

March 12, 2008
Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Social Research Center
American University of Central Asia
(www.src.auca.kg)

Summary of the lecture:

“Political Changes and Return Migration to Europe
from across the Former Soviet Space”

Return Migration of Ethnic Germans from the Post-Soviet Space
Dr. Benedicte Michalon

Our discussion today is about one particular type of migration, known as ethnic migration or return migration. We have chosen to talk about this form of migration because it constitutes the bulk of the initial migrations from former Soviet states after the collapse of the Soviet Union – Jews to Israel, Germans to Germany, Greeks to Greece, Poles to Poland, and so on. In scholarly literature, this special type of migration is conceived as that in which ethnicity is seen as the leading impetus for migration, and as a factor that directs the entire migration process. This type has been the subject of a great amount of empirical research, but of very little theoretical work. Thus, our understanding of this type remains under-theorized.

Still, based on empirical cases, we can identify three general theoretical elements, which I would like to summarize at the outset. First, ethnic discrimination and/or conflicts in the country of origin are thought to trigger the emigration of minority communities. Second, ethnicity is seen as the main factor that determines these migrants' choice of a country in which to settle – for example, German migrants from the USSR feeling that they share something in common with the inhabitants of Germany. In this instance, there is often a great difference between theory and reality. The third element is that ethnicity is crucial in determining the political framework for the migration. With such large-scale movements, the receiving country generally must produce special policies and legal frameworks that provide special legal conditions for coethnic immigrants, differentiating them from other migrants. The government of the receiving country must use ethnicity as the basis of such extraordinary legal frameworks. We wish to discuss these three elements of ethnic migration through the cases of Germans and Jews emigrating from the former Soviet Union.

Before moving on to these cases, however, I want to emphasize that it is quite problematic to focus on these three points, because we are required to presume that ethnicity always plays the dominant role. It is quite risky to “ethnicize” one’s analysis this way – to give too much importance to ethnicity, when so many processes may occur within these migrations that are not directly related to ethnicity. A second problem that we must take into consideration is that ethnicity is a social construction, which should not be essentialized or primordialized, as though it is simply given by birth.

Thus, our question becomes, “does ethnicity make these migrations special?” Indeed it does on some levels. However, there has been a very strong change over the last fifteen years in these two cases, because the migration policies of both Germany and Israel are losing their ethnic character, meaning that the two governments no longer give ethnicity a central place in their immigration policies towards these “returning” populations.

My focus is on the German migration, which I have called “one migration among others,” for various reasons that I will address. Let me preface by saying that Germany is often

considered an archetype for states applying an ethnic migration policy. However, German migration policy is often much more ambivalent than is recognized. Ethnicity does play an important role, but it is not always the determining factor. Increasingly, German migrants from the former Soviet Union are considered for admittance as any other migrant would be.

To give some very general information as to the evolution of the migration flows, first of all, the law concerning ethnic German migration was created after the Second World War, in 1953. It was meant to help so-called German minorities from communist countries immigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany. Thanks to this law, some special legal protocols were granted, along with a set of social welfare policies to help the immigrants once they had arrived. The law created a new legal category, *aussiedler*, meaning German migrants coming from all the communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from across the Soviet Union. Over the last fifty-five years, about four million people immigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany through this framework. The main country of origin from which Germans emigrated was the USSR, later the Commonwealth of Independent States, which contributed about half of these migrants. Another one and a half million emigrated from Poland.

The flow has been very irregular over time. There was a very high peak at the time of the collapse of the communist regime. For example, in just one year, 1990, about 400,000 people entered Germany through this framework. This highpoint presents a very important inflow of people. Central Asia was an important point of origin (as was the interior of Russia), particularly Kazakhstan. However, it is important to note that the migration is now effectively over. Last year, in 2006, only seven thousand people entered Germany through this framework.

Returning to the nature of the legal framework, Germany is often thought to be a state that accords great significance to ethnicity in its legislation. In fact, however, if we examine the details of this particular framework, we find that it was conceived more as a political instrument of the Federal Republic of Germany after WWII, which does not give a central place to ethnicity. This becomes clear when one examines the details of who can benefit from the law. It is significant that, although this law focused on ethnic Germans, it facilitated the immigration of Germans only from communist countries, although there are German minorities in South America, for example. The law focused on Germans in communist countries because they were considered to be facing discrimination in these countries during and after the War. Although I cannot go into the details here and now, geopolitical and ideological issues within this postwar context clearly play a central role, more central than ethnicity alone. To give one example, in the seventies, if it was found that an applicant had been active in supporting a communist regime, they were denied immigration as a coethnic.

Furthermore, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the great expansion of these migration flows caused the Federal Republic of Germany to amend its policies, making return migration on the basis of ethnicity more difficult. Most importantly, ethnic Germans can no longer immigrate through this framework from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, because these countries are now considered democracies. Only the former Soviet space is considered as a place where ethnic Germans may face problems of discrimination. Another major change is that people emigrating from the former Soviet space to Germany must *prove* that they are German, by demonstrating that they had always declared themselves to be German to the authorities in the country of origin. Along with this change, the process has also been made more difficult by shifting the administration of the immigration process to the countries of origin. In other words, if a German person here in Kyrgyzstan wants to migrate to Germany, he must prove that he is German to the embassy here in Bishkek, and fill out all the paperwork here as well, whereas before he would be able to fulfill all requirements once in Germany.

A third major change is that there is an immigration quota. Whereas before there was no quota – I mentioned the instance of 400,000 immigrants in a single year – now there is a

quota of 100,000 people per year. Two further important changes concern language and the status of family members. Applicants must now take mandatory German language tests both in the country of origin and upon arrival in Germany. They must prove that they can function in German in order to earn the right to immigrate. Finally, all family members must be able to speak German. It is not sufficient for just one parent to be ethnically German and speak German. The spouse and all children must also be able to function in German if they are to be admitted to Germany. The last point to note is that ethnic Germans born after 1992 are not eligible to immigrate through this framework. Thus, the policy has an effective end.

These factors point to some elements of this framework that are common to the general migration policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. The first commonality regards the quota, which is a common feature of the migration policies of many countries. The second regards the burden of proof placed on immigrants concerning their legitimate desire to come to the country and contribute to its society, and the need to prove this before leaving their country of origin. It is common for countries to seek only highly qualified migrants, and to make them gain a working contract with a firm before granting them a visa. The last commonality regards the concern with the migrants' abilities to integrate in the receiving country, especially linguistically – hence the language exams. This last aspect is particularly interesting, because it shows that in reality the German authorities doubt the migrants' status as Germans, and subsequently doubt their ability to integrate into German society.

Thus, what first appears to be a purely ethnic migration in fact contains numerous other elements, the play of which displaces ethnicity from its presumed central role.

A Soviet Jewish Diaspora in Israel?

Dr. William Berthomiere

Over the last several years, the idea that I have been developing has been to create a data file which provides a maximum amount of information linking the origins and final destinations of Jews migrating from the Soviet space to Israel. In this perspective, my main point of interest was to gather scientific elements with which to explore the issue of the representations of the Israeli space by the immigrants and their effects on the so-called “mizzug galuyyot.” In this brief presentation, I will proceed through different cases to explore the complex integration dynamic of former Soviet Union (FSU) migrants into their new social context in Israel.

The most significant community of immigrants in Israel today is Jews who immigrated from the former Soviet Union, as the following statistics demonstrate:

Chart 1: Frequency of Immigration of Jews from the Former Soviet Union

Année d'immigration	Fréquence	Pour cent	Pourcentage valide	Pourcentage cumulé
90	185 382	22,5	22,5	22,5
91	147 821	17,9	17,9	40,4
92	65 138	7,9	7,9	48,3
93	66 401	8	8	56,3
94	68 010	8,2	8,2	64,6
95	64 911	7,9	7,9	72,4
96	59 195	7,2	7,2	79,6
97	54 799	6,6	6,6	86,3
98	46 258	5,6	5,6	91,9
99	67 030	8,1	8,1	100
Total	824 945	100	100	

Including migration from the years before 1990, the number of immigrants totals more than one million.

When first attempting to collect such data, I encountered the problem that the state of Israel had collected data of a very global nature. I suggested to the statistics bureau of Israel that they begin compiling new files on immigrants that would reflect more elements of the migrations from the former Soviet Union.

Upon arrival, in order to gain the right to “return” to Israel, immigrants must pass through some customs and control processes, in which they are asked various questions related to social and lifestyle issues, including birthplace and place of residence before migration. I proposed to link this data with the existing statistical data that the state had collected on settlement after immigration. The idea was to develop this kind of data in order to explore the issue of the understanding of Israeli geography possessed by the Soviet immigrants, and its effects on the integration process, known as “mizzug galuyyot,” meaning “the fusion of the exiles” – the *melting pot* of Israel.

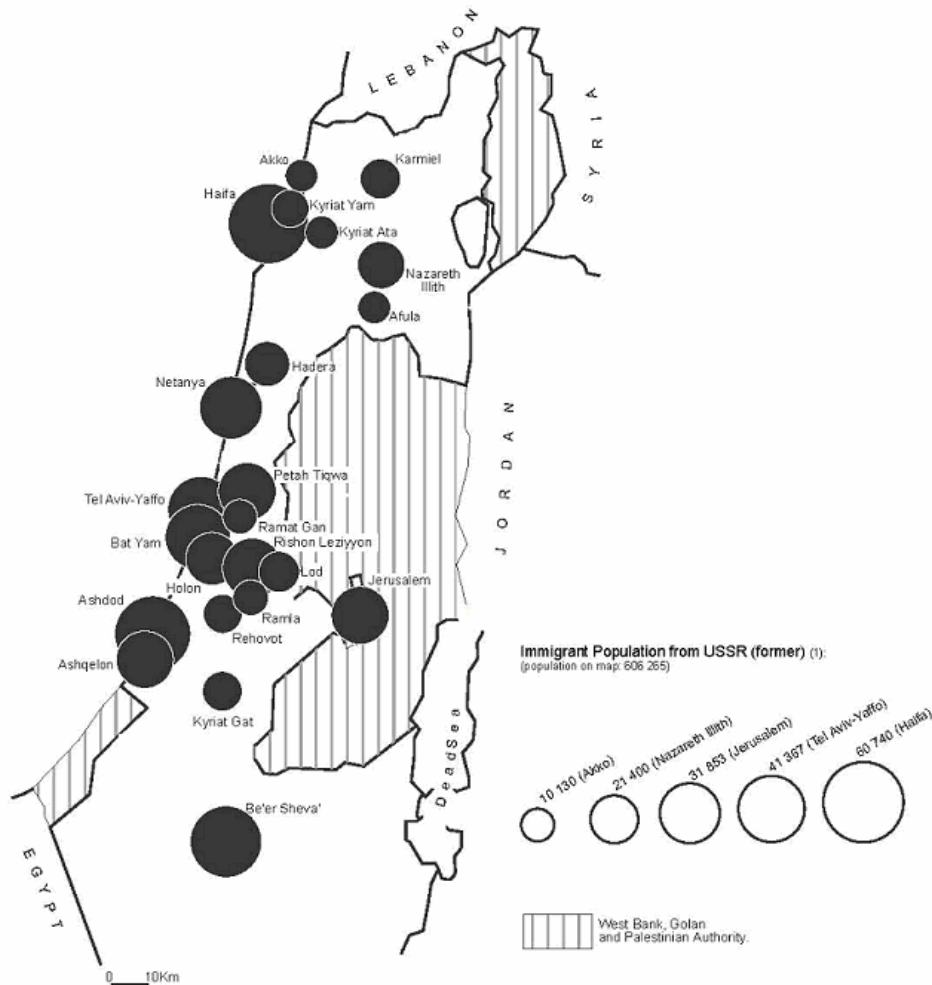
Chart 2: Country of Origin of FSU Immigrants

Origin	Fréquence	%
UKRAINE	262 584	31,8
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	188 191	22,8
USSR when republic is not specified in the immigration file	88 333	10,7
UZBEKISTAN	73 110	8,9
BELARUS	64 797	7,9
MOLDOVA	44 177	5,4
AZERBAIJAN	31 604	3,8
GEORGIA	19 601	2,4
KAZAKHSTAN	15 008	1,8
TAJIKISTAN	10 502	1,3
LITHUANIA	9 081	1,1
LATVIA	8 956	1,1
KIRGHIZSTAN	4 039	0,5
TURKMENISTAN	2 047	0,2
ARMENIA	1 718	0,2
ESTONIA	1 195	0,1
ABKHAZISTAN	2	0,0
<i>Total</i>	<i>824 945</i>	<i>100,0</i>

The problem became one of how to explore such a large migration – more than 800,000 people since 1990. For each migrant, I proposed to collect data on age at time of immigration, sex, marital status, country of birth, country of last residence, city of residence within the USSR, years of education, etcetera. For the period after immigration, we were able to follow the same person through three time periods: the time of immigration, the population

census of 1995, and the population registry of 1999. For all three time periods, we collected data on occupation, district of residence, sub-district of residence, and quarter of residence, allowing us to follow the internal migrations of immigrants after their arrival at various different scales of observation.

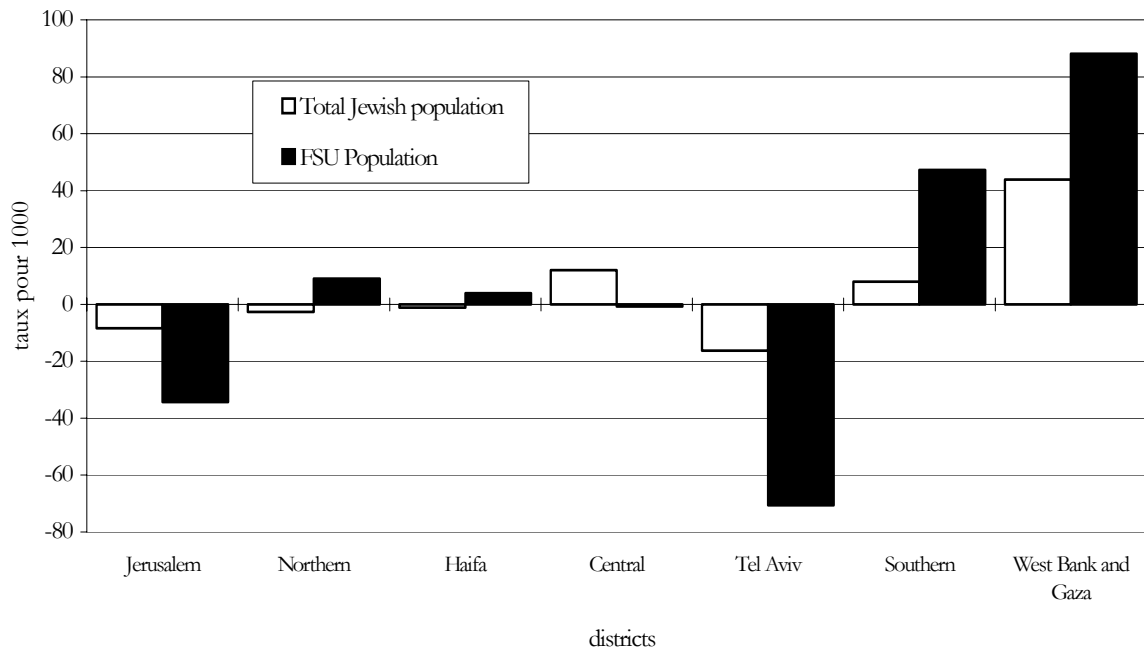
Map 1
Main cities of residence of the FSU Immigrants (2000)



The results showed that the major locations of settlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union were in the central cities – Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, etc. Looking at this map, we can postulate that with such large concentrations of FSU immigrants, there might be some reconstruction of the Soviet Diaspora within Israel, e.g. perhaps in Be'er Sheva' there are primarily immigrants from Uzbekistan.

The first step, however, was to examine Israeli policies on the integration of FSU immigrants into Israel. We must keep in mind that this policy has been one of so-called *direct absorption*, meaning that arriving immigrants received support from the state, specifically financial support amounting to approximately ten thousand dollars for a family with two children. In addition, immigrants are *now* free to choose a place of residence within Israel. There had previously been a policy of *indirect absorption* – a housing policy that attempted to encourage immigrants to settle in the North, the South, and the West Bank for the sake of the development and strategic position of the state. Especially with the intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there was a push to prevent immigrants from settling in the central metropolitan areas of the state. This policy was facilitated through government subsidies of up to 90% of housing costs for immigrants settling in these peripheral regions. This policy was quite a success, as is demonstrated by the following chart.

Chart 3: FSU Immigrants and Total Jewish Population; Internal Migrations by District (1995)

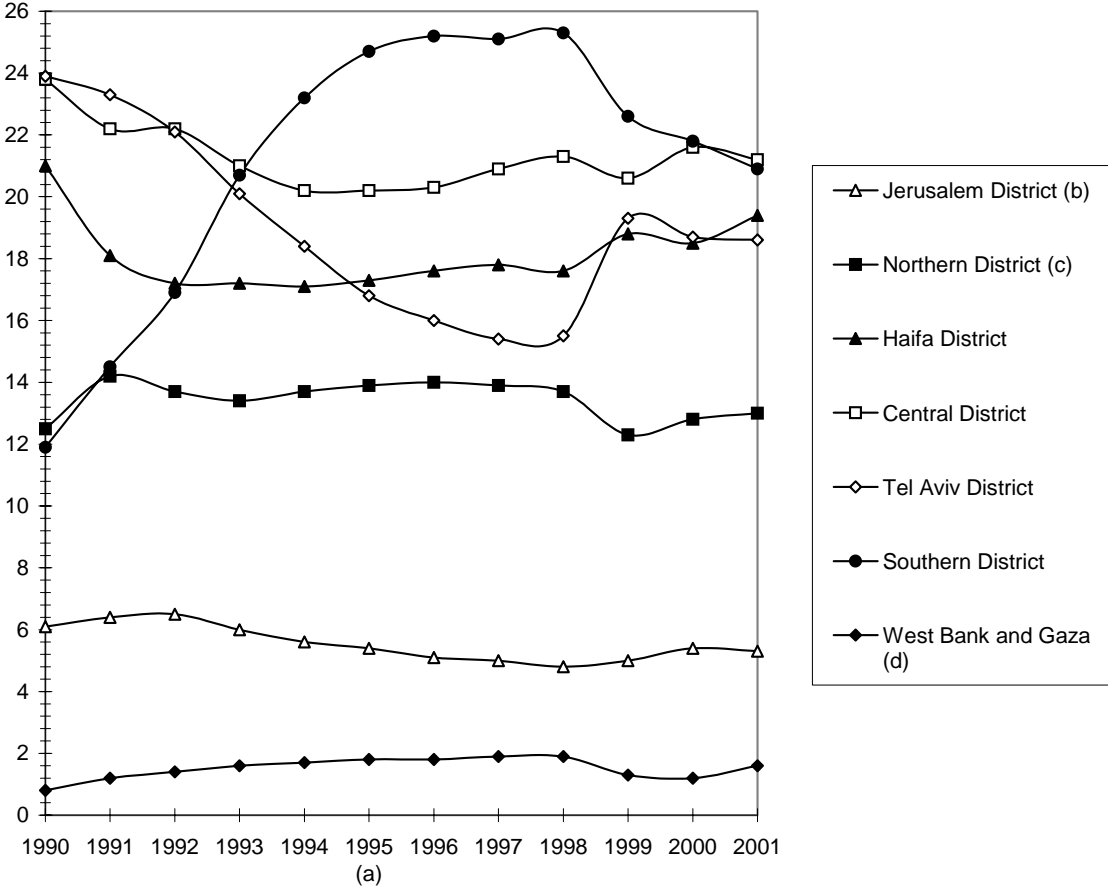


source: Immigrant population from Former Soviet union, 1995: Demographic trends, CBS, 1998, p.21

As is shown, there is a large relative deficit of FSU immigrants in the main cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, to the benefit of the South, West Bank, and Gaza. It was really quite a success to settle people in these regions. Now, however, immigrants are totally free to choose a place of residence.

The next graph gives a sense of the distribution of FSU immigrants by district. We can see that there is one particular district which experienced large growth: the southern district, in which the proportion of FSU immigrants grew from 12% to 25% between 1990 and 1995.

Chart 4: Distribution of Soviet immigrants by district (1990-2001)

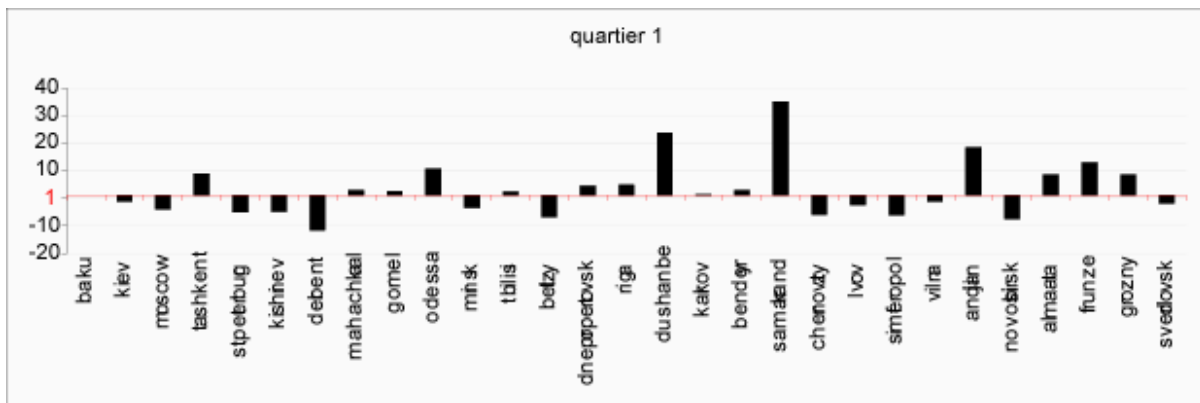


(a): Census Data; (b): incl. East-Jerusalem; (c): incl. Golan; (d): Israelis in Jewish localities
 nb. Not including children born in Israel to mothers who immigrated from USSR (former)
 Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Jerusalem, 2002.

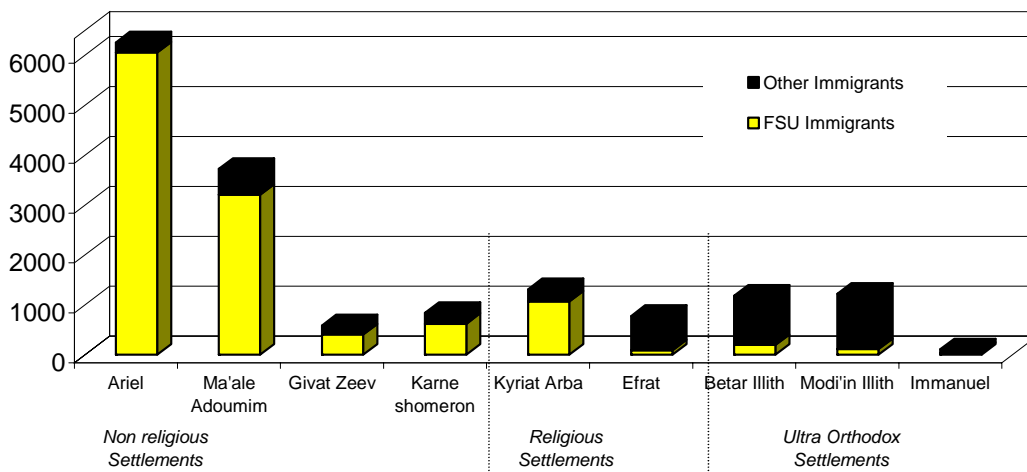
With these data files, it has been very easy to develop information on internal migration – to track which categories of immigrants move after their initial settlement in Israel, where they move from, and where to. For example, if we look at a small city in the North, Or Aqiva, we were able to determine that a large portion (34%) of the FSU immigrants in the city came directly there from the former Soviet Union, but the remaining 76% moved there from other settlements later on after their initial immigration. When we then considered further the points of origin for these internal migrations, we were again able to see the success of the Israeli housing policies to move immigrants out of the main cities and into small towns near border areas.

Turning now specifically to the question regarding the possible reconstruction of the Soviet Diaspora within Israel, we did discover that immigrants sharing the same city of origin within the Soviet space settled in very high concentrations both at the level of districts within cities, and at the level of cities themselves. For example, within Be’er Sheva, more than 50% of all FSU immigrants from Samarkand living in the city settled in the first district, as well as more than 40% of all immigrants from Dushanbe. In some cases, such internal migrations caused concerns, as is the case in the second district of Be’er Sheva, which was also a large recipient of the internal migrations.

Chart 5 : Be'er Sheva – District 1 (Shekhuna Dalet) ; Variation to the average distribution of FSU population by quarter and FSU city of origin (1995)



A particularly intriguing case involves FSU Jews living in the West Bank. We should consider this population in the light of the overall migration: Out of the total population of FSU immigrants, only a very small portion, 16,000 Jews, moved to the West Bank, and we were very curious to see if there were any particularities of this population. Looking at Kiryat Arba, a strongly Zionist colony, we found, first of all, that the population is generally highly educated; more than 39% have a scholarly or scientific background. Viewed from another side, only approximately 24% of FSU immigrants from Samarkand and Dushanbe were living in Kiryat Arba. In general, the great majority of immigrants who settled in Kiryat Arba did not profess strong religious sentiments, and moved to non-religious settlements. Only a few moved into strong Orthodox communities.

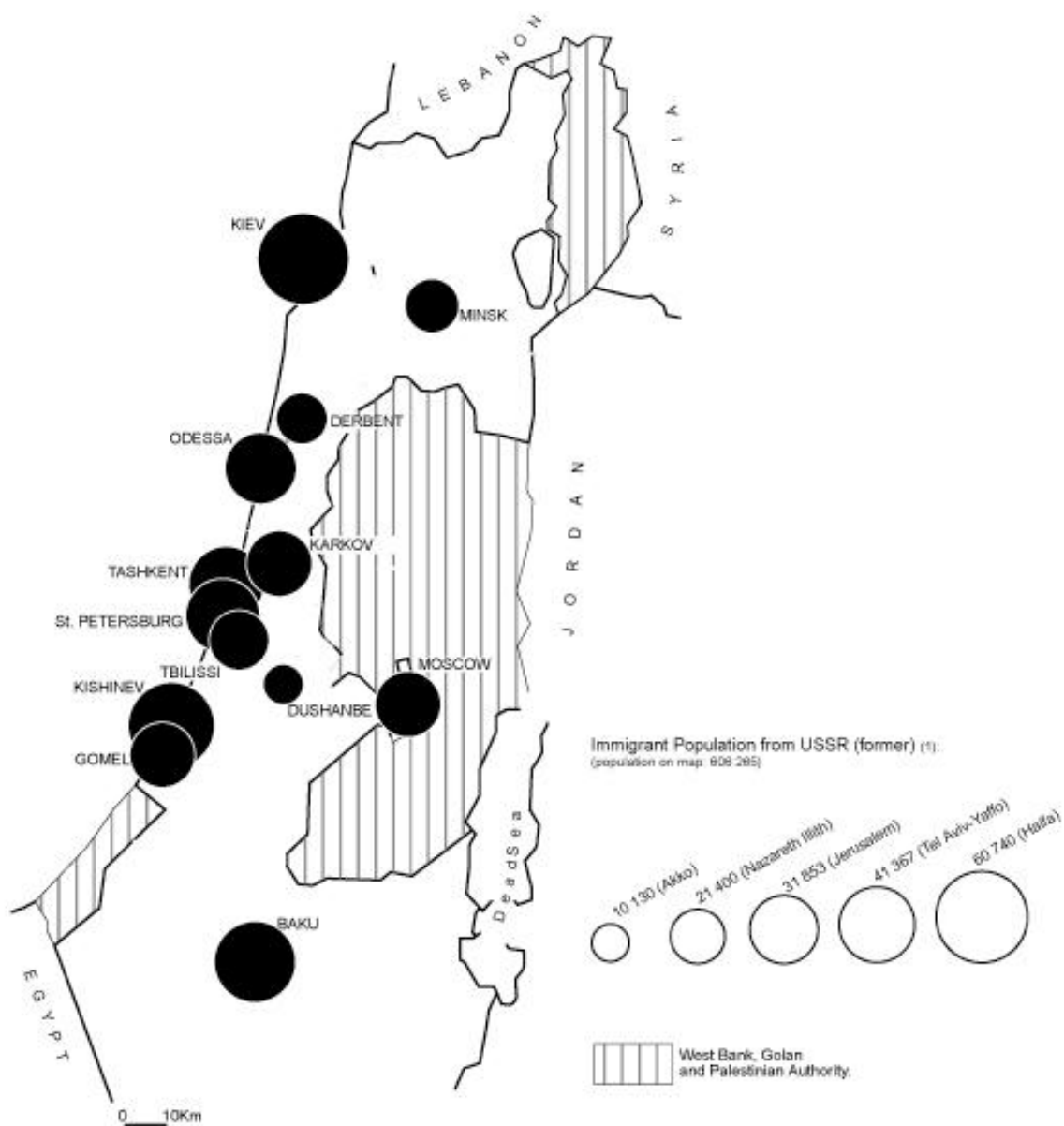


Source: Ministère israélien de l'immigration, 2000.

Currently, continued emigration from the former Soviet Union to Israel is at a very low level. Only approximately 25,000 FSU Jews immigrated to Israel in the past year, which, it is significant to mention, is fewer than the number that immigrated to Germany.

To conclude, I present for your consideration a map of Israel in which the names of cities and other settlements have been changed to reflect these patterns of Soviet Diaspora reconstruction that we found. Through this map, we may be able to grasp the way in which the geography of Israel is understood by Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Map 2
A representation of the FSU Immigrants Space in Israel



(1): Only the cities with more than 10 000 immigrants are mentioned (in 30 September 2000).
 Source : Ministry of Immigration and Absorption, Jerusalem, 2000.
 Réalisation W. BERTHOMIERE, Migrinter-UMR 6588 CNRS - University of Poitiers, 2001.