Biographical Research in Eastern Europe
Altered lives and broken biographies

Edited by

ROBIN HUMPHREY
University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

ROBERT MILLER
Queen's University, Belfast, UK

ELENA ZDRAVOMYSLOVA
Centre for Independent Social Research and European University,
St Petersburg, Russia

ASHGATE
Contents

Acknowledgements viii

Notes on Contributors xi

1 Introduction: Biographical Research and Historical Watersheds 1
   Robert Miller – UK, Robin Humphrey – UK, Elena Zdravomyslova – Russia

PART 1 The Potential of Biographical Research

2 Context, Authenticity, Referentiality, Reflexivity: Back to Basics in Autobiography 27
   J. P. Roos – Finland

3 The Usefulness of Life Stories for a Realist and Meaningful Sociology 39
   Daniel Bertaux – France

4 Three Dimensions of Biographical Narratives 53
   Valery Golofast – Russia
PART 2 Communists, Informers and Dissidents

5 Estonian-inclined Communists as Marginals
Aili Aarelaid-Tart – Estonia

6 Portrayals of Past and Present Selves in the
Life Stories of Former Stasi Informers
Barbara Miller – Austria

7 Czech Dissidents: A Classically Modern Community
Vladimir Andrle – UK

8 Anti-Soviet Biographies: The Dissident Milieu
and its Neighbouring Milieus
Sofia Tchoutkina – Russia

9 The Café Saigon Tisovka: One Segment of the
Informal-public Sphere of Late-Soviet Society
Elena Zdravomyslova – Russia

PART 3 Exile, Migration and Adapting to Social Change

10 Living the Life: Exile in the Experience of the
Polish Intelligentsia
John A. Jackson – Ireland

11 Biographical Continuities and Discontinuities
in East-West Migration before and after 1989.
Two Case Studies of Migration from
Romania to West Germany
Roswitha Breckner – Austria

12 Trajectories of Coping Strategies in Eastern Germany
Olaf Struck – Germany

PART 4 Ethnicity and Sexuality

13 Inequality and Exclusion in the History of Poor Slovak
Families
Zuzana Kusá – Slovakia

14 Different Generations of Leningrad Jews
in the Context of Public/Private Division:
Paradoxes of Ethnicity
Viktor Voronkov and Elena Chikadze – Russia

15 Shame, Promiscuity and Social Mobility in
Russian Autobiographies from Poor Working-class Milieux
Anna Rotkirch – Finland

16 The Construction of Sexual Pleasure in Women’s
Biographies
Anna Temkina – Russia

Index
14 Different Generations of Leningrad Jews in the Context of Public/Private Division: Paradoxes of Ethnicity

VIKTOR VORONKOV AND ELENA CHIKADZE
Centre for Independent Social Research,
St Petersburg, Russia

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the construction of the ethnic identity of several different generations of Leningrad Jews, as a microcosm of the changes that have taken place in Russian society in terms of the private/public division of social life. Our reflections on this subject are based on biographical narratives we collected during a research project carried out in 1993–6 by the Centre for Independent Social Research.1 Biographical research represents an excellent means of demonstrating that different generations of Soviet people were socialised in substantially different ways. Different generations’ experiences resulted in different types of ethnic identity. Thus, the Jewish identity of migrants from the Pale was succeeded, in the subsequent generation, by a quasi-ethnic Soviet identity. Generations of people who lived their lives under late socialism, and who witnessed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have attempted a revalorisation of Jewish ethnic identity, but only a limited proportion of assimilated Jews have redefined the meaning of their ethnicity. Over the whole course of the Soviet period, reflections on ethnicity were closely bound up with the changes that took place in the relationship between the public and private spheres. The public/private division in the Soviet Union was formative in terms of social structures and played a crucial role in the determination of Soviet life-practices.
This chapter also represents a response to the debate in Russian sociology about the ‘borrowing’ and applying of Western concepts and theoretical models in studies of Russian (Soviet) society. We argue that the usefulness of (Western) sociological models and concepts for Russian studies can only be tested empirically. Moreover, we believe it is necessary to reflect on our own experience of cross-cultural research, since doing this will help us to understand better the problems that exist in comparative studies.

**Key Concepts of the Study**

We see ethnicity as a social construction that is formed in the border situations of the encounter with others, when certain social agents ascribe definite properties to themselves and to others. The elements of this construction are not rigid, but indeterminate and open to change. In nomadic contexts ethnic identity may undergo change, and may disappear from the public arena, subject to the particular conjunction of circumstances. In this study, therefore, we use the word ‘Jew’ to signify not only individuals who have Jewish identity, but also those whose ancestors considered themselves Jewish.

A ‘generation’ is a community of individuals of approximately the same age who have similar cultural and societal orientations, follow similar behavioural patterns, and are involved in the same practices. These orientations and patterns are formed through a socialisation process involving shared experiences. In modern societies (including Russia), the formative age for the character of a generation (the inter-subjective *habitus*) is 16-24; in other words, experiences gained during this period of the life cycle serve as a foundation for basic social beliefs.

In the context of the present chapter, it is important to note that we consider generation not as a biological entity but as a sociological category. The problems associated with the concept of generation lie in the social arena; and, though the concept rests upon the idea of the life cycle of a group, it cannot be reduced to it. We might not, therefore, assign to a certain generation everyone who might be assigned to it by age. It seems reasonable, for example, to include in a generation those individuals who are younger, but who were socialised under the powerful influence of cultural and social experience that was relevant for the previous generation. Generations thus defined may sometimes even include biological fathers and children.

The dynamics of Soviet modernity make it possible to establish boundaries between the generations, each of which was socialised under different conditions. These resulted in different types of self-consciousness, different value systems, different attitudes towards social memory, and different life-practices.

**The Public/Private Division in Soviet Society**

The concept of public and private spheres of social life is crucial for this study, and the distinction needs to be explained here, because our interpretation of the two spheres does not accord with the tradition operating in the Western social-scientific community. The public/private distinction in the Soviet Union involved a rigid boundary. The rules of the game in the two spheres, and the corresponding life-practices, were different from those operating in Western societies.

Before we specify this distinction, however, we need to clarify those rules or codes that regulated human behaviour in Soviet society. We make a distinction between habitual (informal) and written (formal) codes. By the former, we mean those non-legal, informal, conventional regulations that were objectified in the practices of everyday life. In the late-socialist period, this informal code evidently played a dominant role in the regulations governing everyday life.

Every modern society, in fact, is characterised by an analogous distinction between a written and a habitual code. But the dominance of the informal code in the USSR during the final socialist decades implied fundamental shifts in social life. The development of the private sphere, and of the informal household economy as well as of entrepreneurship, was mostly regulated by the habitual code.

The Russian researcher Oleg Witte notes that both codes were considered legitimate by people in the Soviet Union, whatever inconsistencies they embodied. Legitimation of the habitual code was necessary, since otherwise the written code would have had to have been revised, and this revision would have led to the failure of the regulating system. Strict demands that the written code should be observed could have led to the failure of the regime. This is why the initiatives of citizens in breaking the written code and thereby installing the informal code were used to promote and reinforce the efficiency of written-code activities. It also explains how this very specific duality in terms of inconsistent codes was accepted by the community as normative.
Legitimation of the coexistence of the two inconsistent codes per se, however, was not sufficient to give the system stability: reinforcement of the legitimacy of the habitual code was ruining the legitimacy of the written code. This is why a mechanism existed for combating social destruction: the reforming of the legal sphere was 'balanced' by a parallel reforming of the communication sphere. Thus the public (official) realm was constructed so that discussion about the habitual code was taboo there. As Witte notes, 'the practical priority of the habitual code was compensated for by the placing of a taboo on discussion about its operation'. The immense growth in the diversity of informally-regulated practices was admitted into the public realm under the banner of a 'fight with the relics of capitalism'.

Life in Soviet society was officially represented in terms of a utopia: completely at odds with everyday experience: it was a world of outstanding construction projects, heroic labour, great cultural achievements, high moral standards, humanistic slogans, etc. The day-to-day reality of social life-practices, however, contrasted sharply with what was publicly admitted and discussed. Thus, the official-public sphere represented only written-code practices, and single cases where these were broken. Beyond the official-public realm, by contrast, everything was submitted to discussion. What was this 'beyond'? It was the private sphere, which underwent change over the course of Soviet history.

The Stalinist system was characterised by a lack of privacy. This was the period when the borderline between private and public was unclear and indeterminate. Beginning in the 1920s, the private realm was reduced to a minimum: it is as if it were absorbed by the public realm. Such an absorption resulted from a collectivist ideology, from the practice of overall party-state control, from new everyday life-practices. The housing policy adopted in towns led to the mass destruction of apartments for individual families. Local governments practiced what was called a 'density housing strategy', according to which tenants who previously had occupied individual apartments were forced to reduce their living space to one or two rooms. The remaining rooms were distributed among workers who were resettled from the basements, and among numerous migrant peasants.

Living conditions in the so-called kommunalkas (shared apartments) left almost no space for privacy. The climate of mutual suspicion and bad relations among tenants led to total social control being exercised at the level of social interaction. Thus private space was reduced to a minimum, and the public/private division became subject to a purely conventional understanding. A motto was coined: 'A true Soviet citizen has nothing to hide.' In other words, there could be no subject closed to public discussion.

Nevertheless, parallel with the official-public sphere there came into being another public sphere. The latter was separated from the former by a rigid demarcation. This new public sphere started to develop with the end of Stalinism. The XXth Party Congress, along with the official criticising of Stalinism and new opennesses in the political regime, resulted in critical, critical reflections being undertaken on the nature of social reality. This was the period of the 'double message'. On the one hand, real life still could not be discussed in the official-public sphere; on the other, the risks associated with involvement in reflective criticism diminished with the Khruschev thaw. Such an ambivalence brought into being a new conception of the 'public'. We shall call this new dimension of social life the private-public sphere. This was a social space where almost any issue of interest could be discussed. In our view, this sphere is much more comprehensive than the 'demi-prive' sphere discussed by Ariès (visiting, invariant theatre-boxes, limited access clubs, etc. – i.e. public realm, though closed).

We have already mentioned that the latent functions of housing policy were the construction of social space, and the promotion of an appropriate private/public distinction. The massive house-building programme that began in the 1950s provided a solid space for the private sphere, involving as it did the construction of separate flats, or flats containing only one household. With these changes in housing and living conditions, the boundary between official-public and private-public spaces became clearer. By contrast, that between the private sphere proper and the private-public sphere was rather unclear. The former, in Soviet society, was rather ill-defined. One example of this is the famous 'intelligentsia kitchen', the home as a 'yard with a through-passage', etc.

The relevant concept here is not that of a 'second society', as discussed in some studies of dissident groups and of the informal economy in Eastern Europe (Hankiss, 1988). One need not assume that the private-public sphere was associated only with the practices of identifiable social groupings (which might possibly offer opposition to the authorities). We assume that every Soviet individual, including those constituting the nomenclature, lived and acted in both spheres, respected the invisible but effective boundary between them, and did not confuse the different rules regulating the official-public and private-public realms. This is the essence of that social schizophrenia which is justly attributed to the 'common Soviet man'.

243 Biographical Research in Eastern Europe
Methodological Implications of the Public/Private Division

What are the implications of the dynamics of the public/private distinction for the sociological interpretation of narrative interviews (not to mention that of data gathered via survey questionnaires, where the interpretation of answers is always uncertain)? We would argue that social arrangements in the Soviet Union gave a new meaning to the issue of the reliability of information drawn from narratives and problem-oriented interviews. In analysing narratives, sociologists should take into account the rigid division between the rules of the game applying in the public-private and official-public realms of Soviet life. Lack of awareness of this division results in distorted explanations of social actions, and a distorted construction of biographical realities.

For an interview respondent, communication with a sociologist is a fact of the official-public sphere. As a result, the respondent's behaviour is regulated, perhaps even non-consciously, by the rules relevant in this sphere. These rules define what may be discussed (or else hushed up), and in what way. And this applies not only to the taboo on the verbalising of certain themes (i.e. sexuality, social origin, military service, etc.). As we mentioned above, it was 'wrong' (inappropriate) to discuss 'real life' in the official-public sphere. Therefore, the issue of 'inappropriateness' represented part of the accountability (as an aspect of communication) of the interviewer and the narrator. The style and substance of official-public interaction differed drastically from those of private-public interaction. Thus a Soviet individual had at his or her disposal two differently constructed biographies, which as a set of biographical facts differed in terms of their interpretation and of their presentation within a narrative structure.

A typical example of such a double biography is the tale of the poverty career. A sociologist who has been granted permission to conduct an interview gains detailed information about low wages at an official place of employment, about the irregularity of payments, and about official allowances and pensions. The matter of unofficial incomes gained in the shadow economy (and in contemporary Russia most people gain the majority of their income in the shadow economy!), however, does not appear in the narrative. This is not only because the informant may be afraid of being seen to be involved in racketeering, or of being investigated by the tax police, but mainly because of the incongruity of discussing real-life strategies in official-public interaction. Attempts to stimulate discussion of these strategies threaten communication in general. The real, relatively well-off lifestyle of the informant observed by the sociologist contradicts the narrative of poverty created specifically for the official-public sphere.

On the other hand, in cases where the informant is well-acquainted with the sociologist and trusts the sociologist, he or she can probably elicit quite a different presentation of the biography, one designed for a circle of confidential friends and relatives. Although its conditions and life-rules are undergoing serious change, Soviet socialisation exercises a lasting grip on informants. Our research experience demonstrates that there is a cultural continuity in habitual notions of what can be discussed in the public realm, and how.

The interviews we conducted with representatives of the younger generation (those under 25) whose secondary socialisation took place in the post-Soviet period affirm this statement. In these interviews, we encounter the phenomenon of double biography less often. More and more topics become open for discussion. The very refusal on the part of an individual to be interviewed shows that he or she is trying to escape from a situation where double biography is unavoidable. We hypothesise that in interviews with younger narrators, the official-public and the private-public versions of the life stories do not differ markedly (although admittedly we have insufficient evidence for such an assertion).

The misconceptions we encounter in the literature on the Soviet Union can be explained by a failure to recognise this phenomenon of the double biography. For example, there are numerous publications which give a somewhat myth-based representation of the everyday lives and problems of Soviet Jews or Soviet Germans who emigrated to Germany. It is quite easy to understand the origins of these myths. One of the authors of this chapter took part in some research examining a Russian community in Berlin. At one point, a recent immigrant, describing to him how he had been interviewed by a German sociologist, said the following: 'Don't worry – I told him absolutely everything that I thought was necessary to tell.'

Thus we consider that the stories presented by a Soviet informant in the official-public sphere (i.e. those presented to sociologists) are not of great value for an understanding of everyday life (or 'real life', as we conventionally call it). It is clear that under such conditions a great deal of attention should be paid to the technique of participant observation. A version of biography presented by an informant who does not trust the sociologist can scarcely be interpreted properly. An atmosphere of trust and
It was rather funny to read the lines where my granny tells of a delegation of Austrian young people that visited Kharkov. And she describes their clothes and says that she was dressed in a red headscarf and a leather double-breasted jacket. I mean, I understand now that it was exactly like she wrote, that these were not symbols or an image invented later. And she writes: ‘as our Russian Komsomol member’. Thus in these letters – there are not many of them – you will not find any emphasis on Jewish origin, no mention at all, so, exactly like this: this is our Russian Komsomol member. This was such an epoch. (Leonid G., b. 1973)

It seemed strange to the informant, who constructed his Jewish identity on the basis of two ‘Russian’ generations of his family, that his ‘Jewish’ grandmother did not think of herself as a Jew, as it would have been “natural” for her (in her grandson’s eyes) to have done, but instead called herself Russian. Ethnicity, however, was probably not something his grandmother at that time problematised, and the signer ‘Russian’ did not seem to contain any ethnic meaning for her.

Despite the fact that the primary socialisation of this generation had occurred within a traditional Jewish environment of mesteckhos, the young people who had moved to Leningrad were rapidly adapting to the new conditions and were successfully forging their ‘Soviet’ careers. The overwhelming majority of young Jewish migrants graduated from universities and colleges:

My father was a Komsomol member in the '20s, then he became a Red Professor. That is to say he was an absolutely Russian person. He remembered his childhood in Byelorussia, he comes from there. But then he became a European, a Russian scientist in the broad sense. (Elena L., b. 1939)

My grandparents came from a small borough called Konotop: it is located in the Eastern Ukraine, and my grandfather belongs to exactly this generation – the people who got their first education at a haedor [a Jewish religious school]. Then he entered the Young Communist League, later he entered the Party, and soon he arrived in Leningrad, went to work at the plant, then the Army, where he acquired a military rank, then during the war he became a colonel. Well, he is a military professional, he graduated from the Military Academy. (Alexander F., b. 1961)

The parents of the young people who had settled in Leningrad moved to the city from mesteckhos to join their children. Jewish values, attitudes and practices usually remained important for the older generation. The young people did not interfere with their parents’ upholding of Jewish values.
religious traditions. But their elders did not constitute a reference group for
them, and their Jewish identity remained simply a fact of their private life
linking them with their parents’ family:

However, none of my relatives, children, nephews and nieces, nobody can
speak the language in our family, nobody. My father [the Komsomol member
of the ‘20s who had arrived from the mestechno] could speak a little, my
grandfather and grandmother spoke fluently, my mother did not speak at all.
... My grandfather and grandmother sometimes spoke Jewish (Yiddish),
when they wanted to conceal something from us ... (Elena L., b. 1939)

My aunts and grandmother, when the Jewish Easter came, made something in
line with the rites, and my father took it calmly. This attitude came from a
general standpoint existing in society, from an urge towards atheism.10 Jewish
traditionalism burst under the pressure of socialist ideas. (Boris M., b. 1938)

The reunion of Jewish families in Leningrad did not prevent the
ongoing Sovietisation of the younger generation, who continued to lose
their former ethnic identity. One informant remarked: ‘... my mother ...
was, generally speaking, Russian, though she was entirely Jewish by birth.’
She went on:

My mother’s parents were politicised people, they were sort of engaged by
the Soviet power. That is, my mother’s father was even a member of the
Communist Party, and his wife – my grandmother – in the ’20s took part in
the Young Pioneers movement ... Jewishness – it has always been associated
with religion. And as they were such people – those who loved the Soviet
system – I mean my mother’s parents, big patriots of the Soviet state, true
Leninists, true Stalinists, I would say, then, quite naturally, everything that
was related to religion had to be swept aside. Therefore my mother did not
have it [Jewish identity]. Though, naturally, when they (my mother’s parents)
were a boy and a girl, they got this Jewishness from their parents, because my
grandfather, before he became a Communist and a military man, had studied
in a yeshiva – this is a Jewish school – and my grandmother – my mother’s
mother – she also was sort of the same ... Well, all this was on the level of
grandmothers and grandfathers – this is something that is inherent in every
Jew, because they all had to live there ... (in Jewish mestechno), therefore it
could not be otherwise. (Elena L., b. 1939)

My father was a typical Leningrad child. His parents attended only a primary
school, so they were completely uneducated people. And after they had
arrived in Leningrad, the maximum they did in their homes was circumcision,
which they did to their children – boys, of course. But my parents – neither
my father nor my mother – had anything else of this kind. All this had
stopped at the level of grandfathers and grandmothers, and moreover – both
grandfathers and grandmothers only had it in their early years. And nothing
more than that. (Irina I., b. 1960)

Along with this Sovietisation, the number of mixed marriages
increased, which in the opinion of one informant is ‘... inevitable. If the
grandmother and the grandfather come from one and the same mestechno,
[then] already her youngest daughter marries a Russian, and almost all her
grandchildren enter into [ethnically] mixed marriages’ (Irina B., b. 1952).
Jewish customs, religious practices and language disappeared with the
dying out of the older generation. ‘Our family almost did not follow the
traditions. Only my grandfather and grandmother spoke Yiddish. They
spoke fluently. But they died when I was three years old. And I did not
need the language’ (Osip M., b. 1933).

Jewish culture at that time still existed, both in the private sphere and
in the public realm, as the culture of the older generation (in Jewish
organisations and cultural institutions, and in the mass media, and so on).
Ethnic issues were still subjected to public discussion, although they were
losing their topicality. Ethnic discrimination, which later conditioned the
problematisation of Jewish identity, did not exist at that time. The large-
scale repressions which took place in the late 1930s did not involve the
systematic persecution of definitive ethnic groups. Any event in a life story
(including ethnic origin, of course) that set a person apart from the great
mass of others could serve as a reason for repression. The NKVD invented
cases of ‘nationalists’ (e.g. Poles, Finns, Estonians) who had their ‘ethnic
native land’ outside the USSR. At the same time, its repressions were not
aimed directly against ethnic groups.11

Even the subsequent repressions that took place on ethnic grounds did
not, up until a certain point, concern the Jews. (None of the parents,
grandparents or relatives of our respondents suffered seriously during this
period.) As a result, there are clear reasons for defining the first generation
of Leningrad Jews, and perhaps all Jews who lived in urbanised Russia, as
those who originated from Jewish families, later abandoned Jewish
practices, and finally stopped being homines ethnici. Most of these people
were born during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and so their
secondary socialisation occurred during the period described. This
predetermined their future assertion of ‘internationalist’ Soviet values
above ethnic values whatever their life-circumstances.
The Generations of the Anti-Semitic Era

The following two generations of Leningrad Jews were socialized under fundamentally new conditions. They had much in common, and for the most part we do not observe any great intergenerational differences between them. The first of the two generations came to adulthood at a time when the policy of anti-Semitism was being established.12

By the end of the 1940s, even formal ethnic status (either as registered on a passport or as conferred by a 'Jewish' surname) served to jeopardize effective life-strategies ('... as for my mother [b. 1925], I guess she has always been afraid of the fact that she was Jewish, and she tried to think about it as seldom as possible' (Nikolai G., b. 1952)). At that time a campaign was launched to fight 'Jewish nationalism' and cosmopolitanism, and everyday manifestations of anti-Semitism increased sharply. This resulted in a striving on the part of 'normal' Jews to get rid of the stigma: whenever possible, they tried to obtain passport registration as ethnic Russians both for themselves and their children.13 Families' previous Jewish heritages were hushed up. All these strategies led to the deliberate destruction of social (ethnic) memory, and to the ousting of references to Jewish ethnicity not only from public but also from private life. These 'survival' strategies resemble those of the upper strata of Russian society after the 1917 Revolution, when in order to survive physically parents concealed their social origin and family history from their children.14 Children of the anti-Semitic generations recalled these parental strategies as follows:

I got to know about it [his nationality] I guess at the age of 8 or 10 ... Before that I believed that a Jew was sort of a military rank, and I confused it with a 'corporal' ['Jew' in Russian is yevreei, and 'corporal' is yefredor]. And even when the gypsy children — when we lived at our dacha — cried 'Hey, you Jew, Jew!' — I remember it well now — I could not understand why they called me a kind of soldier. I thought that the word 'Jew' meant a corporal, a soldier. And only when, somebody started to throw stones on to our roof and to break windows, at this point I started to understand something ... and once, after the next stone was thrown into the kitchen window of our dacha, I did not understand why exactly our windows were broken, so I asked my grandfather about it. And then my grandfather explained to me ... that's because we were Jews ... He said: 'This is a nationality.' And my grandfather told me that many great people were Jews as well. This is how I got to know that we also belonged to this thing. (Alexander K., b. 1962)

And when [I was] in kindergarten, there was a girl, and once she called me a zhidovka (a Yid) [an offensive, scornful name for a Jew in Russian]. I remember that I came up to my mum and asked what a zhidovka was, as I did not understand it at all. She told me that in tsarist times there were such ... such a word was thought up, well, something like this. There was always such an unpleasant feeling — I felt that this was so bad, that it was really an obscene word. Then my father started to tell me about something — you see, I think he was always telling me, well, something ... historical facts, some scantly information from [the] Old Testament. (Elena Sh., b. 1974)

These two excerpts illustrate how children encountered their Jewish origins in the standard occasions of early socialisation — at the dacha or in the kindergarten. The family left these children secure, and ignorant about their Jewishness. Under external pressure, parents were forced to provide certain explanations regarding ethnicity in the form of a justification, because these first encounters with their ethnicity were harmful for Jewish children. Even in these interviews, they can hardly find a fitting word to describe their Jewishness.

If, on the part of the first generation of Leningrad Jews, we can observe a rapid and unquestioning formation of Soviet Russian identity, among the second and third generations a sense of Jewish identity had already become a rare exception:

I belong to the Russian culture, and I can't find anything stronger [than Russian culture] in the Jewish culture. (Boris M., b. 1938)

... Assimilated, to a great extent assimilated [her parents], yes. In principle, I believe that if it hadn't been for the passport, for some recent events, maybe we would never have thought of the fact that ... (Elena Sh., b. 1974)

Even when some remnants of Jewish identity have been preserved, Soviet identity is nevertheless much more important for these Jews:

My mother [b. 1927] was such a ... sort of a Soviet woman, simply a human being, ordinary, very nice. The fact that she was a Jew — in general, she never concealed it, she was never ashamed of it, but for her it was never a very essential feature, and actually this is not a very essential feature anyway. I mean, one did not try to forget about it, but at the same time — there were times when this was also not needed. Look at me — I am Jewish. And so what? I am an engineer, I am working at the research institute. What of it that I am Jewish — does it make any difference? (Leonid G., b. 1973)
One informant recalled that in 1980 she was not allowed to work as a guide with foreigners. Striving to overturn this decision her mother went to the dean of the university where her daughter studied and said the following:

If necessary, I can bring recommendations from my work, from my husband's work, from our Party committees, that we never ... the very best characteristics, that we are not connected ... that is, we are good workers, we are active participants in all Party meetings, political seminars – that nobody is tangled up with anything suspicious ... and my husband also attends all these ideological seminars. I am doing Marxist-Leninist courses ... (Inna L., b. 1960)

Outside the family, Jewish children more and more often felt that 'Jewishness was already something indecent' (Boris, b. 1959). The categories 'decent' and 'indecent' are often used to describe the discomfort caused by Jewish ethnic identity. 'Indecent' meant abnormal, not good, dangerous, suspicious: in other words, marginal to the Soviet mainstream. Thus a child had to face the problematisation of ethnicity in the public sphere. For instance, if somebody called him a 'Jew', he already perceived this as an obscene word. This problematisation of Jewish ethnicity represented a public challenge, demanding of Jewish ethnic self-identification as 'indecent' people. On the part of the second 'anti-Semitic' generation, the response in the private sphere to this public challenge was a jettisoning of ethnic identity.

After the XXth Congress of the CPSU, however, when Stalinism was exposed, and with society becoming more and more open, a new type of reaction to the public challenge gradually began to develop in the private sphere. Relations started to tell children the ancient history of the Jewish people, citing the names of famous Jews of the past (usually the list of names was the same: Karl Marx, Einstein, Eisenstein, Charlie Chaplin ...). One of our informants remembered the feelings of surprise, happiness and pride that seized him when he learnt that a favourite poet of all Soviet children – Samuil Marshak – was a Jew like himself. As a result, his simply formally being a Jew led to an ambivalent feeling: '... from one side, a pride that came from nowhere, and from the other – a terrible humiliation' (Yuri P., b. 1951). Such a humiliation registers as discomfort, and creates a desire, if not to conceal, then at least not to overemphasise the shameful fact of the life story: 'I knew that it is shameful, an awkward position – decent people – and being Jews ...' (Elena Z., b. 1961).15

Thus, 'ethnic pride' was cultivated in the private sphere of family and friendships, and 'ethnic humiliation' was mainly a public phenomenon. The gulf between personal, private dignity and public humiliation deepened. At the same time, in the public sphere distinct 'rules of the game' regarding the contact of Jews with the state were upheld by mutual, silent consent. Violation of these rules was considered importunate and indecent. As an example, one of our informants told us how she, then an active Komsoomol member, was not allowed to go abroad in 1962. When she submitted her papers a second time, she did something which was considered absolutely unacceptable in the public sphere. She went to the official who was dealing with the matter, and asked her bluntly whether she would be allowed to go abroad given the data regarding nationality that were on her passport. The official was completely taken aback. The girl won permission for the planned trip, though the outcome might well have been different and rather unpleasant for her (Elena L., b. 1939).

We consider the Arab-Israeli Six Day War of 1967 as marking the borderline between the two ethnic generations, which were in many ways similar to each other. The Israeli victory in this war created a new public challenge to the identity of Soviet Jews and brought about changes in Soviet policy regarding Jews. On the one hand, a strengthened state policy of anti-Semitism seriously tramelled the life-strategies of Soviet Jews. A campaign against 'Israeli Zionists' was launched in the mass media:

Every paper wrote only about Israeli aggressors. But of course they could not write that Jews were just bastards. It could not be said: I do not like Jews. But one could well say: I do not like Zionists, they do great harm to poor Arabs. It was clear that Zionism meant Jews. (Boris S., b. 1959)

At the beginning of the 1970s a special 'Jewish' KGB department was created. As a consequence, the education and employment of Jews were rigidly regulated. Jews could not choose any college or university they wished; both written and unwritten rules specified those colleges they were allowed to enter and the relevant quotas. The same was true of employment, as the majority of our informants attest.

On the other hand, the appearance of the Israeli theme in the official-public sphere (in the mass media) created new opportunities for the constructing of Jewish identities. It became possible for Jews to reconstruct their Jewish identity in a new symbolic space:
Israel gave us some pride, of course. There had been such a strong feeling of humiliation all the time, that they [Jews] could neither fight nor work, neither in agriculture, nor anywhere, and then it appeared that the most productive cows were there in Israel, that they gathered God knows how big harvests, and the main thing was that they knew how to fight. (Lyubov', b. 1948)

Thus, private ethnic pride was justified by a publicly-avowed military victory. At the end of the 1960s, the legal opportunity to emigrate from the USSR on the basis of Jewish origin was re-established. This conjunction of political and social-psychological circumstances incited differentiation among Soviet Jews, including, first of all, differentiation between the two generations of the anti-Semitic period. The first of these generations was homogeneous enough in terms of its Soviet Russian identity. These Jews, who were the majority, had long considered themselves 'Russian' (in the sense of 'Soviet'), and the above-mentioned conjunction did not really affect this. By contrast, in the next generation we can observe the growth of a minority which for various reasons opted for the ethnic identity of their grandparents who had come to Leningrad from the mesteckhos.

We can mention one example of intergenerational conflict in the family centering on the issue of Jewish identity. One informant described to us his father, who had been such a 'decent' man that he had even not attempted to enter the CPSU, as he had never considered himself worthy to be a party member. This man visited his cousin who was leaving for Israel, and told him that 'everyone who was leaving our state was his personal enemy' (Yuri P., b. 1951). The first generation of the anti-Semitic period and the Soviet Russian majority of the second are essentially similar. In the following, we focus on the formation of a minority (new groups of Soviet Jews) who developed a new ethnic identity and new ethnic strategies.

It was at the end of the 1960s that a number of those Soviet Jews who had long been assimilated started to assume for themselves Jewish values, which they attempted to reconstruct from the scant information they had about Israel. From this time on, one can speak of the formation of a specifically Jewish environment in the private-public sphere. However, the characteristic practices of this environment did not so much replicate those of these people’s great-grandparents from the mesteckhos as relate to contemporary images of the Israeli hero.

The ‘New Jews’ violated the established rules of the game, forcing a transfer of the discussion to the public sphere. Society became open enough for some forms of protest to manifest themselves. The protest against anti-Semitism took the simplest possible form: a desire to emigrate. The majority of potential emigrants did not get permission to leave the country (they were unofficially called okazniki, i.e. those whose right to emigrate had been refused). In any case, if a person applied for permission to leave they were stigmatised and encountered powerful discrimination. Since the state prohibited free migration, a movement emerged upholding the right to emigrate. In public, a Jew who intended to emigrate resembled a dissident engaged in anti-Soviet activities. In the official-public sphere such Jews found themselves isolated, and this contributed to the construction of Jewish self-identity and a Jewish ethnic milieu in the private-public realm.

How was Jewish identity constructed in this period? Here is a typical story presented by one of our informants (Boris S., born 1959). Boris’s grandfather (born in 1902) took part in the Civil War on the side of the Red Army, then graduated from the Red Professors Institute, and later worked at the Komintern. His grandmother (born 1904) was a pious woman, but, as Boris himself puts it: 'I think that she had not had much influence on my upbringing or on anything else: the family was absolutely assimilated.' However, although his grandparents knew Yiddish, his parents (who were born in 1927 and 1933) did not know their mothers’ language. ‘No traditions were kept’, observed Boris. His father was a communist. At school, both secondary and high, ‘I tried to be like others. I tried to avoid any confusion.’ He started to reflect upon his ethnicity: ‘Well, I am a Jew, and what does this mean? Who are these Jews, and where did they come from? You couldn’t read anything about that anywhere.’ He also started to read some available (i.e. anti-Zionist) literature, then he became acquainted with an okaznik, an active member of an illegal Jewish group. He took the process of constructing a Jewish identity further, and his life became separated into two spheres: the official-public, lived out at the plant where he kept working, and the private-public, lived out at Jewish seminars and lectures where all his interests were concentrated and where his ‘personal milieu’ was being formed.

On the one hand, then, analysis of the ethnic identity of the generations of the anti-Semitic period reveals the almost complete assimilation of Leningrad Jews, which was additionally stimulated by state discrimination. On the other, examples may be found of a new response to the changed conditions that led to the formation of the new Jewish identity. The numbers of those attending illegal Jewish associations in the 1970s (circles, seminars) were not great, because participation in such activities was risky and could lead to persecution. Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, in the private-public sphere a non-formal Jewish community was
emerging made up of ethnic social networks. Although more and more ‘New Jews’ were recruited into this milieu the community was unstable, since the losses to it were high: many people emigrated (i.e. succeeded in realising their life-strategies), for the sake of which they ‘became Jews’.

In the public sphere, discussion of ‘the Jewish theme’ was somewhat polarised: there existed aggressive ‘Israeli Zionists’ and Soviet ‘persons of Jewish nationality’, the latter protesting against the activities of the former and thus supporting the decisions of the CPSU. Life as it was lived was echoed in the public condemnation of ‘non-typical’ cases of disloyal conduct on the part of ‘certain derelicts’ - the traitors to the motherland who were willing to leave the country.

The Generation of the Transformation Period

The reforms that commenced in the second half of the 1980s resulted in the gradual attenuation of the Soviet private-public sphere. Ethnic discourse underwent crucial change. Awareness and discussion of ethnicity passed from the private-public sphere into the public as restrictions on the content of public discussion disappeared completely.

Further reforms led to the aggravation of an identity crisis in Soviet society. At the same time, these reforms created further new opportunities for the development of strategies based on new identifications. In Leningrad (which in September 1991 reverted to its historical name St Petersburg), this meant that achieved Jewish status provided opportunities both for emigration and for successful survival strategies based on the advantage of belonging to the ethnic community. The very fact of belonging to the Jewish community presumed participation in the ethnic networks relating to foreign support, jobs within the community, education, humanitarian aid, etc. With support from abroad, the community expanded and developed rapidly and came to include a number of Jewish organisations.

How did this transformation influence the ethnic identity of the younger generation? The early socialisation of some of our young informants took place in what was still the pre-perestroika period, and thus a bifurcation of consciousness was intrinsic to them just as it had been to many from the ‘anti-Semitic’ generations. One informant remarked:

It seemed to me that, on the one hand, this was ... sort of my misfortune. I always suffered because I had this bad luck - to be a Jew ... Then, on the other hand, I was sort of proud of it. I thought: the token people ... It was sort of a struggle inside me. I would have been happy - earlier - if I had not been a Jew. (Elena Sh., b. 1974)

Now that the issue of ethnicity has entered public discourse, however, those young Jews who have been involved in community activities (camps for Jewish youth, a Jewish college, Jewish theatre, etc.) have discovered that Jews are ‘absolutely normal people’ (Elena Sh., b. 1974). As they have eliminated the ‘split-personality’ complex, so they have discovered many opportunities for self-expression offered by the Jewish community, and have sought to become Jews andconvert to Judaism.

It was in the narratives of the younger generation that we encountered once more descriptions of those grandmothers who had come to Leningrad long ago from the small regions. These babushkas and their Jewish practices are the focus for a myth that forms the basis for the construction of a new identity. In many interviews, reminiscences about these babushkas or grandmothers occupy a lot of space; the role of these grandmothers in their socialisation seems to be very important for these young respondents:

My grandmother [b. 1896] always stayed with us, she always celebrated Jewish feasts - until the age of 95 she always went to synagogue. Her native language was Yiddish. So it was no revelation to me that I was a Jew - I was soaked in it somehow. (Leonid G., b. 1973)

For me it [Jewish nationality] has always been important ... perhaps because I was mainly brought up by my grandfather. He told me a quite a lot. I remember, they brought me in my childhood to the synagogue. I liked being there! I lived with my parents, separately from my grandparents, but quite a lot of time I spent at my grandparents’. Saturdays there was cooked something fantastically delicious - I remember that most of all I liked eating something tasty on Saturdays ... (Natalia G., b. 1974)

For comparative purposes we can quote from our interviews with informants belonging to previous generations that demonstrate the different attitudes such people had towards the Jewish traditions of their grandparents: ‘My grandfather [born 1809] attended [synagogue], prayed mornings, and also he read prayers. At that time it looked, of course, grim’ (Lubov D., b. 1948). And: ‘From my mother’s side my grandfather was very religious. All the devotions and customs we knew from our childhood, but we definitely did not keep all that up ... It brought about disgust which lasted all my life’ (Lilia L., b. 1949).
Among the random sample of our informants the majority were descendants of those Jews who migrated from the Pale of Settlement soon after the 1917 Revolution. It is they who represent the dominant contemporary type of St Petersburg Jew. Reconstruction of families’ ethnic biographies was done on the basis of the narratives provided by informants born in the 1930s or later. The aims of the project did not include interviewing older people, but Leningrad Jews of the 1920s and 1930s as an ethnic group have been studied elsewhere (Bayzor, 1989).

Here, the word ‘Russian’ is for the narrator a synonym for ‘Soviet’. The loss of their ethnic identity did not convert Jews into ethnic Russians, but rather made them Soviet, along with the majority of the population in the USSR. In this case, the concept ‘Russian’ was not linked to ethnicity, but rather implied the notion ‘Soviet’ (and ‘Russian-speaking’).

The 1920s and 1930s represented a period of atheist ideological propaganda. The destruction of religious values undermined ethnic identity, for which religion served as an ideological basis.

Ethnic repression in the USSR started at the very end of the 1930s (the war with Finland) and then broadened with the USSR’s participation in World War II. The formal ground of such repressions was ‘nationality’ (ethnic origin) as stated on a passport. Hitherto, this article in a passport had been filled in on the basis of a citizen’s statement. However, following an NKVD instruction issued in 1938 this article was filled in only according to the documents identifying the ethnic origin of the applicant’s parents. The absence of such documents created a lacuna in the passport, which caused suspicion on the part of the authorities. Such a procedure made it impossible to conceal a ‘wrong’ ethnic origin and facilitated ethnic repression. In broad terms, the ‘passportisation’ of the Soviet population started in 1932, initially in large towns. One of the social control functions of the passport system was the selection of a population along lines of class, ethnicity, age, marital status, residence, etc. Residence was legal only if confirmed by the military authorities, on the basis of both passport data and NKVD files. The passport fulfilled the same selective and discriminatory functions in terms of gaining employment or entering educational institutions.

We chose 1947 as the cut-off year for the second Soviet-Jewish ethnic generation because, in spite of the importance of World War II experiences for this cohort, we do not consider the major changes in ethnic practices that occurred in Russia during the war. Although the relatives of many Leningrad Jews perished in the Holocaust, the Soviet ideological machine hushed up the Jewish genocide. As late as 1996, when the truth about the Holocaust was publicly debated, 50 per cent of Russian citizens reported total ignorance of this fact (as against 8 per cent of Germans, 9 per cent of Polish, 10 per cent of French, 24 per cent of British and 33 per cent of American citizens). The politics of state anti-Semitism are usually associated with the sublimation of the failures of domestic and foreign policy, the difficulties of the postwar period and the personal anti-Semitism of Stalin. The beginnings of political discrimination against Jews can be dated back to 1947.

Statistics for the age-distribution of Leningrad Jews in 1989 (when the massive emigration of Jews from Russia began) shows that the proportion of Jews in different age groups differs. This is not on account of a longer life expectancy for Jews or differences in the birth rate (over the last few decades these differences have been statistically insignificant). The chief reason for these differences is a change in the strategy for choosing the nationality in the case of mixed families. According to micro-census data for the city’s population, fewer than 10 per cent of children born in Russian-Jewish families were registered as Jews; the others were registered as Russians (O nationalnom sostave naselejja Sankt-Peterburga. Peterburgskomstat, St Petersburg, 1995, s.17).

Bertaux (1966). On the other hand, in one of our interviews an informant remarked: ‘I never considered my Jewishness as something shameful’ (Osp M., b. 1933). This case is essentially different from the typical ethnic biography of a Leningrad Jew. We interpret this difference in terms of the specific social experience of the informant. He is not only one of our interviewees not to have belonged to the middle class and to have held the post of industrial worker at the plant. For people of Jewish origin this is quite a rare case. The majority of Jews in large Russian towns belong to the middle class (bearing in mind the conventionality of such a designation in the Soviet context) in terms of education and social status. According to the 1989 census, 70–5 per cent of Leningrad Jews in the 25–55 age range had received or were receiving the highest level of education (by the 1970s this indicator falls to 60 per cent). By comparison, among the non-Jewish population the percentage of those who had received higher education was almost three times lower (Kogan, 1994). Differences in social experience (in particular in work experiences) result in different perceptions of ethnicity. Our research confirms the theory that experiential differences accumulate to create different meanings, different ‘rules of the game’ and different ethnic practices for people belonging to different social classes. Our interlocutor did not encounter state anti-Semitism, but often came across everyday officiousness typical of the working-class milieu: ‘Of course, they insulted me — “Yid”, I took it easily and if they start insulting me they know I’ll beat them back right away...’

It is important to emphasise that a demonstration of Jewishness does not imply self-identification as a Jew. Sometimes such demonstration has been the only way of confirming one’s right to emigrate. Instrumental usage of ethnicity did not, however, distinguish these Jews from non-Jews who bought false ‘Jewish’ documents that would enable them to emigrate. (This was the context in which the proverb emerged ‘Jewishness is not ethnicity, but a means of transportation’)

Those grandparents who, according to our informants, were influential in the reconstruction of Jewish identity had grown up in mesteckhos. Although they might be younger than the core age group of this generation, their socialisation in the mesteckhos milieu and their experience of migration to industrialising central towns make it possible to ascribe them to the first Soviet-Jewish generation. On the other hand, in the case of Leonid G. we have the phenomenon of the so-called late child with its implications for identity formation: in the case of a child born to parents over 45, the grandparents belong to the first generation of Leningrad Jews and the second generation is ‘missing’.

References

15 Shame, Promiscuity and Social Mobility in Russian Autobiographies from Poor Working-class Milieux

ANNA ROTKIRCH
Department of Social Policy, University of Helsinki, Finland

Introduction

This chapter will examine two descriptions of poor and socially marginal milieux written by two men from different Soviet Russian generations. 'Mikhail Ivanov' (born 1935) talks about incest and about promiscuous milieux of the 1950s, and 'Aleksei Lukashin' (born c. 1960) about Leningrad suburban gang and rock subcultures of the 1970s and 1980s. I am interested in the links between private and public selves, and in the conflicting ideals of masculinity exhibited in these autobiographies. The first autobiography, also, created doubts as to its authenticity. I conclude with a discussion of whether it is possible to extrapolate a certain way of life from only a couple of autobiographies, and propose a conceptual distinction between milieux and subcultures.

The autobiographies belong to a corpus of 47 items, collected in an autobiographical competition about love and sexuality organised in St Petersburg in 1996. They clearly differed from the rest of the material, and were for me personally among the most unexpected and shocking to read. Ivanov's life story paints a fairly classical picture of the Soviet class journey from poor, marginalised worker to well-to-do upper-working-class citizen. Just as in workers' autobiographies from a century earlier, male self-control, including sexual self-control, is seen as an intrinsic component of upward social mobility (Maynes, 1995). Ivanov depicts an amoral world,