

**ORIENTAL JEWISH
GROUPS IN THE
FORMER SOVIET
UNION:
MODERN TRENDS OF
DEVELOPMENT**

❖ **MICHAEL A. CHLENOV**
MOSCOW, STATE JEWISH
MAIMONIDES ACADEMY

The Twenty-first Annual
Rabbi Louis Feinberg
Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies
Department of Judaic Studies
University of Cincinnati
March 10, 1998





RABBI LOUIS FEINBERG MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES IN JUDAIC STUDIES

Rabbi Louis Feinberg (1887-1949) graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1916 and was chosen valedictorian of his class. He served as rabbi of the Ohel Jacob Congregation in Philadelphia from 1916 to 1918 and of the Adath Israel Congregation in Cincinnati from 1918 to 1949. Founder of the Menorah Society at the University of Pennsylvania and editor of *Our Jewish Youth*, which later became the *Young Judean*, he also contributed short stories for many years to the Anglo-Jewish Press under the pseudonym of Yishuvnik. He wrote with equal fluency in Yiddish, Hebrew and English, and is the author of *The Spiritual Foundations of Judaism*, which features essays in all three languages. In addition to his many rabbinic responsibilities, Rabbi Feinberg was an energetic member of the Board of Governors of the United Jewish Social Agencies, the Jewish Community Council, and the Bureau of Jewish Education.

Rabbi Feinberg was especially known for his sweetness of character and sincerity. His good cheer and love for his fellow man endeared him to the entire Jewish community of Cincinnati and to thousands of others who came to visit him from across the country. In him were combined the best traits of rabbi, teacher and community leader. No more appropriate person could have been honored with a named lectureship, and the series is privileged to bear his name.

IN APPRECIATION

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1. Benny Kraut, *The Role of the Jewish Academic in Jewish Affairs: A Conference Held at the University of Cincinnati, October 30-31, 1978*.
2. Benny Kraut and Abie I. Ingber, eds., *Assessing the Significance of the Holocaust*. Papers Delivered at the University of Cincinnati on Yom Ha-Shoah, May 6, 1986.
3. Benny Kraut, ed., *American Judaism: Present and Future* (The Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Lecture Series of 1987, featuring papers by Rabbis Saul J. Berman, W. Gunther Plaut, and Mordecai Waxman, plus a symposium on the future of Cincinnati Jews and Judaism).
4. Kent Greenawalt, *Religious Liberty, Non-Establishment and Political Discourse* (A Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Lecture), November 15, 1994.
5. The Ecumenical Chair in Theology Lecture, Xavier University: Stanislaw Musial S.J., *The Holocaust, Christianity, Poland: Some Reflections of a Polish Christian Fifty Years Later*, and Benny Kraut, *The Holocaust, Christianity, Poland: A Response*, November 9, 1995.
6. Sylvia Barack Fishman, *Negotiating Both Sides of the Hyphen: Coalescence Compartmentalization, and American-Jewish Values* (A Jacob and Jennie L. Lichter Lecture), November 14, 1995.

STUDENT JOURNAL:

1. *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, Vol. I, Spring 1990.
2. *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, Vol. II, Spring 1991, Hanna G. Yerushalmi, ed.
3. *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, Vol. III, Spring 1992, Jeffrey Mandl, ed.
4. *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, Vol. IV, Spring 1994, Rebecca Broder, ed.
5. *Cincinnati Judaica Review*, Vol V, Spring 1995, Marc A. Wolf, ed.

FOREWORD

Southern Russia was somewhat of a *terra incognita* for the Jewish communities in the centers of the Islamic world and among East European Jews as well. Hence it is not so strange that lost tribes of Israel were placed in Ethiopia or east of the Hindu Kush or perhaps in the Turkic regions of the southern steppes that stretched from the Caucasus to Central Asia. Dr. Chlenov, an active ethnographer and anthropologist as well as leader of the post-Soviet Jews, visited all the Jewish communities in this region of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), learned their languages and problems, and represented them to the new authorities in Russia and Israel.

Dr. Chlenov's scholarly report reflecting first-hand experience is an important contribution to our knowledge of the modern and recent history of these 'lost' Jews. Moreover, the lecture explores the vicissitudes of nationalism and the effects regional nationalism had on local Jewish communities, themselves divided among a host of linguistic and ethnic units. Dr. Chlenov presents the Jewish mosaic in its natural environs and pursues some of its ramifications in contemporary Israel. One may, after reading this essay, relegate the myth of the Lost Tribes from Caucasia to Bukhara to another time and place.

Dr. Steven Bowman
Professor
Department of Judaic Studies



1.1. The Soviet Ideological Approach to the Problem of Jewish Unity

Anti-Semitic theories differ in their approaches to the question of the unity of the Jewish people. Nazi and Soviet anti-Semitic ideologies share some common pedigrees from Eastern European xenophobic and The Black Hundreds movements of the late nineteenth century [Ganelin 1992]. Nazism (as well as Neo-Nazism in post-war Europe, the USA, Arab countries or modern Russia) treated (and still treats) World Jewry as an indivisible and pernicious bearer-of-evil for various, usually transcendental, reasons. Soviet official ideology, to the contrary, denied that Jews form an identifiable unity. The premise of Soviet anti-Semitism affirms the ephemeral nature of the very existence of the Jewish people as a separate entity. The negation of the “false theory of a single Jewish nation” was an official component of the Soviet ideological interpretation of the Jewish question. It is based on the ideas of the founders of Marxism-Leninism (see a detailed historiography in [Dymerskaya-Cigelman, Kipnis, 1997]).

According to this approach, Jews represented an incomprehensible social formation not united by anything except class interests, usually expressed in pernicious behavior. Yet even this was not always the case because the “Jewish exploiter classes” were constantly fighting not only against the world proletarian masses but also against the “Jewish workers.” The latter, together with workers from other nationalities, fought against Zionism as “the most reactionary ideology of the world bourgeoisie.” Still, the majority of Jews, as was commonly stated in Soviet anti-Zionist literature, belonged to the exploiting classes. Thus, at a certain historical stage, the ideology of the bourgeoisie merged with Jewish ideology.

This was quite controversial because along with rootless cosmopolitanism the ideology also included a most aggressive chauvinism. Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda considered the idea of Jewish unity as Zionist propaganda implemented to divert Jewish workers from their class struggle and from their uniting with workers of other nationalities in the fight to build a Communist society and in their fight against Zionism.

Different also were the ways of solution of the Jewish question by the Nazis and by the Soviet Communists. The Nazi “*Endlösung*” led to the Holocaust. Before the Wannsee decision, Nazis saw isolation as the preferable treatment of the Jews. They planned different programs to segregate the Jews of the Empire either in a distant and presumably uninhabited piece of land (Hitler seriously discussed plans to resettle the Jews in Madagascar) or in special ghettos. The Nazis considered the assimilation of the Jews into other peoples as very dangerous and injurious. Contrarily, Soviet Communists staunchly considered assimilation as the only proper solution of the Jewish question. (For a detailed survey of Soviet ideological positions on the Jewish problem see [Laqueur 1993].) These two anti-Semitic concepts of the ethnic nature of the Jewish people, Nazi and Soviet, differed considerably. While the Nazi approach recognized racial unity among the Jews, Soviet anthropology for many decades denied that there was any unity but that of an historic religiosity between different Jewish ethnic subdivisions. Official Soviet social science had not troubled itself with proving its ideas in this field. Such ideas were presented in encyclopedias and reference books of a general nature or in specific “anti-Zionist” propagandistic publications. Otherwise the Soviet social sciences kept silent on everything Jewish. There were, for instance, no publications devoted to the origin of the Jews or Jewish ethnic history, not because these parts of anthropology were being neglected or non-developed. On the contrary, for two post-war generations ethnogenesis studies were among the most fashionable and developed topics in Soviet anthropological study. Numerous volumes were devoted to the ethnogenesis of all the peoples of USSR and all major peoples in the rest of the world — but not that of the Jews. (Even before the war there were not many publications on Jewish anthropology, but, at that time, the reason was a general low level of Jewish studies rather than an ideological pressure of state anti-Semitism).

1.2. Jewish Nationality in Soviet Union

Surprisingly enough the fight against the theory of a single Jewish nation co-existed rather peacefully with the administrative and registration rules in the USSR where Jews were mostly treated as a single “nationality.” There were, at the least, three indications that Jews formed, if not one nation, at least one nationality:

1. Jews were registered as a separate nationality on internal passports.

2. Jews, including the Oriental groups, were registered in one folder, titled "Jews," during all-Soviet censuses of 1959, 1970 and 1979.

3. A Jewish Autonomous Region had been established in the Soviet Far East.

Until the end of the 1980s the Soviet census (except that of 1926) classified all Jews under one heading. However, the last Soviet census (1989) singled out, as separate nationalities among Jews: Central Asian Jews, Georgian Jews, Mountain Jews, Tats, Krymchaks and Karaims. In spite of this administrative practice of listing these Jews as nationalities, and the registering of these nationalities on numerous internal documents and countless forms, a National Jewish Singularity continued to be disavowed in official ideological statements. (In the mid-nineteen eighties, I was asked to write an article about Jews for an anthropological encyclopaedia. All articles were supposed to begin with a statement that the given ethnic group is a people living in a certain place, numbering so many souls, etc. Jews were to be an exception. I tried to persuade the editors that Jews should be also granted the honor to be a people, but in vain. Only in 1988 with the dawn of *perestrojka* did this problem cease to be an ideological issue and the article was published as I wanted [Chlenov 1988].)

Such material demonstrates a specific and delicate question of whether the Jews are or are not a nation. In the Soviet Union this question had become one of the components of the Soviet-Jewish identity, and an assertion in the affirmative became one of the ways to resist the official Soviet anti-Semitic ideology. This denial of unity among Jews was a pure ideological instrument aimed at suppressing independent Jewish activity. It disaffirmed the right of the Jews to have independent contact with their brethren outside Soviet Union. Last, but not least, it affirmed a conservative, Slavophile type of nationalism, the so-called *pochvenniki* concept, which had served since the post-war period as the theoretical framework for Soviet policy towards minorities, especially the Jews.

In practical terms the idea that Jews do not form a single people has had few implications and sometimes even contradicted administrative practice. Still there were at least two situations where it became meaningful. The first one has become known to the whole world and played a providential role in the destiny of Soviet Jewry. That was the fight of the Soviet Jews, the so-called Refuseniks, for the right of emigration to Israel in order to join the Jewish State, or to reunite with other Diaspora Jewish communities. By itself the demand for freedom of emigration for Soviet Jews was based on the concept of Jews as a single people or nation. This idea was not alien to Jewish traditions, and was specifically pronounced on both the conscious and unconscious levels by the Jews of the Russian Empire who retained up to the twentieth century much more ethnic specificity than did Western

European Jewry since the *Haskalah*. The Zionist movement itself originated in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century and has succeeded due to the fact (among other reasons) that the Eastern European Jews considered themselves as a single nation rather than a single religious community. The Refuseniks of the nineteen seventies were not the first Soviet Jews who expressed such ideas. In the nineteen forties, immediately after World War II, the then Jewish leadership, the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, suggested that the Soviet authorities should allow them to develop contacts with progressive Jewish organizations in the world. The Soviet authorities cruelly suppressed these intentions and shortly after physically exterminated the whole Jewish elite [Kostyrchenko 1994; Redlich 1995]. The Refuseniks of the nineteen sixties through the nineteen eighties were much luckier and the result of their victorious movement signaled the end of the Soviet political and ideological system.

2.1. The Notion of *Edah* in Jewish Anthropology

The second field where ideological conceptualization of the unity of Jewish people could have played some practical role or have had some practical implications, was the question of the status of Oriental Non-Ashkenazic Jewish ethnic groups in the USSR and their relation to the far more numerous Ashkenazim.

The existence of these Oriental Jewish groups remains largely unknown outside the former Soviet Union, and even within it did not and still does not constitute a matter of common knowledge. Numerically they accounted for no more than seven to eight percent of all Jews in the Soviet Union. (Censuses did not correctly define their numbers regularly, usually underrating them [Chlenov 1988a; Zubin 1988; Chlenov 1995].)

Areas where they live or lived until recently were located on the periphery of the former Empire. Their historical destiny, circumstances of incorporation to Russia, their linguistic traits, behavioral culture, and attitude towards religion were all very different from the socially dominating Jewish group, the Eastern European Ashkenazi, a mixture of Russian and European Jews.

The problem of Jewish ethnic groups, *Edah* (plural *Edoth*), (known as sub-ethnic groups in Soviet historical tradition, or ethno-linguistic groups in Israeli tradition) and their status within the broad concept of Jewry, is quite complicated and unexplored. It deals with whether one can ascribe polyethnicity as one of the traits of a Jewish people. This contradicts the prevailing point of view, not only in traditional Jewish comprehension, but also in the normal approach in Jewish Studies. *Edah* very seldom became an object of special attention, and is almost completely ignored in the vast Jewish heritage including Jewish philosophy and even works on the nature of Jewry. Popular Jewish tradition treats the *Edoth* pejoratively, associating them with everyday domestic life, which is regularly viewed as insignificant

because it is not aimed directly at the spiritual mission of Jewry.

But in reality the *Edoth* play a very significant role and take the same positions within Jewry as do peoples or nations within other civilizations. They share with other ethnic groups such traits as common vernacular, territory and behavioral culture manifested in the common law, the *Minhagim* [Chlenov 1998]. In some cases, as it happened for instance with the Eastern European Ashkenazim at the turn of this century, ethnic identification manifests itself very strongly and results in the inception of vigorous centripetal movements. In other cases the identity of the *Edah* is totally subjugated by the predominant identity of Jewish civilization which normally manifests itself as religious identity. In the situation in question, among the Soviet Oriental Jewish *Edoth*, this balance between the civil and the ethnic identities has been influenced by the ideological premises of the state, resulting in a very peculiar form of ethnic development among the non-Ashkenazic groups in the former Soviet Union (FSU).

2.2. An Overview of the Oriental Jewish Groups in the FSU

The Central Asiatic Jews, the Bukharan, made up the largest group, being part of an entity of Iranian Jewry called by Max Weinreich "Paras-u-Maday" [Weinreich 1980: 47, 72-74]. Their vernacular was a unique Jewish language based on Tajik, the Iranian tongue of Central Asia and Afghanistan. They were culturally linked to Jewish groups of Eastern Turkistan (the modern Sinkiang Province of China) and of Afghan Jews, both of which disintegrated during the twentieth century, but some of whose remnants merged with their Bukharan co-religionists of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Prior to the mass migrations of the 1990s, the Bukharan lived in all the republics of Soviet Central Asia, but their historical center was the Zeravshan Valley in Uzbekistan near the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Late in the nineteenth century they had settled in cities of the Fergana Valley and the Tashkent region [Gubaeva 1995]. Early in the twentieth century they spread as far as Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe; small groups now live in major centers such as Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and different cities of Kyrgyzstan, *viz.*, Bishkek and Osk. Their pre-migration numbers have been calculated at 40,000 to 80,000 [Chlenov 1998a; Kupovetsky 1996; 305].

The second largest group, the Mountain Jews or Dagh-Dzhuhur, may also be considered a part of the larger Paras-u-Maday group, although their ethnic history is very peculiar. They speak a Western Iranian Jewish-Tat language. (Non-Jewish dialects of the same language are or were until recently used by Tat-Moslems and Christian Armeno-Tats of Azerbaijan [Grunberg 1997: 141 - 143]). The Mountain Jews live in Eastern Caucasus, both in Transcaucasia and in the Northern Caucasus. Their main centers are in Azerbaijan

(Baku, Krasnaya Sloboda, being a separate part of the Northern Azerbaijani town of Kuba, and the village Oguz, or Vartashen in the Sheki-Zakataly district of Western Azerbaijan) and the Russian republic of Dagestan (towns of Derbent, Makhachkala, Buynaksk, Khasavyurt). Since the early nineteenth century the Mountain Jews settled around Russian fortresses in Northern Caucasus. They still live in Mozdok in North Ossetia, Nalchik in Kabardino-Balkaria and Pyatigorsk in the Caucasian Mineral Water Area. Until recently there was a Mountain Jewish settlement in Grozny which disappeared after 1995 due to the Chechenian war. The Oguz-Vartashen population migrated during the first half of the twentieth century westward to Georgia, mainly to Tbilisi where they still inhabit a separate barrio, and up to Sukhumi in Abkhazia. In the last decade, at the time of the mass emigration to Israel, a smaller but still tangible emigration took place from Dagestan and Chechnya to Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The number of Mountain Jews in the FSU in the late nineteen eighties was estimated between 53,000 and 59,000 [Krupnik, Kupovetskiy 1988; Chlenov 1988a; Altshuler 1990: 152 - 153; Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

The third main non-Ashkenazic group is the Georgian Jews who, unlike other groups, speak ordinary Georgian and not a specific Jewish vernacular, so that linguistically they are not singled out from the rest of the Georgian population. Now the majority of the Georgian Jews live in Israel, but until two decades ago they lived mainly in Georgia, their largest settlements being in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, and Batumi. There still are typical small Jewish urban settlements, Georgian "shteytls" sui generis in the Western part of the country: Oni, and until recently Kulashi, which emigrated totally in the nineteen nineties. The number of Georgian Jews was estimated at the end of the nineteen eighties at 16,000 to 18,000. In nineteen eighty-nine, 1172 lived in what is now the Russian Federation [Chlenov 1988a, Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

Other non-Ashkenazic groups of Soviet Jewry are small in numbers, fragmented and on the verge of disappearance due to emigration and assimilation. The following groups can be singled out among them:

The Krymchaks, a separate Jewish *Edah*, descendants of the Jewish population of the Crimean Khanate, until recently spoke, and some probably still do, a Jewish vernacular based on the Crimean-Tatar language. Most of them live in urban settlements of the Crimea in Ukraine: Simferopol, Kerch, Feodosia, Sevastopol. Other groups are scattered in Russia (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Novorossiysk) and in Sukhumi in Abkhazia, a rebel province of Georgia. Their number at the end of the nineteen eighties was estimated between 1,000 and 2,000 [Chlenov 1988a; Krymchaki 1988: 606, Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

The Kurdistani Jews, (the Lakhlukhas as they are called in the Caucasus), before their

resettlement to Israel in the nineteen fifties and sixties, inhabited the Kurdistan Highland and were divided politically amongst Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Those who lived in the FSU are descendants of migrants from mainly Iranian Kurdistan of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They settled in Transcaucasian urban centers in Tbilisi, in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the nineteen fifties, those who retained Iranian citizenship were banished by the Stalin regime to Siberia and Central Asia. Some of them and their descendants still live in Almaty in Kazakhstan and Tbilisi, Georgia. As all other Kurdistan Jews, the Lakhluhas speak a Jewish language based on the eastern dialect of Neo-Aramaic. Their number before the mass emigration was estimated between 1,000 and 2,000 [Chlenov 1988a; Kurdskiye 1988: 638; Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

Another small group of immigrants, descendants from the northern part of Iran and Afghanistan lived, until recently, in the towns of Bayram-Ali and Iolotan in southeastern Turkmenistan. They spoke a specific dialect of Judeo-Persian called "Gilyaki." Most of them have now immigrated to Israel; before, they numbered about 1000 [Chlenov 1988a; Kupovetskiy 1992; Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

This short overview of the non-Ashkenazic Jewish groups in the FSU would not be complete without mentioning the East European Karaites, or Karaim dispersed among Crimean cities (Simferopol, Yevpatoriya, Kerch, Feodosia), Lithuania (Trakay, Vilnius) and major cities of Russia and Ukraine. In the 1980s several Karaim families still lived in historical Karaite centers in Western Ukraine in Lutzk and Halitzch. Most of them in the FSU are now russophones though some of the old men still communicate in the Turkish Karaim language, which is close to Crimean Tatar. (Some scholars treat the Karaim language as one of the Jewish languages [Moskovitch, Tukan, 1980]). The majority of the Eastern European Karaim do not now consider themselves as part of Jewry and tend to deny any ethnic closeness to Jews. They represent the most drastic and successful case of de-Judaization that, to a certain extent, has touched almost all of the Oriental Jewish groups. The last Soviet census in 1989 counted 2602 Karaim in the FSU, and 680 in the Russian Federation, a later estimate for the mid-1990s is 2300 [Karaimy 1994: 181, Kupovetskiy 1996: 305].

2.3. Oriental Jewish Identity

Most of the Oriental Jewish groups in the FSU established themselves in their areas of settlement long ago. In 1998, the Georgian Jews celebrated the 2,600th anniversary of their settling in Georgia. The first material evidence of the Jewish presence in Transcaucasia, Crimea, Northern Caucasus and Central Asia dates from the early centuries of the C.E. [Nadel 1961; Zand 1988]. The Krymchaks were shaped as a separate *Edah* in medieval Crimea from different peoples, among whom were descendants of the Jewish population of antiquity and

later medieval Jewish migrants [Kupovetskiy 1984]. The first appearance of the Karaim in the Crimea should be dated in the medieval period or even earlier. Only the Lakhlukhas and the Iraman Jews of Turkmenistan descended from migrants of the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

During the last few years many individuals who belong to Oriental Jewish *Edoth* in the FSU began to refer to themselves by a new name, Sefardy or Sefardi (an obvious Israeli influence). In the early 1990s several communal and religious organizations of Bukharan, (Mountain or Georgian Jews) settled in Moscow and founded the Moscow Sefardi Home, the Moscow Jewish Religious Sefardi Community, and others. This new denomination stresses the contrast between the Ashkenazim and the presumed closeness of other non-Ashkenazic Jewish groups in Israel and the Diaspora. (That certainly should not be considered as a hint towards the presumed origin from the Spanish exiles of the fifteenth century.) Some justification for the application of the term Sefardy to Oriental Soviet Jews may be found in their non-Ashkenazic nature, which distinguishes them from the numerically dominant Jewish group, and the common use among them of the liturgical "*Nusah Sefardi*" (Sefardic versions of prayer-books).

The dominant identity patterns of Oriental Jews in the FSU have been largely influenced by the nature of their historical development. Generally speaking they can be characterized as being: archaic, having been founded on a specific cultural model based on *adats* or unwritten laws and customs which determined the everyday religious behavior, with clan or kin structures, territorial isolation, and the presence of a Jewish language or at least a pronounced Jewish linguistic patois. In the past, occupational specificity was also one of the components of this identity pattern. For example, in the mid-nineteenth century most of the Bukharan Jews were cloth-dyers, while the Mountain Jews were wine-makers and tobacco planters. Even now occupations differentiate the Oriental Jews from the Ashkenazim. Many of the former are employed in service, crafts, and trade; some work as minor officials at the local level. In contrast, the Ashkenazim, the most educated national group in the FSU, are mainly employed in the white-collar professions, science and education, and are widely represented among the sophisticated urban intellectual elite [Ryvkina 1996 : 20 - 241].

The Oriental Jews, unlike the Ashkenazim, remained devoted to religious tradition. But their religion, as mentioned earlier, manifested itself through *adat*, an oral set of norms of common law, where elements of standardized Judaism are combined with different non-Jewish habits of local Caucasian or Central Asiatic origin. Except for the Georgian Jews, each of the others has its own vernacular that distinguishes them from their neighbors. The Mountain Jews are surrounded by peoples who speak languages belonging to other linguistic

families, particularly Caucasian or Turkic. Even within the Tat linguistic area their dialects differ sharply from those used by Moslems and Christians. The local Judeo-Tajik, although understandable to Moslem Tajiks or Persians, also plays a dividing function. These Jews have not adopted the standardized Tajik language in spite of the fact that it has been the main means of education in the schools of Bukhara and Samarkand for two generations. One of the reasons for that was (and still is) the preservation of the traditional type of Jewish community, exemplified in the Central Asiatic *mahallas*, or Jewish quarters in the main Central Asiatic cities. These communities preserved a specific way of life, called by M. Weinreich *derekh haSHaS* (but probably better termed “*derekh adat*”) in Central Asia or Caucasus which presupposed the presence of a local Jewish language. There were also other reasons. The Tajik language was not an official language of Uzbekistan, where most of the Bukharan Jews lived before the mass emigration. Moreover, the Iranian Tajik favored the Turkic Uzbek, so the local authorities were not terribly interested in the strict Tajikization of the Uzbekistani Jews.

The ethnic identity of the Oriental Jews in the FSU appeared to be very stratified and complicated. The first layer of this stratum was the consciousness of belonging to the Jewish civilization. It dominated among other “belongings” up to the pre-World War II period. In some groups, like the Georgian Jews, the Lakhlukhas or the Iranians, and, to a lesser but nonetheless prominent degree, the Bukharans, it remained the strongest component of identity until the nineteen nineties emigration. This component, however, was far from being a simple replica of standard-Jewish-textbook learning. First of all, its comprehension resulted from a traditional ethno-confessional division of society so typical in the archaic Orient. Under this regimen, religion and sometimes the occupational orientation of a given group determined its uniqueness as a body and finally determined its legal position within the society. This ethnic or national subdivision does not recognize strict, logical, non-contradictory criteria. Let us give as a particular instance the subdivision of the society in modern Israel that has been inherited from the country’s Ottoman past. The Israelis distinguished between the Jews, the Moslems, the Christians, the Druze, the Cherkessians (who are Moslems), the Bedouins (who are also Moslems), the Karaite (who are Jewish), and the Samaritans (who are not Jewish but have The Right of Return under Israeli legislation.) In addition, on an unofficial level, most Israelis consider Arabs (who are Moslems, Christians, Druzes, Bedouin, and Fallah) as a main ethnic subdivision, but who are not individualized by the state’s archaic legislation because “Arabs” are not an ethno-confessional unit characterized by occupational specificity.

In Central Asia the Soviets began their national policy of categorization in the nineteen

twenties by formally defining ethno-linguistic units rather than using religious and/or economic bases that resulted in the appearance of a number of completely new units. For example, the Uzbeks, the most numerous and powerful nation in modern Central Asia, simply did not exist as a distinctive unit in the early twentieth century. The new concept of ethnicity cancelled the old Oriental view of the society. It has not disappeared completely but has remained where the old and new concepts partially overlapped.

Soviet Jews were just such a case. While slightly differing linguistically, their main social distinction was religious and in the social status which resulted from their religiosity. Religion governed also another basic principle of their behavior, endogamy. (In a corporate society law was also corporate: the more so common law and the *adats*.) The Jewish segment of the ethnic identity of the Oriental Jews followed the common *adat* of the countries in which they lived. In the feudal Moslem states of Azerbaijan, Daghestan, in Northern Caucasus, in the Bukhara emirate and in the Kokand khanate, Jews suffered from overt religious discrimination. There is much evidence confirming this fact [Altshuler 1990: 70-88: Kalantarov 1963]. During the Soviet period, Caucasus and Central Asia were much less influenced by the state policy of atheism than were Russia and other Western parts of the Empire. That is why religion remained as a valid ethnic factor in the southern parts of the Soviet Union. The number of synagogues used by the Oriental Jews outnumbered the number of synagogues in the Ashkenazim area. (Of all the synagogues in Soviet Union in late nineteen seventies, about a half were in Georgia!) The synagogue remained functioning as a real center of the community in places where the community was not dispersed: Samarkand, Bukhara, Shahrissabz, Kokand, Margelan, Khatyrchi, Andizhan, Derbent, Kuba, Oguz, Nalchik, Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Kulashi, Oni and many other smaller settlements. Semi-official religious schools continued to function within the synagogues and Hebrew was widely used as the language of prayer. Still, the majority of Jewish men whom I met in Central Asia or in Caucasus in the nineteen eighties knew by heart at least some Jewish prayers, mostly the Kaddish. The tradition of writing in Hebrew, or in Tat and Tajik using Hebrew script, was preserved among Bukharan and Mountain Jews until the nineteen twenties.

Another component of Oriental Jewish identity was the wide and sometimes controversial contact between the Ashkenazim and other Jewish *Edoth*. The amalgam that resulted became stronger in the post-war period by a certain level of identification with the Jewish State in the Middle East and by romantic feelings of emotional closeness to Israel. These feelings were much more dangerous in Moslem parts of the country, whereas Georgians, who lived in one of the rare Christian areas of Soviet Asia, expressed their sympathies towards Israel and Zionism relatively freely.

Anti-Semitism, as a strong Jewish consolidating factor, should not be omitted from mention here. It has traditionally manifested itself as an everyday reaction of the surrounding Gentile populations, and as a part of the official policy of the state. This last factor resulted in the active spread of de-Judaization among the Mountain Jews, the Krymchaks, and first of all among the Karaites. By de-Judaization, which will be analyzed in more detail later, I mean a semi-voluntary attempt, with the support and direction of the authorities, to separate a given *Edah* from traditional Jewish communities and to construct fictitious non-Jewish entities to which they might want to belong.

In addition to the “Jewish consciousness,” there was another quite important component of the ethnic identity of Oriental Jews in the FSU. That was their identification with the nearest and closest non-Jewish people, their so-called “own” people with whom they shared a territory, often a more or less common language, and also a long and sometimes controversial tradition of common understanding and contacts. This identification was quite intimate and embraced the whole sphere of everyday life, which they did not share normally with other Jewish *Edoth*. In this dual apposition, Jews normally played a subordinate role due to the social and political domination of their partners. The contacts between them were usually filled with difficulties and mistrust. On the other hand, both parties were opposed to the Russians, as local inhabitants often are to foreign colonizers and intruders even though the Ashkenazim were mostly considered by the Russians to be fully assimilated. Such was not *always* the case: the Bukharan and Mountain Jews sought refuge with the Russians in order to avoid persecutions by the local Moslem rulers and their “own peoples” in time of social unrest [Kalban 1989: 24 -26; Altshuler 1990: 56-69]. Still, on a grass-roots level, the Jews shared with their Moslem neighbors many reservations, mistrusts, and hatreds, alongside respect, envy and even admiration towards their European colonizers. Sometimes local Jews demonstrated a tendency to idealize relations with their “own” people by making statements that these peoples were always free of anti-Semitism. Most often we hear it about the Georgians and Northern Caucasians, like Kabardinians [Arbel, Magal 1992: 48; Danilova 1997: 5 -7]. Needless to say such apologetic statements reflected only the utmost importance of the relations to their “own” peoples. The whole normal flow of everyday life, after all, depended on such relations. Sometimes, as in the situation of the rescue of Mountain Jewish communities during the Nazi occupation (see later) these relations became crucial. They became crucial again when the Soviet Union fell apart and the Jews found themselves in the situation of being citizens of new states where not the Russians but their “own” peoples became real bosses and demanded from the Jews demonstrations of loyalty. It is very significant that in the national republics within the Russian Federation (Daghestan, Chechnya,

North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria) the Oriental Jews shared the main trends of development and the local social and political vicissitudes not with the Russians, not even with the Ashkenazim, but with their “own” peoples. More than that, they were considered and treated by Russian society as local Northern Caucasian minorities and not as Jews.

The third component of the identity of these Oriental Jews, the consciousness of being part of the Soviet people, was realized through their “own” peoples’ local, peripheral, and ethnic groups and not through Russian channels, as happened in the case of the Ashkenazim. This identity had its advantages, but did not always appear to be the best method of adaptation to the new social environment. So, in the late nineteen eighties and early nineties the Mountain Jews unequivocally defined themselves as a local Caucasian people which was substantiated by their way of life and recent historical experience. As a result they immediately became subject to all the civil strife and raging criminal violence which had seized the whole Northern Caucasian society in those years. This resulted in a panic flight of the Mountain Jews from Daghestan, Chechnya and Kabarda to Israel, to European countries and to the cities of European Russia. The panic was specific only to Mountain Jews. Only one Ashkenazic community in Northern Caucasus, in Vladikavkaz, the capital of North Ossetia and the largest city in that area, remained relatively stable during those years. The Ashkenazim were considered by the local population as Russians or Europeans in general and therefore did not become involved in the internal strife within the Caucasian world, such as the bloody Osset-Ingush conflict in the outskirts of Vladikavkaz.

2.4. Social Strategies of the Oriental Jewish Groups

The multiple identity patterns of the Oriental Jews opened to them different strategies for their development in the difficult years of the twentieth century. As usual the choice was not easy. Some of these individual or group strategies can be identified:

1. The most unique way was assimilation with the Ashkenazim. This appeared only as a specific strategy that necessitated a separation from one’s *Edah*. Some specific families, mostly of Bukharan, Karaim and Krymchak origin adopted this strategy when they migrated to European areas of the Soviet Union or in mixed, Ashkenazic-Oriental families, emigrated to Israel or other Western countries. The number of such cases was very limited.

2. Some considered themselves a separate ethnic entity linked to Jewry only through the religion of their forefathers in the atheistic Soviet society, and linked at the same time to the local “own” peoples. This way is also rare and is caused by a conflict situation and identity crisis. The late Mountain Jewish anthropologist and public figure in Daghestan, Mikhail Matatov is an example we shall discuss.

3. Conservation in clan and kin structure of the Oriental form of *derekh haSHaS* is

typical of the Lakhlukhas and Iranians in Turkmenistan. This same strategy was adopted by some small Mountain Jewish communities in Azerbaijan, like Kuba and Oguz, and some Georgian groups who consider themselves in occupation, culture and confessional closely allied with the Georgians.

4. The Zionist strategy of *Aliya* or resettlement to Israel became popular mainly among the Georgian Jews in the initial post-war period. I have already mentioned their link, not with a Moslem — like all other Oriental *Edoth* — but with a Christian “own” people who were historically opposed to Islam, and created for the Georgian Jews a unique situation, in which they could (almost) openly express their sympathy and devotion to Israel. During the nineteen seventies and eighties, Georgia became the most liberal part of the Soviet Union regarding Israel and the Jews. Many Georgians had sympathies towards the small non-Moslem state bordering their region. The indifference of the Georgian authorities, certainly to some extent, stimulated the growth of Zionist sentiments and a relatively mass emigration of Georgian Jews to Israel in the Soviet period. The Zionist strategy was adopted by a part of the Mountain Jews who opposed the official policy of de-Judaization, and by some representatives of other *Edoth* though their numbers were not dramatic. In the late nineteen eighties, *Aliya* became a mass trend among all the groups except the Karaim and the Krymchak, and resulted in a practical extinction of such small groups as the Lakhlukhas and the Iranians, and a dramatic decrease in the number of the Georgian, Mountain and Bukharan Jews.

5. Emigration to Western countries seriously affected only the Bukharan Jews in the mid-nineteen nineties. The largest number of former inhabitants of the large cities in Uzbekistan immigrated to the U.S.A. and established viable communities organized initially along traditional lines. The most flourishing Bukharan community is in Queens, New York. Small groups of Bukharan, Georgian, and to a lesser extent Mountain Jews migrated to Germany and Austria.

6. The last crisis strategy, quite unusual and worthy of attention by scholars in Jewish Studies, may be labeled as de-Judaization. Above, I mentioned it as one of the peculiar processes among the Oriental *Edoth* and defined it as a semi-voluntary attempt under the support and direction of the authorities to separate a given *Edah* away from Jewry and to construct a fictitious non-Jewish entity to which they might want to belong. The real aim of de-Judaization is to avoid discrimination and to distance it from the Ashkenazim as a group which the outer world associated with Jewry *per se*. An additional aim of this practice is to strengthen the integrity of one’s own *Edah* and not to allow its dissolution by the loss of *adat* as the basis for national life.

3. De-Judaization among the Oriental Jewish Groups

3.1. Preamble: the Karaim

The first *Edah* to adopt de-Judaization as its main ethnic development strategy was the East European Karaim. They began long before the Great Revolutions of the early twentieth century. The reasons were the same as those that caused de-Judaization among other *Edoth* centuries later: they wanted to avoid the anti-Jewish discriminatory policy of the Russian authorities and thereby strengthen their ethnic originality. They were probably the first in the continuum of Jewish history that appealed to a presumably non-Jewish order in order to get benefits from the authorities. In fact, from the very beginning of their settlement in Troki (Lithuania) in the fourteenth century, they were very much aware of the religious differences between them and the Rabbanites, as they called the normative Jews. Still, in 1441, they received their first separate charter based upon the Magdeburg law. In 1646, the Polish king Wladislaw confirmed their privileges and commented that the charters given before should be understood as given to “*Judaeorum Trocensium, ritus Caraimici.*” [Bershadsky 1882: 28 -34; Gessen 1910 : 570 - 571.] But in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries the Karaim were part of the system of Jewish self-government known as the *Va'ads*, and paid their taxes to the Polish and Lithuanian states through the system of all-Jewish communities (*Va'ad arba arazoth*). For several centuries the Karaim tried wherever possible to separate themselves from the all-Jewish network, stressing again and again that they belonged to a different denomination. The authorities knew this but paid attention to it only when interested. In the troubled years of the three partitions of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century, the Karaim from Troki for the first time tried another tactic, by demanding from the authorities specific rights but this time referring to their Tatar-Mongol origins [Greenbaum 1995: 159]. In the nineteenth century, the most ardent proponent of de-Judaization was the famous Karaite ḥakham, a scholar and public figure, Abraham Firkovitch (1787 - 1874). It was he who first created a specific historical theory of the origin of the Crimean Karaim, attempting to prove that they were already in the Crimea in the time of Christ's crucifixion. According to his idea the forefathers of the Karaim first settled in the Crimea, having been brought there as mercenaries by the Persian, Darius, in his war against the Scythians. In the twentieth century these machinations have further developed and the Karaim leaders now tend to deny all kinds of ties or proximity with the Jews. During the Nazi occupation of Poland, the Baltic States, and the Soviet Union, the Karaim escaped the Holocaust by means of petitions to the Nazi leaders that they were not Jews, but Turks. In 1939 the German Internal Ministry issued a decision that the Eastern European Karaim do not belong to the Jewish race. This decision was confirmed by the independent expertise of three detained

Jewish historians: Zelig Kalmanovich, the editor of "YIVO - Bleter", Meir Balaban, a well-known Polish Jewish historian and Itzik Schipper, a Polish Jewish historian and politician. All three, understanding that the life and death of a whole people depended on their answer, told the Nazis that the Karaim were not Jews [Ben-Zvi 1963 : 157 -159; Greenbaum 1995: 159].

Karaite ethnic separatism was quite successful. It is probably the only example of de-Judaization brought to an ultimate end. Karaim who live today in Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland and Russia do not identify themselves anymore with Jews and consider themselves as descendants of medieval Khazars or other Turkish tribes. At the same time, not all Karaim approved of separatism as the best possible method for their development, fearing that substitution of religion by a de-Judaizing nationalism could be the beginning of the denouement of the Karaim saga. The last Karaim great leader ḥakham, Toviya Levy-Bobovich, who was born in the Crimea and ended his life as leader of the Karaite community of Cairo before their dramatic emigration to Israel, wrote in a letter to Prof. Ananiy Zajaczkowski dated April 2, 1937: "I don't know any other unifying force which is as indissoluble as religion. When we decided to ignore this force and to erect a new force, nationalism, we started to fail.... Nationalism is always pregnant with chauvinism. It is shaky even for peoples whose sons number millions, for those who are united by single territory, language, culture etc. For the dwarf nation of the Karaim it will inevitably end in death if religion will be suppressed [Algamil 1998: vol. 1, 38.]

Indeed, during the last decade the number of Eastern European Karaim continued to diminish and is now close to 2,500. The majority of them, as I have mentioned already, have divorced themselves from the Jews; Karaism and religion seems to be firmly forgotten, at least in Russia. A few months ago, in June 1998, a remarkable meeting took place between a delegation of Israeli Karaites of Egyptian origin and the Moscow Karaim in the Israeli Cultural Center in Moscow. They tried anew to find shared ideas. Surrounded by indifference, the Karaim, living in a state that is no longer discriminatory towards Jews, are remembering their former ties. The story of the de-Judaization of the East European Karaim is well known and I wanted here, for sake of the totality of my story, only to mention how it was centuries ago and how it seems to be ending. I can refer those who are interested in the Karaim story to recent historical publications on that matter [Miller 1993; Vikhnovich 1998].

3.2. Case 1: The Krymchaks

Much less is known about how de-Judaization developed among two other Oriental Jewish groups in the FSU, the Krymchaks and the Mountain Jews.

In 1783, when Russia annexed the Crimean khanate, practically all the Krymchaks

lived in one town of Karasu-Bazar (now Byelogorsk) in the central part of the peninsula. Moslem authorities of the khanate made a distinction between the Orthodox Rabbinical Jewish community and the non-Orthodox Karaites, although both were officially labeled as Jews. As in the case of most other Oriental Jewish groups, their relations with the Ashkenazim appeared to be crucial for maintaining their identity in times of crisis. The Ashkenazim began to settle in the Crimea in greater numbers after its annexation to Russia, but some had entered earlier, during the Khmelnitsky purges in the mid-seventeenth century. For the Krymchaks, relations with the Ashkenazim were not crucial while those with the Karaim were. The strained relations with the Krymchaks, with whom the Karaim had co-existed all their time in Crimea, had not resulted in serious identity shifts; to the contrary however, it had strengthened to a certain degree the Karaim consolidation with the newly arrived Ashkenazim. On the other hand, the Krymchaks shared with the Karaim the common ethnicity of Crimean Tatar language and of day-to-day culture which in fact both shared with the local Moslem population.

The Krymchaks, however, sacrificed more than other Jewish groups to the Holocaust. In 1941 and 1942, about 75% of the Krymchaks were killed by the Nazis [Kupovetsky 1983]. During this same period, the Karaim, who were the most culturally, linguistically and even religiously linked ethnic group to the Krymchaks, were spared during the Nazi occupation because they were considered by the Nazis as being racially non-Jewish. Moreover, Jewish scholars of Poland helped the Karaim by falsely testifying before the Nazis that the Karaim are of Turkic or Mongolic origin. Nobody, however, stood up for the small community of Krymchaks, and almost all of them perished. In 1941, a well-known Krymchak educator I. Kaya appealed to the Nazi occupational authorities, directing their attention to the presumably non-Jewish racial nature of his tribesmen. The German commanders began to investigate this question. Meanwhile, the Red Army recaptured the City of Kerch and held it for a short time. Some two hundred Krymchaks escaped and then retreated from the peninsula together with the Soviet soldiers [Kupovetsky 1984: 65].

This Holocaust story influenced those who survived dramatically. In the late nineteen forties a group of Krymchak survivors petitioned to the Soviet authorities to allow a change of their registered nationality from Jewish to Krymchak. The authorities reacted favorably to this request. In the nineteen sixties, another Krymchak educator, Ye.I. Peysakh, established a circle for the preservation and study of Krymchak cultural heritage in Leningrad. This circle made the first attempt to formulate a de-Judaizing theory for the Krymchaks. Peysakh developed a theory in which this *Edah* should be recognized as descendants of the most ancient inhabitants of the Crimean peninsula, the Taurians, Scythians, Sarmatians and

Cymmerians. These ancient peoples, according to Peysakh, adopted Judaism from immigrating Jews [Peysakh 1974: 172]. Later, in the nineteen seventies and eighties, another prominent Krymchak leader, V. Achkinazi, established a Krymchak Society in the Crimea aimed at reviving national traditions. They organized funeral repasts on a regular basis and in accordance with specific ritual, the *tkun*. At the same time they continued developing the de-Judaizing concept of Peysakh [Khazanov 1989]. This society, called "Krymchakhtar" (Krymchaks) continues its activities and professes the theory of the autochthonous origin of the Krymchaks from some non-Jewish tribes who became Jewish proselytes sometime during the Middle Ages. Attempts are being made to provide an academic background for this theory [Achkinazi 1990, 1993]. Also at that time, another segment of the Krymchaks were leaving their native peninsula for Israel because of the troubled times in autonomous Crimea as a part of the independent Ukraine. The concept of de-Judaization causes uneasy discussions in their minuscule and still diminishing community, almost all members of which now live in the Crimean capital of Simferopol.

3.3. Case 2: Mountain Jews

3.3.1. Mountain Jewish - Ashkenazic Relations

The first serious contacts between the Mountain Jews and the Ashkenazim had taken place in the mid-nineteenth century, and intensified during the eighteen seventies due to an influx of qualified Ashkenazim from the Pale of Settlement who had migrated to Baku and Grozny to work in newly discovered oil fields of the Caspian area. As often happens, relations between these two groups on a day-to-day level were not ideal. The reason was not only in the striking difference in material cultures. The Ashkenazim were relatively Europeanized and assimilated by average Russian standards; the Mountain Jews were the traditional Oriental of Azerbaijani or Daghestani type. The two communities differed very profoundly in their understanding of the meaning of Judaism and of its place in the world and in the surrounding society. It should be noted that many of those European Jews who migrated to Baku in the late nineteenth century were bearers of acculturation attitudes. Moreover, they were highly educated so that they got permission easily for working outside the Pale. However, the *derekh haShas*, the common Jewish folk with a traditional Jewish identity pattern, did not migrate on a regular basis to centers of new industrial growth in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and, as a result, had no permanent social and/or cultural contacts with the Mountain (Bukharan) Jews. In Baku (now the largest city and port), and in Grozny, (now the second largest oil producing center) relations between the Ashkenazim and the indigenous Mountain Jews became quite strained in the late nineteenth century. This conflict resulted from differences between the two different Jewish identities, between the Europeanized

Ashkenazic milieu on the one hand and an archaic, Eastern-Caucasian-Oriental-Mountainous local society on the other. More and more it appeared to be a social struggle between the prosperous, urbanized Ashkenazim and the poor, countrified Mountain Jews. The results of this cultural conflict remain ambivalent. The Russian conquest of Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries certainly meant for the Oriental Jews protection against the local feudal lords' outrages. More importantly, however, it gave them a conduit, through the Russian Ashkenazim, to the mighty, Jewish world of Europe and an understanding of its way of life and values. This conduit enabled Zionism to become fashionable amongst the Mountain Jewish youth in the early twentieth century. Because of their contact with the Russians and the Russian Jews, they could understand Zionist literature, printed in Russian, which had been brought to Eastern Caucasus by early Russian Zionists. [Altshuler 1990: 486 - 487]. During the Civil War and the first years of the Soviet regime in Eastern Caucasus, Mr. Eliyahu Anisimov, a well-known Mountain Jewish educator and the creator of the first, academic survey of Caucasian Jews, served as the leader of "Tse'irey-Tsion" in Daghestan. He was the first of the Mountain Jews to graduate a university. He lived for a number of years in Moscow where he became a part of the Russian and Ashkenazic intellectual milieu. Like many others, he was deeply disappointed in the presumed "Kulturtraeger" mission of Russia in the Caucasus [Altshuler 1990: 26 - 27, 308]. He obtained his knowledge of Zionism and other Jewish social, political and religious thought through contact with his co-religionists, the Ashkenazim. In the same way, but a few decades earlier, his father, Shervet Nisimov, studied at the Volozhin yeshiva and learned Rabbinic wisdom from his Ashkenazic teachers. Both of these experiences came as an indirect result of the Russian conquest of Caucasus.

Contrarily, the negative aspects of this contact were not of less importance than the positive. From the very beginning, the Mountain Jews feared, with good reason, that the government would treat them as they had treated the Jews of the Pale of Settlement. Still, in 1835, under the "Jewish Statute," maintained under the private control of Czar Nicolas I, Caucasus was excluded from the list of places open to Jewish settlement. Due only to the protection of the local authority, the Caucasian Jews, Georgian and Mountain, escaped such an unbelievable disaster as deportation to the Pale of Settlement [Berlin 1911:74]. The decision not to use this statute for regulating the Mountain Jews, yet keeping it valid for Ashkenazim, opened a chain of events during which the authorities gradually installed a differential legal approach towards the two Jewish communities. The Mountain Jews eventually became subject to specific legal norms used by the Russian government to regulate the life of the so-called "Mountaineers." Among these norms was the right to maintain local courts based on local *adat*. The long and sad history of how the Mountain Jews fought against

not having equality with the Russian Jews is well known to the historians of Russian Jewry and of Caucasus, and it is relatively well described [Berlin 1911:75; Altshuler 1990: 70 - 82].

This fear of isolation added to the disquietude of Mountain-Jewish/Ashkenazic relations. As far as I can understand, the first modest signs of the de-Judaization trend became visible in late nineteenth century and probably existed before that. In 1889 the Derbent Rabbi Yaaqov ben Yitzhaq Yitzhaqi presented a note to local authorities on the situation of the Mountain Jews. In it he wrote:

“I believe that the people of the Mountain Jews who lived since time immemorial among Asian Moslems in Caucasus, borrowed from them local customs and ways of life. As a result of local circumstances they differ very much from European Jews so that there is no proximity whatever between them. There is constant discussion among them on the validity of different customs in the Jewish religion. Our people have always preferred to be united with the Moslems while continuing to strictly follow the rules of our old, sacred Book of Talmud” [Altshuler 1990: 73-74].

In 1899 a petition of the Mountain Jews to high authorities stressed the fact that they have lived in Caucasus since before the Christian Era and also hinted that they should not be blamed for the crucifixion of Christ [Altshuler 1990: 7]. Neither of these two statements are real manifestations of de-Judaization, but both already have some elements of it. As we know from the Karaim case, de-Judaization starts with the attempt to shed the responsibility of being God’s murderers, and then stresses the difference with those who are the more discriminated against, here the Ashkenazim. So we can see, in the nineteenth century the Mountain Jews benefited several times because specific anti-Semitic legal norms issued by the Czarist government were not applied to them.

On the day-to-day basis, Ashkenazic-Mountain Jewish relations were not free of complaint. Anti-Ashkenazic proverbs in Tat folklore give additional evidence of this [Anisimov 1888]. The level of cordiality of these relations is as ambivalent now as it was in the last years of the Soviet period. Social comments invariably have an ideological flavor and recently, after the beginning of *Aliya* to Israel, a political overtone as well. Sympathy or solidarity, such as not speaking about identification with the Ashkenazim in the last Soviet years, was equivalent to a manifestation of political opposition. It meant that a person who was unhappy with the official policy of the Tatization of the Mountain Jews, had certain sentiments towards the Jewish State and towards *Aliya*, and probably even had prepared for emigration. As for non-ideological contacts, they were and still are very ambivalent and ambiguous.

When I first met one of my sources, a 63 year-old driver from Derbent, and introduced myself as a Jewish anthropologist from Moscow, he greeted me in the following way:

“What is there in your soul, my dear? Say it, tell everything! For me the coming of such people as you means a great pleasure. You are my blood, my nation; it is my obligation to love you!”

After a while, in the flow of our conversation, we touched upon the problem of mixed marriages in Derbent. He told me that one hardly finds a marriage of a Jewish boy to a Moslem girl, probably only one or two. More often are cases where the girl is Russian, but their number is also very limited.

“People are fond of intermarrying with the Ashkenazim,” he continued. “Mostly our girls marry Ashkenazi boys, because Ashkenazi men are very good and [their] women quite unpleasant....Your Ashkenazim are not gregarious. Our folk always participate whenever one of their neighbors celebrates a wedding or organizes a funeral and everyone comes. But your people....[as a sign of disappointment he waved with his hand]. And you never find an ordinary worker among the Ashkenazim. Don’t feel hurt. I am telling it just as it is so among our people, but that’s true.”

His nephew who was present at the meeting interrupted by telling me that he always stands up for the Jewish cause and hits anyone who dares to say anything uncomplimentary about the Jews. “And your boys usually quail, I cannot understand why. They never strike back,” he said.

Such an attitude towards the Ashkenazim is typical and not only for this family in Derbent. Similar attitudes are frequently expressed by Bukharan or Georgian Jews. It is not so much an attempt to characterize the European Jews, rather it is a stereotypical reaction of Oriental Jews towards modernization of Jewish life. Usually they recognize in it a danger to the preservation of their own customary law and to the continuation of their existence as a separate ethnic or cultural entity. In 1992 during the peak of mass emigration, I came across a family in Nalchik who decided to come back from Israel to the Northern Caucasus, not by far the safest region of Russia. The lady, who stood at the head of the family, told me how distressed she was because she could not allow her 15 year-old daughter to be brought up according to Israeli habits and norms. According to these norms, girls and young women are allowed to leave their apartments in the evening after 9 p.m. without being accompanied by male relatives. There in Nalchik, people welcomed a high official from the Jewish Agency in Israel who came to visit them and to persuade them to make *Aliya*. Some were afraid that they would not be allowed to resettle to the Jewish State. So they attempted to persuade him with the argument that if he takes them to Israel, he takes the best and genuine Jews who

sacredly follow all the national habits and will not disgrace their historic homeland. They showed him a bloodied sheet from a young couple's bed, as an offer of proof that they have remained faithful to ancient, original Jewish customs. Mountain Jews normally denounce European Jews for being alienated from *adat*, the ideal form of Jewish life. They fear that the Ashkenazic influence upon their youth may become dangerous for their internal integrity as a group that lives in an area where *adat*-norms still govern the communal life.

3.3.2. The World War II Saga of the Mountain Jews

With all the hints and introductions the real de-Judaization of the Mountain Jews started with World War II. The Nazi politicians first faced the problem of how to treat Jews from Caucasus and Central Asia in 1940 during the occupation of Paris. Several Jewish families of Bukharan, Georgian, Persian and Afghan origin were in the French capital at that time and presented the Nazi occupational authorities with a memorandum that they were racially not Jews, but either Georgians or "juhuds" of Mosaic faith. Among them were people who fled from Caucasus and Central Asia after the Bolsheviks conquered the areas. During the whole war they remained in France and were not hurt by the Nazis although there were attempts to reclassify them as Jews. Strangely enough, during the Nazi occupation there remained in Paris a Jewish newspaper, "Bulletin de l'Union Generale des Israélites de France" and apparently also a Jewish consistory until the liberation. In 1944 the newspaper published a reprint article by some early twentieth-century traveler, innocent at the first glance, describing Georgian and Mountain Jews as genuine Jews faithful to their ancient cultural and religious heritage [Baye 1944]. The group of Oriental Jews who still lived in Paris in those days considered this article as a provocation. But it was already too late.

In any case the petition by the Oriental Jews in Paris saved the lives of hundreds of Jews in France and also had a direct relation to the fate of the Mountain Jews in the Northern Caucasus. For two years German experts from the Institute of Racial Studies of the SS issued contradictory circulars on racial characteristics of the Mountain Jews. Some of them suggested that Oriental Jews were the product of a mixture of an Oriental race with different Indian, Inner-Asiatic and other indeterminable races [Altshuler 1990: 117]. The problem remained unresolved during the Nazi occupation of Crimea and Northern Caucasus.

The first encounters of the Oriental Jews with the Nazi army were tragic. Not having the will and time to go into details, let me just say that the Nazi military saw in this people whom they occupied, merely Jews who were doomed to extermination. The first blow came when the Nazis killed all the members of a Mountain Jewish collective farm named after S. Shaumyan in the Crimea [Kruglov 1997: 216]. In September 1942, they killed an entire group of Mountain Jewish farmers in the villages of Bogdanovka and Menzhinsk, the former

Gantrapovka in the steppe part of the Stavropol district not far from Mozdok. The number of victims in these actions was close to 1,000 souls [Altshuler 1990: 120].

The whole story took another course when the Germans occupied the city of Nalchik, administrative center of Kabardino-Balkaria that had a compact Mountain Jewish population of about 3,000 centered in a special Jewish quarter called Kolonka. The city remained occupied from October 28, 1942 to January 5, 1943. As far as we can understand from different sources, German occupational commanders decided not to crush the Kolonka, and the Mountain Jews safely survived the awful two months and remained alive.

There are interesting memoirs on that story written by a Russian orientalist, N. Poppe, who was of German origin and went over to the Germans during the war:

“In November (1942 - M.Ch.) I was called to Nalchik in the Kabardinian region where a problem arose with the Mountain Jews; they were Jewish by religion but ethnically Iranian. The German occupiers were of two opinions. The SS, true to form, wanted to annihilate them. The army officers, however, were opposed to this plan and called on me as a kind of expert witness in their dispute with the SS. In November I met Professor Deeters, a professor at Bonn University and a well-known specialist in Caucasian languages, and Captain Theodor Oberlaender, the Commandant of Nalchik. Both were very sympathetic to the Mountain Jews and opposed the gassing of all Jews. (Oberlaender was a former minister in the Weimar Government and, after the war, the Refugee minister in the Adenauer government. He later became a professor at Bonn University.) I wrote a memorandum about the Mountain Jews in which I pointed out that Tsarist laws had not treated them as Jews, but as Caucasian mountaineers. Furthermore, their real name was Tat, and scholarly literature had indicated that the Tat were people of Iranian origin who spoke Iranian language. I also suggested that the Tat leaders invite the Germans to a party with wine, song and dances. All of the guests, including the SS Obersturmbannführer (Mayor) Pesterer, enjoyed themselves immensely and agreed to a man that the Tat were not Jewish. Pesterer himself said: ‘We are not interested in their funny religion. If they want to be Jewish in religion we don’t care. It’s the racial Jew we are against.’ I was happy that I was able to help save the Tat people from annihilation. Otherwise they might have gone the way of the Krymchak in the Crimea. The Krymchak were also of Jewish religion but racially Turkic, and were exterminated by the German” [Poppe 1983: 166].

In addition to the colorful nature of this story, one point deserves attention. N. Poppe

explained to the Germans, that the “real” name of the Mountain Jews was “Tat”. That explanation points unequivocally to the fact that the name Tat was not known in Nalchik as an identification of the inhabitants of the Kolonka quarter of Nalchik.

Another memoir was written by a Kabardinian, Selim Shadov, who was appointed by the occupational authorities as head of the Kabardinian administration. He too wrote about his contribution to the rescue of the Mountain Jews. Significantly enough, he, as compared to Prof. N. Poppe, was not overburdened with academic knowledge, but still used more or less the same arguments. In his memorandum to the German commander, he called the local Jews Tats or Tat-Jews. He claimed that they were considered part of the native population, that their habits, mores, culture, and even language resembled those of the mountaineers, and that the natives themselves never treated them as Jews [Altshuler 1990: 122 - 123].

The destruction of groups who lived around Mozdok and the survival of the Nalchik community are not mere accidents. The Jews who lived in steppe villages and in the Crimea did not have traditional types of settlements. Instead, they lived in kolkhozes, settlements established by the Soviet authorities through its Jewish arm, the OZET (Association for the Rural Settlement of Jewish Toilers) which had been created and guided by the Ashkenazim to foster the establishment of a “new life”. These people were the first to fall victims of the Nazi invasion. The Nalchik Jews, on the other hand, remained in their usual Caucasian surroundings and managed to survive due to their internal relations with the Caucasian world. Through intrigue with the local administration they succeeded in proving that they were not Jews but an ethnically Iranian people whose ancestors once converted to the Mosaic faith. Furthermore, Jewish affiliation with other “mountaineers” allowed easy adaptations to these varying circumstances. Very useful too was their ethnonym “Tats” which simplified distancing themselves from their Jewish heritage. But, these were not the sole factors in the survival of Nalchik Jews. Perhaps the more substantial reason for their miraculous rescue was the short time of the Nazi occupation of Nalchik and the fact that Kabardinia was to the rear of the Stalingrad battle. No doubt the Nazis would not have tolerated a relatively numerous Jewish group had they succeeded to strengthen their dominance over the Northern Caucasus. Two survivors, fifteen years after these events, tell how people felt about their chances at that time:

“... here (in Nalchik - M.Ch.) they survived, although ten men were shot of those who were brought from outside the city. First they gave silver, after that gold and jewelry. So they gave every month. Natives from Nalchik said they could do it because of good feelings by one Kabardinian who was respected by Hitler’s government. Otherwise they (the Nazis) began compiling the lists of those they

planned to finish during the three months of Nazi rule. In the beginning the Kabardinian boss told them that they differ from the Ashkenazim. Later Hitler's administration gave in to the idea that they were Jews. Some Balkarians reported so to the authorities. The danger of extermination became very real" [Altshuler 1990 : 126].

That was the reason why the Mountain Jews, unlike their Moslem neighbors, were very happy welcoming the Red Army when it reentered Nalchik in January 1943. A year-and-a-half later all the Balkarians were banished by the Soviets to Central Asia for presumptive collaboration with the German occupation forces. All the vicissitudes of war-time greatly impressed not only those Mountain Jews who lived in Kabardinia but all Jews, including those who remained outside the Nazi rule. The lesson they got from the war, how to behave themselves in a critical situation, proved to be useful after the war in the midst of the anti-Jewish persecutions initiated by the Stalin regime.

3.3.3. The Post-War "Tatization" of the Mountain Jews

What does the word "Tat" mean? According to some scholars this ethnonym is Turkic by origin and was used by the Turkic nomads as a designation for subjugated farmers, mostly of Iranian descent. The word Tat was used either as a separate designation or as a component of a composite ethnonym such as tat-ar, tat-jik, or others in Central Asia, Caucasus, Iran, Siberia, Mongolia. Even in Hungary, the Slovaks are called in Hungarian *tot* [Minorsky 1934: 755]. Usually Tat is an external ethnonym, i.e., it is not used as a self-designation and often bears a slightly pejorative shade. Linguists normally speak about the Tat language, which by itself is a calque from Iranian *tati*. The Persians used Tat as a name for a language in Eastern Caucasus and for a number of non-related dialects of Persian itself [Gryunberg 1961: Rastorguyeva 1997:10]. The name of the language caused the Tat-speaking population of Azerbaijan to be called Tats in the Russian anthropological literature since the end of the nineteenth century. Tat-speaking Moslems (more often Sunni than Shi'a) comprise the largest part of the population of the Apsheron peninsula along with scattered groups in the northern and northwestern part of the country, as well as a few villages in the border area between Azerbaijan and Daghestan. Two villages in Central Azerbaijan spoke Tat until the recent ethnic clashes. Their people profess an Armenian type of Christianity.

The third group that speaks Tat is the Mountain Jews. Several dialects are singled out within the Jewish Tat ethnolect:

- Kaitagh in Northern Daghestan and all other areas of Northern Caucasus to the west from Daghestan
- Derbent in Southern Daghestan

- Kuba in Northern Azerbaijan
- Shemakha in Central Azerbaijan of which the only remnant is the idiom of Oguz - Vartashen, a village in northwestern Azerbaijan.

The Mountain Jews did not regularly call their language Tati or Tat, but preferred to call it *juhuri* (Jewish). Today, and most probably earlier, one hears the term Farsi (Persian) as a designation for that language. Thus, the name of a language is highly prestigious in the whole Caucasus and Near East compared to the half-contemptuous term “Tati” [Danilova 1997 : 96-97]. Before the war, the word “Tats” usually meant Moslems or Tat-Armenians. The Mountain Jews were not called as such either in the Russian or in the foreign literature. This practice started only after the war. The tragic fate of Bogdanovka and Menzhinsk, the anti-Semitic campaign of the late nineteen forties, and the near escape of the Nalchik community, were sufficient enough reasons to make many Mountain Jews understand that they should secure their lives. The best way to do so had already been proven with the Nazis during the war.

In the nineteen fifties, groups of citizens belonging to the Mountain-Jewish nationality, encouraged by the local authorities, sent petitions to the central and local governments asking to be allowed to change the nationality registration on their passports from Mountain Jew or Jew to Tat. The authorities readily agreed and in the early nineteen sixties initiated a mass campaign of changing nationality registration on the passports of the Mountain Jews.

This campaign centered in Daghestan, at the time an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The Daghestani officials did everything to simplify what was a near to impossible process. After Daghestan, officials started to prompt the change in the other Russian autonomous republics of the Northern Caucasian area: Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechen-Ingush. The Jews of Baku also began to change their Jewish nationality registration to Tat, although the position of the Azerbaijani authorities differed from that of Northern Caucasia. In the Transcaucasian Republic of the USSR, then under the rule of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, G. Aliyev (who was recently re-elected President of Azerbaijan,) the authorities created The Nationalities Police. By their new accounting method all Moslems were considered as Azeris, and only non-Moslems were divided into different ethnic groups. According to this policy such ethnic groups as the Talyshi and the Shah-Dagh tribes and, significant to our topic, the Tats-Moslems, simply disappeared from the map one morning. This policy was crucial to the destiny of the Moslem Tats. Their assimilation by the Azeri, that had been going on for many decades, had become irreversible by the nineteen sixties. The Tats began to call themselves Azeri and to feel Azeri. They treated their Tat dialect as a kind

of language of the family. This assimilation process had been moderately stimulated by the de-Judaization process of the Mountain Jews and their attempts to construct an artificial "United Tat People". In the nineteen seventies an unprecedented event happened at one of the Tat *auls* (a local term for a rural community) of Southern Daghestan, and thus inside the RSFSR. A village assembly discussed recent news that the Mountain Jews of Derbent decided to call themselves Tats. As a reaction, the assembly recommended to all the village men to abandon their Tat nationality and language, and to call themselves only Azeri and to speak only the Azeri language, which everybody was able to speak. The presence of remnants of the language and, for some of them, adherence to the Sunni form of Islam amidst the predominant Shi'a Azeris, are the only two facets still extant of the former Moslem-Tat society. As for two villages of Armeno-Tat, situated as already mentioned, in the Shemakha area in Central Azerbaijan, they have, according to some rumors, disappeared and their people fled to Armenia or other parts of the FSU in late nineteen eighties, thus sharing the fate of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan.

This means that, according to the Azerbaijani policy, the non-Moslems were allowed to remain what they were. This was just another manifestation, this time still within the framework of Soviet policy, of the archaic, Oriental, Near-Eastern system of ethno-confessional and ethno-social taxonomy characterized above. The Azerbaijani singled out as components of their population Moslems, Russians, Armenians, Georgians and Jews. That is why there was no change of nationality registration in the Azerbaijani province (Kuba and Oguz). There the Jews simply remained Jews and were registered as such, or as Mountain Jews. In Baku the situation was different because of the presence there of a large number of Derbent Jews from Daghestan. So, many Jews there started to follow the Daghestani regulations, and they were openly supported, not by the Azerbaijani, but by the higher level Soviet and RSFSR authorities.

Daghestan certainly was and still is the center of de-Judaization. In the Daghestan Republic, formerly the Daghestan Autonomous Republic of RSFSR, Tats are recognized officially as one of the native peoples, along with some twenty others. In 1973 a special broadcasting service started in the Derbent dialect of the Jewish-Tat language. In the capital of the republic, Makhachkala, a yearbook *Vatan Sovetimü* (Our Soviet Fatherland) was published in the same dialect of the Tat language. The yearbook became the main propagator of the Tatization process. Its proponents were the most famous leaders of the Daghestani Mountain Jewish intelligentsia. The most famous was the number one writer in the Tat language, Khizgil Avshalumov. His group, supported by the Daghestani authorities, formulates theoretical substantiation of the need to disassociate from Jews. They have published

a number of articles in different journals, including academic journals, under party censorship, where they presented a mythological ethnogenesis of a single Tat ethnos, a part of which adopted Judaism as their religion somewhere in the Middle Ages [Matatov 1981; Golotvin, Matatov 1986; Avshalumov, Matatov 1988].

The activists of the Tat movement got substantial support for their claims from the Moscow-based Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and the Central Academic Institution on Anthropology, (at that time called “ethnography” in the Soviet Union). In the late nineteen seventies, one of the leaders of the movement, Mr. M. Matatov, who lived in Moscow, received a written certificate from the institute signed by Deputy Director S. I. Bruk and stamped by the Academy of Science! This certificate verifies that the Mountain Jews are in fact a part of a single Iranian Tat ethnos. No doubt the issuance of such a certificate opens one of the most shameful pages in the history of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. After that, the authors of the Tatization theory started, publicly, to qualify all attempts to prove any kind of connection between Jews and Tats as Zionist provocation [Chernin 1982; Avshalumov 1986a; 1986b; 1986c; Hirszowicz 1986].

This last topic is very much up-to-date. In the late nineteen seventies and early nineteen eighties the emigration of the Mountain Jews to Israel from all the territories they inhabited in the Soviet Union had become very evident. This meant, by Soviet standards, that the administrative and documentary recognition of the Mountain Jews as Tats, and the elimination of the Mountain Jews as part of Jewry or even as a separate “nationality” in USSR would inevitably be understood by the authorities as an ideological problem. The majority of people accepted their change of nationality and started to apply to local police authorities. But others saw their future in Israel and automatically rejected the idea of becoming Tats. Thus there appeared in official documents and in the census several categories for classifying what was a single group of Mountain Jews. Some of them were registered in their official documents as Jews, some as Mountain Jews, and some as Tats. Under the last category were also registered some of the Moslem Tats, and probably Armenian Tats, but their numbers diminished rapidly because the Moslems regularly listed themselves as Azerbaijani, and the Christians in Azerbaijan as Armenians. Thus, the overwhelming majority of the Tats in the Russian census of 1989 are in fact none other than the Mountain Jews.

The official literature in the Soviet Union, mentioned above, was published in Tati, Russian, and English, and supported the theory of a single Tat ethnos of Iranian origin which was divided in the past by three religions. This distinction had become irrelevant in the atheistic Soviet state. Another type of literature, Zionist by nature, in remembrance of the Jewish heritage of the Mountain Jews, calling for Aliya to Israel and the rejection of the

Tatization theory, was published at the time in Israel [Ilishaev 1981]. There was, as far as I know, only one article published in Yiddish in a Soviet journal *Sovetish Heymland* which raised objections to the Tatization theory [Chernin 1982]. The Mountain Jews were characterized by the author as being an Iranian sub-ethnic group of the Jewish people.

A third theory has been developed and defended by a Mountain Jewish anthropologist from Daghestan, M. Ikhilov. In 1949, amidst the infamous anti-Semitic campaign against rootless cosmopolitans launched by the Stalin regime, he successfully defended his Ph.D dissertation at the Institute of Ethnography in Moscow on the Ethnography of Mountain Jews. He promulgated a less popular theory that the Mountain Jews belong not to the Jewish world and not to the Iranian but to the Caucasian. According to his concept, Mountain Jews form a separate ethnic unity native to Daghestan [Ikhilov 1950, 1955, 1960]. He too developed a kind of ethnogenetic mythology that he shared with me in a conversation in 1985. He thought that his ancestors had the same origin as the Karaites, as claimed by A. Firkovitch, i.e., they appeared in the place where they live now as Jewish mercenaries of Darius II in his campaign against the Scythians in the fifth century B.C.E. But the itinerary from Persia to the Crimea was not through the Daryal gorge in the central part of the Caucasian Mountains, as A. Firkovitch thought, but through Derbent along the coast of the Caspian Sea. Some of the mercenaries remained behind in the Caucasus and did not reach the Crimea. Several centuries later they encountered Turkic invaders who gave them the name Tat, and so they became Mountain Jewish, or the Judeo-Tat nation in Daghestan. To a certain extent this theory reflects the fact that some of the Mountain Jews were registered as such in their passports. Their number, according to the last census of 1989, was 18,500, of those 11,300 were in the RSFSR. The number of Tats (allow me to remind you that a small portion of Moslem and even Christian Tats may have been included in this number) was 29,600, of those, 19,400 were in the RSFSR. If we accept the estimate of 55,000 of them in late 1980s, the rest, about 7,000, were registered as "Jews" along with the Ashkenazim and other Jewish groups.

In the last decade of the Soviet state, on the verge of *Perestroyka*, the de-Judaization of Mountain Jews in the USSR and their conversion to a part of the newly established ephemeral Tat ethnos has become the official policy of the Soviet, or at least the regional North Caucasian authorities. This policy had been actively supported by the Mountain Jewish elite as a means to avoid the general discriminatory attitude of the Soviet regime towards the Jews. At the same time, local supporters of de-Judaization did not understand this trend as an assimilation or rejection of their historical national heritage. Quite the opposite, they considered de-Judaization as the way to preserve archaic Mountain Jewish tradition mainly in form of the *adat*, the kin-based *tuhum* social structure that served as a foundation of the

specificity of the Mountain Jews as a separate folk. Some of them, as noted earlier, remained loyal to their Jewish affiliation and tried to confront this policy. But the majority simply immigrated to Israel in the nineteen seventies and eighties. Most Mountain Jews were thrown into confusion by this situation and underwent a serious identity crisis. On the one hand, their breaking-off with Judaism seemed to be a severance of the old tradition, on the other hand, they trusted their leadership. Their ties to Caucasus seemed to many to be more significant than correlating with Ashkenazim, who often appear culturally alien and seem to have betrayed their Jewish heritage.

The mass *Aliya* of the early 1990s, and the breakdown of the Soviet Union, caused dramatic changes in the fate of the Mountain Jews. The majority of them resettled during the last ten years either in Israel or in large Russian cities. The Grozny territorial group disappeared completely in the course of the Chechenian war in 1994-1995. Many Jews from Daghestan, Chechnya and Kabardino-Balkaria moved to the famous resort of Pyatigorsk and also into the Northern Caucasus but in the Russian-populated area. They felt safe there because of the presence of an influential local businessman of Mountain Jewish origin. The number of Mountain Jews in Derbent and Nalchik diminished by more than half. Only several families remain in Oguz, only the Mountain Jews from Kuba remain largely in their settlement as a last stronghold of the once numerous Mountain Jewry. All the remaining communities now undergo a spontaneous process of re-Judaization. They again identify themselves as Jews but not so much with the Ashkenazim as with the Israelis. Many of those who were ready to identify themselves as Tats also participated in the recent migrations and found themselves finally in Israel or in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. The Tat theory is somehow alive only in Daghestan, mostly in the capital Makhach-Kala. The daughter of the spiritual father of the Tatization concept, author Kh. Avshalumov, Mrs. L. Avshalumova represents the Tat nation in the State Council of Daghestan. A few years ago she visited Israel and participated in meetings with her compatriots who became Israelis. Political tension and economic crisis in this southern part of Russia is causing an outflow of the Mountain Jews/Tats from Daghestan. This demonstrates the weakness of the Tat theory, the end of which is already visible as a light at the end of the tunnel.

4. Conclusions

De-Judaization has become in these last Soviet decades one of the adaptive strategies of Oriental Jewish groups in the USSR aimed toward the preservation of the uniqueness of the group and its ethno-cultural components. It has become evident on a group level in three of the communities: the Karaim, the Krymchaks, and the Mountain Jews. As an individual strategy it mostly was a means for assimilation and was widely known in all of the Jewish

ethnic groups including the Ashkenazim.

As a group strategy it included the following elements:

1. Modification of religious affiliation that included the postulation of a newly invented religion, like “Bibliism” as one of the monotheistic religions of the world, in the Karaim case, or a reinterpretation of Judaism as a form of Paganism in the case of the Mountain Jews who claimed that their Judaism was based upon an old Aryan fire-worship cult.

2. Construction of an ethnogenetical myth by way of inventing ancient genealogies, and pseudo-ethnic affiliations. The most clear example is that of the Karaim whose origin from pre-Exilic Jews was first postulated, but afterwards it has been changed to a Turkic affiliation.

3. Construction of a separate ethnic unity which corresponds to the social/philosophical model prevailing in Soviet Union. This posits that a people must be as is its language, included into a group of kin folk. That is how the Turks appear. In the unlucky case of the Krymchaks, their “own” people, the Crimean Tatars, were not the best choice for a good relative as they were banned by the Stalin regime and were simply deleted from the list of the peoples of USSR. The construction of a separate ethnicity presupposes the romanticizing of presumably ancient relations.

4. Emphasizing of linguistic apartness in the form of one of Jewish vernaculars; very often the genetic affiliation of the language serves as a proof for non-Jewish affiliation of the given group; characteristically enough the Georgian Jews, the only group who have no language which separates them from Christian Georgians, almost never manifested tendencies for de-Judaization.

5. Demonstration of alienation from Zionism, Israel, and the Ashkenazim, their heritage and contemporary social behavior.

6. Making political and administrative efforts by appealing to: the authorities, different state institutions, The Institute of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences, different publications, including corrupted academic presses like the journal *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* (Soviet Ethnography).

Certainly, de-Judaization was facilitated by a number of factors. One of them without any doubt, was the harsh experience of Jewish affiliation. The Karaim in fact fought their discriminatory inclusion into the Pale of Settlement in the Tsarist Russia, and the implications of other forms of anti-Semitic persecution. All three groups became victims of the Holocaust, although in different forms and intensiveness. The Karaim saved their lives, although some individuals were killed during the first days of the occupation of Lithuania and Galicia. Still they made many efforts to persuade the Germans not to kill them; the thread was always there.

The Krymchaks almost all perished in the Holocaust, and that made them believe that alienation from the Jews should be the right way to preserve their identity. The Mountain Jews, as the Karaim, learned the meaning of the Holocaust when all the members of three of their kolkhozes were murdered. Almost miraculously the rest saved itself by means of Kabardinian support, the interference of several liberal German officers and the shortness of the occupation. All three groups after the war were under the threat of becoming victims of Soviet anti-Semitism.

Along with the wish to save their lives and decent social status, all the groups feared losing their ethnic identity and, if they would insist on their Jewishness, to assimilate it among the Ashkenazim. The archaic type of their identity, however, certainly could not simply have been merged with the very different and very modern model of the Ashkenazic identity. Again, separation from the Ashkenazim seemed to some of the local leaders as the best way to affirm their own ethnic specificity and to develop it further on a different historical or, rather, pseudo-historical base.

De-Judaization was very much facilitated by the presence of a separate ethnonym, or ethnic denomination. Such words as Karaim, Krymchak, or Tat that can be used without the element "Jew", made it much easier to claim a non-Jewish origin for those groups. The Bukharan or Georgian Jews had no such name and were not practically involved in de-Judaization efforts. Only the Lakhlukhas had an ethnonym, but it was not widely known; also, it was probably pejorative and their proper name was Kurdistanis Jews. Finally, they were too small numerically and too archaic in their cultural behavior to develop a special theory of their non-Jewish origin. Moreover, they felt like, and indeed were, newcomers in the USSR, many of them having not even acquired Soviet citizenship. Their sufferings in the Soviet Union were not because they were Jews, but because they were Iranian subjects. Probably the most important reason why the Lakhlukhas have not tried to identify themselves as non-Jews was the absence of an intellectual, social elite who in all cases had devised and initially borne the ideas of de-Judaization. We find these elite in such prominent figures as A. Firkovitch and S. Shapshal, as well as in (not so impressive but still influential) group leaders like Kh. Avshalumov, M. Matatov, V. Achkinazi and others.

The final factor in the facilitation of de-Judaization is the presence of a state-supported anti-Semitic policy.

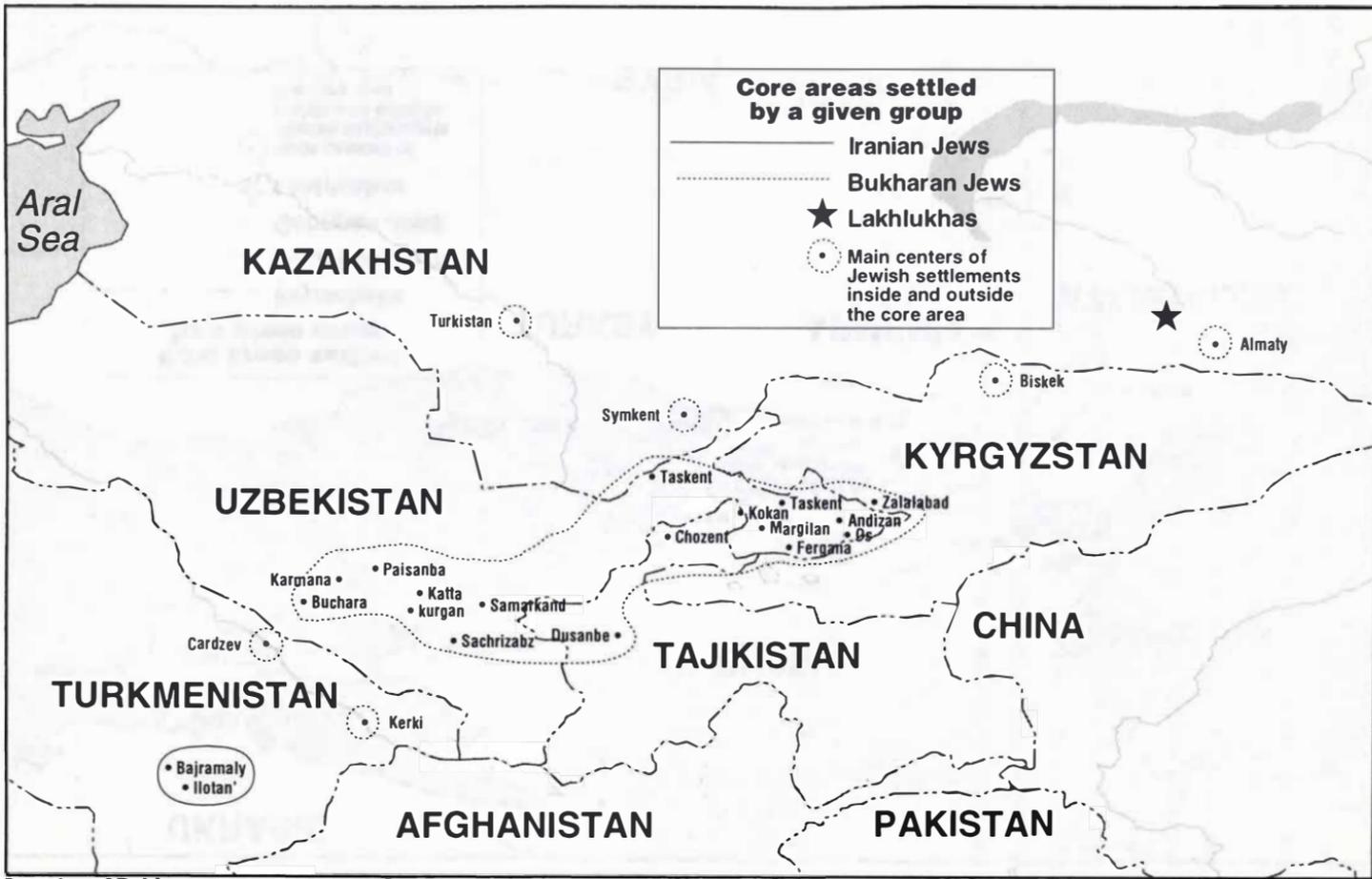
That is not the case now after the breakdown of the USSR, and the mass *Aliya* of the last decade in the midst of serious social and economic crisis. Not one of the countries of the CIS adopted anti-Semitism as a state policy. That certainly endangers the efforts of de-Judaizers because they have succeeded mainly due to the support of the anti-Semitic

authorities. It seems that now the epoch of active de-Judaization is close to the end. With the support of Russia and Azerbaijan ended, emigration appears, when given these new conditions, to be much more adaptive than de-Judaization.

A considerable segment of Oriental Jews are still living in their native areas. Most likely their numbers will further diminish in the next few decades; they will hardly disappear totally. Some of them will merge into the Israeli society and find a way of preserving their ethnicity in the Jewish State. Others will probably consolidate with the emerging Jewish communities of Russia or Ukraine. One cannot exclude the possibility that under some conditions some of them will again try the strategy of ethnic separatism which we have called here de-Judaization, and which is still practiced by the Eastern European Karaim and by some of the Tats of Daghestan.



Location of Mountain Jews and Georgian Jews



Location of Bukharan Jews and Iranian Jews

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