



Before Immigration from the Former USSR to Israel

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Abstract. This work, which is part of a research project that has been presented as a doctoral thesis, relates to a chapter in the lives of four young women in their twenties following their migration to Israel during their childhood or teenage years as part of the large wave of immigration from the USSR during the 1990s. It reflects the points of view of these four women immigrants about their immigration and deals with the period that preceded it in their countries of origin, with their experiences as children or teenagers. The study, which focuses on the motivation for immigrating to Israel, relates to the feelings, thoughts, insights and perceptions of reality that emerged from the in-depth interviews that were conducted with these women using the format of the “self-narrative” interview (Gergen and Gergen 1988).

Keywords: immigration, women immigrants, self-narrative

Introduction

Immigration, even when the people who are experiencing it are part of a mass movement, is always personal. The decision to migrate, its motives, the way it takes place, the encounter with the destined country, settling in, the way one adjusts and the stages one goes through together with the psychological processes – are all personal.

This study deals with the lives of four young women in their twenties following their migration during their childhood or teenage years. Their migration took place as part of the tremendous wave of people who started to leave the states of the former Soviet Union in 1990, after the fall of the Communist regime. Among them were around one million Jews or people related to Jewish families, who arrived in Israel under the country's Law of the Return, which enables every Jew to become a citizen as soon as he reaches Israel.

Research dealing with the immigration to Israel of Jews from different Diasporas since the establishment of the state until today has shown that the main reason

for their immigration to Israel, as attested to by the immigrants themselves, has been their desire to live as Jews in a Jewish state. Among the Israeli public there has been an assumption made, that has become established, according to which most of the immigrants who took part in the large wave of immigration to Israel from the former USSR are just “immigrants” and not Zionist immigrants. In other words, their immigration to Israel arose out of universal motives involving the desire to economically and professionally improve their lives and the lives of their children and that a large number of them had, in fact, weighed the possibility of migrating to another country in order to realise their aspirations.

According to one of the studies (Semyonov 2007) that examined the motives for the coming to Israel of Jews from the Soviet Union in the 1990s and onwards it was found that close to 80% of the immigrants that responded noted that Israel was the only destination for their migration. In another study (Rosenbaum-Tamari 2004) it was found that the immigrants from the USSR left their countries of origin much rather because of the specific motive of “*aliyah*” (migration for reasons of living in a Jewish country), which was connected with their situation as Jews, than because of universal reasons of migration that were not connected with their being Jews; and that they also chose to come to Israel for these reasons. These conclusions acted as the starting point for this work which focuses its observations on the background, the atmosphere of migration to Israel, on the attitudes towards it, including its motivations, as these are reflected through the eyes of those who experienced it first hand as children and adolescents. This is done by examining their life stories, which were related when they were in their twenties and already citizens of the state that absorbed them – Israel.

Methodology

The study is based upon the constructivist approach according to which the “reality” that the young women relate to, the emotional, personal and social “world they live in” is created in a form of construction which is contextual to the framework of relationships from which it is constructed (Bruner 1985).

The analyses of the stories of the women immigrants in this work arose out of the assumption that even past narratives or narrations, such as those regarding the old self are constructed at the time that the story is told, meaning in the present. In other words, the past that is described is perceived and reconstructed within a current context (Freeman 1993; Polkinghorn 1991). This is assumed without challenging the claim that the place of the culture of an immigrant’s original country is an important component within his self (Taylor 1989).

The structuring of reality and the self in the narrative

The form of narrative interview is one of the research tools used in the constructivist research approach and it is particularly apparent in the tradition of phenomenological research, which this work draws upon. This approach sees the individual and his world as being comprehended together: the individual is perceived as having no existence separated from the world and the world is perceived as having no existence separated from the human being (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).

The concept in this work assumes that narratives in general, and immigrants' narratives including, are not collections of data but rather connections made between the experiences which were created by the women in order to form an ideal meaning for their future lives (Widdershoven 1993). Making connections between the experiences undergone in the framework of narratives characterises their holistic nature where the components of information reciprocally influence one another (Maykut and Morehouse 1994).

The contextual approach

The data analysis in the study refers to a written text that was produced from research interviews that were recorded (Kvale 1996). It is based on the phenomenological theory that the way to create understanding for ourselves and for others is through interpretation (Warnke 2009). The data in the study are analysed through a contextual approach to narrative analysis in an attempt "to get (as) close to the data" (Filstead 1970) as possible and to gain insights from individuals who experienced the events while being a part of them. The analysis of the findings will not break down any given narrative into selected segments of life according to themes or categories, which would use categorical analyses (Riessman 2008; Maxwell 1996) but would follow a process of clarification that strictly maintains the holistic nature of the story, with the awareness of the fact that every stage of the analysis would, by its very nature, be a procedure of separation.

Spector-Marzel (2010) takes this issue to an extreme and asserts that: "Categorization does not conform in any way with the principles of narrative theory and in fact it is a strategy of 'de-narrativization' [...]" (ibid., 73). Her words express the importance of maintaining the complete story during the process of analysis in order not to lose track of its plot which has a beginning, middle and an end (Polkinghorn 1988).

Narrations

In the complete interview the individual who tells his/her life story includes various types of expressions that are evaluated and defined by Rosenthal (1993) as argumentation, narration, and description.

This work focuses upon the narrations of those short stories that appear within the sequence of the narrative and will only present findings from those that deal with the period that preceded the immigration of the young women – in other words, their lives in the Soviet Union as little girls and young women under the Communist regime. Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (2010) recommend paying special attention to narrations which, according to them, have a special importance and are worthy of close analysis. These stories also present a multi-faceted analytical challenge because each one in its own right is a narrative unit with its own existence together with which it forms an inseparable part of the entire interview. I assume that different dimensions of the self may be constructed in one story which is told during a narrative interview (Reissman 2001).

This study makes use of these narrations as an initial point of observation of the personal selves of the women immigrants and their social environments in order to study and to comprehend the background of migration.

Content and form

By reading the text of the narrative or the narration, and primarily by analysing it, we can relate to the reality that is described by its content, the manner in which it is told and the way in which it is organised. In other words, it is possible to produce information about a phenomenon by analysing the content of the text and also from its form and structure. While qualitative research in social sciences, primarily in psychology, focuses on the analysis of the content of the text, subjects in the field of the media, treatment therapy and literature tend to use the form in which these texts are presented extensively.

As this work employs contextual analysis the narrations that are presented are analysed with tools that concentrate on both the content and the form in which they appear in the text in an integrated manner, in the phenomenological and hermeneutic spirit of Ricoeur (Allen and Jensen 1990). Ricoeur claimed that the first condition for understanding a text is analysing its objective structure when it is disengaged from its author and the world outside it. The next stage is to integrate it with the contextual commentary that connects it to the reality from which it comes and to which it relates. This work will concentrate on the reading of the text “inside”, as one who is interested in questions about the person who is relating the narrative as this person appears in the written material and, at the same time, it will also combine the reading of the text with the different contexts upon which it is based – including personal, social, historical, and cultural. This means that this work will not make any separation or distinction between the readings and there will not be any order imposed upon them – unless they become intertwined with each other as they arise from the details.

This approach goes together with “the accepted assumption in behavioral sciences today that there are no structures of texts that are disconnected from their surroundings and cultures” (Sabar and Dargish 2002, 87).

Two models of analysis

The data analysis in this work relies upon two models that will be simultaneously used: the formative model of Gergen and Gergen (1988) and the linguistic positioning model of Kupferberg, Green and Gilat (2002). Gergen and Gergen created a narrative typology that follows the plot structure expressed by the forms of progression and withdrawal within it and the combination of both of these in different ways. It is possible to find these within a single narrative. The perception of the development of a narrative is accompanied by structural features such as those that would define the story as romantic, which would be when the hero overcomes the challenges he encounters, or comic, in which the hero also tackles various obstacles, not by using his abilities, but with the help of external forces or through luck. A story can be characterised as both romantic and comic when both of these kinds of forces appear within it at different points. There is also the tragic narrative which begins in the past and depicts this as very positive but ends with the involvement of negative internal or external forces. In addition, it should be noted that even though this is primarily a structural model, the approach is flexible and it encourages the analysis of the content and of the narrative in its entirety or partially.

The explanatory model for analysing details that was developed by Kupferberg, Green and Gilat (2002) is a model that focuses upon the structural approach to analysing the narrative interview. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (2010) explain the power of the structural approach: “While the subjects of the interview have a considerable measure of control and supervision of the content that they present, by using forms – deeper foundations arise and are less controlled” (p. 25). Kupferberg, Green and Gilat based their method upon the traditional definition of a personal narrative made by Labov (1972) and on Bamberg’s (1997) approach which is an extension of the previous.

Labov created an analytical method that, according to Kupferberg and Feingold (2005), enables “the identification of the individual personal narrative within a sequence of spoken or written dialogue” (p. 334) by locating six structures: extract, orientation, a sequence of events creating a problem or unexpected situation, complication, resolution, evaluation and coda. The component of evaluation is most significant in this approach and its location within the story is not fixed. Its uniqueness is that it is expressed primarily through linguistic means that assist the narrators presenting their position with regard to the events in the story. However, while Labov’s method of analysis relates only to the outlook of

the narrators upon the events that they have experienced in the past, Bamberg (ibid) expands upon the element of evaluation as it expresses the interactive connection between both the narrators and those communicating with them at the time of telling the narrative and the place of the researcher.

Bamberg employs the idea of “positioning,” formulated by Davies and Harre (1990), and through it offers a method for analysing narrative conversation with the emphasis being placed upon the dialogue in which there are interactions between those involved within it that affect the construction of the narration and its evaluation.

Positioning relates to the manner in which “the narrator places himself in relation to those involved in the dialogue and also to how he places himself, in the past and the present ... and enables the analysis of the interpersonal self and personal inner aspect of the narrator.” (Ibid., 333.)

The method of analysis that Kupferberg, Green and Gilat developed locates the linguistic means of positioning through figurative language, such as metaphors, imagery, expressions, and analogies, and through other linguistic positioning such as labial syntax and expression. These methods, and primarily the figurative approach, identify the usage of an idea taken from the more familiar semantic field of “life experience” for the purpose of explaining an idea, thus, in the opinion of the researchers, displaying components of the narrator’s identity and consciousness. In the following section the analysis of narrations that were constructed at the time of the interview and which relate to events that were significant to the narrators will be presented (Denzin 1999).

These narrations will be analysed in accordance with the models that I have mentioned in a hermeneutic process of many repeated readings.

Analysis of the texts

All the young women tell their narratives about their childhood and the beginnings of their teenage years in the former Soviet Union in connection with their being Jewish. However, according to the content of the narrative, this does not fulfil a central role in their daily lives. Two of the narrators were not even aware of its presence in their lives until they became teenagers. Nonetheless, in the story that is constructed in the present, in the new country – Israel, which is the country of the Jews, the issue of Judaism became central to the story that is narrated about their past in their countries of origin.

In this way, when they are positioning themselves in front of me, the researcher who has told them to speak about their lives, they are also aware that the research focuses on immigration, and specifically immigration from the Soviet Union to Israel from the 1990s onwards. At the point in time when they tell their stories

they are already aware that immigration to Israel is understood as a Jewish migration, so the concept of Judaism and its place in their lives becomes central to the narration of their past.

Narration from the interview with Olga:

For as long as I can remember, I knew that I was a Jewish girl. My mother used to tell me quietly not to tell anyone that I was a Jew. I understood that this was for my own good, but I remember that I was afraid. And I grew up with this. At that time, the Soviet regime in Ukraine tried to erase every religious symbol, and especially that of the Jews. When I was very little, at kindergarten, or at elementary school, whenever anything bad happened, I thought that it was because I was Jewish. Let's say that this was if they got angry with me at kindergarten, if I got a bad mark, or even if I fell over and I got hurt. In my class, there were no other Jews, or maybe there were and they were also told not to say anything. I remember that I once asked my mother innocently, "Why are we Jews?" She looked at me strangely: "What kind of question is that? Why do you have ginger hair? Why am I tall? It's what we are, and that's it, period." When I was told of the decision to move to Israel, "because the Jews live there", I was already a young adolescent. I had what to say, but I kept quiet. This was already close to the date of departure. I understood and I was happy.

The final goal towards which Olga's story is leading has a positive character. Most of the story describes a sequence of negative events but they lead to a situation that describes liberation. The story is characterised by a romantic-comic structure (Gergen and Gergen 1988) in which the solution to the problem is expressed by a force that is external to her – her parents.

When the decision about immigration was taken by her family, she may have already been at a level on which she could have been involved ("I was already a young adolescent. I had what to say, but I kept quiet") but she was not. She explicitly verbalises the fact of her "silence", creating the expectation within her interlocutor/reader of an explanation for this, but she prefers not to explain. The coda of the narrative indirectly refers to her choice: "I understood and I was happy." This comes from the aspect of, "I identified with my parents' decision, and it satisfied my desires. Therefore my involvement was not necessary."

Spector-Marzel (2010) claims that in the mapping of the text requiring content analysis one should also identify what is not reported within it, namely, that the kind of language and medium used is also worthy of commentary. She distinguishes between things that have been left out when the narrator thinks that they are not relevant to the story, and things that have been suppressed because they are contrary to the main message in the story according to the narrator's opinion. I believe that denying the explanation by the narrator woman

is simultaneously an “omission” and also “silencing” – to use Spector-Marzel’s typology. The explanation that is missing is apparently supposed to deal with the narrator’s past familial relationships which contain subjects that, in her opinion, are not relevant to the subject of the narration, and, similarly, are a contradiction of the image of a concerned and caring family that she depicts. By denying this explanation Olga positions herself vis-à-vis her parents in a way that differs from what exists in a democratic society where the subject of immigration would be raised within the family at an earlier stage and the teenage daughter would be able to be involved in the discussion.

In Olga’s story, notice was given close to departure and this must surely have left her with no desire to react because everything had already been decided. In this narrative, no such reaction appears nor any description of anger or protest that she would not have had time to organise physically or emotionally, and to leave in her own time – not then, and not today, when she is telling her narrative.

The opposite is the case: she reports that she gave full backing to her parents expressing understanding and joy. We could understand this against the background of the totalitarian society in which she grew up and where the system of government exerted control even over the private lives of its citizens. Secrecy, concealing information and measured speech were the norms of the civilian lives of the local citizenry and this had even infiltrated within the nuclear family (“My mother used to tell me quietly not to tell anyone that I was a Jew.” “I had what to say, but I kept quiet”). When she asked her childish question (“Why are we Jews?”) Olga was supposedly reprimanded (“What kind of question is that?”) and she received a reply that did not answer her question but gave confirmation to the detail that appears in the question (“It’s what we are, and that’s it”). The upshot of this is that it is a question that is better not to deal with. The verbal conduct of Olga’s parents apparently characterises the collective voice of most Jews from the Soviet Union, who lived in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity that they also passed on to their children (“I understood that this was for my own good”). She explains her identification with her mother regarding the concealment of her Jewishness and eventually her feeling as a little girl: the result of this was fear: “I remember that I was afraid.” This was the consequence of concealing her identity.

Examining the text as a form in terms of the narrator’s use of words, with regard to the verbs transcribed in the first person in past tense, it can be seen that most of them are intransitive verbs, meaning that they express an action that is performed by the speaker and is not transferred to another person: “I was afraid, I grew up, I was, I thought, I fell, I got hurt, I kept quiet.” At the same time, other verbs describe her only as one who is the recipient of an action without any reaction on her part: “The regime tried ... whenever anything bad happened ... they got angry with me, they said... when I was told.” In this story, there are no descriptions of communication with anyone else or of an action or active reaction

from her. The only situation where there is any communication in the narrative is when she asks her mother why they are Jewish. Her mother's reaction did not encourage a dialogue. Through these verbs we learn that the narrator positions herself with regard to her environment in a passive and helpless manner.

The whole story focuses on Jewish identity. Through it the narrator builds a "story line" (Spector-Marzel 2010) that provides a general picture of the ramifications of Olga's Jewishness and her life as she perceives it, based upon the map of the text according to the features of its content and form. This is expressed by using the components of Labov's structure: for instance the opening extract – "For as long as I can remember, I knew that I was Jewish" – emphasises right from the beginning that this takes centre stage in the story. The device of repetition that appears in the linguistic variation of singular/plural, masculine/feminine – "Jewish girl" – three times, "Jew, Jews" – also positions the centrality of this issue and Olga's positioning in her previous world versus the anti-Semitic environment, with the serious significance that was expressed there as it does in her present world opposite to me, the researcher and her former lecturer.

Then she verbalises a historical-political orientation: "At that time, the Soviet regime in Ukraine tried to erase every religious symbol, and especially of the Jews." In her use of the "extract" and the "orientation" she combines three consecutive sentences of "evaluation". The first one uses a metaphor that includes an explanation of her mother's words ("I understood that this was for my own good") while the second connects with the feeling that this gradual, motherly "trickle" of education towards fear fashioned her life and this feeling accompanied her all the time she lived in the Soviet Union. ("[...] but I remember that I was afraid.") The third expresses the effects of what very definitely became part of the components of her identity then ("And I grew up with this"), and possibly of her identity today. This is reflected in the laconic syntactic structure of these three consecutive sentences: "I understood that this was for my own good, but I remember that I was afraid, and I grew up with this." In the original Hebrew, each one of these is three words long. They are verbalised today, but they are expressed in a brief, compartmentalised form in a manner that would have then been very normative in her home and in the homes of many other Jews in the Soviet Union against the backdrop of the threatening atmosphere.

Narration from the interview with Christina:

I found out that I was Jewish in a sudden and rather traumatic way. We lived in a small village in the Caucasus in which there were Chechens, Asians, Turks, Cossacks and Russians. I grew up with this and I never really showed any interest in what this meant. At school there weren't any problems with it. We were friends with whom we liked and didn't worry about where they came

from. There were fights mostly among the boys and I think the Turks and the Chechens were the most violent.

One day, in 7th grade, there was an argument between some of the girls in the class. At that time I was in competition with one of the other girls for the title of “queen of the class”. You know, the girl that looks good, learns well. A few boys got involved and I heard some strange things being said – names like “Stalin” and “Jews” came up. All of a sudden one of them said “It’s too bad Stalin didn’t kill off all of the Jews.” Some of them looked at me. Then one of the girls yelled over at me with a contemptuous tone: “Jew!” That was the first time I heard the name Stalin, and about Jews I had heard very little, but I didn’t connect it to anything.

Christina opens her narrative with an extract that connects the story metaphorically with the main dimension of the story which is her awareness of her Jewishness. This is accompanied by an immediate evaluation of the content (a “traumatic” event, a “sudden” situation) that creates the expectation of a subsequent revelation at the core of the story. It raises the question of what was traumatic for her – the fact of her “becoming” a Jew or the sudden and surprising revelation of this; or perhaps it was because this event was a turning point in her life. These extreme expressions of evaluation serve as a rhetorical device to introduce dramatic tension already at the beginning of the narrative. Afterwards, the narrator verbalises an orientation that provides some background to the story but does not explain the events from which the complications arise. If anything, the opposite is the case. The long list of different ethnic groups and their children living peacefully together provides an optimistic feeling of a multicultural framework in which the great diversity of its components would not indicate that anyone within it is “different”. This orientation contradicts the information we received in the opening extract and so it raises the dramatic tension within the narration.

We have before us the structure of a satirical story where the timing of the outbreak of the problem indicates that the cultural-social peaceful picture within the “orientation” reveals the narrator’s self-delusion regarding relationships in her environment in general and those that relate to her in particular. In the following stages, where the solution and conclusion appears, a certain sobriety develops.

The stage of the complication in this story is brief but it is presented as a sequence of quick events that took place, some of which occurred inside her head. She was bombarded with ideas that she was unfamiliar with and she admits that they were hurtful and were accompanied by very harsh statements. (“It’s too bad Stalin didn’t kill off all of the Jews.”) She realises that all of these are directed at her and refer to her but she does not know or understand why. The narrator positions herself opposite her classmates through the repeated use of personal pronouns (“me”, “them”), repeating the quotes (the words of different children in the class), and the terms that were problematic for her (“Jew”, “Stalin”). This device of positioning helps her to express her bewilderment and powerlessness.

The other children are active – and she is passive. They speak – but there is no allusion to her response: no voice or feelings on her side were mentioned in the narration. The definition of the situation she mentions in the opening extract as sudden trauma may resolve the enigma of its nature for it seems that the trauma was the difficulty she had in comprehending concepts that she had no idea about and therefore didn't know how to deal with. In this way, her shock and speechlessness can be explained as her "solution" to the problem since she had no other tools to deal with it. Thus the paralysis in her reaction achieves its meaning through the structural elements in the story.

The coda does not appear in this narration. The narrator chooses not to end this story after the event in the classroom. She "puts aside" the solution and end of this story by waiting since this provides her with an easier circumstance in which to implement it. In fact another solution and coda appear in the second part of this story. The manner of its continuation reveals to us the dimensions of the narrator's identity (as seen at the end of the analysis of the second part).

Christina continues her story with a description of events that occurred after the traumatic incident but the scene then moves on from the classroom to the home. Here is the rest of the narration:

I came home as always in tears and my father made an attempt to downplay the whole incident and said: "Don't take any notice of it." And regarding the remarks about Jews he said: "Yes, it's true. And there is nothing that can be done about it; I am a Jew and you are too."

My mother's reaction was more decisive, as always. She said to me, "Simply ignore it. When they say something to you, act as if you don't see them. Move on." There was also one older man, a good man who was there, maybe the leader of the village, who taught me how to hit in first grade as I was often hit because I was small. Now, in seventh grade, he came back and said, "React strongly, with words, and, if you can, also physically." By then I was already big and strong – you can see today, right? And I already had experience in hitting so I stood up to those boys and you know that boys know how to hit. I also had good reasons to do this: I didn't understand why being Jewish made me different from all the other people in my village. So I hit back. But one day, the girl who was competing against me suddenly cancelled her invitation for the class to come to her home and there was an uproar. So I used this opportunity and rushed to her defense and I also reminded all of them about what had happened to me. I managed to arrange a sort of discussion where boys were also present and I said: "Because one girl was competing against me you had to hurt me and humiliate me? You should be ashamed of yourselves." After this, I don't remember that there were any more anti-Semitic taunts in my class until I immigrated to Israel. My mother called me and told me about a special programme for Jewish teenagers who were migrating to Israel without their parents. She asked me if I would like to join it. I

said yes immediately. I was thinking that I want to experience what I am without being in readiness all the time and without the use of apologetics in the context of my identity.

The second part of the story has a romantic structure. It begins with tears and ends with a resolution of the problem that caused it. The transition from a negative situation to a positive one took place because of the narrator's understanding, abilities and courage. The problem verbalised by the narrator in this story is the choice of the way to deal with an anti-Semitic slur. She does not choose the way suggested by her parents but, in fact, continues to follow the direction she chose in first grade in another context – a direct, active, verbal or physical reaction. The solution to a problem that she describes in detail is the use of physical force, the use of an opportunity to position herself against her classmates with strength, and even to reproach them. Structurally, the use of specific details, such as quoting her words from the past and the primary verbalisation of her reaction through her syntax when she positions herself as an active subject in sentence after sentence: "I hit", "I used", "I went out", "I remembered", "I went out", "I said" – all position her as a heroine and the morpheme in the repeated words emphasises the self.

The coda of the story provides validation of her success, which was not just a one-time thing but was long-lasting. Throughout the whole story, psychological dimensions of the narrator's personality appear in the way in which she deals with the problems around her. A prototype of balanced cognitive coping appears in which she prefers to choose an active reaction that is only adopted in moderation and with possible risks. With this moderation and low measure of risk there is a definite ability to control a regressive reaction of powerlessness such as turning inward and crying. Thus when she suffers anti-Semitic taunts against herself in class she freezes and does not allow herself to react. She delays crying until she gets home and even then she waits till she meets her father, the more comforting parent, at home.

In the coda of the story the narrator is positioning herself in the present, in front of me, with an evaluation sentence about her departure, which expresses perhaps her need to explain the rapid decision to leave her home, her family and her life in the Caucasus.

Narration from the interview with Vita:

My immigration to Israel with my family is primarily connected to my brother. My brother is twelve years older than me. When he was a teenager he suffered a lot of anti-Semitic harassment, primarily within the educational setting. I also heard anti-Semitic remarks here and there but they did not hurt me. Generally, I was not particularly bothered by this issue. When my brother had to be enrolled

into the Latvian army we knew that there was a strong likelihood that he would never return or that he would come back disabled, because anti-Semitism was particularly high there. My parents decided that this was the time to do something. And the only thing that could be done was to immigrate to Israel. So, here I am.

The story of Vita's family has the structure of a romantic narrative. The narration describes the family being saved from its difficult situation, which primarily arose because of her brother, by its decision to immigrate to Israel. As a young girl living in her parents' home, her family's story also became hers. She describes it in this manner in the extract at the beginning of the narrative but does not position herself at the center of the immigration story. Her feeling is that her story is connected to that of the family. In the description of the development of the problem, as in the extract, she expresses many details about her brother. She positions herself within the growing problem but as an extra, an innocent bystander. She even gives this clear support by expressing how she was supplementary to this issue within the family. She, in contrast to her family, was not bothered by the anti-Semitism around her. ("I also heard anti-Semitic remarks here and there, but they did not hurt me. Generally, I was not particularly bothered by this issue.")

This is the only sentence where she places herself in the narration in the centre against the other side, the enemy, from the point of view of the events she experienced in the context of anti-Semitism in Latvia. But even though the content of the story refers to her, the linguistic and syntactic structures specifically "reveal" her non-central place in it, her "standing aside" in everything related to dealing with this phenomenon of anti-Semitism. She appears as one who is receiving the action but who does not actually take any action herself. The active, leading party of this story is the other side. This is also the way it is in the text: the remarks were "heard" but they did not "hurt" her. They did not "bother" her. However, her self vis-à-vis "them" appears through personal pronouns ("me", "to me"), or in morphemes within the verb – and indicate the rift between her and her anti-Semitic surroundings. Yet she chooses to remain passive when faced with these manifestations.

This is also the case with the decision regarding immigration. Here the usage is in the third person ("my parents decided"). She is not included in that decision. She could have chosen to verbalise this in the first person plural from her present viewpoint, yet she has chosen to position herself in this story from her past in the Soviet Union as part of her family, and this is expressed by the linguistic structure that adopts a passive line vis-à-vis her environment.

The coda of the story, ("So, here I am") reinforces this direction, and means that immigrating to Israel was "their" decision.

Her story, as part of the family narrative, describes development; and its structure, as stated above, is a romantic narrative that presents a transition from a negative situation to a positive one. However, a critical look at it reveals a more complicated

narration expression. Her personal story is not as progressive as that of her family. She does not describe a need to be saved from a crisis in a personal manner, and her migration is not portrayed as having influenced her feelings in this regard. Her personal story presents the fairly stable situation in which she was living before immigration and which reflects her life as a condition of acceptance of the reality as it is, without the willingness or readiness to challenge it or change it.

Narration from the interview with Irena:

My Jewishness is connected with my rebellious attitude to lessons and schools. In Magnitogorsk, in the Ural Mountains, where I used to live, my grades were bad; I hated learning and mainly hated the teacher that had accompanied me from second grade. Here in Israel, it's hard to believe, I actually began to like school and learning in spite of the language limitations. I didn't understand how that happened to me. That teacher in Russia, who was old and ugly, never missed an opportunity to remind the other students that I was Jewish, and always added a cynical comment. When I told the other students happily that I was moving to live in Israel she said: "Good, there you will be better off; there you will be smart like everyone else." Even though I had bad grades I was well-liked in class by the other students. That teacher didn't bring me down. Here in Israel the studies for me were like entering into a different world. All of a sudden I was saying what I thought in class – not necessarily what I had learned, and the teacher would relate to what I said seriously, and also there aren't so many prohibitions and strict rules. I called the teacher by her name, didn't have to stand up when she entered the room... it suited me well...in Israel I could be me.

In this narration, Irena presents two periods – that of her childhood and that which was just before her migration. She combined them for the purpose of the interview into a single story that she constructed. The events that she relates do not appear in the order in which they actually occurred. She moves forward and backward, breaking the chronological sequence, which creates a convenient way for her to express her opinion of the main dimension of her story. This dimension is presented in the opening extract of the story: her negative attitude to studying, which is related metaphorically to the Jewish issue in her past. Later on, she verbalises the orientation that explains the nature of the formation of the problem, including words of evaluation of the content, such as "I hated learning" and the description of the teacher as "old and ugly".

To the structure of fluctuations in time, an additional structure is added – comparison, through which she reveals the end-point of her story (Gergen and Gergen 1988), meaning the claim or message that she seeks to prove with her story: her hatred for learning in the Soviet Union that stemmed from the teacher's anti-Semitic attitude. The proof is her attitude to learning in Israel.

Using a construction of comparison is considered to be a means of rhetoric and persuasion (Sabar and Dargish 2002) in discourse research. According to Gergen and Gergen (1988), breaking the chronological order expresses a different evaluation of the events that are described, and the more the evaluation changes the more the dramatic suspense in the story is increased. In Irena's story, this technique reflects the dramatic tension between the two cultures.

As she jumps back and forth between times she positions herself between these two cultures that shape her identity – that of the Soviet Union and that of Israel. The first is one which was hostile to her and where she was not wanted and is seen from her teacher's reaction to her announcement of her migration to Israel: "Good, there you will be better off"; and the second one is one which accepts her. In her leaps from there to here, when she describes the attitude of both teachers to her, she uses several structural means: the devices of positioning of repetition and of quoting ("and always added a cynical comment", or "the teacher never missed an opportunity to remind the other students that I was Jewish" and more). These are linguistic signs which attest to the importance of this subject for her.

This structural commentary is reinforced not only by the fact of her choice of these specific situations for her narrative after so long, but also by these sentences integrated into her story, sentences which were spoken then and are engraved (or she chose to engrave them) in her memory. Irena's personal stories are constructed from two main events that are significant (Denzin 1999) to her (her studies in the Soviet school and those in Israel), which she organised as one within another. In this way, she created a coherent narrative that is characterised by a romantic-comic structure: This is a story that passes from a negative situation in her country of origin, the Soviet Union (the teacher's anti-Semitic attitude, her bad grades and her hatred of learning) to a positive situation in Israel. The way she is saved from a difficult situation is not described as something that she actively did, but as stemming from an external force beyond her control – her migration and its ramifications (her acceptance as an autonomous person by her Israeli teacher).

An additional angle to this story that distinguishes between the stories within the uniting narrative, between the descriptions of the events that happened in the two countries, is presented by a more complex narrative structure. The past before the migration, which is generally grasped within the one story as negative – is not actually so negative. The narrator may have been discriminated against by her teacher but the relationship with her peer group is not like the one she has with her teacher. In fact, it is the opposite. Irena relates: "Even though I had bad grades I was well liked in class by the other students."

She considers the relationships with her peers as very important and, immediately after her positioning regarding her teacher, she introduces it in terms of her classmates. Though she describes their relationship with her, she does not verbalise her active processes towards them on the social field. From

the juxtaposition of the sentences to each other it is understood that important to her is to show that her social success is also part of her active way of coping with that particular teacher.

The proof is the coda that ends the narration from the Soviet Union – (“That teacher didn’t bring me down”) in which she uses a metaphorical structure to express this feeling. The apparently negative story concludes with an episode on a very optimistic note: the narrator does not surrender to this teacher. She positions herself as a heroine who can cope with difficulties and deals with them in a way that is suitable for her.

The story has an optimistic direction and it even reinforces her in the part that describes the period after the migration. In this way, the narrator maintains the continuity of her identity by telling a story that is, after all, positive (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 2010), despite the negative background of its first part.

The coda of the story (“It suited me well...in Israel I could be me”) verbalises the narrator’s evaluation of the development of the story of her life, in which she emphasises her feelings of optimism. In this evaluation, there is a kind of “signal” (Spector-Marzel 2010, 70) of a component within her identity.

From the structural point of view, the opening story (the opening extract) and the summary (the coda) of the story complete each other from the point of view of their ramifications for the ethnic-national identity of the narrator. Her studies in the USSR are noted in the opening as producing a negative connotation, from her point of view, for her Jewish identity, while her studies in Israel are described at the end as something that awoke her positive attitude towards her Israeli identity. Through the narration constructed by Irene it is possible to discover different dimensions of the narrator’s self (Kupferberg and Feingold 2005).

The attitude of the teacher in the Soviet Union reflects the dimension of the culture immersed in anti-Semitism in which Irena lived (Duranti 1997) that did not spare its educational institutions either. The social dimension of the narrative, which relates to the attitude of the children, displays a positive interpersonal communication (Schiffrin 1996) which Irena was able to create, while the psychological dimension, which reveals the way that a person deals with his problems, is expressed here in this story by the sophisticated way in which Irena behaved towards her teachers. Here the narrator positions herself vis-à-vis her teachers as one who takes a firm stand regarding the autonomous status of the student. For example when the Russian teacher belittles and even insults her she does not enter into a state of powerlessness or retreat within herself. She does not fight with her teacher but she disengages herself from her and from what is connected with her – the studies. In contrast, she is definitely active and cooperates, learns and takes an interest in her teacher in Israel, who treats her with respect.

Discussion and conclusion

The study relates to a certain part of four life stories which appears also as an independent story, as a narration within each whole narrative, told by four women of about seven to seventeen years old after the events have taken place. In their stories they deal with the reality of their lives and inner worlds in their countries of origin, in the USSR, during the period that preceded the act of immigration to Israel as they experienced them – and through their own eyes.

Despite the uniqueness of each story, it is possible to locate certain connections between the stories of the women immigrants and the findings that emerge from the analysis of the significant events from their childhood and youth – these were chosen by the narrators to be included in the narrations and are presented in this work.

The events, accompanied by the narrators' descriptions and arguments, reflect the development of the narrators' lives by focusing on the idea of immigration, and this leads towards a positive point, particularly in those stories which tell about the transition that takes place in their lives: from living in the former Soviet Union – a dictatorial society, to living in Israel – a democratic western society (Berger 1999). It can be said that the formal structure of the plot of all the narrations can be identified – using Gergen and Gergen's (1988) typology – as forms that express progress that is characterised by a romantic or romantic-comic structure. When the narrator acts directly or indirectly against hostile elements and, as a result, emerges with the upper hand (Christina and Irena) it is romantic; and when the "salvation" comes from an external source (Olga) it is comic-romantic. The fourth narration appears to be characterised, like the previous ones, by a progressive, romantic structure where the events within it lead towards a positive goal: emigration to Israel. But a closer look at that narration reveals that within the family story there is also another story – Vita's personal story, which goes in a different direction. It portrays a stable structure as opposed to the story of her family. Reality in the former USSR was viewed quite differently by her. Nonetheless, from her words we can understand that she also identifies with the family story.

In fact, it could be said that in each narration there are two interconnected stories: the story of the family, which provides a framework, and the personal story of the narrator. The narrator constructs her story within a dialogue that is part of the family narration. Sometimes the stories are combined and move in the same direction, and sometimes they are divided and head towards different, even opposed horizons, such as in Vita's story.

The cultural-social picture in all of the stories, whether familial or personal, appears to be full of repressed anti-Semitism that bursts out from time to time, either as a result of establishment or government intent or as a random episode. All of the family stories describe the decision to emigrate as a solution to the

problem, as a release. It can be said that the story of the immigrant women's lives as children and young adolescents in their parents' homes is described in the shadow of anti-Semitism. The feeling of fear of the danger in which they grew up became a dominant part of their social and interpersonal experiences.

Manifestations of anti-Semitism and the creation of the awareness of that by the family made the girls develop different ways of coping with the threatening reality – either by using tools that their parents had given them, or by ways that they developed themselves. Their behaviour and way of thinking, as these appear in their stories, can be explained by Freud's theory of the defence mechanisms of survival. Within these a range of reactions were adopted – sometimes within the same girl – along the continuum that runs between fight and flight.

Olga and Vita positioned themselves in these narrations vis-à-vis the others in their environment as people who were yielding and powerless. Olga is fearful throughout the period before the emigration in an almost permanent manner. Emigration in her narration is a positive option for her family, which saves her from hardship. In contrast Vita tells her narrative of the emigration as a story that is not hers but is about her brother and her family. She accepts the situation in Latvia as it is, does not report on fears, and is satisfied that no one insulted or harmed her too much because of her identity. Her acceptance/complacency and her desire not to stir things up are understood in her case as apparently being a similar communication pattern to that of Olga.

The role of the emotional processes that are reflected in their conduct is to defend them from negative feelings and especially from fear. They can be defined as “ignoring” and “avoiding” feelings of threat and of being harmed by some tangible danger and are ways of coping with reality. They instituted a kind of denial of the negative reality since, if they didn't react to this, it was as if it didn't really exist and this diminished the power of the offence committed against them. This behavior is a kind of escape from the need to focus on the problem and contains elements of the first primitive defense mechanism, called “denial”.

Vita displayed other reactive behaviors in which disassociation from the problem appeared. As a girl, for example, she saw the problem of her ethnic-Jewish origin as being disassociated from her and, in this way, she “normalised” it. This perception of disassociation-normalisation makes the defender/victim equal to everyone since every individual has one “problem” or another and, in this way, the person becomes the same as everyone else. This is also an expression of the defence mechanism that is used in rationalisation, but here it is being taken in a specific direction. The role of this defence mechanism is to diminish fear by using a logical argument that includes and conceptualises every threat or injury in an equal manner so that it becomes disassociated from the victim.

Irena and Christina, on the other hand, describe in their narrations a greater control over the circumstances in which they live when they deal with it with

finesse, using opportunities for action and primarily employing a reaction of some kind. They deal with their fear by fighting against it. Both were very pleased by the idea of emigration, which promised to save them from this kind of interaction with their surroundings. Christina and Irena describe active, offensive coping when faced with the anti-Semitic hostility expressed in the childhood social environment of their schools. Christina talks about an outward, direct reaction that is both physical and verbal, while Irena talks about a more roundabout attitude to such insults due to her real inability as a child to deal directly with her attacker – who was her teacher.

Christina speaks about the importance of standing up to anti-Semitism in order to express its unacceptability. She presents a firm, constant view of this subject. Her reactions, from her point of view and within the framework of her abilities, are an expression of her power and control over her life vis-à-vis her peer environment. Similarly, this action, as she perceives it, has an effect upon the consolidation of her self-confidence.

Irena is also not prepared to remain in a situation of powerlessness against the offensive behavior of her teachers and she finds an alternative way to cope with this. She becomes a social leader among her peer group, the children in her class. She explains that her social connections as a child were a reaction against the teachers who sought to humiliate her.

These two women express their awareness of the importance of being proactive initiators like those who take the details of their lives in hand and in this way initiate practical steps towards achieving their goals.

According to them, the existence of this understanding, not as reflective but as the foundation of a rational approach, already began in their childhood. In their descriptions, they express self-confidence and a positive self-image both of which reflect assertiveness.

The four narrations that tell us about the period that preceded the immigration of the girls with their families from the USSR to Israel reflect the situation of the people in hostile regimes or frameworks who adopt a variety of alternatives to struggle with this, which can take two directions: general opposition, which includes types of active actions against the factors or frameworks that threaten them, and the direction that expresses opposition to them, as well as the varied manifestations of these, the goal of which is to preserve, as much as possible, the framework of a stable life with no great shocks and without giving up on spiritual, cultural and educational expression.

Both of these were accompanied by psychological processes having the role to protect the individual from the consciousness of negative feelings, especially anxiety. Theoreticians of the psychology of the self claim that these processes also act to preserve a stable identity with positive value and are an expression of mental health (Mirsky 2001, according to WHO 1987 – World Health Organization, Division of Mental Health).

Since individuals are, up to a point, defined by their social identities, they – according to the theories about social identity (Tajfel and Turner 1986) – strive to achieve or preserve positive social identities.

Social reality in the former Soviet Union, as it is reflected in the above stories, did not allow the young women to crystallise their identities in this direction. The immigration to Israel provided them with the option to do this and, as Irena says: “In Israel I could be me.” I imagine that the crystallisation of a valuable identity is the dominant motive for the majority of the “olim” (those who made “aliya” to Israel as Jews coming home).

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

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