The Case of former Soviet Scientists

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An American university is a place where
Russian professors teach Chinese,
Japanese and Indian students.
(From the folklore of Russians abroad)

Introduction

The goal of this essay is to study specific features of professional reintegration of immigrant scientists from the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) trained in the humanities and the social sciences. The international composition of many research projects, international authorship of numerous scientific publications, international associations of researchers in specific fields, global exchange of scientific knowledge at conferences and on the web, and even the de facto adoption of English as the lingua franca of science—all these testify that science as a field of human activity has been deeply affected by globalization (Halfmann 2005; Schott 1993). At the same time, advances in science and technology remain important markers of individual countries’ international prestige and give them a competitive economic edge. It is widely acknowledged today that education ranks among the vital commodities in contemporary knowledge-based societies. In the competition for skilled workers, some countries, primarily the USA, have turned into importers of highly qualified labor force while others have to reconcile with the role of exporters. The Soviet Union could not be placed in either group for one simple reason: the borders were “locked” and only a limited number of dissidents and Russian Jewish émigrés of the 1970s made it to academic institutions in the West. The end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union moved the FSU into the ranks of exporter-countries.

Evaluation of the numbers of unassimilated Russian speakers who emigrated in the 1990s and currently reside in 110 countries of the world ranges from 3 to 9 million (Rossiiskaia Nauchnaia Diaspora 2000: 16). While in the last years of Perestroika and in the early 1990s the majority of émigrés represented what is known as “return migration” and headed to Israel, Germany, Finland and Greece, in the mid-
and late 1990s the deepening crisis of the Russian economy triggered an increase in labor migration (Pushkareva 1996: 64; Rossiiskaia Nauchnaia Diaspora 2000:16). Emigration in that period was perceived as a survival strategy. According to the Russian psychologist Khrustaleva, “If countries of the West had lifted their ethnic preferences in immigrant-receiving policies, members of all ethnic groups inhabiting the FSU would have gone there” (Khrustaleva 1999). A considerable number of émigrés belonging to both categories held academic degrees.

In 1992 the Russian Ministry of the Interior introduced a new entry in the statistical surveys of emigration to register people previously employed in science and education (Zharenova et al. 2002: 11). At about the same time the term “scientific diaspora” emerged in Russian sociological literature. Definitions of this phenomenon differ primarily along the lines of inclusive/exclusive approaches. For example, Dezhina and Egerev, who have both done important work in the field of sociology of science, restrict the notion of the Russian scientific diaspora to émigrés who work in academic positions and maintain contacts with colleagues in Russia. They exclude researchers who have assimilated, and have severed all ties with Russia and with fellow-émigrés. They explicitly omit those who maintain connections with ex-compatriots living outside Russia but refuse to have anything to do with their “former Fatherland” (Dezhina 2002; Egerev 2002). We regard such a definition as weak in that it does not take into account the polycentric nature of contemporary diasporas. A more inclusive definition of the Russian scientific diaspora can be found in Zharenova et al.:

The Russian scientific diaspora is a community of Russian-speaking scientists who emigrated from the FSU and continue research activities abroad. They cope with similar integration problems and as a result seek to maintain relations with each other, as well as with colleagues, friends and relatives living in the Fatherland (Zharenova et al. 2002: 36).

Our other objection to Dezhina and Egerev’s analyses is related to their bypassing ethnic migration in estimating the dimensions of scientific diaspora. Egerev claims that contrary to labor migrants, the majority of ethnic migrants had to change their occupation and did not succeed in joining the ranks of Western academics. Importantly, he makes this conclusion on the basis of ethnic Germans, who resided
primarily in rural areas and small towns so had fewer chances of pursuing a scientific career in the USSR than other ethnic groups, for example, Russians, Ukrainians, or Jews. On the other hand, he ignores other returning diasporas and Jewish emigration to the USA, Canada, and so on (Egerev 2002). The fact that the number of labor migrants working in Western academia considerably exceeds the corresponding number of ethnic migrants is not surprising. Ethnic migration consists of people of various age groups, including large numbers of retirees and people approaching retirement age. Professional composition of ethnic migration waves is often unfavorable for the labor market of receiving countries. In most cases they start job hunting as migrants, which ipso facto puts them into a weak position. Labor migrants, by contrast, leave the donor country only after signing a contract. The difficulties in personal integration encountered by members of the two groups are similar (see Egerev 2004; Ilarionova 2005), but their professional re-integration has very different patterns. We agree with Zharenova and her colleagues that although the structural patterns of ethnic and labor migrations differ, ethnic emigration is still a typical case of brain drain (Zharenova et al. 2002: 14-15).

Restructuring of the research and educational institutions, drastic reductions in research funding, as well as plummeting salaries and general economic instability triggered two trends in post-Soviet Russian science: a large number of researchers left their jobs, opting for more lucrative occupations, and thousands of others decided to leave the country. Reliable statistics as to the size of the latter group do not exist. Guesstimates quoted in the literature range between 30,000 (Ivanitsky 2003, Egerev 2004; Zharenova 2006) and 15,000-20,000 people employed on regular basis, and twice as many working on short-term contracts and shuttling between home and employer countries (Saltykov 2003)3.

The “brain drain” was one of the most politicized issues of the public discourse in the first decade of post-Soviet Russia. It became a hot topic among sociologists of science, but also among politicians, researchers in other fields, and journalists.4 According to Dezhina, emigration of scientists is projected onto the state’s security and its prestige among other nations. As a result the concept of “brain drain” came to be associated with such terms as “national security”, “technological drain”, and “stealing of ideas”. The outflow of talent seemed to cause more concern than its waste within the country (Dezhina 2002). To give just one example, here is a
quote from an article published on the website of the *National Software Development Alliance* that bears the ironic name of *Silicon Taiga*:

Russia’s losses from the “brain drain” and the outflow of know-how have already exceeded $1 trillion. At the same time every ruble invested in our education system is more valuable than any currency. Conceptually our education remains the best in the world, but funds are not channeled in this direction, primarily because of the actions of the government and the State Duma. In the light of forecasts for the future of postindustrial society this situation creates a palpable threat to the national security.

(Shalmanov 2003)

The figure of the losses due to the immigration of scientists has been countered by more moderate estimates; and other voices claim that post-Soviet Russia is subject to the general trends in migration and that in the contemporary world researchers have become among the most frequently migrating professionals. Some even believe that the export of scientists contributes to the expansion of Russia’s prestige and power:

From the geopolitical point of view the more [researchers] leave, the better. Without a single shot Russian culture has spread throughout the world. Today, almost in all the countries of the world there are Russian communities.

(Ivanitskii 2003)

This triumphant vision of Russians invading Western scientific institutions, spiced with the metaphor emphasizing the lack of violence, chimes well with the folklore of Russians living abroad but does not reflect the true state of affairs. The majority of émigré researchers are employed on temporary contracts which include social benefits only partially or not at all. They do not cover sabbatical rights. In other cases the contract does not entitle immigrant researchers to submit research proposals for grants as principal investigators or provide funding for participation in conferences.

**Material and Method**

Our study is based on over 15 years of participant observation, as we are immigrants of the 1990s ourselves. In the last eight years our joint research has focused on various problems of integration of Russian-speaking Israelis and incipient diasporas of ex-Soviets (Fialkova 2005; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2005; 2007; Yelenevskaya
2005). Analytical work and numerous informal discussions with colleagues at national and international conferences triggered reflections on the careers of immigrant researchers and specific features of their professional reintegration. Methodologically our study can be classified as autoethnography in terms of the Hayano's definition. He introduced this term for cultural studies by anthropologists of their “own people”, in which the researcher is a full insider by virtue of being “native”, possessing an intimate familiarity with, or achieving full membership of, the group being studied (cited from Ellis and Bochner 2000: 739). We believe that when autoethnography is not limited to narcissism and self-indulgence, it has healthy elements of estrangement from and “othering” of the self. It involves personalized accounts in which researchers draw on their own personal experiences to enlarge their understanding of a particular discipline or culture (Holt 2003: 2). As immigrants who had to confront all the problems of professional reintegration we consider ourselves members of the group under study.

We chose to focus our study of the scientific diaspora on researchers in humanities and social sciences employed in academia in tenured and temporary positions, including post-doctoral positions and PhD students. Further, we limited our enquiry to those who are engaged in immigration studies and who left the FSU in the late 1980s-1990s. Our choice of this group was guided by the fact that researchers investigating immigrant communities are both subjects and objects of immigration, and for this reason present a unique case of self-reflection.

Following up on our previous projects, we originally intended to conduct in-depth interviews with colleagues in different countries. To our regret, the first candidates we turned to refused to participate. Although we guaranteed anonymity, they admitted that they were afraid to risk their careers in revealing some sensitive issues of integration into Western academia. This failure made us change our research strategy and we compiled a short online questionnaire in Russian; but in the cover letter we noted that we could send it also in English or in Latin transliteration as the latter is a frequent practice among Russophones on the Internet. Our questionnaire is the following:

- Did you have an opportunity/need for additional studies/retraining?
- Do you work in the same field/subfield in which you specialized before immigration?
• Are you a tenured/temporary employee?
• How did you make your way to Western publications?
• Do you publish in Russian? If you do, in Russia or in the West? If you don’t, how do you explain it?
• Do you participate in conferences in the FSU or in meetings organized by immigrant researchers?
• Do you participate in joint research and publishing projects with your colleagues in the FSU and/or with other immigrant researchers? If you do, what sort of projects are they?
• What brought you to immigration studies?
• If we have forgotten to ask some important questions, please write about the issues you find relevant to our enquiry.

We deliberately compiled the questionnaire in such a way that respondents had a choice of answering very briefly or in detail. We realized that in answering the questionnaire our colleagues might feel that they were giving away some ideas that could be useful in their own research, so we tried to make our questions non-invasive in order not to scare off potential respondents. Each researcher we approached was addressed personally. First we wrote to those we knew personally or by correspondence. We also studied information about the authors in relevant book series, journals and conference proceedings. Some of our respondents suggested names of other colleagues who met our criteria. Altogether we sent out 39 questionnaires: 17 to researchers in Israel and the rest to colleagues in 12 other countries (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, Germany, the UK, Hungary, Japan, The Netherlands, Sweden, the USA). Unfortunately, we failed to make contacts in Belgium and Great Britain. Twenty colleagues filled in the questionnaire (11 of them are Israelis; one answered by phone). Two addressees replied that they did not suit our study, and one wrote that she had abandoned her successful career in the West and returned to her home country for personal reasons. Notably nine did their academic studies partially or fully after emigration. Six of them expressed doubt as to whether their experience would be of interest to us, but agreed to participate; two others belonging to the same category refused to participate. Three respondents answered in English; one response was written in a combination of English and transliterated Russian when it described a recent project in Russia. Three respondents apologized
for not using Russian. One respondent used transliteration throughout; one switched to English when research themes naming research themes and project titles. All the rest answered in Russian.

Several of our respondents made comments on the questionnaire. One of these, whose answers were primarily “yes” and “no”, remarked that this terseness was triggered by the formulation of the questions. One Israeli respondent commented that the term “immigrant” did not apply to him because he viewed himself as a repatriate. He emphasized that he was aware of the discussion about the use of the terms “immigrant” and “repatriate” in Israel, but insisted on the ideological importance of the use of the term “oleh” (Hebrew for “repatriate to Israel”). He was the only Israeli researcher to dwell on this terminological controversy.

Besides analyzing questionnaires, we studied materials of the Russian electronic media on the subject of brain drain and monitored web-sites on which Russian-speaking researchers exchange professional and informal information.

**Human Resources in Humanities: Asset or Waste?**

Alarmism in the Russian public discourse about the “brain drain” focused on researchers in science and technology, while social scientists and specialists in humanities remained largely outside the purview. Although this group is completely unquantified, sociological literature shows that the number of researchers in humanities and social sciences is markedly smaller than that in other fields. The difference is particularly visible in labor migration. Zharenova et al. observe that researchers in these fields cannot be employed without retraining of some sort, or refresher courses, which makes their employment uneconomical for receiving countries (Zharenova et al. 2002: 18-19, 37). Our questionnaires, however, do not confirm that this is a valid argument. Only one respondent (Sweden) holding a degree in teaching English and German as foreign languages, had to complete university studies in the same field again and found a position as a university instructor after graduation. Later this respondent studied to become a teacher of Russian to expand career options. Two respondents (Israel) chose to switch fields completely. One was trained in the USSR as an engineer, the other as a mathematician, and both of them completed MA and PhD programs in psychology after immigration.
Two respondents (Hungary and Finland) mentioned taking refresher courses, and one of them added that she uses every opportunity to attend such courses. One respondent (Israel) mentioned courses in Judaic studies taken both in Israel and in England. Note that Judaics was not part of the Soviet university curricula. Three respondents mentioned courses in the language of the receiving country and one took computer courses. In fact, like all new immigrants, Israeli respondents had an opportunity to study Hebrew upon immigration, but only few chose to mention this. We can presume that our respondents from other counties also had to learn or improve the language of their country of residence, whether through official channels or privately. The other respondents, holders of Soviet university degrees, managed to re-enter academia without retraining.

We believe that an important reason why few immigrant researchers in humanities and social sciences re-entered academia is the general devaluation of these fields in the contemporary world. The connection between knowledge in the humanities and national security and economic prosperity is still considered remote, and is largely underestimated by politicians. As the Israeli historian Fania Oz-Zaltsberger (2007) remarked, the connection is there, but we haven’t yet learned to trace and measure it, 01/09/2007). \(^{10}\) Ironically, after years of neglecting the importance of humanities, Russia is currently at the forefront of countries in which the prestige of the humanities and social sciences has increased dramatically thanks to the demand for experts in economics, law, sociology, international relations, politology, and psychology. At the same time interest in history, philosophy, ethnography and anthropology is as low as ever. Young people clearly demonstrate a pragmatic approach to the choice of their future profession. As Yurevich justly observes, socio-economic crises tend to trigger fast development in these fields because they are more adaptive and less dependent on production processes than technology and engineering (Yurevich 2004: 3). Social sciences are “cheap” for the state since they do not require big investments in equipment. Of special importance for the current situation in Russia is the existence of a cult of politics, which dominates social life and accounts for the high demand for experts in the above fields. This recent change in the prestige of scientific fields has affected career strategies of the young generation. Faculties of humanities and social sciences are in great demand and the number of graduates and PhD students in these fields has doubled (Yurevich 2004: 7, 10).\(^{11}\)
The few authors writing about immigrant researchers in humanities admit that their professional integration is much harder than that of their peers in mathematics, technology, and natural sciences. Some of the reasons for this have been identified by Kheimets and Epshtein 2001, Epshtein and Uritskii 2002, Epshtein 2007, Remennick 2007, Zharenova 2006. They are incompatibility of skills, differing academic cultures, and immigrants’ weak proficiency in the language of the host country and in English. We would like to add to this list distrust of the Soviet social sciences and humanities by Western academics as overwhelmingly saturated by ideology, and hence largely useless. Consequently, the demand for them in the West is much lower than that for mathematicians and natural scientists. Incompatibility of skills can mostly be explained by the fact that during the Cold War humanities in the USSR became self-sufficient. While admitting that the lack of contacts with Western colleagues was a disadvantage, some believe today that this triggered independent thought and the emergence of several scientific schools, such as the Tartu school of semiotics (see Frumkina 2007).

The situation with the ideological suppression of scientists was more complex than it is often presented today. In the last decades of Soviet power, despite attempts of the partocracy to censor publications and research on specific topics, so as to limit access to Western information sources and contacts with Western colleagues, complete isolation of science could no longer be achieved, although non-conformist researchers had to display a fighting spirit. To cite just a few examples, we would mention the Tartu school of semiotics, headed by Y. Lotman, Levada center for sociological research, and the ethnolinguistic school headed by Nikita Tolstoy. Unfortunately, many of the independent thinkers were not allowed to travel outside the Soviet Union. Their work, as well as research conducted by their students and followers, were not published in the West, or were discovered after considerable delay. While articles in mathematics and natural sciences published in the leading Soviet journals were usually supplied with abstracts or summaries in English, this was not practiced in humanities. Nobody was expected to write in English, because publications were meant for domestic readership only. Among our respondents who started their academic career in the USSR only one had publications in the West before immigration:
I started publishing in international journals in English back in Moscow, taking serious risks by sending my articles abroad and bypassing Soviet bureaucracy. Over time, I have perfected the art of writing up my research and publishing it, which is the key to my “career success…”

Note that few researchers disposed of the appropriate writing skill in English, nor was publishing in the West a part of the professional outlook of researchers in humanities. Many had limited access even to Western journals kept in the major Soviet libraries and consequently were often unaware of the leading Western journals in their fields. On the other hand, everybody was aware of the ranking of domestic publications according to their prestige, with the leading Moscow journals heading the list.12

Anyone who published abroad required courage, and was at great risk of being regarded as a dissident. This act, just as with fiction, was dubbed *tamizdat* (Russian slang for publications abroad), which was hardly better than the notorious label of *samizdat* (Russian slang for “self-publication”). Trying to use official channels could kill the publication because of the necessity to present it to state expert committees, which could reject it on allegedly ideological grounds. As a result, just as the Soviet scientists were unfamiliar with many of the investigations conducted in the West, the bulk of research done in Soviet humanities and social sciences remained unknown to Western colleagues. In fact, two parallel systems of knowledge emerged and had few opportunities to meet.

This isolation also created complications when émigré researchers applied for jobs in the West. As already mentioned, their publications were primarily in Russian or in languages of national republics, such as Ukrainian, Armenian, Georgian, and so on, so their merit could be evaluated either by fellow immigrants of previous emigration waves or by those few who knew Russian as a foreign language.

One other aspect is that besides incompatibility of skills, émigré researchers are often confronted with incompatibility of fields of interest in various academic communities. A case in point is that when specialists, say, in the folklore of various ethnicities inhabiting the USSR, or in the social geography of Siberia, or in the linguistic patterns of Volga Germans emigrated, their high professional level notwithstanding, the applicability of their expert knowledge in the receiving country was limited.

Finally, there is a dearth of available positions in humanities as a whole. Unfortunately, it is well known that departments of humanities and social sciences are
usually the first to fall victim to financial cuts. Those who managed to enter the academia of a new country often suffered a lowering of status (see, e.g., Dezhina 2002a). The majority are employed on temporary contracts with few or no social benefits. As noted above, the contract does not entitle an immigrant researcher to submit research proposals for grants as an independent party and does not provide funding for participation in international conferences.

Even our tiny sample showed a tendency to temporary employment. Four of the respondents are tenured (two of them received all their degrees before emigration), two are on the tenure track, and nine have temporary contracts. In the latter group three Israeli respondents are employed through a KAMEA program, specially instituted for immigrant scientists. Sixty percent of the funding is provided by the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the rest being paid from the university budget. In the 1990s, when 13,000 scientists immigrated to Israel from the FSU, the government initiated a program for their professional re-integration that presupposed three-year employment in academia or R&D companies (known in the immigrant community as the Shapiro program). Criteria for acceptance were holding an MA with publications or a PhD. The next stage, the GILADI program, was competitive and required post-immigration publications. In the end, 500 researchers in all fields were selected as participants in the KAMEA program. Applicants’ CVs were scrutinized in the way similar to that practiced for tenure-track academics. The program allows promotion opportunities, with the position of Senior Research Fellow, corresponding to Associate Professor, being the highest rank. Although KAMEA was meant for long-term employment of the best immigrant researchers, the contract has to be renewed annually, and every year “Russian” members of the Knesset have to fight for its funding. In addition, unlike faculty members, KAMEA fellows, including those who teach full-time and do research, have no sabbatical rights and no differential component of the salary, computed on the basis of publication record, teaching load and administrative responsibilities. KAMEA fellows are not entitled to hold administrative positions and are not paid for supervising doctoral students. In principle, they can be transferred to permanent academic positions with the same amount of funding still coming from the Ministry of the Immigrant Absorption. If the KAMEA program closes down, however, the universities will become solely responsible for financing immigrant researchers’ work. Given the repeated threats to close the program down, such transfers are extremely rare.
program would mean automatic firing of KAMEA fellows. The ambivalence of the KAMEA fellows’ situation was reflected in answers to our questionnaires: one respondent referred to the contract as permanent, another as temporary, and the third, avoided using any of these categories. Yet despite their insecurity, KAMEA fellows are entitled to submit research proposals for grants as main investigators and are provided with funding for participation in international conferences. Like other temporary employees researchers on the Shapiro and GILADI programs do not receive these benefits, which reduces their competitiveness. Work conditions of temporarily employed academics do not differ for immigrants and their peers among veteran Israelis; but while the former are hired only if they have a substantial scientific record, the majority of the latter are at the beginning of their research career.

**Immigrant Researchers’ Strategies**

Now we would like to discuss strategies that immigrant researchers choose to advance in the academic world of their new country of residence. First of all, some specialists in the humanities and social sciences extended their previous research interests to the study of immigrants. We quote four of our respondents from Canada, Finland, and Israel:

- I investigated language contacts specializing in German “insular” dialectology and came to be interested in the development of a mother tongue in the foreign language environment. This is why Russian spoken abroad seemed to be a worthy subject for investigation. This entailed research into sociolinguistics, language policies, and so on.
- [I moved to immigration studies] from conversation analysis which I conducted already in the 1990s when there were no publications in this field in Russia.
- I study immigrants from the FSU and Ethiopia only in the context of comparative analysis of different groups.
- I began to collect oral testimony on the history of Jews in Russia in the 1930s. While searching for respondents I realized that many of them were immigrants. The rest is history.
In some cases people change direction of research due to necessity. One of our respondents (Israel) said that she had to expand into immigration studies because her main field hardly interested anybody in her new academic environment. Two other respondents (Japan and Israel) pointed out that they had taken up immigration studies on the advice of other colleagues. It was suggested to both of them to choose the niche where they would have a clear priority over others, and both are deeply grateful for this advice.

Epshtein observes that for many immigrant researchers the study of their own diasporal communities, as well as the country of origin, is objectively simpler and more accessible than other subjects requiring substantial proficiency in the languages of their new countries of residence, knowledge of history and understanding of other peoples’ cultural codes (Epshtein 2007: 444). The political scientist Garry P. Freeman gives this tendency a different explanation. He believes that émigrés take up immigration studies not so much to choose an easier path but to oppose discrimination:

Although I know no reliable data, simple observation suggests that many migration scholars are themselves first- or second-generation migrants. Human curiosity seems naturally to turn it upon itself. The history of social science is marked by attempts of scholars belonging to oppressed or marginal groups to draw attention to their plight. Women’s studies are dominated by women, minority studies by minorities, etc. Migrant scholars bring with them special insight and commitment and deserve credit for much of the field’s growth.

(Freeman 2005:115)

Although on the whole we believe there is truth in both of these observations, we see yet another emancipatory factor here. To investigate different aspects of immigration is a way to sort out your own experiences and sometimes overcome the trauma of acculturation. This theme dominates and is the most emotional part of the questionnaire where respondents give extensive answers; accordingly, we decided to quote them at length (Germany, Israel, U.S.A). In some answers several factors discussed earlier merge, with the last respondent summarizing all of them:

- Russian speech abroad grated my ears, and Russian culture, or rather one of its most massive manifestations, the Kazakh version\(^{14}\), grated
my eyes. It was interesting for me to watch how “simple” Russian will evolve in the German environment. After all, didn’t Yiddish form on the basis of German? Soon it became clear to me that the Russian language abroad is heterogeneous. Naturally, self-monitoring was an exciting experience.

- [It was] professional curiosity coupled with personal experience.
- I think that for me it is a perfect conjunction of my academic and personal interests.
- I think it was the desire to make sense and digest one of the most important events in my life.
- Once I wrote a course project in the third year of studies. And this is how it went on. I guess I wanted to sort it out for myself. Add to it that I used to deal with immigrants in my job, so I had data available [for research].
- Only part of my research is on immigrants so I am not an "emigrantolog" (Russian for “expert in immigration studies”). But of course it’s trying to understand your own experiences and also to address injustices that were inflicted on immigrants, and although are unavoidable, still need redressing
- Immigration problems are my problems. My parents have become factory workers. Their Hebrew is non-existent, and their Soviet degrees are worth nothing. Their social status plummeted, and Soviet-like, obsessive fear has become overwhelming in the new country. All of this is my life and the life of my parents in Israel. Why not write about things close to you, things that hurt? It is easy for me to write about immigrants, it is easy not to write something ridiculous. It is easy to spot interesting details. (…) My command of Russian and my immigrant origin are my “relative advantages” and it’s a shame not to utilize them (highlighting by the respondent).

Among personal motives triggering researchers’ interest in immigration studies is observation of their own children brought up in mixed bilingual families. A Swedish researcher (female) cites it as her only reason: “My own children brought
Another motive encouraging people in humanities to research their own communities is that consciously or unconsciously they are interested in the maintenance of the native language and culture, which are the essence of their professional activities and interests. Moreover, they feel their research makes their own group more visible to the mainstream society and empowers it, as is obvious from the above quotations and from the fact that we are writing this essay.

The next strategy is concerns the dilemma of parallel knowledge systems mentioned earlier. Among the first questions immigrant researchers ask themselves is which language to write papers in, what literature to quote, and where to publish. Regarding the language, the choice is among English as the lingua franca of science, the language of the country of residence such as Hebrew, German, Greek, Finnish, etc., and the language of the old country, be it Russian, Ukrainian, Armenian, and so on. We know from our informal discussions with colleagues that many of them had difficulty to begin writing papers in English. Among our respondents only one (Finland) mentioned language complications; “Publications in the West are difficult for me primarily due to my poor command of academic English. My conversational English is pretty good but I have difficulty producing science in English; learning stylistic peculiarities of this register is hard for me. I studied German at school and learned English on my own, back in the USSR/Russia”. Only three of our respondents (Israel and the Netherlands) have no publications in Russian. Importantly, two of them emigrated as teenagers. One answered the questionnaire in English and, as we know, has not learned formal writing in Russian; the other answered in Russian and is clearly oriented to Russian culture. His comment “I don’t have Russian publications yet” suggests that he does not exclude this as an option for the future. Six respondents (Israel, USA) have few publications in Russian but their reasons are different:

- The object of my research—comparative analysis of various socio-cultural groups in Israel—is not directly connected to Russia.
• I think my target audience are still Western academics

• Publications in Russian are not prestigious and do not contribute to your promotion at all.

• Up until recently, I did not write in Russian on professional matters. But lately I have been getting back to contributing to the Russian professional discourse. (Thank God, I can do what I want, having reached the top of the academic ladder—as Russian publications get you no credit in academia, of course.)

Indeed, publications in the FSU in Russian have little value if any for promotion, and other local languages still less, especially at the early stages of a career in a new country. Probably this is why immigrant researchers desperate to increase the number of publications in English sometimes publish in their country of origin in that language. This violates local conventions, and a publisher’s agreement may be considered a sign of good will.16

The majority of our respondents (12) publish in English, and/or in the language of the country of residence and in Russian. When émigré researchers begin to publish in a language other than Russian they have to take into account the readers’ cultural background and shared knowledge. In humanities and social sciences the context is extremely important and the proportions of explicitly and implicitly expressed information differ significantly (Leontovich, 2005: 25-26). Sometimes it takes a newcomer considerable time for to grasp that articles may be rejected not because of insufficient novelty of information but because the author failed to give a sufficient explanation of the information extremely familiar to him/her but unknown to Western readers. As time goes on, some researchers discover a partial loss of professional vocabulary in their mother tongue and find it difficult to express themselves and write papers in the native language (this is another reason why some émigrés publish in Russia in English).

There is also an inner conflict for at least some people. Publications in the West are more prestigious for the researchers’ reputation, but the readership may be more valuable to the authors in the old country. This is particularly true for experts in Slavic studies. To illustrate this we quote our respondents from Finland and Japan:
First of all, it is important for me to address the Russian reader and influence him, because very few foreign journals reach Russia, and Russian studies in the West remain virtually unknown in Russia. Secondly, living abroad and participating in Western scientific discourse one begins to see things differently. One acquires stereoscopic “scientific vision” and as far as I understand, this is interesting to Russian publishers. Then, after all, I feel I represent Russian science, so it is articles and books in Russian that are psychologically important for me. Finally, articles in Russian are absolutely essential for me for the sake of retaining and perfecting my style in academic Russian. This is extremely important for my work with foreigners.

I try to publish primarily in Russian, because my most valuable readers, my strictest critics and my main reviewers are my compatriots, both in Russia and in the West. Tomorrow, I’ll submit an article that’ll come out in Helsinki, not long ago I sent an article to Berlin, and naturally, I publish about three articles annually in Tokyo.

Well, of course, it is not simple. It is not just “two worlds and two systems”; it is “many worlds and many systems”. The style of scientific articles is obviously different, not to mention the content. There are good and weak publications both here and there. It is impossible to translate everything from Russian into English, because it is a different mentality, but it would be useful to write some reviews “in the opposite direction”, so that the English-language world could learn about the Russian-language world. Some devotees of science do this.

The next pitfall is the bibliography. A plethora of names of Russian and Soviet researchers unfamiliar to editors and reviewers often annoys them; and like any other researcher, an immigrant has to demonstrate familiarity with the Western literature. We know that some colleagues avoid citing Russian sources not because they consider them irrelevant, but because they are afraid that their abundance will hinder acceptance. But even those who are prepared to refer to the Russian literature often find that libraries in their new academic “homes” lack Russian books and journals,
mirroring the situation with Western literature in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet countries. This complaint is a response to one of our questions (Israel): “I seldom refer to Russian sources: it is difficult to get hold of them here”.

As our experience and responses quoted above indicate, different researchers cope with these dilemmas differently and their strategies may change in the course of their new careers. Some colleagues, even those who are initially oriented exclusively to the Western readership, make a gradual come back to the “old country” and resume publishing in Russian in Russia, sometimes after an interval of over 10 years. We have also seen an expansion of citations of Russian sources in the work of immigrant researchers published in the West in the last couple of years. Another change we have noticed is that immigrant researchers contribute to the expansion of Russian book collections in the libraries of their academic institutions, bridging the gap between the two parallel knowledge systems created as long ago as the Cold War. Notably, a publishing house with two offices, one in Jerusalem and one in Moscow, and which makes an important contribution to the promotion of the work by immigrant researchers and writers, is called Gesharim (Hebrew for “bridges”) and “Mosty Kul’tury” (Russian for “bridges between cultures”).

**Russian scientists abroad: a monocentric or a polycentric diaspora?**

All who write about immigration of scientists from the FSU agree that we are witnessing the emergence of a Russian scientific diaspora. Following Smith and Guarnizo (1998) and Remennick (2007: 159), we distinguish two types of forces mobilizing transnationalism of the Russian scientific diaspora, “from above” and “from below”.

Transnationalism “from above” is manifested in activities sponsored by institutions in Russia and successor states. In the Soviet period contacts with émigrés were prohibited and few academics would risk their careers to maintain connections with their former friends and colleagues residing in the West. Only in the late 1980s were old ties restored, with hesitant approval by the authorities. Shlapentokh wittily refers to this phenomenon as “reunion with emigration” (Shlapentokh 1990: 247-248). The shift in relations with émigré scientists and new patterns of collaboration are discussed by Russian sociologists of science (see, e.g., Borisov 2002; Egerev 2002).
While until recently Russia tried to court only émigré mathematicians and natural scientist, recently the policy has changed and manifold attempts have been made to involve émigré scientists in joint projects. For example, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research sponsors projects in various fields of science and encourages participation of diasporans. In 2006 the *World Congress of the Compatriots Living Abroad* held in St. Petersburg included in its resolution a proposal to create the International Association of Scientists Living Abroad, which would be affiliated with the Russian Academy of Sciences ([http://www.mid.ru/ns-dgpch.nsf/55718a34e773bd87c325721f00429adb/6669d6473de007aac3257212002f067e?OpenDocument](http://www.mid.ru/ns-dgpch.nsf/55718a34e773bd87c325721f00429adb/6669d6473de007aac3257212002f067e?OpenDocument), 28/07/2007).

Another move was made in 2007 when a presidential decree proclaimed the the *Russian Language Year* (Decree 1488, 29 December 2007). The strategic goal of this project is to rejuvenate interest in learning Russian and about Russian culture worldwide. It also aims at promoting a positive image of Russia at home and all over the world. In this attempt to revive the credibility of Russian as a means of communication outside the country’s borders, the upper echelons of power hope to expand the influence of Russian culture and view this as a crucial political, economic and social target. One may speculate that Russia may take a closer look at active émigré researchers in humanities and try to tap this human resource in order to pursue her new culture-related goals.

Despite the grand names given to the organizations and forums founded to attract the émigré intelligentsia, and despite the publicity around the diaspora, institutional efforts to maintain ties with émigré researchers are not systematic and not always successful. Yet they influence the policies of publishing houses, journals, academic institutions and conference organizers. Since the late 1990s several books by émigré researchers about the life of former Soviets abroad have been published in Moscow and St. Petersburg, their authors include, Alec Epshtein and M. A. Fedorchenko (eds.) 2000; Eliezer Feldman 2003; Moshe Kenigshtein (ed.) 2007; Zeev (Vladimir) Khanin 2004; Ekaterina Protassova 2004; Yuri Slezkine 2005, and others, including ourselves. Publishing activities of the émigré researchers are seen in the donor country as “transfer of diasporic cultural capital” (Zharenova et al. 2002: 96). At the same time, Russian researchers investigate ex-patriates residing in
different countries and publish studies about them. The first to be mentioned here are books about communities of ex-Soviets in Boston by Galina Komarova 2002 and in Germany by Nelly Khrustaleva 2001. Besides publishing, émigré researchers frequently participate in international and national conferences held in the FSU. Some give lecture courses, supervise students and organize seminars. In addition, émigré researchers organize conferences in the countries of residence, inviting their colleagues from the FSU and immigrants from other countries. In Israel, for example, Bar Ilan University has twice hosted the conference on *Russian-speaking Jewry in Global Perspective: Power, Politics and Community*, and the University of Haifa was venue of the conferences on *The Russian Language Abroad* and *Anti-Semitism and Philo-Semitism in Modern Russia and Eastern Europe*. Not only the initiators, but most of the participants of these and many other meetings were Soviet-trained researchers residing in various countries, and the dominant language of presentations was Russian. Most of our respondents are actively involved in joint activities with their former compatriots: 11 wrote they participate in conferences held in the FSU, 15 in conferences organized by émigré researchers outside the FSU, and 13 in joint projects with FSU researchers. As we have shown, not all the diasporic activities are linked to the countries of the FSU. At first sight a sabbatical spent by an Israeli researcher in Italy has nothing to do with the diaspora, if we don’t take into account that the invitation was initiated by his former fellow student from a Soviet university, currently living in Italy. The important aspect of all these activities is reliance on informal professional networks. Four of our respondents (Finland, Israel, Japan, USA) mentioned receiving professional help from other émigré researchers, which included finding a job, arranging for publications, and invitations to conferences. The theme of solidarity with colleagues and compatriots often arises in informal conversations. There are counter-examples as well. Answering the question about publications in the West, one of our respondents (Germany) remarked, “I would say I have not succeeded yet. It is sad to admit, but partially it’s due to my colleagues –compatriots. I am afraid they tend to be unjustifiedly jealous about emergence of new names on the scientific market.” Some of the network ties were established before emigration but others were created in subsequent years.

Transnationalism “from below” seems to work much better than “from above”. Soviet-trained researchers have created numerous non-commercial web sites
which provide information about research grants, post-doc positions, the latest publications in specific fields, and so on. In the early 1990s, when the immigration of scientists was still a novelty, researchers advised each other on how to write a CV, a research proposal, a grant application, and so on. These websites also serve as discussion forums in which participants pose professional questions, discuss social and economic problems, give each other useful tips about academic cultures outside Russia and their survival codes, and just chat about anything. Some of these forums are non-specialized, for example, www.researcher.at.ru and www.inforuss; others cater to communities in specific fields: www.neuroscience.ru, www.mol.biol.ru, http://www.emory.edu/INTELNET/, 29/07/2007.

In between institutionally-sponsored and informal transnational activities there is a gray area in which contacts are initiated by individuals but cannot be maintained without the state’s silent approval or its indifference. Some émigrés, for example, write theses and are granted degrees (PhD and Big Doctorates) in Russia, others supervise graduate and post-graduate students at Russian universities.18

It is difficult to say to what extent Russia will be able to influence the evolution of the scientific diaspora. First, there are possible complications in the relations between the Russian scientific community and the scientific diaspora. As Russia expands its involvement in the international community, émigré scientists are increasingly seen as competitors. As a result the attitude to them is prevalently pragmatic (Dezhina 2002). In addition, as long as people communicate informally on a one-to-one basis things run smoothly, but as soon as collectives start to negotiate joint ventures the partnership invariably ends in quarrels and mutual recriminations (Egerev 2002a). Reservations are voiced outside Russia as well. One of the founding fathers of Soviet sociology, Vladimir Shlapentokh, who reside in the USA, wrote an article in which he reflects on the current re-writing of the history of the field by some influential members of the community; this is likely to repel émigré colleagues and inhibit further cooperation (Shlapentokh 2007).

Conclusions

The term diaspora has become fuzzy, with neither a generally accepted definition nor universal criteria. Émigré researchers involved in diasporic activities
are not always loyal to Russia, and few of them plan to return to the old country. Some are motivated by promoting the culture of the new country in their publications and conference presentations in the FSU. This does not prevent them, however, from trying to get the best of both worlds and to maintain informal networks cemented by the common language, personal friendships and common professional background.

Despite terminological controversies, the material presented in this essay confirms that ex-Soviet researchers interacting professionally can be viewed as a scientific diaspora. Various publications, internet resources created by scientists, responses to our online questionnaire, as well as our participant observations indicate that the Russian scientific diaspora is non-centralized. In the absence of formal organizations supporting them at home or in host countries, Russian immigrant scientists maintain transnational connections with fellow expatriate colleagues, and primarily rely on informal networks.

When the study of immigrants is the monopoly of scientific communities of receiving countries, it is shaped as the study of “the other”. When immigrant groups are investigated by their members the perspective changes, and it is the host society that emerges as the other, viewed and assessed by newcomers. An important feature of the studies conducted by immigrants is dialectic positioning: researchers act as insiders familiar with subtleties of culture that influence behavior and discourse of the group, and at the same time they adopt the strategy of estrangement which de-automates their perception and brings them closer to the view of the host society. The choice of immigration studies as a scientific niche can also be seen as an integration strategy that allows one to gain a foothold in both worlds.

Of special interest are members of the one-and-a-half generation who take up immigration studies as their subject. They do it not because of the inadequate proficiency in the language of the receiving society or lack of knowledge about it generally. Some of them may be oriented by their scientific advisors, but others are guided by the interest in the culture of their origin. Their position is intermediate, because their knowledge of the country of origin is limited, but the new society is more accessible to them with its history and cultural codes.

References


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1 The research reported here is a joint project. The authors alternate priority of authorship in their publications.

2 The Russian concept of a scientist is not limited to people specializing in natural and life sciences, but also includes researchers in social sciences and humanities.

3 These numbers cover only those who maintain at least some type of connections with their fatherland. One of the leading Russian researchers investigating Russian émigré scientists, I. Dezhina claims that obtaining reliable statistics for this group is an elusive goal because the situation changes constantly; to keep track of all individuals is next to impossible (Dezhina 2002; Dezhina 2002a).

4 While we were writing this essay, several articles appeared on the Internet discussing the brain drain from Israel. Their authors reported on a conference dedicated to this problem and expressed concern that academia in the USA and in European countries was more attractive for Israeli academics. A scientific career abroad promises better conditions of work, including funding opportunities, infrastructure and equipment, as well as better quality of life. The two groups that were cited as being particularly active in seeking study and employment opportunities outside Israel were academics of East-European origin young people between 20 and 30 years of age. Special concern was expressed about emigration intentions of the latter group (see, [http://www.ipost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1161811205205&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull](http://www.ipost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1161811205205&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull), [http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3153786,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3153786,00.html), [http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3469004,00.html](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3469004,00.html), 22/11/2007.
5 State Duma is the name of the parliament in Russia.

6 Even the newspaper Pravda in an editorial titled Scientists’ Emigration: Damages to Russian Economy Amount to $30 billion had to acknowledge that “international brainpower migration is an objective and natural process.” Yet it cautioned that Russia was losing either experienced and successful specialists or young promising research assistants, leaving a serious gap in research institutes and academia (Pravda, 7 December, 2005, http://english.pravda.ru/main/18/88/351/16590_scientists.html).

7 A similar experience is reported by Dezhina, who conducted interviews among émigré academics in the USA working at MIT and the National Institute of Health at Harvard. She relates that most of her subjects were reluctant to participate in the study, but during the interviews it became clear that the situation in Russian science and the change it caused in their career had occupied their thoughts. Dezhina also noticed that the younger scientists were more ready to assimilate and accept their new country of residence, while researchers who had experience of work in academia before and after emigration were emotional and nostalgic, and displayed ambivalent attitudes to the organization of science in both the old and the new country (Dezhina 2002).

8 We are deeply grateful to our respondents for the ideas they generously shared with us.

9 We are grateful to Dr. Natalia Kosmarskaia, deputy editor-in-chief of the journal Diasporas for providing us with some names. We are also indebted to the respondents who did the same, but so as not to disclose their identity, we do not name them here.

10 Here and further dates following web addresses indicate when the sites were accessed.

11 According to the research conducted at the Central European University in Budapest by Molodikova, the forecasts for students in humanities and social sciences from CIS and Baltic States, predicting that only about 18-22% of the graduates would return home, proved wrong. The actual numbers are 76.4% in all fields surveyed (Molodikova 2006: 46). These data are relevant to our essay because this university provides education only in humanities and social sciences, and economics is its most “technical” faculty.

12 Even today our colleagues in Ukraine complain that their English publications in internationally acclaimed journals are ignored as prerequisites for submitting Big Doctorate theses and are of much less importance for promotion than articles in Ukrainian journals.


14 Large numbers of ethnic Germans emigrated from Kazakhstan where this ethnic group had been exiled by Stalin.

15 These reasons were a discovery of a rich collection of immigrant newspapers that had not been previously researched and his emerging interest in the language of recent immigrant families, in which one spouse is an Ingermanland Finn and the other is Russian.

16 See, e.g., articles by Halbershtadt-Komar 2006; Tartakovsky 2006; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2001; Yelenevskaya and Fialkova 2000.

17 See information about similar acts of solidarity in Dezhina 2002a; Ilarionova 2005.

18 While writing this essay we came across an advertisement in a supplement to the largest Russian-language newspaper in Israel Vesti. It was placed by the Moscow Open Law School which advertised permanent positions for Israeli citizens who received their academic degrees (PhD and Big Doctorates in the USSR (Kaznachei, 2007, 8 November: 19)).