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JEWS OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE: TRADITIONAL AND SECULAR EDUCATION AS BASIC FACTORS OF SWITCH IN SELF-IDENTITY

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Summary

This study focuses on education as one of the strongest (and in the times of no electronic devices, practically, the strongest) factor of self-identity formation, especially since the times of European Enlightenment. Of significant importance for the study is, first of all, the matter of self-identification of a minority representative in a multicultural society. The study is vital to the present day social life, when many European countries have found themselves in a situation where they have to adopt numerous migrants and search for ways of integrating them. Monocultural societies evidently do not exist anymore in present day world. Today multiculturalism characterizes former one-nation consolidated countries and is stronger pronounced in traditionally multicultural ones. In this research, we investigate one of the most valuable ways of integration and possibility of assimilation – education in a broad meaning of the word. The history of the Jewish community in Russia is analyzed in the study; the objectives are to study the main aspects of education: home education, educational institutions, language of education and existing materials; social aspects and history of the Jewish community are also taken into account.

Key Words: Jewish education, Jewish history, Jews of the Russian Empire, national minorities, multicultural states, national policy of the Russian empire, Russian history of the 19th-20th centuries.

Introduction

Research Subject

The research analyzes various sides of life in a multicultural society in the perspective of education, including home education, language of home education, oral and written sources of home education, traditional education inside the community and official education outside the community. The factors of initial personality self-identity formation cannot but be investigated as well: history of people, religion inside and outside a community (tolerance/lack of tolerance), attitude towards strangers/newcomers. This heterogeneity creates tough questions about the role of education in the changing society. Should there be homogeneous education inside a definite community that in instant future would only emphasize the differences between cultures and people, homogenous majority-oriented education that would contribute to weakening and destruction of initial home-obtained self-identity or particular heterogeneous education, which will give expression to the differences and be unique?

History of the Jewish people is of specific interest for this study as it helps clarify the situation. Thus, concentrating on history, religion, education and language seem absolutely logically approved within this study of the factor of education in the process of the Jewish self-identification formation in the Russian Empire of the 19th century.

Sources and Literature

There are many possibilities to study Jewish culture as culture of one of the minorities in the Russian Empire: scientific research (books and articles), memoirs, fiction, personal reminiscences (interview and diaries). Since the sources are variable, they cannot but reflect different approaches and personal attitudes. All the sources and literature could be divided into four unequal groups of different character.

The first group of sources, in the perspective of educational studies, is memoirs of the Jews (A.Brushtein, S.Dubnov, L.Grossman, L.Levanda, P.Vengerova) who identified themselves as originally Jewish and the Russian Empire subjects. They present much information from inside on Jewish home and official education, on their attitude towards Russian language and literature in general terms of positive/attractive/challenging or negative. Positive attitude encouraged those Jews to share a strong desire for integration that due to the situation in the country had lots of obstacles to overcome, the obstacles resulted just from the fact of their Jewishness.

The next group of sources, actually, arises from the previous one and shows the search for self-identification through the dominant element of the Russian culture, the Russian language (L.Pasternak, Z.Zhabotinsky, M.Morgulis, S.Marshak). Jewish journals very quickly, in addition to Yiddish and Hebrew, started being published in Russian, which became their visual sign of belonging to the dominant Russian culture.

The sources dealing with various aspects of the history of the Jewish community in Russia that was regarded by the government as a problem (I.Gessen, S.Dubnov) and attempts, undertaken to solve it through numerous regulations and decisions, constitute the third group.

The fourth group of sources represents the majority's vision of the Jews (mainly by Russian population), traditional image of the Jews as seen through the prism of the Russian eyes (N.Karamzin, S.Soloviev, S.Harkave, R.Kanror) and based mostly on personal interaction,

stereotypes, religious and social comparison.

Materials and Methods

Multicultural societies both in the past and at present share some similar general characteristics and at the same time cannot but present rather numerous differences. The Russian Empire was not an exception. The life of the Jewish community in Russia shares some general characteristics of minorities within multicultural societies and presents some unique features as well.

The 19th century brought considerable changes into traditional Jewish communities that began their integration into the Russian economy. Timber and grain trade, railways and banking replaced traditional Jewish crafts and selling of alcohol that had been the Jewish trade. The history of minorities demonstrates two major reasons of their existence inside another culture: migration and occupation. Migration brought the Jewish people to Europe and occupation made them become citizens of Russia. The later event contributed to the changes that started taking place in the Jewish society; one of them was writing and issuing literature in Russian, editing Russian Jewish journals. New tendencies that appeared in the Jewish community, its members' interest in Russian culture, economy and political life were demonstrated by those new Jewish journals in Russian - such magazines of the second half of the 19th century as *Evreiskaiia Starina* (Jewish Antiquity), *Evreiskaiia Biblioteka* (Jewish library), *Russkii Evrei* (*Russian Jew*) and *Rassvet* (Dawn), *Voshod* (Sunrise), the activity of the *Obshchestvo po rasprostraneniuyu prosveshcheniia sredi evreev* (Society on spreading of Education among the Jews). Stylistic and textual analyses of the publications together with the analysis of their content and historical sources were used in the study.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is to analyze in general the impact of education on self-identity formation. The notion of education is very broad if one takes into account its various sides: home education including national and social traditions, language, folk tales, songs and ballads, gender stratification in the area of home attitudes; official education including the language of education, its content, discovery of new literary samples and tendencies. Definitely, cultural and social background in educational studies must be taken into consideration. Such sides of life as existence in a multicultural society, including the history of people, religion inside and outside (tolerance/lack of tolerance), attitude towards strangers/newcomers as factors of the nation existence were investigated in this study as well. The historical background is of specific interest for this study as it helps clarify the situation. Still, concentrating on education, language of education and materials of education seem absolutely logically approved within this study of Jewish self-identification in the Russian Empire. One of the objectives of this study is not to examine linguistic determinism theories, but to apply the ideas in the studies of mentality shift in new bilinguals as representatives of minorities in a multicultural society. The analysis of the phenomenon of self-identification of representatives of a specific cultural and ethnic community is relevant in today's world, where there are practically no homogeneous (monolingual or monocultural) states and societies.

Education, language of education, the factor that very often (together with family, of course) predetermines one's self-identity (at least at the first stages of personality development) will be a matter of the analysis in this study and thus could be regarded as the main objective of the research.

Another objective deals with literature – Jewish and Russian – involved into the process of

education, as well as religion together with a majority tradition to accept/reject representatives of other confessions. Judaic religion (before the end of the 18th century with the third partition of Poland) was represented in Russia by some scientists and merchants only and in those cases triggered no special interest. The end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries demonstrated an absolutely different state of things – state attitude to Judaism marked as negative and social attitude that divided the majority into pro and contra parties.

Historical Background

The Jews had been known in Russia long before their official history in Russia started; but their status could be defined as "visitors" as they hadn't settled there in communities (R.Ganelin and V. Kelner, S.Dubnov, S.Soloviev, etc.) They had been involved in supplying, merchandise, medicine, sciences. History of Jews of the Russian Empire began with the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795. In a short period of time about three million of new citizens were incorporated into the Empire and became its new subjects. They were hardly expected and welcomed. Although for a long time Russia had been well known for its ethnic and religious diversity and high degree of tolerance, the Jewish experience absolutely differed from other new citizens' stories. The Jewish people practically had not assimilated in Western European societies, and the reasons had been both social, cultural and religious, both inside Jewish communities and outside; the tendency remained the same when they became a part of the Russian Empire population. In Russia the Jews populated mostly rural areas and small towns, earning their living by shop keeping, peddling, artisanship and a variety of trades connected to alcoholic beverages (Orbach, 1980, p. 3-8). A Jew (also known as *zhid* or *evrei*) became a kind of a legal category, but no successful attempt was made to define who objectively a Jew was, to establish exact characteristic that should necessarily be attributed to a member of the Jewish community (Karamzin, 1980, p. 505-506).

By the time the Jews became Russian citizens Russia had already become home for many ethnic and cultural minorities (Georgian, Cherkessian, Tatar, etc.); Jewish community was just another one. Having examined its life in the Russian Empire, one can see that it shared some general characteristics of minorities within multicultural societies and presented some unique features as well. The long 19th century brought considerable changes in traditional Jewish communities that began their integration into the Russian economy. Timber and grain trade, railways and banking replaced traditional crafts and selling of alcohol.

The history of minorities demonstrates two major possibilities: migration and occupation. Migration brought the Jewish people to Europe and occupation made them become citizens of Russia. The period when the Jews found themselves as Russian empire citizens, the period that started at the end of the 18th century, the time when the Jews suddenly became the subjects of the Russian empire, was a period of social and economic revolutions, borders opened for a flow of peoples and new Western ideas started penetrating into both Russian and Jewish societies. The new generation of the Jewish people was formed, the generation that realized the possibilities of the 'open society' and advantages of integration.

As it has already been mentioned, Jews as visitors had been known in Russia long before the 18th century, Judaism had had an important place as one of the religious choices of consolidation of Russian state (Grossman, 1924, p. 542-563; Pipes, 1975, p. 240-241). Jews met the same attitude as the other foreigners who frequently visited Russia, but never became a threat or unwanted element. A new situation, when a huge quantity of the Jewish people became a part of the Russian Empire.

required a new official attitude and initiated a new social attitude to the phenomenon as it already manifested the case of ethnic minority/majority relations. When the Jews became a mass phenomenon and a part of everyday reality, the attitude of the majority changed from romanticizing them to realistic; on the one hand, it was open for the Jews' complete assimilation and - on the other hand – the majority enjoyed ridiculing them and proclaiming them as unwelcome elements that could easily be accused of all the hardships and turned to objects for humiliation and extinction.

The Jewish community, as many ethnic and cultural minorities, had its own religion, different from Russian Orthodox Christianity, its own customs and traditions (Dubnov, 2002, p. 146-179). Jewish self-identity had always been based on faith that let the Jewish people survive. In Russia traditionally laws were more tolerant to different religions than in many other European countries. Two main factors contributed to the situation. One of them was lack of fanatic tendencies and humanistic attitude towards representatives of other religious confessions, including the Jewish one, on the side of the herds of the Russian Orthodox church. The other one was the policy towards keeping all the citizens inside the country rather than expelling non-Christian religions communities from it. So after the final partition of Poland in 1795, the new governor-general of Byelorussian province Zakhar Chernyshev, promised the Jews respect as official attitude to their Jewish community (*kahal*), freedom of religion choice, confirmation of their existing property rights as well as validity of their own courts and tribunals (Klier a, 2011, p. 180-186; Klier b, 1976, p. 505-509). At the end of the 18th – the beginning of the 19th centuries, religious limitations did not exist in relation to the Jewish communities, the Jewish self-identification based on faith remained as a stable factor.

Education

Education and language factors are strongly interrelated and in general reflect the social status of a minority. Russian emperor Alexander 1st tried to set up educational institutions for Jewish kids, but teaching there had to be conducted in Russian. In 1802 Alexander 1st established a special Committee under the chairmanship of G.R. Derzhavin with the purpose to find possible arrangements for the new Russian Empire subjects. Derzhavin visited new Russian provinces and was strongly impressed by the poverty and lack of necessary human conditions, poor communications and strong influence of the Jewish community authorities on strict regulations of community life. Derzhavin suggested that the Jews be compelled to be working in honest and useful crafts and thus to undergo moral self-improvement similar to German Jews (Stanislavski, 1983, p. 4-9). Alexander 1st hoped that the emancipation of Jews would accelerate conversion of the Jews to Christianity. The work of the Committee resulted in the new Provision on Jews that defined its goal as caring about the benefits of the indigenous inhabitants of the Russian empire. With regard to education, the Provision allowed the Jews to study in all schools, to open their own schools with compulsory teaching of one of the European languages (Russian, German or Polish). The requirement of knowledge of European languages was set for all government officials. As a result of the Provision, a Decree on the establishment of a number of Jewish elementary schools was issued. The Decree establishes the need for teaching in these schools only in Russian, and that can explain the fact why the schools were unpopular among the Jews (Gretz, 1900, p. 272-311).

The notion of education includes two basic constituents: content and form of education (types of institutions, methods and disciplines) and language of education.

The Jewish community of Russia at the end of the 18th – the beginning of the 19th centuries

had its own traditional educational institutions. Traditionally for centuries rabbis (community heads) had been teachers themselves or been responsible for appointment of community teachers (*melameds*) who had taught Jewish boys at schools attached to synagogues (*heder*); the tradition remained in Russia as well. The Jewish boys were taught Torah with its various interpretations, Hebrew (the sacred language of Torah and praying), reading and writing in Yiddish (language of colloquial communication). Two consequences of such education could not but manifest themselves: the students had strong personal Jewish self-identity and practically knew nothing about the world outside the Jewish community; it did not matter whether it was Polish or Russian world. They could communicate with the local population in Polish or Russian only in exceptional cases, when it was business or administrative requirement. Officially established schools for Jewish children were unpopular and education in Russian was not welcomed within the Jewish community and even deserved hostility on the side of the community Rabbis.

A new regime, the regime of Nicholas 1st, was determined to break down the Jewish community, to limit its autonomy, and it pushed forward the idea of forced conversion to Russian Orthodox Christianity. In relation to education the regime in 1847 issued the decree that declared foundation of a network of public schools and seminaries especially set aside for the Jews. Russian Jewry had no choice but to adhere to the policy of passive resistance to the letter of the Decree (Dubnov b, 2002, p. 156-157; Stanislawski, 1983, p. 97-122). The only fixed and consistent aim of the government was to ensure that the Jews, like all the other subjects, supplied in full the fixed quota of the community obligations, i.e. delivered both military recruits and different taxes. The Cantonist system (Jewish recruits) brought to army service approximately fifty thousand children; some of them died out of cold, thirst and neglect in vast numbers. It is rather hard not to disagree with the statement that that policy was directed not to conversion to Orthodox Christianity, but to the enlightenment of the Jewish youth.

Jewish middle class, nevertheless, decided to send their children to new public schools and seminaries. By 1855 more than 2,500 Jewish children attended public schools and more than five hundred students were enrolled in two Rabbinical seminaries in Vilna and Zhitomir. Among the first generation of graduates were L. Levanda, L. Pinsker and N. Bakst (Stanislawski, 1983, p. 13-34).

In the 1840s' little attention was paid to traditional Jewish education and the only known type of a school was chosen as a model for Jewish educational institutions: seminaries - schools for the children of the Russian clergy, usually free of charge. Orphans and children from needy families were paid minimal scholarship if they promised to accomplish the education. Theoretically, standard seminary education presupposed six years of training, but very often the students who found difficulty to cope with final exams stayed for two years at the same grade. Seminary graduates could continue their education in theological academies; similarly, Jewish seminary graduates could enter Rabbinic colleges. Christian and Jewish seminaries had many similarities not only in the form of organization and instruction, but also in problems with their students. Sometimes the process of education seemed endless, beginners and repeaters studied together in the same classroom. (Pomyalovskii, 2014, p. 67-119).

Language and Content of Education as Factors Forming Self-Identity

Language

The language of education is not very important in the perspective of self-identity for the

majority. Thus Russian elite in the times of Pushkin, for example, hardly or not at all spoke Russian, still their identity was not under question as it completely determined their position in the social hierarchy. The minorities in this respect could be subdivided into those that physically belong to the state by having some land as property and those who have neither property nor roots. For landless minorities, such as the Jewish minority, the choice of the language became twice as strong as a marker of one's self-identity.

Official education for Jewish boys included studies in German and lessons in Russian language and literature. The attraction of the new world – the world of Russian word in the poems, fables and stories of the Russian writers was so strong that those Jewish learners chose Russian as the language of literary communication and became life-long Russian literature fans. Home education here couldn't compete with Russian literature as there was no Yiddish literature for kids, they orally were exposed to Jewish folk fables and songs as well as to abridged and adapted subjects from Torah. The world of fantasy that Pushkin and Gogol opened for them, the world, that every child needs in the times of early development, entered their lives through the Russian language and became a part of their personality. Later the boys founded Russian Jewish periodicals and wrote essays, articles, historical pieces and fiction only in Russian. Much later, in immigration in Riga when Dubnov was asked why he was still writing in Russian he answered that Russian once and forever had become for him the only language of written communication.

The language becomes twice as important when it marks access to knowledge and culture, some absolutely new and attractive experiences. Here content and language are closely interrelated. The language of home education of the representatives of the second generation, those, who were educated in state institutions, was Yiddish, language of prayers was Hebrew. The Russian language they were exposed to was a very special variety of the language. First of all, the majority of the Jewish population lived in the rural areas where their neighbors were Ukrainian, Belorussian or Lithuanian native speakers (geographically there the Pale of Settlement was.). In the cities the situation was more or less the same. Only official educational institutions required standard Russian as the language of tutoring, but due to the diaries still many teachers spoke Russian with the local accent. Thus, standard Russian could be acquired only in educated families and could be learnt only in the institutions or by means of self-education.

For the third generation (children of integrated Jewish parents) there practically was no choice. They spoke Russian both at home and with their friends and at school.

Content

Speaking about new tendencies in content of education, one should keep in mind that traditional Jewish education had focused on comments and interpretation of Talmud and ancient – mostly biblical – Jewish history. Home education, whose importance underlined Kaznelson in his articles, had not included books for children in Yiddish. The stronger then was the impact of Russian literature on young learners. Thus, Morgulis in his memoirs wrote about his love to Pushkin and Gogol as well as his commitment to Jewish folklore. The same attitude Levanda expresses in his memoirs.

For young Jewish students Russian language opened the door to the world of Russian literature, history, culture. They wanted to know more about the nation they belonged to – Russian nation - and to inform their compatriots about themselves: Jewish people and their history and culture. The Russian language manifested itself as a strong instrument of self-education and enlightenment.

It is necessary to include the factor of lacunas into the idea of education and self-identity interrelation process. Of a certain phenomenon does not exist in one culture, the lacuna will be occupied by the facts and images coming from another culture and through another language. Thus, literature, arts, classical music had no place in traditional Jewish home education and were discovered by Jewish young generation by means of the Russian language and in the process of official education. Thanks to the new trends in education and a new social feature of a young generation – bilinguality- a new characteristic of Jewish social life, the middle class of professionals and artists, started appearing in the second half of the 19th century.

It is this group of people that become composers and musicians (Valentina Serov and Rosa Kaufman, for example), painters (Isaak Levitan and Leonid Pasternak), writers and publishers, historians and philosophers. The necessity to objectively inform a rather prejudiced society about the Jewish world resulted in a new phenomenon: Jewish periodicals in Russian, the phenomenon that requires a special study. The huge mass of the Jewish population was concentrated on relatively small territory of the Pale of Settlement. In the late 19th century major changes in the social structure of the Jewish society took place. A new class, a class of educated people, the Jewish intellectuals, appeared. It is this group of people that began to publish Jewish periodicals in Russian. Alexander II, the reformer, abolished the restrictions imposed by his predecessors on the Jewish community. The Jews felt that they are capable to take rightful place among the other ethnic and national groups of the Russian empire. They tried to break down the hostility and the prejudice that existed between Jewish and non-Jewish society. Russian language and use of literature and periodical press became a powerful tool in this communication between the representatives of Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. The phenomenon of media dismisses the idea of complete assimilation, although many of those publications were established by their editors with the basic idea of assimilation. For example, the Russian-language *Voskhod* published in Saint Petersburg in 1881-1906 had a circulation of 5,000 copies and its influence on the Jewish and non-Jewish reading public could hardly be underestimated. It should be noted that practically for all the authors of those publications, the Russian language was not the mother tongue, but nonetheless, it was chosen by the authors as the language of communication with the reader. At the same time the publications were clearly Jewish, the fact was always mentioned in the journals subtitles. The mother tongue of the authors and editors of Jewish periodicals in Russian was Yiddish. But despite the fact that in the late 19th century in Russia there were several periodicals in Yiddish, those authors had chosen Russian for their creative activity.

The choice of integration meant acceptance of the new culture, its language and traditions, better understanding of its religion and ethnic characteristics in order to be a part of it. At the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries everything suddenly began to collapse: not only the Pale of Settlement but the barriers between cultures, possible choices opened and became more various. Open borders and new social-democratic and Zionist ideologies provided the Jewish youth with the three possibilities of choices: the Jewish immigration to the United States, the most consistent version of Liberalism; the Jewish migration to Palestine, the Promised Land and secularized Jewishness; and the Jewish migration to the cities beyond the Pale, a world free of both capitalism and Jewish tribalism (Slezkine, 2004, p.2). Between 1897 and 1915, about 1,288,000 Jews left the Russian Empire, most of them (more than 80 percent) for the United States. More than 70 percent of all Jewish immigrants to the United States came from the Russian Empire; almost one-half of all immigrants from the Russian Empire to the United States were Jews. Throughout the Pale of Settlement, Jews were moving from rural areas into small towns, and from small towns – to big cities. Between 1897 and 1910, the Jewish urban population grew by almost 2 million, or 38,5 percent (from 2,559, 544 to 3, 545, 418). The number of the Jewish communities with more than 5,000

people increased from 30 in 1897 to 180 in 1910, and those communities with 10,000 people or more grew from 43 to 76. In 1897, the Jews made up to 52 percent of the entire urban population of Byelorussia-Lithuania (followed by the Russians with 18,2 percent), while in the fast growing new Russian provinces of Kherson and Ekaterinoslav, from 85 to 90 percent of all the Jews lived in the cities. Between 1868 and 1910, the officially registered Jewish population of the imperial capital of Saint Petersburg grew from 6,700 to 35,000 (Iukhneva, 1984, p.24). The number of Jews among university students in Russia increased sixfold between 1860 and 1886. At Odessa University, located in a very close proximity to the Pale of Settlement, every third student in 1886 was Jewish. Jewish women represented sixteen percent of the students at the Kiev institute for Women and the Moscow's Lubianskie Courses, seventeen percent at the prestigious Bestuzhev institute and thirty-four percent at the Women Medical Courses in Saint Petersburg (Nathans, 2002, p. 218-224; Mironov, 1999, p. 31).

Young Jews, the second generation of the Pale of Settlement, became highly visible in the Russian high culture. Rubinstein brothers founded the Russian Music Society and both Moscow and Saint Petersburg conservatories; Gnesin sisters created the first Russian music school for children; Leonid Pasternak was one of the most admired Russian portraitists and illustrators; Leon Bakst (Lev Rosenberg) became the premier stage designer; Mark Antokol'sky was acclaimed as the greatest Russian sculptor and Isaak Levitan became one of the most beloved Russian landscape painters. Jewish bankers and entrepreneurs, such as Lazar Polyakov and Wolf Vysotsky, became prominent art patrons and benefactors.

Conclusion

As a result of new tendencies in social life and new education in general and language in particular the Jewish youth discovered a new world – the Russian world; as a result of new social circumstances and through Russian Jewish publications Russian educated readers discover a new world – the Jewish world.

The most important consequence of the historical situation at the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries in relation to the Jewish minority was the existence of three definite possibilities related to language choice and self-identity: complete assimilation of those people who were the children of the Jewish Russian speaking families, the families of educated middle class professionals and artists (doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, painters and musicians); partial assimilation of the Russian speaking student from Orthodox Jewish families; zero-assimilation of those who preferred to remain members of Orthodox Jewish communities with practically zero knowledge of Russian. The first two groups are definitely the products of a new system of education, including its language and content.

The second group is for particular interest for this study as it presents cases of double self-identity – close links with the roots and a new language of public communication and creative activity, leading to active participation in the life of the majority. It also presents general tendencies in nation formation.

The minority-majority relationship is asymmetrical. The attitude to the majority is one of the pillars constituting the identity of the minority. By rule, the majority conceives itself as irrelative to the minorities. The minority has two opposite images of the majority: of an attractive community endowed with the positive attributes of modernity, culture, progress, and of the sanctioning agent punishing any departure from its own ethnocentric cultural model.

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