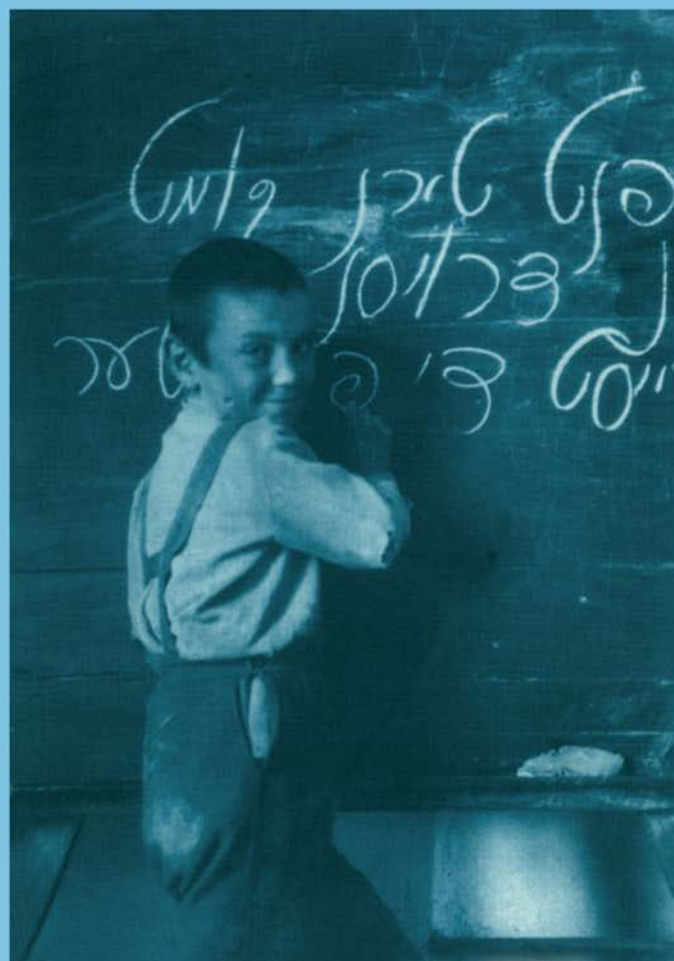


THE CUMMINGS CENTER SERIES

Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union

Yaacov Ro'i, Editor



JEWS AND JEWISH LIFE IN RUSSIA
AND THE SOVIET UNION

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The Cummings Center for Russian and East European Studies
The Cummings Center Series

Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union

Yaacov Ro'i, Editor



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FOR RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES
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JEWS AND JEWISH LIFE IN RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION

EDITED BY
YAACOV RO'I

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To the memory of
SHMUEL ETTINGER
who taught so many of us so much

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Introduction

The story of Russian and Soviet Jewry is basically that of the interrelationship between a number of factors which transcended transformations in the country's political order. One of these factors is, paradoxically, regime policy; another, the attitude of the surrounding population to the Jews; and a third, the Jews' socio-economic conditions, which were largely a function of the first two. Indeed, it often seems as though external factors, rather than developments and trends intrinsic to the Jews' own existence, determined the *sui generis* nature of the Russian and Soviet Jewish community, to the extent that one wonders whether it is appropriate to use the term community, which implies a certain homogeneity.

The four chapters which address themselves to the pre-Soviet era are singularly salient to this issue. While they necessarily touch upon only a few aspects of Russian Jewish existence prior to the October Revolution, each of these features is a significant one. Indeed, the question posed by Eli Lederhendler, whether one can legitimately speak of a Russian Jewry in the 19th century, goes directly to the heart of the matter. Lederhendler's basic contention is that a priori, upon their initial inclusion in the Russian empire, the Jews of Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia and Lithuania were split ideologically, structurally and culturally. It was their common experience with tsarist policy that gradually began to weld them together. Only at the very end of the tsarist period does Lederhendler discern a Russian Jewry in the sense that one speaks of Western national Jewries, namely one that begins to associate with the non-Jewish populations around it, to identify with some of their problems and to aspire to take part in their culture.

Shaul Stampfer dwells on domestic migration within the tsarist empire: its dimensions, quality and significance for Jewish society. Because of the very large Russian Jewish emigration to the United States in the thirty or so years preceding World War I and its relevance for American Jewish historians in particular, local migratory trends have been generally downplayed. Certainly, this migration demonstrated some of the central strengths and weaknesses of the Russian Jewish community: on the one hand, a solidarity that enabled Jews to change their places of residence with a greater feeling of confidence than could other sectors in the population; on the other, a basic volatility and uncertainty that made Jews especially prone to

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move, on the assumption that almost anywhere living conditions would be better than those they were enduring. The most important point, surely, that emerges from Stampfer's essay is that this *perpetuum mobile* began to erode the traditional stability of the Jewish communal structure and the Jews' individual existence before 1917.

The chapters by Ascher and Klier address themselves more directly to political issues. Ascher's topic, the anti-Jewish pogroms in the period of the 1905 revolution and the involvement of the tsarist government in inciting them, has remained a deeply controversial question up to the present day. Ascher contends that the top level of government had a definite and conscious interest in preventing the pogroms, which they feared might further destabilize an already mercurial situation and jeopardize the entire system. Yet, the interaction between official and social anti-Semitism, that is the traditional Russian Judaeophobia that was manifest both from above and from below, was undoubtedly a main factor in unleashing the pogroms. It, too, continued to be one of the key characteristics of Jewish life in the Soviet period.

Klier analyzes Jewish participation in the revolutionary movement in the generation prior to 1917. He takes as his point of departure Igor' Shafarevich's avowedly anti-Semitic condemnation of the Jews as an isolated, offish group in Russian society that had at heart its own interests and not those of the country and the general population, and was, therefore, by definition disloyal. Klier then examines the socio-economic and political conditions in which the Jews lived under the tsars and claims that these basically explain the Jews' attraction to radicalism, combined, he agrees, with a certain 'inner Jewish drive'. As the Soviet regime 'reverts to type', almost, as it were, consciously following in the footsteps of the tsars, both regarding the Jews, against which it discriminates, and on a general plane, as it becomes increasingly corrupt, bureaucratic and inefficient, all three elements that characterized the Jewish situation re-appear under communism. The first of these is the gap between the Jews and Russian society, although in the Soviet period this rift is infinitely more nebulous than before. The second is the uniquely disadvantageous situation of the Jews in an environment in which the vast majority of the population at large endures considerable hardship and suffering. Thirdly, we find again a peculiar Jewish intellectualism-cum-romanticism that makes Jews somehow different and suspect. Shafarevich is, after all, a product of Soviet education, even if his criteria, parameters and values are those of nineteenth-century Russian nationalism.

The ideology upon which the Bolsheviks posited their policy

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regarding the Jewish question was, in fact, new, different and, naturally, peculiar to their regime. Naomi Blank examines the Bolshevik/Soviet position on the level of principle — at the various stages of the party's lifetime — regarding the Jewish question, the issue of the existence of such a question and possible solutions to it. Since Lenin and Stalin saw the Jews as destined to assimilate, and since the Jews did not fulfil the conditions laid down for nationhood, their continued existence as a minority in the Soviet Union was solely provisory and did not obligate their receipt of national rights as a collective. Until the mid-thirties recognition of the prevalence of anti-Semitism, however, did dictate acceptance of at least the possibility of a Jewish question. From that time on, the party itself initiated an ideological campaign designed to eradicate Jewish distinctiveness. This, however, was not limited to Jews who maintained a specifically Jewish identity, but included those who had acculturated totally. In fact, the latter were sometimes viewed as the more dangerous enemy in that they had ingratiated themselves into Soviet society and culture. By the late Stalin period the regime claimed that the Jewish question had disappeared. Future expressions of Jewish identity and even blatant nationalism in the USSR were to be met by 'anti-Zionist' propaganda that, despite its manifest anti-Semitic overtones, purported to draw a distinction between Zionism and Judaism.

Ideology notwithstanding, policy was rooted rather on pragmatic considerations and political constraints. Robert Weinberg's treatise on Birobidzhan illustrates once more the continuity between the Jewish policy of the tsars and that of the RCP(b) — the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) — in the 1920s and 1930s. The Birobidzhan project was intended to 'productivize' Jews, a slogan that had been used by one school at least within tsarist officialdom. In particular, it aimed to settle them on the land — a goal that not a few nineteenth century officials had contemplated for Jews, notably in the southern part of the Pale of Settlement, in 'New Russia'. The failure of Birobidzhan to 'solve' the Jewish question was due to a series of factors that had led to the similar outcome of earlier plans to colonize Jews, namely the socio-economic characteristics of the Jews' own background and such extraneous influences as the dysfunctional link between government planning and implementation.

In contrast, Fishman's essay focuses on new trends that pertained explicitly to Bolshevik policy. True, Jewish education had suffered under the tsars, but it had never been actually suppressed, let alone threatened with extinction. In the 1920s, the Bolshevik regime, committed to 'socialist construction' on the foundations laid by Marxist

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dialectical materialism, sought to rid the country of the trappings of religion, which it viewed as a relic of a class-based society. One of its first edicts — even prior to the separation of church from state and school from church — had decreed the complete control of educational matters and institutions by the Commissariat of Education. Education became a crucial instrument in mobilizing the population as a whole to participate in the building of communism. All education had perforce to come under the aegis of the Soviet party and state. Fishman describes the rearguard action of Jewish religious functionaries throughout the 1920s to maintain surreptitiously the traditional institutions of Jewish religious education, the *heder* and the *yeshiva*. It included the formation and operation of an underground organization that supervised this educational activity, with the material assistance of US Jewry through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the JDC). Not surprisingly, even the resilience of Jewish communal activists and the cooperation between them and world Jewry were unable to withstand the renewed and virulent campaign launched against all religions following the new anti-religious legislation of 1929.

Yet, not all was the outcome of Bolshevik policy. Here and there, groups of Jews, or even individual Jews, played an autonomous role. Such were the Jewish writers who returned to the Soviet Union during the 1920s because they believed that the communist regime was fulfilling their own dreams. They thought that they would, or even should, devote their talents to participate in creating the new society, in bringing to the Jewish masses the message of what they perceived as the new utopia. Der Nister, as David Roskies shows, hoped to find a niche for his anti-bourgeois art in the USSR, only to find himself, by the end of the 1920s, severely curtailed by its increasingly rigorous constraints. With all his wealth of associations — Jewish, Christian and European — Der Nister sought to enrich the new Soviet Yiddish culture. But his offering was rejected and he was personally consumed by the regime, at first silenced artistically and eventually, over twenty years later, tried and executed.

In the interwar period, then, the forecast of Lenin and Stalin seemed to be materializing. Soviet policy, on the one hand, and the desire of Jews themselves to integrate into the new society and take advantage of the demographic, educational and professional opportunities now open to them, on the other, propelled them in the direction of assimilation. World War II transformed this trend radically. The annexation of the 'Western territories' in conjunction with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the influx of several hundreds of thousands of refugees from those parts of Poland overrun by the Germans in

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1939, the Nazi occupation of large areas of the Soviet Union including all of Belorussia and the Ukraine, and the Holocaust reawakened Jewish consciousness and clarified for Jew and non-Jew alike that the Jews had remained a distinct people. Paradoxically, the physical annihilation of two million or so Jews (the exact number has not yet been finally resolved), made Soviet Jewry a distinct nationality in the Soviet Union, perhaps for the first time. The collaboration of non-Jewish Soviet citizens with the Nazis in anti-Jewish 'actions', the resonance enjoyed by Nazi propaganda among large sections of the population and, toward the end of the war, the beginnings of a virulent official anti-Semitism on the part of the top party leadership also served to bring home this point. Altshuler, in his analysis of the singular features of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, dwells on these issues in detail, demonstrating that the Nazis' identification of bolshevism with the Jews, the specifics of the Soviet regime and the Jews' position within Soviet society led to different tactics in the Nazi treatment of the Jews in that country and dictated the nature of the attitude thereto of the non-Jewish population and of Jewish resistance.

Nowhere, perhaps, was the new situation created by the war more evident than in the writings of one of the leading Soviet Jewish literary figures, Vasilii Grossman. The fact that Grossman wrote in Russian and was, indeed, a product of Russian culture made this all the more poignant. John Garrard in his chapter on Grossman's contribution to the literature on the war — as distinct from his journalism (Grossman was a war correspondent for the army newspaper *Krasnaia zvezda*) and his work on *The Black Book* — depicts colourfully the writer's new Jewish consciousness and awareness of his Jewish roots. He shows how, in the precarious conditions in which artists lived and worked in the Soviet Union at the time, Grossman sought to circumvent the constraints of censorship to bring to subsequent generations the individual and collective message of the Holocaust precisely in the *genre* of belletristics.

The period immediately following the liberation of the USSR's western areas from the Nazi occupation seemed in many ways to be a harbinger of a new era of conciliation toward the USSR's Jewish population, according to Allan Kagedan. Hundreds of thousands of Jews who had fled into the country's interior in the face of the Nazi invader, began returning to the Ukraine, Belorussia, the European parts of the USSR and the Baltic republics. In this apparently positive atmosphere a group of Jewish public figures linked with the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee proposed the establishment of a Jewish autonomous region in the Crimea. It soon became clear, however, that

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while the Soviet leadership was prepared to enable Jews to try to return to a normal existence as individuals, it was not willing to condone, let alone encourage, any collective normalization of Jewish existence.

The Jewish community, for its part, continued to display what appeared to the authorities unduly nationalistic inclinations. One of the spheres in which this atmosphere was particularly prevalent was the synagogue, where the various religious communities that renewed their existence and function after the war resorted to a spate of activities that in no way corresponded to what the party and government believed compatible with their *raison d'être*, that is, the conduct of religious worship in the strictest and narrowest meaning of the word. The chapter by Ro'i tries to give a sense of the scope of this new dynamism that seemed to encompass Jewish communities in a large number of towns. Had it not been for the very close control of the powers-that-be, which were not averse to taking severe punitive measures, such as the removal of rabbis and even the closing of synagogues, it is more than likely that the atmosphere that prevailed among certain sectors of the Jewish community might well have taken on significant dimensions.

The situation in Georgia, where there were a disproportionately large number of synagogues, deserves special attention. Lili Baazova shows the basically traditional way of life of the Georgian Jewish community and the importance of the synagogue for Jews in that republic from the immediate postwar period to the 1970s. It was the emigration to Israel of large numbers of Georgian Jews in that decade that terminated the existence of not a few communities, especially in the villages and smaller townships. Even in Georgia, however, already prior to this emigration, the authorities had taken repressive measures against certain synagogues, although in some instances, uncharacteristically, these had been totally unavailing and the authorities had been compelled by the virulence of the Jewish reaction to retract them.

The constraints and restrictions practised against Jewish religious and cultural life in the late 1940s–early 1950s were not sufficient. The regime in the late Stalin years, which was one of the most ideologically stringent, politically harsh and internationally isolationist of all periods from 1917 to 1991, was determined to make the Jews the latest example of a 'punished people', which would be uprooted from their homes like the peoples deported toward the end of the war. The *mise-en-scène* was to be provided by the Doctors' Plot, the basic postulate of which was the treachery and constant subversion of the Jews as a group. Preparations for this drama, as Iakov Etinger, the son of one of

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the arrested doctors shows, had been going on for over two years before the actual announcement of the 'plot' by TASS on 13 January 1953.

One of the many interesting aspects of the Doctors' Plot was the reverberations it evoked among the non-Jewish population. Many Jews who lived through this period, including Il'ia Erenburg in *Ottepel'* (*The Thaw*) published in 1956, have given testimony to the tribulations suffered by Jews in general and Jewish scientists and doctors in particular at the hands of the population during the weeks prior to Stalin's death on 5 March 1953. Alexander Lokshin describes the reaction of non-Jews to the statement published by the new leadership that the entire plot had been a fabrication. He gives us a fascinating insight into the variegated viewpoints held by different sectors of the population, both regarding the Soviet leadership as such and its manipulations and machinations of public opinion and the atmosphere in society, and regarding the Jews themselves. An interesting slant on his story is the significance the party élite attributed to the attitude of the population and the implications of this for the study of the interaction between official and social anti-Semitism, between the deliberate, political anti-Semitism from above and the spontaneous anti-Semitism from below.

The post-Stalin period never reverted to the viciousness of the Black Years of Soviet Jewry, yet anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish discrimination remained the order of the day. Nevertheless, as a result of pressures from both within and without, there was a certain erosion in the official Soviet position. This was made evident in the field of Yiddish culture, which, although never fully rehabilitated and legitimized, did, little by little, gain minimal recognition, with all the limitations that this entailed in an authoritarian regime. One of the people who participated in Yiddish cultural activity in the last decade or so of the USSR's existence, Velvl Chernin, records its scope and content, not in its *samizdat* and clandestine, but in its official and open form.

The attitude to Yiddish cultural activity was but a single component in what Igor Krupnik calls 'post-totalitarian manipulation'. He insists that there was no consistent, carefully thought out and strictly implemented Jewish policy. There was no consistency, uniformity or strategy in the post-Stalin regime's treatment of its Jewish population. On the whole, the Jews were dealt with within the terms of reference of Soviet nationalities theory and policy in this period as in the pre-World War II years. Furthermore, the post-Stalin leadership introduced few, if any, new elements into policy toward the Jews as an ethnic

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group and toward Jewish culture in its transition from the 'ardent restructuring' and 'blunt annihilation' that had characterized the earlier and later Stalin era respectively, to ad hoc maneuvering. Its lack of initiative, however, was more than countered by the Jews' own drive toward social mobility — large numbers of Jews figuring in certain professional and social fields (science, technology, culture and the arts). A challenge seemed in fact to be presented by the Jews' very existence and characteristic features within Soviet society, which contested and contradicted Soviet theory regarding nationality in both its political and ethnic aspects. As a result, the establishment moved erratically from totally ignoring the Jews and Jewish history, including their contribution to the evolution of the Soviet experiment, to lashing out at Jewish nationalism, the reactionary nature of Judaism and the Jews' links to the capitalist, imperialist order. Its failure was practically predetermined by both the lack of consecutive thinking and the anachronistic nature of Yiddish and Birobidzhan, which were the only two existing channels for recognizing and allowing concessions to the Jews as an ethnic group and were a priori incapable of competing with Hebrew and Israeli culture that began seeping through to Soviet Jews as of the late 1950s. The final blow was probably dealt by the *aliya* activists in the 1970s who raised general issues of Jewish identity and survival as part of their struggle to opt out of the system totally.

The vicissitudes of Soviet policy toward the Jews were perhaps no match for Jewish cultural activism and the emigration movement. At the same time, they seem in some ways to have triumphed, especially when one analyzes the Jews' demographic pattern from World War II until the final disintegration of the Soviet Union, and, indeed, even afterwards. This trend, which has been entirely consistent and indicates a dwindling of the Jewish population beyond the point of potential revival, is underscored in its stark reality by Mark Tolts. The processes of modernization and assimilation that had begun to manifest themselves in the pre-war years — urbanization, a falling birth rate, mixed marriages — were accelerated by the concomitants of the war itself, its tremendous losses and the new mobility of the surviving population. The Jews became one of the most elderly populations in the country, intermarriage became the order of the day, the birth rate continued to fall. All these factors were predominant in determining a persistent shrinking of the Jewish population even before emigration began taking its toll in the 1970s, and continued to account for most of the diminution of the Jewish group inhabiting the USSR until the mass exodus of the late 1980s–early 1990s made emigration the prominent factor in this decline.

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The story of Soviet Jewry affected not only the Soviet domestic arena. One of the interesting aspects of Soviet policy toward Israel from the time of its establishment, as appears in the chapter by Sementchenko and Mirokhin, is the Soviet leadership's attitude toward the connection between its own Jewish citizens and the new Jewish state. While officially denying the existence of any such link, it was clear to the USSR's decision-making bodies that this was not an entirely realistic position. Strizhov gives us the official explanation for Soviet support of Israel's establishment and the context in which that support unfolded. Using Soviet foreign ministry documentation, he demonstrates that Moscow's main motivation was the desire to be included in the solution of a pressing international problem that was giving rise to a major local conflict. Its strategy was to take advantage of differences of opinion between the US and Britain, as well as of the obviously partial position of the former, given its exposure to Jewish pressure, and the complex situation of the latter as a directly interested party, to make its mark in the international arena as the debate over Palestine's future unravelled. Yet, the global and regional points of view are clearly not the entire picture. Sementchenko and Mirokhin, basing themselves on the same documentation, give us an insight into the Soviet ruling élite's deliberations concerning immigration to Palestine (until May 1948) and Israel (after that date), including in the latter instance that of Jews from the USSR itself. Despite continued caution in relating directly to this issue, reports from the Soviet legation in Israel in the very first period dwell upon Israeli interest in Soviet Jewish emigration. By 1951 it was being suggested that this might well become the criterion for relations between the two countries.

Israel necessarily felt its relevance for Soviet Jewry. At first, it kept the issue low key in its relationship with Moscow, focusing instead on other, less controversial points of contact, including *aliya* from the East European people's democracies. However, the extreme manifestation of official anti-Semitism in both Eastern Europe and the USSR, as given expression at the end of the Stalin period in the Slansky Trial and the Doctors' Plot, brought things to a head, and Israel, as Govrin points out, became the spearhead of a worldwide campaign directed toward aiding Soviet Jews. This aid was to have two main aims — improving the Jews' situation within the Soviet Union and facilitating the emigration to Israel of those among them who wished to opt out of a socialist society committed to the disappearance of the Jews as a nation. By the 1960s these endeavours were beginning to have effect.

Soviet Jewry also played a significant role in Soviet-US relations. Minton Goldman shows some of the intricacies of the interconnection

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between, on the one hand, the US' general, including strategic, interests and its desire to ameliorate emigration conditions for Soviet Jews, and, on the other, the different perceptions of the Administration and Congress as to how pressures could and should be exerted on the Soviet Union. The results may perhaps not always have been to the best and immediate interests of Soviet Jewish would-be emigrants, although Soviet Jews did find considerable moral support in the Jackson-Vanik amendment and in the knowledge that their fate was discussed at the top-level of superpower politics. Moreover, in the long run the US did make its forceful contribution to the final freedom of emigration enacted toward the end of the Gorbachev period, even if, at the same time, it in practice severely limited its own role as a destination for that emigration by refusing refugee status to more than a core number of Soviet Jewish emigrants.

Eventually, then, as a result of domestic and external pressures, Soviet Jews did begin leaving the Soviet Union in large numbers to Israel and the US, and some to other countries. Prior to the era of large-scale emigration in the 1970s, there persisted a more or less monolithic image of the Soviet Jew, although admittedly it differed somewhat outside and inside the Soviet Union. The very process of large-scale emigration, Markowitz points out, broke down the old stereotypes, which, in any case, did not correspond to reality. In addition, the Russian Jewish émigré adopted certain characteristics of his new country of residence. Simultaneously, he retained specific features of his earlier self-identification, including the imprint of his Soviet experience and of the Russian culture to which most Jews assimilated. Perhaps, more surprisingly, the contact with former friends and relatives and the changing circumstances in their own country have led to transformations in identity among those who have stayed behind. In this way a new 'trans-national' Russian Jewish community has been formed. If, during most of the nineteenth century, there was as yet no meaningful Russian Jewish community even in Russia, by the end of the twentieth century, this community was straddling three continents.

Another channel of mutual influence between Russian Jews who have emigrated to Israel and those who have remained behind is that of literature. Dimitri Segal discusses the mutual reflections of Russian and Hebrew literature, the culminating point of which is the adoption of Russian literary models and values, both traditional and modernistic, by emergent modern Hebrew writers and the effect of Israeli and Hebrew patterns on the literature of *olim* who continue to produce in Russian. In this way, perhaps the Russian Jew whether in Israel, or

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even in Russia (through his new acquaintanceship with Hebrew literature and his earlier familiarity with Jewish literature written originally in Russian), may bridge the gap and correct the asymmetry that exists between the two cultures as a result of the dearth of reference in Russian culture to the world of Hebrew culture.

Our story, thus, does not end with the disintegration and disappearance of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the Soviet or Russian Jew has survived with his own specific identity and features that are the outcome of a lifelong education and experience. On the other hand, just as the Soviet regime inherited a Jewish question from its tsarist predecessor, so did it in turn bequeath to its successor states most of the ingredients of that same anomalous situation that had characterized Soviet Jewish existence. The Jews had indeed largely assimilated, or, at least, acculturated. They had intermarried, perhaps more than any other ethnic minority in the Soviet Union. Yet, they remained distinct, and as the new states sought and seek their identity — political, social, ethnic — the position of the Jews remains a sensitive issue, a barometer, as it were, of both their political orientation and social stability. True, one of the last enactments of the Soviet Union had been legislation recognizing the right of its citizens to leave and return to the country of their free will. And while large numbers of Jews availed themselves of this opportunity (over 400,000 emigrating in the two single years 1990–91), many Jews found themselves in a major quandary. Rosefielde analyzes the economic considerations that might have helped and might continue to help Jews decide one way or the other whether to throw in their lot with the country of their residence or risk the costs of emigration. Unquestionably, the economic factor is a significant, if not the predominant, one in reaching such a decision for large numbers of Jews. It would appear that, except for a relatively small group of entrepreneurs, if material considerations are going to be determinant, the outlook for Russia is such that most Jews will choose to leave.

Ryvkina looks at three major issues in the lives of Jews in the three Slavic countries of the CIS — their national self-identification and attitude to Jewish culture, their professional status and opportunities, and their attitude to emigration. Significantly, in all three fields she finds basic contradictions, which seem to indicate that today, as in the Soviet period, the position of the Jewish population is fundamentally anomalous, characterized by inherent conflict and unpredictability. Neither the Jews themselves nor the society surrounding them appear to be able to decide what the nature of the Jewish existence in the CIS should be, either on the collective or on the individual level.

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As Ryvkina points out, only the future will tell how this dual dilemma will be solved. Although today Jews have the possibility to leave at will, many are reluctant to do so for a variety of reasons. To judge by history, specifically, the accommodation of the Jews to the Soviet regime and of both the authorities and society in that period to the new conditions of co-existence with the Jews, resolution of the dual dilemma may take a long time and may develop along different, even conflicting, lines as circumstances change within the country.

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I

THE TSARIST LEGACY:
SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

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Did Russian Jewry Exist prior to 1917?

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Was there, properly speaking, a Russian Jewry prior to 1917? It is, of course, incontestable that there were Jews living in the Russian empire; but were these indeed *Russian* Jews, and did they constitute an identifiable *Jewry*? In other words, was there anything Russian about them, and did they form a single collective community?

These questions are not raised facetiously. The existence of a Jewry that was 'Russian' is not self-evident: it requires explication; the explication, in turn, ought to tell us something about the historical legacy of that Jewry. This issue will be addressed briefly, and on two levels. First, to what extent are we able to discern a recognizable internal unity that might legitimate a collective label? Second, does the designation 'Russian' bear real historical significance in terms of the life of that Jewry? The thesis of this chapter is that the first two generations that lived under Romanov rule remained divided and heterogeneous and that these Jews' links to Russia were attenuated. But, by the middle decades of the nineteenth century, we may discern processes that led to the emergence of a Russian Jewry, properly designated as such. Those processes accelerated at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decade and a half of the twentieth, achieving a definitive character after 1917. Further, the proposition shall be put forth here that it was the *Russian state* that played the key role in creating Russian Jewry as a historical entity.

What's in a name? The labels that we use to designate Jewish populations have (or should have) inherent and demonstrable historical significance. Thus, we use such general labels as 'East

European', 'Sephardi', and 'West European' Jewry - terms that are meant to stand for a certain set of distinctions that have cultural, social, political, and economic relevance. They indicate that each such Jewry possesses its own characteristic historical experience and historical profile, gained through exposure to different socio-political circumstances. Such terms are useful, for example, when we generalize about historical processes affecting particular Jewish populations in a distinctive way, as we do when we talk about 'emancipation' — Jewish integration into Western societies in the nineteenth century — or when we focus on East European Jewish emigration as a phenomenon that is different from other Jewish migration streams.

We also speak conventionally of Jewish communities as individual geo-political entities: 'German Jewry', 'French Jewry', 'Italian Jewry', 'Anglo-Jewry', 'Hungarian Jewry', and so on. That is, we identify historically distinct Jewish communities with their native lands. This kind of designation is neither arbitrary nor a simplified shorthand. It goes beyond the level of mere scholarly convention because there are valid historical reasons for employing these labels. By the nineteenth century, the Jews living in the countries mentioned were citizens who identified with the nationality of their land; they had adopted the native language as their mother tongue; and they had created Jewish cultural, educational, religious and communal institutions that fully reflected the encounter between them and the wider national society and that set them apart from Jewries elsewhere.

Can we speak in the same way of a 'Russian Jewry'? Jews were not native to Russia in the way that they were native to other lands: it was Russia that came to the Jews, not the other way around. Relatively few Jews spoke Russian. A Russian-language Jewish press hardly existed until the 1870s, one hundred years after the first annexations of lands from the Polish Commonwealth. In terms of civil status, although the Jews were classified according to existing Russian social estates, they were also segregated within the Russian legal system. Eventually, they were segregated geographically, as well, in areas that were not preponderantly Russian, ethnically speaking. The Jews' cultural, educational and communal institutions were formed well before the onset of Russian rule and continued to reflect Jewish segregation from, rather than integration into, the society around them.

What is crucial, however, is that the Jews who came under Russian rule in the period from 1772 to 1815 were not the members of one definable society. No simple transfer took place, then, from a 'Polish' to a 'Russian' Jewry when Russian imperial rule replaced that of the Polish Commonwealth.

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In actual fact, no Jewry is ever quite monolithic. Factional, doctrinal and cultural variations always exist (as they do in any large society). Nations are divided along lines of social class, political faction, religious views, regional variation and allegiance, and so on. A seamless homogeneity is not a requirement here: we know that we are dealing with one definable national society when factors are present that neutralize the divisive forces. Overall territorial and linguistic unity, common literary traditions, the introduction of universal compulsory education, a shared governmental system, and shared experiences in times of war or other crises — all of these can create unity out of diversity or hold an otherwise diverse society together.

Modern European Jewish communities were formed in just this way out of diverse elements. They emerged from the late Middle Ages with strong local traditions and certain attributes of a dispersed world communion. But their identification with the nation-state and their struggle to integrate themselves socially and economically into the national society endowed them with separate and distinctive identities and different political interests. The question is, can the same be said for Russia's Jews, or were they subdivided into too many separate groups and jurisdictions to be considered a national community? To what extent did they possess an underlying affinity and solidarity with one another?

For a century before the advent of Russian rule, there had been two separate Jewries on the territory of the Polish Commonwealth. The Jewish communities of Poland had been loosely joined in a confederation, the *Va'ad arba' aratsot*, and the Jewish communities of Lithuania had had their own separate national council, *Va'ad medinat Lita*. These communal bodies existed formally until 1764 (less than a decade before the first partition of Poland) and endowed the Jewish communities in Poland with whatever collective structure that they possessed. The historical separation between the two national confederations was itself a feature of strong regional and divergent local factors that continued to play an important role in East European Jewish society.

From the start, then, we are dealing here with a population that was not a single entity. Regional differentiation was most distinct in the development of religious life in the eighteenth century: the growth of Hasidism in the Ukraine and in Polish areas was pronounced, while White Russia and particularly Lithuania were areas which presented obstacles to Hasidic influence. Compounding these different patterns of communal leadership and religious experience were differences of local custom, dialect or accent in Yiddish pronunciation, and different

stereotypes of temperament and mentality that were enshrined in folklore and literature.

The piecemeal annexations that made this population subject to Russian imperial rule — a process that lasted forty-three years from the first partition of Poland to the Congress of Vienna, and even then Poland remained legally separate — also militated against the formation of one national Jewish entity. Jewish political leadership in the first few decades of Russian rule bore a pronounced regional rather than national character.¹ The Russian state, for its part, did not encourage Jewish communities to unite in a national *kahal*, synod or consistory, on the French or Hungarian model, and in fact the Russian authorities obstructed the formation of a national Jewish leadership.²

Strong local and regional influences are clear in the case of the Jews in Congress Poland, home to the largest part of the Jewish population in the Russian empire.³ Over the course of the nineteenth century, Jews in the Polish provinces developed closer associations with Polish culture and the Polish language. Some Jews also sympathized with, or even supported, the cause of Polish independence, and far-reaching civil reforms, culminating in 1862, improved the Jews' economic and legal status there, in contrast to the case in the rest of the empire.⁴

Similarly, we can point to important local variations in the social and cultural spheres in other Jewish communities in imperial Russia, outside Poland. In Riga, the dominant non-Jewish cultural influence was German. In Odessa, a modern, urban commercial community was developing in close association with Habsburg Galicia. In Vilna, a thriving publishing trade, a non-Hasidic élite rabbinic establishment, and a polyglot culture based on Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, Russian and German helped to make that city a major Jewish literary and scholarly centre. In Bessarabia, still other conditions and cultural influences were dominant.

Thus, as we survey the map of the major Jewish communities in Russia, we are struck with the salience of local and regional differentiation. Prior to the annexations that expanded the tsarist empire in Eastern Europe, the Jews who lived there were divided amongst themselves, and after the advent of Russian rule those divisions and variations continued to obtain. There was as yet no single entity that could accurately bear the label, 'Russian Jewry'. Instead, there were Jews of Poland, Lithuania, White Russia and the Ukraine, Hasidic Jews and non-Hasidic Jews. To these we have to add the Jews of the Caucasus and Central Asia who shared little of the cultural and social experience characteristic of the Jews in the Pale of

Settlement. Circumstance had brought them all together under the Russian crown. One might compare them, by way of analogy, to the native peoples of North America, who became 'American Indians' only by virtue of the fact that the continent was colonized by 'Americans'.

The Jews of Russia, it is true, shared kinship ties and a common religious heritage. But these ties they shared with other Jews elsewhere as well: other Ashkenazi Jews throughout Europe, in the first instance, and Sephardi Jews of the Levant in the second. What is suggested here is that there was little beyond that minimal similarity that bound the Jews of Russia to each other as a *national community* at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Most historians have, nevertheless, favoured a collective approach in defining this population and its history, and it is well worth considering why that is so. Dubnow, for example, viewed all Jewish inhabitants of the Russian empire, including the Polish provinces, as a society with common characteristics. He discussed developments in Poland in their own local context, but he saw little historical validity in actually severing the Polish-Jewish experience from that of the rest of the Jews in tsarist Russia.⁵ Iulii Gessen, too, included sections on Poland as part and parcel of his history of the Jews of Russia.⁶

One is led to the supposition that Jewish historians who wrote prior to 1917 took this inclusive approach at least in part because the early history of the Jews in 'Russia' was in fact the history of the Jews in the Polish Commonwealth — and, thus, susceptible to a collective definition. Yet, one may also surmise that this approach was also dictated by the political and social realities created by the nature of Russia itself: an empire with a distinctive autocratic system of government under which the Jews were assigned a special status, and therefore experienced a common historical development beginning in 1772. In other words, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, modern Jewish historians viewed the Russian political framework as a compelling, defining attribute for the Jewry that lived under the tsarist sceptre, fully analogous to the manner in which German, French, English and Italian Jews were defined by their respective citizenships.

An analogous issue has been recently addressed by William McCagg, with reference to the question of Habsburg Jewry. Here, too, a Jewish population, highly diverse geographically and culturally speaking, but ruled by one imperial house and increasingly affected by national, political and economic trends, began to exhibit aspects of a 'national' Jewry over a period of time. McCagg argues that, despite the breakup of this Jewry with the disintegration of the Habsburg empire, a distinctive Habsburg Jewry did exist prior to 1918, and his

conclusions are relevant to our problem: 'Habsburg Jewry never had the clarity of identity of Anglo-Jewry or French Jewry. But, in the sharing of a vast though amorphous cultural-political experience, it was as much there as the Habsburg state itself.'⁷ The prominence of the political influence — the power of the state and state-controlled bodies — makes for a consolidating process of historically separate Jewish communities that ultimately can create a national Jewry. The analogy with the case of Russian Jewry is quite close. The difference, of course, lies in the fact that the Habsburg state indeed disintegrated following the First World War, leaving in its wake a variety of smaller national entities, including a series of smaller national Jewries; while the Russian empire was replaced by the Soviet state, in which earlier trends toward the crystallization of a national Jewry were, if anything, magnified. But of this, more will be said in the conclusion.

Another theoretical justification for treating Russian Jewry as a single entity was offered by Ben-Zion Dinur, but for reasons not directly related to Russian rule *per se*.⁸ Dinur focused on factors internal to Jewish society that shaped this largest of all Jewish populations and distinguished it from other Jewish societies:

- the sheer size and the high degree of concentration and segregation of the Jewish population, living for the most part in towns and cities where they formed either a majority or else a significant minority of 25 per cent or more;
- the relative social and cultural stability and solidarity, in terms of language, educational institutions, creative cultural output and family life, that characterized the life of this Jewry, at least until the end of the nineteenth century;
- the exceptionally high degree to which this Jewry remained attached to traditional religious values and lifestyles, compared to Western Jewries.

Dinur argued that Russian Jewry retained and developed a tremendous vitality in cultural, demographic and economic terms that clearly differentiated it from Jewish societies elsewhere in Europe. The internal distinctions between Poland and White Russia, the Ukraine and Lithuania, north and south, Hasidic and non-Hasidic (as noted above) were not as significant, Dinur implied, as were the more fundamental distinctions that divided Russian Jewry from other Jewries. Hence, he could speak of Russian Jewry as a collective entity by virtue of its 'otherness'. Indeed, his willingness to overlook internal distinctions within Russian Jewry allowed him also to view post-traditional groups and political movements (socialists, Yiddishists, Hebraists, Zionists, and even mass emigration to the West) as aspects

or products of internal Jewish cohesion in Russia, rather than as evidence of break-up, dissent and contention. All such phenomena could be bracketed, as he argued, within a collective Jewish 'revolt' against Russian imperial rule, or, put differently, a collective defence, in various forms, of vital Jewish interests.⁹

The underlying concept which most of these historians (and many of their contemporaries) shared and used throughout their works was that of 'national character', or *Volksgeist*, a national-cultural unity that Russian Jewry possessed. This is particularly evident in the cases of Dubnow and Dinur, both of whom were committed Jewish nationalists and were predisposed, therefore, to think in terms of 'organic' or corporate national entities. Armed with their definition of a Jewish national character, they were able to fit social reality and ideological concept into one framework and thus to emphasize the importance of a collective Jewish consciousness, despite internal cleavages. Moreover, in their dichotomous view of the contemporary Jewish world, they emphasized the *national* character of East European Jewry as against the *assimilatory* character of Western Jewries¹⁰ — once again highlighting the distinctive nature of the East European experience. They assumed that distinctive experience was based on a distinctive, historically-rooted identity.

It is the contention here, nonetheless, that this common identity did not exist a priori, and was not inherent in Jewish society as such. This much is suggested by the lack of overarching structures (political or cultural) that we have noted earlier. Rather, the common identity that Dubnow and Dinur discerned was forged over time and it was gradually nurtured by significant social and political forces. Thus, internal migration (especially from north to south) helped to promote greater internal homogeneity in Jewish society in Russia. The processes of urbanization that brought more and more Jews to live in fewer individual locations also contributed to the transcending of local distinctions. The coming of the railroad and the telegraph and other forms of improved transportation and communication certainly facilitated these processes. The alliance that took shape among traditionalists — Hasidic and non-Hasidic alike — prompting the formation of a new Orthodoxy, arrayed against anti-traditionalist forces in the Jewish community, also promoted new bonds of solidarity in place of earlier divisiveness.¹¹ These elements began to fall into place by the middle of the nineteenth century, basically altering previous social and cultural realities.

The policies pursued by the government, from promotion of Jewish agricultural colonies to military conscription; from the establishment of

state-sponsored schools for Jews and rabbinical seminaries to the abolition of the *kahal*; from a retention of the Pale of Settlement to expulsions from rural areas and (in 1891) from Moscow — all these were indispensable elements in determining how Jews lived and how they would respond, over time, as an emerging collective Jewry. In this way, it may be said, that Russian Jewry was partly, if unintentionally, a creation of the Russian state.

Finally, conscious efforts were made by the rabbinic élite and the liberal intelligentsia alike, from the 1860s on, to reconstruct the basis of a Jewish national community. That goal was clearly expressed in the Jewish press that arose in the second half of the nineteenth century and it may also be discerned in the rise of new, trans-regional organizations and, finally, political parties that emerged by the turn of the century.¹²

Thus, in the final decades of Romanov rule, though significant internal distinctions remained (especially in the sphere of social-class stratification), it became increasingly valid to consider the Jewish inhabitants of the Russian empire as one 'Jewry'.

* * *

But in what sense, if at all, was this Jewry 'Russian'? The overwhelming majority — 96.5 per cent — stated in 1897 that their mother tongue was Yiddish. The twenty-five *gubernii* comprising the Jewish Pale of Settlement (including the Polish *gubernii*) accounted for 95 per cent of the Jewish population. In most of that area, ethnic Russians accounted for only one to five per cent of the urban population.¹³ Clearly, Jews were not living in an environment naturally conducive to russification. Of those Jews who reported a mother tongue other than Yiddish, 29 per cent were Polish speakers, 17 per cent were German speakers, and 10 per cent spoke Georgian, Crimean Tatar, Judaeo-Tadzhik and Judaeo-Tat. Only 67,000 Jews, or less than half of the tiny non-Yiddish-speaking minority, were native Russian speakers, and of those, 24,000 resided outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Another 14,000 lived in Odessa and 10,500 in major regional centres like Kiev, Warsaw, Vilna, Minsk and Vitebsk.¹⁴ In 1898, 54 per cent of all Jewish children in the empire still attended traditional Jewish elementary schools rather than Russian schools — but that figure rose much higher within the Pale itself, so that in Kiev Guberniia over 70 per cent attended traditional Jewish schools.¹⁵

Such figures support the argument of historians who maintain that Jews in the Russian empire formed a stable, cohesive ethnic mass, endowed with a common culture, mentality and lifestyle; but at the

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same time, they beg the question: was this Jewry in any way Russian? Or was it merely that part of a larger East European Jewry that happened to be living under a Russian government?

Clearly, there is a semantic difficulty here that is related to the multinational character of the Russian empire itself. The situation of the Jews there was not analogous to that of the Jews in, say, France or Germany. Jews in the tsarist empire lived largely in areas that were ethnically non-Russian. By what justification, then, can we call them 'Russian'?

For that matter, 'Russia' itself lacked clear boundaries or a defined national identity during the first half of our period. That was due to the expansion of the tsarist state into non-Russian territories, making the empire a multinational one, as well as to the country's social structure and cultural development. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Jews of Poland and Lithuania were only beginning their encounter with the land of the tsars, the literary culture of Russia was still in the process of being discovered and crystallized. As for the Russian nation itself, it would take decades before the social and political élites would 'discover' their common links with the enserfed peasantry. Service to the tsar and service to God in the Orthodox church, colonizing expeditions into Central Asia and the Far East, the campaign to repel Napoleon's invasion, peasant revolts and the Decembrist conspiracy, the controversy over 'westernization' — all these were elements in an ongoing and lengthy process of state-formation and national development. They reflect the preliminary stages of a Russian national consciousness. Indeed, even at the turn of the twentieth century, some issues of national definition remained unresolved, given the fluidity of national designations in such places as Warsaw, Kiev and Vilna.¹⁶

Nevertheless, we do find some aspects of 'russianization' among Jews as early as the 1820s, mainly among groups of acculturated merchants, writers, army veterans, professionals and students that grew in relative importance in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷ A growing Jewish presence in Moscow and St. Petersburg (and elsewhere outside the Pale) tended to underscore the significance of this process, if it were continued and expanded — something that would occur after 1917.

Moreover, the self-descriptive use of the term 'Russian' by Jews from within the Pale, at the end of the nineteenth century, indicates that the label had significance beyond the small minority of Jews who lived outside the Pale. Thus, Jewish expatriate students in Western Europe at the turn of the century were clearly identified as 'Russian'.¹⁸

An Orthodox rabbi from the Ukraine, living in central Poland, could describe himself in a letter to another Polish rabbi as having been born 'a native of Russia', and he could refer to Warsaw Jewry as 'the biggest Jewish community in Russia'.¹⁹ And in 1905, Jews were granted the right to cast their ballots in elections to the new State Duma, the first unequivocal act recognizing the Jews' political rights as Russian subjects.²⁰

While these examples should not lead us to conclude that national affiliation in the *ethnic* sense was being expressed, the reality of an 'all-Russian' (*rossiiskoi*) empire was compelling enough to make the label 'Russian' relevant — perhaps even self-evident — to Jews living under the Russian crown, in a way that was not at all the case at the turn of the nineteenth century. The political 'nation' of Russia was being defined by territorial unity and unitary government. Jews 'belonging' to Russia were, in that sense, Russian.

Literary expression was given to these trends by various Jewish writers. Possibly one of the most direct examples is the novel *Goriachee vremia*, by Lev Levanda. Published in the early 1870s, the novel revolves around a protagonist, Arkadii Sorin, who declares: 'Our plan is to make the Jews into Russians. We live in Russia, and so we must be Russians.'²¹ Clearly, once again, the outstanding argument for adopting a Russian label was geo-political: 'we live in Russia'. To Levanda, such political realities deserved to be recognized by the Jewish population: Jews ought to consider Russia their homeland in the national sense. (The fact that the idea required substantiation by this kind of propaganda in the 1870s is illuminating. It testifies to the unresolved status of the issue.)

Among those who had resolved the issue for themselves, the idea of Russian Jewry appeared already self-evident. Looking back in retrospect to before the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish political activist Genrykh Sliozberg recalled:

Since my childhood I have been accustomed to think of myself first of all as a Jew. But from the very start of my conscious life, I felt myself also to be a son of Russia...To be a good Jew did not mean one could not be a Russian citizen, and vice versa. To be a good Russian citizen was no obstacle to being a good Jew, believing in national Jewish culture and being loyal to one's people and helping them as best one could. The affinity to Russian culture, which in the course of my conscious life, grew in giant strides, was in consonance with my loyalty to national Jewish culture.²²

Sliozberg articulated a rationale for a dual identity, combining Jewish ethnic affiliation with Russian civic and cultural affinity:

It was not difficult for us to reconcile Jewish nationality with Russian citizenship and to make Russian culture our own as much as our own

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Jewish culture...A Russian Jew could easily consider himself a Jew by nationality and a Russian by civic affiliation [*gosudarstvennosti*].²³

The distinction between nationality and citizenship — one that was logical enough to assert in a multinational empire — is made somewhat fuzzy by the ‘cultural’ character that Sliozberg assigned to both affiliations. Russian culture, perhaps much more than Russian citizenship, was highly prized. It conferred a sense of belonging that could be compared to a sense of nationality along lines familiar from the experience of Western Jewries. Such, however, was the case only for the most acculturated among the Jews, for whom Sliozberg was an able spokesman. Unlike Western Jews, however, who considered themselves to be Jews by religion only (and unlike even those Polish Jews who claimed to be Poles of the Mosaic faith), Sliozberg’s formulation managed to hold onto both national identities at once: ‘We were not a foreign element, for Russia had many nationalities, all of whom were united as citizens of the Russian state.’²⁴ In this formulation, then, ‘russianness’ became the common property of all the empire’s nationality groups, even though the ‘Russians’, narrowly defined, remained nationally distinct.

We have here a definition of Russian nationhood that was obviously identified with Russian nationality in the cultural sense, but beyond that, was also a political concept, rooted in the existence of the Russian empire, and transcending the sum of its individual parts. Such a definition reflected the penetration of Russian administration, with all its powerful centralism and autocratic symbolism, into all walks of life. In fact, the Russian state created and fostered this sense of ‘Russia’, and in so doing, it also created a Russian Jewry. Given the figures that we reviewed before on the minimal extent (among Jews) of Russian education, Russian as mother tongue, and even residence in ethnic Russia; given what is known about the continued separateness of Polish Jewry in a social, cultural and civil sense; and given the second-class citizenship endured by Jews in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, Russian Jewry could *only* be characterized as ‘Russian’ insofar as it was a Jewry that *pertained to Russia as a geo-political entity*.

The distinction between political and cultural loyalty, on the one hand, and ethnic affiliation on the other, is familiar to us from other multi-ethnic societies: those, like the United States, where ethnicity has no legal or territorial, or even linguistic ramifications; as well as those, like Canada, India, or even the United Kingdom, where territorial, linguistic and other distinctions are formally recognized, without thereby denying Canadian, Indian, or British nationhood.

Had Russia evolved democratically, following the February revolution of 1917, some version of that system might have developed there as well. The regime that took power at that time promulgated full civil equality for Jews, opening the way to a wider civic 'belonging'; to the possibility of feeling oneself to be not merely 'in' Russia or subject 'to' Russia, but to actually be 'of' Russia. The earlier historical trends toward a national Russian Jewry were undoubtedly escalated in the wake of this political change. Even under sovietization, these trends continued and were reinforced. By 1926, large numbers of Jews had moved out of the former Pale of Settlement, many of them settling in Russia itself.²⁵ Subsequently, the Soviet-German war and the accompanying slaughter of Jews in the German-occupied zones accelerated the demographic shift of the Jewish population toward central and northwestern Russia. The demographic changes were accompanied by an important linguistic shift, so that by the post-1945 period, Russian had taken the place of Yiddish as the most widespread vernacular of Jews. Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, the question of whether or not a 'Russian' Jewry existed, was definitively resolved. But, of course, this new 'Russian Jewry' lies beyond the purview of this chapter, and deserves to be addressed in its own historical and political context.

Suffice it to say, that the issue, seemingly settled, would be reopened in the 1990s, when the breakup of the Soviet Union led to the introduction of separate political citizenships and, in consequence, the designation of separate national Jewries.

NOTES

1. On Jewish leadership in Russia in the nineteenth century, see Eli Lederhendler, *The Road to Modern Jewish Politics: Political Tradition and Political Reconstruction in the Jewish Community of Tsarist Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 52–7, 68–81, 133–46.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–7.
3. Population figures from the census of 1897 are cited from Ben-Zion Dinur, 'Dmuta ha-historit shel ha-yahadut ha-rusit u-ve'ayot ha-heker ba', *Zion* 22, 2/3 (1957), p. 96.
4. See Artur Eisenbach, *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780–1870* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); cf. Ezra Mendelsohn, 'A Note on Jewish Assimilation in the Polish Lands', in Bela Vago (ed.), *Jewish Assimilation in Modern Times* (Boulder: Westview, 1981), pp. 141–9.
5. Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1916); cf. the historiographical summary in Binyamin Pinkus, *Yehudei Rusia u-Vrit ha-Mo'atsot, toledot mi'ut leumi* (Jerusalem/Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University, 1986), pp. 4–12, 19–20.
6. Iulii Gessen, *Istoriia evreiskogo naroda v Rossii*. 2 vols. Vol. 1 (Petrograd, 1916); Vol. 2 (Petrograd, 1925); cf. Pinkus, *Yehudei Rusia*, p. 20.
7. William O. McCagg, Jr., *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 223.
8. Dinur, 'Dmuta ha-historit', pp. 93–4.

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9. Ibid., pp. 98, 101, 110–11, 114–5.
10. On the dichotomous or dualistic view of modern Jewish history, see Jonathan Frankel, 'Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?' in Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community, The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 1–31.
11. Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), pp. 133–7.
12. Lederhendler, *Road to Modern Jewish Politics*, Ch. 5.
13. Robert A. Lewis, Richard H. Rowland and Ralph S. Clem, *Nationality and Population Change in Russia and the USSR: An Evaluation of Census Data, 1897–1970* (New York: Praeger, 1976), pp. 239, 415 (Appendix E.14).
14. Yehuda Slutzky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit ba-mea ha-tesha'-esre* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970), p. 35.
15. As late as 1912, figures on Jewish students enrolled at municipal and elementary schools in the Russian educational system throughout the empire show a total of only 67,000 — see Steven S. Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa, A Cultural History, 1794–1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 130; Yehuda Slutzky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit be-reishit ha-mea ha-esrim* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Diaspora Research Institute, 1978), p. 12.
16. On the confusion of national identities in Warsaw, see Stephen D. Corrsin, *Warsaw Before the First World War: Poles and Jews in the Third City of the Russian Empire, 1880–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 9, 11–12, 20, 28, 78, 107–8.
17. See Slutzky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit ba-mea ha-tesha'-esre*, pp. 13–36; Slutzky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit be-reishit ha-mea ha-esrim*, pp. 9–13.
18. Slutzky, *Ha-itonut ha-yehudit-rusit be-reishit ha-mea ha-esrim*, p. 12; Jehuda Reinhartz, Chaim Weizmann, *The Making of a Zionist Leader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 31–6; Jack Wertheimer, 'Between Tsar and Kaiser: The Radicalization of Russian-Jewish University Students in Germany', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 28 (1983), pp. 329–49.
19. Moshe Nahum Yerusalimsky, undated letter, ca. 1911: see Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Responses to Modernity: New Voices in America and Eastern Europe* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), pp. 100, 101 (doc. 15).
20. On Jewish political activity in preparation for the first Duma, see Alexander Orbach, 'The Jewish People's Group and Jewish Politics in Tsarist Russia, 1906–1914', *Modern Judaism* 10, 1 (1990), pp. 1–15.
21. Lev Levanda, 'Goriachee vremia', in *Evreiskaia biblioteka* 1 (1871), p. 347; also cited by Slutzky (1970), p. 100.
22. Genrykh Sliozberg, *Dela minuvshikh dnei. Zapiski russkogo evreia*, (Paris, [S. N.], 1933), Vol. 1, pp. 1–5; Vol. 2, pp. 42–67. Quoted in Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1967), p. 471.
23. Sliozberg, *Dela minuvshikh dnei*, Vol. 2, pp. 297, 302, 306.
24. Ibid., p. 302.
25. Lewis, et al., *Nationality and Population Change*, pp. 199, 238ff.

Patterns of Internal Jewish Migration in the Russian Empire

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The phenomenon of migration of East European Jews in the modern period before World War I is by no means a neglected area of research.* The attention given to migration is justified because large-scale population movements constitute one of the outstanding characteristics of the modern period — in general history as well as in Jewish history. However, in order to understand the role and dynamics of migration among Jews in the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth century, one must consider not only international and long-distance migration but also internal migration among Jews, including the distinctive features of Jewish migration as compared with migration in other populations. Once the scope and features of migration among Jews are understood, it will be possible to examine some of its consequences. Important studies have been devoted to the mass migration of East European Jews to the United States,¹ and a few to large-scale movements of Jews within the tsarist empire, as well as to Poland.² Yet, to the best of this author's knowledge, there is no comprehensive study of migration by Jews within the Russian empire.³

It is difficult to determine the degree and pattern of internal mobility of East European Jews before the end of the nineteenth century. One could point, of course, to dramatic events in the past, particularly persecutions and wars, which led to significant population movements. The most notable of these were the massacres of 1648

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which drastically depopulated many Jewish communities of the Polish Commonwealth and led to the flight of refugees to destinations as far away as Amsterdam. There were similar events, albeit on a smaller scale, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, they do not seem to have involved anything close to a majority of the Jewish population.⁴ Large-scale internal migration over long distances would have blurred regional distinctiveness. However, the persistence of regional dialects of Yiddish up to the twentieth century, as well as local foods, customs and other cultural elements, suggest that such a migration did not take place.⁵ The long-distance migrations in the Middle Ages, which created what would be the Jewish communities of the Russian Empire,⁶ were apparently not followed by continued inter-regional migration, though there were, of course, innumerable cases of individuals who moved from region to region and there might have been high levels of internal migration within regions.

The first half of the nineteenth century saw a significant population flow. Tens of thousands of Jews moved from the Pale to southern Russia and to southern Ukraine, either out of a desire to take advantage of opportunities in an expanding economy or to settle on the land in the framework of a government plan to turn the Jews into farmers. By World War I close to one million Jews lived in the southern *gubernii*, in which perhaps 100,000 had lived in the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ Significantly, these migrants formed the basis for important Jewish communities in the south, such as Odessa and Ekaterinoslav. New patterns of behaviour, culture and education which developed in these communities, such as russification and Zionism, influenced other Jewish communities of the Russian empire. Though large, the numbers involved in this movement were limited and a general redistribution of the Jewish population was not taking place at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century large numbers of Jews were clearly on the move (see Tables 2-1 and 2-2). Not all were long-distance migrants (see Tables 2-3 and 2-4). Many moved from small towns to regional centres and between neighbouring cities. Published Russian statistical reports do not provide direct sources for following these movements because data on migration was not reported by religion, nationality or language, all of which would have provided a gauge for Jewish migration. However, a careful reading of the 1897 census material gives a rough picture of the scope of internal Jewish migration.⁸

Among the various population characteristics described in the volumes of the census are the numbers of residents by social status

and by geographic origin (same *uezd* or *guberniia*, different *uezd* or *guberniia*). These data shed no direct light on the geographic background of the Jews in question. However, analysis of the data can be enlightening. Jews fell almost entirely in the ranks of one social class, the *meshchane*,⁹ and constituted over half of the *meshchane* in most of the locations where they lived. Therefore, data on the movements of the *meshchane* should give a very good indication of the geographic patterns of migration of the Jews. It can be assumed that geographical mobility among Jews was certainly not less than geographical mobility of non-Jews among the *meshchane*. In fact, Jews were probably more mobile than non-Jews, so this is a conservative working hypothesis. Tables 2-1 and 2-2 present data on the percentage of *meshchane* born in the *uezd* in which they were living. The lower the percentage, the greater the role of migrants in the *meshchane* population. The *guberniia* at the top of the list are those in which the greatest proportion of the population were migrants. Figures 2-1 and 2-2 compare male and female patterns, and they are clearly highly correlated. It should be noted that at that time in the Russian empire (excluding Congress Poland), about 1.7 million Jews were recorded as urban, and another 0.8 million in Poland. The population of rural¹⁰ Jews was about 2.1 million in the Russian empire and 0.5 million in Poland. The figures were more or less even with a growing trend toward urbanization.

Tables 2-1 and 2-2 present the share of locally born among the Jewish *meshchane*. The data allow us to distinguish between different types of migrants by the distance they travelled. Presumably, the dynamics of moving a short distance from home are very different from those involved in moving far away. The census data do not provide exact details about distance travelled but they do divide migrants into three categories: those who were born in the same *guberniia* but in a different *uezd*; those who were born in a different *guberniia*; and those who were born abroad. The numbers born abroad were insignificant enough to justify concentrating on the first two. The difference between migration within a *guberniia* and between *gubernii* is not always one of distance. There were undoubtedly, many cases where, in fact, inter-*guberniia* migrants moved short distances between two nearby points located on opposite sides of an artificial administrative border. Nonetheless, generally speaking, inter-*guberniia* travel tended to involve longer journeys than moves within a *guberniia*. Thus comparing the relative size of the two groups can give us a rough indication of the types of migrants within a pool of newcomers.