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**Emigration Narrative among Russian-speaking Jews
in Germany**

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Twenty years separate us from the collapse of the USSR – these years of the new post-soviet society can also be seen as the years of the so-called « great migration » or, as far as the Jews are concerned, the fourth migration wave. This new migration wave which begins with the fall of the communist regime in the USSR distinguishes itself from the previous ones by its magnitude. The demograph Mark Tolts considers that in the first decade which followed the fall of the Soviet Union, approximately 1. 2 million Jews accompanied by the non-Jewish members of their family left former Soviet Union. The first consequence of this massive emigration is the decline of the Jewish population in these countries. According to the post-soviet census, the Jewish population of Belarus declined by 75 %, the Jewish population in Ukraine decreased by 79 % and the decline of the Jewish population in Russia was 59 %. Thus, according to these census, as regards Belarus and Ukraine, we can meet more Jews who were born in Belarus and Ukraine outside both countries. The main destinations of Jews from ex-USSR from 1991 to nowadays are Israel and Germany. The emigration from Russian-speaking Jews to Germany is far less famous than the « Alliah » - the immigration to Israel. The core of my PhD research is this immigration to Germany which I should present before going more in depth into my present paper.

Since 1991, reunited Germany has enabled any Jew from the Soviet Union to come and settle on German soil. Whereas, from 1989, the US borders were closed to them and the only possible land of immigration was Israel, the Jews from the former USSR were given the opportunity to immigrate to a new country: Germany. For a long time, till 1998, Germany didn't officially define itself as a land of immigration. And the policy implemented towards the Jews from the Soviet Union is the first intended for a non-Germanic “ethnic group”. The right to immigrate for soviet Jews has been at first agenda-setted in 1990's GDR as a reaction to the anti-Semitism and “pogrom fear” of these years. Then, in 1991, after Germany's reunification, two main arguments were put forward in government discourse to legitimize immigration right, - moreover, without quotas or any kind of time restriction - of the Russian-speaking Jews: first, immigration will enable the Jewish communities which have been weakened since the war to build up strength again and the second main argument for this specific immigration was the presence of a stronger Jewish minority will be “an essential contribution to German cultural and intellectual life”. Another tacit argument was that Jewish immigration to Germany was a way to improve its international image.

According to the figures given by the German Interior Ministry, since the end of the 80s until the beginning of 2010, more than 200 000 people have immigrated as part of the Jewish immigration allowed by the German government.

I wish to present here what will be a part of one chapter of my dissertation which deals with

the narrative identity of Russian-speaking Jewish migrants. The interactions between the migrants, the State, society, community and their family compose the core of my analysis. These interactions create identity norms by imposing behavioral models. In other words, as the Soviet State recommended its citizens of Jewish nationality to assimilate and reject their religion, today the German State publicly invites them to find their way back to the synagogue. I have made the hypothesis that for migrants, the narration of their “Jewishness“ expresses itself differently in a country where Jews are stigmatized than in one where they are valued. Similarly, the portrayal of Germany, a country of immigration yet an old enemy of the Soviet Union, no doubt varies in the discourse of the migrants whether on German or Soviet ground. Consequently, I will analyze the narratives of the migrants in order to gain a fuller understanding of their identity trajectories before and after the migration, comparing them with the everyday behavior observed during my research.

What I am aiming more precisely is to understand what are the motivations of these migrants and analyze the way they put them in words. The framework of our study is Max Weber's comprehensive sociology but also its sociology of actor and action. That is to say, our questions are why have they decided to leave the country where they were born? How do they rationalise their choice? What are the differences in the migration motivations among the migrants who have chosen to emigrate right after USSR's collapse and those who emigrate fifteen years after it?

In the frame of my fieldwork in four German cities (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Gelsenkirchen and Cottbus) I have made interviews with more than fifty migrants who came from 1991 to 2005 to Germany from Belarus, Latvia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Russia. Unfortunately I did not interview those who decided not to immigrate although they were allowed to.

From a methodological point of view it is difficult to put apart the biographical discourse of the interviewees as a whole from the specific emigration narrative. Emigration narrative and experience are deeply related to all kinds of socialization before the key-event or « turning point ». Besides, as the interviews took place in Germany after they have made the choice to immigrate there, I may think that their whole discourse in the interview interaction can be also considered a justification for their presence in Germany - « the country of Holocaust perpetrators ».

The goal of our global questioning is not to tell whether or not this immigration is an economic one as it has been generally labelled, it is more to make an attempt to typologize the narratives of emigration I have encountered to underline the heterogeneity of the Russian-speaking Jews in Germany.

Below I will present in my paper my chief findings, illustrating them with typical quotations from the interviewees.

First, the emigration narrative begins not with the question « Should I stay or should I go » - *Ehat', ne ehat'*, but with the way they first caught the information about immigration in Germany, which was not spread in all circles. As two interviewees explain:

Информация передавалась через людей, через определённый сорт людей - осведомлённых. Я к такому перебору не отношусь потому, что я работал в рабочей среде. У нас среди моих знакомых, моего круга знакомых, никто об этом не слыхивал. Мы узнали потому, что Гитин брат ездил в западный Берлин, что-то там зарабатывал, что-то отсюда привозил, продавал. Он несколько раз так ездил. В одной из этих поездок, он

как-то нам позвонил. Это было в июне 90-ого года и сказал : "найди своего сына. Я узнал, что в Германию принимают евреи." [Boris, 60 years old, Berlin]

Я об этом законе узнала, когда... Мои друзья уехали, им сказали знакомые. Тех кто имели знакомые в ГДР, те им сказали. И они сюда приехали, в ГДР приехали сначала. [Marina, 50 years old, Berlin]

Generally speaking, being familiar with the possibility of emigration to Germany meant belonging to social circles which distinguish themselves through their links with relatives outside USSR during the Soviet period. The knowledge of the possibility ?? of the emigration to Germany was initially limited to those having a Jewish socialization, that is to say to people who claimed that they had among their friends a majority of Jews. This socialization among one's ethnic group during the Soviet period (a contrario to the post-Soviet one) did not take place in dedicated spaces, such as community spaces but translated into ? the existence of a network of acquaintances (*znakomye, rodstvenniki*) of jewish nationality. For those, to know about the existence of the legislation allowing the Jews from USSR to immigrate to Germany seems obvious, which they explain simply: for example, « Это было известно, об этом все говорили. » [Sasha, 72 years old, Cottbus]. On the other hand, the comments of this other interviewee convey the exact opposite and underline that for him, lacking networks, there was no such obviousness:

Узнал, где-то в 96-ом году, узнал от своего товарища. Мы охраняли магазин ночью. Делать нечего. Он порассказывает, что женился на еврейке, чтобы выехать в Германию. Я стал внимательно слушать. Он специально женился. А потом эта женщина ему так понравилась, что он не хотел с ней расходиться. У него появилась любовь. Так они вместе ехали. И он помогал мне когда узнал, что я еврей.[Leonid, 63 ans, Cottbus]

So, despite the collapse of the Soviet regime, his endeavours to build a Jewish religious identity, in particular by regularly attending the synagogue in Kharkov, the absence of jewish social capital inherited from the Soviet period doesn't allow him to know that Germany opened its doors to the Soviet and post-soviet Jews. He considers, consequently, that the information did not circulate in all social circles. However he is aware that it is rather ironic as he was informed by a non-Jew. The first who were informed of the possibility of emigration came mainly from the capital cities of Soviet Union, and rather logically they were the first to leave. Besides, the first immigrants were also the ones who could settle down in the biggest cities of Germany - in the latter, some Jewish communities existed since the end of the Second World War.

Here is the here brief presentation((developed in the paper) of an attempt to typologize emigration narratives. It is clear that no single ideal type is matching a given real-world. However the classification helps us understand the complexity of some specific social worlds. I have distinguished four ideal-types of emigrant : the dissident, the follower, the conservative and the innovative one. They correspond to a major narrative - because almost all of the interviewees (except the *dissident* one) have mentioned as motive for emigration not a cause but a series of causes: economic situation in the country, antisemitism or nationalism were among them. The rise of nationalism - specially in Latvia and the inter-ethnic conflict in Azerbaidjan – but also in all post-soviet states create special conditions to emphasize discrepancy between the former titular nationality and the minorities. As a consequence in the emigration narrative it contributes to a feeling of marginalization in the own society.

« The dissident »

The one that we name here the dissident is characterized by his considering that his emigration is strictly ideological and has for motive his hatred of the Soviet communist regime. He usually emigrated in the first years after the fall of the USSR. His emigration is by no mean a turning point in his life course. A contrario, it is for him a logical step as his narrative underlines he has always been in latent opposition to all he had considered to be « soviet » during his whole life course. In their life narrative, they evoke the great purges, the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. According to them, the act of emigrating was not caused by a particular event or by a crisis situation, as they always wished to emigrate.

Vy znaete shto ? Ia vsju jizn' skol'ko jil v etoj strane ia vseгда metshtal iz nee uehat' kogda nibud'. Eto byla moia metshta. Poetomu mne nenado bylo sozrevat' togda. Ia nikogda ne tshuvstvoval sebja v svoej strane [Sasha, 72 years old, Cottbus]

The one who follows

The follower is probably the most heterogeneous type. The main motive of emigration he invokes has an exogenous nature. He leaves his motherland to follow his children, relatives or friends. He tells about how he « *provodil* » all who left the country before him. He does not consider himself as the driving force behind the emigration. Attached to his native country, he considers that his *rodina* is there where his *rodnye* live. As his entire social network has vanished he has no more motives to stay. In a way, we could say that he does not necessarily want to leave but he doesn't want to stay either.

Osoznanie svoego otshuzhdenia, tshuzhdosti v svoej strane ona u menia po-stepenno, po-stepenno narastala a potom kogda natshala eta volna emigratsii, kogda vse ehali v Izrail' ili v Ameriku, ia dazhe myslit' ne mogla, shto my mozhem uehat'. Ia ponimala... U menia eto tshuvstvo... Znaesh', ia otshen' ne liubliu etot vysokij stil', pafos, itd, no tshustvo rodiny, ia s trudom vygovarivaju. Ne smotria na to, shto ia tut nenuzhna, no eto ono moe. [...] A potom tshisto sovetskaia psyhologia my ne mogli nikuda poehat', my nikogda nitshego ne videli i ono vovse tam tshuzhoe i nevedomoe a vot tut ono vse svoe i poniatnoe. Ia ostalas' odna s mamoj. Vot. Eta otorvnost'... to est' uzhe nikogo ne ostalas'. Esli by ne uehali Marina i Sereja ia by ne uehala nikogda. Eta immigratsia ona polutshilas' u menia, ne po ideinym pritshinam, ne po ekonomitsheskim pritshinam kak ona byvala tshasto, hot' dejstvitel'no zhizn' byla otshen' trudna, magaziny byli absoljutno pustye, vot takie golye kak etot stol, nitshego daje v vitrinah, v magazine nitshego ne bylo vystavit'. I dejstvitel'no zhizn' byla trudnaja i mnogo uezhali po pritshinam tshisto ekonomitsheskim. Ia ne po idejnym... Mne otshen' hotelsos' shto-to videt'. U menia ne sostoiavshjsja v zhisni metshta puteshestvia, uvidet' shto-to. I mne pokazalos', shto esli uehat' mozhno natshat' puteshestvovat', mozhno shto-to videt', voovshem mir otkrytyj dlja sebja nevedom, i dazhe eta pritshina ne mogla by u menia pobudit' k ot'ezdu, esli by ne ot'ezzd dotsheri, vnutshki. Dlja menia eta byla edinstvennaja pritshina. U menia nikakih sojalenia po etomu povodu, hotia ia vot odna

The innovative emigrant

He is generally old enough to work and has relatively young children. He considers that he does not emigrate for him but for his children. He is innovative because he risks what he has in the name of what his children could have. The emigration amounts to a loss of social position which he goes along with.

Poltora goda jdali otvet. Samoe nepriatnoe to, shto, kogda my jdali, vse vremia dumali, kogda[...] otshen' tiazelo jit' kogda ty tchitaesh' kajduju kopejku. A kogda eto prishlo, my nastol'ko byli k etomu ne gotovy. I imenno v etot moment my kupili kvartiru, nakonets v nashej jizn' u nas poiavilas' sobstvennoe jil'ë, hotia vse den'gi my odoljili. Byli vsem v dolgah no u nas bylo sobstvennoe jil'ë. I v etot je god mne predlozili stat' zaotshom. To est' poiavilsja chans, shto-to imet' na rodine i poiavilsja chans uehat'. I tak byli tiazelo reshit'. Shto delat' ?

Kak my reshili...

My reshili priehat'... Rire. My dolgo sideli pered etim belym listom, pytaias' razdelit' ego na dve tshasti, vse za, vse protiv. V etot god na sledujushij dotsh' doljna zakonshivat' shkolu i nado kuda-to ej postupat'. A situatsia byla takova, shto bez vziatki nikuda postupit' nel'zia bylo. To est' kakim ne umnym ne byl tvoj rebenok, emu nujno bylo material'no podderjat'. Vozmozhno na eto estestvenno na eto ne bylo. My reshili, shto radi detej my gotovy pojertvovat'... ia gotova pojertvovat' svoej liubimoj raboty, ostavit' eshje tam roditelej, druzej, privytshnij krug obshenia i dat' shans detiam poprobovat' sebja v tshëm-to drugom. My reshili, shto vse kvartiry, vse nashi argumenty, mojet byt' ih bylo bol'she. [...] No my reshili radi detej, hotia eto mojet byt' gromko zvutshit, no eto byl nash glavnyj argument.

The conservative emigrant (individualistic one ?)

As Petersen writes some people « migrate in response to a change in conditions in order to retain what they have had ; they move geographically in order to remain where they were in all other respects »¹ The emigration of the conservative migrant can not been seen as the consequence of the soviet regime but rather as the consequence of the post-soviet societies which he considers not to protect him enough. He emigrates because his situation became economically and socially critique. He is conscious of antisemitism but has not encountered it. He takes into account that if everybody migrates, life should be better there. He goes back once a year to his native country.

Veteran truda dal. A shto etot veteran truda, shto ty otrabotal tshestno, blagorodno dvatsat' let zdorovoj jiznju, vsë otdal dlja nashej rodiny.. A shto tebe rodina ? A rodina tebe barak dala. Vot tebe i vsë. Vot shto znatshit rodina. Rodina ta, kotoraja prinimaja tsheloveka emu daët vsë, vot eto vot rodina. Eta ne ta mat', kotoraja rodila, a ta kotoraja vospitala, kormila svoego rebënka. Vote to nazyvaetsja mat', pravil'no ?» [Leonid, 62 years old Cottbus]

¹ Petersen, The politics of population, 1964, p. 275.