Alexandra (Sasha) Zborovsky
History PhD Candidate
University of Pennsylvania

Final Report: "Jewish Repatriation, Reunification, and Emigration from the USSR 1955-1995."
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Introduction:

 Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Offices of Visas and Registration (OVIR) across the USSR (and eventually the post-Soviet states) received almost 1.5 million applications from Soviet Jews with a seemingly audacious request: a permanent exit visa. For individual Soviet Jews, this departure would entail the renunciation of Soviet citizenship, and consequently all state benefits that theoretically accompany one's residence in a socialist country. On an ideological level, Soviet Jews' request undermined contemporary Marxist interpretations of historical patterns of emigration. The 1950 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, in its definition of emigration, reasons that all such movement stems from inherently capitalist, economic circumstances, and therefore, "the profound socialist transformation in the USSR and the new people's democracies in the Eastern Bloc have led to the destruction of the causes that previously forced working people to emigrate."

 And yet, emigration did not disappear upon Stalin's 1936 declaration that the USSR had achieved socialism in all spheres of the national economy. Though Stalin's system of restrictive, internal passports made crossing Soviet borders nearly impossible after 1928, the decades that followed produced trickles of people out of the country in various forms, ranging from defecting soldiers throughout WWII to the forced repatriation of Poles in the late 1940s. My project explores the decades in which these isolated trickles, individual decisions, and state-mandated emigrations, transformed into mass movemenets of Soviet citizens. Specifically, it concentrates on the emigration of Soviet Jews, as their departure from the USSR served as the largest and most internationally recognized throughout the post-Stalin era. Throughout my research fellowship at the Open Society Archives (OSA), I investigated how Soviet Jews' desire to depart the USSR—though typically associated with Cold War battles of human rights, Soviet antisemitism, and Zionism—also reveals how this minority reoutlined both the USSR's and international organizations' vacillating stances on the right to emigration. By emphasizing the agency of everyday emigres, this project challenges the previous historiographic omnipotence of Cold War and nationalist narratives.

Reviewed Materials:

Across two months of research at OSA, I principally worked with the collections of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), but also delved into documents assembled by both the Open Media Research Institute (OMRI) and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHFHR). These collections are valuable not only for the documents within them, but the way these institutions' employees diligently curated them by subject. Throughout the Cold War era, the staff of RFE/RL, in particular, contemporaneously preserved petitions, press articles, letters, and publications as they related to Jewish and non-Jewish emigration.

I began my summer at OSA by analyzing both the unpublished and published samizdat collections of RFE/RL. The assembled samizdat prominently features the petitions of Jews, largely *otkazniki* (refuseniks), striving to permanently emigrate from the USSR and the legal rhetoric they engaged to accomplish this task. To access these Jewish voices, I first reviewed the contents of *Arkhiv Samizdata*. While this renowned compendium is accessible across countless libraries, at OSA its contents are arranged by subject, allowing me to isolate emigration-specific petitions amidst over 6000 documents. Among these, I also encountered appeals from non-Jewish Soviet citizens with a desire to emigrate. These documents shed light on the intersection of emigration strategies employed by Jews, Armenians, and Volga Germans, as the three groups sought to secure their exit visas by invoking their right to either repatriation or family reunification. When I subsequently juxtaposed published Samizdat collections with unpublished Samizdat, I discovered the breadth of Soviet citizens and unofficial organizations campaigning for emigration and their intentions for doing so. These characters ranged from Jewish painters hoping for greater artistic freedom in Israel—rather than the fulfillment of a Zionist dream—to the Committee for the Right to Emigration, whose members claimed no common identity other than their desire to leave the USSR.

Additionally, across all three collections (RFE/RL, OMRI, IHFHR), I found subject-organized newspaper clippings from not only major Soviet publications (*Pravda, Sovetskaia Rossiia, Izvestiia, Komsomolskaia Pravda, Novyi Mir*…etc.) but also the republics' local presses (*Sovetskaia Moldova, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, Radians'ka Ukraiina*…etc.) relating to topics on both Jewish and non-Jewish emigration from the USSR. These state-owned newspapers allow me to trace the Soviet government's official narrative on emigration across multiple decades. They reveal the state's obsession with the few hundred—but ever propagandized—Jewish emigres who detested their new lives in Israel enough to return to the USSR. Moreover, while Jewish emigration occurred across all Soviet republics, the existing historiography has largely concentrated on Eastern European Jews

from the Baltic States and urban centers in Russia and Ukraine. The local presses preserved at OSA permit my research to recognize the experiences of Jewish emigres from Central Asian and Transcaucasian cities, as these Jews' experiences with Soviet antisemitism and religious repression differed from that of their cosmopolitan counterparts. Both the RFE/RL and International Helsinki Federation collections also prominently feature American, British, West German, and Austrian presses. I found the latter three particularly enlightening as they proved more likely to report on both Israel's determination to use Soviet Jewish immigrants to settle the West Bank and the proliferation of Soviet Jews unwilling to immigrate to Israel.

The most illuminating source that I discovered throughout my fellowship at OSA included the files of RFE/RL's Media and Opinion Research Department. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, to ascertain the influence of their broadcasts, representatives of RFE/RL interviewed their Soviet listeners. However, the most accessible interview subjects were Soviet Jewish emigres who already departed the country. While primarily RFE/RL oriented, these interviews feature information on the radio stations (Voice of America, Kol Israel, Deutsche Welle…etc.) that Soviet Jews listened to, their professions, their hometowns, and the programs they preferred to tune in to. These documents, unlike other documents and clippings collected by RFE/RL, purposefully avoid featuring prominent Jewish dissidents or emigration activists. The comprehensive scope of RFE/RL's collection allowed me to familiarize myself with not only the contemporaneous Cold War-colored interpretation of Soviet emigration as a form of dissidence, but to recognize the ethnically and narratively diverse nature of this mass phenomenon.

Challenges:

On the surface, the records of RFE/RL, the International Helsinki Federation, and the Open Media Research Institute contradict my intention to write a social history of Soviet Jewish migration. Firstly, RFE/RL, as an organization funded by the CIA, wove an unflattering picture of the USSR and a rosy one of the United States. Additionally, the organizations' research reports, broadcasts, and samizdat collections purposefully highlight the already popular voices of ardent *otkazniki*, Zionists, and dissidents. Their perils served the radio's mission of spreading anti-communist propaganda. However, when I juxtaposed the content of research reports with the thousands of newspaper clippings, letters, and samizdat documents that RFE/RL offices collected, I could locate the information they chose to omit and investigate why those narratives of mobility did not fit the radio's unflattering depiction of the USSR. For instance, in the unpublished samizdat

collection, I discovered a 1986 letter from a Russian family inquiring whether they could emigrate even though "[they] are not Jewish." The exclusion of this letter gestures to the radio's official representation of Soviet emigration as an issue particular to non-Russian nationalities. Finally, to access the voices of Jewish emigres who did not necessarily associate with prominent dissidents or *otkazniki*, I spent over four weeks locating the aforementioned polls and interviews conducted by the Media and Opinion Research Department.

New Insights and Future Research:

As I navigated both OSA's materials and the analytical challenges associated with them, I acquired new insights on the domestic and international political context of Soviet emigration. Firstly, in folders more generally dedicated to emigration, RFE/RL archivists of the Cold War era treated Jewish, Armenian, and Volga German mobility as a singular phenomenon. Employees filed together their petitions, press clippings about them, and letters drafted by them. This style of curation forced me to consider the false conclusions my project might draw if it considers Jewish emigration in a vacuum. It must determine whether Soviet Jews were unique in their ability to harness internationally dispersed philanthropic and familial networks to facilitate their emigration. It must investigate whether the disproportionate international attention that Soviet Jewish emigres garnered, as opposed to other Soviet ethnic groups, caused any intra-community strife. For example, regarding the former issue, I discovered how Volga German and Armenian populations also capitalized on Soviet policies of family reunification to secure their own exit and even boasted their own population of *otkazniki*. Regarding the latter, through a document shared with me by archivists at OSA, I learned of Ukrainian dissidents' frustrations that Jews could seemingly freely depart from the USSR, while they could not.

A deeper investigation of emigration-related Soviet press publications also led to me develop a new outlook on both the infamous fluctuations in the Soviet Ministry of Interior's attitudes towards emigration and the Perestroika era. Dozens of documents in the Soviet Red Archives anxiously commented on the phenomenon of *noshrim*—a Hebrew word that diminutively translates to "drop-outs." These tens of thousands of Soviet Jews left the USSR with Israeli visas, supposedly "repatriating" to Israel, only to discard them upon crossing Soviet borders and file for refugee status in the United States instead. The growth of the "Noshrim" crisis, according to archival documents, triggered the anxieties of not only the State of Israel, but also the USSR, as the state lost prominent scientists and engineers to their main Cold War antagonist, as opposed to a small state in the Middle

East. These discoveries inspired me to question whether the USSR's decision to curb Jewish emigration in the early 1980s might relate to the "problem of Noshrim." Fully cementing this relationship, however, will require additional research.

As my sources began to reflect the late 1980s and 1990s, the Soviet press's changing depiction of emigration forced me to reconsider my previously pessimistic view of Gorbachev's rule over the USSR. No longer focusing on former emigres desperate to return to the USSR, the Soviet press began to contemplate, in depth, domestic laws relating to mobility. Perestroika, often depicted by scholars and post-Soviet politicians alike as a mortifying failure, inspired steps forward in the realm of migration policy. I discovered how seriously Gorbachev's newly elected Council of People's deputies treated the issue of emigration, even developing and passing comprehensive legislation on the matter in the few months prior to the 1991 August Putsch that subsequently triggered the fall of the USSR.

These new insights in my research represent only a fraction of the ideas I developed throughout my Visegrad fellowship at OSA. OSA's archive also contained hundreds of documents referencing the effect of Soviet Jewish immigration to the Middle East on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Soviet Jews' experiences with statelessness as they traversed the transit leg of their emigration process, and even the supposed emergence of a Soviet Jewish mafia in Italy, Israel, and New York City.

Future Research at OSA and Beyond:

Even two months of research at OSA barely permits historians to scratch the surface of the archive's available materials. And while I successfully analyzed over 2000 documents, I will continue to engage digital collections at OSA. Radio broadcasts by RFE/RL, which I can access from afar, will supplement the documents that I analyzed in Budapest. While the online catalogue contains thousands of hours of recordings, the aforementioned Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research collection identifies the particular programs to which Soviet Jews listened, allowing me to filter through them accordingly. Additionally, the reference librarians at OSA successfully shared with me already digitized documents and films, such as unedited interviews with Soviet Jews prior to their departure from Leningrad/upon their arrival in Israel and the new code subject files of the Soviet Red Archives. Finally, research at OSA pointed me to archives and collections across the world that had previously escaped my notice, especially considering the inaccessibility of archives in Russia and Ukraine. Collected samizdat and petitions from Georgian Jews, who experienced emigration from

the USSR and immigration to Israel differently from their Baltic and Russian counterparts, affirmed to me the vitality of visiting the National Archives in George. References to the personal collections of political scientists and sociologists working on Soviet Jews throughout the 1970s and 80s, inspired me to contact these scholars and request access to their materials. But just as documents discovered at OSA pointed me to new archives and collections I had not previously considered, sources discovered elsewhere may send me right back to OSA.

Files Consulted

HU OSA 204-04-201: Open Media Research Institute	
Call Number:	**Folder Name/Number:**
204-04-201: 232	Religion: Judaism and Jewry, Zionism and Antisemitism 1991-1993
204-04-201: 232	Judaism and Jewry: Jewish Emigration 1991-1995
HU OSA 300-85-12 Samizdat Archives: Subject Files	
Call Number:	**Folder Name/Number:**
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1967-1974
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1975
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1976-77
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1978
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1979
300-85-12: 192	National Question: Jews, Emigration, 1980-81
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1982
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1983-4
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1985
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1986
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1987
300-85-12: 193	Nationality Question, Jews, Emigration, 1988
HU OSA 300-5-180 Subject Files of Ann Sheehy	
Call Number	**Folder Name/Number:**
300-5-180: 2	Antisemitism, 1975-1992
300-5-180: 22	Emigration-General 1982-1991 (1 of 2)
300-5-180: 22	Emigration-General 1982-1991 (2 of 2)

300-5-180: 34	1: Jews, 1979-1992
300-5-180: 34	2: Jews, 1979-1992
300-5-180: 34	3: Jews, 1979-1992
300-5-180: 34	7: Jews, Emigration, 1980-1992
300-5-180: 35	Jews, Official Pronouncements, 1978-83
300-5-180: 35	Jews, Emigration 1980-1992

HU OSA 300-6-3 Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research

Call Number	File Name/Number:
300-6-3: 1	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, 1980
300-6-3: 1	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, 1981
300-6-3: 1	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, 1981
300-6-3: 2	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, 1982
300-6-3: 2	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research, 1983
300-6-3: 3	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research 1983
300-6-3: 5	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research 1985
300-6-3: 6	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research 1986/1987
300-6-3: 8	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research 1988/1989
300-6-3: 9	Soviet Area Audience and Opinion Research 1989/1990

HU OSA 300-80-1 Soviet Red Archive: Old Code Subject Files

Call Number	File Name/Number:
300-80-1: 4	1: Austria: Schönau, 1973-1983
300-80-1: 1180	5: Emigration, General: 1959-1974
300-80-1: 1181	1: Emigration, General 1974-76
300-80-1: 1181	2: Emigration, General, 1977-79
300-80-1: 1181	3: Emigration, General, 1979-81
300-80-1: 1181	4: Emigration, General, 1981-1983
300-80-1: 1182	1: Emigration, General, 1983-1986
300-80-1: 1182	2: Emigration, General 1986-87
300-80-1: 1182	3: Emigration, General, 1988-1990
300-80-1: 1182	4: Emigration, General, 1990-91
300-80-1: 1183	1: Emigration, General, 1990-1991
300-80-1: 1183	2: Emigration, General, 1991-1993

300-80-1: 1183	4: Emigration, Refugees, 1966-1973
300-80-1: 1186	1: Emigration, Jews, General, 1970-73
300-80-1: 1187	1: Emigration, Jews, 1973-75
300-80-1: 1187	2: Emigration, Jews, 1975
300-80-1: 1187	3: Emigration, Jews, 1976
300-80-1: 1187	4: Emigration, Jews, 1976-78
300-80-1: 1187	5: Emigration, Jews, 1978-1979
300-80-1: 1188	1: Emigration, Jews, 1979-1980
300-80-1: 1188	2: Emigration, Jews, 1980-81
300-80-1: 1188	3: Emigration, Jews, 1981-82
300-80-1: 1188	4: Emigration, Jews, 1982-1983
300-80-1: 1189	1: Emigration, Jews, 1983-84
300-80-1: 1189	2: Emigration, Jews, 1985
300-80-1: 1189	3: Emigration, Jews 1985-1987
300-80-1: 1189	4: Emigration, Jews, 1987
300-80-1: 1190	1: Emigration, Jewish, 1987-89
300-80-1: 1190	2: Emigration, Jews, 1990-1993

HU OSA 300-85-9 Published Samizdat

Call Number:	File Name/Number:
300-85-9: 73	AC No. 2832-2835
300-85-9: 91	AC No. 3661
300-85-9: 145	AC No. 6181

HU OSA 300-85-44 Unpublished Samizdat: Subject Files

Call Number:	File Name/Number:
300-85-44: 13	23: The Group for the Right to Emigration
300-85-44: 35	1: Emigration 1970
300-85-44: 35	2: Emigration, 1974-1987
300-85-44: 35	3: Emigration 1976-78
300-85-44: 35	4: Emigration 1977
300-85-44: 35	5: Emigration, 1977
300-85-44: 35	6: Emigration, 1977
300-85-44: 35	7: Emigration, 1977-84
300-85-44: 35	8: Emigration 1978-81
300-85-44: 37	2: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1975
300-85-44: 37	3: Emigration Otkazniki, 1979
300-85-44: 37	4: Emigration, Otkazniki 1979
300-85-44: 37	5: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1979
300-85-44: 37	6: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1980
300-85-44: 37	7: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1981
300-85-44: 37	9: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1981/1982
300-85-44: 37	10: Otkazniki, 1981-1987
300-85-44: 37	11: Otkazniki, 1984

300-85-44: 38	1: Emigration, Otkazniki 1985
300-85-44: 38	3: Emigration, Otkazniki 1986
300-85-44: 38	4: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1987
300-85-44: 38	5: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1987
300-85-44: 38	6: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1987
300-85-44: 38	7: Emigration, Otkazniki, 1987
300-85-44: 38	8: Emigration, Otkazniki: Letter of 13 Jewish Otkazniks, 1985
300-85-44: 38	9: Emigration, Otkaziniki "Not Just For Jews," 1982
300-85-44: 38	12: Emigration, Request for Help, 1988
300-85-44: 38	13: Emigration, Request for Help, 1988
300-85-44: 38	14: Emigration, Separated Families, 1986
300-85-44: 38	15: Emigration, Airplane Hijackers, 1973
300-85-44: 38	17: Emigration, "Freedom of Emigration for All," 1989
300-85-44: 38	18: Emigration, Parental Consent to the Departure of Children, 1979
300-85-44: 38	19: Emigration, Parental Consent to the Departure of Children, 1988

HU OSA 300-85-48 Published Samizdat: New York Office Files Relating to Samizdat

Call Number:	File Name/Number:
300-85-48: 21	Jewish Emigration 1968-71
300-85-48: 21	Jewish Emigration 1972-74
300-85-48: 21	Jewish Emigration 1975-88
300-85-48: 21	A. Ivanova 1971
300-85-48: 21	Jewish Question in the USSR, 1970-89
300-85-48: 22	Jews: Zionism, 1981-1990
300-85-48: 22	Lev Korenblit, 1970

HU OSA 318-0-5 Records of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights: Country Files

Call Number:	File Name/Number:
318-0-5: 131	USSR Press Clippings: Jews (1988-1991)
318-0-5: 133	Soviet Jews: 1985-1994
318-0-5: 134	USSR Soviet Jews, Refuseniks, 1989
318-0-5: 134	USSR, Soviet Jews, Jewish Question 1989-1990