

# Soviet Jewish Resettlement in the U.S. and Israel

## A Comparative Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This research argues that despite assumed similarities between the societies in the United States and Israel, the fourth wave of post-Soviet Jewish emigration has distinct resettlement experiences unique to their destination. Via a literature review, this study acknowledges the heterogeneity of the émigré population in terms of place of origin, age, gender, occupation, education, history, and location of resettlement. For this reason, a multifaceted approach is applied to compare country-specific experiences. This research surveys the integrative mechanisms in the U.S. and Israel, respectively. Anecdotal evidence is incorporated through limited interviews in Richmond, Virginia and Haifa. The differences between these groups of immigrants are evident in the social perceptions and identity of immigrants as well as their host societies. In Israel, the Soviet enclaves generally maintain ethnic autonomy, while in most U.S. cities this is not the case. Despite these differences, religious, cultural, and political realities are quite similar across the study. Major caveats in current research are the experiential differentiation among immigrants depending on their location of origin, gender, and age. All of these variables produce entirely different narratives on integration and acculturation.

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## Introduction

The Soviet Jewish experience and the prospects of emigration from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) are rich and expansive topics for research. Emigration was a unique opportunity, opened to Jews between 1967 and 1982, and again between 1987 and the present, which was never previously permitted in the USSR. The fact that there was such a drastic change in policy under this strict communist system distinguished Jews as an ethnic group of unique standing in the Soviet socialist society. Since pre-Soviet tsarist Russia discriminated against Jews, many make the argument that the society before and after 1917 displayed underlying anti-Semitic tendencies. Nevertheless, this topic is complex, since most émigrés today identify as secular with strong Russian cultural affiliations. The vast numbers, approximately 1.5 million, that left in the latest wave to resettle in Israel and the United States (U.S.) makes the Soviet and post-Soviet Jewish resettlement narrative equally exceptional.<sup>1</sup> As one might imagine the factors and perspectives that could influence a coherent conclusion in regard to this immigration are myriad. Through multiple analyses of these conditions, this paper intends to understand more about Soviet Jews through a comparative examination of their integration and perceptions in the United States and Israel, respectively.

One might assume that because of the similarities of U.S. and Israeli society, Jewish resettlement from the former-Soviet Union (FSU) in the late 1980's and throughout the 1990's ought to be characterized by similar experiences. Both the U.S. and Israel are relatively new liberal societies with democratic elections, freedom of speech and religion, substantial women's and gay rights, and European ideals of rationalism and

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<sup>1</sup> See Table 4.1.

institutionalism. They are both inherently immigrant societies with strong foundations of patriotism, Judeo-Christian culture, and market-based economic systems. All of these features were foreign to secular Soviet Jews. Furthermore, these émigrés had limited or no fluency in Hebrew or English, making the transition equally different for them in both societies in terms of language adaptability and skills transferability. Surprisingly, however, immigrants in the U.S. have had absorption experiences that differ substantially from those resettled in Israel. These differences are demonstrated by an examination of societal integrative mechanisms. These also contribute to the social perceptions of these host societies towards immigrants as well as immigrant identity formation in each society.

This study is dedicated to exploring the differences between the two countries' resettlement experiences. By reviewing scholarship on Soviet Jewish history, I find that each author characterizes emigration according to one primary motivation, with little mention of other variables. I claim that each of the attributes in these narratives is significant in making emigration a possibility and is equally important to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, because of the diversity in population and experiences. This research analyzes academic scholarship, primary government documents, and news sources. It also incorporates the testimony from five interviewees of various ages, gender, location of origin, place of resettlement, and life experience.<sup>2</sup> While this is only a

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<sup>2</sup> *Amit, is an Israeli-born citizen from a manufacturing kibbutz in Northern Israel. He is currently twenty-six, post-IDF service and current honors English undergraduate student at the University of Haifa.*

*Alexandra is twenty-three, post-IDF service, and working towards an undergraduate degree of Theatre at the University of Haifa. She immigrated to Israel at the age of five in 1994 from Kiev, Ukraine. Her mother, grandmother, and herself emigrated by ship to reunite with her uncle who was previously settled in Haifa.*

*Vladimir immigrated to Richmond, Virginia in 1992 at the age of forty from Moscow, Russia. His family escaped Vinnitsa, Ukraine at the start of WWII to Tashkent. They were able to migrate to Moscow after the 1966 earthquake, because his mother's privileged position as a doctor. He proceeded to attend college, serve in the military, and work as a bureaucrat until his emigration. He emigrated with his mother-in-law, two sons (twelve & three at the time), and wife. He is currently a realtor in Richmond.*

symbolic subject group, the insights on Soviet resettlement in Israel and the U.S. that it supplies provides an added dimension to the analysis. This study demonstrates a surprising level of diversity within each population group, primarily stemming from the integration methods of each country. The findings on immigrant absorption, resettlement, perceptions, and identities twenty-five years later illustrate problems in the current literature on fourth-wave Soviet Jewish emigration. These problems focus on the inability of the present literature to take into account variations in origin, profession, gender, class and age, which exerted great influence over the selection of a destination country and the pace of integration.

## Jewish Emigration

There have been four significant waves of Jewish emigration from the Eastern European region. The first was initiated in 1881 and lasted throughout the Russian revolutions until about 1922.<sup>3</sup> This was the largest emigration of Russian Jews and it played an integral role in shaping the early Jewish populations in both Palestine and the U.S. However, under the new Soviet system, emigration was banned since it ran counter to the ideal values of the socialist society. The size of the second wave of emigration took place approximately twenty years later. Emigration was illegal and second wave émigrés

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*Seva immigrated to Richmond in 1997 at the age of 7 from Quba, a small village in Azerbaijan. She was raised in her father's parents' home and remembers living in one room with her parents and sister. She is currently a VCU student studying psychology and religion and is on track for a career in nursing.*

*Riva immigrated to Richmond in 1997 at the age of thirty-two from a small village in Azerbaijan. She was raised in the city of Baku until her arranged marriage. She emigrated to reunite with the rest of her family, which resettled in Richmond and Brooklyn, NY. In 2000, she divorced her husband and has raised her two daughters as a single parent. She has made a career as a pharmaceutical technician.*

<sup>3</sup> Ro'i, Yaacov. "Soviet Policy Towards Jewish Emigration: An Overview." in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* edited by Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, and Ritterband. London: Cummings Center, 1997. 46; Gitelman, Zvi. "'From a Northern Country': Russian and Soviet Jewish Immigration to America and Israel in Historical Perspective." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 23.

included refugees and Red Army defectors who escaped after their service in World War II (WWII). Legal emigration only became possible again for Jews thirty years later, and under very limited circumstances. This is known as the third wave of emigration with vast fluctuations in visas permitted between 1967 and 1982. It was initiated after Israeli victory in the Six Day War (1967 War), which induced public expressions of pride and nationalism among Soviet Jews. This was a perceived treachery against the Soviet state, so under restrictive circumstances, mainly under the guise of family reunification, a limited number of Jews were allotted exit visas.<sup>4</sup> However, the rate of emigration that occurred during the fourth wave, after 1987, eclipses all the previous waves. These statistics can be viewed in table 2.2 for the U.S. and 4.1 for Israel. This study emphasizes the complex historical variables leading up to Soviet Jewish emigration during this fourth wave and examines present day social and political factors that have influenced resettlement and integration of Soviet Jews in the U.S. and Israel.

### **Literary Review: Life in the USSR & Fourth Wave Emigration**

According to several studies, Jews left the former Soviet Union for a number of reasons aside from anti-Semitism. These include inability to enjoy an education of choice, denial of freedom of speech and ideology, low levels of occupational mobility, the desire for family reunification abroad, and the hope for better economic opportunities. Many of these motives were not unique to Jews within the USSR, but only Jews enjoyed the legal opportunity to emigrate during the third and first part of the fourth emigration wave. The following literature review investigates the particular experience of the Jews under the

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<sup>4</sup> Buwalda, Petrus. "They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration From the Soviet Union, 1967-1990." Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 89.

Soviet system, which gave rise to their claims for a special set of emigration circumstances.

While Jewish émigrés from the USSR are extensively researched, there is little material explaining their rationale and methods of emigrating. This is true because of the contradictory nature of emigration under the Soviet ideology. Since emigration was made possible for this minority group, it was seen as an insult to the utopian vision of the Soviet superpower and was thus, kept as quiet and limited as possible. Finally, the lack of literature on the subject indicates that the Jewish narrative and emigration were not at the center of the Soviet politics, but rather a sideline policy that shifted during the final unstable years of Soviet rule.

Gennadi Kostrychenko's *Out of the Red Shadows* illuminates many of the Soviet policies and discriminatory realities that affected the daily lives of Jews in the Soviet Union. Since the opening of Soviet archives in 1991, Kostrychenko has uncovered official documentation dating back to Stalin's rule. The nature of official Soviet documents illuminates systematic nationality-based discrimination inflicted by Soviet authorities in every aspect of social life. Soviet reports specifically documented people in positions of power by nationality and included instructions for their replacement according to chauvinistic appropriated quotas.<sup>5</sup> It is important to note here that since the Bolshevik revolution, the atheistic USSR categorized Soviet Jews exclusively according to an ethnic classification.<sup>6</sup> Kostrychenko's analysis of official anti-Semitism illustrates how suspicions of Jews spread to every level of society. Ultimately, in 1953, Stalin induced the

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<sup>5</sup> Kostrychenko, Gennadi. "Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia." Prometheus Books, 1995. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict." New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007. 192.

“Doctor’s Plot,” a paranoia-driven purge of medical professionals, which caused many to fear a widening societal purge of Jews.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Kostrychenko illustrates a society entrenched in distrust with increasing accusations of Jewish political and criminal activity.<sup>8</sup> He concludes that as conditions worsened, “Jews were deprived of national status...[and] had no alternative but an exodus.”<sup>9</sup>

Taking a slightly different emphasis, Yuri Slezkine claims in his book, *The Jewish Century*, that the unique position of Jews in diaspora throughout history maintained their position as ethnic strangers within host societies. Slezkine labels the twentieth century as a modern age of nationalism. He draws upon tsarist Russia’s discriminatory laws towards Jews to explain how their social, occupational, and political limitations prepared them for revolution and the transition to socialism, Bolshevism, and industrialization.<sup>10</sup> Slezkine illustrates the Jewish formation of a model community and attributes it to their reactive identities of adaptability and marginalized statuses that encouraged the pursuit of wealth and learning.<sup>11</sup> He emphasizes location and ideology in this argument. Rapid migration of Jews to urban centers in the Soviet 1920’s and 30’s allowed their transition into positions of power.<sup>12</sup> New generations were prepared to abandon the religious, rural, and isolationist beliefs held in the Jewish community in the Pale of Settlement<sup>13</sup> for a modern intellectual city life rid of the stereotypical Jewish history.<sup>14</sup> Slezkine highlights the societal and political power of space. The only way for Soviets to “enter the neutral spaces, [was] to

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<sup>7</sup> Kostrychenko, Gennadi. “Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin’s Russia.” Prometheus Books, 1995. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>11</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. “The Jewish century.” Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>13</sup> a Jewish area of settlement in tsarist Russia beyond which Jews were not allowed.

<sup>14</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. “The Jewish century.” Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. 98.

convert to a national faith,” a precondition that Jews as ethnic outcasts were determined to share.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Slezkine sets the scene for a Jewish population eager for acceptance, assimilation, and acculturation to Russian history and Soviet ideology. However, his work identifies anti-Semitism as being deeply entrenched in society throughout history. He describes the sudden imposition of education and occupational quotas, ethnically targeted purges, and ambiguous discrimination beginning in the 1940’s and throughout present day Russia. Slezkine does not offer any other interpretations, which would provide a greater understanding of the factors that led to the opening of Soviet Jewish emigration.

Petrus Buwalda’s *They Did Not Dwell Alone* is a politically grounded book that emphasizes the hardships of emigration under the Soviet system. As the Dutch ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1986 to 1990, he writes about the diplomatic contexts of Soviet Jewish emigration. His account describes numerous oscillations in emigration policy and attributes them to the influence of international policies and Cold War tensions. This emphasis raises awareness of the effects of human rights acts such as The Jackson-Vanik Amendment and Helsinki Act, which exerted pressure on the USSR through trade embargo and taxation clauses.<sup>16</sup> The Jackson-Vanik Amendment was a 1974 federal U.S. law that denies most favored nation status to non-market economy countries that restricted emigration. Since annual emigration temporarily dropped after its passage, there are speculations regarding the direct impact of Jackson-Vanik.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, it symbolized the U.S.’s commitment to the Soviet Jewish cause. This impact along with the policy of détente is visible in the change of Soviet attitude towards emigration. Buwalda

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<sup>15</sup> Slezkine, Yuri. “The Jewish century.” Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. 67, 127.

<sup>16</sup> Buwalda, Petrus. “They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration From the Soviet Union, 1967-1990.” Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 89.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

makes this clear by revealing that even small groups of non-Jews were permitted to emigrate, but only via Israeli visas. This supports Soviet reluctance to allow emigration for fear of the domino effect and thus, “maintaining the fiction of family reunification” fulfilled Soviet objectives.<sup>18</sup> Buwalda’s insights also depict the hardships that the average Jew attempting emigration experienced, especially because of the curtailment of diplomatic relations with Israel. These adversities included denial of citizenship, termination from work, and loss of social status in retaliation for expressing a desire to leave.<sup>19</sup> His focus is clearly grounded in his familiarity with the external factors that influenced Soviet policy, which from a Dutch perspective provides a strong analysis. However, his book does not include research on official Soviet rationales for halting emigration or interviews with Party members, which hurts his credibility on the subject. Furthermore, his insights do not include personal anecdotes depicting the Jewish experience in the Soviet Union.

Henry Feingold’s *Silent No More* covers American Jewish initiatives to foster Jewish emigration and ensure émigré refugee absorption in Israel and the U.S. He justifies beginning this analysis in 1968 because of the activism that arose after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Israel’s victory induced sentiments of pride among Jews abroad and Soviet Jews expressed greater frustrations with the limitations of the Soviet system.<sup>20</sup> Feingold also examines the difference between American and Israeli policy towards Soviet emigration. The first is more civil-rights oriented in light of Jackson-Vanik, while the latter focused on supporting Jews to start a new life of religious freedom in the Jewish

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<sup>18</sup> Buwalda, Petrus. “They Did Not Dwell Alone: Jewish Emigration From the Soviet Union, 1967-1990.” Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 179.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Feingold, Henry L. “Silent No More: Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish effort, 1967-1989.” Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007. 66.

homeland.<sup>21</sup> While Feingold acknowledges the leverage of Cold War power-relations on emigration policy, he is wary of overemphasizing the role of government interactions on this issue. A primary argument of Feingold's is that *refuseniks*<sup>22</sup> were highly influential in raising American awareness of the Soviet Jewish cause and thus prompted American activism to pressure Soviet emigration policy.<sup>23</sup> However, Feingold does not touch upon the individuality and diversity among Soviet Jews themselves. This may in part reflect the tendency of émigré activist leaders to deliver narratives for political purposes, in which they naturally sought to speak for émigrés as a unified whole. Had they highlighted the diversity and complexity of individual experience, it would have undermined their agenda of galvanizing world Jewry behind their cause, and it is possible that this tactical bias has in turn influenced those who have written about this period. Nevertheless, Feingold's argument is grounded in the assumption that most Jews sought emigration because of anti-Semitism and that this act was synonymous with dissident or activist actions. Feingold concludes that disconcerted sentiments among Soviet Jews induced a proactive attitude towards attaining a new life abroad.

Laurie Salitan's *Politics and Nationality in Contemporary Soviet Immigration* provides a very specific focus on nationality during the years leading up to the fourth wave of Soviet Jewish emigration. Her introduction frames Soviet Jews in a Slezkine-like approach, recognizing Jewish successes and explaining them as catalysts for resentful anti-Semitism and deliberate social exclusion.<sup>24</sup> This framework also identifies Jews in

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<sup>21</sup> Feingold, Henry L. "Silent No More: Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish effort, 1967-1989." Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007. 302.

<sup>22</sup> *Refusenik* is a term coined for Soviets that were denied permission to emigrate.

<sup>23</sup> Feingold, Henry L. "Silent No More: Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish effort, 1967-1989." Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2007. 75.

<sup>24</sup> Salitan, Laurie P. "Politics and Nationality in Contemporary Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1968-89." New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 24-25.

positions of ideological and educational consciousness among the rest of society. Salitan denounces the tendency to overemphasize the Cold War's role in emigration rates—a model known as the barometer thesis, which seeks to explain emigration trends via external factors.<sup>25</sup> She does so to support her thesis on the specific Soviet Jewish emigration experience in comparison with other domestic ethnic tensions such as the Soviet hostility against the Soviet Germans. Salitan validates a domestic nationally framed position on emigration policy by comparing the Jewish experience to that of the Germans. Such a comparative analysis clarifies the unique position of Jews despite existing discrimination against Germans and similar accusations of foreign loyalty. She uses the German case in order to confirm the influence of domestic policy and emphasize fluctuations in Jewish emigration. Thus, Salitan defines Soviet emigration policy by internal political decisions and ideology.

Each of the authors focuses on one aspect of Soviet Jewry in order to explicate both causes for, and policy of, emigration. While each of these provides insight to the unique experiences of Jews under the Soviet regime, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation for their desire or ability to emigrate. Jewish emigration fluctuations are representative of both external and internal determinants on Soviet policy. The external factors reflect Soviet-U.S. relations, Middle East policy, and the influence of international politics on non-governmental levels. Non-governmental actors also played a significant role in exerting pressure on Soviet emigration policy. This includes interest groups, multinational corporations, ethnic and religious groups and international organizations. The internal causes include Soviet state ideology, ethnic policies, and Jewish activism.

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<sup>25</sup> Salitan, Laurie P. "Politics and Nationality in Contemporary Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1968-89." New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. 84-85.

Due to the lack of comprehensive study, one of the typical oversights on immigration is that the group is far from being culturally homogenous. The reason the resettlement in the U.S. and Israel are drastically different could be attributed to selection bias on behalf of émigrés, which would mean one type of immigrant went to America and another to Israel. It is difficult to measure and define such a phenomenon, however it is an interesting factor for further research. The inherent heterogeneity of the Jewish émigré population is evident in terms of the republican and urban nature of their origin, their level of religious and familial identity, levels of education and occupational proficiency, level of political and Party participation, age, gender, and experiential distinctions. These all affect the decisions to seek emigration, and also affect immigrants' outlooks and experiences of integration during resettlement.

## **Integrative Mechanisms**

### U.S. Absorption of Fourth Wave Immigrants

#### **Governmental Role**

Governmental activism was highly visible in influencing Soviet Jewish emigration policy indicating an early U.S. interest and commitment. This phenomenon is best explained within Cold War ideological contexts such as the influence of U.S. policies of Jackson-Vanik, or détente. By exerting pressure on the Soviet Union to release this minority population, the U.S. was able to further its ideological goals by fighting for human rights. Furthermore, supporting the freedom of émigrés to Western nations such as Israel, the United States, or even Germany and Canada, would symbolize a preference for the liberal concept over the communist one. Thus, while Jewish emigration wasn't a key

issue in U.S.-Soviet relations, it became a part of it as the U.S. became increasingly invested.

Despite pre-emigration policy efforts, the U.S. integration of Soviet Jewish refugees after 1989 is characterized primarily by local volunteer support without government assistance. The above literature review reveals a high level of American activism on a legislative level, on behalf of national organizations and by local Jewish communities. However, the U.S. government produced quotas for the number of incoming Soviet refugees and surprisingly did not have a unique support system for these new Americans. Why was there a decline in the government's role during resettlement? The function of U.S. governmental ideology reflects its pre-immigration strategy and lack of intervention after the fact. The prominence of private activism on behalf of Soviet Jews reveals Cold War and humanitarian investments. An absence of official U.S. resettlement support is best explained by the size of the arriving émigré population in comparison with other immigrant communities resettling in the United States. In 1989, the U.S. capped its immigrant intake of Soviet refugees at 50,000 annually.<sup>26</sup> Hence, this group is insignificant in numbers when compared to both the incoming and veteran population of the U.S. For this reason, U.S. integration of Soviet Jews was mainly a private organizational effort, which varied greatly depending on the location of resettlement within the United States. Thus, gauging the integration and absorption methods of Soviet immigrants in the U.S. is a difficult process, which also explains why there is only a small amount of literature on this fourth wave of resettlement.

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<sup>26</sup> Lewin-Epstein, Noah, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband. *Russian Jews on three continents: Migration and resettlement*. Frank Cass, 1997. 8.

## Organizational Role

The private American Jewish community had high participation levels in the resettlement under an initiative titled Operation Exodus.<sup>27</sup> Under the leadership of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), immigrants who were not joining settled relatives were dispersed across the U.S.<sup>28</sup> Limited benefits were provided through private Jewish organizations. Volunteer efforts and funds were dedicated to immigrant absorption with the hope that the new Americans would participate in local Jewish life and revitalize it.<sup>29</sup> Often HIAS provided monetary support to local organizational efforts and lobbied the government for reimbursement grants. In 1980, the U.S. Refugee Act standardized a system for potential refugee support via block grants to private ethnic and religious organizations.<sup>30</sup>

In 1999, the Soviet émigré community in New York was five times the size of that in the next largest settlement and remains today a very strong Russian enclave and immigrant network.<sup>31</sup> This research does not emphasize this community, because of its unique situation among a majority of U.S. cities. The lives of Soviet immigrants are undoubtedly shaped not only by the demographics of the immigrant population and the nature of the local Jewish community, but also by regional variables. However, research indicates and a symbolic study in Richmond, Virginia, confirms that across the U.S.

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<sup>27</sup> "Soviet Jewish Family to Arrive in Richmond In Mid-December." *Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond, Virginia*. Reflector, vol. 38, 21. 21December 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Richmond Times Dispatch. "City Forges Link to New Residents." *Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives*. 23 June 1991.

<sup>30</sup> "The Refugee Act." *Office of Refugee Resettlement of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services*. 29 August 2012. < <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/the-refugee-act>>.

<sup>31</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 131.

“Soviet Jewish émigré communities reflect the homogenizing power both of Soviet Russian culture and of American mass-market culture.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Case Study: Richmond, Virginia**

In Richmond, Virginia, the Richmond Jewish Federation (RJF) and Jewish Family Services (JFS) coordinated a resettlement program, which supported Soviet Jews with subsidized housing, vocational counseling, material donations, and synagogue sponsorship. Seva, Riva, and Vladimir, all of whom were resettled in the 1990’s, fondly recalled their first months in Richmond. “The apartments were close to JFS...they were in preferred school districts...and it was wonderful that during this transition, all our neighbors spoke Russian.”<sup>33</sup> HIAS recognized JFS for outstanding local organizational efforts and Richmond as one of the top three communities in the U.S., while other communities generally provided less funding and support.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, it did not succeed in engaging the Soviet Jews in any type of Jewish communal affiliation. In her study of New York, Boston, and San Francisco, Larisa Remennick notes that this trend is visible among resettlement cities across the country.<sup>35</sup> This is best understood in the context of the Soviet experience of Jewishness as an ethnicity, rather than a religious or personal identification. For this reason, measuring the success of absorption methods in the United States is best analyzed outside of the Jewish affiliation framework.

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<sup>32</sup> Orleck, Annelise. “Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans.” Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 131.

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir. 5 November 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Editor, Richmond Times Dispatch. “JFS Did the Most To Aid Resettlements.” *Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond*. 4 May 2001.

<sup>35</sup> Remennick, Larissa. “Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict.” New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007. 191.

## Israeli Absorption of Fourth Wave Immigrants

Soviet Jewish integration methods in the United States contrast in almost every way to the resettlement in Israel. The resettlement of about one million former Soviets is the largest addition to Israel's population throughout its history, while in the U.S. 200,000, is insignificant even among recent immigrant populations.<sup>36</sup> Fourth wave Soviet immigrants make up almost one fifth of Israel's population and have redefined the economic, social, and political landscape in the society. The volume of immigration was perceived as a positive potential for the growth and development of the relatively new state, thus the Israeli government was much more invested in supporting successful integration. Meanwhile, Soviet Jewish political refugees that arrived in the U.S. did not receive direct state support outside of standard welfare and Medicare aid.<sup>37</sup> These immigrants, instead, were expected to overcome "tragic circumstances...[and] become Americans."<sup>38</sup> Soviet arrivals to the U.S. were required to undergo the extensive naturalization process and were issued temporary residence cards, while their contemporaries in Israel received automatic citizenship.<sup>39</sup> The vast differences in integration methods have a tremendous impact on resettlement experiences, the rate of integration, immigrant and host perceptions, and ultimately have shaped the identities of these immigrant communities in the U.S. and Israel twenty years later.

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<sup>36</sup> See Table 2.2 and Table 4.1.

<sup>37</sup> Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Israelis: social mobility, politics, and culture." New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. 11.

<sup>38</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC). "Frequently Asked Questions About Refugees and Resettlement." 2012. <<http://www.rescue.org/refugees>>.

<sup>39</sup> Immigration and Citizenship for Refugees and Asylees. *Welcome to USA.gov: Celebrate Citizenship, Learn About America*. <[http://www.welcometousa.gov/Immigration\\_citizenship/For\\_refugees\\_asylees.htm](http://www.welcometousa.gov/Immigration_citizenship/For_refugees_asylees.htm)>.

The Israeli government supported Jews both in emigration from the USSR and in integrating into a new lifestyle. Israeli policy-makers have capitalized on Jewish immigration to increase the percentage of the Jewish population and continuously reiterate the legitimacy of this Jewish nation. In alignment with Zionist ideology, Israel perceived the opportunity for citizenship as extending to the immigrants a new way of life with religious, political, and social freedom in a way that also directly supported Israel's economy and population. The Zionist ideal, which has its roots in the European Enlightenment and the formation of Israeli statehood, retains influence in every aspect of society. A main aspect of Zionism is the binding of the Jewish diasporic people to their biblical homeland. Thus, in 1950, two years after Israeli independence, the government introduced the Law of Return.<sup>40</sup> In accordance with this ideology, the Law of Return ensures instant citizenship to anyone of Jewish heritage.<sup>41</sup>

“*Ole*, literally “ascendant,” means “immigrant.” In Zionist discourse, *olim* are oppressed diasporic Jews who “ascend” to the Land of Israel in order to build their national home. As such, *olim* are expected to adhere to the ideological norms of first a Zionist motivation for immigration; second an attachment to the Land of Israel; third, a commitment to learning Hebrew, and finally complete cultural assimilation.”<sup>42</sup>

Because of this ideological governance, the state established absorption responsibility in 1968, direct absorption in 1980, and an absorption basket program in 1992 in support of immigrant integration.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the government was both invested in integration and had expectations for its new human capital to assimilate and thrive as Israeli citizens.

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<sup>40</sup> Dominitz, Yehuda. “Israel’s Immigration Policy and the Dropout Phenomenon.” *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Gershenson, Olga. *Gesher: Russian Theatre in Israel - a study of cultural colonization*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Lewin-Epstein, Noah, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband. *Russian Jews on three continents: Migration and resettlement*. Frank Cass, 1997. 5.

In 1968, the Israeli government established the *Sochnut*, The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption and Social Security, in reaction to increased immigration of Jews from the diaspora. Yehuda Dominitz, the Director of Immigration from 1978 until 1986, describes Israel's determination to absorb Soviet Jews, despite the USSR's severance of diplomatic ties after 1967. He describes the urgency that shaped Israeli immigration policy, since the Soviet Union halted the few Jewish emigration rights that previously had been granted.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, third wave émigrés diverted to other destinations once they were permitted to leave the USSR on Israeli visas. Israel's major concern over *neshira*, the "dropout phenomenon" was the direct threat it posed to Israeli goals of accumulating a greater population of Jews in diaspora.<sup>45</sup> See table number 4.2 for statistics drawn from the 1993 Jewish Agency for Israel Report on the *aliya* and dropouts of Soviet Jewish immigrants.<sup>46</sup> The loss of numbers in layover locations across Europe influenced Israel to initiate direct flights from Moscow beginning in the fourth wave of emigration along with a number of other reforms in Israeli absorption methods.

Yair Tzaban, who inherited the position of Director of the Ministry of Immigration in 1992, describes the difficulties of assuming this responsibility after the country had already haphazardly resettled hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Under the coaching of social scientists who were able to point out the government's oversights, Tzaban implemented a new policy called "direct absorption."<sup>47</sup> This policy maintained

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<sup>44</sup> Dominitz, Yehuda. "Israel's Immigration Policy and the Dropout Phenomenon." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 120-124.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Tzaban, Yair. "The Quandaries of an Israeli Minister of Absorption." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 128.

governmental focus on ensuring the successful integration of Soviet émigrés into Israeli society.

Despite an increase in support, compared to previous immigrant waves, the direct absorption of the 1990's required much more personal responsibility on behalf of the individual immigrant.<sup>48</sup> When the Ministry of Immigration was founded in 1968, early immigrants received governmental support through the subsidizing of six months of residence at a hostel-like absorption center.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, direct absorption allowed Soviet immigrants housing aid packages with mortgages and rent subsidies, as well as language and occupational assistance programs. While this was a much greater financial investment on behalf of the government, it did not necessarily support integration. These families were less self-reliant after being given lightly furnished subsidized apartments. Furthermore these communities were often located in development towns, which were inconvenient for finding work. This induced the emergence of a secondary, informal employment sector, which has produced a pronounced Russian-speaking community in Israel.<sup>50</sup> This is related to the creation of networks and the maintenance of language and culture, which are further discussed in the section on social observations.

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<sup>48</sup> Tzaban, Yair. "The Quandaries of an Israeli Minister of Absorption." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 129.

<sup>49</sup> Adler, Shmuel. "Israel's Absorption Policies since the 1970s." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 137.

<sup>50</sup> Lewin-Epstein, Noah, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband. *Russian Jews on three continents: Migration and resettlement*. Frank Cass, 1997. 10.

## Israeli Occupational and Language Aids

Both research and interviews with former-Soviet immigrants indicates that language was a critical indicator of integration into a society and the single greatest barrier towards absorption, while “the workplace is the main social gateway into a new society.”<sup>51</sup> Unlike the U.S. case, which received immigrants without any unique attention or situational empathy, Israel fostered Russian cultural aspects and language needs in daily societal life. From the government’s position, this would support the channeling of information in the hopes of faster integration into education, work, and assimilation into Israeli culture.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Tzaban reflects on the government’s intervention in integrating immigrants occupationally. This was visible for those with professional backgrounds in engineering, medicine, and science. Support was provided through professional retraining courses and placement within their occupational fields.<sup>53</sup> While this policy raised ethical dilemmas, the government made concerted efforts to produce jobs even for those in the arts by opening fourteen new music schools.<sup>54</sup> Tzaban’s reflection provides a number of insights into the absorption experience. It shows that the government was interested in retaining the highest percentage of incoming immigrants. This was advanced by a mass economic investment in occupational and language integration opportunities. It is also evident in his recognition of culture shock and the dilemma between advancing a melting pot, as Israeli integration of immigrants had always assumed, or multi-cultural pluralism.

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<sup>51</sup> Remennick, Larissa. “Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict.” New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007. 73-92.

<sup>52</sup> Yelenevskaya M., Fialkova L. From Anti-Utopia to Utopia: Immigrants' Memories of the Soviet Union. Proceedings of the 13th International Oral History Conference (IOHA) "Memory and Globalization". 2004, Rome (Italy). CD. Atti Del Convegno# Translated into Hebrew by Ido Bassok. 31.

<sup>53</sup> Tzaban, Yair. “The Quandaries of an Israeli Minister of Absorption.” *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 130.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

Because professional identity is a main source of pride in the Soviet Jewish context, Tzaban recognizes the importance of elevating occupational integration for this wave of immigrants.<sup>55</sup> Despite such outstanding efforts, the question remains: to what extent was this successful in Israeli terms? Furthermore, is there a greater level of satisfaction among those who were integrated into Israeli society than those who received no direct support in the United States? These social dilemmas are difficult to measure comparatively, because there are assumed struggles in immigration on its own. It is also challenging to determine whether a specific type of immigrant set out to resettle in the U.S. versus those who chose Israel in the 1990's.

### **Education Policy**

The Israeli Ministry of Education was mainly responsible for educational integration and collaboration with the Ministry of Immigration to ensure successful assimilation. One of the methods applied was the election of soldier-teachers that were assigned to classrooms to support patriotic education.<sup>56</sup> With the support of the Ministry of Absorption, it was able to finance social activities, field trips, and matriculation exams in Russian, a practice that was designed for the latest wave of Soviet immigrants, which included a large percentage of children.<sup>57</sup> From a governmental perspective, “the social absorption of the immigrant student is one of the first steps...[to] make it easier for him to

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<sup>55</sup> Tzaban, Yair. “The Quandaries of an Israeli Minister of Absorption.” *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 132.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>57</sup> Adler, Shmuel. “Israel’s Absorption Policies since the 1970s.” *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 138.

cope with the difficulties confronting him and will also contribute to a sense of well-being in his family.”<sup>58</sup>

Tamar Horowitz, who has dedicated her study to educational integration methods in Israel, finds that there was still a substantial shortfall in the government’s understanding of the social contexts that influenced the youth coming from the USSR. She claims, the educational system based absorption policy on older generations without consideration of the youth culture that had emerged under perestroika.<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, perestroika encouraged an open questioning of institutions, which made Israeli educational policies that furthered assimilation unappealing. Despite these setbacks, because of the sheer magnitude of immigrants, and the positive association of Russian cultural heritage, there was a necessary change in integration policies of education.<sup>60</sup> In her study of immigrant teens, Fran Markowitz finds very positive outcomes from the free state sponsored Na’ale live-in high school program that was initiated for integration in 1992. She claims that this unique program addresses the hardships that adolescents already face in terms of identity and relationships within society.<sup>61</sup> The government provided substantial collaboration to provide for immigrant students, which is unique to the Israeli case. While these methods are ingrained in Israeli culture, studies show that cultural diversity is maintained even among youth immigrants and absorption methods are increasingly reformed with sensitivity towards de-marginalization and cultural awareness.

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<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Education 1974, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Horowitz, Tamar R. “The Influence of Soviet Political Culture on Immigrant Voters in Israel: The Elections of 1992.” *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. 36.

<sup>60</sup> Lewin-Epstein, Noah, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband. *Russian Jews on three continents: Migration and resettlement*. Frank Cass, 1997. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Markowitz, Fran. “Cultural Change, Border Crossings and Identity Shopping: Jewish Teenagers from the CIS Assess Their Future in Israel.” *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 358.

## Military Service

Participation in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) is mandated for all Jews in Israel and has been central to acculturation at the focal point of Zionist ideology. The military is “a normative part of the Israeli ethos” in contrast to an entirely different civic culture of Soviet youth that were privy to challenging ideology and the regime under perestroika.<sup>62</sup> This gap in social ideology is also prevalent in studies that have measured Soviet successes in Israeli military service. Abraham Carmeli & Judith Fadlon who did an extensive study in 1997, immediately during fourth wave immigrant arrival, concluded that immigrant service actually comes at great costs for the army and little benefit to the individual immigrant in terms of acculturation, social integration, and opportunity.<sup>63</sup> One explanation is that they are not valuable to the army in terms of their determination and priorities. Amit reveals that the army’s units have participatory stereotypes across all levels of Israeli society, geographically, socially, and ethnically, and that there are well known lower ranking Soviet units.<sup>64</sup> Another explanation that Rivka Eisikovitz offers is that required military service is not beneficial to new immigrants, since they are entering the force with significant societal disadvantages and are occupied with acclimating to an entirely new lifestyle.<sup>65</sup> Similar to Amit, Remennick indicates that the military reveals the ethnic tensions that exist within Israeli society and is a space in which the marginalization

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<sup>62</sup> Epstein, Alek D. “Violating the Mores, Seizing the Guards: The Riot of the Youth of Perestroika in an Israeli Military Jail.” *Academia*. 9 Oct. 2002. Accessed 7 Sept. 2012. 129.

<sup>63</sup> Carmeli, Abraham, and Fadlon, Judith. "Motivation to Serve in the Israeli Army: The Gap between Cultural Involvement and Cultural Performance." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 404.

<sup>64</sup> Amit. 31 October 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Eisikovits, Rivka A. "Intercultural Learning Among Russian Immigrant Recruits In The Israeli Army." *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006.

of former-Soviets is most pronounced.<sup>66</sup> However, these are general studies, which entirely rely on the opinion of individual interviews, which are subject to a number of circumstantial situations. Alexandra, who immigrated to Israel at the age of five, cites that her military service was the most positive experience of her life.<sup>67</sup> For these reasons, while many former Soviet youth have very positive military experiences, it seems that the fourth wave of Soviet immigration did not reap the same benefits of assimilation that the military provided to previous immigrants; however, it has provided an opportunity for new Israelis to interact with veteran Israelis on level playing field.

### **Conclusions**

It is important to note here the vast differences in the comparison of integrative mechanisms of Soviet Jews in the United States versus in Israel. While the U.S. was primarily a non-institutional immigration experience, the only non-official community efforts in Israel have been in the form of grassroots former-Soviet organizations, or immigrant participation in informal societal institutions. These include night classes in Russian or the popular youth movement, *tsofim*, which is the equivalent of scouts in the U.S.<sup>68</sup> Because of the institutionalized nature of absorption in Israel there are tailored methods for the integration of this wave of immigrants. For this reason, there is also much more data on this pool of immigrants, and thus, more research and analysis.

Interestingly, both in Israeli and in U.S. integration there was a lack of communication in terms of expectations. While the Israeli government expected

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<sup>66</sup> Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Israelis: social mobility, politics, and culture." New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Alexandra. 5 November 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Kahane, Reuven. "Informal Agencies of Socialization and the Integration of Immigrant Youth." *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. 298.

assimilation into society, American Jewish organizations expected to enlarge a thriving participatory community, neither of which seemed to appeal strongly to the fourth wave of Soviet immigrants. In the case of Israel, the government has acknowledged such dilemmas and has prioritized efforts to bridge the immigrant identity crisis with more effective absorption and to fight the challenges of marginalization by integrating aspects of Russian culture into Israeli space.

## **Social Observations**

### Host Societal Perceptions of the New Immigrants

#### **The United States**

The American Jewish community expected Soviet Jews to be active members in their host communities. While the American Jews perceived that what the United States had to offer was a better way of life and a Jewish community, Soviet resettlers seemed to be more interested in economic support and maintenance of Russian culture.<sup>69</sup> Orleck maintains that American organizational campaigns likened Soviet Jewish emigration to Biblical perceptions of the exodus from Egypt.<sup>70</sup> Rita Simon suggests the tension between Soviet and American Jews stems from this lapse in expectations.<sup>71</sup> Seva, who was raised in an orthodox Jewish family in Azerbaijan and attended Richmond's Rudlin Torah Academy orthodox elementary school identifies as agnostic. However, she has invested in taking a religious studies minor in addition to psychology and nursing, because of her

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<sup>69</sup> Simon, Rita James. "In the Golden Land: A Century of Russian and Soviet Jewish Immigration in America." Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997. 78.

<sup>70</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 100.

<sup>71</sup> Simon, Rita James. "In the Golden Land: A Century of Russian and Soviet Jewish Immigration in America." Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997. 13.

interest in maintaining her heritage and understanding Judaism. Both literature and personal observations have produced a solid indication that Soviet Jews were and are not interested in religion or American Jewish life in the way that was expected.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, they mostly identify strongly with Judaism culturally and ethnically in a continuation of the interpretation and identification of Judaism in the Soviet Union.

Equally, veteran Soviet immigrants to the U.S. found fourth wave immigrants to have different values, expectations, and resettlement experiences than their own. Since emigration was often permitted only for matters of family reunification, in many times relatives were reuniting for the first time in many years. While Russian Jews were able to bond across generations over things such as communal mourning of the Holocaust many times they led entirely different lifestyles, which in some cases caused tension.<sup>73</sup> In her study of New York, Orleck finds both welcoming, conflict, and negotiation between New Americans and previous Russian immigrants.<sup>74</sup> However, New York is a special case in which a Russian enclave has formed. In Richmond, Virginia, the two stores that carry Russian products intentionally identify as international, or European, in order to attract a larger market and Russian communal social and religious institutions do not exist. Therefore, across the U.S. it seems that this disparity in experiences and expectations between generations of immigrants has contributed to the lack of formation of a Russian community in most American cities.

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<sup>72</sup> Gold, Steven J. "Community Formation among Jews from the Former Soviet Union in the US." in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* edited by Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, and Ritterband. London: Cummings Center, 1997. 261. and Vladimir. 5 November 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 101.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

## The Israeli Case

Results in Israel are similarly characterized by misunderstandings within a host society that is ingrained in ideological associations towards immigration. Because of the extent of change that the population of fourth wave immigrants brought to the Israeli landscape, the attitude of Israeli society towards the Soviet immigrants requires examination on multiple levels. One of these is characterized by Zionist ideology, which has influenced the Israeli population to strongly support the homecoming of Jewish diasporic people to the land of Israel. This narrative also necessitates a strong Jewish population to support Israel as a Jewish affiliated state. These principles influence both popular Israeli opinion in support of open immigration and clarify immigration policy as a national priority.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the significance and positive polling regarding immigration, on an individual level, the Israeli public lacks involvement in immigrant absorption in comparison to involvement of individuals via funding and support in communities across the U.S.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, in my study, I have found that popular opinion in Israeli news depicts the Soviet community as a social problem within society, which contrasts with the general positive attitude towards immigration.<sup>77</sup> Olga Gershenson, Larisa Remennick and Majid Al-Haj recognize this as a consistent trend in Israeli perceptions towards immigrants.<sup>78</sup> Similar to the U.S. conflict with veteran Soviet immigrants in society,

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<sup>75</sup> Gershenson, Olga. *Gesher: Russian Theatre in Israel - a study of cultural colonization*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005.

<sup>76</sup> Horowitz, Tamar R. "The Influence of Soviet Political Culture on Immigrant Voters in Israel: The Elections of 1992." *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. 6.

<sup>77</sup> [Shomski, Dimitri. "Meanwhile in Soviet Israel" *Ha'aretz, Popular Opinion*. 15 February 2012.]

<sup>78</sup> Gershenson, Olga. *Gesher: Russian Theatre in Israel - a study of cultural colonization*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005., Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict." New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007., Al-Haj, Majid. "Soviet Immigration as

Remennick finds that special privileges offered to the new wave of immigrants under direct absorption create tension with veterans, which reveal class and ethnic conflicts.<sup>79</sup> These ethnic tensions aren't pronounced in the U.S., because the post-Soviet immigrant population is such a minority in comparison to others. However, this rivalry, or issue of belonging and differences in ideologies, is also visible when comparing Israeli immigrant experiences to those of U.S. post-Soviet integration into American Jewish organizations and synagogues. Nevertheless, in an interview with Amit, a native Israeli, his perception was that the Russian community has flourished socially, politically, and economically relative to their tenure in the country.<sup>80</sup> Alexandra, a child immigrant in the 90's herself, claims that she feels fully absorbed within society, yet recognizes an underlying element of racism towards Russian culture because of the separatist nature.<sup>81</sup> Remennick defines this as "mutual social alienation," which will be discussed further in the section on immigrant identities.<sup>82</sup>

### Post-Resettlement Identities

This section seeks to understand the realities of resettlement from the perspectives of immigrant interviewees. In contrast with third wave immigrants who fought to leave with stronger ideological beliefs when visas were only attainable to Israel, fourth wave Jews cite anti-Semitism, economic hardship, lack of opportunity, and discontent with the

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Viewed by Jews and Arabs." *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Kahane, Reuven. "Informal Agencies of Socialization and the Integration of Immigrant Youth." *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. 292.

<sup>80</sup> Amit. 31 October 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Alexandra. 5 November 2012.

<sup>82</sup> Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Israelis: social mobility, politics, and culture." New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. 2.

regime.<sup>83</sup> Many, however, came from successful professional backgrounds and thriving social lives.<sup>84</sup> Thus, immigrants were not in a rush to leave behind their diasporic Russian identities for new cultural realities. This group became more uniform by having a collective émigré experience. However, there are problematic assumptions of homogeneity of a Russian past. This neglects the very different socio-cultural experiences depending on whether people were arriving from small towns or large cities, which highly affect diversity of social types, lifestyles and identity. While it is important to remember the heterogeneity, the conceptual ideology of this group endured a similar Soviet systematized definition. This is one in which Jewishness is defined in ethnic terms, rather than religious affiliation or personal identity.

### **The United States**

Orleck's study provides insight into the unique enclave of "little Russia" in Brighton Beach and other New York Soviet immigrant communities. Her depiction maintains that resettlement in New York mirrored the Soviet lifestyle culturally and linguistically, yet with the opportunities of America. The New York case is one of a kind; it has stable community bonding aspects such as a daily Russian language newspaper called "The New Russian Word."<sup>85</sup> However strong the allure to remain in the comfort of the enclave, many believe that part of leaving everything was to fulfill the drive of a new American life. Riva, who immigrated to Richmond, but moved to Brooklyn within her first year in the U.S. claims that it didn't feel like America. "I was speaking only Russian,

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<sup>83</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 97.

<sup>84</sup> Paltiel, Ari M., Sabatello, Eitan F., and Tal, Dorith. "Immigrants from the former USSR in Israel in the 1990's: Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Economic Absorption." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 299.

<sup>85</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 88.

I wanted my children to have the opportunities that we left for and those weren't being supported there," she said.<sup>86</sup> Vladimir, who describes his ambitious youth and prestigious position in the USSR asserts, "I am American first, and Jewish second. No, I am not Russian. That country gave me birth and nothing else."<sup>87</sup> Orleck describes this phenomenon as a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, "there is nothing left of the world they once knew, nothing left to go back to."<sup>88</sup> Since integration varied greatly among different resettlement sites across the U.S., the issue of post-resettlement identities may be more appropriately studied on a case-by-case basis. However, it seems like the immigrants who arrived in the U.S. were substantially more eager to adopt a new lifestyle and assimilated into American society more readily than the large numbers that immigrated to Israel.

### **The Israeli Case**

Remennick offers the concept of Russian immigrants as a new socio-economic group with its own niche in Israeli society. She attributes this to its common Soviet past and especially because of its current ties to the post-Soviet present.<sup>89</sup> The Soviet Jews in Israel are part of a larger Russian diaspora in the modern century that maintains popular socio-cultural traditions via the media and web. While this is true, the post-Soviet identity in Israel is also shaped through the community's experience and relations with the veteran Israeli society. Media coverage of immigration is given from a veteran Israeli perspective, thus creating the need for a cultural representative niche. Gershenson maintains this was

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<sup>86</sup> Riva. 30 October 2012.

<sup>87</sup> Vladimir. 5 November 2012.

<sup>88</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 186.

<sup>89</sup> Remennick, Larissa. "Russian Israelis: social mobility, politics, and culture." New York, NY: Routledge, 2012. 21.

preemptive for a “thriving industry of Russian language media and culture [to exist] separately from the mainstream Hebrew media.”<sup>90</sup> Many authors cite the Geshher theatre as the ideal integration between Russian and Israeli culture; ironically *gesher* is the Hebrew word for bridge. It is often recognized as a hybrid theatre with acting in both languages, yet it retains Russian traditions and legacy within Israeli society.<sup>91</sup> It symbolizes the possibility of cultural diversity in an immigrant society that up until this point valued assimilation. It seems that while the post-Soviet community seeks to be incorporated into Israeli history, the immigrants intend to do so by maintaining their unique identities as a positive ethnic group in a larger immigrant society.

Despite the transparency and openness of Israeli society, patriotism and historic national pride were much more prevalent back in the Soviet Union than they are among former-Soviet Union immigrants in Israel. This can be attributed to two factors. First, propaganda induced strong sentiments among the youth and fueled military successes. Secondly, the politicized nature of the communist society valued everything Russian, since Stalin’s Cultural Revolution. Interviews and polls that have been conducted in Israel indicate that while integration was readily accepted, Soviet immigrants preferred to maintain Russian cultural affiliations.<sup>92</sup> In many ways this contradicted Israeli assimilation expectations, and thus, affected immigrants’ perceptions of marginalization. Soviet Jews seek to be incorporated into Israeli history as a positive ethnic group, while preserving

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<sup>90</sup> Gershenson, Olga. *Geshher: Russian Theatre in Israel - a study of cultural colonization*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Gershenson, Olga. *Geshher: Russian Theatre in Israel - a study of cultural colonization*. New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005. 1.

<sup>92</sup> Ben-Rafael, Eliezer, Olshtain, Elite, and Geijst, Idit. “Identity and Language: The Social Insertion of Soviet Jews in Israel.” *Immigration to Israel: Sociological Perspectives*. Elazar Leshem and Judith T. Shuval Eds. *Israel Sociological Society*, Ernest Krausz Ed. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1998. 370.

their unique identities.<sup>93</sup> While in the past there may have been more positive motivations inspired by the Zionist cause, this wave of immigrants had strong cultural affiliations, and often elected to emigrate due to opportunities, rather than seeking assimilation.<sup>94</sup> Based on their study of post-Soviet motivation to serve in the IDF, Carmeli & Fadlon attribute this disparity to the dichotomy of collectivist versus individualistic principles.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, while there are great similarities between the fourth wave immigrant groups from the former-Soviet Union in the U.S. and Israel, they have undertaken an entirely different route of resettlement. There was a complexity of variables that led to the possibility for Soviet Jews to emigrate, and this multifaceted set of factors was in turn shaped by their unique ethnic experience under Soviet ideology. Both internal and external pressures encouraged a change in Soviet emigration policy, which often inflicted very different experiences on various families applying for visas. Fourth wave immigrants were a product of the Soviet period of glasnost and perestroika and therefore had many experiences of daily life, of leaving the USSR, and of resettling in Israel and the U.S. that differed from those who had immigrated just ten or twenty years earlier. Expectations of the host societies were grounded in their knowledge of previous waves of Soviet immigration and for this reason were many times not in sync with those arriving and seeking to integrate in the 1990's.

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<sup>93</sup> [Ben-Zeev, Efrat. Literary Review – “Memories of Emigration: Red Army Soldiers in Israel.” *Israeli Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 2: 2005. 494.]

<sup>94</sup> Voronel, Alexander V. “Twenty Years After.” in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* edited by Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, and Ritterband. London: Cummings Center, 1997. 421.

<sup>95</sup> Carmeli, Abraham, and Fadlon, Judith. "Motivation to Serve in the Israeli Army: The Gap between Cultural Involvement and Cultural Performance." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 391.

While the US and Israel are similarly structured societies, the Soviet immigrant experience has been very different in terms of integration, acculturation, and assimilation. A disparity between resettlement in the U.S. and Israel is partly a product of the methods of integration implemented by these societies. Some of the issues that are similar in the U.S. and Israel are the transitions of immigrants to new occupations, primarily due to language barriers and disparity between degrees, which doesn't allow for a continuation of their Soviet careers. Age seems to be a very important factor in both the pace of integration and perceptions among the immigrant groups, yet it is a subject of very little acknowledgement within post-Soviet resettlement research. Orleck briefly acknowledges that conflict exists between children adept to changing quickly and older relatives nostalgic for their past.<sup>96</sup> However, beyond internal generational disagreement, which exists among many families, the rate at which younger generations adopt languages and assimilate provides them with advantages that older generations lack. Generational differences are often overlooked in statistics that measure occupational and social absorption. One of the outstanding findings in this study is that ethnic autonomy did not form in the United States as it did across Soviet Jewish communities in Israel. This can be understood as a result of the much greater Soviet population in Israel, their sovereignty, or marginalization from mainstream Israeli society. It can also be characterized as a reactive identity to the Israeli government's integration methods. While this research indicates a number of patterns in the comparison of these resettled communities, there are a number of factors that require further investigation and analysis. Ideally, this study would include a much larger pool of interviewees. This research would also benefit from comparisons

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<sup>96</sup> Orleck, Annelise. "Soviet Jews in Immigration: The Soviet Jewish Americans." Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. 183.

with other immigrant communities within each of these societies, for example, the Ethiopian and Vietnamese populations in Israel. This research has also not touched upon some very interesting aspects of post-immigration life. It would be appropriate to add analysis of gender experiences, political opinions, familial relations, connections to those still living in the FSU, and current Jewish life in the FSU. Future research would also include Jews in the former Soviet Union and a poll of their experience, consideration of emigration, and life today. This subject of comparison is briefly noted in Lewin-Epstein and addressed in the work of Wienerman and Tolts. Nevertheless, the post-Soviet Jewish experience is still developing and future research that includes first generation Israelis and Americans will provide an added dimension of analysis to the post-Soviet Jewish identities of fourth wave immigrants.

## Tables

**Table 2.1** Soviet Refugee Arrivals to the United States

Year	Dept. of Justice Arrivals
1961-1969	456
1970	209
1971	88
1972	228
1973	591
1974	2,221
1975	3,209
1976	7,090
1977	5,296
1978	9,931
1979	27,135
1980	28,692
1981	11,244
1982	2,838
1983	1,449
1984	791
1985	674
1986	833
1987	3,728
1988	18,880
1989	39,831
1990	53,130
1991	57,587
1992	66,026

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, 1993 *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Washington DC.

Derived From: Chiswick, Barry R. "Soviet Jews in the United States: Language and Labour Market Adjustments Revisited." in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* edited by Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, and Ritterband. London: Cummings Center, 1997. 234.

**Table 2.2** Total Immigration to the U.S. from Russia and the FSU, 1821-1993

Time Period	No. of Immigrants
1881-90	213,282
1891-1900	505,290
1901-1910	1,597,306
1911-1920	921,201
1921-1930	61,742
1931-1940	1,370
1941-1950	571
1951-1960	671
1961-1970	2,465
1971-1980	38,961
1981-1990	57,677
1991-93	128,575

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, 1993 *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, Washington DC.

Derived From: Chiswick, Barry R. "Soviet Jews in the United States: Language and Labour Market Adjustments Revisited." in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* edited by Lewin-Epstein, Ro'i, and Ritterband. London: Cummings Center, 1997. 235.

**Table 4.1** Statistics of Soviet Jews Leaving Versus Those Settling in Israel

Year	No. Leaving USSR/FSU	No. Invitations Sent to Potential Émigrés	No. Immigrating to Israel
1968	231	1,550	231
1969	3,033	10,267	3,033
1970	999	4,307	999
1971	12,897	22,933	12,839
1972	31,903	40,546	31,652
1973	34,733	40,576	33,277
1974	20,767	33,305	16,888
1975	13,363	28,041	8,435
1976	14,254	33,088	7,250
1977	16,833	44,209	8,350
1978	28,956	82,766	12,090
1979	51,331	99,825	17,278
1980	21,648	48,628	7,570
1981	9,448	23,143	1,762
1982	2,692	11,818	731
1983	1,314	8,743	861
1984	896	6,367	340
1985	1,140	7,574	348
1986	904	6,657	201
1987	8,155	20,068	2,072
1988	18,961	100,000	2,173
1989	71,005	300,000	12,117
1990	228,400	1,000,000	183,400
1991	187,500	-----	147,520
1992	122,398	600,000	64,648

Source: Jewish Agency for Israel Report, 1993.  
 Derived From: Dominitz, Yehuda. "Israel's Immigration Policy and the Dropout Phenomenon." *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i, and Paul Ritterband Eds. London: Frank Cass, 1997. 119.

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