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Feeling Alive:
Unofficial Jewish Practices in the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s

By

Olesya Shayduk-Immerman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores unofficial "Jewish practices" in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s. The interest and participation in such practices in the late Soviet period are usually analyzed within either "totalitarian" or Zionist frameworks, which represent them as manifestations of "anti-Soviet" sentiments and goals, and as part of a political movement struggling for the chance to leave the Soviet Union, particularly for Israel within the Zionist framework. However, I argue, this interpretation reflects much less the real Soviet context than the set of assumptions about the Soviet system that have been shaped in Western liberal discourses during and since the Cold War. In this dissertation I show that Jewish practices and pursuits in the late Soviet period could not be grouped under the concept of a "political movement" or reduced to an anti-Soviet agenda and Zionist activity. Instead, they should be understood as a particular example of "searching for the extraordinary" – a much broader cultural phenomenon that developed among the Soviet intelligentsia during that period. My informants often mentioned a unique feeling of "liveliness" that they felt when engaging with Jewish practices and pursuits. Sometimes they linked this feeling with "freedom" – a concept that cannot be easily equated with the liberal conception of freedom understood in terms of individual choice. In fact, many of them also reported that after having emigrated from the Soviet Union to market democracies (Israel, USA, Canada etc.) they, surprisingly, experienced a "loss" of freedom. Analyzing what the experience of "freedom" might mean in the Soviet context, and what unique forms it could take in the context of the "Jewish practices," I argue that a number of ideological, economic and cultural realities of state socialism made this experience of freedom part and parcel of the Soviet system itself. From this perspective, gaining the actual right to emigrate was just as important as, if not more important than, performing the actual act of emigration. The real "Exodus" happened within the borders of the Soviet Union rather than outside of them. This dissertation further reflects on the role of the global political context in shaping the unofficial Jewish practices and pursuits in the Soviet Union and in giving them a unique form that made them different from many other unofficial practices that developed around that time.

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Introduction

Memory and Methodology

Yona[1] was a teacher of the Torah in the early 1980s in Leningrad. He was a part of the so-called Jewish revival in the USSR during the 1970s and 1980s: an explosion of interest in various Jewish activities and knowledge that were not routine aspects of Soviet life or common erudition under late socialism. Jews in the late Soviet period, mostly Sovietized professional intelligentsia, had little to no knowledge of, what the Hebrew alphabet looked like, how a religious Jewish person dressed, and often not even what the differences between Judaism and Christianity were. The revival was comprised of various "Jewish practices" that I understand broadly by including any practice related to the acquisition or dissemination of knowledge in Jewish languages, religion, history, and communities. These practices were pursued in private apartments and came in different forms: seminars in the Hebrew language and sacred texts; lectures in Jewish history and ethnography; the production of non-official Jewish magazines (*samizdat*) not censored by state ideologists; the collective celebration of Jewish holidays and Shabbatas as well as communicative practices around leaving the USSR. Most of the participants in Jewish practices applied for an exit visa to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel. Some moved instead, to the United States and a small percentage went to other countries, such as Germany, Canada or Australia.

I met with Yona in Jerusalem, where he currently lives, and he told me that the years spent in refusal were the most meaningful and fun in his life, and when he was finally given permission to leave the Soviet Union he "strongly considered staying." I asked him whether his perspective is widely shared by other Jewish activists. There are multiple events and meetings devoted to this topic in Israel. Yona said, "Not at all. They invited me to some meeting, I told my story, and they never invited me again." Why did activists stop inviting Yona? Did they find his version of the story unpopular? Was he corrupting the "right story" of the Jewish movement? Did they never think in a similar way? These are the questions we encounter when we study social memory, but the answer also depends on our own positionality.

Memory has become one of the most discussed topics in social, cultural and political analyses in the past two to three decades. Scholars observed that memory and history, presumably objective, are constantly contested and rewritten in many parts of the world. It seems increasingly difficult to be certain whose memories are to be understood as "correct" and how history should be interpreted (Halbwachs 1992; Nora 1989; Huyssen 2003). In this situation, the narratives of the states and social groups which have the most power, including economic power, become dominant and thus function as regimes of truth, in terms of Foucault (1995, 1990) or hegemonic narratives, in terms of Gramsci (1992). What to remember and what to forget is determined not only by the natural significance of certain facts but also by cues in the social and political context of the subject (Bernstein 1994; Novik 2000). Studying western liberal states, Foucault named these dominating narratives regimes of truth (Foucault 2003).

[1] I refer to most of my informants by pseudonyms to protect their privacy. In cases I need to use their real name, I ask for their permission. When I cite documents from the open archives, I use their real names.

People internalize these narratives voluntarily because they sound "rational", while deviation from these narratives is, therefore, irrational. Alternative views are frowned upon by other society members and lead to exclusion. While Foucault is interested in functioning of discourses as such, Gramsci concentrates on the source of hegemonic narratives—the class that rationalizes through them its power as legitimate and natural (Gramsci 1992).

Eastern Europe became one of the biggest arenas for competing narratives because of its multiple radical political changes in the 20th century (Kattago 2009; Todorova 2010; Voronina 2018). I focus on the narrative that traces its roots to the Cold War geopolitical struggles and made a significant impact on the memory and, therefore, the scholarship of the USSR in general (Chari and Verderi 2009; Verdery 1996) and former Soviet Jews in particular (Senderovich 2018). The Cold War gave birth to mutually negative concepts about the USA and the Soviet Union, often lacking sophistication and complexity. For the Soviet Union, some common perceptions of the Western liberal discourse were a lack of freedom, discrimination of national minorities, lack of economic opportunities, unification of thinking, and suppression of creativity. The Soviet Union, according to this discourse, lost in the Cold War, and its inferior position became a common sense issue in public knowledge (Reid 2002, 212; Buck-Morss 2000, xii[2]; Chari and Verderi 2009). Socialism lost its legitimacy in the Western liberal regime of truth, and all the practices and identities of Socialism, as products of the wrong system, lost their right to exist for their inferior nature (Dunn 2004; Merkel 2006; Gille 2007).

In this regime of truth the Soviet version of Jewishness is not considered a real version but a total lack thereof—Soviet Jews are perceived solely a victim of the Soviet state that deprived them of the "real" Jewish culture and the people whose Jewishness is defined only by persecution. Thus, for example, studying an image of the Soviet Jew in fiction of Russian Jewish writers in America, Sasha Senderovich argues that the narrative American Jews perpetuate of Soviet Jews basically emphasizes two things: discrimination of people of Jewish origin in Soviet Society and Soviet Jews lack of knowledge and respect for their Jewish religious tradition. Senderovich argues that the term Soviet Jews is "to designate not just a Jewish person from the USSR but rather the discourse created by some American Jews in the course of their civilizing mission, with the participation of some Jews in the Soviet Union. American Jews… wanted to free the "Soviet Jew," who was constructed in a particular way that demanded rescuing[3]. As

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[2] Buck-Morss points out that "the often repeated story of the West`s winning the Cold War and capitalism`s historical triumph over socialism" poses the question since socialist project is "deeply rooted in the Western modernizing tradition." (Buck-Morss 2000, xii)

[3] Many Jewish thinkers throughout history [Talmud scholars and modern philosophers] have argued, from the position of insiders, that Judaism is not a religion (Batnitzky 2011). In the initial phase of Christians drawing the line between two *religions*, Rabbis themselves were trying to construct Judaism as orthodoxy and, therefore, a religion. However, by the time of formulation of rabbinic Judaism in the Babylonian Talmud (3rd-5th century), the Rabbis "rejected this option, proposing instead… that 'an Israelite, even if he [sic] sins [my note: for example, converts to Christianity], remains an Israelite'" (Boyarin 2006, 10). Jews not considering themselves religious, or even those observing other religions, do not stop being Jews. Lvov suggests that Judaism is a religion, "reflecting itself in pseudo-ethnic categories" (2002), meaning that despite the fact ethnic categories are crucial for Judaism, the definition of ethnicity is highly constructivist. Therefore, one could see the idea of Judaism as a religion as a form of European colonization and Christianization. The world religions discourse presumes liberation from Eurocentrism, "since it acknowledges the actual plurality of cultures and of civilizing process"(Masuzawa 2005, 13). However, this discourse is a product of a modern regime of knowledge and casts doubt on this supposed liberation

part of this rescue, they would civilize the "Soviet Jew" in their own image" (Senderovich 2018, 103). While Soviet Jews constituted a large part of Soviet intelligentsia and shared its general values, such as education, critical thinking and passion for Great Russian culture (Kostyrchenko 2009; Slezkine 2004; Lvov 1996)[4], according to this narrative, they are merely a victim of the Soviet regime. Senderovich argues this picture is not complete, "The wide participation of Jews in different levels of Soviet government, especially in the early Soviet period when the Soviet nationalities policy was devised and implemented, paradoxically made Jews both the subjects and the agents of such internal colonization[5] within the Soviet Union itself. Subsequently, the widespread participation of Jews in Soviet society as members of its highly skilled professional classes turned many Soviet Jews into what could at one and the same time be seen both as a persecuted minority and as cultural elite—a phenomenon that Larissa Remennick has termed, paradoxically yet crucially, a "discriminated elite." Jews in North America, however, were largely unaware of the complex elite status of Soviet Jews: because they perceived Soviet Jews only or largely as a persecuted minority" (Senderovich 2018, 102, Remennick 2007, 31).

This perception became the "right" memory of the Soviet Jewry held to the present day, certainly in public discourse and largely in academia as well. Jewish cultural revival and emigration from the USSR in the 1960s to the 1980s became a battle of mainly two national narratives, American and Israeli versions. Dina Zisserman-Brodsky names them respectively as the Sovietological "totalitarian" and traditional "Zionist." Sovietologists explain the Jewish revival as a pragmatic attempt of the persecuted minority to escape from the USSR to anywhere else. Zionists see the revival as Soviet Jewish activists' interest in the ideology of Zionism (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005).

As we see in both of these approaches, based on dominating national memories, there is no room given to analyze the Soviet Jews as a product of the Soviet system. An emphasis is made

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(Asad 1993, Masuzawa 2005). She asks instead, on what moral and ideological grounds the pluralist doctrine is based. Europeans were always the ones who studied other societies. By exploring differences and similarities between Christianity and other *great religions,* Europeans were developing their own identity. Because the notion of religion has a strong connection with Christianity, it "facilitated the adaptation of Christian absolutism to the modern reality" (Masuzawa 2005, 119). Existence of other worldviews became bearable to Europeans as long as they had familiar principles in their cores. This way Christianity, on the one hand, ceased considering all other religions as "Satan`s empire", while, on the other hand, maintained its status as the only correct [e.g. universal] religion (Masuzawa 2005, 119).

[4] Yuri Slezkine has collected statistics showing the status of Jews in the Soviet Union by the 1980s. At the end of the 1980s, 99 percent of all Jews lived in cities (compared to 85 percent of Russians). Being an urban citizen in the USSR differed significantly from being a rural citizen. It meant not only a huge gap in terms of access to various resources, but also a gap in status. "The proportion of employed college graduates among them [Jews] was 64 percent (compared to 15 percent for the Russians); and the number of "scientific workers" per 10,000 people was 530 (compared to 50 for the Russians)" (Slezkine 2004, 330). "The top five occupations for Russians were metal workers (7.2 percent of the total employed), motor vehicle drivers (6.7 percent), engineers (5.1 percent), tractor and combine drivers (2.4 percent), and 'nonmanual workers with unspecified specialty' (2.4 percent). The top five occupations for Jews were engineers (16.3 percent), physicians (6.3 percent), scientific personnel (5.3 percent), primary and secondary schoolteachers (5.2 percent), and chief production and technical managers (3.3 percent)" (Slezkine 2004, 330).

[5] The term is coined by Alexander Etkind (2011).

on the migration, while practices, such as learning Hebrew, Jewish history and sacred texts, publishing samizdat, performing *purimspiels*, etc are considered just a preparatory part of the emigration rather than a unique product of the late Soviet culture. In contrast to these two approaches, Zisserman-Brodsky suggests that we approach the Jewish revival as part of the dissent in the Soviet Union in response to Soviet limitations on freedom. In a way, her approach could be understood as Sovietological as well. It helps one to highlight the Jewish practices themselves as opposed to the process of emigration, however, her evaluation of the relationship between the Soviet Jews and the Soviet state as solely antagonist is one of the Sovietologists'.

An approach that sees Soviet Jews as a product of the Soviet system would study the Jewish movement in the USSR as a result of internalization of Soviet values such as a high priority on education, specifically philosophic knowledge, and comparatively little interest in material goods. This internalization was harmonious in some respects, antagonistic in other respects, and everything in between. This approach would also pay attention to the movement's infrastructure, largely provided (intentionally and unintentionally) by the Soviet Union itself as opposed to repeatedly mentioning the aid of American Jews and Israel. I am talking about such privileges as the provision of basic needs, an abundance of free time, and low cost of travel across the Soviet Union. These aspects supporting a possible alternative narrative, continuously come up in my fieldwork, when informants talk about their everyday experiences. However, when they try to think of themselves historically (Crane 1996), they conceptualize their experience through clichés of dominating and socially acceptable narratives. I see here an example of Paul Connerton's power of habit. An ability to shape thoughts into language is a bodily practice, just as the ability to read, write or ride a bicycle: it is highly habitual. Even a scholar, trying to find the most accurate language for a complicated phenomenon, does not always win the struggle for precision. "Absolutely new is inconceivable", says Connerton: old clichés with somewhat satisfactory accuracy are ready-made explanations for speakers to make sense of the world. Thus, not only do metaphors become clichés, but the very logic of a narrative could become a cliché. "The oral history of subordinate groups will produce another type of history: one in which not only will most of the details be different, but in which the very construction of the meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home" (Connerton 1989, 19).

Exodus Metaphor

The idea of liberation from Egyptian slavery, the Exodus, is a leitmotif of the Jewish tradition. Every year Jews celebrate Passover, the main holiday of Judaism and Jewish tradition. The holiday commemorates the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The Exodus did not necessarily lead to better conditions since afterwards Jews had to wander through the desert with minimal to no food or water. Despite all the hardships of wandering, the event is memorized as a relief from slavery and acquisition of freedom. The narrative of the holiday became not only a uniting tradition but also a powerful metaphor for the rest of Jewish history (Smola 2015).

The metaphor of Exodus has become a cliché in scholarship, fiction and especially public writing on practices and events I examine in the dissertation which are usually referred to as the "Jewish movement." My informants sometimes use the Exodus in their narratives along with other metaphors of freedom. However, here lies a paradox. The narrative of the Exodus suggests that freedom came only after Jewish people were released from Egypt by the pharaoh. When taken literally, the metaphor is applied by inattentive external observers to the Jewish departure from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, in casual conversations my informants enjoy recounting the years of "slavery", which they remember as the most meaningful, productive, inspiring, and fun times in their lives. Using various metaphors of life, they mention that they felt alive back then. Why, then, is the metaphor of Exodus simultaneously felt to be so relevant? And where should we look for the origin of liberation?

I claim that liberation happened within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, rather than outside of them. And I will show how this experience was connected to the acquisition of "Jewish knowledge." Analyzing my ethnographic and archival materials, I will show that the familiar Western liberal narrative of the Soviet Jews as "escapees" from "Soviet slavery" to the Western and Israeli "freedom" is misleading and a product of popular discourse on socialism shaped by the Cold War. Individuals' experiences of freedom took place not only due to the external support of the powerful state of Israel and other Western countries, but also due to internal resources. I will study factors that made the experience of freedom possible in the late Soviet context. Among these factors is a relative lack of state and institutional control over "Jewish practices and knowledge." Another important factor is the feeling of participation in a global mission, such as developing pride in Jewish origin, creating a Jewish homeland, reviving a traditional lifestyle, and returning to the *Garden of Eden*. Equally significant are the cultural resources, such as the values of intellectualism, passionate engagement and inquisitiveness characteristic of Soviet intelligentsia (Tromly 2013, Yurchak 2006, Volkov 1996). I will also discuss the fact that freedom is experienced in the late socialist context differently than it is generally conceptualized in literature on political movements. Usually left out from analysis is a relative economic freedom enabled by the Socialist state. And, finally, the economic and moral support of the State of Israel and the Western countries created the context for this freedom to take place.

In my dissertation, I will explore a type of freedom available to Jews who chose to pursue certain Jewish practices in the late Soviet period. However, I believe that this groups' case is only one example of a broader phenomenon wherein a particular type of freedom emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s under late socialism (e.g. freedom of being *vnye* in Yurchak 2006; Ninetto 2001).

The Fieldwork

I did my main fieldwork in the academic year of 2013/2014, however, I began meeting with potential informants long before that, in 2007, when I wrote my Master's thesis at the European University at St. Petersburg. In the years 2013 and 2014 I spent eight months in Israel and five months in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the summer of 2012 I went to Israel for a preliminary six-week fieldwork trip. Both times I stayed in Jerusalem, but I spoke to informants

all over Israel, including cities and surrounding areas of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa as well as several Jewish settlements.

The materials I use include 130 interviews with nearly 90 informants. Most of my interviewees were participants in "Jewish practices" in the 1970s and 1980s. Informants comprised various positions and levels of involvement in the practices: from leaders and famous teachers to active learners and merely those who learned some Hebrew in preparation for emigration. They include representatives of various groups, both religious and non-religious. Most of them currently live in Israel, though I have some interviews for comparison with those ones who either stayed in Russia or emigrated to the United States. I held some interviews with their children for an additional perspective on family life. I performed interviews with six people, who officially studied Hebrew and Jewish disciplines at universities. Some of them later taught Hebrew at *The Higher School of the KGB* or collaborated with the KGB to varying extents, and, are therefore, perceived by Jews who participated in unofficial Jewish practices as enemies, who operated as part of the punitive organ. Among the interviewees who are experts in particular issues examined, are Yakov Kedmi, an employee of the Israeli Liason Bureau (a governmental organization that maintained contact with Jews of the Eastern block and facilitated their immigration to Israel through special operations); Vladimir Tumarkin, an employee of the Department of Ideology of the Communist party in the late 1980s who was in charge of investigating the issue of "Jewish activists"; Lyudmila Alexeeva, a famous Soviet dissident; and Adolf Shayevich, the official Rabbi of the Moscow synagogue since 1980.

I utilize my observations of public events devoted to the "Jewish movement in the USSR", such as the 2007 Sefer conference roundtable, multiple events and lessons in Judaism at the Russian library in Jerusalem, lessons Talmud in Machanaim, etc. I was a participant observer of everyday life for the former Soviet Jews', especially during Shabbats and holidays, when public transportation in Israel does not function and I had to stay in place overnight.

Finally, I use materials from *The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People* at Herbew University in Jerusalem, *The Memorial Society Archive* in Moscow and *The Archive of the VAAD of Russia*, also in Moscow. The video and audio archives at the *American Jewish Historical Society* significantly enhanced my understanding of the Jewish revival. My archival sources include Soviet Jews' letters addressed to their friends who had already left for Israel; pieces of samizdat periodicals (unofficial publications about Jews, Jewish history, religion and communities); photographs; and finally videotapes of the Soviet Jewish life made by American tourists as well as immediate audio interviews given by these tourists to Western media.

Chapters Overview

Chapter 1 looks at different types of groups that pursued "Jewish practices", and shows that they varied in goals, values and leadership. In the scholarly and public discourse, the phenomenon that I analyze is usually conceptualized as a "Jewish movement" and is linked to a more prominent concept of Jewish emigration from the USSR. However, I argue that the term "movement" has connotations with so-called political and social movements, and, therefore, does not adequately describe this phenomenon. In fact, the Soviet Jews explicitly avoided belonging to any kind of a common "movement" because such belonging connoted to them

one's membership in "a party" and a principle of "party unity"—something they despised. The term movement may also suggest the goal of united emigration—something that was not necessarily central to this phenomenon. By preferring the term "Jewish practices" and "Jewish knowledge" to the term "movement", I suggest a shift in emphasis away from a common organizational unity of this phenomenon and the alleged goal of emigration.

Chapter 2 contains informants narratives, which cohesively formulate a specific feeling associated with "Jewish practices" in the Soviet Union. This feeling is characterized by my informants as *exodus, being alive, real life, falling in love, getting high, being fulfilled, feeling lightness and transparency, etc*. Trying to make sense of this feeling, some informants call it "freedom." Analyzing this specific type of freedom, I show that the creation of a *new Jewish person* (an ancient Jew or a healthy and strong modern Israeli) in the Soviet Union was minimally structured by the Jewish professional, religious and political institutions that were present in the Western and Israeli world. The high level of freedom from Jewish normativity allowed for the "Jewish practices" to be experienced almost as an artistic act.

Chapter 3 explores which ideological and economic resources in the Soviet context inadvertently enabled the development of these practices and pursuits of Jewish knowledge. I develop a concept of "creation of extraordinary social milieus" that I understand as a creative practice formed by collective construction of a new social space. In contrast to the dominating approach to studying Jewish milieu as non- or even anti-Soviet, I claim that this milieu, just as some other seemingly anti-Soviet milieus heavily drew on the basic Soviet values of striving to become someone special and completing something meaningful in one's life. In addition, I show how the unique Soviet combination of low pressure for consumerism, state provision for basic needs, support of the working class, and high value of erudition and education unintentionally created a space for effective learning of Judaism and the development of Jewish subjectivities.

In Chapter 4 I demonstrate how the unique regime of citizenship applied solely to Soviet Jews created conditions for an experience of a special freedom. Unique positionality in the geopolitical space, created by historical dispersion of the Jews around the world, high number of Jewish US citizens, competition between capitalist and socialist systems, and demographic request of a developing nation state of Israel in combination with the Soviet people's "narcotic"-like curiosity of an imaginary West, amplified in Jews by a mutual mistrust with the Soviet State provided a unique context for the story of Jewish Soviet Exodus to take shape in world history.

Chapter 1
Reassembling the Jewish Movement in the Late Soviet State: The Character of the Phenomenon

There was such a strange train that departed from one station, has not arrived to any other station, it was not clear at all whether it would arrive after all, but on the other hand, everyone was on the way.
--Chaim

In the dissertation I intend to study an explosion of interest of the Soviet Jews in the 1970s and 1980s in various Jewish activities and knowledge that were not a part of the Soviet routine life and knowledge under late socialism. Most of these practices were pursued in private apartments and included the collective study of the Hebrew language, Jewish history and traditions, and sacred texts; the production of non-official Jewish magazines (*samizdat*) not censored by the state ideologists; collective celebration of Jewish holidays and the Sabbath (shabbat); and communicative practices about leave-taking (*ot"ezd*), e.g. emigration from the Soviet Union. These practices by themselves would not have interested the Soviet authorities much, but some (limited number of) people involved with them were also involved in more provocative practices, such as protests in the public spaces, that were understood as a declaration of disloyalty to the Soviet Union. Most of the people involved in the practices I discuss, applied for exit visas to emigrate from the Soviet Union to Israel. Young people, mostly of ethnically Jewish origin, but also their non-Jewish spouses and sometimes Soviet citizens with no Jewish roots at all, gathered in groups in private apartments to pursue these practices. These groups had different leaders, values, activities, and even conceptualizations of Jewishness. They did not have strict boundaries and at times overlapped. There is no doubt that something, let us call it an interest in Jewish activity of some kind, unites all of these groups and even disparate individual practitioners into one phenomenon, though any attempts to name a more specific uniting cause or characteristic risks obscuring integral parts of the phenomenon. The groups, individuals and practices had "no one thing in common" though "related to one another in many different ways" (Wittgenstein 2009, 35e). "…We see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein 2009, 36e). Wittgenstein suggests calling such a phenomenon a *family resemblance.*

The phenomenon I explore is typically called "the Jewish movement", both in public and academic discourses. However, given, its non-homogenous nature, I would argue that this term obscures rather than enhances our understanding. When I ask my informants to tell me about their experience in the Jewish movement, without asking specific questions, I sometimes have a feeling that they tell me the stories of different movements. Some narrate their emigration to Israel, some reflect on how they began to observe Judaism, some recollect the stories and practices that led to the development of their Jewish self-consciousness and pride, and some

reminisce primarily on accounts of specific successful projects, e.g. the organization of intensive Hebrew study summer school, the launch of uncensored journal production, or the initiation of official academic research committees on Jewish topics. One might think that all of them participated in essentially different movements, or not even movements for that matter. The use of the term "movement" does not seem to bother my informants/participants, because everyone uses it in their own way. Definitions vary from opposition to a political regime to inspiring collective activities. The purpose of movement is discussed and argued in multiple public and academic texts, yet the term "movement" itself is not problematized.

Learning about any movement, the first intention we have is to ask, what the movement's purpose is, however in case of the Jewish movement the definite purpose is extremely vague. Although narrators of the movement (both participants and observers) identify practices listed above as a movement, they disagree on the meaning of the activities. Currently existing approaches to the movement emphasize either the Jews' pursue of an escape **from** the "Soviet prison", or emigration **to** the Jewish motherland Israel, or development of Jewish freedoms in the USSR.

An ambiguity of the term has been discussed by Dina Zisserman-Brodsky. She describes the tension between the Sovietological "totalitarian" (Zaslavsky and Brym 1983) and traditional "Zionist" (Ro'i 1991; Pinkus 1993) frameworks of the Jewish movement, which belong to correspondingly American and Israeli schools. These frameworks determine how scholars answer the questions of which phenomenon might be considered the Jewish movement, when the movement emerged and what its character was.

Sovietologists tend to see the movement as a result of a general failure of the Soviet project. For them the Jewish movement is the escape of an oppressed minority from the hated USSR. They connect its beginning with a political opportunity such as partial liberalization [de-Stalinization] and the creation of an institution of Jewish emigration in the Soviet Union in 1967 when the Prime Minister Kosygin publicly declared that the Soviet Union would not impede the reunion of Soviet Jews with their relatives in Israel (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005). Sovietologists argue that the Jewish movement "was not Zionist, since the majority of emigrants had not chosen Israel as their destination" (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005, 130). Israel did not play the main role in the orientations of the movement; it solely embodied the West and, unlike other countries, was always ready to accept immigrants.

Zionists see the movement primarily as a result of inspiration to return to the Jewish national homeland. According to this model, Israel plays the central role in Soviet-Jewish life and in the formation of Jewish identity. Rather than external pressures (such as the policy of the Soviet Union) being the main reason for the nationalist awakening, it was an "immanent process." The very term "emigration" is never used within this school of thought: "*Aliyah*" and "repatriation" (lifting and returning to the historical motherland respectively) are used instead[6]. Unlike sovietologists, who see the movement emergence as a Soviet political opportunity of the late 1960s, Zionists trace its origins to the founding of the state of Israel in 1948. They see the difference between the movement of the 1940s and 1960s only in scale: "from islands of Zionism into an organized movement with a large aggregate of participants" (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005, 122).

[6] I will further use the more neutral words, such as "leave (-taking)" and "emigration".

Zisserman-Brodsky points out that both of these approaches equate the Jewish movement with Jewish emigration. In contrast, she offers an alternative perspective, of the Jewish movement as a social/political movement. The commonplace of all the texts about the Jewish movement became a motto of some of its participants *we did not want to change anything, it was not our country and we just wanted to leave it*. In this sense, Zisserman-Brodsky places the Jewish movement firmly in the context of the dissident movements and nationalist movements. She emphasizes that "opposition to the existing political order, as well as collective efforts to change this order, i.e. public expression of this opposition, was the major constituent element of all nationalist movements in the USSR", including the Jewish movement (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005, 123). She specifies that "those who made upon the government unrestricted demands for their 'legitimate national rights' broke the national Soviet approach to the relations between authority and citizens" (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005, 124).

All of the frameworks described above—an escape from the USSR, a special attitude toward Israel, and a dissident spirit—are legitimate and appeared in my fieldwork. However, I consider that these explanations should be treated as reflecting the multiplicity of reasons that caused and conditioned the Jewish activity, rather than theoretical models of the movement as a whole. We will further see that all of these elements coexisted. The question is: why are such different processes united under one term--"the Jewish movement"? And does that not obscure one's understanding of a phenomenon in some significant ways? How do those who do not problematize the concept of Jewish movement define the basis of unity of all its parts? Why did a concept of movement survive? Is there any epistemological utility in it, or is it merely a product of current power/ knowledge regimes that understand resistance as the most valuable form of human agency? If indeed the concept of "movement" is not in fact useful, why is it still used both in scholarship and everyday discourse? Do different groups take issue with being grouped under the same agenda? Why do these groups, even those that criticize one another, agree to be understood as a part of the same movement? I believe that we must look beyond homogenizing statements about the Jewish movement, and study its diverse constituent groups in greater detail.

The 2012 volume *The Jewish Movement in the Soviet Union* marked a new approach to the Jewish movement. Edited by the Hebrew University professor Yaacov Ro'i, the one classified by Zisserman-Brodsky as a representative of a Zionist approach, it was the most comprehensive academic publication on the topic to date, and for the first time, analyzed the discursive formation of the concept of "the Jewish movement" itself. "I have decided to use this term—rather than the "Jewish national movement", the "Zionist movement", or "the movement for Aliya"—for emigration to Israel, which it was in its initial stages. For it was not a national movement in the classical sense of the word, and it digressed from its main purpose—the struggle for emigration to Israel—to also cover cultural, educational, publications, and even religious activity… Be that as it may, it was clearly a movement—a conglomerate of people capable of coordinating their activities on the basis of a common worldview or guiding ideas to attain specific goals…" (Ro'i 2014, 1). Ro'i makes an important step away from calling the movement Zionist, which, he hopes, allows him to avoid the problem of the multiplicity of groups, ideas and practices that constituted the movement. However, his insistence upon the underlying unity of the character of the phenomenon, as a "movement", perpetuates the problems I have discussed. First, on what grounds can something that has such different

purposes as repatriation to the historical motherland, development of the Jewish culture in the USSR and revival of the religious tradition be called a single movement? Second, what exactly were the common worldviews, guiding ideas and goals he refers to? And, third, in what sense can such diverse activities been regarded as "coordinated"?

From the first sentence of the book, Ro'i takes an established term of "movement" for granted, and it constrains him to write about the phenomenon in a particular way that does not necessarily lead a reader to a clear understanding of this phenomenon. It determines the logic of narration, the boundaries of the phenomenon, types of activities and agents to include. Thus, for example, the second chapter is called "Strategies and Tactics." Indeed, if there is a movement, the most logical thing is to describe its strategies and tactics. However, if there are strategies and tactics, it necessarily means that there is an aim which is supposed to be achieved *through* these strategies and tactics. Now Ro'i is obliged to find such an aim despite his original intention to avoid a reductionist concept. Thus, Ro'i says, "With the creation of the All-Union Coordinating Committee in 1969, a semi-institutionalized framework was created that enabled activists from different cities to discuss how to proceed conjointly to attain their **common purpose of emigration to Israel.** They elaborated strategies and tactics that were to provide the guidelines for the movement for almost two decades. Likewise, the instruments of activity they resolved to adopt and pursue characterized the movement throughout its existence" (Ro'i 2014, 46). From this passage we learn that 1) the movement had a unifying purpose—to **emigrate** to **Israel**, and 2) the movement had a central organ which was in a position to instruct activists and 3) the movement had shared strategies and tactics that were utilized by all throughout the movement's existence.

Speaking about such strategies, Ro'i starts with the case of the *samoletchiki*, who planned to hijack a plane to escape to Israel in 1970. They were caught by the police in the airport, sentenced to long prison terms and two of them were even sentenced to death, though later the death sentences were reversed under international pressure. Then Ro'i writes about collective petitions, strikes and demonstrations. All these conventional strategies are followed by the practices of publishing *samizdat*, studying Hebrew, running seminars and symposia, and holding cultural and festive occasions. A composition of the book follows perfectly the logic of narration of a movement, but not the phenomenon discussed. Extraordinary public events such as the hijacking case, demonstrations and hunger strikes were not the most frequent activity and surely not the uniting one. While some groups saw these practices as the most important, others would participate in some of them, such as signing petitions, only to save their loved ones and some groups even considered these "strategies" not sophisticated enough in the Soviet context, or even harmful for the Jews. In fact, further on Ro'i names the practice of studying Hebrew as the most widespread and uniting practice, "The study of Hebrew was inevitably a main feature of the Jewish movement" (Ro'i 2014, 73). I find this statement reasonable, but in that case why is the main activity preceded by occasional and controversial ones? I suggest that Ro'i is caught by the framework that inevitably follows the use of the term movement. Holding demonstrations and hunger strikes, signing petitions and otherwise publicly expressing the protest are definitive methods of movements—therefore, they should be always mentioned first. These methods were not the most natural and even, as Yuli Kosharovsky, a movement participant, points out, not the most effective within the Soviet order:

Activism, the action genre was much enjoyed by the Western journalists… We often wrote papers [letters of protest and petitions] not to get a support from the addressed authorities—nobody seriously expected an answer from most of the Soviet institutions and many international organizations—but to mobilize the Jewish and international public to support our struggle. Not once did we try collective visits to the institutions of authority—the ministry of internal affairs, the Party Central Committee, the Supreme Council, the ministry of foreign affairs, etc. these visits were often supported by sitting demonstrations and collective hunger strikes, which often led to administrative detention for 15 days. It was an effective action which usually got a lot of mass media attention (Kosharovsky 2008: 282-283).

As we see from the citation, the Western public was excited by loud expressions of disloyalty to the Soviet system. Given what little effect they had within the Soviet system, would these actions of open opposition have been avoided, were it not for Western attention and support for Soviet Jews? What was the point of "tilting at windmills"? Practices that were seen as true expressions of human agency by the supporters in the West were not necessarily the practices that were considered an expression of agency in the late socialist society. The logic by which the pursuit of freedom is carried out through the existing political process and embodied in the legalization of identities and rights, did not work in the Soviet Union, despite an extent to which public protest has a power over people's narratives. In interviews I often observe a tension between the specificity of the Jewish movement's activities and common assumptions about what social movements should look like; interviewees feel the need to justify themselves as movement participants if they did not partake in conventional practices of resistance. I would argue that my informants are responding to dominant assumptions that agency equals resistance. Thus, if informants' activities were not an expression of resistance, the Jewish movement does not deserve to be considered a significant phenomenon. This tradition of thinking is rooted in Kant's conceptualization of moral autonomy.

According to Kant, moral principles are an intrinsic quality. An attempt to follow external good principles or someone's decent example is not guaranteed to prevent evil acts. Kant states that the maxims of good and bad are not inborn, but acquired through life. However, these maxims are adopted out of subjective reason and this reason is inscrutable, thus not socially developed. On the other hand, "nature is not to blame for it [being a bad person]… the human being is alone its author" (Kant 1999). From his list of peoples' drives (animality, humanity, and personality) it follows that only the third one, the "susceptibility to respect for the moral law as of itself a sufficient incentive to the power of choice" leads to good acts. Both nature (animality) and culture (humanity) lead to the bestial vices of gluttony, lust and wild lawlessness and the vices of culture, such as envy, ingratitude, joy in others' misfortunes (Kant 1999). Kant concludes that a real human is supposed to get rid of any external constrains, both natural and cultural, or at least to resist them.

Webb Keane (2006) claims that continuation of an order is not seen as an action of real agents because of the certain view on historical progress. The Westerners have an idea of what is modern and what is not, and agency is revealed where people seem to pursue the change to what is more modern—namely an intent of self-transformation. The choice to obey the rulers, orders, institutions, and traditions is a displacement of agency. History is understood as a moral

liberation, in which "progress is not only a matter of improvements in technology, economic well-being, or health but is also, and perhaps above all, about human emancipation and self-mastery" (Keane 2006).

Analyzing Muslim women's religious movements, Saba Mahmood finds it problematic to define agency as "a capacity to realize one's own interest against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will or other obstacles" (Mahmood 2001, 206). This approach couples the notions of self-realization and autonomous will, as well as agency and emancipatory politics. It places the political and moral autonomy in the sphere of power. However, does the piano player who maintains a strict discipline in order to achieve mastery lack agency? Mahmood suggests thinking "of agency not as a synonym to resistance to relations of domination, but as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create" (Mahmood 2001, 203). Thus, she argues that agency is not always utilized to cause change, but sometimes as a means of a continuation of order.

Lila Abu-Lughod studied Bedouin women, who resisted the Muslim tradition of modesty by wearing bikinis. Wearing bikini underwear is considered immodest for Muslim women even if it is hidden from the public eye under one's clothing. Yet some Bedouin women decided to express their resistance by wearing such provocative underwear. Using this example, Abu-Lughod shows how resistance is romanticized in the public discourse as a true expression of will or agency. However, she suggests this case is an example of "backing… into wider and different sets of authority structures" (Abu-Lughod 1990, 52). In resisting the traditional culture of elderly Bedouins, women experience the influence of other structures, that of Western capitalism and consumerism.

Yurchak wrote that agency can be "entailed in acts that are neither about change nor about continuity, but about introducing minute internal displacements and mutations into the discursive regime in which they are articulated. Such acts may appear inconsequential to most participants and remain invisible to most observers" (Yurchak 2006, 28). Many representatives of the last Soviet generation claimed to be uninterested in anything political and instead focused on the "deep truth" of issues common to all humanity (Yurchak 2008). Often they were engaged in various aesthetic pursuits such as, for example, necrorealism[7]. Instead of talking in political terms, necrorealists chose the nonverbal awkward languages that the state could not distinguish and therefore could not control. Though these languages took on strange forms reminiscent of art, necrorealists did not describe themselves as artistic performers. Their "weird" behavior was a part of their everyday lives. Necrorealists wanted "to explore alternative subjectivities that were radically different from a regular Soviet person" and looked for situations "that broke the frame of familiar perception" (Yurchak 2008, 201, 208). They were looking for forms of life that differed from the ordinary Soviet existence. Although their practitioners claimed them to be apolitical, such pursuits can have highly political effects (Yurchak 2009).

In his review of Sessil Vassie's *For Your and Our Freedom,* Marco Clementi questions the applicability of the term "movement" to the dissidents practices in the late Soviet period

[7] The necrorealists' absurd events materialized suddenly and rushed by quickly, giving their witnesses no time to understand what had just happened. Naked men ran away in different directions, a person beaten by violent men with sticks turned out to be a dummy, and then all abruptly disappeared; and so on (Yurchak 2008).

(Clementi 2015). Clementi builds his argument through the idea of organization. A movement is a form of a popular union with intentions to change reality. Its purpose is to create change but it cannot be considered a movement without leadership and cohesive organization. Clementi points out that this unity was missing among the Soviet dissidents, who were divided into disparate groups and often acted separately. Despite all the differences between the dissidents' case and the so-called Jewish movement, the same argument of an absent cohesion is relevant.

The general issue with the term "movement" in the Soviet context seems to be easier to resolve in the case of dissidents than in the case of Soviet Jews. Clementi can avoid using the term "movement" and remain clear about what phenomenon he is referring by simply saying "dissidents." In the case of Soviet Jewish activities finding terminology to make sense is harder. Aside from "movement", there has been suggested no other general term that can unite all the multifarious practices I describe. Indeed, the term "Jews" would have to include all the Jews of the Soviet Union, whether they were interested in the Jewish practices or not. The term "*Aliyah*", used by some of the movement participants, incorrectly presumes that emigration to Israel was the primary goal of this sociality. The term "refuseniks*"* or, in Russian, *otkazniki* (literally meaning a person who was refused permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union[8]), unites individuals solely based on their bad luck in applying for exit visas. The term "Jewish dissidents" presents two main problems: first, it connotes an association with the dissident movement from which many Jews distanced themselves; secondly, it was rejected by those who did not view their actions as a confrontation with the Soviet system.

Highly refreshing theoretical conceptualization of the phenomenon has recently been made by the historian Galina Zelenina. She demonstrates how all the narratives of the Soviet Jewish movement are endowed with the pathos of heroism. "Even academic texts commonly discuss "heroic Russian Jews similar to the Maccabees", "strong in their loyalty to Zionism", "fighting for freedom against violent oppression of the Soviet regime" (Zelenina 2018, 212). Dissatisfied with the academic tendency to borrow "heroic" narratives of the Jewish movement from the ideologized public discourse, she aims to "transcend the boundaries of both the heroic narrative and traditional binary oppositions (mostly "Soviet vs. anti-Soviet" and Soviet vs. Jewish")" (Zelenina 2018, 208). Zelenina intends to "depoliticize and even de-ideologize" the image of the Jewish movement in the USSR and focus on "social, recreational and emotional aspects of the Jewish movement" (Zelenina 2018, 213). She describes the subjects of her study as "everyone, who in this or that way participated in new Jewish life": "refuseniks, "*podavanti*" (those who applied for an exit visa) and "*nepodavanti*" (those who did not apply for an exit visa), the secular and religious, the "politically-oriented" , those who fought for emigration from the USSR (in collaboration with the dissidents or independently), and the "culturally-oriented", who cultivated Jewish identity by teaching Hebrew and organizing various cultural-enlightening events." "The level of involvement and activity of these and those participants …, their ideological and political positions could have differed significantly. However, together they created a common social network—"the public of *svoi* (ours, us)", whose unity was founded on

[8] "The word "*otkaznik*" became known to the public in the beginning of the 1970s. In 1971 Michael Sherburn, a well known activist of the British movement in support to the Soviet Jews, in a conversation with Gabriel Shapiro heard the word "*otkaznik*", related to the word "*otkaz*". He translated it into English and constructed the term "refusenik", related to the English word "refusal". International journalists picked up and popularized it" (Morozova 2011, 12)

personal connections, common interests and attitudes towards several basic things (Soviet power, Jewry, Israel)" (Zelenina 2018, 214). I would slightly alter this description of the Jewish "*svoi*" by suggesting (and demonstrating through various examples) that the attitude towards these several basic things was not necessarily congruous among different representatives of the public. What is correct though is that these things "basic things" were indeed basic and necessary for individuals to reflect upon them in order to formulate their social positions.

Zelenina suggests naming the subject she studies "refuseniks' milieu" (*otkaznicheskaia sreda*). Despite the fact that the term enlarges the boundaries of the phenomenon, its definition has both advantages and disadvantages. In contrast to the category of "refuseniks", the new term widens the boundaries of the demographics to include all the groups listed above. On the other hand, in distinction to the term "movement", it stresses the sociality aspect rather than the activity aspect. We will further see how sociality plays a crucial role in the late Soviet period in general and particularly in pursuit of what is usually called "alternative/non-Soviet practices." Zelenina's characteristization of this milieu as refuseniks' (*otkaznicheskaia*) is a bit contradictory for me to fully embrace. On the one hand, the semi-rebellious spirit which applicants for an exit visa brought to the milieu spiced things up, and, therefore, made the milieu more romantic for everyone, even those who were not applying to leave at that moment. On the other hand, this way of formulating the subject returns us to both heroic and emigrationist emphases in these practices. The use of this term presumes that the milieu emerged and was perpetuated only due to those people who chose to leave or even only due to those people who chose to leave and were held back by the Soviet authorities with a refuse. Since we will never know what would have happened if the unique possibility of Jewish emigration in the Soviet Union had not been allowed, it remains a matter of scholastic speculation, whether Jewish practices would still have taken place. Taking into account the emergence of other milieus such as the milieus of hippies, milieus of various religions, the milieus of rock musicians and stylization (*stiliagi)*, I tend to think that Jewish practices had all the reasons to emerge regardless of emigration, even if in in a different form. Zelenina's approach shows the Jewish movement as "an episode of the late Soviet history having multiple non-Jewish analogies" (Zelenina 2018, 213), which makes me suspect that she would agree to the perspective in which Jewish practices would emerge whether emigration was allowed or not, and, therefore, some other term for the Jewish milieu should be used.

If we wish to keep the phenomenon as it is currently assembled, we will not find a more accurate term for the components as they are united now are chosen and interpreted to remind of a movement. In *Reassembling the Social,* Bruno Latour argues that the way social scientist see the social, has a particular shape, gradually formed out of various components in accordance to a certain logic and formed into a stabilized assemblage (Latour 2005). In order to break up with a rigid essence, we need to disassemble it into components and connect strands of logic that have the potential to be shaped into other assemblages. If we disassemble the term "Jewish movement" back into practices, ideas and agents, we can reassemble it into multiple other phenomena that better remind us of existing social categories. In this case, one would need to perhaps include practices, ideas and agents from outside of the existing limits of the Jewish movement. In these terms Jews' interest in Soviet Judaism will not differ from their interest in Christianity or it would be impossible to draw a boundary between the openly protesting parts of the Jewish movement and the same parts in the dissidents' movement.

Some part of the movement might remind one of what Alexei Yurchak calls "the publics of *svoi"*, people who neither supported the soviet regime nor opposed it[9], but managed to remain uninterested in politics and be a part of a deterritorialized milieu of the Jewish seminars (Yurchak 2006).

To illustrate the variability of the phenomenon, I will further examine some cases that complicate our understanding of the phenomenon through the optics of movement. Talking with my informants, I felt the energy of youth, excitement, infatuation, discovery and curiosity. Here is an impression of phenomenon I observed through the people I interviewed, an impression of both insider (by the context of origin) and outsider (by the generation and a perspective of a Berkeley anthropologist).

Hebrew and a Lamb Shank

In January of 1970, six Jewish men gathered at an apartment in the newly finished building on Novolesnaya Street, near the Belorussian train station in Moscow. The table was laid with typical dishes for a Russian celebration: perhaps, *Oliv'e* salad, or mushrooms in a cream sauce and, of course, a bottle of vodka. The occasion was the birthday of their friend, Viktor Ful'makht. He was a curious young man. In high school he attended the math club, where he "admired his brilliant classmates from the last row." Later he took part in a literary club held at the kitchen of a private apartment (*kukhonnie posidelki*) and enjoyed the delicacy of poetic forms along with other young poets. At different points such writers as Ioffe, Prigov, Zinik, Faibusovich and Aizenberg attended this particular *kitchen club*.

On that day Ful'makht had a surprise for his friends, and was anticipating the moment when he pulls the rabbit out of the hat. "The rabbit", whose name was Moshe Palkhan, also known as Erik Trakhtman, was born into a Jewish-Israeli family. His mother was sent out from Mandated Palestine to the Soviet Union for excessive communist activity by the British authorities in 1931. His father came to the Soviet Union from Israel out of personal conviction, separately from his mother. Moshe's parents did not speak Hebrew with him, but he later learned the language himself. Ful'makht met Moshe Palkhan through his brother Izia Palkhan, who, just as Viktor, did an internship at the metallurgical factory *Serp i Molot* (Hammer and Sickle). On that day Viktor brought Moshe to his birthday party to surprise his friends with Hebrew sounds and a script, secret symbols that an ordinary Soviet young man would have had no chance to encounter unless he specifically and industriously looked for them. But why would an ordinary Soviet young man, who was taught to appreciate the sophisticated Russian language of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, look for it?

As Viktor Ful'makht described it to me, "some kind of revelation happened at that party, something huge and deep." The language connected acculturated young Muscovite Jewish mathematicians with the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah, with the proud biblical Jews, with intellectual Talmudic giants, or, perhaps, with the strong and healthy image of Israel's first

[9] I mean opposition in a broader sense, because through the years refuseniks developed an official position claiming that they are not interested in changing the soviet system, but would rather leave.

settlers[10]. The encounter was so exciting that friends decided to meet regularly to learn Hebrew together, thus forming one of the first collective Hebrew study group. "Perhaps, we were not the first and the only group, but we definitely did not know of others back then, well, even now", says Viktor Ful'makht. These friends were Leonid Ioffe, Zeev Shakhnovskii, Mikhail Gol'dblat, Izrail Palkhan, Alexei Levin and Beniamin Deborin, the future teachers of Hebrew, who would teach generations of students as well as they were the giants of the non-official Hebrew world in Moscow. In addition to Hebrew classes they were meeting every week and socializing, first, in Russian, then in Hebrew.

> *Izia Palkhan: We would gather at the apartment of Vovulia Shakhnovskii for a bottle [of alcohol] and a lamb shank… and the whole night spoke Hebrew. With songs, girls, radio... and all of that was in Hebrew. Well, we did not always have a lamb shank (laughing)* (Kosharovsky 2008, 212).

Just as in the case of Shakhnovskii's cohort, groups and their participants in the movement were not rigid in worldviews and activities—they changed through the time.

> *Zeev Shakhnovskii: Well, they gathered at my place even before Zionism. We all wanted something else, non-Soviet, we were excited by it… at the same time we were not anti-Soviets [antisovetchiki]. We started gathering at my place in 1969. Gradually our gatherings [posidelki] turned into Jewish ones with a Zionist spirit* (Kosharovsky 2008, 225).

As he became more and more observant Jewish orthodox, Zeev Shakhnovskii eliminated the lamb shank [slaughtered and cooked in an unkosher way] from the gatherings at his apartment. Then he changed the day of gatherings from Saturday to Sunday to respect the shabbat. Shakhnovskii himself started teaching Hebrew in 1971, but gradually he switched to primarily teaching the Torah (Kosharovsky 2008, 223-224).

Jewish groups varied in their values, activities, and conceptualizations of Jewishness. Some of them were interested in organizing seminars on Jewish history, some of them studied the sacred texts, and other understood their objective as primarily changing the policy of Jewish emigration or release of "prisoners of Zion" (people who were presumed to be arrested for their activity in the Jewish movement). They might partially overlap. The same person could teach a Hebrew class and be a student in a class on Torah. Almost everyone in what we call Jewish movement studied Hebrew, however, for some people it was a symbolically important action and for some it was the very essence of their Jewish revival. Some people found signing

[10] The stereotype of a weak and sickly Jew came into being only in the nineteenth century. Ironically, Jewish scholars actively contributed into the development of this image. In addition, many scholars showed that emphasis on the Jewish physical and mental illnesses became central for Zionists (Hart 2007; Efron 2001; El-Haj 2012). They stressed it out of the intention to conceptualize the 'Jewish body' as a problem while offering Zionism as a solution. According to early ideologues, Jews could become healthy and develop a martial spirit only in their own country. The needs of physical labor and state defense were considered capable of developing a Jewish body. "The survival of the race was spoken not just in language of [cultural] purity but in a language of health" (El-Haj 2012, 29). The dominant Zionist idea of uniting "biological" Jews in the land of Israel to cure their bodies led to the intensive study of the Jewish biological self.

petitions the most important activity and some signed them only out of social pressure or a feeling of duty. And as the case above indicates, no groups were stagnant: they developed, changed their orientations, and as such people kept joining and leaving certain groups due to changes in world views and interests.

"Hunveibini" and "Bonzi" in Moscow

Up until 1979 Jews who applied for an exit visa were mostly given a permission to leave the USSR. The authorities hoped to get rid of the most agitated representatives of the Jewish population. However, gradually it became obvious to governing institutions that this rationality was not working as anticipated. Thus, for example, in 1974 a consultant of the Department of Propaganda wrote a secret note to the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. He warned that the idea of letting Jews out of the country was harmful, because it provoked unrest both among the Jews who initially did not intend to leave, and other national minorities. Furthermore, it gave support to Western propaganda that the Socialist project was a failure (Morozov 1998, Document 57, 199). By 1979 it became obvious that letting a small group of activists out of the country was both ineffective and counterproductive, the process of allocating exit visas slowed down significantly. This change in policy resulted in a growth of the number of Jews who applied for an exit visa while remaining the Soviet Union for protracted period of time. Such a situation contributed to the flourishing of Jewish non-Soviet activities of various kinds. Some people lived in a constant depression, because they had broken all connections with the mainstream Soviet society and were ready to start new life somewhere else, yet were delayed from doing so. For others, on the contrary, this opened up new opportunities to pursue fulfilling and stimulating lives as refuseniks (*v otkaze*). In most cases, participants felt both ways at different times.

In 1973 in a group of young and particularly zealous, Moscow-based Jews decided that they were tired of "sitting on their suitcases": the only thing they wanted was to leave for Israel immediately. They had applied for an exit visa quite some time before and decided that they have been waiting for a decision for too long. They "felt lonely" and were afraid of getting stuck in an uncertain situation for years (Kosharovsky 2008, 285). They chose to organize loud protests in the streets, because they wanted to provoke the authorities to make an immediate decision on their exit visa applications. Within two months the group organized five demonstrations, and within one month after the final demonstration, the leader of this group was allowed to leave for Israel. Most of the group's participants were let out soon afterwards (Kosharovsky 2008, 302). "For their military spirit and lack of compromise, this group was called the *hunveibini* [Red Guards, the militant groups of the Cultural revolution in China])" (Kosharovsky 2008, 284).

One might find *hunveibini* the most typical representation of the concept of movement—they seemed to have a concrete goal, they organized public protests in pursuit of this goal. However, how typical and representative were they of the Jewish movement? First, most of their demonstrations numbered five to ten people. Second, most of other groups who took part in some kind of Jewish activity disapproved of the *hunveibini*, since they jeopardized not only

their own safety, but the safety of all the other groups who did not choose "departure at any cost" as their strategy.

At first glance, the *hunveibini* was a group that supports the conventional concept of the Jewish movement, especially within the Zionist framework. Interestingly, Mikhail Babel, who started the initiative and was the first spiritual leader of the group, has broken all connections with his movement companions and has since joined an ultra-religious group in Israel; therefore, currently, depending on the religious community he belongs to, he must more or less question the legitimacy of Zionism and the State of Israel. Perhaps, he found his specific way to reconcile Zionism with the sacred texts? Indeed, what did it mean to be a Zionist? Did it mean a commitment to making *Aliyah*? But what if one merely wanted to escape from the Soviet Union? What if one had both intentions? Did being 'Zionist' mean to fervently study Hebrew and have a warm feeling toward Israel? Or could it mean to move to Israel and keep one's Russian/Soviet culture? What kind of politics should one support in order to be considered a Zionist in the Soviet Period? A widely known member of the *hunveibini* group, Natan Sharansky, claimed to have enjoyed the group's "spirit of freedom and romanticism of fight" (Kosharovsky 2008, 292). This group called the rest of the movement activists, *bonzes*[11], and saw them as consulting Israel on what they could and could not do. While the *Nativ*, the Israeli secret service was helping Soviet Jews in their pursue of *Aliyah*, Israeli diplomatic institutions were against further deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union by support of open expressions of disloyalty by the Soviet Jews. The *hunveibini* stood in opposition to subordination to Israeli diplomatic agendas, while at the same time they did want to leave for Israel. Shall one call this behavior Zionist or anti-Zionist? And can *hunveibini* be considered the part of the same movement as those whom they called bonzes? And how, for that matter, does the division between *hunveibini* and *bonzi* correlate with the following division, the one that took place in Leningrad?

Old refuseniks (*starii otkaz*) and new refuseniks (*novii otkaz)* in Leningrad

As I mentioned before, the Jewish movement consisted of many groups with different values, leaders and activities. For those who tend to see a united movement, these differences might seem negligible, but certain individuals and even whole groups refuse to see them as such.

Misha (Avraam), who now lives in Israel, recalls how at the age of about twelve, he opened the Bible (the New Testament) and was shocked to learn that the whole thing was about Jews. Two presumptions caused his puzzlement; first, that the Bible was a Christian book and, second, that Christians were all anti-Semites, and therefore, the Bible could not be a book about Jews. Misha remembers having thousands of questions and nobody to ask. Later his good friend made a decision to emigrate to Israel and started attending various seminars. This is how Misha finally located people who could answer his questions. He himself joined the seminars on Jewish history and Hebrew in 1981 and "was not going to leave for anywhere." Misha shared his view of the Jewish world in Leningrad at that time as divided into *old otkaz* (old refuseniks) a

[11] Bonze - Japanese or Chinese Buddhist monk.

new otkaz (new refuseniks). He said that the main goal of an old otkaz was *Aliyah*. The new otkaz was opposed to this goal and aimed instead for a return of the Jews to the observance of ancient Jewish laws and traditions.

> *Misha: I am talking about the beginning of the 1980s. One who began getting interested in Jewish matters quickly found out about one category of people – an old otkaz. These were people who we did not like very much, because they were too mercantile [Sasha means they were interested merely in emigration and in the economic benefits of Jewish activism since they attracted the attention and resources of international tourists] … They despised us, and we despised them.*
>
> *Olesya: Really? Specifically despised?*
>
> *Misha: Well, it did not turn into any squabbles, but we did not have anything to do with them. They learned their Hebrew, hosted foreign visitors, sold cameras – it was important for them. They indeed were fired from their jobs [and remained in this state for a long time], so they needed something to live on and teach Hebrew. But as for sharing anything with them, we did not.*

Misha, of course, takes the view of the new *otkaz* to a radical level. However, from this excerpt one can see that people who are usually united in the same movement did not see themselves as having similar interests. The old *otkaz* also talk about the new *otkaz* sarcastically. In 1980 Pavel, who lived in Leningrad, wrote a letter to Serguey, who had been given an exit visa the year before and had left for Israel. "There is a new group of young people who disagree with our approach to the Jewish question. They pray instead."

I must clarify that the role of Israel was perceived in very different ways among these groups. While for both of these groups Israel was associated with Jewishness, the revelation of the new *otkaz* was that Aliyah was not the sole way to be Jewish, and emigration to a country other than Israel was not in fact a failure to express real Jewishness. Members of the old *otkaz*, of course, emigrated to different places as well, but a discourse of shame and even disdain accompanied the failure to make *Aliyah*. Therefore, both old and new *otkaz* looked down upon each other, one for the failure to express Jewish spirit in *Aliyah* and the other, for finding this spirit *only* in *Aliyah*.

One of the spiritual leaders of the new *otkaz* Grigorii (Grisha) Vasserman writes in a letter to an emigrant friend,

> *Someone called Vasserman, honestly, if he is permitted, would go to Israel, he has some business there… But what if he decided to not go at all and study Torah here [in Leningrad] and help others in doing so? Would he then become "not one of us" (ne nash) and not worth knowing at all? He studies the Torah, after all, he is crazy (Hebr. meshumad)…*
>
> *You have already seen that neither departure [from the USSR], nor even arrival to Israel does not solve the complicated problems of modern Jewry, even if one copes with bad American Jews and, much worse, noshrim [Soviet Jews who were given permission to leave for Israel but went to other countries instead, out of pragmatic reasons]* (letter to Lev Utevskii from May 9, 1982).

Vasserman does not define his purpose as departure to Israel. Moreover, he does not even see this purpose as the salvation of Soviet Jewry itself. He sees Soviet Jewry as "an equal partner in all-Jewish Business", which is supposedly a revival of Jewish life according to the text of the Torah and approaching the Messiah's coming. In a letter to Grigorii Kanovich, who taught Jewish history until 1979, and who received an exit visa and left for Israel, Grigorii Vasserman writes:

> *In your letter… there was a thought that I declare too much my anti-Zionist views, which causes you there [in Israel] many unnecessary problems… It is important to point out that my view is not anti-Zionist, but non-Zionist… Perhaps, someone from Bnei Akiva did not like the lack of scintillation in my eyes upon mentioning how many times the clothes produced in Israel since 1913 can wrap the globe…* (letter to Lev Utevskii from May 9, 1982).

Vasserman is trying to explain to his *emigré* friends in Israel that in just one year since their departure everything had changed—people, "their views, positions, activities", and even that "empty Zionist mottos and learning Hebrew as the main way of returning to the Jewishness already attracts only quite dimwitted people" (letter to Grigorii Kanovich from June 13, 1983). Vasserman expresses the idea that while thinking in a Zionist way was once "out of box", it had now become a kind of "party membership", while "nothing worthy was happening in the secular division" (letter to Grigorii Kanovich from June 13, 1983). Whether Vasserman's evaluation is fair or not, my intention in using this exchange is to emphasize an extent to which views differed among individuals involved in Jewish practices.

Further, in Misha's interview, one finds out that there was no unity even in the "religious camp"; the division gets even more complicated.

> *Among the people who were in a way in between, formally an old refusenik, but [practically] completely ours, was Izia Kogan, he was the one we communicated with…*
>
> *Izia Kogan also represented a synagogue activity and attracted young people to it, but they were not on good terms with Grisha Vasserman [a teacher of Misha] and people who chose his way, which was to study, study, study and study. Social life in a synagogue means that we study a bit, and then we dance. Grisha Vasserman would not go dancing in a synagogue. But Izia Kogan thought lack of dancing on a holiday was no Jewishness at all. The tension did exist, but they were both respected people… So students of Vasserman treated Izia Kogan with much respect. There were, though, people who gladly gathered around Izia Kogan, but studying!? They did not go to Grisha Vasserman's [classes] at all. And the old otkaz looked down upon all of this, at best they taught Hebrew, because they stayed this way for a long time and… could teach it.*

Even religiosity was understood differently in the movement, and a spiritual leader of one Jewish religious group was not necessarily a spiritual leader of another Jewish religious group. The same person made a great impression on some people and was ignored or even disrespected by others.

> *Olesya: And those who gathered around Izia Kogan, who were they?*
>
> *Misha: They wanted to share his synagogue enthusiasm: they [kosherly] slaughtered chicken, sold it to the Jews and delivered it to other cities. Such a life of activists, but*

[they] did not want to study Hebrew in order to finally open the Talmud and to learn the commentaries to the Khumash (Torah). This is hard, one needs to sit and study. Not everyone can do it, not everyone must do it. So for those who could not or did not feel that they had to do it, Izia Kogan was a person to have an [everyday] Jewish life with. At the same time, Izia Kogan was a representative of the old otkaz in terms of meeting shlihim (missionaries), specifically [western] rabbis. And, therefore, one could meet and listen to someone [interesting] at his place. It was a miracle wasn't it? In Brezhnev's times.

One can see that while even specifically religious Jewish groups were not homogenous, every particular person could be considered a part of groups with conflicting views. Earlier I discussed Clementi's opposition to naming the dissidents a "movement", since they were not only divided into groups, but also because some dissidents acted individually. The phenomenon I describe also includes individual cases that hardly fit any one group. The following case is significant not only because this person acted alone in the movement, but also because he constantly tried to pursue and adapt his interest in Hebrew *within* Soviet institutions, even while he saw himself opposing the official system.

The Case of Institutionalization of an Interest in Judaic Studies

Semen Yakerson is currently the Chair of the Department of Semitology and Hebraistics at the Oriental Department of St. Petersburg State University, and the only practicing scholar of the Hebrew incunabula[12] in the world. He never planned to leave the USSR, but rather wanted to be "a proud Jew in his country of birth." He always expressed empathy with those children from mixed families who chose to be registered as Jews by passport, as he thought that the only honest position was to be on the side of the persecuted. Up until high school he was in love with Russian history and poetry; that was until he was told that because of his Jewish origin, he would not be able to pursue his dream of applying for a higher education program at Leningrad State University. This revelation was painful, and he decided to find out for himself what he had been forced to sacrifice his dream for. That is how he started studying Hebrew. He primarily learned it on his own and practiced long conversations in Hebrew with his friend, a refusenik, but he never learned Hebrew with a group of refuseniks. He later taught Hebrew to other refuseniks, mostly teachers, both privately and in a group.

Yakerson graduated from the Department of Library Science at the Institute of Culture and Arts. He dreamed of working with Jewish books, and made attempts to gradually implement this plan. Accidentally he was assigned to work at a branch library of the Academy of Science. Then, in a spirit of protest, he did not evade being drafted to the army, and completed the required year and a half as a soldier. Upon returning to the library, he could no longer be officially refused to work with Jewish books (those who served in the army were expected to be treated with more respect). This was all the more so the case because he was the only library

[12] Incunabula - is a book, pamphlet or broadside that was printed—not handwritten—before the year 1501 in Europe, when the art of printing was still in an early stage.

employee who had a significant command of Hebrew (so Hebrew books were never put in order getting dusted in vein). Because of a formality issue—Yakerson did not have a document of professional education in Hebrew—the library sent a request for him to be an auditing student at the School of Semitology in the Department of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg State University that was a highly prestigious and elitist institution, which did not welcome Jewish students, especially those who was Jewish by passport, while also being under the watchful eye of the KGB. Yakerson's modern Hebrew language was at that point already better than that of his professors. However, his supervisors were still afraid of hiring him as a registrar of the Jewish books, and offered him instead to work for two years as a logistic manager and at the same time volunteer as a registrar of the Jewish collection. Finally, Yakerson was officially hired as a professional Hebraist to register the Jewish collection at the Institute of the Oriental Studies. This was a collection of the 15th century Jewish incunabula, and Yakerson was enthusiastically making a catalog of that collection. Published in 1985 (before *the Perestroika*[13]*!*), it was the first academic book on a Jewish topic in the USSR in many years. Without a doubt, however, Yakerson's interest in Hebrew books was not purely academic; he made constant attempts to institutionalize his personal interest in a Jewish matter within formal Soviet organizations.

Yakerson recalls that the authorities despised him for being so hard to classify; he was both inside and outside of the Jewish movement. On the one hand, he sought to penetrate the system and become a part of the professional structures in the field of semitology. On the other hand, he openly interacted with the refuseniks and even taught them Hebrew. He was not interested in Israel, or any kind of emigration, in any way, but considered the Soviet Union an unjust system in general and towards the Jews specifically. As was the case for most movement activists, his Jewish origin was extremely important to him and spurred exploration questions that lead to various kinds of engagements. In the same way, as it was for most unofficial Hebrew teachers, this language was not merely an intellectual activity for him. He always compared his attitude to Hebrew, full of tenderness and passion, to a romantic relationship. He behaved slightly provocatively towards the authorities, not enough to get imprisoned, but enough to be under its surveillance and to get arrested once.

Yakerson is as hard to categorize for contemporary researchers of the Jewish movement as he was for KGB officers. His own view of his position in the movement is itself contradictory. On the one hand, he says that he was a part of two Jewish worlds, one official and one underground. On the other hand, he was "an outcast here and an outcast there." Talking about the Soviet system, he uses "we" in relation to the refuseniks, while when talking about refuseniks themselves, he uses the word "them." At times he is even sarcastic about their views.

> *When I had just begun studying Hebrew, I pretty quickly found the Department of Literature of Asia and Africa in the public library. It was open from 9 am to 9 pm, and anyone with a passport was allowed in. The trove of Hebrew books there was astounding! It had any book published between the XIX and XX centuries until 1967. Fiction, guides, dictionaries—anything you want. Even contemporary periodicals from*

[13] Perestroika (lit. restructuring) – reformation of the Soviet socialist economic and political system under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Israel—of course, those were communist newspapers, but what mattered was that it was in modern Hebrew. I was going there for many years, but no refuseniks did. I told everyone, "Guys! It's absolutely legal, go read! Nobody is in the way!" But this fact did not fit their ideology at all. If this is legal, why leave [the USSR]? They needed to prove to themselves and everybody else that there was no Jewish culture there that it was dead and they should leave in order to return it. However, if an open library existed, it meant that there was culture that it was legal, and that contradicted their plan.

Yakerson's point is crucial for understanding the contradictions of the Soviet context. On the one hand, he is correct that if refuseniks were only interested in Jewish culture, there were some legal ways of accessing it. Yet the idea of the overwhelming legality of Jewish materials is not entirely accurate either. Judaism was both legal and restricted in the Soviet Union, and this dynamics can only be explained in highly subtle terms. Yakerson's experience caused him to emphasize the availability of Jewish cultural production. However, many informants' experiences differed from Yakerson's. For example, in Moscow all the literature in Hebrew was kept in a restricted area (*spetskhran*), for which one had to have a "reason" to access, e.g. writing a thesis or a dissertation. Since most of my informants studied science or technical disciplines, they had no official business in the restricted areas. In addition, the variety of cases shows that Yakerson's explanation of the motivations for departure–as an interest in 'reinventing the wheel' of Jewish culture, so to speak–departure—is insufficient. One could leave without any reason or any knowledge of Hebrew, for that matter. Interest in Hebrew language was by no means a prerequisite for the desire to leave, nor was it a common denominator for all emigres. What I find even more important, Hebrew did not need to be illegal to attract the attention of these people; it was enough that it was hidden, or limited to certain spaces. Excitement about unofficially printed copies of Hebrew books could be explained by sheer curiosity and attraction to non-Soviet (in their imagination: *secret*) knowledge. This motif appears in almost all the interviews.

Refuseniks, who consider Yakerson "one of "them", emphasize that he played a very important, albeit idiosyncratic, part. At the same time, I also heard people talking about him with suspicion. They were puzzled by his spoken Hebrew—they found it unbelievable for someone who learned the language by himself, to have such excellent conversational and pronunciation skills.

For me, this entire story ended in a very interesting way. I had a feeling that I closed it; we all went to different places... And twenty years after I began to not think that it was important what they did or we did. They, on the contrary, after twenty years had a feeling that they committed a heroic act, that they broke through, that they defeated the regime… And I think there was no heroic act in it at all. Had they not snuck into the classified institutions, they would have been let out eventually…[14] *But at some point I also had nostalgia about all this. Suddenly, they organized an exhibition, "The Struggle" in the Beit ha Tsufot in Tel-Aviv. And I thought, indeed, it was an outstanding event, and Aba Taratuta organized it and he wrote to me... And I told Mika Chlenov, 'Let's go, this is*

[14] Yakerson is talking about one of the most widespread reason for a rejection to a petition for an exit visa due to some sort of clearance received for work at a classified institution.

also about us'… And we came and here it was, this hall, this unbelievable exhibition, and all of them gathered and all of them are old and all of them are victors (pobediteli), and all of them are order bearers (ordenonostsy)[15]. And their grandchildren and their children came there. And there was another part [of the auditorium] as well, the Americans and the Canadians who helped… The hall was jam-packed. And some woman sits next to me and says in Hebrew with a strong American accent, "Well, let's talk. How many years did you stay in the Soviet Union as a refusenik?" I say, "Well, I was never a refusenik." "Ok", says the woman, "How long have you been living in Israel?" "I don't live in Israel." "But where do you live?" "In St. Petersburg" "So you are saying that you still live with the Russians?" She stood up and changed seats. I was the only person in the room who had an empty seat next to them. And I am very proud of it, after all of that [activity in the Soviet times] ... And I sat there, and refuseniks gave presentations. And Aba Taratuta did. And I understand that he got lost, but they directly asked him, who his teacher of Hebrew was. And he could have said that I was in the room. I was teaching him for all those years, and it was a great risk, because he was really famous… We were good friends, and it was definitely not for the money… But he said nothing. And Zelichenok as well. And I looked at it and realized that it was not my story anymore… and I kind of got offended because there wasn't one word, no thank you at all, to those people who helped the refuseniks but didn't plan to leave. I was not the only one.

What does this case tell us about the movement and memories of it? What can we learn about the memorialization of history and its transformation into political ideologies? Yakerson was not interested in going to Israel or generally leaving the USSR, but without a doubt, he participated in the revival of Hebrew and felt strong about showing its beauty to the Soviet Jews. He did not learn it in a group, but he taught other unofficial groups. He refused to be in dialog with the official Soviet organs of power, but he tried to become a part of official academic institutions of the USSR. Of course, Yakerson is a special and non-typical case, but by no means separate from the general phenomenon being described. And while it is difficult to estimate the number of people who learned Hebrew on their own, certainly they existed, independent of revivalist or refusenik groups. So Yakerson and others who learned Hebrew on their own can neither be excluded from what is commonly referred to as the "Jewish movement", nor do they fit neatly into existing frameworks for understanding it. We cannot easily say that refuseniks and Yakerson were united in a common movement "toward" any particular goal, but they certainly shared something fundamental. They were a part of the same phenomenon, but perhaps one with a different character than that usually assigned. Without a doubt, the spirit of freedom and upsurge as well as the feeling of a mission among the Jewish actors in question makes the term 'movement' appealing and understandable. However, the archeology of this category ascribes misleading characteristics to the phenomenon.

[15] Yakerson is being sarcastic about the idea of the Jewish movement represented as some kind of a battle with the Soviet regime for Jewish freedom. He calls the people at the event order bearers making an allusion to the veterans of the World War two awarded with orders for defeating the Germans.

Soviet Jews in Christian Groups – Same Phenomenon?

An interesting fact that is usually not emphasized in literature about Jewish practices in the USSR is a participation of many of its members in Christian groups prior to Jewish ones. Many people shopped around unique milieus in search for extremely precious non-programmatic knowledge[16]. Members of the intelligentsia devoured any information of this kind. According to many informants, insofar as this information was perceived as hidden or restricted by Soviet authorities, it was assumed to contain the truth. Knowledge could be characterized as programmatic and non-programmatic, and in these terms, knowledge about Judaism for Soviet Jews was not any more precious than knowledge about Christianity was; the only difference was that some information about Christianity was available through sanctioned sources and widely read classic Russian literature, which attracted some people and turned away the other. In fact, it was often the case that Jews who later became interested in Judaism started their search in Christianity. It is possible that at the outset, they did not even draw a boundary between the two, they were just looking for anything spiritual and new.

The late Soviet period gave birth to many novel (or rediscovered) streams of thought and directions of intellectual pursuit. Refuseniks, dissidents, Russian nationalists, devout Orthodox believers, and hippies could be also studied as examples of a more general tendency (Furst 2012; Kornblatt 2004; Voronel 1997). The Jewish revival, Furst argues, was not simply the result of an isolated growth of Jewish sentiment, but was also a product of the "mental and physical worlds in which the postwar Soviet intelligentsia lived" (2012, 139). One might go even further and suggest that namely an admiration for any alternative milieu, rather than Jewish sentiment itself, was the main force behind the activities that later were reclassified into the Jewish movement. Indeed, what does 'Jewish' in the term *Jewish movement* actually mean? We already had a chance to learn that the purposes of the movement as well as understandings of Jewishness were perceived in different ways by various Jewish activists. Does one call the movement Jewish because most participants were Jewish by origin? If we decide to follow this direction, then should not we include into the movement those interested in Judeo-Christianity? It could perhaps be more productive to shift the boundaries of the term *Jewish movement,* and examine Judeo-Christianity alongside other Jewish revivalist practices. After all, is that any less valid than grouping Jews interested primarily in religious observation together with political activists fighting for the right to emigrate?

In her book *Doubly Chosen,* Judith Kornblatt (2004) makes an attempt to understand what for an American scholar is the unusual phenomenon of Soviet Jewish Christianity. According to Kornblatt, the conversion of Soviet Jews to Christianity was neither "an escape from antisemitism", nor an attempt to feel more Russian, as we might immediately and perhaps logically assume.

Rather, what Kornblatt finds is that most of her informants express "a feeling of increased Jewishness after baptism, and their narratives of faith return over and over to their Jewish identity" (Kornblatt 2004, 15). This stands in stark contrast to Judaism in the US and Israel, where religion and ethnicity are intertwined elements of the Jewish identity, even if following

[16] Programmatic topic was the topic widely discussed in various official discourses, and therefore, a part of a general erudition of any educated person.

the commandments is not a fundamental component of this identity. As some studies showed, converting to another religion is seen in these countries as a loss of Jewishness (Kornblatt 2004, 45). As Kornblatt puts it, "here the very wording *Jewish Christian* or *Christian Jew* sounds oxymoronic, to say the least." (2004, 45). Yet the Soviet case represents another paradigm altogether. Kornblatt argues that the conversion of Soviet Jews should be seen not as specifically Jewish or specifically Christian, but rather as *Soviet;* it reflected the desire of the Soviet intelligentsia "to express themselves in a repressive society" (2004, 143). In the Soviet context, Jews did not commonly associate their identity with Judaism *as a religion* per se, but rather as an ethnic background intensified by an official note in a passport. This was in fact reinforced through the study of the New Testament, through which Soviet Jewish Christians felt connection to Palestine and ancient Israel (Kornblatt 2004, 137). The process of conversion included multiple reasons and stages. Initially, Jews did not sense a contradiction between Jewishness and Christianity. They were influenced by Russian philosophy and culture, charismatic personalities such as the priest Alexander Men'[17], and the fascinating aesthetics of Eastern Christianity. And by the time such Soviet Jews began sensing a contradiction between being Jewish and being Christian, they were already attached to Christianity. Perhaps they even enjoyed the contradiction by experiencing the double nonconformity—they considered themselves "doubly chosen." This observation makes even more sense in the light of a statement made in much scholarly and public literature, that a basic element of Jewishness for European Jewry was and is the state of "being proud of one's nationality" (Gitelman 2003, 51) and "feeling oneself a part of the Jewish people" (Nosenko-Shtein 2013, 60).

Is there a movement?

At this point one might reasonably confront me with the question: was there a Jewish movement or not? The simplest answer is that whether or not there *was* a movement in past, there *is* a movement now. That is, the "Jewish movement" is treated as real by the participants themselves, by politicians, by journalists, by those in the Western liberal countries, who supported them, and even by the scholars. And, according to the Thomas theorem "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1928, 571). Indeed, currently the term "movement" is deeply rooted in documentaries, public articles, scholarly books, memoirs, exhibitions and other public events. When I explain to people that my research is about trying to avoid the term movement, they get confused, and sooner or later use the term themselves to clarify what phenomenon I mean—"oh you are talking about the Jewish movement", or perhaps more specifically, "the refuseniks' movement!" After a general understanding is established, I can explain what I dislike about the term, but the term itself is hard to dispense with. It came into use along with the set of practices, ideas and agents it included; therefore, any attempt to use a different term is unsuccessful in terms of communication. To find a better term, one would need to reassemble the phenomenon itself.

[17] Christian priest of Jewish descendence, born in 1935 in the Soviet Union to two Jewish parents. His mother was attracted to Christianity, and his father was "a fiery Jew and even a Zionist". When Israel was founded, Men` wanted "to contribute to the cause of Jewish survival" and decided to become a priest (Kornblatt 2004, 71-72).

My next answer to the question of whether or not there was a Jewish movement is that within what we call "the Jewish movement", there were smaller groups that indeed resemble more conventional Western political or identity movements, designed to be movements as such. However, we would still be talking about multiple factions with separate goals; e.g. the *hunveibini* might remind one of a classical protest movement, *new refuseniks* might have something in common with the earlier described religious movements, some groups might have parallels with typical national movements. However, there was no such united movement as has been preserved in collective memory. Even the fact that the Jewish movement is usually divided into three parts—political, cultural and religious (or *politiki*, *kul'turniki* and *religiozniki*)—shows that there is a conceptual problem in the attempt to see the movement as a single thing.

At the 15th Annual International Conference on Jewish studies in Moscow in 2008, a roundtable on the topic was held, titled **"**What was the essence of the Jewish national movement: Zionist, immigrationist, cultural, national, dissident?**"** One of the speakers, former teacher of Hebrew Alek Zelichenok, expressed the concern that new generations did not adequately understand the term "movement."

> *Movement is an ambivalent word. We, who participated in those events kind of understand what it means, but those who did not participate might think that a movement existed in "Soviet" terms, that there was some kind of a Central Committee, where smart people decided things for everyone else. That they could instruct someone, punish someone, help someone financially. They could tell one what to do and what not to do. There was nothing like that. What we usually call a movement was rather a self-governing multicentral system… The thing that we call a movement was an orchestra that played different melodies at the same time, and we can talk about each melody separately, and they played without a conductor. When something came up, there was no centralized or even semi-centralized organ where one could come and ask, for example: "In two years my son will be 18 years old and be drafted. What can I do now?" One went for an advice to someone whom he personally respected and talked about such things.*

As we learn from the speech, Zelichenok is uncomfortable with the term "movement" when commenting on the phenomenon, and feels the need to amend the term by explaining that this movement was neither organized nor centralized. He turns to the metaphor of an orchestra playing different melodies at the same time with no conductor. Indeed, the movement consisted of many different groups that were initially based either on friendship or a similar activity and developed differently and independently. The metaphor of a conductorless orchestra has one more important feature: in addition to being "leaderless", it emphasizes the importance of a *process* as opposed to an *objective*. The objective embedded in the term movement is a change in the social order, an end result, while the objective of playing is simply playing itself.

Lev's recollection of the Passover Seders in Leningrad in the 1980s reflects a similar idea. "In 1982, life was filled with many events for me personally and in general: someone left, someone visited, someone was caught—there was crazy movement around." Lev uses the term "movement" in its physical meaning, as an act of changing physical location, as a state of non-

quiescence. Though he does not mean to use this term to categorize a phenomenon, intuitively he gives it a name. I would argue that a good part of movement participants have an unconscious overlap of these two meanings when they use the term. In fact, according to one of my informants, the slang Russian word *dvizhukha*, an increased activity that could lead to multiple changes, grasps the phenomenon pretty well. *Dvizhukha* is a modern word that did not exist in Soviet times. It has the same root as *dvizhenie* (movement), but it emphasizes the feature of *action* rather than a feature of *direction* in the change of a system. In fact, *dvizhukha* is used primarily to evoke an image of multi-directional activities. The antonyms to this term would be such words as *zastoi* (stagnation) and *boloto* (swamp), rather than a counter-action. The suffix "ukh" gives it a bit of a hip tone typical for any extraordinary activities of that time. In this sense, the term *dvizhukha* grasps something of the energy of the described phenomenon. However, I avoid relying on it extensively, because its playfulness might lead to an accusation in undermining the serious intentions and consequences of some Jewish activism in the period (which as I've discussed, could indeed involve imprisonment or worse). My intention is not to undermine any of the honorable attempts that made the discourse of "movement" possible, but rather, to show the limits of this discourse for capturing the rich and diverse activities and motivations involved.

New identity theory

My aim in critiquing the term "movement" is not to prove its irrelevance. Rather, I am trying to provide a fresh lens to understand the explosion of Jewish activity and curiosity about Jewishness in the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet Union, in ways that the existing framework of a "movement" obscures. "Movement," as it is generally applied in this case, assumes particular forms of political action. But how political was the interest in the Jewish activities? What is considered political? "New Social Movements" theories enlarge the limits of the category of "movement" beyond classical models of resource mobilization and political process. How helpful are these theories to the case late Soviet Jewish life?

The "new social movement" theories represent a paradigm shift from the Marxist idea that any conflict in a capitalist society is based on a fight between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, to a post-Marxist attempt to identify other systemic reasons for a conflict (Crossley 2002, 150). The important and helpful basis of these theories is that "the personal is political"—the boundary between political and non-political is extremely subtle and changes from case to case. "It has abandoned the model of politics developed within Marxism, wherein it necessarily centered upon parties, revolutions and states, and has sought to explore the broader territories of movements and politics" (Crossley 2002, 152). Though resource mobilization and political process scholars have recently taken culture and identity into consideration, their firm commitment to Marxist analytics generates an instrumental approach to culture "as a means through which agents are mobilized into political struggle", while "some movement struggles begin and end in specific cultural fields" (Crossley 2002, 152).

In contrast to the argument of the new social movement theorists, I question the term movement not because political protest in a classic sense was completely missing in the Jewish case, but because it was only one form among a variety of others that are usually included in

the category of Jewish movement. Moreover, I take issue with new social movement theories' presumption of a commonality of aims or identities. The variety of cases I present above shows us how differently Jewish identity was understood by different groups. A crucial detail of the phenomenon was an absence of a single standard on how to be a Jew in the right way. Another form of "party membership" was something the late Soviet Jewish intelligentsia was *escaping* from. If Judaism had been immediately structured and institutionalized in the way it is structured and institutionalized in the United States, it is unlikely that the Jewish movement would have taken place, or would have had a completely different form.

In the book about Soviet Jews, journalist and social scholar, Elie Wiesel called them the *Jews of Silence* (1966). As discussed earlier remaining politically silent is considered immature among western intellectuals due to the idea of progress as self-emancipation among other things (Keane 2006). Intellectuals should reveal an interest in politics and a public expression of their position: knowledge without action has a low value. Arguing against Wiesel, Yaglom pointed out, "Elie Wiesel meant a state of slave-like downtroddenness and lack of ability [of the Soviet Jews] to express themselves… [In the Soviet Union] silence is a necessary condition of survival, and a free word is a criminal act. However, silence is gold… it can be not only a means of survival in unbearable conditions, but also a constructive ground for development of self-consciousness and spiritual life" (Yaglom 2000). Following the framework of Rabbi Soloveichik, Yaglom sorts out four stages on the path from slavery to freedom: silent slavery, the emergence of a voice, the ability to sing in full voice and a fourth stage that to an outsider looks exactly like the first stage. This is a stage of "wholeness that does not need any outer expression. Perfection lacks particularities, it expresses itself in its very existence. No words can describe wholeness, which expresses itself through silence" (Yaglom 2000). Therefore, the true experience of Jewishness does not need to be expressed in challenging self-affirmative practices.

American journalist David Tuller observed a similar process in the gay movement in Russia in the early 1990s. "In the United States, those who decline to stake out queer space in the public arena—so the argument goes—are presumed to feel ashamed of their sexuality" (Tuller 1996, 264). However, those who identified as gay in Russia sought "…not freedom in a pure political sense, but an internal liberty that contrasts with the sometimes oppressive constraints of American identity politics. This is not a freedom to declare oneself openly, but the freedom to not have to declare; it is not the freedom to define oneself for the world to see, but the freedom to cast off restrictive definitions altogether—to flip through a repertoire of identities as the occasion and desire demand" (Tuller 1996, 264).

This aversion to public execution of freedom is also described by the scholar of Slavic and Comparative Literature, Svetlana Boym. She claims that "using half-words" is a code for being accepted to the circles of intelligentsia. "To say a full word is to say too much; communication on the level of words is already excessive, banal, almost kitschy… Hence the American metaphors for being sincere and authentic—"saying what you mean," "going public," and "being straightforward"—do not translate properly into the Soviet and Russian contexts. "Saying what you mean" could be interpreted as being stupid, naïve, or not streetwise" (Boym 1994, 1). Being a dissident in a way is opposed to being a part of intelligentsia in Russian and Soviet culture. One has to find more sophisticated ways of critique to social reality.

Tuller and Boym seemed to grasp an important characteristic of life in the late socialism. Indeed, an aim of any movement, or of systemic change for that matter, is an ability to live in a certain/different way. Why could one not simply pursue this way of life, instead of trying to change the system as a whole? The presumption of any movement is that within the existing system this other way of life is impossible. This situation could lead to two logics of action: 1) a fundamental and comprehensive change in the system, or 2) carving out a space *within* the system where a compromised version of a certain way of life is possible. Since the Soviet system seemed immutable to most of its citizens, any attempt to change it was perceived as an indication of either bad taste or even insanity (Yurchak 2006). It also seemed a waste of precious time in which something interesting could be done. Lack of belief in a possibility of any serious systemic change led the generation of "Brezhnev's fledglings" (*brezhnevskie ptenci)* to the belief that the realization of a meaningful vanguard project was likewise impossible: any serious project would require a support of the system and therefore cannot be vanguard. This basic presumption caused a unique type of non-goal-oriented subjectivity, a subjectivity that within a non-Soviet system might be considered pointless or irrational. In contrast, amateurs learning languages for fun, writing poetry "to put into the desk drawer" (*v stol*), or reading the Talmud because of a "mind-blowing style of reflection" had great respect among the Soviet intelligentsia, and these "purposeless" activities comprised a far more important part of many people's lives than, for example, such goal-oriented projects as their careers.

Though identifying a unified goal in Jewish unofficial practices is not an impossible task, I suggest that in doing so one boxes such practices into familiar Western liberal models of thought. Instead, I argue that the intelligentsia of the late Soviet period tended to take place within a non-goal-oriented kind of reasoning. Most of the participants in Jewish practices (except for, perhaps, some activists, who were specifically involved in political actions, such as meetings with international journalists relaying messages to the American government) participated in Jewish practices purely out of personal interest. If participants use language expressing a view of a goal-oriented movement in their interviews, it is because they learned to conceptualize their experience from another source, external to the Soviet context. Analysis of the Jewish movement through the lens of measurable success, as a finished and professionally performed project, came later, and is foreign to the actual phenomenon.

I must disclose, the practice of application for exit visas does not fit as easily into the "non-goal-oriented" approach. To apply for an exit visa one had to make the decision to openly show lack of loyalty to the Soviet Union, not necessarily because this is how the individual interpreted their action, but because this is how the practice was understood in Soviet authoritative discourse (this will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4). However, for many Jews, Jewish practices did not begin with an application for an exit visa. Most did not apply for exit for quite some time and yet still enjoyed Jewish practices as experienced in their Soviet life. Furthermore, after 1979 emigration from the Soviet Union became limited and people applied without the expectation to leave immediately. Even though this practice was dictated at least partially by goal-oriented reasoning, for most Jewish people the leave was not a ruling principle, as, it was for the group of *hunveibini,* discussed earlier in this chapter. Finally, in the early 1980s the Soviet Union made a decision to give those who applied for exit visas a break from scrutiny and a chance to return to normal life. Although earlier on, in order to apply for an exit visa, one

had to quit their job and seize all their connections in society, later the character of the practice changed and stopped being such a life ruining decision.

My dissertation challenges the ideological assumptions behind the term "movement" that are routinely used to describe the phenomena of Jewish revival and Jewish practices in the late Soviet Union. I follow Bruno Latour's method of reassembling the social phenomenon in order to discover new perspectives by switching from the term "movement" to the more neutral term "unofficial Jewish practices." As I have mentioned in the introduction, I define this term quite widely by including any practices related to the acquisition or dissemination of knowledge in Jewish languages, religion, history, and communities. I include in the term the practices that were pursued in private apartments and came in forms of seminars in Hebrew language and sacred texts, lectures in Jewish history and ethnography, the production of non-official Jewish magazines (*samizdat*) not censored by state ideologists, the collective celebration of Jewish holidays and Shabbat, as well as communicative practices around moving and the actual application to emigrate. If these practices did not constitute a movement, then what kind of a phenomenon should we assign to them? Further in Chapter 3 I will discuss the character of these practices and their meaning in the broader context of late socialism.

Chapter 2
The Art of Jewishness:
Feeling Alive and the Freedom of Creation

In the end of the 1980s a Jewish man from Moscow, who I will refer to as Itzhak, celebrated the Jewish holiday of Sukkot in the little guard room (*storozhka*) where he worked. Religious Jews have historically celebrated the holiday by building a sukkah, a temporary human sized shelter out of natural materials, where they have meals and sleep. Itzhak made a toy sukkah out of matches instead and placed a toy person inside of it. Manipulated by his puppeteer, the toy Jew followed all of the rituals with an orthodox rigor—he lit candles before sunset and read the right prayers at the right times with an accuracy to the minute[18]. One might presume that Itzhak used a toy to avoid persecution by the Soviet state. However, in the late 1980s there were relatively few risks connected specifically with observing religion in the Soviet Union—it was more socially awkward than physically dangerous. More importantly, as we will learn from the chapter, Itzhak himself explained this substitution differently. Many questions arise from this story. Why did Itzhak decide to observe Judaism? Why did he decide to do it in such a contradictory form? Would the orthodox, conservative, and reformist Rabbis consider Itzhak to be an observing Jew or they merely laugh at him? At the end of his story, Itzhak told me that he was a free man in an unfree country. This statement complicates the story even more. How can someone under constraints not only from state ideology but also from religious ideology claim to feel free?

In my project I attempt a study of a slippery object for a scholar—a feeling. I discern this feeling both directly, through the metaphors used in its description, and indirectly, through the excitement of my informants, in all of the conversations about Jewish revival in the USSR. This feeling is characterized by them as *exodus, being alive, real life, falling in love, getting high, being fulfilled, feeling lightness and transparency*, etc. Trying to make sense of this experience, some informants call it freedom. More than once, former Soviet Jews recounted to me this specific feeling of freedom they had experienced in the late Soviet Union, one they were unable to find either after the state's collapse or after their emigration to other countries, be that Israel or the United States. In fact, this freedom was difficult to recognize and articulate in the late Soviet period, as it was a part of their daily routine and only became visible later, from a postsocialist perspective. These narratives were especially intriguing in contrast to other narratives from informants who reproduced a familiar discourse about Soviet life, emphasizing severe restrictions on their freedoms of speech, religion, press and assembly. How is it possible that people characterize their experiences in the same circumstances as simultaneously free and unfree? On the other hand, how are these narratives of freedom compatible with the secular-liberal idea that religion is opposed to freedom? In this chapter I collect some of the narratives of Jews who pursued Jewish practices in the late Soviet period and experienced a unique feeling that they formulate in the ways mentioned above. As I have mentioned in the introduction, I believe that this case is an example of a broader phenomenon whereby a particular type of freedom emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s under late socialism.

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[18] Religious Jews follow the calendar of exact sunset times in order to perform rituals with an accuracy to the minute.

The Shaping of Soviet Jewishness

After the Socialist Revolution of 1917, scientific atheism became an official political doctrine in the USSR. The eradication of religion (as opposed to its confinement to private spaces) was an official Soviet policy[19]. Following the Marxist theory that people become religious out of ignorance, the Bolsheviks attempted to eradicate religiosity through scientific enlightenment campaigns—they built a massive knowledge structure through which religion and science were juxtaposed and sensed as mutually exclusive. Jews supported the revolution as, at least immediately after it took place, it granted them a certain equality of rights, e.g. the cancelation of the pale of settlement[20] and an official policy against everyday anti-Semitism (Shternshis 2006, 3). Thus, many Jews did not find it hard to reject their religious traditions. They initially experienced a feeling of justice and believed that the authorities were on their side. Second, many of them supported the large-scale changes introduced to renovate and improve the social system, and in this new system religion was considered a decrepit institution. As Slezkine argues, Jews have proved themselves throughout history to be the ideal modern citizens (Mercurians) by being "urban, mobile, literate, articulate, intellectually intricate, and occupationally flexible" (Slezkine 2004). These qualities made them compatible with the prevailing atmosphere of each epoch. If the new system required refusal of the "opium of the people", it was perceived not as a discriminatory policy, but rather as a progressive measure. Interestingly, the anti-religious campaigns against Jews and the campaigns against popular anti-Semitism were often directed by the same people (Shternshis 2006, 3). Jewish religious beliefs and everyday practices were gradually substituted with Soviet ones. Although the Soviet atheist campaigns' attempts to use science as a demonstration of religious fallacy did not work immediately, this mutual exclusion of science and religion became important for the generation of intelligentsia who were active at the end of the 1960s and later[21].

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[19] Marx considers religion to be one of the most significant sources of social conflict. This observation makes him come to a conclusion that religion should be abolished. Moreover, in critique of Bruno Bauer`s liberalist position, he claims that political emancipation and replacement of religion into private sphere is not enough (Marx 1844). Although products of the same revolution, Droits de Citoyen (civil rights) contradict Droits de l'homme (human rights). While the first lead to political unity, the second result in *egoistic particularism*. Droits de l'homme guarantee people freedom of religion, but religious differences even in the private sphere result in social conflict and destroy political unity. Human rights are also guaranteed only until they do not contradict the political life. "When political liberation is the form in which men strive to achieve their liberation, the state can and must go as far as the abolition of religion, the destruction of religion. But it can do so only in the same way that it proceeds to the abolition of private property, to the maximum, to confiscation, to progressive taxation, just as it goes as far as the abolition of life, the guillotine" (Marx 1844).

[20] Pale of settlement is a boundary within the territory of the Russian Empire, existing from 1791 to 1917, outside of which citizens observing Judaism were not allowed to live (with an exception for some very rich and educated elites).

[21] Analyzing Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular*, Matthew Scherer writes that for Asad the notion of the secular is substantial and concrete. It exists in particular behaviors, knowledge and sensibilities—and it is impossible to simply shed (2010). Asad differentiates between the secular as an epistemological category and secularism as a political doctrine and claims that the secular as an epistemological category precedes the political doctrine of "secularism" (Asad 2003, 16). Although secularism as a political doctrine is not fully applicable to the

In the USSR being Jewish, like being Russian or Ukrainian, was considered an ethnic identity, or what was termed “nationality” — inherited from one’s parents. Nationality policy in the Soviet Union was contradictory. The Bolsheviks “deliberately and quite consistently promoted group rights that did not always coincide with those of the proletariat” (Slezkine 1994, 415). Despite most socialists agreeing that federalism was a bourgeois ideal, the Soviet Union was separated into ethno-territorial autonomies. Nationalism was supported by the state in order for it to eventually disappear once the Soviet socialist society became fully developed and people would no longer feel the need for it. The justification for supporting the national self-determination of ethnic groups was driven by higher effectiveness of revolutionary ideas taught in native languages. Besides, the nationalism of certain groups was considered a progressive phenomenon. Indeed, two types of nationalism were recognized. “Good” nationalism of oppressed nations was thought of as a legitimate reaction to discrimination. “Bad” nationalism of the oppressor nations, labeled great-power chauvinism, was a result of “unfair size advantage” (Slezkine 1994, 418). Despite this differentiation of nationalisms, all nationalities were theoretically equal because they all had the same rights (Slezkine 1994, 416). Nationality was considered a primordial concept which did not always coincide with statehood. "Nation-building" policy was a state-sponsored project rendering different levels of political autonomy to the groups of people sharing language, culture, and territory. By “culture” the communists understood “various combinations of "material life," "customs" and "traditions" (Slezkine 1994, 428). Soviet nationality was not only formal, it was incorporated into many institutions. “Every Soviet citizen was born into a certain nationality [which was stated in a birth certificate], took it to day care and through high school [in a class journal], had it officially confirmed [in a passport] at the age of sixteen and then carried it to the grave through thousands of application forms, certificates, questionnaires and reception desks. It made a difference in school admissions and it could be crucial in employment, promotions and draft assignments” (Slezkine 1994, 450). Because it was so deeply rooted in social institutions, Jews were constantly reminded of their origins, even though Jewish traditions were not a part of their erudition.

As mentioned before, in the Soviet Union Jewishness was a nationality, but as Slezkine pointed out, “No other ethnic group was as good at being Soviet, and no other ethnic group was as keen on abandoning its language, rituals, and traditional areas of settlement” (2004, 247). In 1930 the Soviet government created the Jewish National Region in Birobidzhan, the territory deep in Siberia, with the intention of providing Jews with their own “homeland.” However, this territory had no historical connection to the Jews. Moreover, Jews who just made it through the pale of settlement dreamed to live in the megapolises, and thus, perhaps unwittingly, recreated the diaspora by moving away to large cities. By the 1970s and 1980s most Soviet Jews lived in large cities in the Western part of the Soviet Union. The official language of Soviet Jews was supposed to be Yiddish, however only a tiny number of older

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Soviet case, thinking of the secular as an epistemological category may be fruitful for studying late socialism as a Soviet version of a modern society. Thus, as described by Asad, reading the Bible to develop erudition, as opposed to studying it for religious practice, is an example of a developed secular sensibility: “If the Bible is read as art (weather as poetry or myth or philosophy) this is because a complicated historical development of disciplines and sensibilities has made it possible to do so” (Asad 2003, 9).

people in the cities spoke it. Yiddish, just like religion, appeared to the Jewish youth as backward and therefore irrelevant. Did the Soviet Jews have their own culture? For Soviet Jews living in megapolises traditional Ashkenazi Jewish culture was almost non-existent—the culture of the Soviet Jews generally coincided with the culture of the Soviet intelligentsia[22]. Even more importantly they did not think of themselves as having any specific "Jewish culture." For this reason the term Jewish nationality, understood by the state as a group of people sharing a territory, language and culture, did not have any material or practical content for Soviet Jews.

By the 1970s Jewish sacred texts and rituals were not a part of everyday Jewish life and were incomprehensible to Soviet Jews. By that time, most Jewish families had no observant members, nor was Jewish religious tradition a part of the common knowledge of every generally educated person. On the contrary, information about Judaism and Jewishness became available only as a result of a very concrete and active interest. Hebrew was not present in the Soviet public space either. Most Soviet Jews, like other Soviet citizens, were secular and did not associate themselves with Judaism. This understanding of Jewishness contrasts sharply with that of the modern United States, where Jews are expected to demonstrate their "Jewishness" in practice (Shternshis 2006; Gitelman, Glants, and Goldman 2003): "For example, a significant number of modern North American Jews, just like their Russian counterparts, refuse to think of the ultra-Orthodox as model co-religionists, yet many Americans (unlike Russians) in some way celebrate Passover and Rosh Ha-Shanah, and attend synagogues on Yom Kippur" (Shternshis 2006, xiv). While many American Jews do not strictly observe the commandments of the Torah, most of them have a basic knowledge of "what Jews do", or even speak Hebrew. Most of them are affiliated with some religious or traditionalist Jewish organizations and are surrounded by other Jews. Socialization among other Jews places them within a specific regime of knowledge that dictates the basic practices that every American Jew needs to pursue.

The people I write about were mostly professionals and scientists originating from non-observant soviet families. Their Jewish identity was based mainly on their passport record, mostly negative unofficial institutional practices built around it and ethnic stereotypes, both positive (intellectualism and industriousness) and negative (fragile physique and nerdiness). They were made Jewish by a biographical fact, not because they performed Halakhic practices or joined a synagogue. As Lvov puts it, "Here in the former Soviet Union, for several generations Jewishness was not an ideology, but the fact of biography. One could neither refuse it nor choose it… Being Jewish meant something completely irrational, meaningless, because it in no way depended on the lost or found meaning of this word. We, 'the Russians' [Russian Jews], did not become Jewish. We were born Jewish" (Lvov 1996). He concludes that while American Jews make themselves Jewish, Soviet or Russian Jews try to understand the secret of their Jewishness. Thus, for example, there was an unwritten taboo against uttering the word *Jew*. As

[22] Detailed interviews reveal that some families possessed objects of Jewish material culture such as old praying books or ritual devices. Even in the 1970s and 1980s a number of Jewish young people went to synagogues on the Jewish holiday of Simkhat Torah. They did not enter buildings, but socialized outside of it. For Passover many Jewish families bought matzah in synagogues, which they ate along with bread (unleavened dough is allowed on a Passover week). Some Jewish families gave their children Jewish names, or one conventional Russian and one formal Jewish name, which they did not use in everyday life. More often, they gave conventional Russian names starting with a first letter of a dead Jewish relative.

has been wittily noted by Vail' and Genis, "Jews were almost the main secret of the Soviet Union. Only sexual life was probably concealed more diligently. Both could exist only in the form of euphemisms… Common sense and sense of propriety pointed out when, where and with whom an intercourse or Jewish origin could be discussed" (Vail' and Genis 2004, 849). Uttering any word with "Jew" at its root was not illegal or dangerous—it was improper. In her analysis of "injurious speech" Judith Butler showed that practices of silencing of particular words and expressions may work as a form of discursive violence (Butler 1997). Indeed, silencing is sometimes remembered as a humiliating practice by my informants, and this is how this silencing is usually analyzed. However, apparently this analysis is insufficient. Igor, who was Jewish by the passport, expressed his feeling about secrecy around being Jewish in the Soviet Union as followed.

> *…Severomorsk was an [ethnically] Russian city… there were Jews too… I remember my father's friends; there were a lot of Jewish officers… I knew we were Jews, and could not understand what it meant, because nobody could explain it to me… We spoke Russian, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, dad was an officer – everything is the same… And suddenly we are different. I only knew it was something different, not good… It was the secret of my childhood… something mystical around them [Jews]. There are many of them, they are visible, they are in Moscow, they are in Leningrad, they are everywhere. They are humanitarians [gumanitarii], they are technicians, they are great scientists and they are illegal… This was a secret and I needed to resolve it…*

Censorship in the Jewish topic also worked productively. Taking into account an elite status of the Jewish citizens, silencing around Jews created just as much curiosity as shame about Judaism.

An Explosion of Curiosity about Judaism among the Soviet Jews

An increase of interest in Jewish knowledge and practices in the Soviet Union emerged in the 1970s and increased in the 1980s. On the one hand, this became possible due to the softening of the state gaze. On the other hand, the gap between the generation born before the revolution, for which observance was a daily routine, and the generation who were in their 20s, 30s or even 40s in the 1970s and 1980s, made Jewish practices and the style of Jewish studying foreign enough to be romantic and desirable, and to carry a potential to trigger novel forms of thinking. When Jews encountered Judaism in special spaces, such as seminars at the private apartments of their friends and the friends of their friends, it appeared to them as both scary and intriguing.

> *…Didn't I tell you, how these extraterrestrials with little boxes on their heads and in bird-like shawls frightened me?... I came into the room and saw these incredible birds with something like magnifying glasses on their foreheads, hands twisted by lashes. They bent under giant books. Hum… do they read through these magnifiers?... It seemed to me completely surreal at that time…*

This was Itzhak's first encounter with Jewish religious dress. Since religious garments were not usually encountered among a Soviet set of subjectivities, Itzhak chose to keep away from these people, whom he considered to be insane.

Itzhak explains, "Later I nevertheless encountered the inhabitants of this room. They turned out to be bearded mathematicians and physicists, just the same as I was…" It was important for Itzhak that those who found something in Judaism had first achieved success in a conventional field of science. Such an exotic figure of a religiously looking Jewish person would only have intrigued Soviet Jews if they somehow trusted the performer. Within the Soviet regime of knowledge, religious behavior was perceived as either intellectual backwardness or a form of madness. The fact that the possibilities afforded by Judaism were being explored by successful Soviet Jewish scientists however, as the above example indicates, validated this field as worth exploring. Interestingly, most of those who became interested in Judaism were well-educated and had solid careers in science, engineering or other spheres. Others, either institutionally educated or self-educated, on the contrary, chose not to work in official intellectual positions. Many of them applied for exit visas to emigrate from the USSR, which often implied leaving their job. Some of them, such as Itzhak, intentionally avoided institutionalized academic positions in order to avoid getting involved with extra-curricular responsibilities and to keep their minds free from work-related issues. Instead, they took unintellectual positions such as boiler room or elevator operators, cleaning personnel, or guards. The design of the socialist system allowed them to maintain a socially acceptable living by working only a few hours per day or even per week. Since they were free for the rest of the time, they occupied themselves with interesting activities such as learning and teaching Hebrew, studying Judaism, attending seminars on Jewish history or publishing unofficial Jewish journals.

The experience of developing a Jewish subjectivity was a somewhat artistic act. Choosing a Jewish name was the first thing people did when they began studying Hebrew. They could choose any Biblical or fictional character to associate themselves with. These names, despite their exoticness to the Soviet reality, were related to the secret Jewish connection of those who chose them. In his essay *My Names*, Vladimir Gorenshtein recalls that his parents named him Vladimir after his grandfather who had passed away a few months before. The bitter irony of the story lay in the fact that his father's name was Ilya, which produced Gorenshtein, Vladimir Ilyich — the full namesake of Lenin. Far from being a fan of Lenin, Gorenshtein is puzzled as to how it is possible that an individual not participate in such an important part of his subjectivity as naming. He then recalls choosing a Jewish name.

> *The Teacher's name was Boria… Leading me through the covenant of Abraham (circumcision), he suggested me to choose myself a Jewish name. The name that I finally chose for myself (from existing ones), the name, the sound of which [in the Soviet Union] makes a Christian friend flinch, and which gives parents goose bumps, "This is not us! This is not ours!" The name, full of meaning, the hatred of enemies, and the veneration of those who remember their kinship. My land of Yehuda, my people of Yehuda and a descendant of the Lion of Yehuda, live in me with no fear of hunters. Many people started calling me that, and many of them did not even know that they could call me something else. The name entered into my accounts and passports. My wives called me that and girls loved me using this name.*

Soviet Jews were given a chance to imagine themselves in a new way: in different bodies, in a different time and space, doing different things, speaking a different language. They found themselves recorded in the Great age-old Book that kept the secret of who they were and situated them in world history. Alexander Kholmyansky wrote about his experience of studying the Hebrew language.

> *…and an amazing feeling, which I had never experienced before, appeared. The feeling of touching something that is yours, age-old, undecayed. Jews read these very words one hundred, one thousand, three thousand years ago, they are reading them now and will be reading them forever… and I, I understand it! I understand this language! This is the same language we learn, the language of "Passover Hagada" and "Megilat Esther"…*[23] (Kholmyansky 2007, 47)

Alexander describes this feeling as if he is touching something age-old, as if he has been given a chance to return to the past in a time machine, to take a glance at his forefathers' life. The magic experience contains an answer to the Soviet Jewish riddle, wittily formulated by Igor, "If we are just as all other Soviet citizens, why are we different?"

Another informant, Arye speaks about his experience of studying Hebrew:

> *I began studying Elef Milim.*[24] *And I had learnt it in two weeks. I already knew how to read… At the same time I found out that in the Inostranka [The Library of International Literature] there were books in Hebrew. I went there and I spent all of my free time in the Inostranka, trying to learn Hebrew… And this is how the first year passed. I mean I was in some trance from Hebrew! I was just high from Hebrew!*

Arye uses the metaphors of hypnotic trance and being high to explain the feeling that accompanied him in learning the Hebrew language. Later, Arye was introduced to Hasidic events in Moscow. He describes his experience in the following terms:

> *These mystical actions are really powerful, really powerful! Rebe is a powerful mystic. When I went out from farbringen, the world did not exist… This is called religion! All the rest is just a research of religion. Some people have sex and some people research it… Hasidut, and especially modern Hasidut, I do not know how it is in Russia, in Judaism [now] there is no sex. It means there is no tension whatsoever, there is no tonus there, no religious feeling.*

Arye is a master of provocative metaphors, but the parallel with love and desire is constantly present in the stories I collect. Thus, Boris says "I fell in love with Hebrew." And Yosef recalls,

> *All of this fulfilled me so much! I remember approaching my homebuilding entrance. And the old ladies on the bench in front of the entrance. They would whisper something to each other and look at me in a judgmental way. And I just don't care!*

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[23] Hagada and Megilat Esther – Jewish sacred texts.

[24] Elef Milim (Thousand Words) – the name of the textbook for Hebrew language that was used in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s.

Yosef describes a state of mind in which nothing apart from a particular object of desire matters, and in which everything beyond this feeling seems petty. Ironically, the eroticization of knowledge and objects of knowledge is a familiar line of thinking in Judaism (in the Talmud, and especially in the Kabbalah) (Boyarin 1990; Libes 2000). Suddenly, Soviet Jews inadvertently incarnated an ideal model of studying in the Jewish tradition. What a revelation it was for those of them who became interested in reading sacred texts specifically, when they found out that the content of the Talmud not only mirrored their attitude towards Jewish knowledge, but also served as a paragon of studying for the world Jewry. They felt themselves as more authentic than any other community, and were prepared to be great contributors to the body of Jewish knowledge in the near future.

Soviet Jews were enchanted with this new language, with these new forms of thinking, living, and reading texts — all of which were not recognized by Soviet political institutions as political forms and, therefore, were not controlled by them in any significant way. Since the Soviet state considered Jewish ethnic sentiments irrelevant to the context of late socialism, it left this life outside of any meaningful Soviet institutions[25]. At the same time, Jewish institutions such as synagogues, media, museums and social and educational programs, which served a disciplinary function of correcting neophyte practices in Western countries and in Israel, did not exist in the Soviet Union. Suddenly Jewish practices became a space in which people could experience freedom. Lev, who first came to a synagogue at the end of the 1970s says, "Nobody criticized anyone. At that point religious revival seemed to be something like a hippie movement. You could do it this way or that way, it was up to you: to smoke or not to smoke on Shabbat, to use transportation or to walk." Therefore, people who became interested in observing Judaism did so in a zone of relative freedom full of unique experiences, meanings and pleasures that were not possible once the Soviet context disappeared.

All of my informants recalled that they began to observe Judaism gradually, and that their observance took strange or even funny forms. Boris decided to stop eating pork, and every time he went to the grocery store, he asked the salesperson if hot dogs were made of pork. When one of the salespeople answered, "There could be just a little pork at most,"[26] he bought them. Many Jews were careful not to consume meat and milk together, yet did not take issue with the use of butter to fry meat patties. Uri decided to stop using a telephone on Shabbat, so when someone called, he would pick up the phone, quickly whisper, "I can't talk on the phone, it's Shabbat" and hang up. People used their imagination to make Jewish rituals possible in the Soviet context. Lev made a kippah,[27] a mandatory male head cover, out of a woman's bra. An explanation of this becomes clearer, perhaps, through similar stories about scholarly practices. For example, at some point Zeev heard about the famous Rashi commentary on the Torah,

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[25] Officially, Jews could satisfy their interest in Jewish religion, history and ethnography through certain—limited—sources: popular fiction literature, e.g. Sholem Aleichem and Lion Feuchtwanger; Soviet critical literature on religion and Zionism in the form of newspaper and journal articles, and scholarly books in the special storage section of larger libraries.

[26] Boris is joking about his reasoning, in which eating less pork was better, or even enough for observing kashrut, even though technically dishes that contained any amount of pork are not kosher. Another side of the joke is the typical Soviet person's sense of self-irony about the low quality of everything Soviet, e.g. no meat in hot dogs.

[27] Kippah is a ritual male headwear.

written in a variant of Hebrew script which one had to learn in order to read the comments. Zeev found the text and devised a specific method to decipher the script of Rashi. He presumed that the comments would necessarily contain the names of the characters mentioned in the commented verses, found them in the text, and through them de-coded the alphabet. He told me, with both irony and pride, that he had reinvented the wheel. It is interesting that although these stories were always accompanied by laughter, the narrators seemed to be proud of them.

Soviet Jews thought they were reviving an old tradition, but I would suggest that in the end they created something new. Though they learned to be pious in groups, many of them had some unique understanding or form of Judaism in mind. As Vladimir recalled, "I felt as if I were the only observant Jew in the world."

Thus, Itzhak, who built the sukkah out of matches, had his own concept of enlightened Judaism as a game to cope with the pettiness of daily routines through strange performance. He found it frustrating that people would stop paying attention to most of their lives as all of their actions became routinized. Judaism estranges normal practices of consuming food, going to the bathroom, using electricity, etc. When I argued that the Jewish way of life could also become a routine over time, he replied that the practices of Judaism are designed in such a way that they cannot. He joked about Sukkot rituals, "What the hell is this behavior? Some freaking hut, you shake the freaking palm branch this way and that way. What is this? A healthy behavior?" According to Itzhak, the ridiculous performance of Judaism pokes fun at petty human needs and errands. Yet, as we know, he did not build a real human sized tabernacle as most observant Jews do. He explained, "I could not build a real sukkah, I had no intention of showing it to the whole world, but I had fun playing the game." Building a real sukkah would have been too provocative a behavior in the Soviet context; it would have caught the attention of the public and, therefore, may have elicited the necessity of explaining himself or even fighting for this behavior. When someone acts provocatively in front of another who finds it provocative, he knows that it is necessary to explain his actions and prove their significance. When one enjoys the practice itself, one does not want to argue about it, but rather to keep doing what he is doing. Since the Soviet system seemed immutable, an attempt to change it was perceived by Soviet citizens as an indicator of bad taste or even craziness (Yurchak 2006). It also seemed a waste of precious time. Different from the understanding of freedom from the perspective of political movements, the need to prove a position publicly was associated, in the Soviet Union, with a lack of freedom rather than its manifestation. True freedom was associated with the ability to actually pursue the practices one considered significant with as little pauses for explanation as possible.

Itzhak hated the idea of challenging Soviet society with awkward rituals. His position might appear to coincide with that of Jewish reformists: the impossibility of fully implementing Jewish rituals in the context of Soviet life led him to a more moderate form of observance. However, Itzhak disagreed with this understanding of his view.

> *They [reformists] just think the Jewish tribe has to survive. Why? For what?... Performance is productive while it pursues the idea of making normal things strange, but when you start to observe routinely, or just fanatically think things must be a certain way, you lose the idea of performativity… Then it is just a primitive ritual like mumba yumba, it is like party membership.*

Inspired by the idea of a struggle against spontaneous uncontrolled existence through Judaism, Itzhak left for Israel to study the Talmud in a yeshiva in one of the settlements there. He lived there for 20 years, had his children, wore a black kippah and observed the covenants in the ways that were normal in his community. Three years ago, he moved back to Russia, became a part of an elite intellectual circle and constantly thinks of returning to a toy sukkah to avoid participation in collective behavior, since he is not sure anymore that his idea of enlightened Judaism is shared by even the most educated adepts of Judaism.

In the Soviet Union Itzhak did not feel free to act publicly as an orthodox Jew, though he did feel free enough to create a person that most accurately expressed his needs and values. In Israel, he was free to join any denomination—a fact that was regarded as an indication of freedom. However, the opportunity to belong to an institution ultimately limited rather than enhanced the experience of Judaism for Itzhak.

Encounter with Western/Israeli Jewish Institutions

Upon emigration to Israel or, for those who stayed, after the establishment of Jewish institutions in post-Soviet countries, Jews from the USSR revealed how Soviet their Jewishness was. They had either to conform to existing institutions, abandoning any expectation of finding the same meanings in Judaism as those they had previously discovered, or to find other spaces of freedom.

Chaim, who made art and organized unofficial exhibitions in his apartment, had a similar experience. In the late 1970s Chaim began observing Judaism, and its combination with art was the most harmonious thing for him. All of those ritual objects—tefillin, tallit, siddur, shofar—and practices—the ethics of the Jewish rituals, rocking while praying, wrapping one's arms with straps, blowing the ram's horn—which were so awkward in the secular Soviet context, aroused Chaim's imagination. He was creating a new person and a new reality apart from the real Soviet or the real Israeli life: the reality of the Biblical forefathers.

> *[Back in Moscow] I was arranging exhibitions at home… and I was completely naïve, meaning I exhibited photographs of… naked people among the other stuff. And people would come, giggle, etc… including X, who is a much-respected woman [in religious circles] now. Well, it does not even matter what THEY did, the important thing is that I would not have done it now—there is some inconsistency about it… And back then it seemed completely logical.*

When he moved to Israel, Chaim intended to continue his creation of both new canvases and a new pious Jewish person. Once there, however, he realized that these two projects were incompatible.

> *[In Israel] really, you come to a gallery, they see you wearing a kippah and immediately your value goes down... They look at you as if you fell from somewhere, especially because your kippah is usual [black/orthodox], not for fun, not colorful, not white, not rabbi Nachman, they see you wearing it routinely. Or, for example, some exhibition, and opening takes place on Saturday. You say, "I kind of can't do Saturday [because of Shabbat]." They say, "What?! Are you ok buddy?" That's it, you have to*

choose, either this or that. I am already used to these situations where you are neither with the whites nor with the reds[28]… You come to a religious place, they look [at your art works] and say, "And what the hell is this here? Nudity?" You start explaining, "Well, no, this is art, you know the Italian artists, I am in a dialog with them…" In short, that was a very peculiar time [late socialism], which shaped very peculiar people…

Chaim's black kippah and religious piety were a source of distrust for Israeli bohemians, as these were the signs of backward taste. At the same time, religious artists avoided him because they found his art immoral. In the view of religious circles, Chaim's dialog with the Italian artists did not justify the presence of nudity in art. Chaim was free to act either as an artist or as an orthodox Jew. The mixture of these identities made him a dilettante in the eyes of both communities.

"Identities require subjects to behave in ways that are identifiable," writes Laurie Essig (1999). "For instance, to 'be' a lesbian requires continuously behaving in agreed upon ways. Once the rules of the game are violated (e.g. by sleeping with a man), one can no longer be a lesbian." (Essig 1999, 81). Identities are always shaped in certain contexts. Jewish identities that had been established in the USA or Israel were therefore foreign to former Soviet people, and vice versa. In the Soviet context, participants of Jewish practices experienced religion as a form of critical thinking, rather than as a pre-existing tradition to be revived. Religion provided tools to question common Soviet ideas, e.g. that there is nothing that cannot be discovered and described by science (at least in the future); that ritual behavior and esthetics is crazy; that there is nothing worthwhile to be learned from the sacred texts; that there is no wisdom in thinking as an ethnic individual (as opposed to a cosmopolitan person), etc. In the Soviet world, religion was located in the same space as experimental art. Some people, such as Chaim, participated in both practices, as both were considered alternative experiences, ways to express inner questions. Both could have existed only in private apartments, and both attracted attention of authorities. This proximity between Judaism and experimental art is not mirrored in modern Israel or even the United States. This was a Jewish subjectivity that appeared only in the Soviet context devoid of conventional Jewish institutions.

Not only could religion and experimental art be mixed together, but even different branches of Judaism and even different religious traditions could serve as simultaneous sources of ideas for the same people. The knowledge of tensions among the Jewish denominations and ideologies outside of the Soviet Union was really limited. One of my informants told me about how every week a different rabbi came from Israel and other Western countries to teach the Soviet Jews in the 1980s. Mostly they were rabbis from Chabad and the Orthodox Union. One of the visiting rabbis was disappointed that the space where they studied sacred texts did not have any portraits of rabbis. He corrected this by hanging up the portrait of Rav Shah. It hung there for a week. The next week another rabbi arrived, from Chabad Lyubavitch and said, "Why did you hang a portrait of Rav Shah? It is not good, here is another respected Rav, and he hung the portrait of another Rav. Next week one more rabbi arrived and told them, "Why do you have the portraits of these two rabbis hanging together? I cannot stand it, let's take one down."

[28] Chaim refers to Russian Civil War terms: the Red Army (communists led by Lenin) versus the White Army (the army consisted of allied forces.

For Soviet Jews all of this was a petty fuss. For them the entirety of Jewish knowledge along with all the rabbis was precious and these portraits with unusual looking people were especially exciting. This argument between various Western and Israeli Jewish institutions was completely foreign to Soviet Jews.

The video archive of the American Jewish Historical Society has a tape from 1988 made by American Jewish tourists visiting Jewish activists in Vilnius, Lithuania. At the end of their meeting, one of the Jewish activists asks which denomination these tourists belong to (he presumes they are reformists). The main interviewer says that they are conservative, though there are two voices behind the camera who say they are reformist and traditional).[29] Therefore, all kinds of American Jewish denominations are represented in the video. The interviewer says he has a question about whether the visitors believe in Jesus Christ as a messiah of Jews. Several voices immediately object vehemently, shaming the man: "Oh no no! Of course not! Jews do not believe in Christ. Who taught you this question? We are Jews! Jews do not!!!" The guy looks disappointed and ashamed, like a person who feels that he said something stupid, but who does not understand what is so stupid about it. He is trying to explain that he has read a book by a man named Herzel, but we don't learn what the book is called or what it proposes, because the visitors do not let him finish and are not interested in what he says. They simply interrupt him, expressing either disappointment or condescension. Their tone teaches an inexperienced Soviet Jew not only that belief in Christ is a non-item of Judaism, but also that even saying the name of Christ out loud is indecent and shameful.

If I were to speculate on the background of this tape, I would say that the man read a book from samizdat—at that point any piece of available non-censored literature on a non-programmatic topic was perceived as a jewel. The intelligentsia gorged themselves on any information of this type. Since such information was perceived as hidden by the Soviet authorities, it was considered, according to many informants, to contain truth. Knowledge was divided into two categories, programmatic and non-programmatic. In these terms knowledge about Judaism for Soviet Jews was not any more precious than knowledge about Christianity. The only difference was that some information about Christianity was available in programmatic and widely read classic Russian literature, which attracted some people and turned away others. Not infrequently, Jews who later became interested in Judaism began their search by means of Christianity. At that point, they perhaps did not even draw a boundary between the two, but were just looking for anything spiritual, new, meaningful.

Criticizing reformists' approach to Judaism, Itzhak compares their actions to party membership. This metaphor is quite capacious. On the one hand, one might draw the parallel with Communist party membership, which by the 1980s had become more of a ritual than a meaningful political action (Yurchak 2006). On the other hand, the metaphor is meant to differentiate between political and spiritual activity in general. Since party activity is aimed at concrete achievements in the political field, it presumes unification among the members, the

[29] Orthodox, Conservative and Reformist are different ways of observing Judaism. This division is relevant mainly for American Jews. The Orthodox branch allows for the least accommodations of the modern world. The term traditionalist is mostly used in Israel. Traditionalists feels free to choose what to observe. Usually they symbolically celebrate some holidays and Shabbats without meticulously following the commandments. I mention this detail to elucidate the variety of Judaisms that were represented in that room.

stability of one's convictions, the reduction of an abstract philosophical idea to a concrete party program. To achieve political recognition and power, social minorities have to form parties and follow party principles. Soviet Jews who became interested in religious observance, whether they eventually succeeded or not, were rather escaping from the party principles. Some stories illustrate this aversion literally.

Gershom was curious about Judaism and scrutinized all the books he found on this topic. He learned, from Simon Dubnov's history of the Jews in Russia, about the book of Zohar, a foundational book in the literature of Jewish mystical thought. He decided that he wanted to read it and looked for someone to help him.

> *I came to the synagogue in Mariina Roshcha… There was a great elder [in this synagogue] back then, Avrom Genkin, a disabled veteran of the Second World War, a former Gulag prisoner, who was a step-father of all [Jewish] religious youth. He had lost a leg and had a prosthesis. He worked at the Savelovskii market as a locksmith, he made keys... I came to the synagogue and saw Avrom who was coming down from the second floor where a regular Shabbat spree took place. He burst out laughing at me. I had a very provocative appearance of a hippie. Clothes with bells, long hair, funny hat, colored pants. And then he invited me to come up. Elders and young people seated around the table saw me and broke into laughter too. I got very offended and said that they shouldn't laugh at me because I, in fact, I wanted to learn how to read the books Zohar and More Nevuchim… people simply rocked with laughter under the table. I can imagine how funny it sounded. A pal with a ridiculous appearance suddenly utters [Jewish] words that nobody knows. Zohar and Moreh Nevuchim are the most difficult books of the Jewish tradition. Then when people crawled back from under the table, they asked me if I had already done a Kiddush that day. I asked them who Kiddush was, they poured me [14 years old] a shot of vodka, explained to me what I should say and I was completely convinced. Then we all went to someone's place nearby to be able to walk to the synagogue [for Havdalah] and read my first real Jewish texts.*

The synagogue that Gershom came to was a small, dusty, ramshackle wooden hut in the outskirts of Moscow. It was maintained by several old Habad rabbis, who had remained religious through the Soviet period. They were born before the revolution and originated from traditional Jewish families in which rituals were a part of everyday routine. In the Stalinist era many were imprisoned, after which they lived and observed quietly. It was for this reason that they were reluctant to see new faces at the synagogue. However, for young educated Jews who became curious about Judaism, they were the only connection to their remote Jewish ancestors both from the Bible and the books of Sholem Aleichem. On the shelves emanating the scent of wood, the elders kept huge, ancient volumes with sand colored pages written in mystical scripts. These people looked like all old Soviet people—worn suits, old caps, no black clothes. Even beards didn't appear until the 1980s, because before that they would have stood out too much. Gershom fell in love with the little outcast synagogue and its inhabitants, but he became alienated from it after American Hassids brought changes to this world.

> *I was always attracted by Hassids, because Jewish mysticism as such always attracted me. I distanced myself from it in the mid-1980s, when Russian Chabad was changed significantly under the influence of American shlihim (emissaries). The people*

who I liked were those elders and their students from youth who belonged to a different, more genuine world than the new Chabad did. The new Chabad was shaped in the US in the 1970s and 1980s and began exporting itself everywhere, including the Soviet Union, to the extent that this was possible. While at the time there were not too many shlichim[30], everyone knew what to believe and what to think based on the books they read. [And] the exported Chabad movement was rigid and ideologically oriented. In fact, ideology replaced religion... For example, in 1982 the Chabadniks declared the Rebbe to be a mashiah (messiah). Under no circumstances could I reconcile to that. I felt acutely that it was wrong.

Gershom told me that those Moscow Jewish elders had little in common with the modern Hassids, who lived in a certain way mostly because their people lived in this way—their religion is mostly the result of a social milieu. For the elders, living according to the Halakha was rather the result of a free choice. Gershom felt himself a part of the quirky little synagogue, which he described as "our place!", but once this synagogue turned into a party headquarters with structured entrance and membership rules, it became alien to him.

Gershom broke up with the Hassids, but kept observing Judaism. In contrast, Oleg, who had become observant in the Soviet Union, took off his kippah in Israel, the capital of religiosity. When he arrived in Israel in 1989, he was accepted in a short-term Russian program at the religious Zionist yeshiva Shvut Ami in the settlement of Alon Shvut. At the yeshiva he read three prayers a day, and it became a formality lacking, in his understanding, "the sacred." After his educational program they offered him a permanent place at the yeshiva, but he already "could not pray in a conventionally Jewish way" [*molit'sia evreiskoi molitvoi*].

I told them, "You stank up the heaven with your prayers" (provoniali nebesa svoimi molitvami). I took off the kippah. Taking off your kippah is like removing half of your head. Habits grow strongly in your body. It was a really painful surgery, removing the Jewish habits.

First time I talked to Oleg in 2007, seventeen years after he dropped the yeshiva. When I interviewed Oleg back in 2007 I did not pay attention to the phrase he dropped about Machanaim, a group of former Soviet Jews, living in the settlement of Maale Adumim and identifying themselves as religious Zionists. They, unlike Oleg, still keep up the observant way of life today. Oleg told me that when he met them in Moscow, they were a group of young, full of life and deep people, while in 2007, he claimed, they "had a pale look and the shape of a suitcase" (*blednii vid I formu chemodana*). I was intrigued by this statement for six years, when I finally asked him to clarify what he had meant by that.

Well, it is my subjective feeling that they were full of energy, interesting and deep [in Moscow]. When my Teacher left [for Israel], I was looking for other sources [of knowledge] and found Machanaim. I attended the class of Zeev Dashevskii and absolutely loved it. There were young people, who knew everything better than I did,

[30] Shlichim – emissaries from Israel and the Jewish communities of other countries who visited Soviet Jews at their homes. Sometimes they were sent to help financially, sometimes—spiritually, and sometimes they were just curious to see the everyday life of a Soviet citizen/Jew.

who discussed everything with so much confidence! When they all came here, they realized, unlike me, that they had to look for their place in society, to fight for survival. They found it, they created it. They opened a center [for the study of Judaism]. Most of them, of course, work as programmers and either need this center or not really… This center was and is nothing in my eyes. Perhaps someone needed it, girls were learning there to prepare for a giyur [Jewish conversion].

Oleg smiled sarcastically. In Israel giyur is not only a matter of religion, but also of citizenship. One who went through a real giyur (a process that usually takes about three years) learned the intricate ways of life of an observant Jew as well as the history of the Jewish people. The initiate then becomes observant him/herself, becomes Jewish in the eyes of Israel and, therefore, has a right to citizenship and the benefits of a new Israeli, which includes a yearlong allowance for accommodation in a new country. When I came to Israel in 2012, most students at the center were non-Jewish girls from former Soviet countries who wanted to get married to Israeli men, whether of Soviet/former Soviet background or not. Oleg continued.

It happened not only to Machanaim, it happened to the whole community [people who started observing Judaism in the Soviet Union]. All of us faded away upon arrival, because back then all felt themselves to be such heroes, discovered something new, but here Judaism plays completely different roles than there [in the Soviet Union]. By the way it also plays different roles in modern Russia. It got stabilized and routinized there. There was an inflow of American and Israeli money. People who do Judaism-related jobs get money for it, and nothing heroic happens anymore… We felt that we did something spiritual/meaningful (dukhovnoe) and that we could become victims for it, but in return we got a deep meaning of life. Here Judaism turned out to be a part of politics, and no one is interested in our way of studying. We do not have a place in any yeshivas, we do not have place in any 'outside of yeshivas' [v neieshivakh nam tozhe mesta net]. Everyone responded differently to it, but generally, I think, people got dispersed. The Machanaim people were faithfully wearing kippahs on their heads, but nothing interesting. They got together to discuss [some sacred texts], such a rotten place (tukhloe mestechko). I have never heard anything interesting there.

I suggested that if they had wanted they could have studied Jewish texts in the same way as in Moscow, disregarding the extent to which Judaism had turned out to be a part of politics in Israel. After all, why was it important that someone made politics out of it? Oleg took a long pause.

Machanaim is an institution, and as an institution they are, no doubt, a part of politics. It is impossible just to sit and study. As for studying itself. Yes, why not organizing a small beit-midrash, where people would study the *Russian [Soviet] style Judaism that we are used to? I have not seen anything like this… Well, people do not live here and now and they do not live in their bodies, but in their dreams, which are usually about another place and often about another time. For example, members of the Russian orthodox paint icons. Andrei Rublev, for example. There is an element of an icon called icon hill. What is an icon hill? It is actually Jerusalem hills as imagined by a Russian monk of the 15th century. There is a standard/canon of how to paint it. Why does the*

canon of painting icons include the hill? Because, staying in the forest, monks are dreaming about Jerusalem. However, if they had suddenly, God forbid, found themselves in Jerusalem, they would have had nothing to dream about. And our [Jewish] sages of the 2-4th centuries understood it when they said, "We are not coming back [to Palestine][31], because if we come back we will have to take a responsibility for our life. We will be taken over by some Roman empire, lose again and not be able to believe in our God, because he does not protect us. And if we stay in some other place, we can twice a year say 'next year in Jerusalem'[32] for 2000 years and everything will be all right."

Oleg uses quite a few metaphors to describe Judaism in the Soviet Union vs in Israel and modern Russia. For him Judaism in the Soviet Union is associated with energy, deep meanings, and heroism. Judaism in Israel and modern Russia is formal, lacking spirituality, stinky, rotten and faded away. All of these misfortunes are conditioned by politics and the fight for survival. The dream he speaks of occupies a central place in his discourse—for him to live means to be able to dream, and dreaming is something that characterizes Soviet Jewish practices. According to Oleg, the anticipation of the encounter with the land of Israel gave Soviet Jews a stronger feeling of life than the routine of everyday Israel life itself, which Oleg in turn associates with death.

Another person, who used the metaphors of life and death to compare the exciting Judaism of the Soviet Union with its institutionalized counterpart in Israel, is Yona, who began studying Hebrew and then Torah in the Soviet Union in 1980. He quickly became a teacher himself. In Leningrad in the early 1980s he wore a Hassidic hat and a long black Hassidic suit wrapped around by a gartel,[33] in public. He kept up a religious life style and, according to Oleg, "made a serious impression on his students." In the Soviet Union Yona studied the Torah very seriously, and people knew him as an extremely knowledgeable teacher who could certainly make a religious career upon arrival to Israel.

When I came, I am not saying I was famous, but there was some interest in me. These people say, "Come join us", Moshe Pontelyat says, "Come join us!", Izia Kogan says, "Come join us!"…

Yona had enough knowledge and social connections to become a part of the yeshiva. However, not only did he quit the yeshiva, Yona even removed his kippah, which meant an end to the public display of his affiliation with a certain branch of religious Judaism.

On the way here, I was thinking, what I will be doing there? Should I go to a yeshiva? I tried sitting in this and that yeshiva, and I understood it was not… I tried going to [the

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[31] Oleg means Rashi's commentary on Shir-ha-Shirim and its discussion in the Talmud. The discussion is about whether Jews are allowed to return to the land of Israel before the Messiah shows up, and, if so, how (one by one or all together).

[32] Ba shana habaa (next year in Jerusalem) – the words from the Jewish prayer.

[33] Someone who looked this way in Sovietized Leningrad would necessarily attract people's attention with all the possible concluding scenarios: being judged or even beaten up by someone who is bothered by difference as well as being stopped by a policeman, should they be in the mood for an argument.

Chabad yeshiva] Shamir, [the religious Zionist yeshiva] Shvut Ami, [and the misnaged yeshiva] Mir. I realized that I could lose myself here, this was not life. Imagine an athlete who reads all his life about high jumps, but never jumps. Yeshivot seemed to me the place where people learn how to live, but do not live… the world of yeshivot is a cult that locked itself in and thinks that life is a dirty thing that they should stay away from… and life is like gambling. Our fathers lived exactly this way. They took the stakes. Jacob ran away from Esav without any money. Esav used different tricks to steal Jacob's blessing. This is life! And they [yeshiva students] do not live. Life is complicated and therefore it is alive…

I am recalling the Jewish revival in Piter[34]. I lived a full life in all respects. All those things you tell me about—fear, pressure—this all was completely peripheral. When you feel that you are in your place, that you live, that you do the vocation [delaesh delo]. Back then I thought that I did it for the Jewish people, for God, but today I think that, by all accounts, I did it for myself, because I lived the full life and I was good at it. At teaching, communicating with youth [younger people and other students, since Yona was pretty young himself].

I sat in, looked at these students, listened to their conversations, just the same as all people have. What costs what, how much he paid here, how much he paid there, complete materialists in a bad sense… Then I went to Shamir, where Rav Steinsalz gave lessons of Hassidut on a pretty deep level. He read with us such texts as Likdei Torah, Alter Ego—pretty kabbalistic texts, hard to understand… So Shteinzalts was just discussing something impenetrable. And students asked him just really formal questions. I could tell that they did not feel it in their gut. It all looked like some abstract algebra. One can study anything this way, but how is it connected to life? And I understood that I wouldn't study in a yeshiva. I am sure many people consider me a weak person.

While observing the rituals, studying Hebrew and, later, Jewish sacred texts, Yona experienced what he characterizes, when recounting it to me, as feeling alive. This feeling affects one physiologically, leaving no space for anything else. Indeed, when something is happening in one's gut, it is hard to focus on anything else. He compares the feeling that he gets from performing Jewish practices to gambling and to the feeling one has while performing a vocation. Finally, he compares Judaism to participating in a sport and, whether intentionally or not, he chooses the high jump—an exercise that involves free flying, presumably causing that feeling in the gut as well.

Selling your skills is not scary, selling your soul is. Why was I afraid of staying in the place where you get money [for selling your soul]? First, they make you feel attached, and then it becomes one of the factors for which you wear a kippah. It only seems that you just sit in a yeshiva, get the money and study the Torah. The minute you become dependent on the organization where you study, you have to line up [as in the army]. You can't have your own opinion, you can't be independent in your thinking. When you do a secular job, you sell them your qualification, your brain, and your convictions remain your private issue.

[34] Piter is a diminutive from St. Petersburg: Leningrad under the Soviet state.

The party metaphor, which we have already encountered, turns into an army metaphor and refers to the prevalence of an institution over one's feelings. Yona told me that he went to Israel to find the Teacher, but was not able to do so. Perhaps, in the Soviet Union he thought that what he needed was a clarification of the hard texts he read, but it turned out that another person's explanation was the last thing he wanted.

In speaking about highly institutionalized and politicized Judaism in Israel, Yona characterizes it as materialistic in a bad sense. His feeling of being alive around Jewish practices did not leave space for mundane needs, and the people he observes at yeshivas do not share his excitement for dialog with the sacred texts. Yona observes that the texts do not change these people and they do not change the texts. Since Judaism in Yona's life had so much meaning, he could not profane it by turning it into a profession. He even refused to receive a stipend at the yeshiva. Yona says that the yeshiva's manner of learning the Jewish texts reminded him of formal algebra. There were quite a few people in the Soviet Union who felt much the same way about algebra as Yona felt about Jewish practices. Yona himself is a chemist, by the way, but the key word here is, probably, *formal*, meaning, again, missing the feeling.

There is a story about a rabbi who came to Moscow from the US and was teaching the Jewish texts for fourteen hours. Finally, the completely frazzled rabbi asked if this was enough, but his students wanted to study further. No matter how interesting an object of studying is, such a drive does not make sense for mere knowledge acquisition, unless this knowledge constitutes one's life.

Two other important parts in Yona's quotation touch on the conversations of yeshiva students, which are the "*same as all people have*" and about the studying of the texts, which yeshiva students carry out the same way that "*one can study anything*." Yona has a presumption that people who study sacred texts are not the same as other people: they are special, just as the thing they study is not everything, but something special. Yona felt that for yeshiva students religion became a job, a business they did to provide for their families rather than to have deep experiences and answer tormenting questions.

The Freedom of Feeling Alive

In reading these stories, we can identify two feelings around Jewish practices, one that informants had in the Soviet Union and one they had after its disintegration or their arrival to Israel. They are juxtaposed in different metaphors, such as life and death, flourishing and rotting, life and algebra, life and party membership. There are some common sense explanations for this change that can be observed, in a more or a less radical form, in each story. One of them is nostalgia for being young. This is an obvious reason for a description of the change in such metaphors. Another familiar explanation lies in emigrational downshifting: many emigrees to Israel were not able to succeed professionally, economically or socially. Although these explanations are factors (presuming their accurate formulation), I argue that there is something else that needs to be theorized in this story.

Can we use freedom, a term with the baggage of political movements, to analyze the feeling experienced by my informants around Jewish practices and knowledge in the Soviet Union, and to explain the shift after their emigration to the countries with democratic political systems? Isaiah Berlin's classical text on freedom says that "there is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule" (Berlin 1997, 202). He suggests sorting out two types of freedom: 'negative'-*freedom from* and 'positive'-*freedom to*. The negative sense of freedom comes to light when we ask the question "how far does government interfere with me?" and "what am I free to do or be?" To understand positive freedom, one should ask "who governs me?" and "who is to say what I am, and what I am not, to be or to do?" As elaborated by Berlin: "The desire to be governed by myself, or at any rate to participate in the process by which my life is to be controlled, may be as deep a wish as that for a free area for action, and perhaps historically older. But it is not a desire for the same thing" (Berlin 1997, 203). Was this feeling that Jews experienced a freedom in a negative sense, shaped due to resistance to the Soviet power? And, if not, did Jews experience freedom in a positive sense by mentally breaking with the Soviet worldview and values?

The term *freedom* is strongly connoted with politics in Western liberal contexts. Indeed, freedom is rarely used, for example, in a Marxist sense—as economic freedom and the right to the provision of basic needs. Amy Ninetto, however, argues that what people experience as freedom is determined by culture and is sometimes detected only upon emigration to another cultural environment. Studying the role of freedom in science, she examines a case of Russian scientists who have experience working both in Russia and Western countries such as Germany and the U.S. She begins with a puzzling statement from her informants that "Russia is the freest country in the world", which resonates with the discourses that I myself encountered before. Trying to understand this statement in the context of Russian poverty and corruption, she comes to a conclusion that "'freedom' exists in a problematic relationship to science" (Ninetto 2000, 40). One would expect that "scientific creativity is engendered by the free and autonomous science, independent of the social conditions in which it exists. Yet these social conditions clearly create the contexts in which "freedom" is defined and constructed; moreover, in a transnational context these definitions and constructions are frequently and inevitably, multiple and contradictory". While advantages found in the Western capitalist countries, such as the latest equipment, reagents, journals and other materials may free scientists from material constraints, their institutions of science, unlike Russian, were designed in a different (market-like) way. Hence Russian scientists in US academic institutions felt unfree despite the material comforts. Science in Germany and the U.S. is oriented to the market which chooses need-based popular projects, such as Viagra, over slow fundamental research with no immediate result aimed for a future advancement. Scientists also felt unfree because of the "unpredictability of the grant approval and renewal, by the organization of work,… inability to publish results that are considered either confidential or the property of… [the] boss". Ninetto argues against the assumption that "scientific freedom can be located in only one cultural context—that of a capitalist free market". Her agenda is not to show what is universally free or unfree in the capitalist market or communist planned economy. Rather, her study clearly shows that what people understand as freedom and in which situations they can experience it are conditioned by their socialization in a particular environment. Freedom is connected to a certain system, and in order to feel it one has to be a part of the system itself as well as know it

well enough to find its space of freedom. To feel free in a different system one has to learn and absorb the way in which people feel free within that other system.

In the context of a liberal understanding of the term *freedom*, my story takes on the familiar explanation: the freedom that Soviet Jews experienced was the result of having declared oneself as a *bad guy* who is not loyal to the state, wants to leave for Israel and does not obey the unwritten rules of the Soviet system—in short, the freedom of protesting the rules of the system. Although this explanation may be true for some of my informants, it does not seem to explain the phenomenon of feeling alive resulting from the pursuit of Jewish practices for others.

First, this feeling was experienced by extremely varied groups of people. They included those who radically broke with the Soviet Union by applying for an exit visa to leave for Israel, who quit their jobs, and who were excluded from the former social environment. However, these groups also included people who applied for exit visas yet managed to keep their jobs and social environments. Also included are people who participated in Jewish practices for the sake of the practices themselves, and who did not intend to leave, or at least not initially. Analyzing the last Soviet generation, Alexei Yurchak articulates its relation to the Soviet system as being *vnye* (both inside and outside). Most late-Soviet citizens were not under pressure to either agree to or support an existing system or to explicitly resist it. The lack of constative meaning of the system language (in a broad sense) made both support and critique of the system meaningless (Yurchak 2006). Jewish practices per se were not a form of fight against the Soviet system, even if they eventually contributed to its disintegration. Participants tried to avoid breaking the rules, where following them did not impede their primary interest—Jewish knowledge.

Second, even if the feeling of freedom was conditioned by a certain fallout from the systemic routine, this still does not explain the feeling itself. Shall we assign such a powerful stream of energy to an ability to say the words that no one says, or to the lack of necessity to attend bureaucratic meetings?

Alexei Yurchak shows that the Soviet system did two contradictory things to its citizens. On the one hand, the project of bringing up a Soviet citizen succeeded in instilling a longing for large ideals and for creating something important. Being raised on classical Russian and Soviet literature, one was often under pressure to find the greater meaning of life. The Soviet system claimed this greater meaning to be the building of communism. On the other hand, the Soviet system left this space empty in many people, who did not share the constative meaning of the communist authoritative discourse. Soviet people fulfilled their longing for ideals and a meaningful life in various deterritorialized milieus: the milieus of various religions, Hippie culture, national movements, alternative music and artist groups, archeological expeditions, backpacking and hiking trips, etc. (Yurchak 2006). They felt that these milieus, unexplored and, therefore, lacking clichés, could be a potential source of freedom, the experience I will explore in details in the next chapter.

Instead of drawing the logical conclusion that the freedom of being alive came from meaningful action within the milieu of one's choice, for now I will perform an opposite operation. I believe that my case provides one with a taste of how basic the Soviet value of living according to certain ideals actually was, if in finding them one felt so alive. Berlin's freedom in a positive sense looks applicable, at first glance. Soviet Jews enjoyed the mental

independence of finding new meaningful milieus. However, it was namely the inability to break up with the basic need of the Soviet system, the need to have ideals and to be productive within their system that conditioned the phenomenon of freedom that Soviet Jews experienced.

Chapter 3
Practices of the Search for the "Extraordinary": Economy and Ideology

The Concept of the "Extraordinary" and Creation of "Extraordinary Social Milieus"

In this chapter I will discuss Jewish practices in the broader context of late socialism and will place them among other similar practices, such as the pursuits of hippies, rock musicians, and alternative artists, various religions, yoga, martial arts, mountaineering, etc. In order to do so I will introduce the concept of the "extraordinary" and suggest that these practices embodied a search for the "extraordinary" by the Soviet intelligentsia. The term "extraordinary" could be understood in two senses. First, it is anything, practices, objects, forms, texts, sounds, smells and people, sensed as unusual/uncommon/unfamiliar/rare/or even exotic. Second, it could be understood as outstanding/remarkable/exceptional/and brilliant. I use the "extraordinary" in both senses and will further demonstrate how both of these meanings are present in the pursuit of Jewish practices and how they intersect in my field. I will also explain what the search for "the extraordinary" has in common with and how it differs from the other phenomena that these practices might look like: "internal emigration", an experience of "elsewhere", "professional development" and "unique hobbies." I will also show that the feeling discussed in Chapter 2 is associated with this type of practices. Finally, I will analyze, how these practices, usually narrated as existing "in spite of" the Soviet system, are, in fact, economically and ideologically embedded within this system.

Unusual/uncommon/unfamiliar/rare/exotic

"We all wanted something different, non-Soviet, we were excited by it… at the same time we were not anti-Soviets [antisovetchiki]," Zeev Shachnovskii, a Hebrew language teacher explained about the friendly gatherings at his place, where young people met, spoke Hebrew, listened to the radio (presumably international broadcasting, such as Voice of America), sang Hebrew songs over food and drink (Kosharovsky 2008, 223-224). One who began to pursue some kind of Jewish practice, found themselves in the new unknown world of exotic practices, material objects, forms, texts, sounds, smells and most importantly people, who possessed unique knowledge and/or had a different appearances. Unfamiliar names, rituals and traditional objects, the shape and sound of Hebrew letters, texts read from right to left, the smell of ancient Jewish folios in a synagogue, the sound of songs by Nechama Lifshitz or Shlomo Karlebach, an uncommon concept of being a proud Jew, and the mysterious image of Israel shaped this exciting and fresh world. The search for these non-cliché worlds became an important part of the intelligentsia Soviet life in the 1970s and 1980s. Zeev Shachnovsii formulated this search as a search for "something different, non-Soviet." I am going to unpack this term and suggest that an alternative category of "the extraordinary" avoids a common confusion related to the emic term "non-Soviet."

For an internal observer the term "non-Soviet" intuitively makes a lot of sense: it refers to the border between the Soviet and non-Soviet, geographical, temporal, political and symbolic.

Therefore, one way of understanding the "extraordinary" is to think of the practices related to "beyond the border." Describing the world of the late Soviet citizen, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak analyzes an important characteristic of this period—"various cultural and intellectual pursuits based on the experience of a faraway "elsewhere"[35]—foreign languages and Asian philosophy, medieval poetry and Hemingway's novels, astronomy and science fiction, avant-garde jazz and songs about the pirates, practices of hiking, mountaineering, and going on geological expeditions in the remote nature reserves of Siberia, the Far East, and the North" (Yurchak 2006, 160). The ideal model of such an "elsewhere" for the Soviet people is "*zagranitsa*" (a noun "which literary means beyond the border and in practice means" a place "that is abroad"). "*Zagranitsa*", the archetype of which was the "West" was one of the dream worlds created by the Soviet people, in which the border was geographical, between the Soviet Union and the other world. It is extremely hard to cross, and therefore, anything beyond it is romanticized. One had to have "special means" to cross: to be a high-ranking politician, a famous dancer, a part of the military intelligence, etc. and all of these people went through a process of screening for "political reliability" (*politicheskaia nadezhnost'*). For this reason, teachers, visitors, material objects, texts, etc. from beyond the border, the non-Soviet space, produced profound interest among the Soviet people in general and among the Jews in particular. Using the words of Chaim (fully cited in Chapter 4) the image of "*Zagranitsa"* (abroad) worked on the Soviet people as "some powerful drug."

While in the case of "*Zagranitsa*" the border is geographical, my informants' "non-Soviet" also refers to other types of borders. The "extraordinary" could also be experienced through encounters with symbols, foreign to the Soviet reality: the Hebrew alphabet, Jewish symbols, ritual objects, Hebrew texts and songs, etc. Emphasizing the importance of the aesthetical and emotional Zelenina argues, "…every fronde (*Fr*. rebel), including religious and ideological not rarely began with the style[36]" (Zelenina 2018, 240). She mentions as well that the aesthetical

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[35] Yurchak does not make an emphasis on the "extraordinary" as a term, however from his example of "imaginary elsewhere" we learn that "elsewhere" is where Soviet citizens look for the "extraordinary." One of the examples of an "imaginary elsewhere", given by Yurchak, is a movie by Andrei Tarkovsky *Stalker,* based on the popular Soviet science fiction novel Roadside Picnic by Boris and Arkadii Strugatsky . "The story takes place in an unnamed country twenty years after it served as a picnic stop for an alien spaceship. The spaceship left behind some debris around which the Zone has formed. The Zone is dangerous and can cause death to anyone who ventures in; the state declares it off limits and installs special arm forces to guard it. But the Zone is also a site of mysterious powers. Adventurous individuals, called stalkers, bring people to the Zone for a fee, leading them to the room at the Zone`s center where one`s deepest desire is granted. It is widely recognized in Russiathat the Strugatskys meant their book to be a metaphor of the late Soviet reality… When the characters of the Strugatskys` book reach the room, they find to their surprise nothing **extraordinary** there." (Yurchak 2006, 160) Yurchak`s "elsewhere" is one of the dimensions of the extraordinary that is helpful to understand Jewish practices and other similar engagements in the late Soviet period. "Elsewhere" and "extraordinary" are the terms that I use to translate Zeev Shachnovskii's "different" and "non-Soviet".

[36] Zelenina uses the word "style" in a narrow sense, giving examples of tefillin (an element of ritual Jewish costume) and a magendavid necklace. However, enlarging the meaning of this term would only alter her concept. Thus, for example, I find it legitimate to include the style of conceptualizing the word "Jewish" or the style of analysis in the Talmud. The tension created between style/aesthetics and content here is the same as generally discussed in the theory of performativity. Thus, for example, having classified utterances into constative and

and emotional aspect was important not only in the newly discovered world of Jewish practices, but also other nascent worlds in the Soviet Union, those of hippie, orthodoxy, yoga and martial arts. Those who found some Jewish family relics among old things in closets or those who came to the ramshackle wooden synagogue in Malakhovka and discovered pre-revolutionary folios in Hebrew emanating the scent of antiquity imagined "crossing" some kind of a temporal border, the border that separated not only material objects, but also different concepts of what being Jewish meant. While in the Soviet Union, as I have explained in Chapter 2, it was a pure label that lead though to certain unofficial institutional limitations, family relics and Hebrew script kept the key to the riddle of where the Jewish label came from, what tradition, religion, residence or outfit historically separated Jews from other seemingly similar Soviet people.

Geographical border usually coincided with the political border; however some examples reveal a divergence. Thus, refuseniks, who had minimal involvement with the Soviet institutions did not cross the geographical border, but certainly crossed the political one in that they were not normal citizens anymore. On the other hand, we could think of a situation when one crossed a geographical border, but did not cross the political border. For example, in the hierarchy of curious things, embodiments of the socialist block (material objects, people, etc.) evoked less interest than that of the capitalist world. Traveling to or obtaining things from Yugoslavia and Cuba was exciting, but not as much as visiting or acquiring things from the US, France or Israel. Therefore, *beyond the border non-socialist* spaces were more "extraordinary" than *beyond the border socialist spaces*. Crossing the political border could also be expressed in joining explicitly oppositional groups (such as dissidents). In contrast to Yurchak's "normal people" who escaped the political and juxtaposed themselves to both communist activists and dissidents—anyone interested in the political—in the case of Jewish practices it is more productive to not perceive the options of political opposition and an escape from the political as two mutually exclusive choices. I suggest considering them as parts of a spectrum, in which one could not only be more or less provocative, but also move from one type of action to another at different times, or be closer to one type and maintain friendships with people closer to the other type. Also, in the case of Jewish practices, such expressions of political disloyalty as an application for an exit visa (to be discussed in Chapter 4) could be combined with lack of any further provocative behavior or with practices that could be thought of in terms of a grey zone (as, for example, the practice of teaching Hebrew).

This various ways of the search for the "extraordinary" could be pursued on different levels of engagement and visibility for an external observer. The concept of transcending a border helps us to see parts of the phenomenon that the term "movement", for example, does not. However, the concept of the border between Soviet and non-Soviet has its own flaws as well: in some cases the border between Soviet and non-Soviet was flexible or vague. While the concept of border helps clarifying some of the cases of encounter with the "extraordinary", other cases could not be understood in this way. Carl Shmitt wrote "The decision on the exception [my

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performative, John Austin demonstrates that, in fact, all the utterances contain both dimensions (Austin 1975). All of these things, unusual for the Soviet reality, impressed Soviet Jews.

note: beyond the border] is a decision in the true sense of the word. Because a general norm, as represented by an ordinary legal prescription, can never encompass a total exception, the decision that a real exception exists cannot therefore be entirely derived from this norm" (Schmitt 1986, 6). Many Jewish practices fell into the category that Carl Schmitt analyzes as an "exception", and therefore, were not to be categorized through merely juristic means—the Sovereign was eventually the one who made a decision on the political meaning of these practices, whether they were Soviet or non-Soviet. Only in some cases did the state consider Jewish practices beyond acceptable and deserving of punishment. However, often in the same kinds of cases it did not consider them harmful and left them within the legal norm. Escaping from the political had multiple forms, but all of them required making use of "symbolic free time"[37], the time empty from Soviet ideological activities. Thus, even if the substance of practices did not explicitly oppose the Soviet system, it impeded its flow. This ambivalent state of Jewish practices in the Soviet Union complicates the use of the term "non-Soviet" in this regard.

The border was moving, both in imagination of soviet citizens themselves and in decisions on the exception by the sovereign. For example, a trip to the world of Jewish practices often began with an interest in regular books, such as the books of Sholem Aleichem and Lion Feuchtwanger, published in Soviet publishing houses and present on regular Soviet shelves. These books contained some quite extraordinary worlds; however calling them non-Soviet would be awkward. Analyzing the practice of reading *samizdat*, unofficial publications, one discovers that for some Soviet citizens the practice felt like an act of bravery and for some of them it was a normal practice. Another example is Hebrew language—not explicitly present in the Soviet everyday life—and usually categorized as an example of a non-Soviet activity that attracted my informants. However, in Chapter 1 I gave an example of Semen Yakerson, who read Hebrew books in the Public Library in Leningrad easily and completely legally, which makes the term "non-Soviet" inaccurate. At the same time, these same books in Moscow were kept in a special section of the library where one had to get a special access confirmed by the Soviet institution, which makes these books not exclusively Soviet either. This contradiction shows us that the Jewish practices that my informants pursued existed in the grey area, where their legality was determined locally, and therefore, they cannot be strictly categorized as Soviet or non-Soviet. The practice of teaching Hebrew had the same status—it was not illegal (in fact, it was limitedly taught at universities) and did not necessarily irritate the authorities as such, however, its connection to emigration placed it in the same grey area. Many Hebrew teachers never interacted with the authorities, some of them, however, got imprisoned (either for nationalism or for "spread of the views besmirching the Soviet system", or, later, in the 1980s, through fabrication of some other criminal cases against Hebrew teachers, such as drug possession).

Addressing these grey areas of Soviet "elsewhere" worlds, Yurchak suggests not analyzing this space as a non-Soviet, but as a "*vnye*" Soviet, meaning both inside and outside of the state system (Yurchak 2006, 128). Yurchak cites here Vail' and Genis, astonishingly accurate observers of the time, who "referred to these Soviet worlds of the 1960s as "some unknown and wonderful country of Dolphinia (*strana Del'finiia*)… [that] could exist anywhere—in other

[37] "Symbolic free time" has been analyzed by Alexei Yurchak and is further discussed in this chapter (2006, 156).

galaxies, as in science fiction books, or in one's own room, separated from the surrounding world with something private—usually in a typical Russian way, with books" (Vail' and Genis 2000, 137-38)" (Yurchak 2006, 160). Vail' and Genis demonstrate that despite the seeming remoteness of these dream worlds, they are the products of the Soviet imagination, springing from everyday Soviet rooms.

Another researcher of the late Soviet period, Juliane Furst, shows the importance of the Soviet informal worlds as well, however she refers to them as "internal emigration" (*vnutrenniaia emigratsiia*) from the Soviet reality. She observes a shift from an outward opposition to an internal opposition. The "regime confrontation" seen in the public spaces of Mayakovskaya and Pushkin squares in Moscow during the late 1950s—early 1960s transforms into internal emigration to the "alternative public sphere of" kitchens, private apartments, dachas, and uninhibited spaces of tourism such as Russian North, Crimea, Siberia and outskirts of Moscow, where people pursued "a lifestyle that tried to ignore much of the Communist superstructure" in the 1970s and 1980s (Furst 2012, 160).

Referring to Jewish practices in the USSR, my informants often use this same term, "internal emigration" (*vnutrenniaia emigratsiia*). This term is usually understood as a break-up with the Soviet system, a complete rejection of its arrangement and values. Although my informants characterize their interest in Jewish practices as an "internal emigration", I will show how, in fact, their interest had deep roots in the official Soviet project and emerged largely due to either consciously or unconsciously shared Soviet values. I incorporate Jewish practices into the bigger picture, in which people, who remained within the boundaries of the Soviet institutions claimed to have similar kinds of experiences. I also take into account the term's retrospective nature in people's narratives and the geo-political context in which it is used.

My interviewees feel the term "internal emigration" is relevant, because they claim it grasps their lack of interest in what they label "Soviet life." However, the formulation of "Soviet life" is rather vague, and this vagueness allows them to include and exclude certain components that were equally foundational to the Soviet system. Not only did the Soviet system encompass the state apparatus, but it also entailed people's friends and family who were raised and educated in the Soviet Union; their value for education, erudition and high culture; the very infrastructure that allowed for practices they understand as anti- or non-Soviet: apartments where various Jewish gatherings took place; cheap transportation, including long-distance traveling; and the availability of free time. Even their search for "non-Soviet" practices and milieus was rooted in Soviet ideals, as I will show later. By "Soviet life" my informants usually mean very particular aspects, such as the State apparatus, an authoritative discourse, and unpleasant people, who said and performed unpleasant deeds in the name of the Soviet system. Contrary to the common image of the Soviet citizens presented in liberal discourse (the narrative of grey Soviet environment), a crucial characteristic of the Soviet intelligentsia is their desire to be different from everyone else (*bit' ne takim kak vse*). While aspiration for the "extraordinary" is sometimes described as a non-Soviet or even an anti-Soviet intention, its value comes from the Soviet educational system, pushing for the extraordinary knowledge and activity through the system of multiple and diverse educational projects. Thus, the authors of the book *The Islands of Utopia* showed that despite the line of unification always present in the Soviet education, unexpectedly great diversity of forms became its main advantage in the late Soviet period (Kukulin, Mayofis, Safronov 2015). The authors claimed that education was an

area that to a greater extent than other areas allowed for experimentation. They compare creative educational projects in the USSR to the man-made islands that upon the end of the *Perestroika* became so multiple that they reminded one of the ocean full of archipelagos.

The term "internal emigration" is only partially accurate and describes only one side of the relationship of a Soviet citizen with the state. As Yurchak put it, "This powerful metaphor should not be read as suggesting complete withdrawal from Soviet reality into isolated, bounded, autonomous spaces of freedom and authenticity. In fact, unlike emigration[38], internal emigration captures precisely the stage of being inside and outside at the same time, the inherent ambivalence of this oscillating position." As a more accurate equivalent of internal emigration Alexei Yurchak suggests to use the term "deterritorialization" coined by Deleuze and Guattari, and the networks of people, united by a concrete world of deterritorialization—"deterritorialized milieus." Unlike "emigration", the term "deterritorialization" characterizes these networks of people as "although uninterested in the Soviet system", yet still heavily drawing "on that system's possibilities, financial subsidies, cultural values, collectivist ethics, forms of prestige, and so on" (Yurchak 2006, 132). The main characteristic of the deterritorialized milieus for Yurchak is a displacement different from a dissident-like opposition. Instead of leaving the system empty-handed, one, like a wasp, takes its pollen and moves it to another space. My ethnographic material highlights how even upon emigration to other countries Soviet Jews found themselves full of the Soviet pollen, despite their notions of being filled with pollen of a completely different type while still inside the Soviet Union.

Yurchak gives some examples of deterritorialized milieus, and he unites the kinds that liberal discourse usually places on opposite sides as Soviet vs. anti-Soviet. Thus, for example, such milieus as amateur rock and jazz musicians, stiliagi, and necrorealists are usually seen as oppositional, provocative and, therefore, compromising safety. However, Yurchak shows that some such deterritorialized milieus emerged in the spaces considered Soviet. They were a part of Soviet official institutions and, therefore, viewed as not transgressing any boundaries and even considered supportive of the system. Yurchak gives examples of theoretical physicists and various clubs at the Palace of Pioneers such as literary and archeological clubs. His example of the theoretical physicists in the USSR shows the pitfalls of the analytical binary of Soviet vs non-Soviet. Theoretical physicists "worked in prestigious research institutes, received higher salaries and bonuses, and enjoyed considerable social prestige", which might be considered as evidence of Soviet conformism (Yurchak 2006, 139). At the same time, though, their milieu was shaped by such practices as reading unofficial publications (*samizdat*), listening to bards like Okudzhava and Visotskii and mounteenaring—practices that are often associated with "alternative culture" in the Soviet Union. Therefore, Yurchak concludes "characterization, which makes a familiar division into "the totalitarian uniformity of culture" and "alternative culture," reproduces the problematic effect of a binary division, de-emphasizing the fact that the very existence of creative, dynamic, and relatively independent milieus of theoretical scientists and other cultural producers was an indivisible, if somewhat paradoxical, element of the Soviet state's cultural project, not its opposite…" (140-141). According to Yurchak, the analysis

[38] Ironically, as my work shows, even emigration to another country does not lead to a complete break up with sovietness. Quite the opposite, more often it leads to recognition and conservation of at least some elements of sovietness.

separating cultures located in the Soviet institutions and outside of them is insensitive to the Socialist context. These two separated kinds might be equally critical of and uninterested in different Soviet phenomena, both of them drew on the system's possibilities and both of them were uninterested in changing the authoritative discourse that seems immutable. Both of these kinds of milieus existed to provide this discourse with constative meanings.

Outstanding/remarkable/exceptional/brilliant

At some point, when I was about 17 years old, already before the Six Day war I began to think what the meaning of my life in the Soviet Union is. Everything is completely known and programmed in advance. Well, I need to graduate from some college so that they do not draft me to the army. Then I will work at some lab. The best case scenario I will write a candidate's dissertation, they will not let me complete the doctoral dissertation, because Jews were almost never allowed to complete a doctoral dissertation. It means that at maximum in the peak of my career I will be a chair of a research lab. And every step has been already planned in advance. And this seemed to me really humiliating. I do not want to be a cog in a wheel as a robot, which follows the guide rail. I want to have a chance to do something that is mine (sdelat' chto-to svoio).

In 1979 the author of this passage, first, studied Hebrew, then became a famous teacher and organized a network of unofficial Hebrew groups around the Soviet Union. In 1984 he was arrested under the article for illegal possession of firearms and served a year and a half in prison. In prison he held a hunger strike for six months and a dry hunger strike for a month. While on strike he developed health problems and in 1988 moved to Israel. The story of Alexander Kholmyansky is quite remarkable and, despite all its misfortunes for Alexander and his near and dear, epitomizes self-actualization and not living as a mere cog in a wheel.

Alexander's aspiration to complete some extraordinary project (*chto-to sovershit'*) is another dimension of the concept of the "extraordinary." Many of my informants mention that participation in Jewish practices gave them a feeling of joining a mission, whether it was the mission for recreation of political home for Jews, reconstruction of Jewish pride, or a return to the Garden of Eden. Despite non-Soviet formulation of these missions, the very aspiration for becoming someone special (*stat' kem-to*) and completing something extraordinary (*chto-to sovershit'*), is a deeply Soviet value that has been taught in the Soviet educational institutions, especially in the classes of literature through Soviet and pre-Soviet fiction books. This dimension of the "extraordinary" makes possible an application of the clichés of the Soviet authoritative discourse in a serious, not simply ironic way (not as a *stiob*), it does not feel inappropriate. In Chapter 4 I will give an example of such a serious use of the authoritative discourse in relation to the issue with *neshira,* emigration of the Soviet Jews to the USA (and some other countries) instead of Israel using the invitation from Israel.

Two dimensions of the "extraordinary" are not autonomous meanings happened to be covered by the same word—they intersect. First, late Soviet citizens associated them to different extents—from partial to full association. Thus, Kholmyansky expected his Jewishness to interfere with his career within the Soviet institutional activity, and the pursuit of an extraordinary=unusual, *vnye*-institutional, practice provided the space for it to become

extraordinary=outstanding. Besides, many Soviet citizens believed that authoritative discourse impeded the search of "objective truth" in the social science[39]. Thus, they chose hard and natural sciences for careers. Indeed, unsatisfied interest in social/philosophical issues was not the last reason for joining Jewish practices, according to interviews. Some Soviet intelligentsia believed that careers in social science meant mere reproduction of the Soviet authoritative discourse. Others, as, for example, Itzhak (discussed in details in the Chapter 2), had even more radical views. They felt that any career in the Soviet Union was accompanied by an impossibility of completing outstanding projects (*chto-to sovershit'*). They believed that to complete an outstanding project one needed resources, and to get the resources one had to be actively loyal to the system. To do justice to specifically Itzhak's perspective, I should mention that he ended up deciding that completing an outstanding project is impossible not only within the Soviet system, but in any kind of system[40].

The "extraordinary" practices could be characterized by two important things: creativity and sociality. Berger and Luckmann described habitualization of social reality through two steps: "we do it again" and "this is how these things are done" (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In the first case, people actively create an order, while in the second, the faceless order already exists and is reproduced. In the first case there is an active "we", while in the second one there is no "we"—only "I"s who take positions regarding this order. Soviet citizens were tired of the authoritative discourse and were looking for spaces not yet covered by it. Joining an "extraordinary" practice gave one a space for exploring their creativity. Thus, in Chapter 2 I demonstrated how in joining Jewish practices, people took new names, spoke new languages (Hebrew – in a narrow sense, new discourses – in a broader sense), practiced new behaviors, changed outfits, tried unknown concepts of Jewishness, etc. The "extraordinary" practices offered an experience of inspiration or creative excitement due to invention of a new version of a known form. However, as in any kind of creation, new forms are made out of recombination of old resources, both from inside and outside of the system, this is why elimination of Sovietness in this analysis is a mistake.

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[39] In fact, this belief was also instilled by the Soviet positivist education due to Marxist belief in the possibility of study and construction of society based on scientific principles

[40] "In the USSR there was a situation in which it was a shame [for intelligentsia] to become successful (*sostoiat'sa*), to become a part of whatever (even in such spheres as hard science, though to less extent there). It was a shame to be a writer or a poet, even if not Rasputin or Rozhdestvensky, but even Bitov and Yevtushenko. Because recognition or compliance with any Soviet format meant submersion to shit, acquisition of the smell of this system, unwashable stain. The more radical guys understood that it is not even the USSR that matters, but compliance with the format as such wherever, in all its kinds is something that crosses out your humanness, a person in its entirety, it alienates you, uses you, bends you, exploitates you, fucks you. The very evasion of everything, maintaining of independence, undergroundness, marginality is itself the validation… [of such a behavior]. Essentially, development of such an ideology in a different country, in a different cultural context or in the post-Soviet space could go two ways: 1) to say that to become successful in a different context is not a shame (to become a professor in Israel – X, a director in modern Russia – Y, a recognized singer – BG [Boris Grebenshchikov]), 2) to continue "resistance", meaning to insist on the position that becoming successful is still a shame, no matter where, everywhere it is the same shit, bending and fucking you (such as Yuri Leiderman, former conceptualist – in Berlin, Evgeniy Yufit, the necrorealist – died in Peterhof, Russia)… Those who chose the first way most often are a bit of ashamed of their success, but those who chose the second way often have a longing for at least some kind of success. Because institutional validation is sketchy in any context, but its absence bothers you in so called free world, like "who was in your way?" (from the personal email on March 27, 2017).

Another important characteristic of the extraordinary practices is their collective nature. Only through *obshchenie,* interaction of the "active we", are certain practices given transcendent meaning. *Obshchenie*, according to Alexei Yurchak, is a term that "has no adequate equivalent in English. It refers to "communication" and "conversation", but in addition involves nonverbal interaction and spending time together or being together. It is different from just "hanging out" with friends, as used in the United States, because it always involves an intense and intimate commonality and intersubjectivity, not just spending time in the company of others... *Obshchenie*, therefore, is both a process and a sociality that emerges in that process, and both an exchange of ideas and information as well as a space of affect and togetherness. Although *obshchenie* is an old cultural practice in Russia, during late socialism it became particularly intense and ubiquitous and acquired new forms, evolving into a dominant pastime in all strata of Soviet society and in all professional, ideological, public, and personal contexts (Vail' and Genis 1996, 69). According to cultural critics Petr Vail' and Alexander Genis, in the 1960s and 1970s *obshchenie* emerged as a new cult (1991, 242)…" (Yurchak 2006, 148). *Obshchenie* is not only a means of creating a common project; it is a goal, a creative project itself. Creation of extraordinary social milieus is a creative practice through collective construction of a new social space. This practice is creative not only because new and different projects sparked by the imagination take place (making of unofficial Jewish magazines, inventing teaching systems, finding new parallels in the Torah and Talmud), but also because realizing the Jewish milieu through *obshchenie* was a creative process that contributed to my informants feeling of liveliness.

The Concepts of "Professional Development" and "Unique Hobbies"

The search for the extraordinary is characterized by the allocation of significant amounts of time, energy and often learning to it. In capitalist rationality, such an investment makes more sense, when this practice coincides with a professional career. However, as I have already discussed, in the Soviet Union these practices took place both within institutions and even more often outside of them. In the second case, they were pursued in one's free time, or more accurately stated, they were not limited to institutionally determine working hours, more often than not did not bring an income, and the associated knowledge and skills were usually not acquired through formal education nor were they confirmed by any official license. Therefore, practices of the search for the extraordinary would not fall under professional career characteristics.

If these practices did not often coincide with professional development, should we analyze them as hobbies? On the most basic level, hobby is understood as a category separating leisure from necessity. "The Industrial Revolution, by making nearly all consumer goods cheaper and more readily available, and by expanding leisure, opened a much larger space in Western life for hobbies, the work-like play that "a body is not obliged to do", writes Maines (2009, 9). She further complicates the category, "When we dig in our own soil to plant flowering trees, build a backyard barbecue, or crochet antimacassars for our furniture, are we enjoying the activity for the sake of the simple physical and creative pleasure we feel in it? Improving our property? Making our personal environments more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing? Building up

our self-esteem and enhancing our reputations for competence? Killing time? Finding ways to bond with others interested in either similar goals or similar activities, as in the cases of quilting and model railroading? All of the above? I do not propose to disambiguate these issues, but to suggest that the pleasure we feel in hedonizing technologies assimilates elements from all of these motivations and others as well. Part of our pleasure is derived from the recognition of productive virtue." (2009, 13) Some characteristics, mentioned by Maines, such as productive virtue and building up self-esteem, intersect with the practice of creation of the search for the extraordinary. Therefore, any human practice could be either a hobby or a search for the extraordinary. The difference lies in the meanings that the community assigns to the practices. The meaning assigned to the practices of getting connected to the extraordinary has to do with the bigger questions, concerning the meaning of life and changing the world around. My informants sometimes use the categories of "mission", "action transcending the boundaries of their own lives", etc. Ironically, some of my informants point out that in the Soviet Union they felt like they could change something, while in Israel they do not.

A strange position of the practice of the search for the extraordinary is related to the fact that in the capitalist economy, we are used to structuring time into work and leisure. Analyzing commodity fetishism in application to a South American tribe, Michael Taussig wrote that labor, perceived as work in exchange for money, is just an abstraction created by Western culture. In fact, labor should not necessarily be separated from personal life. "For our system of industrial production to operate, people's productive capacities and nature's resources have to be organized into markets and rationalized in accord with cost accounting: the unity of production and human life is broken into smaller and smaller quantifiable subcomponents. Labor, an activity of life itself, thus becomes something set apart from life and abstracted into the commodity of labor-time, which can be bought and sold on the labor market" (Taussig 2010, 4) In the capitalist line of thinking all the productive capacities of a person should be aimed at their capitalization, be that in the form of money or status acquired. An activity whose sole aim is enjoyment can only be considered a hobby, and a hobby should be limited to one's residual time as it is always secondary to a profession. A hobby that evokes true meaningfulness in one's life tends to be transferred into a profession. If someone has an activity that is defining for them, why not turn it into one's profession and do what one likes professionally? One can imagine a courageous person, who in their thirties finally decides "to do what one likes" and make money from it—one receives formal education in the sphere of the hobby they enjoy so much and becomes the quintessential happy person, who "does not work, because one likes what one does." This is the rationality of capitalism. If one feels destined to do something significant within a market economy, it must be corroborated by a relevant institution: professionalization through official institutions seems to be the only path that is considered legitimately successful. This rationality only partially worked in the late Soviet space—connection to the extraordinary could be established both through professional and non-professional activity. In stating this, I am not trying to construct an irrational "other" of the Soviet people as seen in one of the Western liberal methodologies criticized by Anna Krylova (2000). The concept of "the search for the extraordinary" seems to be a continuation of the tradition to present Soviet subject as irrational. However, I claim that the particular context in which these practices emerged, in the context of the Soviet life, made it much more rational than it sounds: first, because a Soviet citizen could afford the pleasure of looking for the

extraordinary economically and, second, because this "irrational" activity was supported ideologically. In what follows I will show, how practices of getting connected to the extraordinary, having played a central part in the Soviet life, were supported ideologically and economically by the state.

Unofficial Jewish practices in the late Soviet period that are usually described as non-Soviet or even anti-Soviet were one of the possible ways of the search for the "extraordinary", yet all practices of this type emerged and existed not only "despite", but also "thanks to" the Soviet ideological and economic preconditions. According to my interviews and observations, Jewish practices in the Western world do not create the same space they did in the Soviet Union: such practices occupy some other niche and have a different meaning all together. I claim that the feelings elicited from these Jewish activities described in the previous chapter; *exodus, being alive, real life, falling in love, getting high, being fulfilled, feeling lightness and transparency*, were the experiences of "connecting to the extraordinary."

Organization of Time

Practices of the search for the extraordinary require a supporting system. Specifically, they require free time and an ability to fully focus, just as professional practices. Therefore, they could only take place in a system that supports a certain organization of time. Applying an anthropological concept of time to socialist Romania, Katherine Verdery seems to criticize what she calls "etatization" of time in socialist countries, which is immobilization of citizens' bodies and expropriation of their control over time by the Communist Party (Verdery 1996, 40). Staying in lines for goods and services as well as waiting for public transportation are among Verdery's examples of how the state wastes people's time. "The most obvious example, all too often signaled in the Western press, was the immobilization of bodies in food lines. I see this as a state-imposed seizure of time because it was precisely the state-directed export of foodstuffs, alongside the state-supported crisis in agriculture that raised to epic proportions in Romania a phenomenon also present in several other socialist countries. More generally, it was socialist policy to suppress the market mechanism (which, in Western economies, eliminates lines by differentiating people's ability to pay). Urban in its habitat, the food line seized and flattened the time of all urbanites except those having access to special stores (the Party elite and Secret Police). Meat, eggs, flour, oil, butter, sugar, and bread were rationed in most Romanian cities; they arrived unreliably and required an interminable wait when they did. During the 1980s other food items, such as potatoes and vegetables, came to be in shorter supply than usual, as well. Depending on one's occupation, some of the time immobilized by provisioning might be subtracted from one's job—office clerks, for example, were notorious for being absent from their desks when food hit the local store—but people like schoolteachers or factory workers had to add onto already-long working days the two or three hours required to get something to eat" (Verdery 1996, 46). "Unless one walked, no one could choose when to arrive at work, since public transportation was wholly unreliable (owing to measures to conserve use of gasoline), and the ration of gasoline for private cars was so derisory that cars did not provide an alternative for daily movement" (Verdery 1996, 44).

Verdery briefly mentions that expert citizens knew how to manipulate the system so that they had more control over their time. However, she does not stress this enough. Using the concept of strategies and tactics, Michel De Certeau showed how powerful citizens could be in moving systems in certain directions. Certeau links "strategies" with institutions and structures of power, the "producers", while individuals are "consumers." Acting in environments heavily defined by strategies, individuals use "tactics" as a means of alteration. Strategies are planned and imposed by governments, corporations, and other institutional bodies, however people act within these strategies in unpredictable ways. Through tactics consumers do not directly reject the system as a whole; they merely do not let strategies work without their control. This approach empowers consumers that are usually considered just puppets of the bigger systems and agents. For example, Indians did not reject the culture imposed by Spanish colonizers in general, yet did not accept its exact form: they ruined colonizers' rituals and laws not by refusing them, but by using them in foreign ways. Production of the system has two stages, open production and a hidden production, changed by consumption. If you read a book and skip some of its parts, interpret it radically, are surprised or not; all these practices produce the book anew. A personal assistant might not openly violate the system by being absent from work or by stealing things, but she could restructure her schedule, using her worktime to write a love letter. A worker could not impede the production in general, but he could use a machine for making the furniture for his own place (De Certeau 2011).

Soviet citizens as experts of the Soviet routine learned how to navigate inconveniences of everyday life. Alexei Yurchak mentions such tactics as *blatt* (cultivating "informal networks for procuring products, finding resources, providing assistance"), "turned time into expandable and exchangeable resource; rendered time indeterminate by engaging in *obshchenie* in all professional contexts…; created free time by taking undemanding jobs with multiple sickness leaves, bonus days off, and so on…" (Yurchak 2006, 156). Yurchak claims that all these techniques "did not just provide "free time," but rather restructured one's relationship with time "filling it with busy lifestyles, intense interaction, and the pursuit of unusual interests" (Yurchak 2006, 156). As I have mentioned before, a framework in which time is structured into work and leisure does not let one understand the nature of practices of the search for the extraordinary. They permeated the boundary between work and leisure all the time.

Thus Boris was subjected by socialism through waiting in long lines and taking public transportation.

> *Olesya: So [you said] allocation of time [freed up]? On the other hand, [some complain], one had to stay in lines all the time?*
>
> *Boris: Yes, we had to. I read while staying in lines. It was my time (Boris is smiling)... In the subway I always read. Taking a ring road train I made an additional circle to not get distracted from reading. You were free for this kind of flights, and here...*

Boris had to spend time in lines, but for him it was not a complete waste of time, it was a quality time with a book, perhaps, one of the most enjoyable and valuable activities in the lives of the Soviet intelligentsia. The fact that this activity was considered by Boris as the most important is confirmed in the following observation on subway commutes. Time spent on commuting was not only considered not a waste of time, but this "waste" was doubled on purpose to not disrupt the most important activity—reading. Back in the Soviet Union, Boris

had a priority for activities and allocation of time that is hard to understand outside of the context. Indeed, if the reading had to do with work, why did he not rush to the office or home to complete the reading? If the reading was for pleasure, how could he choose to have this pleasure on a public train? Why would one rationally choose to prolong the commute?

Although analysis of etatization of time in the Western countries is not Verdery's objective, some falsification of her criticism towards etatization of time in socialist countries through comparison is useful. Thelen critiques Verdery for an uncritical application of a neo-institutional approach to socialism, that sees property as the decisive institution in the economic development of the country and, therefore, socialist economies as deficient (Thelen 2011). Time productivity is a matter of perspective. After all, characterizing time in Ceausescu's Romania, Verdery writes "time… [there] stood still", as opposed to time constantly "speeding up" under capitalism. Should we not perceive "time as money" as an etatization of personal time? Spending time on practices of capitalization, such as earning the money, searching for cheaper or best quality for price products, investing money (if one has the privilege of having spare money), dealing with bank accounts, collecting documents to apply for lines of credit, mortgages and loans, filling out tax declarations, figuring out insurance plans and dealing with insurance companies, etc. is just as much of a subjection a subjection through the techniques of socialist governmentality. And only ideology determines what kind of subjection is more productive. After all, one could consider copious amount of reading time as another example of etatization of time in the socialist countries, since the focus on citizens being cultured was initially a state endeavor. The kind of temporality, "still time", established in the Soviet Union allowed for practices of the search for the extraordinary to emerge and flourish. Creative practices demand full concentration. Only boredom can create a fertile ground for an interest in transcendent issues.

Participation in the Jewish practices of various kinds takes time. Let us consider reading of the Talmud. It requires gradual acquisition of multiple skills: a command of Hebrew and Aramaic languages, Rashi script, not to mention the general knowledge of the Torah structure, style and content. A typical soviet citizen, even of a Jewish background, did not have even a common erudition in religions. It could take a novice (in any country) years of studying before they are able to understand the Talmud. Burning curiosity about Judaism and a temporal infrastructure made my informants rushing to limitedly available Talmudic texts in only a year.

> *Olesya: I am really interested in this topic of how people just did things in the Soviet Union. Not because this activity was in the frame of some institution, not in the frame of their work, but just an activity [the product of which] goes to the desk drawer, but it is some interesting activity that they enjoy: it looks like life outside the box.*
>
> *Boris: Yes, indeed, it is very interesting. And… it is not widely spread in the West, because the West takes you all, the West does not allow you. There is both good and bad about it. Bad – because it takes all your time, good – it does not allow you to do all kinds of nonsense, which is probably bad in a certain way. If you want to study the runes, for example, or to participate in the horse races, you are not the only person in the world, who discovered that you can race or read the Scandinavian Runes, but there are people who do it professionally. It stops many people here [in the Western/capitalist countries], because it becomes hard.*

Boris is a successful professor of linguistics at an Israeli university. Back in the Soviet Union, in 1983, Boris got a degree in biology that he was absolutely passionate about. He was hired by a respected institution and worked on interesting research projects and nearly finished his PhD research. He made a comment that the process of writing a dissertation in the Soviet Union was organized perfectly—"you only worked on your research project and did nothing else." His colleagues were curious intellectuals, running mad after science. They enjoyed talking about science in their work hours and at co-worker get-togethers (*posidelki* and *pyanki*) after work. In 1985 out of curiosity Boris began studying Hebrew, just as he studied some other languages every now and then. Hebrew "was not the first language on his list", and one of the reasons he began studying it was that he managed to find a Hebrew textbook. Boris wanted to learn Danish but could not find a book on the language. Emerged in Hebrew, Boris lost an interest in his job. He avoided *posidelki*. He pretended to keep working to continue receiving a salary as long as possible and eventually quit work in 1989. He studied Hebrew zealously at the lab all day long. Initially he was not planning to leave for Israel. When Boris began studying Hebrew, there were no regular jobs in the Soviet Union to capitalize his knowledge for financial support. There were no official prestigious statuses or documents corroborating his knowledge. His job of a biologist became just a job rather than a defining characteristic, as it once was. Boris has been equally captured, first, by the milieu of the research lab and then by the milieu of Jewish practices. He did not differentiate an importance of these activities by thinking of one as profession and one as leisure. Both contained an element of the extraordinary for Boris.

One of the reasons why I was interested in speaking with Boris about the practices of the search for the extraordinary is his status in Israel. He is one of those few informants, who after the emigration, managed to adapt to their new situation and achieve success within a capitalist system by pursuing his Soviet born passion for Hebrew professionally in Israel.

Boris points out that the practices that took place in the Soviet Union and that I call "getting connected to the extraordinary" are hard to pursue in Western capitalist countries, because "the West takes all your time." By this Boris means two things: First, that, having an economic incentive, on the one hand, and pressure for consuming more, on the other hand, people in the capitalist countries tend to work much more. Second, the pressure of professionalization and career success within the dominant system in these countries is much stronger, more sophisticated and, therefore, more effective. He says that the aim is to be recognized by a related institution as the best in one's profession, and in order to achieve that aim one has to subjugate all their activities, interests and energy to the subject of their career. One has to rationally choose all their activities so that they somehow contribute to one's success in a career. All the activities that do not have a connection to the main subject are generally felt to be waste of time and loose value. "The West does not allow you to do all kinds of nonsense", by nonsense Boris means either a subject that does not exist as a recognized area of activity within a dominant system, or a subject that is not pursued professionally.

As a person from the Soviet past, Boris has known the excitement and liveliness these non-capitalized and non-professionalized practices were performed with in the Soviet Union. As an expert of Western academia, he has now lost respect for these practices as amateur, and, therefore, worthless. He does not see the point in "inventing the wheel." In the capitalist discourse of knowledge, being an expert as opposed to an amateur is considered a good thing. What is usually implied is that one should do their job in a profound way due to a great amount

of knowledge one has. Boris says that Soviet people who used to share these "nonsense" practices stop doing so after emigration, because "it becomes hard." In addition to this reason I would add another one: they also stop, because the practices lose their excitement conditioned by the Soviet context. The critical studies of the last decade showed that expertise is a more complicated phenomenon than simply the amount of knowledge one has attained (Bourdieu 2015, Carr 2010, Boyer 2005, Vaugn 2017). First, expertise is always ideological, because "it is implicated in semi-stable hierarchies of value that authorize particular ways of seeing and speaking as an expert" (Carr 2010, 18). Second, expertise creates and functions within the system of power relations. Third, expertise is measured largely in a performative dimension, and therefore, "requires the mastery of verbal performance" (Carr 2010, 19).

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union or upon arrival to Israel or other Western countries, Jews attempted to incorporate the well-known Western rationality of *do what you like then you don't have to work.* They tried to capitalize their Jewish knowledge in the framework of existing institutions: religious (yeshivas), academic (schools and universities) and political (the structures of government). My research shows that only a limited number of activists were satisfied with the results of these pursuits. More often, these attempts revealed an incompatibility between the search for Jewishness in the Soviet Union and scholarly practices associated with Judaism or Jewishness within established institutions. Jews saw a lack of 'life' in institutional knowledge, while institutions saw them as dilettantes.

Boris: Here [in the West] you have a possibility to compare your achievements with the others'. For example, here I cannot[41] *stay at home and pretend like I study Hebrew and to do it in isolation from the whole world… Here, the research I do, has to be a part of some official institution.*

Olesya: Well, theoretically you can do it without an institution.

Boris: Of course, you can! Well, I know a bunch of people who come home after work and do things enthusiastically, but it feels now to be some… it is just some kind of a game.

Olesya: And what was it in the Soviet Union?

Boris: Well, in the Soviet Union it was also a game, but it was saturated with an additional meaning. Besides in the Soviet Union it was the maximum of what you could do. You did the maximum, and this maximum did not depend on anyone besides you, and it frees up of course, because it makes you a free person, who studied a [Hebrew] alphabet, for example. For example, I made lists of Hebrew words that begin with the letter "ב" (bet) and mean some kind of separation and words that begin with the letter "א" (alef) and mean some kind of consolidation. (Boris understood this activity as a research in Hebrew linguistics.) *Perhaps, there is something to it (v etom chto-to est'), but it has nothing to do with the positive science, although it is interesting. When you end up being among the people who do something professionally, in the country, where it is possible, then, in my view, you have to [do it professionally]. Well, it is, of course, a great dependence on public opinion (zavisimost' ot obshchestva), but in order for this*

[41] Presumably Boris means to say that one cannot study something at home and feel self-fulfilled, because amateur practices are not rewarded in capitalism in anyway, especially in the form of status as it was in the USSR.

activity to have any value, you have to measure it against the public norms (meriat' otnositel'no obshchestva).

Boris says that the Soviet practices of getting connected to the extraordinary are interesting, but this reason is not enough to pursue an activity. An activity has to have value for the society, it has to be a recognized activity (in his case existing as a scholarly discipline) and it has to be pursued in a normative way. I suggest that Boris says this not as a former Soviet citizen, but as a professor and a long-term citizen of Israel. Boris' perception of what is worthwhile spending time on and what is not has changed since he had emigrated and become a part of an academia. Back in the Soviet Union these kinds of "nonsense" practices had high significance and respect among intelligentsia, because they had a meaning of creating the social reality anew. Thus, in the case of Boris' lists of Hebrew words based on observed commonality, social reality was organized in a new way through a different organization of language.

In the Soviet Union Jewish educational practices for the most part were not significantly structured and not validated by any official institutions[42]. Many of these practices provided no decent income, no official status, sometimes caused little attention to housekeeping and very likely no tangible future benefits. On the other hand, promulgators of these practices were extremely popular among educated youth and often accumulated fans and proponents. These practices in combination with the practice of application for emigration created a unique space which people often characterize with the metaphors of liveliness discussed in the previous chapter. Valerii, who was a teacher of Hebrew in the USSR, got imprisoned for a year and a half and almost died in prison after a hunger strike, said, "It was veeery cool/respected (*prestizhno*) to be a Hebrew teacher." Yosef, who was Valerii's students told me that Valerii "was a king and a God" for him, "a person who broke up with everything for departure, who learned Hebrew and taught it, and was extremely knowledgeable."

Marina attended Hebrew classes as well, but she learned under a different teacher. She said that, "Valera was too scandalous." She preferred to quietly enjoy learning Hebrew with rather apolitical and cautious Ilia.

Marina: He wanted to teach quietly and then to leave [for Israel] quietly. He wrote poetry, including the poetry in Hebrew. He had such a romantic nature (poeticheskaia natura)."

Olesya: And what was his motivation for teaching?

Marina: It was cool/respected (prestizhno)… [Besides], he got [already] kicked out from his job… (He was a refusenik).

Valerii: Well, he must have worked somewhere, perhaps at some refuseniks' [unskilled] jobs.

Marina: he was a linguist in his nature, he spoke several languages and he was curious about it.

[42] There were some official institutions for Jewish knowledge, such as university groups that studied Hebrew and Israel related disciplines, as well as *Sovietisch Heimland,* a journal in Yiddish. However, to be a part of these institutions one had to be considered as interested in and actively express friendliness to the Soviet politics. Since most people in the Soviet Union were uninterested in Soviet politics, these institutions did not interest them much. Yet, to claim that no one was seeking the extraordinary in Jewish practices through official venues would also be inaccurate.

Olesya: it was respected by whom?

Valerii: In the Jewish circles, in our Jewish movement.

Marina: Well, not only…

Valerii: There were around fifty teachers [of Hebrew] in Moscow at that point; he was one of them…

Marina: Among the intelligentsia, the circles of dissident intelligentsia, I would say, dissident in a broader sense[43]*. First, these circles were very educated/had much respect to knowledge (academicheskaia sreda)… In these circles knowing something beyond the profession is always respected. These people [Hebrew teachers] got a good command of Hebrew by themselves. It was obvious that they could not have it confirmed by any official paper. Besides, they stuck out a long tongue at different kinds of authorities, and taught it to other people. It was twice as prestigious.*

To avoid scandalous life Marina did not become Valerii's student… She became his wife. Perhaps, the cool image of a Hebrew teacher did the trick: being a teacher of Hebrew was not only respectful, but also romantic. The power structure took shape within the alternative hierarchies the same way it takes place in the official one. Thus, Yona told me about his teacher of Torah:

I am thinking now of the groups of male and, what is interesting, mostly female students, who came to the lessons of Binyamin Rozman. I lived at his place at some point and could observe it. He taught groups consisted of mostly women, mostly very young women. They sit there drooling over Benia... I remember we could not even semi-criticize Benia in presence of these women; they would claw your eyes out.

Expertise not only in official, but also unofficial knowledge guaranteed one not only an exciting experience, but also social appreciation in the form of adoring friends and fans. It is important to emphasize here, that their popularity was conditioned precisely by them simultaneously being inside and outside the social structure. Many of the teachers had formal education in the Soviet institution and therefore their intellect was confirmed by the system's authority. In the previous chapter, I mention that Itzhak began to take the practice of reading sacred texts seriously once he discovered some other odd looking students of the Talmud, turned out to be fellow mathematicians. The fact that they disregarded the authority and submerged into an alternative and semi-secret knowledge gave their image a rebellious charm and the sense of mystery. Essentially, this simultaneous position of being inside and outside the system made these people as attractive as they were, as is constantly evidenced in my interviews.

[43] In context by a "dissident" Marina means anyone, who critiqued any part of the Soviet system and was engaged in some non-Soviet activity.

Structural Conditions for the Practices of Getting Connected to the Extraordinary

One should not assume that a burning curiosity was the only reason for such a time-consuming engagement with the extraordinary, nor should one characterize it as disconnected from the socialist reality. These practices were also made possible due to system's both economic and ideological reasons.

My project intends to describe and analyze the "freedom" that my informants in the Soviet Union experienced while taking part in some Jewish practices. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, when the concept of "freedom" is invoked in most academic and journalistic accounts of the former Soviet Union it tends to acquire the meaning that freedom has in a Western liberal context. This meaning emphasizes a presence of a political process and an ability to influence various governmental institutions, legally available to everyone. In economic terms it is understood as a right to unlimited income. "Freedom" is assumed in these cases as something that the liberal democratic context *has* and the Soviet context *lacks*. In this public discourse freedom is rarely used in other senses, for example, in a Marxist sense—as economic freedom and the right to the provision of basic needs. Soviet project has been designed to solve the problems of the previous Tsarist regime, such as inequality, hunger, poverty, and exploitation. "It promised laboring people dignity and freedom, women equal pay for equal work, and national minorities equal rights in the state… major problems that capitalist liberal democracies had not adequately resolved", writes Verdery (1996, 4). "Unfortunately, the execution of socialist programs encountered a number of snags; attempts to rectify them ended by corrupting its objectives, sometimes through monstrous, despicable policies that subjected hundreds of thousands to terror and death" (Verdery 1996, 4). Therefore, "criticism and exasperation came more readily than sympathy—and were more readily rewarded with notice. Those who sought to analyze it with an open mind could be dismissed as wild-eyed radicals or apologists of dictatorship" (Verdery 1996, 4). In the Western liberal discourse, the achievements of the Soviet welfare system in income maintenance, education, healthcare and housing are usually either ignored, or belittled in the light of the various pitfalls of the Soviet system. The topic of freedom in the Soviet Union in this discourse is usually discussed as "freedom in spite of" and not as a "freedom thanks to." To fill the gap I explore the second logic, which is "freedom thanks to," and how my informants incorporate this into narratives of the Soviet system so that it does not contradict the overall negative summation of Soviet life. Later in this chapter, I will show how freedom to pursue Jewish practices was also conditioned by the fact that the USSR was a socialist state in an economic and ideological sense, yet informants generally cannot accept this as truth. Only rarely do they talk about the Soviet achievements in a positive way. Most of the time they integrate this information into their speech in such semantic constructions that it allows them to use this achievement of the Soviet system for criticism. I will specifically pay attention to the following aspects: provision of the basic material resources and infrastructure by the soviet state as a condition for free time, economic privilege of the working class, an anti-consumer culture discourse and the politics of culturedness.

Socialist Project: Successful or Not?

Yosef got a degree in chemistry in 1976 and began to work at a scientific research institute (*NII*). Two years later, in 1978, he began studying Hebrew. Yosef admired his teacher, a former engineer who worked as a street sweeper. In 1979 Yosef quit the job at the institute and became a worker at the ceramic tile factory. Three years later he quit the job at the factory and became a street sweeper too. Such a professional trajectory may appear marginal, and yet this was not rare during the late Soviet period. People gave up intellectual professional careers for undemanding jobs of boiler room technicians, watchmen, loaders, etc. These jobs were "organized in long shifts with breaks in between" and "spared the need to attend meetings, parades, and other public events (since only people with stronger institutional affiliations were required to attend such events through their jobs)" (Yurchak 2006, 153). In what follows, I will discuss similar practices of disinterest in professional careers and suggest that structural elements of the Soviet State made the practices of capitalization unnecessary, boring or even shameful, as well as created a context for a different kind of an upward mobility.

Yosef: And at that point an even more perfect life has begun. I woke up at 6am, quickly wiped the streets and at 9am I already did my own thing.

Olesya: Could you live on this money?

Yosef: As a street sweeper?! Of course! Well, as an engineer I earned 120 rubles per month, as a worker I got 150 and as a street sweeper – 180. Well, I had two areas to clean[44]*… We live in a materialistic world today. The world is materialistic, I care about my salary. And there I did not.*

Yosef says that working about three hours a day, he managed to feel safe with providing a normal standard of life. He also said that working as an engineer, a factory worker or a cleaning person he could maintain about the same level of life. Finally, he mentions that the feeling of sufficiency was achieved not by the fact that he could afford anything one could imagine, but instead by the low-maintenance standard of life in the Soviet Union of the 1970s and 1980s. The standard was, as shown below, enough to forget about materiality and devote oneself to ideals while not feeling deficient, because of these same idealistic orientations. In the liberal discourse this logic is usually constructed in a different way; emphasizing an economy of shortage, the lack of consumer products and their variety.

Olesya: Was it because there was nothing to buy with it?

Yosef: First, because there was nothing to buy with it. Well, indeed, we did not need anything! Ok, we did not have children. When you have children, you live more in the society; you encountered the Soviet reality more. Neither my first wife, nor my second wife worked. I worked, but what kind of job was it? (Yosef means that the job was easy and non-competitive.) *We all worked as operators of boiling rooms, we knew that they [management] wanted us because we did not drink [were not alcoholics]. And as for food? Well, when you start observing kashrut, you stop eating. Just fruit and vegetables.*

[44] Yosef means that he worked double shifts and got paid double the salary.

There was no fruit [to buy], and vegetables were really cheap. We just needed to pay the apartment[45].

Olesya: Did not you perceive a lack of food as a problem? Some people talk about it as a hunger.

Yosef: What kind of problem is this? Well, when you have children, it is probably harder… and if you did not [have children], there was pasta, canned fish; we had almost no problems at all!..

Yosef keeps talking about the low level of needs that gave a feeling of sufficiency. Yosef says that one was not worried for one's working place as long as they did not abuse alcohol. Yosef does suggest that his experience might be unique because of his lack of children. He suggests that the level of needs increases with a growing family not only because of higher number of family members, but also because, on the one hand, children might need more complicated products that are absent in the Soviet Union and, on the other hand, children might have an aggressive consumer culture that some theories claim to be natural.

Yosef: I remember Passover Seders[46] (in the Soviet Union). We wandered from one Seder to another. We invited people for shabbats. We had a bedroom, a corridor and a kitchen [at our place]. We had [one] sleeping bed. Girls, about three or four of them slept in that bed, my wife and I slept [on the floor] in the corridor, and guys slept on the kitchen floor. We put some blankets, mattresses. It was always warm in Russia [due to central heating] except for sometimes in falls and springs. And people had to step over us to get to the bathroom (Yosef is laughing and smiling).

Yosef looks happy, while talking about their parties. He seems to be both ironic and proud of their modesty. The impediments of the living conditions did not interfere with the merry life of young people and in some ways made it even merrier.

In the interview Yosef constantly repeats that today's world is "materialistic", and the world back in the 1970s and 1980s was "idealistic." He says that he would constantly worry about fixing things to avoid additional money expenses. Yosef is nostalgic about this "idealistic" world where he did not have any "real problems." The path Yosef chose was on the more radical side of the Soviet intellectual spectrum of getting connected to the extraordinary. He decided to not pursue a career in the Soviet Union and found a low qualification job for comparable wages to free up time for non-marketable practices, such as studying Hebrew and sacred texts. Yosef's case shows the mechanism that allows one to work minimally to cover living expenses while spending most of one's time on non-provisional practices. Part of the story is the low societal pressure for consumption. Unlike most of my informants, Yosef had to pay rent, as he was not originally from Moscow and could not inherit (or live in) a family apartment. Yet, he did not feel unhappy about eating the same food every day and not having any delicacies. It was also considered fine for a married couple to invite a crowd to a Shabbat sleep-over at a one-bedroom apartment with only one bed.

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[45] Yosef`s case is more rare, because he moved to Moscow from Ukraine and had to rent an apartment.

[46] Passover Seder - celebration of Passover that has official (structured) and unofficial parts. In the official part guests read the Passover Hagada and analyze parts of the text.

Chaim had a similar employment story. He quit his job as a geologist and became a loader. Unlike Yosef, Chaim has four children three of which were born in Moscow. Chaim's vocation was art, however, it did not give him any income, so in Israel he first held a regular 9 to 5 job as a sales associate, followed by a job as an educational programs coordinator. Finally, he became a freelancer, doing web design and web site maintenance. Working for a living filled his day time, while night time was spent on his art. He remembers his Soviet life as follows.

Chaim: So I left the job [as a geologist] and began to carry books [to work as a loader of books for a post-office]. Great job, indeed, if only I had something like this in Israel. I moved books to the different branches of the Library of the Academy of Science, and after 2pm the time was mine, easy. Like from 9am to 2pm, and then, just awesome. If I had had such a job in Israel, it would have been heaven…

Olesya: Could you live on the money you earn at this kind of job [low qualification]?

Chaim: It is an interesting thing, you know, it is like a kibbutz[47]. In fact, yes, in fact, yes. Well, what do you mean by living? If you ask my children, they would not have lived in such a way; they do not live in such a situation. For example [back in the Soviet Union] we had two children and we lived with parents. Most of my friends lived in the same way, and it was completely normal. Normal people do not work for eight hours a day, such a person as I was, and this was completely normal too. And if they had told me back then, "Do you want to live separately from parents, you would have your own [apartment], this and that, but you would work [earn money] as crazy ten hours a day and also you would think all the time whether they fire you or not, and you would not know, what to do?" What art are we talking about [in this situation]? Are you crazy? Who the heck needs it? So, it is clear to me what I would have chosen[48].

Olesya: So to live with parents?

Chaim: Well, yes. It was normal back then.

Chaim says that his job of a loader gave him enough money for a socially expected standard of life. The expected standard allowed one to focus their attention and energy on non-material issues, such as vocation. I have had to correct myself in stating that the standards in Moscow and a remote village differed, but they did not differ much in individual neighborhoods of Moscow or various parts of the village. On the other hand, says Chaim, this standard does not work for the modern capitalist countries. His children, who we could roughly characterize as middle class citizens of Israel, would not consider themselves satisfied or successful at this life standard. There are surely alternative groups of people in the Western capitalist countries, who criticize the value of consumerism, who go against the norm and choose low-maintenance lifestyles. However, these groups are rather an exception from the mainstream, and, I have the temerity to suggest that lowering standards has a variety of impediments in the capitalist

[47] Kibbutz is a type of settlement in Israel. Initially it was organized on the principles of socialism that many early Zionists shared. The first kibbutzim had common budgets, infrastructure, full financial support of the weaker sections of the kibbutz, etc. Ironically, Chaim compares the Soviet Union to kibbutzim that were founded in the image of the Soviet Union and not vice versa.

[48] Chaim says he is confident that he would have preferred a low-maintenance life for the sake of time. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, he might have said as many others, that he wanted the western standards of life. Only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union did it become clear what these standards take.

society: one can ignore capitalism, but capitalism won't ignore one back. Downshifting in a capitalist society is more of a sacrifice than it was in the Soviet Union, as capital is installed in all concepts of human existence: talent, professionalism, beauty, taste, love, friendship, etc. Thus, for example, in the Minimalist movement, minimalism becomes a goal: they actively find the ways to keep low maintenance. For my informants, as well as other Soviet citizens, minimalism was in no way a goal: it was rather an unnoticed context that was comfortable enough to not get distracted from the "real goals."

> *Olesya: So what could you do with this money? Provide some kind of food, right?*
>
> *Chaim: Look, I, for example, never had a car. Well, I never even thought that a car was a must. I took a subway, it was horrible, because I worked [made art] all night, it was awfully hot [dukhota], I was weak in the knees, I always fell down onto someone in the subway, because it took forty minutes [to get to the destination]. It was absolutely horrible, people stunk as of booze, but it was a humor. Everyone spoke about it, joked about it. Well, now theoretically you can drive a car, but when you think how freaking expensive driving is, gas, what life goes for. This is the standard [now].*

In a couple of sketches Chaim draws both the essences of capitalism and socialism as perceived by him. Capitalism is cruel, competitive, establishing high consuming standards as a norm, and, therefore, taking all human time to catch up with these standards. It is more comfortable and gives an option of an unlimited satisfaction of all sorts of wants. In the end, however, it is frustrating for people, who realize that they pay for this comfort with a lifetime. Socialism is uncomfortable, but guarantees freedom from consumer standards and fights against discomfort with humor. Chaim's job was volume-based (as opposed to time-based) and he got around 100 rubles per month for it. Both Chaim and Yosef emphasize the low level of wants in the Soviet Union in comparison to their Western experience.

Scholars tend to explain lack of want of the Soviet subjects by lack of consumer products and thus lack of citizens' knowledge of possible standards. "The socialist social contract guaranteed people food and clothing but did not promise (as capitalist systems do) quality, ready availability, and choice" (Verdery 1996, 10). Some scholars, on the presumption that lack of consumer culture is a disadvantage, argue that consumer culture was present in Soviet society (Chernyshova 2013). A popular fact that is usually used as an example of consumerism among the Soviet people is "the hunger of the urban youth for Western jeans and the astonishingly high price they were prepared to pay for them" (Chernyshova 2013, 3). Even though both of these approaches partially describe the late Soviet reality, I observe a general trend toward comparatively low level of needs and interpret it as a success of the Soviet project to raise, for the most part, people with a low level of material needs and create a context in which social value is not defined by one's level of consumption. After disintegration of the USSR former Soviet citizens had to deal with the new value system in some ways, and for many of them it was not an easy process (Humphrey 1995; Burawoy 2001; Shevchenko 2009).

In the USSR the state, rather than market and consumer demand, regulated the production and distribution of consumer goods, and production was privileged over consumption (Verdery 1996, Gurova 2018). It would be inaccurate though to claim that the ideology of asceticism was prevalent in the Soviet Union from the times of the Revolution to its end. In fact, profound calls for asceticism were only the case until the middle 1920s, when petty-bourgeois materialism

and philistinism were harshly criticized. “Fashion should be functional and utilitarian and should transmit the values of a new socialist culture.” (Gurova 2018, 102-123). In the 1930s the Soviet ideology toward consumption recognized the importance of consumption for building socialism as well. Thus by the 1970s and 1980 two ideas were present in the Soviet ideology on consumption. “The ideology was aimed at creating a ‘post-materialistic world’ (Gurova, 2006) in which there would be relative abundance of goods, which signalized to people in the country and to the rest of the world about success of the socialist system, but in which Soviet people, at the same time, were expected to maintain an indifferent attitude towards consumer goods” (Gurova 2018). It was important for any product’s practical value to be higher than its symbolic value. Using the metaphor of the Soviet fiction writers Il’f and Petrov, Soviet people should have treated an automobile not as a luxury, but as a means of transportation.

Criticizing the popular term of Janos Kornai “the shortage economy”, which means demand in socialist economies was higher than supply, Ina Merkel claims that “shortage” is a relative term. The term is relative since it is based on another relative term of “material needs.” These are terms conditioned by a class, culture and a historical period. “The label ‘society of shortage’ acts as a combative term in East-West discourse; the cultural critique of consumerism or a society of abundance is simply ignored”, writes Merkel, as she considers the case of GDR, which can be extended to other socialist countries (Merkel 2006, 268). “The West becomes a coloured layer, the GDR appears in black and white. The term “society of shortage” also carries a misreading, that is, that shortage leads to frustration, greed, envy, parsimony and stinginess” (Merkel 2006, 269). However, Merkel emphasized that in such societies “consumer behavior reveals a potential for improvisation and enjoyment. The cultural practices in handling shortage are ambivalent and not solely concerned with restriction and moderation or the wise handling of resources” (Merkel 2006, 269). Thus, for example, the modern practices of DIY (Do It Yourself) culture flourished in the Soviet Union. Despite the widespread discourse on DIY practices in the socialist economies as an attempt to cope with the shortage, Vasilyeva claims that these practices had a bouquet of meanings that go far beyond the context of shortage, just as they do in the Western countries (Vasilyeva 2012, 2019). Both Gurova and Vasilyeva claim that these practices were perceived by the Soviet people not as a sign of backwardness, but “rather a sign of being modern and progressive” (Gurova 2018). This understanding of DIY makes them another example of the search for the extraordinary, according to my analysis.

Oftentimes, Soviet excitement about the goods from the West[49] is analyzed as an example of consumerism. Alexey Yurchak suggests that these goods “were not commodities but shells of commodities whose role was to link the here and now to an “elsewhere.”” Indeed, most Soviet people were excited about empty liquor bottles, cigarette boxes and gum wrappers just as much as full ones. Rather than satisfy the whims of the Soviet people, they “injected an imaginary dimension into the space of one’s room, reinterpreting and deterritorializing the meaning of that space” (Yurchak 2006, 195).

Modern liberal discourse regards low-maintenance only as an indicator of poverty caused by laziness, and, therefore, as a negative state. The narrative is, once everyone works hard, they can live the same way as the richest people on earth. In social science the liberal discourse

[49] One of the examples that people use the most to claim the presence of consumerism in the Soviet Union is the popularity of jeans that were not sold in the USSR.

has been critiqued in terms of systemic impediments to increase the capital of the poorer classes (Marx 1975, Bourdieu 1990). Another direction of critique is offered by various ecological theories. For example, a school of the steady-state economy, rooted in the ideas of John Stewart Mill about limited natural resources, showed that the gross national product (GNP) growth, associated with an increase in consumption as an indicator of personal well-being, is, in fact, a corrupt indicator (Daly 1980). It does not diversify between the growth in consumption between wealthy and poor classes. If natural resources are limited, then capital growth of the upper class takes place at the expense of the lower class. At the same time overexploitation of natural resources ultimately leads to ecological catastrophe and everyone's loss. Increase in the GNP as an indicator of progress ultimately reveals a poor understanding of progress that does not consider factors such as free time, stress levels, family time, etc. (Daly 1980).

The Role of Culturedness (*Kul'turnost'*) in the Life of the Soviet Citizens

While talking about practices of the search for the extraordinary, Boris mentioned that their perceived value in the Soviet Union came from the Soviet value for broad erudition.

> *Boris: Then again, all these biological friends, there is such a cult, that you have to simultaneously be a highly cultured person [and a good professional]. I am not saying that everyone was highly cultured, but it was thought to be right and good. In the West, as far as I understand, one has to do [only] the thing that one does [professionally]. I remember one of the things that impressed me when we moved here. We were at the place of some neighbors, friends from the yeshiva, and I saw the book about Iris Murphy. I told him that I read it [just one of many others], that I liked it. He got surprised and said, "But you are a biologist?!" So if I am a biologist, than I [should read biological books], and Iris Murphy should be read by those who study modern novels, I guess. This kind of approach was completely absent.*

Yuri was a photographer and a camera man in the Soviet Union. I first met him in 2007 in the thick of Nachlaot, one of the central parts of Jerusalem, a religious neighborhood with a touch of bohemianism, which is filled with atypical, funkily dressed observers of Judaism, cafés playing Jazz, cute yet shabby old homes that share space with cute and newly renovated overpriced ones. Yuri had long curly hair and wore perfectly round glasses. He was thin and dressed in loose white clothes made of natural fabric. Yuri's semi-underground studio had empty dark blue walls and the only thing it fitted was the mattress lying perfunctorily on the floor. Yuri invited me to sit at the cozy small tatami table in the tiny yard in front of the building. He skillfully brewed tea in a glass teapot and put it on a small candle stove in the middle of the table to simmer.

I met with Yuri seven years later and found him sporting a short haircut at his new place in the remote, quiet and peaceful Israeli village, founded by vegetarians. He stayed in a nice and simple wooden house in return for occasional work as an amateur handyman for the owner.

When I arrived, Yuri said he was awfully hungry and should make something to eat first. He made a big salad of cabbage and carrots.

It [USSR] was a heaven for artists; we just did not know that. The state gave the money this way or that way for any creativity [tvorchestvo]. If these creativity strongly conflicted [with the Soviet ideology], then it did not give the money. But here [in Israel] they do not give the money for any creativity. There was a huge amount of admirers [tsenitelei] of this creativity. Even if the state did not give you the money you could live. Here there is not such an option. You cannot just sit and paint. Well, you can, but you have to earn for living (zanimat'sa nikaiunom-Hebrew, zarabotkom) at the same time. And, most importantly, when you finish the project, there is no one to appreciate it, no one is interested.

Besides criticism of a society where money is the precondition for adequate social participation, Yuri mentions another ideology, instilled by the design of the Soviet project—a high priority on being cultured and following events in the world of high culture. Lack of institutional status within an existing system was compensated for by informal status among intellectual circles. Yuri talks specifically about the practice of art exhibitions at private apartments. However, the notion of culture also encompasses other kinds of knowledge and erudition. His reflection is also relevant to Jewish practices at private apartments.

Olesya: And why was it [creativity] interesting there?

Yuri: Well, first of all the USSR had a multi-million population, in Leningrad there was the same number of people as there is in Israel. In Leningrad there were two opera theaters and around 10 drama theaters, a couple of which were good. And there was an intelligentsia, partially Jewish, partially Russian, some new and some old intelligentsia. There were people, who appreciated [creativity]. Here, especially when I came, it was awful, better in some sense because the country was warmer, but in terms of culture it was a complete chicken coop. Nothing! Well, classical music and nothing else. No theater, no jazz, no art… People, who were born in Russia, intelligentsia, they did not really pay attention to the working class and this communist party. Everyone had a group of friends [kompanii]. Everyone interacted [obshchalis] all the time. Everyone was engaged in creativity for each other. There were a lot of these "each other" [etikh drug dlia druga bilo ochen mnogo]. Clearly there was banditry and horror [razboy i uzhas][50] around, but somehow you felt fine living in it. And now these people, as I, for example, move to the country where there is no such banditry, where there is a kind of democracy and where you can do completely nothing, because, first, you do not have the money and you have nothing to live for, and, second, because nobody needs it [creativity], which is even harder.

[50] In Moscow Yuri was badly beaten up "almost to death" by hooligans. Recovery took him about a year. He mentioned that this act of hooliganism could have been organized by the KGB as a message to someone involved with Jewish practices, however, there is no certain evidence. Yuri was involved mainly in cultural and religious practices, and was not as active as some of the other participants. Thus, analytically, though organization of this act by the KGB is possible, as their choice of victims were sometimes unpredictable, I tend to assign this incident to regular hooliganism.

An example of interest in informal art is the exhibition of the Aleph Group, the group of artists who claimed to make Jewish art. The exhibition took place in November 1975, in Leningrad at the apartment of one of them, Eugene Abeshaus (*Evgenii Abezgauz*)[51]. According to different accounts, it lasted for six to eight days (Okun' 2005-2006; Genkina 2005-2006). Twelve artists presented 112 paintings "in a small corridor and a small room thirty meters square," and the exhibition has been seen by more than four thousand people (Okun' 2005-2006; Genkina 2005-2006).

Yuri mentions that in the "kind of democracy" of the Western capitalist countries people of his circles feel they are unfree. Their freedom is confined by the need to survive economically: and this statement is as relevant to the living situation of an artist as to the professional survival of a big politician. In another interview Yuri talks about lack of freedom for political leaders. They are unable to make any significant changes, because they depend on money, and must balance between the demands of different donors. Therefore, they are never able to put through significant changes. Even more painful for Yuri though is that few people, usually only professionals, care for his art.

> *Absolutely nobody needs anything, no creativity, nothing. A completely different ideology of culture in the country. In Russia people live for creativity. Even those people, who do not create projects, they would go to exhibitions. They live for it, because they are taught to be like that, this is their religion. There is no other religion. For Russian intelligentsia, creativity is a cult. And if you can create something, you can be a Jew, you can be an asshole [negodiaem] and you can have a bad temper, but if you can do it, everyone will contribute into your creativity, including the film studios, all these big film studios. Here you can be whoever, but if you can't smile and enjoy savoring beer in the company of some troglodytes, you won't make a step. Therefore, the feeling of freedom withers away. You can feel free here, if you do not want to work anywhere, if you, for example, have a business in Russia.*

Yuri talks about the economic freedom available to artists of the Soviet Union, something that was unavailable in the West. Disregarding the mainstream discourse, he also critiques the idea that freedom of expression did not exist in the Soviet Union. Similarly, studying post-Soviet filmmakers, Faraday critically approaches the 1986 "revolution in the name of art", the revolution protesting against socialist control in art. "Unorthodox artists and intellectuals working within (or in exile from) state socialist countries tended to present cultural activity as a sphere that could—or, at any rate, ought to—express absolute 'humanistic' values against the ideological distortions and political repression of the Communist state" (Faraday 2000, 4). In this discourse Soviet films were divided into "good" –"artistic, individualistic, humanistic, truthful and "bad"—inartistic, conformist, immoral, and escapist" (Faraday 2000, 5). Faraday considers such an approach simplistic. The idea of artistic autonomy is a recent invention. Before the modern period there was neither a practical possibility, nor a public demand for it. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the romantic ideal of art has been shaped by and brought with it both freedom and insecurity. The uniqueness of the Soviet cultural policy

[51] I transliterated the name the same way as in Wikipedia.

was the combination of "nineteenth century rationalism and romanticism, incorporating something of that century's attitude to artists" (Klinka, cited in Faraday 2000, 12). As heirs of the culture of romanticism, socialists had great respect for artists and hoped to grow "their own Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky" (Klinka). Therefore, artists under socialism were not only punished, but also lavished upon. After disintegration of the Soviet Union, artists figured out the truth that "the "production perspective" to the sociology of culture—that all forms of cultural production are influenced by the immediate social context within which creative workers operate—is as applicable under socialism as under capitalism" (Faraday 2000, 12).

Culture and Culturedness as a State Project

In the article *On Common Sense* Eppinger describes her confusion about the social structure in the early post-Soviet space. Following the call of Laura Nader for anthropologists "to study up, down and sideways", she tried to figure out who was "up" in Ukraine in the early post-Soviet years. Common sense dictated her to look at the economic and political elite that tend to overlap. In the post-Soviet Ukraine, however, the "up" was not obvious. On the one hand, former Soviet countries were already introduced to the capitalist value of consumerism in which "up" would be the economic elite. On the other hand, most of the Soviet citizens successfully internalized Soviet disdain for consumerism and the value of good education, broad erudition and high culturedness (*kul'turnost'*), which placed, often poor, intellectuals "up" and the nouveau riche "down" (Eppinger 2014). After all, "Russian intellectuals have a long and sturdy tradition of contempt for what is understood as commercialism…" (Kelly and Volkov 1998, 291). While in the societies of developed capitalism economic capital is mutually convertible with other forms of capital, cultural, social and symbolic, in the Soviet Union and its successors this has not been the case. Therefore, people who managed to quickly appropriate significant economic capital immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union for the most part did not overlap with those who owned cultural and some symbolic capitals.

High culturedness of every Soviet citizen was a part of the Soviet ideology (Volkov 1996). The proletariat has been expected to become a pillar of the Soviet state. Rapidly formed out of the former peasants by the politics of industrialization, lacking education and having left the villages where they were disciplined through traditional norms and communal ties, they became violators of the social order. Disrupting the social order, they were a real threat for the socialist system. The state solved this problem by two methods: punishment through the GULAG system and enlightenment. According to Volkov, "There is not enough evidence to consider punishment to be the main means to cope with an increasing chaos" (Volkov 1996, 198)[52]. To discipline the new urban citizens, the Soviet authorities began to civilize them

[52] Referring to the archival research of Getty, Rittersporn and Zemskov, Volkov also mentions that most of the political criminals interned and shot in the 1930s were "arrested for banditism, robbery, theft of state property, hooliganism, fraud and other criminal offences. Politicization of crime (meaning tendency to qualify some types of crime as "political") was stipulated by the fact that these types of crimes were regarded by the authorities as a direct threat to the regime. Politicization of the social order problem as well as a lack of strict differentiation between political and criminal offence later caused not entirely correct impression that the entire population of the GULAG are the victims of the political terror" (Volkov 1996, 198).

through the politics of culturedness. The concept of *kul'turnost'* has never been explicitly defined by the Soviet authorities. Initially *kul'turnost'* was associated merely with external aspects, such as appearance, style of apparel, personal hygiene, dining culture and the interior design of dwellings. Gradually the concept of *kul'turnost'* shifted, "from the superficial attribute culturedness turned into internal quality, an attribute of a person. Along with increase in the value of the internal culture, expressed in a requirement to be and not to seem cultured, the method of its acquisition was changing as well" (Volkov 1996, 205). The practice of becoming cultured has turned from a focus on consumption to education, or more accurately acquisition of broad erudition. Thus, Volkov gives an impressive example of a weekly questionnaire, "Are you a cultured person?" from the popular journal *Ogonek.* The questionnaire offered to cite at least one poem of Pushkin by heart; to name and characterize five plays by Shakespeare; to enlist at least four rivers in Africa; to name one's favorite composer and three of his pieces; to name five brands of Soviet cars; to turn 3/8 into a decimal; to name the three biggest sport events in the previous season and their results; to describe three paintings one liked the most in the last season; answer the question of whether one read "Scarlet and Black" by Staendal and "Fathers and Children" by Turgenev; and finally to tell why the Stakhanov movement became possible in the Soviet country[53] (Volkov 1996, 207-208). Each questionnaire was provided by an instruction "Remember, if you cannot answer at least one of the offered questions, obviously you know little about a whole sphere of science or art. Let it be a signal for you to work on yourself." (Volkov 1996, 207). After the World War II in the 1950s culturedness continued to develop until it became a routine and the concept of culturedness got replaced by the concept of culture. The cult of culture in the late Soviet Union grew out of the confluence of the politics of culturedness and enlightenment in the early Soviet Union in combination with the cult of culture shared by the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. This confluence was especially important for the Soviet Jews, who formed a big part of new Soviet intelligentsia. On the one hand, they came out of the shtettles (Jewish rural communities) and wanted to rapidly acquire all required aspects to become successful in the new society. On the other hand, Jewish intelligentsia always admired Russian intellectuals, and wanted to both model themselves after them as well as be included in its circles. Upon the 1970s and 1980s, many Jews felt Russian culture to be a pillar of their Jewishness (Slezkine 2004; Lvov 1996).

Jewish knowledge was not a part of the mainstream cultural knowledge one was expected to have. Individuals lacked the support of methodological skills for acquiring specific knowledge of sacred Jewish texts. Jews, whose ethnic auto-stereotype was based on their broad erudition, encountered knowledge that they never encountered before. They felt challenged or even wounded as if by the questionnaire from the magazine *Ogonek*, telling them they "know little about a whole sphere of science or art."

> *I accidentally went to a lecture about the Torah, [then] I was attending these classes as if wound-up (kak uzhalenii). I am not a stupid person, right? But I was desperately trying to understand at least something and I could not. I felt that something completely circular was discussed, and this circular thing consisted of just as circular blocks. Finally, I asked the lecturer what I had to do to understand what's going on. He told me that it*

[53] The last question referred to the Stalin's speech of 1935 on the Stakhanovite movement (Kelly and Volkov 1998).

would have been not a bad idea to read a parashat ha-shavua (weekly Torah portion) [before the class]…

Narrative Confusion

I began my work on the Soviet Jewish practices with a reflection about memory and its dependence on social and political contexts. The Cold War and the Soviet defeat in it became a crucial event shaping the narratives about every element of the Soviet world. As I have mentioned in the introduction, all the practices and identities of Socialism, as products of the wrong system, lost their right to existence for their inferior nature.

My informants associate Marxist language with the hypernormalized discourse used in the Soviet Union, one that by the 1970s became irrelevant to the Soviet reality. Logically when they look for an appropriate language to describe their Soviet experience to me, they often use the forms available in public discourse. The widespread Western liberal discourse that has been altered in labeling the Soviet phenomena for decades, offers convenient ready-made solutions. These solutions feel to my informants to be at times very accurate. At times they feel perhaps to subtly skew the experience, but still good enough to emphasize a specific facet of their experience, relevant to their current situation. Other times ready-made solutions of the liberal discourse completely contradict the logic of people's narratives. An interview with Boris contains a good example of such narrative confusion:

Western world, I think, is in some way much more unfree, it is funny, because, roughly speaking, when I live in Russia, I have an apartment that I inherited from my parents or parents of parents, does not matter, and I work there. And let's say I decided to practice Judaism, Buddhism, cat breeding, doesn't matter. I can do it as much as I want, nobody will fire me, I do not have to pay an apartment. Food? Well, there is no special food, and the one that exists is available, meaning you are free. Again, I think it is a freedom of a slave. It is not required much from a slave, because you can't squeeze much of them, besides some radical cases like plantations in New Orleans. Even there, I do not know how indeed it was, of course. And in the West you always have to run…

Boris' narrative is an exemplary way of discussing Soviet life among my interviewees. The content of certain parts of their life does not logically coincide with the discourse on the Soviet Union they generally use. Boris explains that in terms of provisions the "Western world" is "more unfree," but he has to characterize this as "funny," since by common knowledge nothing in the Soviet Union should possibly be freer. He talks about how he had stability in terms of basic needs met and the freedom to do whatever he liked unrestricted. However, he must explain this freedom in negative terms, since, for them, by default, nothing good in the Soviet Union is indeed good. Therefore, this freedom is the freedom of a slave, meaning that this freedom is not the freedom that one takes, but the freedom that is generously given by someone else. To make his comparison relevant (after all, a person who lived in Moscow during the 1970s and 1980s and worked in the NII had little in common with the slavery we know from literary sources), he says that, indeed, "it is not required much from a slave." He confounds his logic and adds that he is talking about slaves, but not the slaves of forced labor on plantations.

Finally, thinking of what else slaves could do if not work on plantations, he must assume that "even there" the state of a slave could not be that bad, and then his comparison of a Soviet person to a slave becomes legitimate.

I think we all were slaves in the Soviet Union. This is a freedom of a slave. A slave does not do anything, nobody demands anything from him. An owner can kill him without a punishment or leave him alone, and then he [slave] controls his own time. He can, for example, study biology 24/7[54]*.*

Olesya: And what can't a slave do?

Boris: For example, he cannot earn the money [increase his wealth].

Boris switches to the modern capitalist mode. As many of my other interviews evidence, he most likely did not think in this mode back in the Soviet Union.

Olesya: You know, for example, the generation of my parents. They often say, "Well, how much do I need? Just this and this, and I do not need anymore. And I do not want to work more, I do not need it."

Boris: Do they say it already in the West?

Olesya: No, back in Russia.

Boris: well, you know. What does it mean, I do not need anything? For example, I do not need anything, I am from Moscow and I do not need anything. "Except for a clean dress, to say the truth, I do not need anything." At the same time I have an apartment. And if I am not engaged in an anti-Soviet activity, no one will take it from me. I have food, very bad food, but I have it. If I need some serious drugs, I will die, because I simply won't get [ne dostanu] them. And under no circumstances will I get strawberries in the winter. And I had a projection [back in the Soviet Union] that there will be time when a walk in the forest will cost a lot and I won't be able to do it. So behind this "I do not need anything" there was so much that the Soviet system, that I hate, really [gave people], I mean did not have enough time to deprive them of it. We can consider the regime of Putin as a logical continuation of that power. It found the way to deprive people of water and air too. Well, in Israel, for example, I do not need anything, but I need to pay mortgage 3000 shekels [a month]. I need to buy food for shabat celebrations, and every time of grocery shopping is close to some astronomical sum of money. I mean if I want to have guests over, I cannot… The West takes you all.

This passage is rife with contradictory information. On the one hand, Boris says that the seeming lack of needs in the Soviet person was conditioned by the fact that basic needs were provided by the state and their cost thus became unconscious for someone living only a Soviet experience. On the other hand, Boris yet again turns a positive statement about the Soviet Union into a negative one by saying that, in fact, the Soviet system apparently had a plan to deprive people of this provision and simply ran out of time for its implementation. Moreover, he claims that modern Russia is a logical continuation of the Soviet system. Boris entirely ignores how after disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia was carefully directed by Western

[54] Studying biology 24/7 is considered a positive thing for Boris. Boris is talking about intellectuals whose work was their life. At some point in the interview he says that the system of doing research for a PhD was great in the Soviet Union, since one did not have to do anything on top of it, just research.

economists into the “right direction” of capitalism. He says that this finally developed Soviet system (modern Russia) found ways to deprive people from basic privileges. Ironically, Boris’ projection for the Soviet Union to capitalize upon forest walks has been partially adopted by some capitalist countries.

It is common among my informants to see all the evils of dictatorship as a result of the socialist system. I assign this logic to a result of hegemony of the liberal discourse. Verdery’s observation, that an open mind in recollection of Soviet life “could be dismissed as wild-eyed” radicalism and apologetics of dictatorship, takes place in recollections of the Jewish practices in the USSR. Informants tend to narrate their experience of the extraordinary only as an experience “despite”, even though the details of their narratives reveal factors that contribute to another logic of relationship between the Soviet system and Jewish practices—where practices exist “thanks to” the state.

Chapter 4
"Multiple Citizenships" of the Soviet Jews: Possibility of Emigration as a Practice and a Discursive Field

In this chapter I will show how the special regime of citizenship for the Soviet Jews became crucial for the experience of freedom I analyze. This special regime emerged from a few factors. First, the historical dispersion of Jews around the world empowered the Soviet Jews with a feeling of unique positionality in the geopolitical space. Despite the Soviet Jews becoming sovietized and viewing themselves mostly as Soviet citizens, their historical belonging to the international Jewry was always a part of their imaginary. Second, the high number of Jews in the United States, the state that was, on the one hand, the main enemy of the Soviet Union in the Cold war, and, on the other hand, one of the countries that had the most weight in the international discussion, led to two interdependent outcomes. It gave the Soviet Jews a certain level of protection and at the same time made them more suspicious in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. Third, the geopolitical situation in Israel, in which Israel needed a higher Jewish population to prove the necessity of its existence led to an alternative opportunity for the Soviet Jews to quit the Soviet political community. Finally, the world geopolitical situation at the time made it imperative that the USSR maintained a good global image both for ideological and economic reasons: this fact made the state cautious about the group of citizens it found suspicious. Therefore, to understand the freedoms and limitations the Soviet Jews had, it is important to analyze their positionality between the three countries: USSR, US and Israel.

Calculated Kindness

In the first chapter I referred to Dina Zisserman-Brodsky, who divided then existing concepts of the Jewish movement in the USSR into two groups: an emigrationist concept and a Zionist concept. The first one regards all Jewish practices simply as collateral of an attempt to escape from the Soviet Union. The second approach equates Jewish practices to Zionist activity and considers emigration, although emigration specifically to Israel, as the main goal. While my research does not concentrate specifically on emigration, it's understood that emigration was a discursive field in which these practices took place. Moreover, for Jews an opportunity to leave the Soviet space, whether they employed it before the disintegration of the Soviet Union or not, created a unique regime of citizenship which largely conditioned their enjoyment of freedom.

Mass emigration of Jews became possible after a 1966 press conference in Paris when the Premier Kosygin was asked whether Soviet Jews—just as Greeks and Armenians—would be allowed to reunite with the families from which they had been separated during World War II, he answered, "As for reunifying families, if some families want to meet or want to leave the Soviet Union, the road is open to them and no problem exists here" (Friedgut 2012, 252). A symbolic permission began to accrete the empirical attempts to leave. In order to emigrate, a

Soviet citizen had to obtain an exit visa, for which specific documentation had to be collected (the process will be discussed later[55]).

Legally, Jews could leave the Soviet Union to join their family anywhere, however practically the OVIR only accepted invitations from relatives in Israel. Up until 1979 emigrants followed an unwritten rule to only go to Israel. However, in 1979 one of the big American *Sochnut*[56] donors asked the organization to transfer his relatives from the Soviet Union directly to the United States without a stop in Israel[57] (Kosharovsky 2009). The *Lishkat-ha Kesher*[58] gave the *Sochnut* permission to do so. Around that time, about two weeks later, Jewish American organizations *HIAS* and *Joint* were planning to close their offices in Vienna, the offices that worked on Jewish emigration since World War II and that in 1971 helped Czechoslovakian Jewish emigrants who mostly went to countries other than Israel. When Israel asked them to transfer the relatives of the donor to the US, they used it as an opportunity to continue their stay in Vienna on the ground that other Soviet emigres might want to go to the US instead of Israel. The rumor spread around, and more and more families began to ask for a refuge in the US upon arrival in Vienna. The American Jewish organizations, Joint and HIAS saw in these families a potential prospect for financing their Vienna offices through the US government and the United Jewish Appeal (Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York).

For the US government financing the transferring of Soviet Jews to the US was beneficial both in terms of building good relations with its influential Jewish populace and as a geopolitical strategy, as each emigrant from the USSR was evidence of the Soviet failure. As Loescher and Scanlan mentioned, "Guided for a generation by the view that" each refugee from the Soviet orbit represents a failure of the Communist system", successive administrations have sought to transform each new arrival into symbolic or literal "freedom fighter". The "kindness", for sure, was "calculated" (Loescher 1998, xviii).

Yakov Kedmi pointed out that each organization, including the US state, had their own motives—economic, political or administrative—to redirect the Soviet Jews to the US instead of Israel, "but they always reasoned it by the fight for the human rights, for the freedom of movement. The fight for the human rights and for the freedom of movement stopped to interest them, when the aliya from Ethiopia began. Black Jews should not have been allowed to the US, they should have all gone to Israel. No *Joint* and *HIAS* tried to help them moving to the US, for them—just Israel" (Interview with Kedmi cited in Kosharovsky). Kedmi argues that the "human rights" argument was used as a convenient tool, and indirectly mentions the graduated nature of citizenship (Ong 1999b) I will discuss further in this chapter. In that political and

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[55] One of my informants, Lena, noticed that visiting tourists did not always understand the nature of the process. They would sometimes say, "Why do you need a visa? Just come and we will let you in!" They did not understand the concept of visas being used not only for entry, but also to exit.

[56] Sochnut (The Jewish Agency for Israel) is a nonprofit organization, inspiring and helping Jews to move to Israel. They met Soviet Jews at the emigration station in Vienna (there were no direct flights to Israel from the USSR due to the lack of diplomatic relations) and represented Israel. Later, when the Soviet Jews had an option to ask for a refuge in the US too, they tried to convince the Soviet Jews to go to Israel.

[57] From the interview of Kosharovskiy with Yakov Kedmi, an associate and later a chair of Lishkat ha-Kesher.

[58] Lishkat ha-Kesher (Liason Bureau) or Nativ is a part of Mossad, the agency specialized in bringing Jews to Israel by the method of special operations.

administrative context Soviet Jews turned out to be in demand, and that situation provided their special regime of citizenship.

Citizens without Citizenship

In the book Hopeless Wars (*Beznadezhnie Voini*), Yakov Kedmi recalls how in 1967, not long before the complete severing of diplomatic relations between Israel and the USSR, he cunningly sneaked into the Israeli consulate in Moscow. After a nice conversation with a consul, he was immediately seized by Soviet police upon exiting the consulate. Knowing the consul was watching, Kedmi was disappointed that he did not receive help in any form from Israel. He had expected the foreign state to protect him against the state of his very citizenship.

While doing archival work on the Jewish revival movement in the USSR of the 1970s and 1980s, I encountered an interesting phenomenon. In letters to friends in Israel, Soviet refuseniks consistently call themselves Israeli citizens. Indeed, Israel's Law of Return immediately confers full citizenship on any Jew who immigrates. However, these letters are written by Jews who, at that moment, continued to live outside of Israel, lacking legally-recognized documents confirming their citizenship, and moreover, had never even visited Israel. Furthermore, at that moment, these writers felt able to influence certain aspects of Israeli politics. This is in sharp contrast to today, these same people, now holding Israeli citizenship and having lived in Israel for a long time, no longer feel they can affect the politics of the country. This concept of citizenship appears at odds with the legal concept, in which citizenship is regarded as a status, bestowed to all full members of a political community and confirmed by a legal document. Indeed, how can one consider himself a citizen of a country that he has not even once visited, and even feel he has influence over its politics? How can someone unilaterally declare himself a citizen of a foreign country? Would not that sound awkward to us if a citizen of the USSR began referring to himself a US, German, or Australian citizen on the basis of plans, or desires, to emigrate? One might point out that, in the case of Israel, it does not sound so strange because Israel has historically been understood to be the Jewish motherland. Yet, could not one likewise call himself a citizen of Tanzania based on the fact that all of humanity has an origin in the Olduvai Gorge? I am, of course, attempting to present as strange a situation which otherwise may appear normal. I would like to show that this unique situation is not transparent, and it is only perceived as normal due to certain socio-political premises. The rhetoric of citizenship and of the historical motherland among the refuseniks became a rather usual, and quite specific, phenomenon – a group of people who physically lived in the Soviet Union, but virtually considered themselves a part of another political (and I stress *political*, not ethnical or religious) community. The legalistic model of citizenship does not allow us to understand the specific relationship between the refuseniks and the state of Israel. Many questions arise. How does this phenomenon inform the category of citizenship, currently monopolized by the field of legal studies? What is this strange type of citizenship, outside of Israel, that was experienced by the refuseniks in the Soviet Union? How do people experience citizenship of a country they have never lived in? Through what everyday practices did the refuseniks experience Israeli citizenship? What is the specific context that makes an outsider capable of influencing, and even participating in, the politics of the state? I

will reflect on these questions through the examples I collected during interviews and archival work in Israel.

Studying Citizenship

Many academic concepts of citizenship have been formulated in dialogue with T.H. Marshall's classic work on the topic. Marshall sees citizenship as a legal status, bestowed to all full members of a political community. He singles out three European historical stages of "enriching the body of rights"—civil rights in the 18th century, political rights in the 19th century, and social rights in the 20th century (Marshall 1998). Proceeding Marshall's work, many scholars such as Roger Brubaker, Renato Rosaldo, Aihwa Ong, James Holston, and Saskia Sassen have elaborated on this legalistic definition, similarly stressing the importance of de facto rather than de jure inclusion in society.

Citizenship is neither merely an abstract philosophic concept, nor a strictly legal status, but rather a link between the state and the subject which reveals itself in various situations. This link is not only recorded on paper in the form of rights and responsibilities, but also built into practices of everyday life. Citizenship is, on the one hand, a way for people to recognize their belonging to a political community by framing various claims on a state. On the other hand, it is a way for the state to affirm the legitimacy of its institutions and exhort an existing order.

The philosophical grounding of the modern notion of citizenship can be found in Rousseau's theory of consent. According to this tradition, citizenship is commonly understood as a legal contract between the citizen and the state, according to which the citizen is "the free and autonomous individual, who makes, or shares in the making of, the laws he obeys" (Walzer 1989, 212). However widely discussed, the vague definition of the state deployed in this notion of citizenship renders the meaning of citizenship nebulous as well. Exactly with whom does this person have a contract? Theorists of the state have made attempts to define a state and even eliminate the category of the state altogether. Timothy Mitchell suggests perceiving the state "not as an actual structure, but as the powerful, apparently metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures appear to exist" (Mitchell 1999, 180). According to Mitchell, the state is merely the cumulative effect of institutions like the army, schools, bureaucracies, passports, immigration laws, or inspection offices – all of which exert some influence over people. Indeed, he suggests that we perceive the state as a practice or set of practices rather than entity. Following this logic, citizenship, which is unavoidably defined through the category of the state, might be further understood as the effect of practices, rather than solely a status (unless one intentionally reduces the link between the state and the subject to merely legal terms). Saskia Sassen also indicates the importance of practice in studying citizenship. She defines it as "an incompletely theorized contract between the state and the citizen. …Incompleteness brings to the fore the work of making, whether it is making in response to changed conditions, new subjectivities, or new instrumentalities" (Sassen 2009, 230). This notion of imperfection in the legal definition of citizenship has been explored further by scholars in the humanities.

Studying citizenship through practices rather than statuses offers the possibility of learning something new about the relationship between states and their citizens. Taking this into

account, I would like to consider the relationship between the state of Israel and the Soviet Jews.

Israel and the Soviet Jews

If we consider citizenship as a practice rather than a status, it appears that some Soviet Jews indeed became the citizens of Israel long before their arrival. Let us further inspect the functions of citizenship both for the state and the citizens. The state expects the support of state institutions of power and the reproduction of an existing order. For citizens, the functions of citizenship include state protection and the enjoyment of freedoms and benefits guaranteed by the state. Both the state of Israel and the Soviet Jews[59] pursue practices aiming for these goals. Soviet Jews, on the one hand, contribute to the various institutions of Israel: increase the number of potential olim[60], educate them in Hebrew language and Jewish culture, and support Israel with samizdat unofficial publications, thereby shaping public opinion not only of other Jews, but of other Soviet citizens as well (mostly among the intelligentsia, but also among laymen). On the other hand, such practices come with certain expectations to be fulfilled by the state of Israel, including the expectation that Israel will (indirectly, due to lack of diplomatic relationships) afford them some protection from the Soviet punitive apparatus, provide financial support, support in emigration, etc. In other words, expectations usually held by citizens in regards to their state. Israel, in return, has claims on Soviet Jews, as future Israelis, helping them financially, defending them in critical situations, and furnishing them with documents. These are the functions that states usually perform for their citizens. Thus, we have a situation in which a foreign state and foreign citizens maintain the same relationship as a state and its official citizens. I would like to give a sketch of what this connection looked like.

Following Timothy Mitchell, I agree that the concept of state should not be considered unproblematic in how it's perceived as a monolithic entity. On the contrary, the state of Israel is a complex web of institutions with their own, and often contradictory, sets of goals. Likewise, the populations are characterized by sharply contradictory views concerning the state and its objectives. Here I consider the dominate right-wing power in Israel. When I talk about the support of Israel by the Soviet Jews, I specifically mean the Soviet Jews, who saw Israel as a democratic state that gave Jews an opportunity to break up with their servility in foreign countries, and who understood it to be their mission to explain this perspective to other Soviet Jews and create ample conditions for comfortable relocation. The letters of the refuseniks written to their friends in Israel express deep concern with the *neshira* (lit. dropped out), the Soviet Jews who applied to leave for Israel, but eventually sought to live in other countries. They felt a personal responsibility for these Jews not making it to Israel.

An intensely loyal relationship was established between the state of Israel and some Soviet Jews, who were involved in Jewish practices. The interest in Jewish practices exploded at the end of the 1960s and flourished until the early 1990s, when official Jewish institutions, such as

[59] Here and further on I do not mean all Soviet Jews, but only those, who somehow participated in Jewish practices of various kinds.
[60] Olim (lit. ascended) – people, who immigrated to Israel. The word has the same root as "aliia".

Sochnut, Israeli Center of Culture, Hillel, Chabad, etc. came to the post-soviet space and took over informal practices. I do not consider the phenomenon of the Jewish revival as a whole an explicit outburst of Zionism. Rather, I am examining the practices that linked some Soviet Jews with the state of Israel yet were not necessarily considered to be Zionist. Even the meaning of Zionism was not put in a global perspective back then: Soviet Jews had extremely limited understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and possible perspectives on it. A Soviet Jew living in the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, claiming to be Zionist and a modern American Jew, claiming to be Zionist, claim two different things. In addition to people who explicitly expressed their Zionist intention, I include people who neither planned to leave for Israel nor studied Hebrew out of Zionist motivation, those who did not regard emigration to Israel (*Aliyah*) as the primary goal of the collective Jewish practices in the USSR.

Language is one of the main uniting factors of nationalities. Soviet Jews who moved to Israel would know at least some foundational Hebrew from the informal, yet passionately taught classes from home. Aron expresses feelings about his Hebrew classes as follows:

> *Never in my life, in school, in college, did I treat my lessons so seriously. It was not a formal lesson, forty minutes, one hour or an hour and a half. One learns a topic and 'good bye'. It was some communication, these conversations about Jewishness, Israel…*

At these classes people had a chance to learn about Israel, ask questions they had always wanted to ask, see pictures of Israel, and even meet Israelis (holding a passport of a country other than Israel, thus allowing them entry to the Soviet Union[61]). "One student and teacher of Hebrew opined that in the *ulpanim*[62], people felt that they were "living in Israel" (interview with Boris Ainbinder cited in Volvovsky 2012, 337). Discussions on Israel and Jewish culture provided in these classes, as well as other seminars covering Jewish history, tradition and ethnography, culturally prepared people for life in Israel.

USA, Canada, France, Germany, UK and Mexico are only a handful of the countries that require citizenship applicants to pass both a language and civil exam. These exams are designed to guarantee some level of involvement by the newly arrived immigrant in the political community while further fostering loyalty. Had Israel required such an exam, one might have considered the Hebrew classes, tradition and history seminars as a form of institutional preparation. Teachers of Hebrew (and of Hebrew only) usually took a symbolic payment for classes, mostly one ruble per lesson, but sometimes two to three rubles per lesson, and other times they taught for free. Highly passionate people, even those with extremely high levels of Hebrew knowledge, essentially, worked for Israel with only occasional and modest requests, such as tape recorders.

Unofficial publications (*samizdat*), produced and spread around by activists, presented Israel in a positive light in contrast, for example, to the anti-Zionist brochures in the Soviet Union. Evgeniy recalls,

> *…And then, when the movement for leaving for Israel began, when I was still clinging to Russian culture, one of my friends, who previously shared the same view as I did,*

[61] There was no diplomatic relationship between the USSR and Israel between 1967 (upon the beginning of the Six Day War) and 1991 (after the disintegration of the USSR).
[62] *Ulpan* (pl., *ulpanim*) is a class of Hebrew.

reported that he was leaving. I said, "No! What?!" He, "Yes, read this," and gave me the book Exodus and the letter of Moshe Gutterman. I remember, it was a private letter, but like an appeal to Jews, stating that here [in Israel] is our home and we have nothing to do with the foreign land… And Exodus. I read it in a night and the day after I said, "I am leaving"… It became more clear, Israel, its history…, a lot of facts. And it is written so touchingly…

Spread by activists, the samizdat pieces got passed around to more and more people, and achieved an audience much wider than just those who were involved in Jewish practices.

Along with taking up their "civic" responsibilities, as I have previously stated, Soviet Jews expected support from Israel. Having planned a significant educational project, one of the Hebrew teachers asked a representative of the *Lishkat ha-Kesher* to request money for the project from the organization. Upon hearing that the *Lishka* did not have enough funds at that moment, he got angry, "What do you mean they don't have the money?! Tell them to send us a couple less of their *shlichim* (lit. missioners) and give us the money instead!" It is very hard to calculate the extent of financial support from Israel, as it came in different forms. For example, they sent things that were hard to buy in the Soviet Union, such as cameras, watches, tape-recorders, clothes and footwear (Beizer 2012, 371). Activists would then sell them on the black market in order to make up for the lack of money. For example, a camera could be sold for up to 3000 rubles, while the typical salary of an engineer per month was 120 rubles. They sent parcels with Hebrew textbooks and tape recorders for the Hebrew classes. They sponsored various educational and cultural activities. They financed underground Jewish schools, kindergartens and summer camps. They supported families of imprisoned activists, as well as those who were forced to quit their jobs due to applications for exit visas or active involvement in the movements' activities. Michael Beizer suggests that the overall support from the *Lishkat ha-Kesher*, sponsored by the JDC, to the Soviet Jews "increased from 1974 through 1977 from $2.6 million to $4.5 million and continued to increase" (Beizer 2012, 367).

In establishing state – citizen relationship the *Lishkat ha-Kesher* even resorted to some trickery. In order to emigrate to Israel from the Soviet Union, one had to have an invitation from a related Israeli citizen (*vizov*), a document that confirmed that a Soviet citizen had a relative who invited them to move to Israel as a permanent resident. This invitation had to be notarized and confirmed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This document had to be accompanied by a paper from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating that the bearer would be allowed to immigrate to Israel if he was permitted to do so by the Soviet Union. In the 1950s the responsibility of confirming the invitations and accompanying documents was transferred to the *Lishkat ha-Kesher*. Though thousands in the Soviet Union sought such an invitation, very few actually had relatives in Israel. Thus, the *Nativ* (*Lishkat ha-Kesher*) implemented a system of fake invitations, having them signed by Israeli citizens who had the same last name as the Soviet Jews who requested the documents. The *Nativ* would also eliminate the statement on family relation in the documents, giving instead a blank space for the Soviet citizen to forge their relation to the OVIR. Next, public notaries confirmed the Israeli citizens who signed the documents really existed and the *Nativ*, using the stamp of the ministry of foreign affairs, authenticated these invitations as legal documents of the state of Israel. In this way, the whole system of invitations was one of falsification. Legally speaking, Israel did not forge these

documents, it just confirmed the fact that certain Israeli citizens really existed and that they invited their Soviet "relatives" for permanent residence in Israel. However, the system was initiated and authorized by the state organ. When, with increasing number of invitation requests, the search for Israeli citizens who would agree to invite a Soviet "relative" became difficult, the *Nativ* organized the mass collection of these invitations through kibbutzim (communal settlements, defined in more details in Chapter 3). It simplified the process, because people in kibbutzim lived more closely and tended to be more Zionist (Interview with Yakov Kedmi). An increased number of Jews who wished to apply for an exit visa in the Soviet Union caused a necessity in newer more effective methods in the search for Israeli "relatives." Collection of invitations was organized through unions and factories, as well as former Soviet Jewish volunteers who wished to help. Sometimes it was hard to convince an Israeli to write an invitation, because they were afraid of the Soviet "relatives" making claims on their property upon arrival. Until the end of the 1980s when the data was computerized, all the invitations were prepared on typewriters (Interview with Yakov Kedmi). Besides the amount of work needed to retype an invitation each time, this fact also meant that there was no way to find an Israeli "relative" with the same name automatically: each time one had to look through the lists.

In 1979 the Soviet Union limited the exit visas to only those who had close relatives in Israel, e.g. parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, sisters, brothers and spouses. Therefore, it became harder for people to get invitations. In addition, Jews who chose to emigrate to the US cut off the opportunity for their relatives to apply for an exit visa by having an invitation from someone real, who was already in the Soviet lists of emigrants. As I have mentioned before, the OVIR did not accept the documents for emigration to the US. These people could still get an invitation from Israel, but only from a fake relative, which complicated the procedure in the OVIR.

Another problem, faced by refuseniks was a Soviet law about "parasitism." Soviet citizens had a right to not work for three months, after which they faced the possibility of being arrested. Usually, when one applied for an exit visa to emigrate to Israel, one had to relinquish one's job. However, job supervisors were reprimanded by higher authorities, if someone in their institution/unit applied for an exit visa. Therefore, sometimes supervisors required an associate to quit the job in exchange for a document, saying there were no material claims to this associate, the document one needed for an exit visa application. Sometimes applicants quit their jobs before applying out of respect and compassion for their supervisors. Visa applicants sometimes had to find creative ways to resolve this problem. For example, teachers of Hebrew attempted to argue that their job was teaching Hebrew and, therefore, they were not so-called parasites. Soviet authorities responded by saying they did not qualify as teachers because they lacked proper certification. In turn, the *Lishkat ha-Kesher* asked the Oxford Center for Hebrew and Jewish studies to issue certificates, confirming that these Soviet Hebrew teachers had passed exams and had been granted teachers' certificates by real professors. This fact is important for my story not because it helped in the argument with Soviet authorities, but as another example of protection, more symbolic than real in this case, that Israel gave to formal non-citizens.

Finally, in 1985, Israeli Knesset passed a law that any Jew who had been prevented from going to Israel would be allowed to apply for, and be granted, Israeli citizenship even if residing

in the territory of another state. Before this change, only one physically present in the land of Israel could gain the status of a citizen. Initially, when Yakov Kedmi suggested this project in the Nativ, its associates protested against it. They did not understand the purpose behind such an action and did not want to provoke an open fight with the Soviet Union. However, when Kedmi managed to implement the change in law through the Knesset, they agreed to provide some refuseniks with citizenship certificates. By the beginning of 1986, nearly 1,400 Soviet Jews received a certificate of Israeli citizenship, yet this certificate did not permit them to leave the Soviet Union. Legally, in such cases where people have dual citizenship, they still remain subject to the law of the country in which they reside at the moment. These citizenship certificates did not have any actual power within international law, because Kedmi was not able to convince Israel into giving out passports to the Soviet refuseniks. Still, they were authentic citizenship documents that Israel had furnished to foreign citizens (Interview with Yakov Kedmi).

Of course, the most important factor in the relationship between the refuseniks and Israel has long been recognized as ethnicity. This is the premise that makes this story intelligible. Shockingly enough, at the time no organization in Israel was checking the ethnicity of the Soviet immigrants before granting them citizenship, meaning that, theoretically, both Jews and non-Jews could have been eligible for Israeli protection. This is not to say that many non-Jewish people tried to take advantage of this due to the size of sacrifice, but rather serves to highlight that these citizen-state relationship were often without bureaucratic basis, and instead operated on unofficial practices.

Studying Citizenship through Leave: Rights and Practices of Emigration

In people's daily lives, the concept of citizenship remains largely invisible, and people tend to use the term unproblematically or not at all (Holston 2009). I argue that citizenship reveals itself only when everyday life is disrupted by new situations or by the failure to perform a usual practice. This can happen in the context of starting life in a new country, as in the cases described by Rosaldo and Ong (Rosaldo 1999; Ong 1999a); in the aftermath of a catastrophe, as in Petryna's case (Petryna 2002); or in a situation of total marginality, when daily practices can never be routinized, and satisfaction of very basic needs requires much strategy, as in the situation of illegal communities in India (Das 2011). In this section I explore one more type of a disruption—the decision to leave one's country of citizenship.

The unique possibility for the Soviet Jews to leave the Soviet Union conditioned the phenomenon of freedom I described in previous chapters. The fact that the Soviet Union limited emigration usually serves as evidence to its criminal nature. The current state of increased global mobility creates an impression that leaving places is a "historical given" (Green and Weil 2007, 2). However, the norm of people leaving their homes "in pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere" is a comparatively recent achievement of the French Constitution of 1791, which declared the right of citizens "to go, to remain, [and] to depart" (Torpey 2007, 13). To further illustrate this point, I will briefly overview emigration policies at different times and places.

John Torpey explains liberation of departure as a necessity resulting from free market labor and changes in the character of economy. According to him, in times of serfdom, people were

simply bound to the soil. The change in practices brought about by the development of capitalism led to the development of the new institutions for citizenship and exit control, such as the systems for granting passports and visas. Military service became not only a necessity for protection of a political community, but also an obligation imposed on citizens, impeding their possibility of leaving. Torpey explains how the norm of free departure was gradually extended from more to less economically and socially privileged populations.

In 1669, Louis XIV of France issued an edict that banned French subjects from leaving the country and required that those who did leave possess a passport. In the process of revolution and the proceeding stabilization period, the extent to which citizens had freedom to exit the country was in constant flux. On the one hand, revolution proclaimed freedom of departure, but, on the other hand, revolutionaries understood the need of some level of control. Unlimited liberty of movement turned out to be "harmful for the revolution" (Torpey 2007, 15).

In Germany, serfdom was abolished in 1807, and in 1817 a law was issued canceling passports for internal movement. Noncitizen Jews and some types of journeymen were among the nonexempt groups. In the 1830s most German states required confirmation of admission from the countries of destination before issuing travel passports. This was an earlier version of the modern visa system. In the 1840s, Prussia officially accepted emigration of its citizens with the exception of those who owed military service. However, with the approaching Crimean war of 1854-56, when the state needed to mobilize troops, it limited the indiscriminate leave of young men. In 1867 all the passport and visa requirements were abolished. Both German citizens and foreigners were allowed to leave, enter, or move around the North German Confederation. This law remained in existence until the establishment of the Third Reich in 1933 (Torpey 2007, 18).

In Russia, abolition of serfdom in 1861 was paradoxically accompanied by tsarist restrictions on movement. Nobody was allowed to leave or even move without special permission, which was difficult to obtain, especially for ordinary people, who were put under multiple obligations, including military service that prevented them from departure. Only a small number of Russians left the country despite dissolution of serfdom, and the majority of émigrés were Jews and Poles, who constituted 70% of the 2.36 million emigrants from the Russian empire between 1899 and 1913 (Torpey 2007, 20). The October Revolution liberalized departure; however, the pressures of the Civil War and the need for military power required increase of control over emigration. In 1932, the Soviet government reinstituted internal passports mainly to prevent peasants from leaving the impoverished countryside, so that they would continue to produce food supplies under the planned economy. This policy effectively instituted different regimes of citizenship for urban and rural populations.

These brief examples of the right to leave a political community demonstrate how this practice has always been dependent on economic, social, and ethnic characteristics. Leave-taking has never been a given reality; rather, the right to exit had to be developed. However, even legalization of leave did not normalize the practice or separate it from the factors identified above. Exit from a political community is one of the situations that disrupt everyday practices, even if this disruption is foreseen by the state on a legal level. This disruption makes the connection of the citizen with the state noticeable, which might not have been noticed before. An act of emigration reveals certain general characteristics of citizenship in relation to a given state, as well as the distinctive ways in which the state relates to various groups of

citizens. However, even when formal rights are established, they never address all the possible empirical situations; this incompleteness leads to a multiplication of unexpected institutions and practices and also establishes a productive space for inequalities.

In reference to inequalities, the concept of graduated citizenship shows how on the level of practices "populations subjected to different regimes of value enjoy different kinds of rights, discipline, caring and security" from the state (Ong 1999b, 217). Though political status continues to be a basic step for asylum seekers, it does not necessarily guarantee political and civil rights. Many exceptions remain even within the boundaries of legal citizenship. Specifically neoliberal modernity significantly reshapes the practice of citizenship. On the one hand, "citizens who are deemed too complacent or lacking in neoliberal potential may be treated as less-worthy subjects" in modern western countries (Ong 2006, 16). On the other hand, "the neoliberal exception gives value to calculative practices and to self-governing subjects as preferred citizens" (Ong 2006, 16). Thus under a neoliberal lens, values of the state citizenship are disarticulated and rearticulated.

The practices of the right to leave as a part of the citizenship "package" can also be considered to be graduated. Ong utilizes this concept to explain what role different kinds of capital play in the contemporary instability of citizenship borders. However, we have seen how, in different historical periods, distinct possibilities for exit have existed for groups like military-eligible men, peasants or certain ethnic communities. Below, I would like to describe some additional examples that illustrate states' attitudes toward emigration. These 'attitudes toward emigration' have been formulated variously as a criminal effort, a beneficial project, an effort of cultural expansion and a spiritual betrayal.

In China, up to the mid-nineteenth century, the attitude toward leave-takers was extremely radical. Emigrants were considered criminals and authorities did not admit any responsibility towards Chinese expatriates (Pina-Guerassimoff and Guerassimoff 2007, 246). When at the end of the 1880s, the Chinese government became aware of the potential economic benefit of emigrant investment in China, it abolished all laws against emigration and return. During the Maoist Era (1949-1976), China followed Soviet ideas of progress and modernization. Chinese intellectuals emphasized the importance of science and technology and criticized feudalism and Chinese traditions of the past (Ong 1999b). Similarly to the Soviet Union, the Chinese government prohibited departures (with the exception of a short period at the beginning of the Maoist period). From 1950 to 1966 it focused on returning Overseas Chinese to China. They were declared "bourgeois capitalists" and became the target of ideological criticism (Pina-Guerassimoff and Guerassimoff 2007, 256). During the Dengist period (1976-1996) Chinese intellectuals turned to a new image of Chinese modernity—"socialism with Chinese characteristics." Revived Confucianism emerged as an important basis for cultural modernization. Discourse around Chinese modernization emphasize the difference of Chinese values from Western ones, and the ideal modernity was seen as one in which "Chinese humanistic values triumph over modern science and Western callousness" (Ong 1999b, 46). Racial distinctiveness became one basis in the formation of such discourses. Overseas Chinese emigrants were therefore constructed as people linked to mainland Chinese and constitutive of Chinese modernity. They possessed "the scientific knowledge, the capitalist skills, the loyalty to the motherland, the Chinese humanism, the cultural and racial exceptionalism" (Ong 1999b, 46). Thus, overseas Chinese, who had learned all the knowledge and skills of the West, but had

not become an "inferior version of Occidentals", were considered to play a crucial role in the building of Chinese modernity (Ong 1999b, 52). This important detail in the Chinese attitude toward emigrants lies in its terminology, which indicates that China perceives any leave as temporary. The term *huaqiao* literally means "Chinese person temporarily residing abroad" (Pina-Guerassimoff and Guerassimoff 2007, 248). Therefore, the emigrant is not one who betrays China, but one who goes abroad to accumulate capital and ultimately return to enrich the motherland. This more friendly politics around expatriates might have saved Chinese communism against the kind of symbolic defeat that the Soviet Union experienced, largely due to backlash around the painful process of Soviet emigration.[63]

Similar versions of this friendly approach to émigrés can also be found in some European countries at the time. Comparing the histories of Germany, Italy and Poland, a group of scholars has pointed out that, despite some concerns about America-bound movement, emigration was also understood by these countries as a positive phenomenon. However, in contrast with China, which merely did not impede leave-taking, Western countries actively initiated emigration considering it as a kind of cultural expansion usually named "quite explicitly in all three countries 'colonization'" (Gabaccia, Hoerder, and Walaszek 2007, 80). Remaining suspicious about the national sentiments of expatriates in the US, they saw Latin America as an ideal destination for emigration.

In Germany, the idea of colonization was promoted by cultural nationalists, who pointed out that emigrants helped to both spread national influence and relieve the state of an impoverished population and the burden of insufficient resources. Having portrayed emigrants in this way, cultural nationalists insisted on the protection of German emigrants abroad. Starting from 1897, they managed to direct Germany's emigration policy toward strengthening of "its emerging colonial empire" (Gabaccia, Hoerder, and Walaszek 2007, 67). They wished to protect their image abroad and project strength. Thus, for example, authorities attempted to prevent German female emigrants from solicitations to engage in prostitution as it would reflect poorly on the nation.

Similarly to their German counterparts, Italian liberalists promoted imperialist attitudes toward emigration. Interestingly, this political stance remained the same during Mussolini's rule. One might presume that any state based on strong central ideals would consider leave as a betrayal. Such sensibilities have been observed, for example, in most socialist countries as well as in the young nation state of Israel; however, the Italian case does not conform to the trend.

Poland is an interesting example of this colonialist way of thinking, there 'colonization' through emigration took place during the same time Poland itself was being colonized and divided by European empires. The first historian of Poles in North America, Waclaw Kruszka, formulated the governing principle of the Polish attitude towards emigration: "Poland is not just land along the Vistula River but a collection of people with a common origin and lineage. Wherever a Pole settles, there a piece of Poland is born" (Gabaccia, Hoerder, and Walaszek 2007, 76).

These three examples are united by the fact that the citizenship logic of each country inclined toward *jus sanguinis* (principle of blood), rather than *jus soli* (principle of land). The

[63] I will further discuss this case below.

logical outcome of this principle is that partial relocation of the nation does not lead to its disappearance, but rather to the spread of national culture. However, this logic does not apply when a new national state is formed on the basis of *jus sanguinis*, as exemplified by the case of Israel.

Israel is a unique example of a nation-state created comparatively recently. Its establishment was a project, based on the writings of Jewish philosophers and justified by lack of protection for Jews during the Holocaust (Brown 2008; Novick 2000). Further legitimization for the existence of Israel is provided by the presumed active desire of Jews all over the world to immigrate to the homeland. Consequently, emigration from Israel is considered to be an ideological and demographic problem (Gold 2007, 285). Israeli authorities therefore encounter the problem of keeping Israeli citizens inside the country. Unlike early socialist projects, Israel cannot declare emigration a crime against the state and close its borders (Gold 2007, 291). Rather, the nation uses methods of "moral and ideological pressure, speeches by prominent officials, and the creation of anti-emigration cultural productions (such as books, articles, news reports, and films)" (Gold 2007, 291). Up until the late 1980s, the diaspora was presented as a harsh condition for Jews, emigration was condemned as immoral, and emigrants were described as unhappy and unsuccessful. Furthermore, Israel discouraged Jews in the diaspora from assisting Israeli emigrants. On the legislative level, the government issued laws discouraging exit and encouraging return (Gold 2007, 291). This tough policy towards emigrants was relaxed at the end of the '80s, when authorities realized that a more tolerant, paternalistic policy might be more effective. The new logic was that sojourners might provide economic benefits for Israel and eventually return. In addition, a huge immigration of the Soviet Jews in the 1990s increased the Israeli population by approximately 20%, with the majority being highly educated people. This partially decreased Zionist worries around a low population. All these concerns, of course, apply only to the Jewish population of Israel. Israeli Palestinians live under a completely different regime of citizenship, and political conceptualization of their leave was rather seen as a relief to the Israeli right-wing majority.

The demographic and economic success of Israel was accompanied by a more tolerant position towards Jewish emigrants; however, the long history of political dishonor surrounding emigration has made the topic highly sensitive among Israelis (Gold 2007, 299). A continued negative connotation towards emigrants is reflected in everyday Hebrew vernacular. The words *oleh* (immigrate to Israel) and *yored* (emigrate from Israel) literally mean *to ascend* and *to descend*.

Studying the various states' conceptualization of leave-taking reveals the precise characteristics of relationships between states and citizens. Evidently, the legal domain is not the only area (and, perhaps, not even the most important one), in which these conceptualizations disclose themselves. A state's attitude toward emigration is not expressed solely through the establishment or elimination of rights. The way a state produces a certain order reveals dynamism and creativity even under the regulation of law. Therefore, studying governmental techniques through a Foucauldian lens might contribute to understanding regime "attitudes" towards emigration (Foucault 1995). As Mitchel pointed out, the modern state is a vague category that does not exist outside of perceptions of its institutions and practices. Therefore, studying state policies requires analysis of how these policies are internalized by people in everyday practices through education, media, bureaucracy, language forms, jokes,

etc. In the following section, I will illustrate this point by showing how the Soviet attitude toward emigration circulated in everyday lives of the Soviet Jews.

Emigration in the USSR

An important characteristic of Soviet policy (which has been inherited by modern Russia) was its strategy of framing most of its actions in terms of law, which does not necessarily equate to justice. Occasionally, laws could be applied in unforeseen ways. As Ugo Mattei and Laura Nader showed on various examples, the rule of law can be illegal (Mattei and Nader 2008). It would also be inaccurate to call Soviet laws undemocratic. These laws were based on the modern Western standards of rights to freedom, which Soviet authorities found important to conform to at least publicly (Ro'i 2012, 110). One could not object to the actions of the Soviet state in the legal domain. The legal framework alone presents obstacles to an effective analysis of Soviet citizenship and specifically emigration. For example, the most common accusation for charging activists in the Jewish movement of the late Soviet period was "propagation of deliberately false thoughts, degrading the Soviet social and state system." Evidence for these accusations, such as letters to friends abroad, could have contained complains about the Soviet Union. However, first, whether thoughts were "false" and whether they degraded the Soviet system was a matter of interpretation. Second, in the context of the complaint system, almost every citizen could have been theoretically accused of "degrading" the Soviet system. Particular reactions to Jewish activists' critique demonstrate how even though punishment was applied in a legal way; the actions they were punished for were frequently different from those declared. For example, would it be possible to say that every Jewish activist imprisoned for propagation of Zionism was a Zionist? In order to consider someone a Zionist, the court had to interpret the accused person's practices as Zionist, which did not necessarily coincide with the defendant's own interpretation. Someone accused could have studied and taught Hebrew language for educational or cultural reasons, not political activism.

In addition to the *interpretation* lens, Rigi proposes a *counterfeit* lens. Analyzing the Soviet system's legacy and its impact on Putin's Russia, Rigi shows the inadequacy of Agamben's state of exception theory. The idea of the state of exception presumes that the law is suspended, while in Russia, Rigi suggests, it is corrupted (2012, 81). Thus, for example, in modern Russia, to take over someone's business, one does not have to resort to the kinds of illegal methods prevalent in the early 90s (intimidations, blackmails, and murders), but rather one might employ creative tricks to design a lawful case. This corruption of law is not specifically a Russian phenomenon, according to Rigi. It is connected with a broader post-modern tendency of corruption of a sign, when signifier is detached from signified. The idea of law became a fetish rather than a meaningful sign. Referring to the Comaroffs, Rigi argues that law and order are not always connected. The corruption of law might be evoked by the contradiction between law and order. Rigi's critique of exception might be productive for the Soviet case, where the existing emigration "law" did not reflect the "order" of the state's conceptualization of emigration (e.g. emigration as a spiritual betrayal or emigration as a punishment).

From 1927 to the 1953 the Soviet state officially opposed emigration. Though occasionally authorities used expatriation as a measure of punishment for "undesirables", it was commonly perceived as "an act of disloyalty" (Friedgut 2012, 250). Indeed, as I have already mentioned the US regarded each emigrant as an evidence of the Soviet failure, and the Soviet authorities were aware of this interpretation of emigration by the West (Loescher 1998).

Based on statistics, Friedgut claims that after Stalin's death in 1953 it has been decided "to permit selective and carefully restricted emigration from the USSR" (Friedgut 2012, 251). In the period from 1954 to 1957, 750 Jews were permitted to leave the USSR, compared with only 18 during the last five years of Stalin's rule (Friedgut 2012, 251). The government presumed that this policy would be "low-cost" as it applied only to ethnic minorities: Jews, Germans, Armenians, Poles, Spaniards, and some others. In 1960, the Declaration of Human Rights was signed, and emigration was among the other freedoms guaranteed. This direction was considered beneficial for the domestic and foreign interests of the Soviet Union at the time. As the result of mass Soviet Jewish emigration starting in the early 1970s, the vast majority of Soviet Jews currently live outside of the post-Soviet space: out of the 2.166 million Jews living in the USSR in 1970, 1.925 million emigrated during the following 40 years (Tolz 2012).

Even after emigration was legalized, its perception as an act of disloyalty remained the overarching theme of the state's emigration practices. Thus, when, at a 1966 press conference in Paris the Premier Kosygin was asked whether Soviet Jews—just as Greeks and Armenians—would be allowed to reunite with their families which they had been separated from during World War II. He answered, "As for reunifying families, if some families want to meet or want to leave the Soviet Union, the road is open to them and no problem exists here" (Friedgut 2012, 252). Analyzing this statement, which prompted mass applications by Jews for exit visas[64], Friedgut concludes that "the regime studiously avoided any recognition of an unconditional human right to emigrate" (2012, 252). Kosygin underlined that family reunification was the only legitimate reason for leaving the state. This demonstrates how Soviet emigration rights and the attitude toward emigration were not cohesive. Therefore, following Rigi, I find it useful to separate the law and the order of emigration in order to show the actual practice of emigration based on the state's attitude. Implementation of the late Soviet order toward emigration was not well planned and poorly communicated between various levels of authority, as evidenced from the contradictory results of applications by people with seemingly identical backgrounds. OVIR (office of visas and registration) officers had to decide with each individual case how to evaluate various factors: lack of required parents' permission, applicants varying levels of access to state secret materials at work, uncertainty of social status, etc. How was an order created within the regulation of rights? And how was this order experienced in the everyday lives of the Soviet Jews?

In order to apply for an exit visa one had to surpass several financial obstacles. The required renunciation of Soviet citizenship cost 500 rubles and an international passport cost 300-400 rubles at a time when average wage was 150 rubles per month (Gitelman 1988, 281). In August 1972 the authorities decided to collect higher education tax from emigrants (Rogovin Frankel 2012, 188). The state paid everyone's education at all levels, yet research on Western laws regarding educational bank loans led the Soviet Union to consider an education tax as a

[64] The exit visa was a document a Soviet citizen had to obtain in order to emigrate to another country.

legitimate measure. They found that American citizens could not leave the US permanently until paying off all debts (Morozov 1998, 166). The education fee requirement is an interesting example of how Soviet citizenship revealed itself through the economic domain in regards to emigration. This policy reminded an emigrant not only of the contract between them and the Soviet state, but also about their educational benefits from this contract (not that it actually made people reconsider their intention to leave). One had a chance to, finally, *experience* a socialist welfare system through this disruption in one's daily routine. The legal system of the Soviet Union assigned every citizen a benefit of free education on the sole condition of their citizenship. Following this logic, if an individual decided to refuse their citizenship, one had to return the investment made by the socialist state in their education. However, the citizenship "contract" between the Soviet state and the Soviet citizen did not explicitly mention the repercussions if the citizen was to leave the state. The state could insist on the fact that it covered a citizen's education without knowing about their future emigration, while the citizen could insist that had they known about the conditions of the benefit in advance, they would have not have utilized the benefit. This problem was ultimately solved by an external agent. In October 1972, the US added an amendment to the Jackson-Vanick Trade Act, which enacted punitive economic sanctions against countries impeding free emigration. Even though the Soviet education tax was not officially eliminated, by March 1973 it was shelved[65]. The interference of an external agent into the relationships of the USSR with its own citizens provoked the state to assume a stance of antagonism toward the protected citizens and effectively increased distrust towards them.

Mass emigration from the Soviet Union led the state to another (the first being Stalin's fight against cosmopolitanism) wave of suspicion about disloyalty among Jewish citizens. "They [Soviet authorities] were confirmed in their belief that Jews ought to be removed to the margins of society because they simply could not be trusted to be loyal citizens" (Gitelman 1988, 282). This distrust in its turn affected the institution of education, which had been the subject of claims by the external agent mentioned above, the United States. The level of Jewish admittance to institutions of higher education decreased by 40 percent, as the state perceived their education as an investment in the economy of Western countries (Gitelman 1988, 283). These actions offended the Jews who had not planned to emigrate and ironically may have inspired them to consider leaving.

In addition to financial barriers, an applicant for an exit-visa had to collect multiple documents: "invitation from a relative abroad; a declaration of intent to leave; an autobiography; character attestation from one's place of employment; permission from one's parents, regardless of the applicant's age; permission from a former spouse in cases of divorce; a certificate from the house committee in one's residence[66]; copies of all important documents (birth certificates, educational degrees, death certificates of relatives, etc.), and photographs" (Gitelman 1988, 280). To collect this range of documents meant to inform and involve all possible circles of people and occasionally to be stopped by them. Because the situation of

[65] Edith Rogovin Frankel let herself suppose that "it is legitimate to question whether Jackson-Vanick Amendment actually contributed to the permitted emigration of the Soviet Jews, once the threat of its enactment had succeeded in achieving the goal of eliminating the education tax" (Rogovin Frankel 2012, 188).

[66] Every apartment building had a committee consisting of the building's residents. A couple of residents worked on it as a part-time paid job, the rest came for discussions of important questions in the life of the building.

emigration was perceived as disloyalty and any social group, be that family or a group of colleagues, was considered responsible for each member of that group, the various people involved were obliged to share some of the applicant's emotional and physical burden. Relatives who stayed behind in the Soviet Union, as well as the applicant's managers on different levels might have been reprimanded or even fired from their work places. The fear of implicating relatives and friends[67] prevented some Jews from applying. Some relatives and managers refused to cooperate in writing letters to the OVIR. Occasionally it was impossible to find a parent or a spouse because they had left the family long ago. Undeveloped means of communication made it difficult to find those who had changed addresses and/or stayed out of contact for several years. Sometimes an applicant's poor social relations were met with refusal to sign any papers, thereby interfering with the applicant's objectives.

Even though the entire institution of application was produced by a political state system, the problems experienced by applicants were of a more common social nature. The same way an American student might think, "Shall I disappoint my parents by not becoming a lawyer or a doctor?, would-be émigrés asked themselves, "Will I disappoint my parents by applying for an exit visa?" The same way an American employee might wonder, "Should I flatter my boss, for whom I have no respect, in order to get a promotion?" an applicant for an exit visa might ask, "Should I ask for the favor of a written permission and depend on someone I despise?" The nature of rationalities and sensibilities is the same in both cases, but they circulate in different contexts that produce unique situations in which these rationalities and sensibilities are launched. The broader human questions of the Soviet emigrant emerged out of an order in which emigration was conceptualized as betrayal. And this order was translated through various people and institutions in everyday life. Applicants did not always see their problems as an effect of concrete state policy. More precisely, they might have theoretically known that the nature of the state was a source of obstruction, but practically they needed to decide here and now how to convince their parents that Western perspectives were preferable or how to bribe or charm a secretary of a house committee, an "unrefined old maid" who probably hated Jews, to get a certificate or signature from her. The state conceptualization of emigration as betrayal was therefore experienced by people as a power/knowledge system in Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1990).

The media was another institution for transmission of the idea that emigration constituted a form of betrayal. An article entitled "Uncrowned Kings of Otkaz" (Tronin 1987) in the newspaper *Soviet Moldavia* exemplifies a typical source of betrayal message. A part of the article called "She Played with Our Souls and Left Us" tells the story of a brilliant schoolteacher who became the best friend of her high school students, who trusted her with all of their secrets. At some point she left for Israel without saying a word to them. The newspaper comments that in Israel "she will not need to hide her real attitude to the Soviet government anymore behind the screen of perfectly memorized lessons about love to Motherland" (Tronin 1987). Besides the fact that this statement connects her leaving with hatred toward the Soviet Union and deceitfulness in teaching, it strongly associates her disloyalty to the Soviet Union with the personal betrayal of her students. The fact that she deceived innocent children makes her traitorous act even more despicable.

[67] In Russian I would use the word *neudobstvo,* literally lack of comfort, to describe this feeling.

Disloyalty and alienation of Jews from the Soviet state was not a stable fact, but, using the term of Ong, more of a process of negotiation (Ong 1999a). Both sides—the Soviet state and Jewish emigrants—contributed to the mutual distrust. The precipitating relationship between the Jews and the USSR, e.g. the campaign against *rootless cosmopolitanism* of the period 1948-1953 and the Doctor's plot of 1952-1953 initiated discourses about the disloyalty of the Soviet Jews, despite the fact that most of them supported the Russian Revolution (Slezkine 2004, Shternshis 2006). This insult along with support from the world Jewry led to the negative attitude towards the state from the Jewish side. As described above in the case of education, there was an ongoing cyclical expansion of mutual alienation. Despite their high educational and professional level, feelings of marginality became a predominant sense among Soviet Jews. Some of them started imagining themselves to belong more to the West than to the USSR (Israel was perceived by them as a Western country at that point), or, more accurately, their ideal of, in terms of Yurchak, an "imaginary West" (Yurchak 2006). Some Soviet Jews became fully imbued with Zionist ideology and intended to leave specifically for Israel. Some of them were hostile to the Soviet system and planned to escape wherever possible. For most of them, emigration was the result of a concurrence of circumstances. However, for all of them, *Zagranitsa* (foreign countries) constituted an imaginary world, engendered, on the one hand, by its separateness from Soviet life and, on the other hand, by intermittent encounters with its "products" (books, things from abroad, letters). It was that "… imaginary place that was simultaneously knowable and unattainable, tangible and abstract, mundane and exotic" (Yurchak 2006, 159). The mysterious appeal of the West became even stronger with the emergence of a structural opportunity to emigrate. While the Chinese state decreased this appeal by opening the boundaries and supporting its emigrants with positive discourses and the possibility to return, the Soviet state only strengthened the gap through its policy toward emigration as betrayal.

Communicative Practices about "Leave" (*ot"ezd*)

Recalling his path to Judaism, my informant Yuri mentioned that once a friend brought him to someone's place, where a group of young people "did something." I asked what exactly they were doing. Yuri said, "Well, they were hanging out, talking about how nice it would be to leave for Israel," to which I felt truly puzzled by the concept of people organizing around talks about leave-taking.

"Leave"-taking created not only the practice of application for it, but also the practices of *obshchenie* (communication, see more in Chapter 3) about it. *Obshchenie* focused on leave taking was a common practice among all Jewish groups I mentioned in the first chapter. I would like to emphasize though that the common goal was not the leave *per se*, but more so *obshchenie* exploring perspectives of leave-taking that sparked people's imagination around Israel and the West in general.

> *Look, I think 1970s and 1980s it was an extraordinary period, I think globally, even in America, right?...In Russia, I think there was also an extraordinary situation. Why extraordinary? In a certain circle that embraced, roughly speaking, all the intelligentsia of Piter and Moscow… First, the system was closed… it was almost closed [from outside]*

and open inside, open in a very strange way… Everything that happened in the West, and I talk from my own perspective, my brother's perspective, his friends' perspective, was intensely attractive, as if it was a drug. I mean it was a state of craziness, when unequivocally, absolutely axiomatically everything there is positive. No, even more than positive, because when someone says positive, he compares, what he has here and what he will have there. For example, my nephew, who is a bit older than my kids, he is about 36, I feel he is thinking where to move or something like that. Well, he comes here, compares, what he has there, what his experience here is. He comes here, he sees: cool, people are communicating, there is something human, emotional, you know? But, it is anyway really rational [choice]. And what it was back then, it was some powerful drug, there was no ratio in it. Well I mean there were separate people, who due to their personal characteristics, as I learned later, had followed some logical line of thinking, like "I am Jewish, there is a chance to leave for Israel, for example, I have relatives there, here they do not let me work, etc…"

Chaim explains that at this point he sees that some people, who chose to leave, made a "rational choice", as opposed to his emotional reaction to the "drug." However, when personally speaking with me, the people mentioned recollected similar emotional reactions to the topic of the West and, specifically, Israel.

Alexei Yurchak refers to the narcotic world described by Chaim as an "imaginary West." He understands it as a combination of elements wafting from the real West and dreams of this romanticized "West." It lays "at the intersection of these two attitudes toward the wider world, signifying an imaginary place that was simultaneously knowable and unattainable, tangible and abstract, mundane and exotic. This concept was disconnected from any "real" abroad and located in some specific place—over there (tam), with them (u nikh), as opposed to with us (u nas)…" "It was produced locally and existed only at the time when the real West could not be encountered." (Yurchak 2006, 159). It is very important for people that this world has characteristics that they assign to it.

The Land of Abaraham and the Land of Uncle Sam

Throughout the work I referred to Israel as a part of the West, because this is how my informants perceived Israel in comparison to the USSR: democratic, more economically prosperous, full of opportunities. That said, participants of Jewish practices did hold different images of Israel and the United States in comparison to one another.

In the communicative practices around leave taking a topic of the destination choice was of high importance. This topic was largely sparked by the discourse of disappointment and shame towards the Jews who chose to go to the United States, rather than to Israel. While Israel-oriented people were perceived as noble idealists, the US-oriented (*noshrim)* were understood as "tempted by Uncle Sam": Jews moved to Israel for the ideals, and to the US – for the money. *Neshira* was understood as a "search of the comfortable and warm place [*teplen'koe mestechko*]", "violation of the moral principles", "demonstration of careless attitude [*naplevatel'skoe otnoshenie*] to our national interests", "*noshrim* do not take on them moral or

legal responsibilities, and, in fact, steal the money that belong to Israel and go to another country." The *noshrim*, of course, were conscious of this attitude and some chose not to even mention their intention to emigrate to the US. There were people involved in Jewish practices (mostly religious), who claimed an indifference to the direction of leave, for example, Vasserman, whose letter I cite in the first chapter. He saw the primary meaning of the Soviet Jewish awakening in a special mission of improving the world through Judaism that could be realized from anywhere. However, an emigration destination was a contentious issue that one could not ignore, and had to consider one's stance.

I interpret this regime of knowledge, in which "materialist" reasons are considered as dishonest and stinky in relation to "idealist" reasons, as a successful realization of a socialist project in the USSR. Indeed, the priority of the common interest over individual well-being (as the difference between Israel and the US was perceived), was the same ideal taught in all Soviet institutions. The examples of discourse on the *noshrim* surprisingly could be easily mistaken with authoritative discourse in the Soviet Union. While the only function of this discourse in relation to Soviet life among the public of svoi, could be "stiob" (irony) (Yurchak 2006), this same kind of discourse in relation to the world of extraordinary, was full of constative meaning.

In this chapter, I considered a factor that in scholarly literature is usually perceived as the most significant reason for the Jewish experience of freedom in the USSR. I took into account the historical uniqueness of Jewish people in the analysis of their special regime of citizenship at the time of the phenomenon I study. Yet, I also attempt to show how Soviet Jews' belonging to the Soviet Union was the crucial factor for both Western interest in them and their personal experiences around their ability to leave the Soviet state. I suggested a perspective that still gives an important place to emigration in the story of Jewish practices, yet assigns more significance namely to the opportunity to leave whether or not actual emigration took place.

Conclusion

At a Jewish studies conference in Moscow in the early 2000s, a young scholar gave a presentation about the Soviet Jewish movement in the 1970s and 1980s. At the end of his talk one of the movement participants stood up and said, "Well, everything is correct in your presentation, but why so boring? It was fun (*veselo*)!" In this dissertation I intended to show the "fun" part of the story that is usually narrated as a struggle resulting in victims. The emphasis on the struggle and victims, I argue, is to a great extent caused by the hegemonic discourse on the inferiority of the Soviet system and therefore, the idea that the only relationship between the Soviet system and its citizens that could possibly exist was in the form of a fight. This discourse also reduces the Soviet state to punitive organs and the authoritative discourse, denigrating any economic and ideological achievements. This discourse has been shaped by the political context of the Cold War and limits our understanding of the Jewish phenomenon as a part of the Late Soviet history. In the dissertation I gave a voice to the people left outside due to the perceived irrelevance of their stories to the "official" commemorative practices on the Jewish movement. I also paid attention to parts of the narrative that are usually considered insignificant.

I presented unofficial Jewish practices in the late Soviet period as a way, among others, for Soviet citizens to get connected to the "extraordinary" that gave them an exciting feeling of life, Exodus or even freedom. I began the dissertation with a paradox: how can such a liberating feeling be possible in the context of a country that is usually associated with an authoritarian political system and persecution of difference, while in the countries with seemingly democratic political systems this feeling is absent? In the dissertation I tried to put all the pieces of the puzzle together to show what kind of freedom it was and how it became possible. I have discussed, that to understand how Soviet Jews experienced freedom, one has to analyze the limitations of the Western liberal discourse's meaning of the term. Jewish practices were not a part of a conventional political movement seeking the freedom of public expression of the lost Jewish culture. Neither was it solely a movement for freedom of *Aliyah*/emigration. In fact, I demonstrate how the very opportunity to emigrate was, perhaps, more liberating than emigration per se. I analyze Jewish practices as a search for the "extraordinary" in the Soviet space, both extraordinary as exotic and outstanding. I argue that in most cases Jews did not fight for the right to pursue extraordinary practices, they just pursued them.

My informants expected that after emigration they would continue their pursuit of the extraordinary practices in an extended way since they would not be tied in their actions by the Soviet political limitations. However, they realized that their previously independent act of creating new persons, socialities, attitudes, and spaces was now limited by the various institutions regulating Jewish life in the West. They thought that they would find the same freedom, only larger in the democratic political system. However upon arrival, they discovered that the same practices have a different meaning in a different fabric of Western life. The design of Soviet life with its copious symbolical free time, basic material support and absence of ideology of consumerism provided a fruitful context for an experience of extraordinary Jewish practices. The values of following ideals and sacrificing for them, being well read and highly

cultured turned out to not be irrefutable indicators of success. Success in the West had other codes and standards that they did not know and had to learn.

Upon emigration of the former Soviet Jews to other countries, it became obvious that they represented a type, identifiable among other Jewish types and recognized as such by Soviet Jews themselves; the type that cannot be reduced to the victim of the Soviet system. There is a joke in Israel about Soviet Jews: in the Soviet Union we were Jews, when we moved to Israel we finally became Russians[68]. I find this joke exact evidence of the fact that Soviet Jews are neither solely Russians nor "conventional" Jews (those, who fit existing institutional types in Israel and the US). In the spirit of Exodus, the 1990s and 2000s became fruitful for Soviet Jews' conceptualizations of a special mission that they would be capable of completing for the Jewish world (for example, Lvov 1996, Yaglom 2000, Kara-Ivanov 2008[69]). They made an attempt to formulate how their experience, the forms of studying, and the means of changing the world could turn out to be more effective than that of the "proper" western Jews. Understood in this way, Jewish practices in the late Soviet Union stop being an imperfect stage of the Soviet Jewry on the way to "real" Judaism but acquire their own right as a unique project of the Soviet Jews. In the dissertation, I showed in detail how the uniqueness of the Soviet Jews gave this project originality and to what extent it was shaped by the Soviet state.

[68] "Russian" in this context should not be understood solely as someone from the State of Russia, but in a broad sense, as someone from the post-Soviet space, in which the word "Russia" is used to simplify the formulation of a joke.

[69] The publication is dated according to the Hebrew calendar as 5769.

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