RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SOVIET DIASPORA: ANALYSIS OF THE JEWISH IMMIGRATION FROM THE FORMER USSR IN ISRAEL.

William Berthomière

MIGRINTER (International Migrations: Spaces & Societies)

Maison des Sciences de l'Homme et de la Société

99, Avenue du Recteur Pineau

86000 Poitiers

France

william.berthomiere@mshs.univ-poitiers.fr

While most European countries have only timidly opened their doors to the population of Eastern Europe -clearly preferring those who are highly qualified-, Israel has welcomed hundreds of thousands of former Soviet citizens within a few years. One reason for this tendency is that the only populations to leave Eastern Europe en masse were those which had a historical 'homeland' to which they could emigrate. That was the case for ethnic German, Jewish and Greek minorities who, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, were released from their 'house arrest'. Even a casual glance at the post-1989 patterns of migration will confirm the passage of these ethnic minorities through the opening created by the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Of the 450,000 people who left the Soviet Union in 1990, 45 per cent moved to Israel, 42 per cent moved to Germany, 6 per cent went to the United States and 5 per cent went to Greece (Vichnevski and Zayontchkovskaia 1992, 44). Even if the percentage of Jews migrating has globally been on the decline, no less than 850,000 migrants from the former USSR have entered Israel between 1990 and 2000, around 15 per cent of Israel's current population.

These hundreds of thousands of immigrants asked the state of Israel for assistance and in turn brought an incredible wealth of growth and knowledge, but have also raised the question of Israeli identity in the course of these last eight years. The purpose of this paper is therefore to explore the process of FSU Jews' integration in Israel and to establish socio-political points of reference on this migratory movement towards a country in full identity introspection.

A CONSIDERABLE MIGRATORY MOVEMENT

Between 1990 and 1999, Israel welcomed more than 850,000 people from the former Soviet Union (see Table 1).[1] Half of these immigrants entered the country during the two years which followed the events of 1989.

---

[1] Some estimated statistics reveal 30 per cent of non-Jewish people within the total amount of immigrants from the FSU. In addition to the anecdotes concerning the falsification of passports, which enabled them to enter Israel as 'Jewish,' these statistics reveal the

December 1990 alone saw the immigration of more than 35,000 Soviet citizens, which is a number equivalent to the total French migration to Palestine and later Israel since the end of World War I. Over the passing months, the whole country was affected by migratory movements. Every part of Israel witnessed the arrival of the much-expected *Jews of Silence*[2].

Table 1 – Immigration in Israel: FSU, Ethiopians and Others (1990-2000)

Country of origin	Period of immigration	
	1990-1995	1996-2000[(a)]
Former USSR	597 230	264 271
Ethiopia	31 026	9 783
Other countries	59 807	38 158

(a): Period I-IX for 2000
Source : *Central Bureau of Statistics*, Jerusalem

This inflow is of major significance for Israel, probably as important demographically as the mass migration that occurred after the creation of the State in 1948 (687,624 people migrated to Israel between 1948 and 1951). Nonetheless, the volume of immigration decreased after the mid 1990s. In 1995, only 61,200 immigrants were recorded, in 1997, 55,600 and in 1999, 43,900.[3] It is nevertheless difficult to estimate the evolution of that migration in terms of stability and thresholds, because the current situation is conditioned by different factors. The decrease in the current flood from the former Soviet Union is partly connected to the global diminution of the Jewish immigration to Israel. The perception of Israel as the gathering country of the Jews is less prominent than before in the Jewish diaspora. Moreover, as the post-1989 agitation calms down, the combination of growing stability within most successor states of the former USSR and the relative difficulties of integration in Israel all contribute to keeping the Jewish population in this region. Finally, the Jewish population which is likely to emigrate to Israel has significantly decreased. According to the Jewish Agency, almost all Jews who lived in Transcaucasia and Central Asia have already emigrated. In 1996/7, this rate reached 70 per cent in Ukraine and 55 per cent in Russia (The Jerusalem Post, 19 August 1997). In addition, a substantial percentage of the non-emigrated Jewish community is above 55 years of age, which is an inhibitor of emigration.[4] One has to

high frequency of mixed marriages among the Soviet Jewish community. On average, in 1988, more than half of the Jews in the Soviet Union found themselves in mixed marriages (see Mark Tolts' studies, 1999).
[2] In reference to the title of Eli Wiesel's book 'Jews of Silence' about the Soviet Jewish community.
[3] For 1999, only immigrants registered until end of September.
[4] Sergio Della Pergola and Mark Tolts underlined that the Russian Jewish community had reached its final stage in terms of age structure. They explained that the proportion of people below age 15 had fallen below the rate of 10 per cent in the 1970s (8.4 per

check the 'iconography' of the Jewish solidarity between the former Soviet Union and the rest of the world (provided by the United Jewish Appeal) to understand the structural state of the remaining Jewish communities, and to realize how difficult emigration is for elderly people who in future will constitute an essential part of the remaining migratory potential. The ad from the Joint Distribution Committee's solidarity campaign shows an old woman leaning on her kitchen table claiming:

> *'It's not an easy life in Moldova, but my friend from the "Joint" comes to see me every few days.*
> *She brings me food and medicine. And news of my family. They went to Israel three years ago.*
> *Life is just starting for them, that's good. But leaving's not for me. This is my place, my home.*
> *Everything I know is here. I will never, ever leave,'*

testifies to this situation. Thus, it becomes clear that the aging Jewish population is another reason behind the slowdown in departures (Paltiel et al. 1997, 291).

Even though those facts may be the catalysts of the migratory dynamic, one must also take into account other elements, such as the opportunities to emigrate to a country other than Israel. The United States and Germany constitute the two other attractive poles. They have become welcoming places, 'competing' with Israel. For example, of those leaving Russia in 1993, 55.5 per cent of the Jews moved to Israel, 34.6 per cent to USA and 7.9 per cent to Germany, whereas in 1998, the figures were, respectively, 55.1 per cent, 16.1 per cent and 25.8 per cent (CDEH 1997; Tolts 1999). In the late 1990s, some 250,000 non-ethnic German immigrants from Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine lived in Germany, many of them in Berlin (Münz 2000).

A DOUBLE MOVEMENT: A SOCIETY DESTABILIZED BY AN IMMIGRATION/AN IMMIGRATION DESTABILIZED BY A NEW SOCIETY

The first five years of the immigration of Jews from the FSU were probably the most intensive as regards the management of the current immigration wave. During this period, the integration policy of Israel moved from a liberal point of view (developed by the Likud party at the beginning of the 1990s) to a policy characterized by the assistance of the State (which was, in fact, close to paternalism in the tradition of the Labor party). It was finally transformed into a political system in which the subject himself or herself became an actor of his or her

---

cent in 1989), and that the average age of Jews from Russia was 20 years older than that of the Russian population (52.3 and 32.8 years old, respectively).

future. However, the period which led to this equilibrium in the integration policy was (and still is) considered as a real 'crossing of the desert' in the eyes of many of the former Soviet citizens. One of the consequences of these difficulties in the management of the immigration wave and in the adjustment of the integration policy was a loss of social status for most of them as well as a difficult period of cultural dislocation.

UNEMPLOYMENT, LOSS OF SOCIAL STATUS: "HARD TIMES" FOR ISRAEL AND THE MIGRANTS

The wave of migration had considerable impact on Israeli society. At the beginning of the immigration wave, the reasons for this instability were twofold: on the one hand, the aim of the Shamir (1988/92) government's policy was to build the 'Great Israel,' and not to worry about the newcomers' integration. The housing program was relegated, for a large part, to the private sector which was not in a hurry to plan in advance and, for the part controlled by the government, the construction was mainly oriented in development areas and above the green line.[5] On the other hand, the spatial strategy of the immigrants was opposite to the government policy that placed the wave of immigration as an opportunity to achieve the plan of demographic development of peripheral districts. Two-thirds of the immigrants settled in the main districts of Israel: Tel Aviv, the Center and Haifa (see Map). Above all, Soviet Jews wanted to live in the largest towns of Israel, partly because they themselves came from large towns and also because they believed that opting for these cities would make labor market integration easier (Berthomière 1995, 25; Jones 1996, 129).

The employment of the immigrants became the key problem which successive Israeli governments had to solve. It posed a real dilemma. In Jerusalem, the walls of the immigration and integration ministry offices (visited by many former Soviet citizens) were all covered with ads. The bus stops and the streetlights looked dressed up, wrapped with dozens of ads from people looking for work. In 1992, one-third of the immigrants (of age 20 to 65) were unemployed (IMIA 1996, 17), a situation which led half the former Soviet citizens to cast left-wing votes during the 1992 elections. Consequently, Yitzhak Rabin was elected against all odds: pre-election surveys at the time showed that the result would be a majority for the Likud because of the low predisposition of the Soviet Jews to vote for a socialist party (see von Koppenfels in this volume). We were therefore dealing with the first Soviet vote in which the new immigrants expressed their discontent (Goldberg 1996, 192).

---

[5] The Green Line constituted the borders of Israel before the territorial change following the Six Days' War in 1967.

Even if it seems contradictory, the fact that immigrants were overqualified was a real obstacle to their integration. Their professional qualifications were indeed very high: engineers, medical doctors, academics, etc. Among former Soviet citizens who arrived between 1990 and 1995, 40 per cent of them had studied for 13 years or more (only 25 per cent of those already in Israel had studied that long). Employment was all the more difficult as there was a real discrepancy between supply and demand. A qualification as a petrochemist or metallurgic industry engineer was in fact unusable. Moreover, the field of medicine was already overloaded.[6] The immigrants very quickly understood that they would have to look for jobs in fields other than those for which they were trained. The demand was so important that they also understood they would be forced to work within a less valued field. This phase of the Soviet integration is explained well in Allan Galper's survey 'From Bolshoi to Be'er Sheva, Scientists to Streetsweepers' (1995). Even the press mentioned the various problems the migrants had to face on the labor market in stories detailing how a company manager who had a heart attack was saved by a maid who happened to be a former Soviet doctor. A study carried out by anthropologists and other researchers all revealed the cultural and social deprivation of the migrants. The government of Yitzhak Rabin tried to fight these problems of integration, but unfortunately, the proposals were 'more tranquilizers than real cures'.

Both time and political mobilization were major assets in improving the hardship of emigration.[7] Even if migrants engaged in political mobilization, emigration remained synonymous with loss of social status, an unbearable experience for most migrants. While the daily life of the Soviet Jews underwent a notable improvement, this improvement was lost in mourning for those of the new immigrants who, due to situations of distress, committed suicide. Compared to the rest of the Israeli population, the suicide rate within the migrant population is 60 per cent greater for men and 40 per cent higher for women (Jerusalem Report, 5 March 1998). According to experts, the reasons for such a dramatic difference could be the difficulties of going through problems of professional integration, the depreciation of social status, and also the difficulties of feeling culturally alienated in Israel.

The entire sociopolitical context led to a reorientation process of integration policy and practice. Once more, this change found its expression in the political sanction represented by a vote in favor of the Russian

---

[6] Out of the 10,597 medical doctors who asked for permission to practice in Israel, only 6,227 were given permission. Among those who were accepted, only a minority opened a practice (Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, 1996). They encountered difficulties because Israel ranks among the countries with the highest number of doctors in employment proportional to the population.

[7] For these families, the motivations for immigrating were mainly linked to the desire to ensure the welfare of their children, the desire to live as 'a Jew in a Jewish environment,' and also to live in an Occidental Democracy (see Damian and Rosenbaum-Tamari 1996). The support which was given to the former Soviet citizens who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s was crucial. The solidarity networks which developed in Galilee cities such as Karmiel are good illustrations (Horowitz 1989).

immigrant party - called *Israel be-Aliya* - and the *Likud* (Saadia 1996). The year 1996 was a real turning point. At that time, all the efforts that the immigrants made and all the strategies they used became evident.

TOWARDS A NEW MOTHERLAND-MIGRANTS RELATIONSHIP

The *Likud*'s return to the political arena constituted a landmark change in the history of immigration integration. The new immigrants' vote had once again sanctioned the government. In 1996 two-thirds of the former Soviet citizens living in Israel voted for *Likud* (Goldberg 1996, 194). One reason for such a sanction was the disappointment of the Russian intelligentsia (Storper Perez 1996; 1998), who could not bear being ignored by the *Ashkenazi* elite, which was identified with the Labor Party. Another reason was the revolt against the intellectual waste and loss of social status caused by the ex-Soviet immigrants' underemployment. Yet beyond these political considerations, this date represents for immigrants the point when they gained control of their own fate. Many factors enable us to understand this reversal of the situation. As Dominique Vidal explained it: 'Against all expectations the burden turned into a lever, for production, construction, and for consumption, and this thanks to an exceptional combination of circumstances' (Vidal 1996). Dominique Vidal seems to give importance to the change of the political context, symbolized at the international level through Yitzhak Rabin's and Yasser Arafat's handshake and, at the national level, by the Israeli privatization process. Besides these exterior factors, a whole set of interior factors can be taken into account in the context of the migratory wave. These facilitated the 'lever process.'

First of all, the current of migration decreased due to a self-regulation process, the emigration potential decreased, and the options for other destinations increased. The potential post-Soviet emigrants were told by the earlier immigrants of the difficulties within the Israeli context. Secondly, a reorganization of the spatial distribution was implemented. Many strategies backed this territorial decomposition, such as the departure to development cities in the Galilee;[8] and the establishment of migratory networks between FSU localities and some Israel areas or towns. This led to a self-management of the current of migration and of the integration.

A few precise cases of localisation strategies will enable us to broadly illustrate these comportments.

---

[8] The originally low-level growth in the numbers of Jews in this district during the 1980s was compensated for by the migratory dynamic in the 1990s. With the immigration of 79,500 former Soviet citizens between 1990 and 1995, the total increase in the population was to the advantage of the Jewish Community with the net addition of 76,400 people to the Jewish population vs. 70,600 for the non-Jewish population. As a consequence, the difference between these two communities considerably decreased

. Residential attitude linked to the presence of immigrants of the 70's and 80's

The immigrants of the 70's and 80's of Soviet origin have undeniably played a major role in the new immigrants' trajectories. The town of Karmiel, in Galilee, is a true illustration of this. In the 70's Karmiel expanded with the arrival of Soviets, particularly from Baku (Azerbaïdjan). During the events at the end of 1989 in the Soviet Union, a group of Soviet people from Karmiel organised themselves and took action to prepare for the possible liberalisation of emigration. Messages were sent to the Soviet Union through the *Kol Israel* radio station, which transmit*s* to the Soviet territory, and the reliable reception team in the country did the rest. The emigrants heard about Karmiel[9] and over 7,600 people from the Former Soviet Union emigrated to this city between 1990 and 1993. At the end of 1993, the share of the former Soviet population amounted to a quarter of the total population. This reception team, and the new immigrants themselves joining in, were so successful that the town mayor planned to go to the airport so as to ask immigrants no to come to Karmiel anymore. Through a feed back process in association with public accommodation put at people's disposal at Nazareth Illith, the activity of this migratory chain came to a stand still and was redirected partly towards this city localised in Galilee also.

Beyond this illustration of attitude based on solidarity networks, migrants' attitude was found to be logically obeying the guiding line of the search for residential areas at a lower cost.

. Residential attitude on the basis of economic motivations

The map in the appendix fairly clearly reflects the settlement patterns generated by economic motivations. The 1990 and 1991 mass migratory waves were responsible for a housing crisis. It was partly due to a governmental policy advocating state non-intervention and the giving of priority to the market economy as a means of integration. This crisis has forced migrants to start looking for housing places at a lower cost.

Choosing to live in the suburb of Tel Aviv such as Petah Tiqwa or on the outskirts of Haifa as in Kyriat Yam, are archetypal. A majority of migrants live there because of cheaper housing costs. They also acknowledge a general feeling of well being, all the more so because of the high proportion of former Soviet people in this locality. Thus, with the first immigrants of 1991 attracting new ones, ghetto-like areas are created.

---

within five years. In 1989, the Jewish population of the North reached 364,800 (and 397,900 non-Jews); in 1999, it lies at 470,300 and 481,800, respectively.

[9] This town in Galilee, showing much dynamism in the reception of immigrated people, has its own site on the Internet where people can have access to appropriate information: http://www.webscope.com/karmiel.

Such settlement patterns clearly reveal the thin line between movements based on community regroupings and those based on economics. However, choosing to live in towns like Arad, in the Neguev, or in Ariel at the heart of the occupied territories is primarily economically based. The cost of buying a house in Arad is roughly 70,000 $ and can be as low as 35,000 $ (prefabricated houses) in the new housing estates, that is to say 3 to 6 times cheaper than in Tel Aviv. Prices are all the more attractive in settlement like Ariel which, despite its situation in the middle of the West Bank, is but 50 minutes away from Tel Aviv as the immigrants point out.

On the urban scale, housing choices motivated by economic reasons are also noticeable. In Jerusalem, many immigrants have opted for a house within the growth areas of towns like Pisgat Zeev, Neve Yaacov[10] (where a lot of Georgian people settled) and Maaleh Adummin (new town of the West Bank) where a stronger proportion of owners is evident.

. Residential attitude on the basis of "a community withdrawal"

Further to these economic considerations, at the same time we observe interesting community groupings opening up substantial research areas for the future. Indeed the statistical analysis reveals that:

- the community from Derbent (Daghestan) has mostly gone to Hadera (30% of the global flow with 1250 people), i.e. far ahead of the second recipient town of Beer Sheva (600 people), despite the incentive policy to settle in the southern towns where housing costs are lower. The new immigrants from Derbent make up almost a third of the Russian community of Hadera (the communities of Moscow and Leningrad only form 15% of it);

- inside the Belorussian community nearly six times more migrants from Gomel than from Minsk have chosen Nahariah (respectively 600 and 100 people). Nonetheless these two communities represent almost half its Belorussian community on the northern boundary line of the Haifa metropolitan area;

- over 15% of the Samarkand community lives in the town of Or Yehuda (i.e. 880 people) and the Samarkand community forms two thirds of its Uzbek community, that of Tashkent constituting only 15%. Thus Or Yehuda and Tel Aviv (first settling up town with 1,450 people) together make up almost half the migrants from Samarkand;

- over 2000 Kharkovien (Ukraine) community members are in Haifa, i.e. three times more than in their second recipient city of Jerusalem (with 640 immigrants).

During our interviews with new migrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel, we asked them about the possibility of migratory networks and subnetworks. For a large majority of them, the interviewees said that according to them such spatial and social attitudes were not so pervasive. However, some of them expressed similar attitudes like Odessites going first of all towards Haifa since the setting reminds them of that of Odessa, whereas those from St. Petersburg would rather go to Karmiel for the same reason. Other respondents directly favour an ethno-based characterisation of these attitudes. They clearly differentiate between the Georgian area and the others and underline, in particular, the towns of Lod and Ashdod as their privileged areas. As for Tel Aviv, it is worth noting that for the majority of them the Jews from Central Asia live together in the working-class neighbourhood of Shapira. Very strong family ties within the Jewish community of Bukhara are at the origin of such a grouping. Moreover, historically this neighbourhood has always been regarded by this group as a favourite attracting recipient centre.

In spite of bringing to the fore patterns on the basis of community groupings, this is not however a commonly held vision of space within the migrants' group. Let us bring those illustrations of spatial attitudes to a conclusion with the group of the "intelligentsia" which is aware of its regrouping [Storper Perez, 1996].

. *Residential attitude on the basis of social status: the case of the intelligentsia.*

The migratory trajectory under consideration is worth remarking even though it concerns only a small group of migrants. The intelligentsia is all the more interesting since its people reside in the very heart of Israel's two largest cities and is a pressure group on the government. The intelligentsia has a number of newspapers in Russian at its disposal so as to mobilise the community from the Former Soviet Union [Zilberg *et al.*, 1996]. A clear illustration of this is the personal itinerary of Nathan Tcharansky, who obtained the position of Minister of Industry after his "Russian" party *Israel BeAliya* was successful in the last elections.

Even though the migrants from Moscow and St Petersburg make up 40% of the total flow from Russia, they make up two thirds of the Jerusalem Russian community. This predilection can be explained partly by this city's mythical attraction held by the migrants coming from the two largest Russian cities and mainly by the intelligentsia. Whilst meeting members of this group, it clearly became apparent that one of their characteristics

---

[10]New residential areas north-east of Jerusalem within the extensive limits of the town after 1967.

is a heavy concentration inside Jerusalem and Tel Aviv[11]. The attraction of these two urban centres -areas of culture production and circulation- is undeniable.

We met a great number of artists[12] who told us that in their migratory plan emigrating to an other city than Jerusalem was unthinkable. It is worth noting that a large number of exhibitions, aside from this official one, has turned Jerusalem into a huge exhibition space for Art from the East. Restaurants and other places of "Russian" conviviality have today become major places of artistic expression where people can join various clubs of Russian literature and philosophy. The small revenue from their productions, as well as the "timid receptivity" to the Russian culture on the part of the Israelis, reveals a slight nostalgia in this "community within the community".

Nevertheless, that period of migration, during which the migrants saw themselves as 'plenipotentiary' actors of their future, embodied an effective stage in the resolution of the integration problems within Israeli society. The movement went through two stages: first, the mobilization organized around the Soviet forum (created by Natan Sharansky); secondly, it was supported by a 'community withdrawal.' Facing the difficulty of the time of integration, the Soviet Jews had a tendency to withdraw to their communities. The refuge taken in the 'Cyrillic space,' or in the columns of the Russian newspaper, demonstrates these problems and difficulties.

Some problems of integration that reveal a distance between Israel and its migrants

After the passion aroused by the " homecoming " of the Jews from the ex-USSR, various events have borne witness to an increasing decline in Israeli interest in this immigration. The " ethnic intensification " of Israeli society seems to have resulted in the *aliya* becoming a far less central issue than it was during the early days of the state. An analysis of the opinion polls investigating the perception of immigration reveals this state of affairs. Over the last two decades, the feeling that immigration was one of the central values of Israeli society was shared by fewer and fewer Israelis: 87% in 1973 and only 67% in 1995. Still more worrying are the results recorded for the period 1990-1994. At the beginning of this period, interest in the *aliya* returned to a value close to that of 1973, but four years later, it had fallen by more than 20% [MIA 1996, 57].

Within a post-Zionist perspective, this rapid loss of interest in immigration from the former USSR has all the traits of a final effort, as if the population had attempted in vain to convince itself for the last time of the

---

[11] The Russian communtity comprises 47% of migrants originating from Moscow and St Petersburg.

cardinal value of the *aliya*. This sensation is all the more strongly noticeable as, from the end of 1990, a general strike had been organised in order to protest against supplementary taxes that the population had to put up with in order to support the national effort of integrating the former Soviets [de Tinguy, 1998 :14]. Even if this distancing from immigration seems to have been rooted in essentially economic considerations, it could be perceived by the former Soviets as an expression of rejection. This feeling did indeed exist: Anne de Tinguy recalls that a quarter of Israelis declared in 1995 that they did not want former Soviets as neighbours whereas this number was only 4% in 1990 [de Tinguy, 1999 :64].

Faced with the discontent shown by the former Soviets when confronted with the problems of settling and employment, the *vatikim*[13] were somewhat shocked by these attitudes, the so-called " second Israel " (Israelis of Oriental origin) took as an injustice the complaints of the former Soviets[14]. The Sephardi Jews were even less accepting of the complaints of the former Soviets as the latter had not been obliged, in the way that they themselves had been, to settle in the peripheral towns of the country. Furthermore, for numerous Sephardim who had no other choice but to stay where they were, the new immigrants, who had settled in the development towns, following the problems of economic integration that they encountered in the centre of the country, were rapidly perceived as " unfair " competitors. Highly qualified and "enriched" through state aid, these immigrants caught the attention of the employers and only served to stir up feelings of discrimination amongst the Sephardim faced with very high unemployment in these new towns [Isralowitz et al., 1992]. On the sociological level, this primary source of rejection shown towards immigrants from the former USSR can thus be considered as a reification of an inferiority complex and a lack of consideration which is strongly internalised by the Sephardim.[15] This feeling is all the stronger given that their social situation, in terms of education and employment categories had hardly developed. Twenty years after the " Black Panther " demands, the category of manual workers contained more than 54% of Sephardim and that of higher executives only 19%; a completely inverted social structure to that of

---

[12] Between 1991 and 1995, nearly 15 000 immigrants stated that they were artists. Almost half of them are said to have received a grant from the State or from other Israeli authorities.

[13] A Hebrew term meaning "veteran", used to define "long-standing Israelis".

[14] Within this mutual incomprehension underlies an interaction of distinct temporalities. The Sephardim situate the complaints of the ex-Soviets in the "long time of Israel" whereas the latter produce their demands within the "long time of the diaspora". Thus, for the former, the complaints of the ex-Soviets are "inadmissible" because they must construct their new life " themselves " and not " with grants from the state ", as they themselves did; for the others, the state should support them because it formulated the desire to see the Soviet Jewish community emigrate and now that that wish has become reality, the state should " take on board its responsibility ".

[15] On this theme, cf. the sixth chapter " Beyond the Melting Pot : pluralism " of the work by Uri Ram [1995 : 97-117].

the Ashkenazim where the first category comprises 28% and the second 48%[16]. At the end of the 90s, the average Sephardi income was estimated at less than 70% of that of the Ashkenazi [Klein 1999, 53].

This of course led to some conflicts between the two groups and an indirect influence on the Orientals' interests. It even made many Oriental Jews think they were being left behind by society (Jones 1996, 143-9). As a matter of fact, the results of the 1996 election revealed respective fears within the two groups, because of the entry of the party *Israel be-Aliya* into the *Knesset* (Israeli Parliament), and the progress of the radical religious party *Shas* [17]. At the same time, the unemployment rate decreased and the State's financial inducements enabled 70 per cent of the former Soviet citizens (who had entered the country in 1990) to become homeowners.[18] This confirms the establishment of the former Soviet citizens in their New Homeland, Israel. At the beginning of the year 1996, the emigration rate among these recent immigrants did not exceed 8 per cent and has not risen since[19].

Caricaturing the analysis, some people would say that the former Soviet citizens have integrated perfectly in Israel, as they have taken on the so-called 'Israeli *chutzpah*' (the famous insolence). The media does not cease to praise the migrants' economic success. Anyone strolling on Ben Yehuda (the famous pedestrian street downtown Jerusalem) would no longer meet a musician, playing around a small box, on which '*New immigrant from Russia - No Job*' could be read. On the contrary, if the passer-by looked up, he would discover a poster saying 'Arbat Restaurant' written in Hebrew. He could also see a bookshop, whose stock had just arrived from Moscow. Even if poverty has not completely disappeared among the migrants - in 1999 around 20 per cent of them lived below the poverty line[20]- their standard of living has clearly increased. The statistics concerning unemployment reflect this improvement. The rate of unemployment dropped by 20 percentage points between 1992 and 1995 and stood at 10 per cent in 1999. The fact that many immigrants are now nearly fluent in Hebrew has helped them improve their social conditions. As mentioned above, this improvement was achieved at the expense of a serious loss of professional and social status, but since then, many migrants have regained new

---

[16] See the *Jerusalem Report*, June 12, 1997 and the article by Peter Hirschberg, " Beyond the Rage. A group of Sephardim, successful children of immigrants, want to restructure what they see as Ashkenazi-dominated Israeli society ", *Jerusalem Report*, September 14, 1998.

[17] Many young Oriental Jews find an answer to their problems in this religious movement belonging to the Israel Religious revival. *Shas* undertakes tasks in the social sphere neglected or even abandoned by the *Likud* and Labor and has become the most influential political voice of the Oriental Jews in Israel.

[18] Among the remaining 30 per cent, 9 per cent were settled through public accommodation offices, and 20 per cent found rented accommodation (MIA 1996, 15).

[19] Most of them left Israel for the United States or Canada, some for Germany.

[20] The poverty threshold is fixed at 1,300 New Israel Shekel per month per person (by the National Insurance Institute). 'According to government estimates, 1,500 people live on the street in Israel ... ninety percent of them are Russian immigrants' (Jerusalem Report, 12 March 1999).

social status. During interviews conducted among the new ex-Soviet entrepreneurs, we were surprised by the stories they told us. Some of them, such as a musician from Kiev, whom nothing predisposed to be at the head of a 'help at home' company, are today responsible for prosperous small and medium-sized businesses. The majority of them worked in more or less precarious jobs before reaching these positions. In the last few years, those tendencies have been accelerated by the fact that migrants arrived in the country with the money from selling their flats or other properties in the former Soviet Union. These amounts of money plus a subsidy for the establishment of firms have enabled the immigrants to attain more acceptable living conditions. By mid-1999, 7,000 former Soviet Jews had decided to create their own companies and in 1998 alone, 900 new 'Soviet businesses' had been created (Jerusalem Report, 25 December 1997 and 12 March 1999; Gomelski 1995).

Because of the market potential, Soviet Jews preferred developing businesses which would serve the new immigrants' needs. They also tended to favor those from their former home regions in the Soviet Union. Most of them aimed to employ almost exclusively Soviet and post-Soviet immigrants. Their rates of success led them to be suspected of belonging to the Mafia, or of setting up a state within the state. The fact is that all these examples of advancing professional status testify to the improved social status, which more and more Soviet Jews have reached, even if it does not indicate complete integration.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude from the most recent decade of immigration to Israel? The expression 'tour de force' could be the most appropriate one. Israel welcomed some 850,000 new immigrants between 1990 and today, i.e. more than 15 per cent of its total population. Even if the comparisons are quickly made, would any European country have accepted such a challenge? This *aliya* represents a major new element since the creation of the state. During the official ceremonies for Israel's 50th anniversary in 1998, a young Ukrainian-born Jew came and lit one of the twelve torches that illuminated the event. By doing so, she symbolized the stone brought by those who constituted the lines of the first *aliyot*, and by those who participated in the building of the country. Nonetheless, the perception of immigration has evolved considerably over the passing decades. While one ought not attempt to give an answer to this changing perception of immigration in this article, stressing the hesitation to use the word *aliya* is more revealing. Some articles, such as the one by Judith Shuval (1998), called 'Migration to Israel: the Mythology of Uniqueness,' raised questions which will have to be answered sooner or later (Barnett
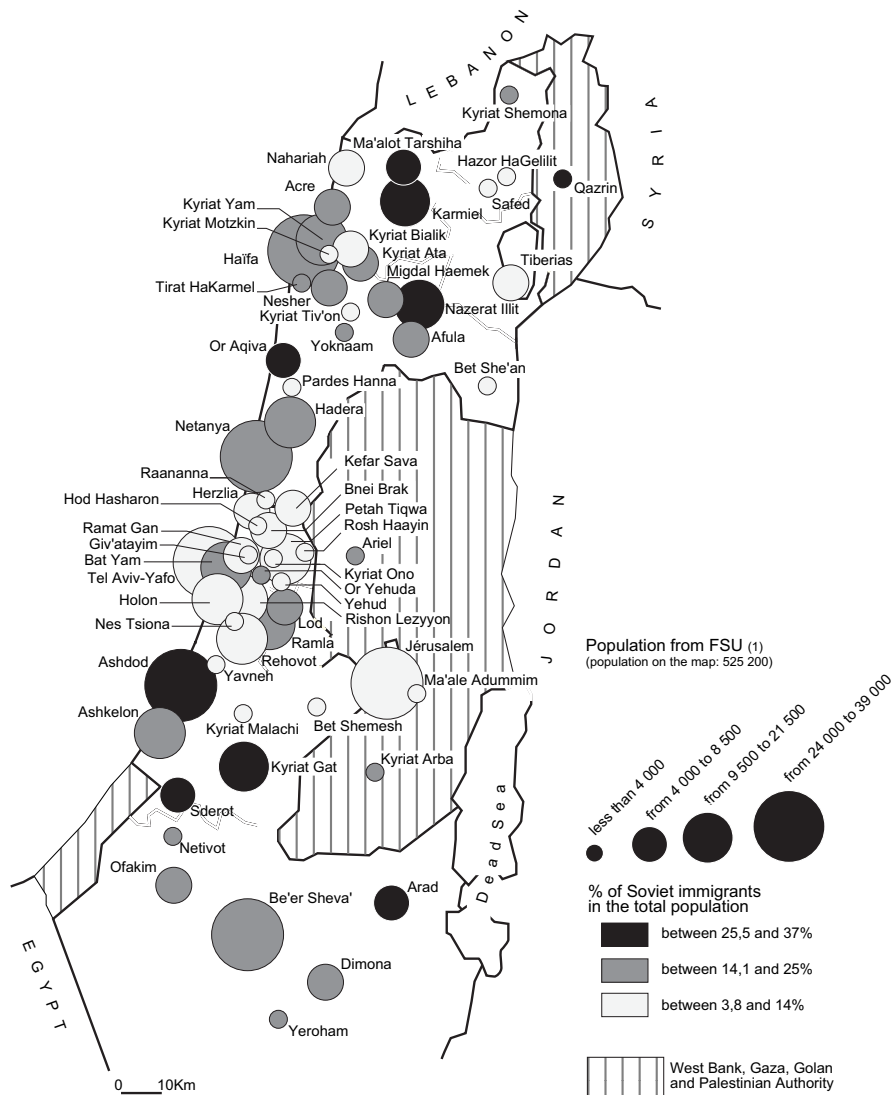
1996). And in the daily life, the frequent debates on the growing of the non-jewish part in the FSU immigration contribute to change the climate concerning the immigration in Israel. Will this immigration continue? Answering this question is a difficult, as too many variables enter into consideration. In the course of the last years, the prospective analysis done has already revealed its poor accuracy in the face of an unpredictable world. Without planning things at random, one can nevertheless argue that because of the demographic structure of the Jewish communities in the successor states of the Soviet Union, emigration to Israel will continue to decrease (Paltiel 1997). During the year 2001, less than 31,000 FSU immigrants entered Israel. A number equivalent to the level of the FSU immigration registered during the unique month of December 1990…

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- *American Jewish Yearbook*, Volume 1996 (New York: AJC, 1996).
- *American Jewish Yearbook*, Volume 1997 (New York: AJC, 1997).
- Anteby, L., Berthomière, W. et Simon G., (eds) *Les nouveaux visages de l'immigration en Israël* (Poitiers: *REMI*, 1996).
- Anteby, L: 'Voies de l'intégration, voix de la Tradition. Itinéraires socio-culturels et pratiques de communication parmi les Juifs éthiopiens en Israël'(thesis) (Paris: Université René Descartes, 1996).
- Barnett, M. (ed) *Israel in Comparative Perspective. Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- Berthomière, W. 'L'immigration des Juifs de l'ex-URSS: un nouveau défi pour Israël ?', *REMI*, 11, 3 (1995).
- Berthomière, W. 'De l'aliya à l'immigration' ou la lecture d'un continuum migratoire israélien', *REMI*, 12, 3 (1996).
- Berthomière, W. 'Analyse géodynamique de la migration juive de l'ex-URSS vers Israël depuis 1989', *Dossiers et Recherches INED*, 58 (1997).
- CDEH [Russian Population 1996] (Moscow: Population et Sociétes, 1997).
- Damian, N. et Rosenbaum-Tamari, Y. 'Identité juive et immigration en Israël: Une enquête en cours sur l'actuelle vague d'immigrants russes1, *REMI*, 12, 3 (1996).
- De Tinguy, A. " Les Russes d'Israël, une minorité très influente ", *Les Etudes du CERI*, n°48 (1998)
- De Tinguy, A. " Les Russes d'Israël: l'ethnicité valorisée ", *Les Cahiers de l'Orient*, n°54 (1999)
- Galper, A. *From Bolshoi to Be'er Sheva, Scientists to Streetsweepers. Cultural Dislocation among Soviet Immigrants in Israel* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995).
- Goldberg, G. 'Immigrants voters in Israel, 1992-1996', *REMI*, 12, 3 (1996).
- Goldscheider, C. *Israel's Changing Society: Population, Ethnicity, and Development*, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996).
- Gomelski, N. et al. *Entrepreneurial theory and practice: immigrant opportunities* (Haifa: Technion, The S. Neaman Institute, 1995).
- Horowitz, T. (ed) *The Soviet Man in an Open Society* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989).
- Horowitz, T. 'Value-Oriented Parameters in Migration Policies in the 1990s: The Israeli Experience', *International Migration*, 34, 4 (1996).
- Isralowitz, R. "Soviet Immigration: Ethnic Conflicts and Social Cohesion in Israel, *International Journal of Group Tensions*, vol.22, n°2 (1992).
- Jones, C. *Soviet Jewish Aliyah, 1989-1992. Impact and Implications for Israel and the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).
- Kaminker, S. 'Jerusalem Est, un cas d'école en matière de planification politique', in R. Dhoquois-Cohen et al. (dir.) *Jerusalem ville ouverte* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).
- Klein Claude, 1999, Israël, *Etat en quête d'identité*, Firenze: Casterman-Giunti (XXe Siècle)
- Leibowitz, Y. et Burg, A. 'Le peuple juif sur sa terre et en exil' in Y. Leibowitz et al. (eds), *Peuple, Terre, Etat* (Paris: Plon, 1995).
- Lipshitz, G. *Country on the Move: Migration to and within Israel*, *1948-1995*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers - The Geo Journal Library, 42, 1998).
- Ministry of Immigrant Absorption (MIA), *Immigrant Absorption: Situation, Challenges and Goals*, (Jerusalem: MIA-Planning and Research Division, 1996).

- Paltiel, A. et al. 'Immigrants from former USSR in Israel in the 1990s: Demographic Characteristics and Socio-Economic Absorption' in Lewin-Epstein, N. et al. (eds), *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

- Rivière-Tancer V. and Attal A. *Jerusalem, destin d'une métropole* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997).

- Saadia E. *Systèmes électoraux et territorialités en Israël* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996).

- Sheffer, G. 'Israel Diaspora Relations in Comparative Perspective', in M. Barnett (ed), *Israel in Comparative Perspective. Challenging the Conventional Wisdom* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

- Shuval, J., 'Migration to Israel: The Mythology of "uniqueness"', *International Migration*, 36, 1 (1998).

- Storper Perez, D. *L'intelligentsia russe en Israël, Rassurante étrangeté* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1998).

- Storper Perez, D. '"Intelligent" en Israel. L'intelligentsia russe aujourd'hui, entre repli et ouverture', *REMI*, 12, 3 (1996).

- Tolts, M., 'Russian Jewish Migration in the Post-Soviet Era', paper presented at the *European Population Conference*, (The Hague, 1999).

- Vichnevski, A. and Zayontchkovskaia, J. 'L'émigration de l'ex-Union Soviétique: prémices et inconnues', *REMI*, 8 HS (1992).

- Vidal, D. 'Troublante normalisation de la société israélienne' in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Mai 1996.

IMMIGRANTS FROM FSU IN ISRAEL
since 1989

L E B A N O N

S Y R I A

Kyriat Shemona

Ma'alot Tarshiha

Nahariah

Hazor HaGelilit

Acre

Safed

Qazrin

Kyriat Yam

Karmiel

Kyriat Motzkin

Kyriat Bialik

Kyriat Ata

Haïfa

Migdal Haemek

Tiberias

Tirat HaKarmel

Nesher

Nazerat Illit

Kyriat Tiv'on

Or Aqiva

Yoknaam

Afula

Bet She'an

Pardes Hanna

Hadera

Netanya

Raananna

Kefar Sava

Hod Hasharon

Bnei Brak

Herzlia

Petah Tiqwa

Ramat Gan

Rosh Haayin

Giv'atayim

Ariel

Bat Yam

Kyriat Ono

Tel Aviv-Yafo

Or Yehuda

Holon

Yehud

Nes Tsiona

Rishon Lezyyon

Lod

J O R D A N

Ramla

Jérusalem

Rehovot

Ashdod

Yavneh

Ma'ale Adummim

Ashkelon

Kyriat Malachi

Bet Shemesh

Kyriat Gat

Kyriat Arba

Sderot

Netivot

Ofakim

Be'er Sheva'

Arad

D e a d S e a

E G Y P T

Dimona

Yeroham

0 ___ 10Km

Population from FSU (1)
(population on the map: 525 200)

less than 4 000

from 4 000 to 8 500

from 9 500 to 21 500

from 24 000 to 39 000

% of Soviet immigrants
in the total population

between 25,5 and 37%

between 14,1 and 25%

between 3,8 and 14%

West Bank, Gaza, Golan
and Palestinian Authority

(1): Only cities with more than 500 immigrants and more than 5 000 habitants (at 12/31/1995) are on the map.
    Eilat (localised in the Gulf of Akaba) received 2 700 immigrants and is not represented for technical reasons..