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Abstract of the Doctoral Thesis

The Evolution of National Identity in Young Women Emigrant

PhD Coordinator:

Prof. Petru Iluţ

PhD Candidate:

Rivka (Rodi) Schipper

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Structure of the thesis

Key words: *the process of immigration, national identity, dynamic and developmental identity, constructing Identity, mixed methodology, mechanisms of narrative alternative, feelings of empowerment, groundbreaking experience, otherness, feeling of belonging, experience of continuity, preserving the culture of the country of origin, hyphenated identity.*

Introduction

The subject of immigration and its consequences has received much attention in social research which sees its role, not in ontological and theoretical discoveries alone, but also in creating usable knowledge, for example by providing ideas for coping with the international phenomenon of immigration which has grown to enormous proportions and has become a characteristic of the modern age.

The purpose of this research is to examine the processes within which young women struggle with the problems of national identity and the cultures to which they belong as Jews from the USSR following migration to Israel. It tries to learn about the ways they perceive the collective identity of the new society into which they have been absorbed and the level of their identification with it or with parts of its makeup at different times - from their immigration until the time of the research. It also explores the ramifications of this new identity on their inclusive identities and the different interactions between their old and new 'selves'.

The Study Population

The research group consists of young women who immigrated to Israel seven to seventeen years ago as part of the wave of immigration following the political and social collapse of the former USSR, which began in the 1990s and is still continuing. As part of their compulsory national service all of the women (who participated in this study volunteered to work in formal educational frameworks with children who had immigrated to Israel with their parents. During this time they also studied education once a week at the college where I teach but, at the time of my meetings with them for the purpose of this study, they were already in their twenties, most of them were married and some of them were mothers.

Methodology

This study uses the type of mixed methodology in which both qualitative and quantitative paradigms are used interactively on a continuum in the process of collecting the data. Modern scholars (Creswell, 2003 and others) see the combination of quantitative and qualitative research as the most suitable approach to examine multifaceted phenomena and, in line with the suggestion of Newman et al. (2003), it

bases itself upon qualitative research with the addition of quantitative findings for a work with this kind of goal.

This study uses a pattern of research that utilizes both paradigms continuously in such a way that both of them are used together in the same research, at the same stages.

The quantitative part at this work has been carried out using questionnaires which include closed questions that ensure easy processing in the statistical analysis. It also makes use of an existing questionnaire that was developed in 2007 by The Institute of Immigration and Social Integration at the Ruppin Academic Center (Semyonov et al., 2007) that deals with identity and culture and was considered suitable to the purposes of the present research.

The qualitative part of the research makes use of two methods in the form of personal and social interviews. The first was group interview**s**, which were constructed as "focus groups": (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and the second was "in-depth interviews" (Johnson, 2001) which were constructed as "narrative interviews" (Chase, 2003).

The information gathered through the three models was examined and interpreted by the following quantitative and qualitative research analysis tools:

a. descriptive statistics used for analyzing the data from the questionnaires.

b. an approach based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) approach known as 'Grounded Theory' which is used to examine the data collected from the discussions in the focus groups This divides the text of the dialogue into selected segments of life according to themes or categories while, in the stage that follows, the information in this initial form is translated and set out according to theoretical concepts.

The data analysis of the interviewed narratives relies upon three models:

a. the formative model of Gergen & Gergen (1988); b. Spector-Marzel's six mechanism model of narrative alternatives (2010); and c. the Kupferberg, Green and Gilat's explanatory model for personal stories (2002).

The interpretive analysis simultaneously combines the use of these models which map the text each in its own way according to its content or form, while each model lays stress upon a specific aspect or direction, provides enrichment and makes the information and its meaning more distinct.

The narratives, or the story plot units within them (narrations), are categorized using Gergen and Gergen (1988) according to the plot structures into forms that

express progress, retreat or combinations of both, as well as according to narrative structures whose typologies have been taken from the field of literary criticism such as the novel, the comedy, the tragedy and the satire and different combinations of them.

The research tools of Spektor-Marzel for the analysis of narratives examine them, i.e. mostly their characteristics, using six mechanisms of narrative alternatives. The latter essentially expose the essence of the characteristics that have been included, emphasized or detailed in the narratives, as well as what has been left out of them and silenced, what has been told in a superficial way and what interpretations have been provided for them in light of the central goal that becomes increasingly clear through the telling of the story. After the findings of the three models were combined and synchronized, a total and complete picture of the studied phenomenon was achieved.

In the light of the above, it must be said that the triangulation (Maxwell, 1996) strategy, which relates to the cross-referencing of information or conclusions using many procedures and sources, was used in this research. The analytical method used by Kupferberg, Green & Gilat (2002) which is, as aforesaid, also used in the analytical process, is essentially sociolinguistic in nature and focuses on research into the structure of the story delivered in the natural spoken language of the narrator which is studied using the tools of discourse analysis.

The main findings of the research

In this work it was found that the feeling of having an Israeli identity was most dominant. This appears prominently in both the quantitative findings and the qualitative part of the research - in the focus groups and narratives which reciprocally strengthen the quantitative findings.

This finding is distinctly different from the findings from other studies in regard to the declared feeling of identity expressed by immigrants to Israel from other countries in parallel times, since most of them see themselves, first and foremost, as Jews, and only a small part of them prefer to declare an Israeli identity. The general population of immigrants from the former Soviet Union also feels that they have more of a Jewish identity, but this is not greater in force than their feeling of having an Israeli identity or having one that relates to their country of origin.

Other studies, however, show that the component of Israeli identity for women and young people among this population is higher and these variables do match up with the research group. Nevertheless, the feeling of Israeliness that the women in the research group have is more prominent.

The Israeli identity of most of the women in the research group is presented as a positive alternative to the Jewish identity they had under the Soviet regime and which is perceived by them as a threatening identity, which practically and emotionally imprisons those who have it. This was even metaphorically defined by one of the women as 'a prison'. In their stories the Israeli identity is generally linked with concepts of support (mainly in schools) and   of freedom, autonomic choice and female empowerment. Feelings that relate to these concepts reach their peak of expression in their descriptions of their period of army service in Israel as soldier-teachers, a period that one of the women in her narrative called the stepping stone for the rest of her life.

One must note that in all the narratives of the research group, every woman, in her own way, points out the connection between the positive army experience and the strengthening of her Israeli identity. The subject of the army service also came up in the focus groups where it is also described by one of the women as a unique Israeli experience, in which the emphasis was placed upon the interpersonal relationships especially in the soldier-teacher units. The interpersonal relationships reflect social cohesion, power of relations, cooperation, mutual support and respect for the cultural values of everybody there. Thus it is clear that the IDF is indeed seen as a clear agent of 'Israelization'.

There are those who see the army service, from structural and symbolic points of view, as a 'rite of initiation' (Lieblich, 1989; Azarya, 1989) which acts as an important component in the formation of the Israeli identity and the young people who do not go through this 'rite of initiation' are sometimes not seen as full members of Israeli society with equal rights. This perhaps explains why young people express a high motivation to serve in the IDF.

For the women in the research group the army service in the soldier-teacher unit filled additional roles that connect up with their social world view and the reality of their lives as new immigrants from the USSR. Their successful activity with immigrant children as soldier-teachers gave them the feeling of fulfilling themselves, while developing their autonomous functioning, and empowering their sense of

capability and competence, as well as moving them towards making the decision to have a career in education. It also won positive acceptance from their families and friends. This chapter in their lives enhanced the separation process from their parents and helped them construct adult, separate and independent identities.

One can conclude that the army service was perceived by them as a worthy, correct and desirable demand made of them and, in their stories, we find arguments that support patriotism and army or other national service as a duty that should be demanded from all citizens as a necessary act of making a contribution to the public good. This, after all, is the expression of the collective values they were educated towards and which continued to exist in the USSR even after the fall of communism (Horowitz & Brosch, 2011).

We can see from what they say that, as immigrants, they saw their army service as a promising entry ticket into Israeli society as people who had contributed as equally to it as other Israelis and as those who had experienced part of their lives that could be listed in the national collective resume of authentic Israeli experiences. These components related to their army service as teacher- soldiers, which describe the feeling of belonging to society, the empowering success they experienced in the field of education and their identification with the collective values it expressed.   The latter expressed” have all helped to establish the foundations of their Israeli identity.

In the parts of the narratives that were calmly related, there were hardly any faults in the picture of Israel presented, but there were a few mentions in the narratives of feelings of being insulted or angered by the different types of labeling that were attached to them as women immigrants. However, in a response to a direct question asked about this matter, after their stories had been told, they even related to this uncomfortable topic as a minor thing.

In the focus groups, nonetheless, an entirely different picture was revealed in which the reality described in their complaints is replete with situations in which the immigrants are labeled and excluded. Feelings of 'otherness', and strangeness, were echoed by all of them in their subjective experiences, whether due to visible elements, meaning the way they looked as immigrants, or the foods they ate or to moral contexts – mainly involving gender issues. But the main thing that appeared in the discussions was the way the women immigrants related to their stigmatization as being morally questionable from a sexual point of view. Every one of the women indicated that the term 'Russian slut' was thrown at them at least once and that there were situations in

which this was accompanied by certain types of behavior towards them that expressed the way they were perceived by the speaker as being less valued. The label of slut insulted them, made them angry and defiant and their reaction to this, or so they say, was something that swung between ignoring it, as a sign of contempt of the person who related to them in this way, to direct reactions that were both verbal and physical. The more positive experience regarding the attitude towards immigrants in the army from the point of view of the atmosphere, the social relationships and the significance of their roles in their military units, is described, unfortunately, by them as a *"social bubble"*.

It appears that in their life stories the immigrant women chose to remove or deny the situations which were not comfortable for them for personal or social-national reasons. From a personal point of view, they do this so as not to damage the picture of their personal realities which most of them described as positive during their interviews. From a social-national point of view, this occurred as the result of the clear reduction of negative phenomena described about Israeli society, ten years after the beginning of the large wave of immigration from the USSR, as a result of the large number of victims among the immigrants from terrorist attacks in Israel from 2000-2001 (Almog, 2011).

In the discussion group the interaction between them created a framework effect of mutual encouragement, in which they could raise these experiences which were an inseparable part of their lives as women immigrants.

In regard to the matter of their ethnic Jewish identity, a finding that is reflected through all the research tools is the fact that there is an unambiguous feeling of Jewish identity in every one of the women in the study, that is perceived to be deterministic and an immanent part of their existence – also among those who declared that the Israeli identity represents them more. Moreover, in the narratives and focus groups, their striving to preserve this and give its experience a positive significance was expressed among all the women, even those who had not experienced this at all in their homes.

The women in the research group all grew up in hostile and threatening realities because of their Jewishness but, in contrast to what has been written above, most of them do not describe any antagonism to this Jewish identity.

The stories mostly focus on the details of how they struggled with the reality and seem to be expressions of survival defense mechanisms, usually found on the

continuum of flight to fight. There are reactions such as ignoring, receding into the world of the imagination, the distancing of the problem and its normalization – meaning a sort of rationalization in which the problem becomes 'normalized' and not part of a specific detail from the point of view of accepting reality as it is and as inevitable. In addition, there are also some active verbal and even physical reactions. Since individuals are, up to a point, defined by their social identities they, according to the theories about social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), strive to achieve positive social identities.

On the basis of this approach and, in the light of the unpleasant experiences as Jews some of them had, one can understand why, being young women, they have chosen their new Israeli identities – which have been derived from their old ones as Jews.

This is, for example, reflected in one of the narratives where the narrator points out in her story that she grew up with a negative attitude towards her original Jewish identity because of the negative experience she had had with it (i.e. the anti -Semitic attitude of her teachers in the school in the Ural Mountains of Russia because of which she hated studying) On the other hand, her Israeli identity is described positively because of the connection in her consciousness with the accepting and supportive treatment she experienced in her Israeli school, which resulted in a complete revolution in her attitude to studying. This revolution reached its peak when the narrator reached a decision to develop from being just a pupil, who accepts her studies positively, to becoming a teacher with a strong professional awareness regarding her work.

The positive experience she had regarding her Jewish identity in Israel, in contrast to the negative experiences she had as a child in the USSR, acted as a basis for the construction of a new positive social identity – an Israeli identity.

In the process of constructing a new identity for herself, something which generally accompanies the immigrant for all his/her life and which is non-linear in development (Mirsky, 2005), the narrator tells about the awakening of a need to connect to her Jewishness which arose from the feeling of the strength of her Israeli identity.

It seems that the immigration to Israel provided these women, and all the Jewish immigrants as well, with a comfortable and positive basis for creating a renewed connection with their Jewishness which had been considerably reduced in their lives in the Soviet Union, in the wake of the general policy of the Soviet regime. During the

seventy years of its rule, the regime forbade the organization of any focal point that might be a competing force to its ideology and, as a result, religion was repressed and the authority and functioning of its communal institutions were almost completely eradicated. For the Jews, this process of denying them the ability to carry on an ethnic/religious life was especially prominent in "White Russia" (Belarus) and in the large cities, to the degree that, in most of them, their Jewishness was formally reduced to their registration as Jewish nationals in a passport (Gozman, 1997).

The aspiration for a renewed connection with their Jewish identities is not only a personal need for these women, but reflects a yearning for authentic belonging, since these same women, who were aware of their Jewishness from childhood, had not had the experience of belonging to their ethnic group, owing to the fact that the existence of such a framework was forbidden. This aspiration expresses an immanent need that has not been realized in their lives up till now and which, in classical psychological theories, is presented as a basic need in man.

For instance, according to Maslow (1970), this is a psychological need that precedes all other psychological needs that come after the basic physical needs.

This phenomenon, that is reflected in what they say, appears to be a yearning to be participants in such a social experience and to have the authentic feeling of being part of it.

For example, one of the women describes a unique social experience that took place when she was 16 years old, in 2001 in Kazakhstan, where she used to live, when she met Jewish youth at a summer seminar, which was run by the Jewish Agency in order to prepare them for immigration to Israel. She said that she had never had such an experience in her whole life and described it as an epiphany. In fact, in this encounter, for the first time in her life, she experienced being part of a group of young people who were from the same ethnic group as her and the powerful effect of this experience led to her aliyah to Israel. When she arrived, she asked to undergo conversion, despite the fact that, formally, being the daughter of a Jewish mother, she was anyway considered to be Jewish according to Jewish law. She explained that it was important for her to understand her identity and to feel that she meaningfully belonged to her primordial ethnic community.

The strengthening of the attachment to Judaism also serves the component of continuity which is dominant in a person's identity (Erickson, 1987). In this way, for example, the women describe the central place studies play in their lives.

Consequently, the role played by studying is described as a Jewish value that they absorbed through the education they received. Studies and education indeed were a means of fitting in the alien culture for the Soviet Jews, but, more than this, it was something that made their peripheral ethnic group stronger.

This yearning for studying was defined by one of the women as:*" ...a Jewish tradition and way of life"* and the value of sticking to one's studying, together with other values such as family closeness and respect, was absorbed at home in Azerbaijan. Not only does the above young woman wish to preserve her belonging to Jewish society, but she also intends to instill this in her pupils in Israel.

These women act as learners and, in their choice of education as a profession as an expression of a Jewish value that they were educated towards from early childhood and which they are now realizing as adults, it is reflected a line of continuity in their lives.

It seems that the narrators consciously, and sometimes unconsciously, organize aspects of their 'selves', taken from the inventory of their biographical events that express belongingness to Jewish culture. In this way they create a continuous and continuing, coherent experience that gives meaningful expression to their existence. What is expressed in the narratives is both the effort made by the narrators to preserve their Jewish identities which they see as deterministic, and the need to provide it with new meaning.

The vital importance of continuity in their identities is expressed both in the quantitative and qualitative parts of the research also in regard to the non-Jewish Russian culture which most of them see themselves as belonging to, and with which they express the desire to widen their contact, despite the fact that the place the country of origin plays in their identities is not great.

In the statistical findings which refer to the answers to the question about the level of importance that the women immigrants attribute to the preservation of the culture and customs of their countries of origin, the research group expressed a stronger desire than the general group of immigrants from the USSR to preserve this culture (81% as opposed to 69% as adjusted).

The argument of the theory of integration, that describes time as a central component for integrating into the absorbing country, does not correspond to the findings in my research group, since an examination of the variable of the time of their immigration to Israel shows that it is not necessarily those who have been the

longest time in Israel who have reduced the importance of preserving the culture of their country of origin. I assume that, through their educational work and their studies, they have developed a higher awareness of the place of the original culture in their lives.

The question of the relevance of the culture of the country of origin as part of the Jewish-Israeli identity makes the wave of immigration from the USSR in the 1990s different from previous ones. Although the previous waves of immigration did bring diaspora influences with them from their countries of origin, these did not go beyond the definition of their Jewishness. The 'Russian' immigration presents a picture that is different, since the Russian immigrants mixed non-Jewish components into their culture, not only as those who experienced it, but also as those who played a part in fashioning it and were its purveyors. This was the focus of the criticism of the veteran Israelis who had to deal with something like this for the first time. The immigrants from the USSR are defined by some in the absorbing Israeli society as being part of a 'non-Jewish immigration' and the immigrants reject to be presented as such in this light as an insult and protest against it.

. The rejection of this perception of the veteran Israelis in general is based on the argument that while the reality of the lives of most of the immigrants were indeed not very Jewish in the accepted way, they never abandoned their Jewish culture and values, and even included components of 'universal culture' (as they define it) or Russian culture in their definition of this. In this spirit, a number of the women in one of the focus groups even argued that Israeli Jewishness should conduct itself in more universalist ways that would enrich and empower it, exactly as it happened throughout Jewish history. They went on to say that, in their opinions, this approach is also consistent with the multi-cultural approach that has become popular in Israeli society. In contrast, there were women who supported a position which was more sectarian and particular, and who argued for preserving the unique nature of Jewishness in the State of Israel and see it as a status that is fundamental to maintaining national fortitude. One of the women describes this as an approach that inspired people in their Jewish homes in the villages of Ukraine and, in her opinion, it is also important in Israel since it is a country surrounded by enemies.

Conclusions

To summarize, the Israeli identity of most of the women is a modern national expression of Jewishness and, when they belong to it, they see it as having a positive value. This is in contrast to the feelings some of them have about the USSR which they connect with a negative experience for their Jewish identity.

Having an Israeli identity is the renewal of the feeling of belonging, of continuity and is perceived as the outcome of the strong foundation-laying experience they had in their army service as soldier-teachers. During their army service in education, they began to develop their professional identities, and while this challenged the element of continuity in their sense of identity (their connection to Judaism), on the other hand, it created a solid foundation for belonging to Israeli society.

One needs to note that, on the social-cultural level, one of the central findings in the research is the reflection of the research group's complex identity which includes the combination of Israeli, Jewish and Russian components in different degrees. Amongst some of them, this can be defined as a multi-hyphenated identity that is: Israeli-Jewish-Russian, in that order. This is in contrast to previous immigrants from the USSR who have defined themselves only as 'Israelis' or, alternatively, as 'Jewish Israelis' and 'Russian-Israelis'.

On the personal level, Israeliness creates the option for the immigrants to express themselves in their own way as mainly free women who have chosen this way of life as an autonomous expression of their essential nature. The process of constructing their collective and personal identities has taken years and the stages they have gone through have not been linear in development. It is a unique process which mainly crystallizes actively and is what gives their lives significance.

The research results need cautious extrapolation due to some *limits of the research* consisting in: a. The size of our sampling is not enough in order to sustain theoretical generalizations. One future possibility is to extend this micro-research to a representative sample of young population (girls); b. It is obvious that many other groups of young people have more or less similar identity issues, not just young Israelis immigrants from former USSR. One productive sociological extension in this direction can be to compare 'Russians-Israelis' adolescents groups (girls or/and boys) with other adolescents arrived in Israel from other cultures and countries, in the light of challenge and identity construction.

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