

When Time and Space Are No Longer the Same: Stories about Immigration¹

Maria N. Yelenevskaya, Larisa Fialkova

This paper analyzes personal narratives of immigrants to Israel from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Time is constituted by social activities, and its perception varies across cultures and changes over time. Growing up in a culture we internalize a specific system of social time characterized by regularities, cycles, and repetitions. This paper demonstrates that all of it changes when immigrants find themselves in a new culture. The loss of stability is viewed as a temporary life in a temporary home. While before emigration people are future-oriented, upon immigration they tend to emphasize the significance of their past. Perception of space also undergoes transformations. Some narrators suffer from “claustrophobia” caused by moving from the largest country in the world to such a small country as Israel. In addition a marked difference in the climate, flora and fauna lead to the shift in the perception of exterior and interior space. In order to adapt to the new environment, immigrants attempt to interpret it in terms of familiar cultural codes.

Introduction

Time and space are among the most overworked categories discussed in various fields related to society, from philosophy and sociology, to psychology and behavioral geography, to literary studies, folkloristics and linguistics. Scholars in these disciplines are less concerned with physical characteristics of time and space than with their social perspectives, symbolic dimensions and cultural differences in their perception (Adamowski, 1999; Arutiunova, 1998; Bakhtin, 1979a, 1979b; Bausinger, 1990; Cassirer, 1966; Gold, 1980; Kellerman, 1989; Lebedeva, 1999; Lefebvre, 1991, Lotman, 1992a, 1992b; Ricoeur, 1988, Turaeva, 1979). This study focuses on the role of time and space perception in the evolution of immigrants’ identity as expressed in personal narratives of our contemporaries, immigrants to Israel from the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU), both Jews and non-Jews. Material for the article is drawn from the interviews conducted in 1999-2001. The total sample comprises 115 interviews, approximately 75 hours of recording, transcribed in full². The interviews were conducted in Russian, the mother tongue of both the interviewees and the interviewers. All the informants immigrated to Israel in the 1990s; for all of them the experience of immigration still

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² Sixteen interviews were conducted and put at our disposal for analysis by the students of the University of Haifa: Hanna Shmulian, Svetlana Berenshtein, Marina El-Kayam and Alina Sanina, the rest of the interviews were conducted by the authors.

remains vivid, and reflections about it involve a range of emotions. The context of interviews varies; some conversations were held in the homes of interviewers or interviewees, others in offices, still others in public places, such as parks, beaches, etc. In general, the interviews present a multi-genre discourse, and include dialogic exchange with interviewers and/or other interviewees, as well as narratives proper, i.e. complete and structured stories (Labov and Waletzky 1966, Labov, 1972).

Immigrant stories, a sub-genre of personal narratives, have been studied by folklorists in various countries (Bar-Itzhak, 1998; Elbaz, 1987; Dégh, 1978, 1985; Dorson, 1964; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1978, 1983; Noy, 1984). Until recently folklore of the immigrants to Israel from the FSU was not researched. According to our observations, there are a number of situations, in which stories of immigration are told: they are an indispensable part of festivities, such as birthday parties, anniversaries, weddings, etc. Besides, “old timers” share their experience with newcomers in order to encourage or warn them against the pitfalls of life in the new country. In other words, these stories mostly circulate within the immigrant community. By contrast with the topics we studied previously, e.g. the image of the Other, and lucky coincidences in immigrants’ stories, deliberations about time and space seldom form complete well-structured narratives (Yelenevskaya & Fialkova, 2001; Fialkova & Yelenevskaya, 2001). In most cases they appear in accounts of the pre-emigration image of Israel, descriptions of the first impressions of the country, and reflections about nostalgia. While passages devoted to the adaptation to the new space and familiarization with the new system of social time appear in virtually all the interviews, not all the informants are conscious of how closely these processes are connected with the process of acculturation.

Immigration: A plunge into unfamiliar space and time

It is axiomatic for social scientists that time is a social construction. (Adam, 1990: 42). Because it is constituted by social activity, its perception varies across cultures and changes over time. Growing up in a culture we internalize a certain system of social time characterized by regularities, cycles, and repetitions. Eviatar Zerubavel points out that “The temporal regularity of our social world has some very significant cognitive implications. In allowing us to have certain expectations regarding the temporal structure of our environment, it certainly helps us considerably to develop some sense of orderliness. (...) Temporal irregularity, on the other hand, contributes considerably to the development of a strong sense of uncertainty.” (1981, 12).

First and foremost, the novelty of social time for immigrants to Israel is manifested in a different calendar. The Jewish lunisolar calendar, used to determine religious holidays, starts from the Creation and reckons time from 3761 BC. So the year 2001 of the Gregorian calendar corresponds to 5761. Immigrants also have to get used to a different division of a week into weekdays and the weekend, Friday and Saturday instead of Saturday and Sunday being the days of rest. All, and in particular those coming from the North of the FSU, are surprised to find out how early the workday begins and that in the middle of the week, on Tuesday, many offices are closed in the afternoon. Changes in the institutional time are reflected in the fact that some secular holidays celebrated in the USSR and much loved by the people, e.g. the New Year, the International Women’s Day and the Victory Day, are regular workdays in Israel. On the other hand, Jewish

religious holidays, which are also state holidays of Israel, are not always meaningful for the former Soviets.

Government institutions in Israel make use of both calendars. Official papers often carry two dates, and various institutional forms may require the marking of the year and month according to the Jewish calendar. The radio channel broadcasting for immigrants in their mother tongues always mentions the Jewish date, so do the Israeli radio and TV channels for Hebrew speakers. In spite of this none of the interviewees uses the Jewish chronology in reference to time, the only exception being days of the week. In Hebrew these are either marked alphabetically or numbered; e.g. Sunday is *yom aleph* or *yom rishon*, the 1st day; Monday is *yom bet* or *yom sheni*, the 2nd day, etc. By contrast, in the Soviet and post-Soviet calendars, the first day of the week is Monday and the last one is Sunday. The difference in the internalization of the new time system—fast acquisition of the days of the week and slow familiarization with the dates, years and months—can be explained by the role of the former in everyday life. While the difference in the division of monthly and yearly cycles hardly influences the life of urban dwellers, particularly if they are secular, the difference in the weekly cycles is experienced by newcomers from the very first day in Israel. As a result, it is customary among immigrants to name days of the week in Hebrew, this being one of the most pervasive cases of code mixing. In the mind of an immigrant, the association between Sunday and a day off lingers on, while the first day of the week, whatever it is called, is linked to the beginning of the workweek. The weekly cycle is a purely artificial construct, and by virtue of its conventionality is subject to confusion (Zerubavel, 1981: 27). The shift in the system of a weekly cycle increases the possibility of errors in reckoning the order of days.

As regards the similarities between the systems of social time in Israel and in the USSR, two are of particular interest. Both the establishment of the Soviet republic in 1917 and the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 signified a break in continuity. The two dates were the crucial points in history and were often treated by ideologists as the creation of a New World; thus both dates are similar in the sacral meaning ascribed to them by society. Another point is the importance of time in Judaism. Like in many religions time is divided into sacred and profane, moreover, it is sanctified. The past is viewed as the national and universal memory, and certain events of the past have a unique holiness. Observing religious norms on the days that mark these events is extremely important (Kellerman, 1989: 76). In the Soviet Union, religious holidays were prohibited. However, the state holidays that replaced them, e.g. the Day of the October revolution, the Day of the Soviet Constitution, the International Labor Day, etc. were also to some extent sanctified. They were highly ritualistic and charged with ideological meanings. It is not accidental that they were referred to as “the red days of the calendar”. The system imposed their importance upon the minds of the people by making teams and individual workers pledge labor achievements in commemoration of the Soviet holidays. Citizens were encouraged and sometimes even forced to participate in festive demonstrations. Naturally, in the last decades of the Soviet power, in the period of mass disillusionment with the system, the result was skepticism and contempt for celebration of holidays with which people no longer identified. Sometimes the ironic attitude to “compulsory” celebration affects immigrants’ attitude to the holidays of the new country.

In our material there are instances of reflections about both time and space, but thoughts about space prevail. Immigration is always a spatial change, and a change of territory. Human territory is a multidimensional notion, one that according to John R. Gold, is not limited to physiological needs, but serves social and personal needs as well. Gold emphasizes the significance of individual and social fixed territories “which are commonly used as a means to satisfy human needs for status and recognition, and as a medium through which the self-image of the possessor may be communicated to the outside world.” (1980: 86). Every immigrant loses one of the most valued personal territories—home. Yurii Lotman notes that among the universal themes of the world folklore the antithesis of the Home and Anti-home has always been important. The former is one’s own home, safe, and culturally organized--the space protected by the deities, while the latter is “the forest home”, alien, demonic space, and a place of temporary death. Finding oneself in such space is equivalent to the journey to the *Other World*. The archaic models of consciousness linked to this opposition are stable and productive in the history of culture (1997: 748). The importance of Home as a refuge from the omnipresent “System” increased after decades of communal life in the USSR, when not only apartments, but even rooms were sometimes shared by several families. “My house” may not have been the “fortress” of the British, but it was one of the main components of wellbeing and stability. That’s why many of our informants have bitter memories of the feeling of homelessness that haunted them in the first period of immigrant life.

In order to understand the spatial world of the former Soviets we also have to touch on the issue of borders. The importance of the concept of “border” is reflected in the Russian language. Thus L.B. Lebedeva, who investigated semantic features of the noun “border” and its derivatives, points out that it has an essential bearing on our psychological relations with space. The primary semantic components of the word are *ogranichenie* (limitation) and *razgranichenie* (demarcation), yet the variety of other meanings expressed by the lexeme in different combinations is virtually unmatched in other languages (2000: 95, 97). In the context of our interviews the most frequent combinations are “go/be abroad” and “cross the border”. They show that “border crossing” is still perceived as a crucial event of life by the former Soviets.

Interestingly, the words, “emigration”, “immigration” and their derivatives have



Picture 1: Chamomiles are as wild and unruly as they are at home.

retained the stigma of the Soviet times and in some sense still remain a taboo among the Russian speakers in Israel. Israeli society as a whole considers arrival of Jews in Israel repatriation; Zionists see it as a duty and religious Jews as a *mitzvah* (a commandment), yet few of our interviewees apply the term “repatriants” to

themselves. Almost none of the informants use any of the three mentioned words in the interviews, although it is difficult to imagine a more appropriate context for them than a story about immigration. Instead interviewees use the neutral verbs of movement “leave”, “depart”, “come”, “arrive”, which function as euphemisms.

Our interviewees have absorbed several cultural traditions. One is the Slavic perception of borders, which separate “*Our world*” from the “*Other world*”. In the Slavic cultures border crossing has negative connotations and is often associated with crime, danger and death. Numerous rituals performed on the border point to the role of borders in social life and in a metaphysical perception of life and death (Tolstoj, 1995: 537-540). Shared attitude to borders can be traced to Russian folktales, in which “not only are people who come into the village from outside suspect; anyone who has left home and traveled, thus crossing boundaries in space, seems to be incapable of returning to the village except as one of the unquiet dead” (Moyle, 1989: 89).

In the Soviet times, the concept of border crossing was charged with ambivalence. Official ideology associated it with betrayal of Motherland and its ideals while at least some part of the population perceived it as an escape from the suffocating system and poverty, and associated life outside the USSR with freedom and prosperity. And finally, in the Jewish tradition, returning to Israel is both a duty and a privilege. Although in the majority Soviet Jews were secular and assimilated, the notion of the Promised Land was not obliterated from the collective consciousness, but was preserved even though in the forms very different from traditional ones, e.g. in jokes. This intricate maze of cultural traditions is represented in the analyzed narratives. In most cases we fail to find a consistent system of beliefs, rather we see their eclectic combination.

In the shared perception of space, we see a similarity between the two cultures, the Israeli, and the Soviet, in that both countries had to experience isolation. In the early stages of its existence the Soviet Union was surrounded by capitalist countries. The reiteration of the ideological mantra “the country is encircled by enemies” developed the psychology of the besieged in several generations of the Soviet people. Then, after World War II, the country was again cut off by the “iron curtain” of the Cold War. In Israel too, years of economic boycott and hostile relations with the neighbors have bred the perception of the alien world encroaching onto the country.

The fundamental difference in the perception of space by the two cultures stems from the difference in the size of the countries: Israel and the FSU. Soviet ideology always emphasized the importance of vast territory. The fact that the USSR occupied a huge part of the land surface was a source of great pride. In Israel, the small dimensions of the country increase the value of every inch of the territory in the eyes of the inhabitants. According to A. Kellerman, “Zionism may be interpreted as a spatial ideology par excellence” (1989, 84). This is particularly important for immigrants from the FSU, who suffer from claustrophobia and fear even the most modest territorial concessions when peace with Israel’s neighbors is negotiated. The change of territorial dimensions seems to affect the imagination of immigrants irrespective of their age and education.

Vast and small spaces: Power v. insecurity

The excerpts quoted below are permeated with explicit and tacit comparisons of the space of the two countries, and the new country tends to be at a disadvantage. The

antitheses focus on physical and symbolic dimensions, the most frequent being: big-small, center-periphery, exposed-protected and powerful-weak³.

Maria B., 16, a high-school student⁴

(The excerpt refers to the pre-emigration period, when Maria was 7 years old.)

I was told that we were going to Israel, that it is a very small country. I imagined it as a globe, and there is a tiny point there. I was worried: "How shall I stand on such a small piece of land?" All the time I was afraid of how I would stand there.

Igor K., 59, a researcher

Here in Israel...And I spoke to them (Igor refers to his pre-emigration telephone conversations with his relatives in Israel, F.&Y.). I received information, I received all these newspapers. And the provinciality of this life...

(...) It is a province. And second of all, there is a factor of scale. I am like the pilot from "Exodus": Where shall I land the plane? Where shall I land? (Igor alludes to the novel by Leon Uris.) There is just a narrow strip of er... land along er... the sea.

Inna R., 49, a medical doctor

(Comparing driving in Haifa and in Leningrad)

Inna: I was learning driving in the back of beyond, somewhere outside Leningrad. (...) Well, of course I took extra lessons. And I drove beautifully because there was vast expanse. Well, here I don't have enough space for a running start.

Irina G., 18, a soldier

Interviewer: Ira, has your attitude to the Israeli conflict, the conflict between Jews and Arabs changed during the army service?

Irina: Yes. It has become much closer to me. I came to understand what's going on. In the past, it was sort of far from me. And now... Rosh Hanikra is very close to Lebanon. And recently I've seen in the paper that everything that's going on in Lebanon is very close to us, it is just a couple of kilometers away from us. I even cut this page out to show you, because I thought it was so incredible, so strange...

Interviewer: That everything is so close...

Irina: Yes, that everything is so close. And how things are related... Kiryat Shmona... it's terribly close to Lebanon. How can people live there when they know they are shot at? And... I would have nightmares.

In all these passages the limits of physical space is seen as a danger, jeopardizing physical survival of the nation and individuals. Such perception may be rooted in the genetic memory of the Soviet people, which is still alive even in the younger generation. During World War II, and after the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl, the population was evacuated from the threatened areas. And even in the worst hours, people knew that there

³ We translated excerpts from the interviews without editing them in order to preserve specific features of oral narration and the individual style of each storyteller. We also preserved instances of code switching. Hebrew insertions in the excerpts are italicized. Some stories are registered in Israeli Folktale archives named after Dov Noy (IFA).

⁴ Some of the interviewees were apprehensive of disclosing their identity. We respect their request and have changed their names. The age, profession and occupation have not been altered.

was always a place to move to and find refuge. Experience of many families proved that rescue depended on the promptness of the decision to leave the home place, thus salvation was more a question of time than space. In a tiny country like Israel, the concept of evacuation does not make sense. When immigrants come to realize it, they react emotionally. This is manifested in the choice of lexis: “to be afraid, strange, incredible, terribly close, nightmares” and in the use of rhetorical questions and exclamations. While Irina explicitly links her feeling of uneasiness to the political conflict, Igor expresses the same attitude implicitly by the allusion to literature. Note instances of metaphorical use of spatial terms in the quoted excerpts; for example Irina uses the adjective “close” in the meaning “familiar”, “clear”, while the adjective “far” connotes “lack of interest”, “lack of concern”. And when Inna complains about not having “enough space for a running start”, she does not refer to driving alone, but to the scope of activities narrowed by the dimensions of the new country.

While in the four excerpts quoted above the focus is on the perception of the space of the new country, in the next one it is the “old country” that is in the foreground.

Boris P., 50, an engineer, works as an electrician

Interviewer: You said that Andrei (Boris’ son, F.&Y.) doesn’t watch Russian TV at all. And you? What TV do you watch?

Boris: Well, most often I watch Russian TV. So, then, er... but not because it’s in my mother tongue, but because I think it’s like this... Firstly, forgive me, but after all, it’s the sixth part of (pause) the dry land.

Interviewer: Well, well, no more. (laughs)

Boris: Well, ok, it doesn’t really matter, but it is still the lion’s share. Well, and obviously, it will influence the whole world (pause) irrespective of the state it is in. And so such a territory, er...won’t leave the world in peace, and that’s why I want to know...

The Soviet Union ceased to exist almost 10 years ago, but the stereotypes created by its ideology are still alive. The once celebrated “one sixth of the dry land” continues to be a marker of power, which is emphasized by the metonymic transfer: the noun “territory” stands for “country”, or “state”. The collapse of the USSR does not put into question its influence on the world arena. Although the narrator admits that the “old country” has shrunk and the state of its affairs is volatile, he is not ready to part with the myth that it is still a super power. He doesn’t idealize Russia and is aware of its potential to be an adversary in international affairs-- “won’t leave the world in peace”—yet Boris cannot resist the habit of expressing haughty pride in his Motherland.

Our observation that Israel evokes the feeling of claustrophobia in the immigrant community is supported by the emergence of a folklore verse parodying once popular children’s poem by Sergei Mikhalkov (1999: 6).

Sofia Y., 48, a university teacher

(According to the informant, she heard the following quatrain in the early 1990s before the peace treaty with Jordan was signed.)

*A iz nashego okna
Iordania vidna,
A iz vashego okoshka
Tol’ko Siria nemnozhko.*

From the window of my room
Jordan can be seen in full.
When in your room we sit,
Only Syria is seen a bit.

In the original version, the kids are boasting about the view on the “main square of the country”, the Red Square, and make fun of those who are deprived of the privilege: “*A iz nashego okna / ploshchad' Krasnaia vidna. / A iz vashego okoshka / Tol'ko ulitsa nemnozhko.*” (One can see the Red square from our window, while from the small window of your room, one can only see a little bit of the street.) In the original, the essence of the antithesis is the prestigious v. a commonplace location of the house. In the folkloric paraphrase, the issue is the proximity of the borders of the two Arab countries. The local space is re-proportioned to the dimensions of the country's territory. The humorous touch cannot hide the implied menace, and the mood of the quatrain is reminiscent of the popular Soviet folklore genre of children's sadistic verses (Belousov, 1998: 545-557).

Metamorphoses of space in the unknown land

Reflections about space illustrate immigrants' attempts to investigate and interpret the unknown. In the beginning, when appraising the unfamiliar space, immigrants tend to go to extremes, they describe it as dream-like, beautiful and attractive, or conversely, alien, hostile, almost enchanted. As we will see in the following excerpts, alienation often stems from an immigrant's

1. inability to communicate in Hebrew in public places.
2. disorientation caused by exotic nature and an unfamiliar architectural style.

Sofia Y., 48, a university teacher IFA 22131

It happened in my first month in Israel. (...) And once, together with a friend we were looking for the City Department of Education, we had to register the kids for school. We circled round and round but couldn't find the street. And no wonder! Having pulled together all our meager knowledge of Hebrew, we managed to compose a sentence and ask the way to the office, but the only thing we caught from the reply was, “*rehov smola*” (a street on the left). We kept asking passers-by, “Where is *Smola* street? They looked at those crazy Russians with sympathy and invariably pointed to the left. Exhausted we asked once more, this time in English, and immediately found the place.

Boris B., 24, a medical doctor

(The interview was conducted one month after Boris' immigration to Israel. Six years before immigration he had visited the country as a tourist.)

Interviewer: And don't you recognize the city now? Or only as fragments, as parts?

Boris: Yes, I recognize it. NOW I do recognize it. Well, a week passed, and when I walk... when Katia (Boris's wife, F.&Y.) and I went for a walk on the Carmel on our own, I told her, “This is... here, there should be...” Although during the first days, you know, we spoke about it... that I was afraid to make any short cuts. Because I thought I wouldn't be able to find my way back

home, although I have always been good at finding my way around. And in the same place, when I got there for the second time, I knew what we would see on the way, and I was not mistaken. It, sort of, came back to me. Probably, because emotions were not the same as then, feelings were different.

**Vladimir, Ya., 61, a technician by training, works as a fitter, self-employed IFA
22128**

Vladimir: So, well, surely, the first impression was that I found myself in some big apartment, which is clean and in which the air is pleasant. I found myself on Nordau (a promenade street in Haifa, F.&Y.). I strolled along Nordau as if it were an apartment. A big apartment, and long (Note the image of a “long apartment”, which is obviously associated with Soviet communal apartments with long corridors, F.&Y.). I walk, and it is clean and pleasant. And I came from Kiev. It was about minus 25 degrees there. That’s why I felt as if it were a clean and warm apartment. And the *Sohnut*... (the Jewish Agency, F.&Y.) and I stayed in *Tal’pion*... (Even 6 years after immigration Vladimir is unaware that the correct name of the hotel Talpiot, and that it means “fortress or magnificent building”, F.&Y.).

Interviewer: In the hotel?

Vladimir: In the hotel. And it took me three days to get from *Tal’pion* to the *Sohnut*. And why did it take me three days? Whoever I ask, nobody knows where the *Sohnut* is, that is the Ministry of Absorption, nobody knows. (The ministry of Absorption is the governmental body in charge of immigrants. Vladimir doesn’t realize that it is not the same institution as the Jewish Agency, F.&Y.)

Finding one’s way in a modern city, which is usually marked with various signs, is not considered to be a difficult task. But it is not so for new immigrants. In the first two passages, language incompetence prevents newcomers from making sense of the space organization of the city. The inability to cope with the simplest speech patterns leads to the feeling that space is enchanted. The attitude of the informants to their first “adventures” in a new city is different. While Sofia is self-ironic, Vladimir adds to his story an element of drama, created by the quasi-dialogue. Boris, whose experience in Israel is the shortest of the three, feels the alienation of the space the strongest; he openly admits fear of getting lost.

Discovering a new spatial environment is a sensory experience. While the dominant source of spatial information is sight, hearing, smell and tactile perception complement it and extend the range of one’s knowledge of the environment (Gold, 1980: 52).

**Rosa Ch., 27, a teacher and a graduate student
(About the first impressions of Israel)**

Here is a romantic detail for you. When we got into the taxi... We arrived in the afternoon; and after all the paperwork... it was winter and it was dark, about 5 p.m. And you know, palm trees, then the moon, and for me it was the first association with the East. In all the oriental fairytales the moon, the young moon is lying, not like in the Union (in the Soviet Union, F.&Y.) And a star is sparkling, exactly like on all the mosques. There was some music, I cannot say what it was, whether it was Moroccan or Arabic music, but it was some oriental music, and there was the moon, and the star, and the palm trees! And that was it, I realized I was in the East. Talking

to my relatives who arrived in the daytime... My aunt, who wasn't badly off in the Union, she had had a very cozy apartment. They arrived before *Pesach* (Hebrew for "Passover", F.&Y.) and so she says, "They drove us around Haifa, they drove us around Haifa, and I look around and those gray houses--somewhere in Hadar (a district in Haifa, F.&Y.)-- everything is so gray, and pillows are drying on the balconies. And I", she said, "became so upset, and I", she said, "began to cry: Where am I? What have I done?" (laughs)

The narrator forms her spatial and temporal image of Israel absorbing visual and sound information. She opposes two chronotopes: the exotic and attractive image of the oriental nature emerges at nighttime, while daylight exposes the colorless and mundane of the cityscape.

Many report unfamiliar sounds and floral scents as their first impression of Israel. Plants become markers of familiar or unfamiliar space, the most prominent examples being chamomile and palm trees. But the strongest sensory sensation experienced by the immigrants is tactile, skin perception of warmth. And again to make sense of the new experience, immigrants look for analogies with the familiar spatial environment. A good example is Vladimir's story quoted above. After severe frosts, the pleasant warm temperature and the cleanliness of the streets breed associations with an apartment. The image is so strong that Vladimir reiterates it three times.

The instability of the spatial world of the interviewees is often manifested by the confusion of deictic markers **here** and **there**. A human being perceives space as organized around himself/herself. As V. Gak remarks, we put ourselves into the center of macro- and microcosm (2000: 127). This peculiarity of our cognition accounts for the similarities between mythical and perceptive space, both of which, according to Ernst Cassirer, are products of consciousness. Cassirer postulates that position cannot be detached from content, which underlies the construction of geometric space, or be contrasted with it. It is filled with a definite, individual sensuous or intuitive content (1966:84). In the analyzed narratives we often come across instances of reference to Israel as "there" and the FSU as "here".

Gaiane A., 77, a pensioner

(About her son's family first days in Israel)

...and they were accepted by a kibbutz. They came **there** without any personal belongings, because they went away from **here**, they left the Soviet Union under tragic circumstances.

Anastasia Ts., 48, a bookstore owner

(About mass emigration in the early 1990s)

I worked in second-hand bookstore, and every day people brought plenty of books to sell. And when occasionally there was, for example, a face that did not look Jewish, I would be astonished. People were leaving, and nothing would stop them: neither the complications of departure nor the fact that they are leaving apartments **here**, some property—just nothing would stop them!

In both of these excerpts, the narrators place themselves in the space of the "old country".

"Here" indicates proximity of both space and time. It signifies the speaker's involvement in the events described, and is linked to the expression of emotions.

As we see, spatial confusion in immigrants' stories is intensified by the confusion of the outer and inner space. We have already noted the destruction of the borders between inner and outer space in Vladimir Ya.'s story; similar metamorphosis was experienced by Ekaterina B. She mistakes apartment houses for hotels—in the Soviet Union they were signs of luxury. Ekaterina is amazed at the vastness of space in Israel. But while normally the notion of vastness is associated with the outer space, she refers to the inner-space, in particular to the planning and furnishing of houses. Like some of our other informants, Ekaterina is perplexed when she sees subtropical plants growing everywhere, on the streets, along the highways, and in back yards. In her native town they are liked for exoticism and grow in houses. They are known to be quite difficult to cultivate, and are often a source of pride for a successful owner. Ekaterina associates rubber plants with the coziness of her home. In the new circumstances she cannot imagine herself growing such common species for decorating the house, and this bewilders.

Ekaterina B., 23, a housewife

Well, when I was thinking about Israel... I had never been abroad, that's why with me it was probably different from other people, because for me it was some fairy-tale, some paradise. In fact, when I came here I wasn't disappointed; and, that is, I reacted normally and calmly, I think I did. Well, probably deep inside, it affected me, but I think I reacted very calmly. First I perceived it as a seaside resort... yes... with some holiday hotels, which didn't look like ordinary apartments, and in fact, it was such a vast-vast space, and very unclear to me. Yeah. And it wasn't crammed with furniture, cupboards, and all sorts of things.

(...)

Interviewer: How did you picture Israel in your imagination, if you pictured it at all?

Ekaterina: Well, firstly I thought that it...well, I don't know, that it is really a very holy land.... I believed that it's the biggest...that is the most, the most... I thought all the time that they say that if you go to Israel and you don't get closer to the God in your brain, then you will never become a believer. That is, for me Israel was something very religious, in this respect you know... and with numerous... well, simply, Boris told me there were numerous supermarkets in Israel, where one can find anything, and a million... well, plenty of everything... and that it's simply some sort of... I don't know... well, just milky rivers.... (Both laugh). Yes, like this. And otherwise...well. I don't know, I thought it was all desert without any trees, and so I was preparing myself for the worst. (She laughs.)

Interviewer: But you saw the trees...

Ekaterina: Yes, I saw them. It was very... Well, it is very important for me. But the funniest



Picture 2: Palm trees are so near and yet so far...

thing is that all those rubber plants which grow here as trees, they used to be my favorite house-plants. And now I don't know what to grow.

Interviewer: How about lilac?

Ekaterina: Probably lilac... I don't know.

Ekaterina's pre-immigration image of Israel was even more contradictory than the first impressions upon arrival. Before immigration, Ekaterina had never left her native country. She is not unique; many of the informants had never traveled outside the Soviet Union before emigration and could only imagine life outside their homeland on the basis of media information, literature, art, and hearsay. Thus Vladislav V., 29, says, "...and in principle, some of the information about "abroad" was inaccessible to us, because we had never been there. And that's why it was difficult to imagine what it's like. It seemed that there was everything there, so to say, it is not that manna drops from heavens, but there is general wellbeing." So Israel was part of "the abroad", that proverbial notion, which for a "Soviet" encompassed the riches and luxury of the "other world" on Earth (In the normative usage *za granitsej*, "abroad", is a prepositional phrase, which means to be outside one's own country. The Soviet writers I. Ilf and Ie. Petrov coined a noun *zagranitsa*, which ironically referred to the rest of the world as opposed to the Soviet Union. The word caught on and has retained an ironic flavor. Ekaterina visualized "abroad" as a fairy tale, and it is synonymous for her with paradise. Interestingly, in other interviews we see that when the prosperity of Israel was put into question, it was denied the status of a real "abroad". Hence the popular proverb of the last decades of the USSR: "*Kuritsa ne ptitsa, Izrail' ne zagranitsa.*" (A chicken is not a bird, and Israel is no "abroad".) Trying to imagine Israel, Ekaterina mobilized her fragmentary knowledge of the Bible, folk images of the Land of Plenty, and above all, rumors about the abundance of consumer goods outside the FSU. Abundance, especially abundance of food is a motif typical of folklore of many peoples related to the image of the kingdom of the dead. These images merged with the fairyland and paradise. Vladimir Propp emphasizes that changes in the real world are reflected in the images of the fictional world of the dead. But the emergence of the new motifs does not affect the survival of the old ones (Propp, 1986: 287-297). Thus the "self-set" tablecloth of the traditional Russian folklore gives way to supermarkets and health resorts, but both refer to the same archetype. The self-set tablecloth always appeared as if out of thin air, set with all the victuals the heart could desire. An example of this popular belief was observed and analyzed by A. Moroz in 1996. He found that his informants, inhabitants of Russian northern villages, conceptualized paradise as "life in a resort" (2000, 294). Ekaterina is one of our many informants who link the first favorable impressions of Israel with the Black Sea resorts. The images of the milky rivers and resorts, however, clashed in her imagination with fear of the unknown, which she perceived as emptiness embodied by a desert. The desert is one of the most frequent and powerful spatial symbols found in the interviews.

Landscapes: Topophilia and topophobia⁵

Symbolic value of landscapes varies across cultures and changes as time goes on. A growing concern about preserving what has been inherited from the past may be

⁵ We have borrowed both terms from Gold (1980: 117-123).

one explanation of why landscapes are being increasingly rendered symbolic meaning. People are becoming more aware and appreciative of differences and resist homogenizing effects of globalization (Dodgshon, 1998: 117). New immigrants tend to idealize the landscapes of their pre-immigration past. In evaluating Israeli landscape, be it nature or cityscape, narrators rely either on their own experience or knowledge drawn from literature and art.

Ella V., 69, a pensioner IFA 22113

Ella: And two weeks before our departure he (Ella's son, F. &Y.) called us and said, "Mom, come to Eilat". But what is Eilat? Er... but because international calls from Israel were expensive, we hung up and at one o'clock in the morning began searching the map for Eilat. (...) By two in the morning we had found Be'er Sheva, and we had found Dimona. To the North of them we had found Kfar Saba, where my sister and my nephew were, where all the family was. In fact we had found everything. The only place we couldn't find was Eilat, because we didn't look beyond Dimona. We read that further south was Negev.

Interviewer: And you didn't look there....

Ella: But Negev is lifeless. The desert is... er... it's out of the question. That's it. Our eyes didn't look further down (Note the spatial metaphor: moving south is "moving down" because on maps the North is "up", F.&Y.) And only at around four in the morning, my younger son shook me awake and says, "I've found it! Come along." And he led me to the map of Israel, which hung in the bedroom. "Here it is", and he showed me Eilat. And it was then that I really got very scared, because I saw that it was on the other side of Negev. The only thing that calmed me down a bit was er... let's say, Jewish generosity. Eilat was colored with such a deep shade of green that I immediately understood it was a green spot on the shore of the Red (pause) Sea. It is the Eilat Bay, so there was nothing wrong about going there.

(...)

And when in Ben Gurion (the central airport of Israel, F.&Y.) while queuing for a taxi, we said we were going to Eilat, the people, sort of looked at us in a funny way. It was nighttime, the 25th of June, the night between the 24th and 25th of June. It was very hot, very hot. And a man wearing a *kipah* (Hebrew for a "skull-cap", F.&Y.), a Jew with side locks said, "Do you know where you are going? Do you know it's very hot there? Take a lot of water with you." At this point my heart sank, because when they tell you to take a lot of water, it means living conditions leave something to be desired. So we were driving to Eilat all night long, from about two until seven in the morning. And because there was no light, and there were no built-up places with light on the way, I tried to imagine the map. But because my knowledge of geography was rather poor, I tried to find Cheops' pyramids. (Both laugh.) I understood I was in Africa. I even tried to clarify it with the taxi driver: "Cheops' pyramids should be here. Why don't I see them?" Well, when we came to Eilat, it was seven in the morning. There were only few people in the streets. It was... it was the first shock because I saw a one-



Picture 3: Laundry and cactuses — the clash of exoticism with the mundane.

floor stunted town. And I immediately said, “Oh, gosh, we are in some sort of Tartarstan. Because for me Tartaria is associated with Evpatoria (A resort on the Crimean coast of the Black Sea, F.&Y.) (Note that Ella is using both the Soviet and the post-Soviet names of the autonomous republic, F.&Y.) It’s because once, former Tartars, I was with the Tartars during evacuation, and they have low flat buildings and this was what we saw (pause). Well, this is when our tears began (pause). We couldn’t accept it.

A characteristic feature of many interviews is that immigrants admit their complete ignorance of the country where they intended to move to. This ignorance was not limited to vague ideas about the country’s history and culture, but extended to the inability to imagine local landscape or Israeli towns. Suffice it to say that some interviewees report they had to search for Israel on the map or on the globe. As we understand from the excerpt quoted above, such attempts were not always successful. In spite of the fact that all our informants are literate, and many have university degrees, their knowledge of geography often betrays them and leads to misconceptions and absurdities. It was not only Ella who placed the ancient Egyptian monument, the pyramid of the pharaoh Cheops in the Israeli desert, the Negev. Ella’s husband Moisei V., 74 IFA 22115 when planning to settle down in Eilat tried to calm down his wife by saying, “So what can we do? After all, there is Sahara desert in Russia...” In anxiety he mixed up the African desert with the Kara Kum desert in Central Asia. Both of these examples are not merely amusing but support the premise that unfamiliar space may be confusing and frightening.

In Ella’s narrative such natural phenomenon as hot weather becomes a marker of space, i.e. extreme heat is associated with Africa. In addition, in order to interpret the unfamiliar space, Ella compares it to those places in “the old country” which have symbolic significance. Although she has never been to Tartarstan, it has derogatory connotations for her and she associates it with provinciality, lack of civilization and non-European style. Ella tries to “read” and “decode” new space. She uses both the codes applicable to different languages and cultures (African heat) and culture-specific codes meaningful only for the specific historical period and collectivity (Lefebvre, 1991: 17).

Note that for a family from central Russia a desert symbolizes a border between life and death. The only consoling factor is the green spot near the Red Sea on the map. Overwhelmed by excitement, Ella forgot that the green marks lowlands. Like other interviewees she perceives it as the color of freshness and a promise of rich vegetation. Speaking about the desert, our other informants use the word in the metaphorical rather than in the literal meaning:

Inna, Ch., 52, a housewife, a teacher by training

(About the choice of the country of immigration)

Interviewer: Did you ever think about going to another country?

Inna: You know, I cannot even explain why. Germany... I think, I simply absorbed it with breast milk.

Interviewer: So, you didn’t?

Inna: No. Never! Shall I go to the Germans? Never! Just as the mere sound of the German language—you know it’s an incredible feeling—it has always caused nausea in me. I wouldn’t learn it. It’s ridiculous, it’s a prejudice. It’s not even on the level of the conscious, but of the sub-

conscious. America is a DESERT, in which.... **There** (in Israel, F.&Y.), I have an acquaintance here and another one there, at least some kind of.... The country is small and in other towns.... I can at least pick the phone and talk. And there (in America, F. &Y.), well I am.... done for. "But you speak English!" So what can the language do for me? I still come there as... From everything I'd read, I gathered that I'd be a 25th rate person there. How can I start there? As god knows who, as god knows what and...a DESERT! Indeed, the main thing is that it's a huge country and I am in it, and it is a desert. I won't be able to pull through there, and so...No, there were no thoughts about it (emigration to another country, F.&Y.).

Boris B., 24, a physician

(Comparing past impressions as a tourist with the first immigrant impressions)

I think I could imagine it. But at the same time I recollected everything with difficulties... er. If during the first years after my visit here I remembered the country, it was an unforgettable impression, then just at the time when we were to leave... (Boris means to emigrate, F. & Y.) I ... I would wake up at night and imagine, say, Haifa, as almost a desert, where there is no greenery, where there is emptiness. So all these... that is, I want to say that all those impressions had been erased. I was going here as if for the first time.

Anatolii P., 26, a sound operator, self-employed

Anatolii: And we arrive here, and it is still a wasteland, I mean, in the sense that it is (pause) a spiritual wasteland. Because you come here, and you have nothing. Well, there might be an address of a guy in Jerusalem, or just a telephone... In sum, you are in a state ... of utter confusion and it's very hot, it's August.

Note that while Inna and Boris speak about the desert, Anatolii compares Israel with a wasteland. In Russian, both words have the same root: *pustynia*, *pustyr'* and both have semantic links with *pustota*, "emptiness". For our informants it is a metaphor of solitude, it symbolizes the lack of friends and the feeling of being lost. This metaphor does not necessarily apply to Israel. Inna uses it to explain her unwillingness to migrate to America, which for many of our other interviewees still remains the ultimate temptation.

The existence of the negative image of the desert, which symbolizes aridity, isolation and despair, has been reported by the psychologists studying dream landscapes. The dreamers see the desert as the least appreciated environment by people of different age groups. By contrast, fertile landscapes are symbols of hope and renewal (Stevens, 1995: 268).

Topophilic and topophobic perception of nature to a large extent depends on where interviewees lived before immigration. Notably, research carried out by geographers, ethnographers, and sociologists indicates that perception of nature also depends on the place of origin of an ethnic group (Lebedeva, 1993: 82-101). Yet our material does not provide such examples. Rather we see that the scenery of immigrants' birth-place serves as a standard and as a basis for comparison.

Lilia V., 22, a university student

Interviewer: Do you think you will still want to go to Lvov, when your mother is no longer there?

Lilia: I think so. Just to come for a couple of days and walk in the city—I wouldn't need anything else.

Interviewer: So you feel the need to stroll along the streets, look at the buildings, touch the buildings.

Lilia: To look, to be caught in the Lvov rain. It never rains here like it does there (pause), a drizzle, a nasty rain of the fall. (Note that the “nastiness” of the rain does not prevent Lilia from feeling nostalgic for it because it is part of the image of her native town, F.&Y.)

(...)

Lilia: The color of the entire country (Israel, F.&Y.) is... it is a little bit faded.

Interviewer: So what color do you miss?

Lilia: Green. Green is very bright, very intense there (in Lvov, Ukraine, F.&Y.), particularly the green of the young plants, of the young grass, of the young trees. When Israelis look at my photographs, they keep asking, “Is it a painted picture?”

Interviewer: Oh really? I've never heard this before.

Lilia: I have photos with the forest and the green grass in the background. Israelis: “Is it a painting in the background?”

Anastasia, N., 61, a biologist

And once we were on a romantic German street, this *Romantische strasse*, a German highway. We traveled with my brother by car. And you stop there, or pass those little houses, and you get an impression that they are toys. And so... We came there, and there were Alpine meadows there, which I hadn't seen for years, for decades. Even in Khar'kov you won't find such meadows. While in the Urals there were such meadows. After all I grew up in Nizhnii Tagil. And there were simple wild flowers there. And there was a long-long meadow, bright green. And the greenery was so bright. There were coniferous forests and the blue sky, which you can never see here. Well, I don't know, sometimes the sky is blue, but very rarely.

(...)

Interviewer: And in fact, how did you imagine Israel? When you arrived, you were surprised. And what did you expect to see?

Anastasia: I didn't expect anything, anything. That is, I couldn't imagine Israel at all, I couldn't understand. My brother wrote to us that it was like... in terms of climate, if you wish, it reminds one of the southern coast of the Crimea, or of Sochi (a resort in the Caucasus, F.&Y.), something like this. Yes, everything was alien. Everything was alien and exactly of the sort I dislike. Say, I always preferred Leningrad to Moscow. In Moscow, now it is already a modern city, but then in the first years, when I was there once, it was not really ... well, a European city. There were buildings of the sort, uncharacteristic of, say, Leningrad. And so when for the first time we went to France, I went out onto the street and saw that it was almost like in Leningrad. Well, the feeling was as if I had come to Leningrad. And in fact, that I came, I came... And here, there are those horrible roofs, as if they were steamers with white funnels sailing off. Flat roofs, extending to the horizon, and gray houses. Gray houses, roofs, gray houses, roofs. And they were so dirty. Even the houses, which I came to like later, the stone faced, Arab houses. They were dirty then, and gray. Or have I got used to things? A terrible amount of ruins, particularly when we were going across... The bus there, where we lived, in the *shchuna* (Hebrew for a “neighborhood”, F.&Y.) where we lived., the bus from the *shuk* (Hebrew for a “market, F.&Y.) passed an old *shchuna*. Now it has been dismantled, demolished, because apparently the time when it was not allowed to demolish houses abandoned by Arabs had expired. So, the most comfortable place for me was a bus. I said, “This is my home.”

Both narrators are nostalgic for the landscape they loved in the “old country”. Everything about it is dear to them, even “the nasty” drizzle and the environs of Nizhnii Tagil—the city notorious for its ecological situation.

In many narratives attractive and repulsive landscapes are associated with certain colors. Thus Anastasia misses the bright blue sky, the feeling, which is difficult to share, because the sky in Israel is rarely overcast. Just like Anastasia and Lilia, many other interviewees suffer from the lack of green, and complain about the abundance of yellow in nature, and of gray in the cityscape. The negative perception of both of these colors may have roots in Russian cultural tradition. In the prose by F. Dostoevskii and A. Belyi, in the poetry by A. Blok, etc., yellow is associated with disease, madness, and deterioration. Moreover, derogatory connotations of yellow are reflected in the dead metaphor “*zheltyi dom*” (yellow house) which denotes a lunatic asylum. Gray for Russian speakers is the color of mediocrity and lack of individuality. Thus sleuths were often referred to as “people wearing gray hats”.

Anastasia associates gray houses with the dirtiness and untidiness of the city. She is so depressed by the grayness of the cityscape that the adjective “gray” is repeated four times in a short passage. Gray and white, the pale colors signify gloom and monotony for the narrator, and the expressiveness is strengthened by the repetition. Israeli cities are opposed to European towns, and the basis for comparison is Leningrad. Everything, which resembles Leningrad, is beautiful. Even the impression of France is determined by its alleged similarity to Leningrad: “it was almost like in Leningrad”. In fact, Leningrad as a symbol of city beauty is mentioned in many of the interviews. Symbolic importance is often attributed to cities, the most notable examples being Paris, Jerusalem, Rome and New York. As Gold remarks “These are not necessarily beautiful cities, but they appear to have mediated the city symbol as it emerges both in the minds of their creators and those who experience them (1980: 127). Traditionally St. Petersburg (in the Soviet times, Leningrad, F.&Y.) was opposed to Moscow and was perceived as the most European city of the country. It was lovingly referred to as the “Northern Venice” and “the window on Europe”. Many books and articles are devoted to the city’s image and its role in Russian culture (Lotman, 1992b). The city has retained not only the aura of mysticism but also of prestige, and in our material it is constantly opposed to provincial towns, be it in Russia, Central Asia, or the Middle East.

The excerpt above contains double inversion of static and moving objects: the houses with flat roofs are compared to steamers, while the bus is perceived as a substitute for home. Both the ship and the bus are connected to traveling, to the change of place. By contrast with a real home they may give only temporary shelter.

Immigration: Temporary life, temporary people?

Among the most important features of life in the Soviet times was limited mobility. Registration of domicile was an obstacle for people who wished to move from town to town and even from one apartment to another if it involved neighborhoods and towns of unequal social value. On the other hand, once the state granted an individual or a family the right to housing, it didn’t as a rule take it away. As far as citizens’ professional life was concerned, there were various regulations that discouraged workers from changing jobs. For non-party members chances for promotion even within

the same organization were rather slim, yet jobs were secure, and unemployment and lay-offs were unknown in the USSR. A change of profession in the course of a career was a rare case, and anyone who would venture change an occupation was seen as an adventurer. On the one hand limited mobility was detrimental to people's ability to exercise initiative on the other hand it gave an illusion of the predictability of life and social protection.

When emigration from the USSR stopped being an extraordinary event, the Soviet authorities invented a new cliché and its abbreviation (*PMZh*). Emigrants were referred to as people "leaving for another country for permanent domicile". Yet the feeling of permanency and stability forms slowly, and some of our interviewees complain that they fail to acquire it in Israel.

Lilia L., 42, a physician

You know, in Israel I have always had a feeling that everything is temporary. And I was watching myself as if everything was not happening to me, but I was watching myself as a third person. And all the time I felt everything was unreal, unreal.

Irina B., 70, a pensioner

Irina: What depresses us is that we don't have our own housing. It's really depressing... this endless *skhirut* (renting).

Interviewer: Is it your first apartment?



Picture 4: Today there is hardly a town in Israel that does not have Russian signs to help new immigrants navigate in the new life.

Irina: Yes, the first one. We've been living here for a year. And we decided to stay another year, but we don't know what will happen in the future. Well, it's the most depressing circumstance for repatriants. A person left his apartment, in which he may have lived for 10 years or something like that. And he came here and he has no housing. It's depressing. You may not put a nail into a wall, you may not hang things you want on the wall. And you always feel you are a temporary person here. And this very feeling is depressing. And things don't belong to you, and you are here only temporarily. And this state of temporariness, you know, it's depressing, because it is your overall state. As if you were here temporarily, you know. You don't have a feeling you have come here to live permanently, because all the time you are here... er... here and at the same time not here.

The opposition of the temporary v. the permanent is not limited to the perception of time. The unexplored space is seen as a temporary environment. People react differently to it. For some it is the loss of reality,

for others the feeling of homelessness. Furthermore, the radical change of space made some informants feel as if they were tourists, enjoying life but fearing that their stay in this exotic place is nothing but temporary.

Our material indicates that besides the loss of stability, immigrants experience a change in the perception of life cycle. In addition to the traditional division of life into childhood, adolescence, youth, etc, immigrants draw another demarcation line—life before and after emigration. Moreover immigration changes subjective perception of one's age. There is a distinction between biological and mental age. Socially constructed categories of age do not necessarily correspond with chronological ageing, but they are related to social competence and power (Adam, 1990: 98-99). Thus we observe early maturation of teenagers immigrating to Israel alone, without their families. On the other hand, in the families in which parents experience difficulties with learning a language, children very often assume a patronizing attitude, and then the roles in the family reverse. In adults the perception of age is closely connected to the ability to find a job corresponding to one's qualifications, or learn a profession of comparable social prestige. Naturally, an important element to ensure one's contentment is financial independence. Conversely, a lack of social competence and inability "to find one's place" on the job market and in a new life as a whole, makes people feel either old before age or infantile.

Leonid B., 36, an electronics engineer by training, works as a superintendent

Interviewer: You have been here for eight months. Has the way your family spends leisure time changed?

Leonid: Of course it has. It has changed completely. But also our life has changed altogether. And it has changed to be suitable to the local life, to the local conditions... Of course, it has changed. And completely... The life experience acquired there in the course of over 30 years doesn't work at all. That is, in the first period, we felt like we were little kids. Now we have some local experience, even if it is still modest. And in the beginning, it was weird to feel like a child at the age of 30. What? How? But absolutely... We sort of started from scratch. Neither life experience nor anything, so to say...

The division of life into pre- and post-emigration period sharpens the division into past and present. People who integrate successfully prefer to concentrate on the present, while those who suffer failures tend to idealize and re-create the past.

Inna R., 49, a doctor

I have just said that one shouldn't return to the past. The past was once, but it passed. One should be always oriented to the future. Because we live in the present and in the future. The past does not exist. It has passed. It is impossible to live with the thought of what no longer exists.

Inna P., 49, an economist by training, works as a cleaner

Yes, I feel nostalgic. I (pause) often say, "I want to go home." But (pause) it is a very strange desire. I want to go home and (pause) so...when my parents were still alive. I want to be back in my paternal home. Yes. Otherwise, there are only graves to return to. I have no one left there.

In the second excerpt the notions of space and time are inseparable. Inna P. is nostalgic for the home that does not exist any more and she misses the time, which she knows, will never come back. In extreme cases immigration is ascribed existential meaning. The total change of environment and routine is perceived as the end of life.

Piotr G., 42, a theater director

(About the first days in Israel)

Interviewer: The impression was that life was over. On the second, on the third day, there was a feeling that that's it. Because then we couldn't think that it would be possible to go to and back without problems. (...) Yeah, but step by step, and you sort of get involved into all this stuff. And you forget, and everyday routine problems start. The first ten days were the hardest.

Interviewer: Why?

Piotr: Because the impression is that you have passed into a new dimension. There is an impenetrable wall. And it is as if that other life would be no more, but there is a new life, which is in Nazeret. (...) And then it moved to the background, but the first 10 days were the most distressing. I felt I wanted to jump off the roof. I did, though I don't know whether my wife felt the same. But this was my state of mind.

Like the two previous narrators, Piotr speaks about going back. Yet for him it is not going back in time, but the possibility to go back to "the old country". Although formally he didn't have to renounce his citizenship, he still perceived emigration as an irreversible step, which cut him off from his roots. His spiritual ties with the home country remained strong, and six years after emigration, having failed to integrate professionally, Piotr returned to Russia. He said, "... the most important thing for me is to be able to work. It makes no difference whatsoever whether it is in America, Israel, or Tumen' (a town in Siberia, where he worked upon his return to Russia, F.&Y.), it's irrelevant."

Whether immigrant life is perceived as temporary existence, a sort of limbo, or as a deadlock, such a state of affairs cannot go on permanently. People choose one of the three options: to return back to the "old country", to move on to some other country, like Lilia L. who emigrated from Israel to Canada after 10 years of reasonably successful integration, or to find an acceptable niche in Israel, which is the case with most of the immigrants and most of our informants.

Conclusions

1. The immigrants interviewed for this study do not sanctify the new country and do not perceive it as the Promised Land as reflected in the Jewish legends, and which is characteristic of Jewish tradition. Only in 3 interviews we find any reference to the Holy Land, but even then it is identified with Christianity, rather than with Judaism. Furthermore, the perception of the new country is clearly influenced by Russian fairy-tales, by the image of the "Thrice-Ten Tsardom" in particular, and by the Soviet mythology of the "abroad". None of the interviewees, all of them secular urban dwellers, regards immigration to Israel as a religious obligation.
2. The analyzed material does not indicate any noticeable difference in the perception of time and space by the immigrants who are Jewish and non-Jewish, but

different patterns of familiarization with the new space and social time can be traced to the place of origin in the FSU.

3. Accommodation to the system of social space and time of the receiving society is an important component of integration into this society. General discontent with the new way of life is frequently reflected in the dislike of the landscape, both in the countryside and in the city.
4. Under conditions of immigration, changes of time and space are always interconnected. In the analyzed interviews the crossroads where they merge is border crossing—a crucial point in life for our informants. Time and space merge in the imaginary border which separates immigrants from their homes and introduces a new division into the life course—pre-immigration and post-immigration life.

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Ko čas in prostor nista več to kar sta bila: Zgodbe o imigraciji

Maria N. Yelenevskaya, Larisa Fialkova

V članku so analizirane osebne pripovedi priseljencev v Izrael iz dežel bivše Sovjetske zveze. V človekovi zavesti je čas sestavljen iz družbenih aktivnosti in njegovo dojetje je v različnih kulturah različno, prav tako se tudi spreminja skozi čas. Odraščajoči v določeni kulturi se priseljenci spoprijemajo s spremenjenim specifičnim sistemom socialnega časa, ki ga zaznamujejo drugačna pravila, cikli in ponovitve. Avtorici v članku ugotavljata, da so spremembe, pred katerimi se priseljenci znajdejo v novem kulturnem okolju, očitne. Zgubo stabilnosti dojemajo kot začasno življenje v začasem domu. Medtem ko so pred izselitvijo ljudje orientirani v prihodnost, v imigraciji težijo k temu, da povečujejo pomen svoje preteklosti.

Tudi zaznavanje prostora podlega spremembam. Nekateri priseljenci iz bivše Sovjetske zveze trpijo zaradi "klavstrofobije", ki jo povzroča premik iz največje dežele na svetu v tako majhno državo, kot je Izrael. Poleg tega velike razlike v klimi, flori in favni vodijo do drugačnega dojetja zunanjega in notranjega prostora. Da bi se prilagodili novemu okolju, ga skušajo priseljenci interpretirati z izrazi in v govorici svojih domačih kulturnih kod.