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### Identity Construction among Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union to Israel and Germany through Food Practices

This study deals with identity construction of a person through material objects, namely food practices. Food, which is a basic symbolic element connecting cultural perceptions, body experiences and physical sensations, appears to be important in the process of personal identity construction. Food practices encoding information about communication systems are an integral part of a person's relationship with different social groups. The basic assumption of this study will be that various kinds of food, when used in different social contexts, signal an economic and political status. Their meaning, significance and modifications are to be explored in the present study.

The study will focus on a special case: people in the immigration process who are exposed to the necessity of reconstructing their cultural perceptions as well as dealing with a new reality and confirming their place in it. In this study, the main objective is to relate to two different immigration contexts and to carry out comparative research among Jewish immigrants who came from the Former Soviet Union to Germany and Israel during the last ten years. For this purpose it is relevant to understand the self-definitions of immigrants, taking into consideration the previous historical context as well as the present different (and changing) German and Israeli contexts.

One of the main points of focus will be an investigation of different expressions of the transition from a socialist society (with its insecure food supply system) to two capitalistic societies (with secure food supply systems). It is also important to explore the European identity of immigrants in their transition from the Soviet Union to two different contexts.

A main approach will be to explore how Jewish immigrants create and construct their new 'home' in two, to a marked degree different, realities: in Israel which ideologically justifies Jewish immigration as "a national returning home" policy and as part of the nation-building

process, and in Germany which legitimizes the immigration of Jews as giving refuge to a national, oppressed ethnic minority from the Former Soviet Union.

The comparative investigation will reveal differences between ethnic and cultural which contain and combine changing cultural elements (Russian cultural origins, their nationality and ethnic identity as Jews, the European identity, contacts and connections with their friends and relatives in Israel and Russia).

Two phenomena are central as they connect the private sphere (family and home) with the public sphere (street and consumption). Each one reflects and designs the identity of immigrants and their social relationships in the particular state in which they find themselves: 1. Purchasing special food supplies in stores selling Russian food (produced as a part of the Russian cultural enclave phenomenon in Israel and Germany); 2. Hosting guests in the participants' homes, an event which takes place around the table and presents a framework for meetings between people and different social groups.

Both phenomena, stores selling Russian food products and gatherings around the table, have to be seen as informal frameworks to be decoded in order to analyze a person's coping abilities within a new reality. Identities among immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Israel, which combine original cultural elements with new Israeli ones, and identities of immigrants in Germany.