In this way Russian-speaking Jews in Germany form a part of a wider and dispersed entity – a transnational diaspora of its own – that is now one of the major components of global Jewry. On the other hand, and this is particularly relevant to the case of Germany, Russian-speaking Jews may also see themselves as a part of the Russian-speaking population (i.e. the *Aussiedler* who were ethnic Germans in the Former Soviet Union). Besides these identities, Russian-speaking Jews cannot be discounted as part of Germany's social fabric, and will, sooner or later, become 'Germans.' (Although this identity still arouses the weakest enthusiasm at present).

These multiple influences raise questions about the future of Russian-speaking Jews in Germany. Bodemann<sup>9</sup> forecasts Russian-speaking Jews' assimilation into the German society, the product of their 'empty Judaism' (the wording is ours). This assumption, is not, however, substantiated by our findings that show Russian-speaking Jews, in fact, tend to adopt stronger markers of Jewishness the longer they are in Germany. Bodemann also contends that Russian-speaking Jews have experienced Nazism less dramatically than other Jewish populations and therefore are less reluctant to integrate the German society. This too is not supported by our data that show an awareness of the respondents to the problematics of Jewish life in Germany.

A more optimistic hypothesis has been presented by Pinto<sup>10</sup> who forecasts that Russian-speaking Jews – in Germany as well as elsewhere in Europe – are now able to contribute to the re-emergence of a European Jewish Jewry that will constitute a third axis of the Jewish world, between Israeli and American Jewries. Several factors shed doubt on this projection: The absence of a common European language and the numerical weakness of the total Jewish population in Europe, compared to Israel and the United States. Realization of such a projection hinges, perhaps, on further 'Jewish maturation' of Russian-speaking Jews – a process that seems to be well in progress when one considers Russian-speaking Jews' present-day activism. Numerous Russian-speaking Jewish figures are already playing prominent roles as rabbis and community leaders, heads of clubs and cultural centers, while journalists have set up a new press.

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<sup>9</sup> Bodemann, *New German Jewry*, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Pinto, *Can one Reconcile the Jewish World in Europe*. In: Bodemann (ed.), *The New German Jewry*, 2008.

Russian-speaking Jews in Germany also participate in transnational-diaspora structures, which bind them to their counterparts in Jerusalem, Moscow, and New York. Germany's Russian-speaking Jews, who are now the bulk of this country's Jewry, are neither a continuation of past German Jewry, nor its transformation or metamorphosis. They are a transplant that anchors itself in a new soil and develop new roots. It is but another sequence of a long history of Jewish migrations.<sup>11</sup> In line with this legacy, Russian-speaking Jews, whatever their hesitations regarding what 'Jewishness' means, rely on Jewish education to transmit to the young what should make Jewish life meaningful.

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<sup>11</sup> Cohen / Eisen, *The Jew Within*, 2000.