Jewish Samizdat: Dissident Texts and the Dynamics of the Jewish Revival in the Soviet Union

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“Samizdat” refers to the system of uncensored production and circulation of texts that developed during the post-Stalin era in the Soviet Union. 1 Samizdat is not a collection of unofficial Soviet works so much as it is a specific type of textual culture. 2 What does this mean? What light could such an understanding shed on the resurgence of Jewish national feeling in the late Soviet Union? Anna Akhmatova famously spoke about living in a

Research for this chapter was supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. My debts to those who shared memories and materials are many. I would like to acknowledge by name here a few who provided extraordinary practical support, including Jonathan Dekel-Chen, Stefani Hoffman, and Enid Wurtman. I am also particularly grateful to those former participants in the Soviet Jewish movement who graciously shared their own current historical work, including Michael Beizer, Yuli Kosharovsky, and Aba Taratuta. The faults and omissions in what is presented here are, of course, my own.

1. The term “samizdat” is based on a coinage by Moscow poet Nikolai Glazkov, who in the late 1940s imprinted his own typewritten collections of unpublished poetry as “Samsebializdat” (“I-publish-myself”). According to the historian Aleksandr Daniel, the shorter term “samizdat” came into usage in limited literary circles around the end of the 1950s, and was relatively common among Moscow intelligentsia by the mid-1960s. See A. Daniel’, “Istoki i smysl sovetskogo Samizdata,” in Antologiia samizdata: Nepodtsenzurnaiia literatura v SSSR—1950e–1980-e, 3 vols., edited by V. V. Igrunov (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi institute gumanitarno-politicheskikh issledovanii, 2005), 1:18.

“pre-Gutenberg” era, a time in which poetry like that written by Joseph Brodsky had to be produced and circulated outside print media outlets. Although one may debate whether samizdat is properly described as “pre-,” “post-,” or “extra-Gutenberg,” one thing is certain: The habits, values, and paradigms associated with samizdat are distinct from the established modern characteristics of Gutenberg print culture. For one thing, samizdat depended more than regular print culture on the active participation of readers. The text in samizdat survived only when readers acted also as publishers and distributors, passing on the copy received and producing additional copies of the text for even wider distribution. Each successive stage in the life of the text differed from the previous one, marked by the traces of a reader (manifesting as wear on the text, corrections, additions, or full reproduction of the text) who validated the text by passing it on to new readers. Such traces accumulated over time to produce the typical dog-eared typescript pages of samizdat. Samizdat texts circulated primarily on the basis of networks of personal trust. Thus, each reader actively contributed to the life of the text, investing it with successive layers of credibility and meaning.4

Thus, whereas Jewish samizdat delivered the uncensored content important for fostering a renewed Jewish identity in the post-Stalin era, it also provided a forum for a highly active, social, and dynamic new construction of that identity. Considering the Soviet Jewish movement through the lens of a textual culture that resisted modern paradigms gives us a new way of perceiving dissidence and of understanding the subversive—and creative—capacities of Jewish national expression at this time.

**Jewish Samizdat and the Creation of a New Jewish Self**

How did Jewish samizdat support the (re-)creation of a Jewish identity among Soviet Jews? Sources on Jewish samizdat include Stefani Hoffman’s

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3. Akhmatova may have borrowed the formulation from Nadezhda Mandelshtam. See Nadezhda Mandel’shtam, Vospominanii (New York: Izdatel’stvo imeni Chekhova), 200.

article, which is the most targeted and comprehensive overview of texts and developments in Jewish samizdat to 1980. The Shorter Jewish Encyclopedia in Russian (Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopedia) provides an overview of Jewish samizdat within the context of samizdat at large. Under the title Jewish Samizdat (Evreiskii samizdat, vols. 1–27, 1974–92), one finds periodical editions and other materials associated with the struggle for aliya and with the Jewish cultural revival in the Soviet Union. The Jewish Samizdat series makes available much of the content that circulated in connection with the Jewish dissident movement in the USSR. It does not include everything, of course; translations and material printed outside the Soviet Union and smuggled in were naturally excluded. At the same time, Hoffman’s discussion, like Yuli Kosharovsky’s more recent investigations of samizdat based on personal memories of the period, raise sociological questions that access to lists of titles and selected content alone cannot provide: How widely did particular texts circulate? What did it mean to people to read, copy, and otherwise participate in the production and dissemination of this risky material? How was the activity of samizdat significant for reestablishing a Jewish identity and Jewish community?

Samizdat, as we know, was produced primarily on typewriters and by photographic reproduction. It was in this way more individualized and spontaneous than the prerevolutionary clandestine press. Yosef Mendelevich’s account of putting together and duplicating the first periodical edition of Jewish samizdat, Iton (Hebrew, Newspaper), illustrates well the conjunction of individual with organizational initiative, as well as the combination of planning and chance that went into the samizdat undertaking. In the process of transporting a homemade photo drying machine from apartment to apartment in Riga, Mendelevich and his collaborator very nearly

6. The definition of “samizdat” and of “Jewish” in the encyclopedia is very broad. See the article “Samizdat,” in Kratkaia evreiskaia entsiklopedia na russkom izyke v 11-i tomakh, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Obshchestvo po issledovaniiu evreiskikh obshchin, 1994), 627–42, http://www.eleven.co.il/article/13674.
7. Evreiskii Samizdat was produced by the Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry at Hebrew University and published as one of the series appearing under the umbrella title Evrei i evreiskii narod (Jews and the Jewish people).
8. See the chapter on samizdat by Yuli Kosharovsky, My snova evrei: Ocherki po istorii sionistskogo dvizheniia v byvshem Sovetskom Soiuze (We are Jews again: Reflections on the history of the Zionist movement in the Soviet Union), 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 2007–9), 2:349–81.
got themselves arrested.\footnote{See the chapter “Iz predystorii ‘Svad’by’,” in Operatsia “Svad’ba”, by Y. M. Mendelevich, edited by P. Kleiner (Jerusalem: Gesher Ha-T’shuva, 1987).} Later, at Mendelevich’s trial for participating in the plot to hijack an airplane, authorities did seize upon Iton as evidence of his and his associates’ “anti-Soviet” activity.

Mendelevich’s experience with samizdat highlights the extraordinary creativity and engagement, as well as the considerable risk, that often went into samizdat activity. Mendelevich wrote articles for Iton, but the very process of producing and reproducing samizdat texts was itself a powerful means of self-expression in a context that punished this type of activity. Hoffman analyzed a questionnaire distributed to 447 Jewish activists who emigrated to Israel. For most of them, samizdat activity was essential; slightly more than 70 percent indicated they had read illegal publications on Jewish themes, whereas 80 percent said that they or a family member had participated in distributing samizdat literature.\footnote{See Hoffman, “Jewish Samizdat,” 88–89.} Reading samizdat was a significant activist activity, and so was its distribution. In fact, the functions of reader and publisher, like those of reader and author, tend to overlap in samizdat. This suggests a richness and intensity of cultural experience in samizdat that contrasts with print culture, where these functions are normally separated.

The first period of Jewish samizdat activity, before 1967, consisted primarily of creating, distributing, and reading translations of material printed before the Revolution and/or in the West on Jewish themes.\footnote{Hoffman divided Jewish samizdat into a first period, from the mid-1950s to the Six-Day War in 1967, featuring mainly translations. The second period, from the late 1960s through the early 1970s, saw mainly letters of petition, legal documents, and transcripts of trials. The third period featured original works and periodicals. See Hoffman, “Jewish Samizdat.”} This is generally considered to be a preparatory phase for the movement proper, but the impact and character of samizdat activity here, as remembered by activists, are indicative of its importance. Among translations of Western works, Leon Uris’s novel Exodus was by far the most popular. Viktor Polsky, working with David Drabkin and another friend, translated, copied, bound, and distributed Exodus. Polsky described the effect the translated novel had on his mother: “That book transformed my mother. From a woman hounded by endless persecutions, she turned into a Zionist. That was definitive evidence for me of the strength of Exodus, its ability to exert a powerful emotional
effect on people.”

Sources agree: *Exodus* was tremendously significant for mobilizing Jewish activists. Obviously, the content of the novel mattered. *Exodus* portrayed Jews as people of action, as proud and compelling Jewish heroes, like those found in other translated fiction popular in samizdat, including Howard Fast’s *My Glorious Brothers* and André Schwarz-Bart’s *The Last of the Just*. The interesting point about *Exodus* as part of Jewish samizdat textual culture is the way it inspired readers to active re-creation of themselves as they read and/or rewrote the samizdat text.

*Exodus* entered circulation in Jewish samizdat in the form of at least three different translations. This is remarkable already, given the size of the 600-plus-page printed version and the difficulty of translating such a large work. In fact, however, these versions differed—not all were so long. According to one account, a prisoner in the camps who knew the book in English before incarceration told the story to fellow inmates. One of those was so impressed that he wrote it down from memory after release. That version was abbreviated to just 70 or 80 pages. As Viktor Fedoseev told it, the Russian version of *Exodus* based on prison camp retelling, led to another, more explicitly Zionist, version of the short samizdat text. That version omitted the romance between the Jewish hero Ari and the Christian heroine Kitty. Perhaps there was some link between this version and that done by Leah Slovin in Riga, who also described cutting out the love story for her translation of Uris’s novel. Slovin characterized the purpose of Jewish samizdat as “infecting” people with Zionism.

13. See the discussion of these and other popular works from the first phase by Hoffman, “Jewish Samizdat,” 90–92.
14. See these stories related first by Leonard Schroeter, The Last Exodus, 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 64–68. They are corroborated with more details elsewhere; e.g., Baruch Podolsky told of fellow prisoner Kiril Uspensky in Dubravlag receiving Exodus in a package of English books from his wife. A group organized translation and readings. After release, Podolsky began to socialize with a group in Moscow including Viktor Polsky and David Drabkin, who (as noted above) obtained another copy of the English Exodus and organized its translation for Samizdat (http://www.slovar.co.il/life.php). See also Yaakov Ro’i, The Struggle for Soviet Jewish Emigration, 1948–1967 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 293, 302–3. Exodus was unquestionably the most popular and most widely read of all Jewish samizdat materials.
15. Leah Slovin expressed this view relative to the second period of Jewish samizdat, after the Six-Day War in 1967, when aliya had to be, in her view, the sole focus; Hoffman, “Jewish Samizdat,” 91, 94–95.
powerful capacity of the text to affect its readers. Many Jewish readers willingly shared this “infection,” though it carried risks: The authorities used *Exodus* against Anatoly Goldfeld at his 1971 Kishinev trial, where he was accused of possessing 100 copies of the translated novel for distribution.

The success of the text in modern print culture has generally meant large print runs of identical copies—this was as true for texts officially approved for the edification of Soviet citizens as it was in the case of texts sold in capitalist markets. The opposite seems to be true in samizdat culture; the popularity of the text, especially in cases of passionate engagement, manifests in spontaneous personal production, including alteration of the text as it multiplies. The Jewish samizdat texts titled *Eksodus* provide the most striking example known to me of the way samizdat culture rests on the paradigm of the spontaneously reproduced, variable, and collectively authored text.

The samizdat text can transform people in powerful, but essentially non-uniform, unpredictable, and spontaneous ways. Slovin’s reading and writing of *Exodus* in Riga, reflecting the strong Zionist heritage preserved there, differed from other readings and writings. Slovin saw her chance to facilitate a transformative experience in other, more assimilated Soviet Jews. In fact, a number of stories about reading and writing *Exodus* highlight its transformative effects—people were moved to action as Jews, often for the first time. As the beginning of a new positive Jewish identity, such a radical experience would have been more common among the highly assimilated Jews of the central Russian portion of the USSR. This Jewish “awakening” resembles what Andrei Sinyavsky described as the dissident “stumbling block,” a sort of *prise de conscience* consisting of the Soviet individual’s new effort to think and judge for oneself, a reconstruction of subjectivity expressed in an alternative style of writing.16

Sinyavsky’s description of the dissident experience appears to me particularly useful for considering the emergence of a new Jewish identity and the elaboration of its agency through uncensored textual production. Sinyavsky, who was ethnically Russian, created a Jewish alter ego for his dissident writing—Abram Terts. Terts’s writing was not only criminal for the Soviet authorities, Terts himself was “an impudent, incorrigible dissident, who provoke[d] indignation and aversion in a conservative and conformist

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Siniavsky’s writings as Terts include the novella *The Trial Begins* and the later long essay *Strolls with Pushkin*. Whereas the first got him in trouble with Soviet authorities, the latter, written in prison camp, caused a scandal among Russian émigrés and post-Soviet readers. It is worth noting here that the mode of textual production and distribution was crucial to Sinyavsky’s case; he was tried, along with his fellow writer Yuli Daniel, for publishing uncensored works abroad without official permission, as “tamizdat” (which is the twin of “samizdat,” uncensored, published *tam*, “over there,” i.e., in the West, and smuggled back into the Soviet Union for distribution there). The arrest and trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel became landmarks in the history of dissidence, and they directly sparked further developments in samizdat.

The fact that Sinyavsky chose to imagine his dissident self to be a Jew suggests the provocative potential inherent in the Jewish identity. To write as a “Jew” was to be dissident, and to be dissident was (often) to be criminal, or at least perceived as such. This is a poetic understanding as well as a sociological fact: Siniavsky’s dissident pose may be likened to Marina Tsvetayeva’s stance when she asserted: “In this most Christian of worlds / Poets are Jews.” We may remember also the poet Osip Mandelshtam’s insistence that the only writing that matters is criminal—it is “stolen air,” as he said. Moreover, in the late Soviet period, this “Jewish” type of writing encompasses the particular mode of existence, the special “life” of the text; Terts’s provocation had to do with style (Terts’s challenging personality as embodied in the text), and also with the fact that Terts’s writings circulated outside official control (the uncontrolled movement and reproduction of the text, including out to the West). Had the Terts writings simply languished in a small circle of friends or gotten stuck in Soviet publishing limbo (as the authorities tried to catch and contain the other early tamizdat scandal, Boris Pasternak’s *Doctor Zhivago*), they would not have been nearly as

19. The arrests of Sinyavsky and Daniel stimulated the first major samizdat open letter campaigns. Such campaigns became a major dissident tactic at about this time. Aleksandr Ginzburg’s samizdat White Book about the case and trial demonstrated also the increasingly important role of communication between Soviet dissidents and Western press representatives. See Aleksandr Ginzburg, *Belaia kniga o dele Siniavsksogo i Danielia* (Moscow: Samizdat, 1966; Frankfurt: Posev, 1967).
20. See part 12 of Tsvetayeva’s Poem of the End (1924) and part 5 of Mandelshtam’s Fourth Prose (1930).
inflammatory as they were having been published in the West. If we adopt Sinyavsky’s view, Terts embodies in some sense the Jewish “spirit” of samizdat.

The Sinyavsky/Terts tamizdat affair underscores once again the fact that reproduced copies of (samizdat) texts are not identical; it matters who reproduces the text, when, where, and in what circumstances. Similarly, if Jewish identity as recovered among Soviet Russian Jews is a sort of “text,” elaborated through participation in samizdat and other activities relevant for a new Jewish self-construction, then how much do the various constructions of new Soviet Jewish identity coincide? What does it matter? I will return to these questions, but the point I wish to make here about samizdat and Soviet dissidence, the point that I think Jewish dissidence highlights very well, is that samizdat subversion consists most of all in shattering a hegemonic social homogeneity into pluralism (notwithstanding the fact that the Soviet Jewish movement did not necessarily value pluralism within its own ranks). When KGB head Yuri Andropov spoke on the occasion of Feliks Dzerzhinsky’s centenary, in 1971, he singled out the ideological unity of Soviet society as its greatest strength. Dissidents, he said, were an invention of Western anti-Soviet propaganda. If they did exist, they were just common criminals. The plurality of dissenting voices fundamentally threatened the vaunted unity of Soviet society.

If such pluralism is the essence of samizdat and dissent—and I think it is—then, we should look for it in our research of this history. We have not always done so. There has been a tendency in general dissident historiography to unify various groups under a modern ideal of universal humanism, often expressed in terms of human rights. This reflects the discourse of the democratic dissident movement, which produced leading historians of the era. According to this perspective, the Jewish movement, like other national or interest movements, contributed to the general struggle for a democratic society to the degree that they were fighting for a common cause of

21. Sinyavsky sent his works out to the West before the first big “tamizdat” publication, Boris Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago, and through the same channel, though Sinyavsky’s works appeared later and with less fanfare; see Ivan Tolstoi, Otmytyi roman Pasternaka (Moscow: Vremia, 2009), 165.
23. First among those dissident historians is the author of the fundamental study: Liudmila Alekseeva, Istoriia inakomysliia v SSSR (New York: Khronika Press, 1984), which was published in English as Soviet Dissent, translated by Carol Pearce and John Glad (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1985).
individual human rights. Dissident pluralism was in fact much more contentious, and the field of “dissidence” was more agonistic, than this discourse of universal values would suggest.

Aleksandr Voronel’s path illustrates this difficult dissident pluralism. Voronel belonged to leading democratic dissident circles when he experienced what he has described as his most significant transformation. He was mobilized as a Jewish activist by reading (and then writing) samizdat: Meir Gelfond introduced Voronel to Jewish samizdat texts in 1969. In 1971, Gelfond asked Voronel and his wife Nina to type protocols of the first Leningrad trial related to the famous hijacking case. Reading the interrogation of Yosef Mendelevich, with information on the Jewish samizdat journal *Iton*, Voronel felt his heart “miss . . . a beat.” This was, he later wrote, the “call of destiny, the word from heaven.” In 1972, he began his own samizdat journal for discussion and debate of issues relevant to assimilated Soviet Jewry—the highly successful, long-running *Evrei v SSSR* (Jews in the USSR).

Debate in Voronel’s journal highlighted the “psychological dissonance” of a Soviet Jewish identity, which manifested less as a challenge to the regime than as an uncomfortable self-awareness with respect to the surrounding society. For example, in the first installment of the rubric “Who Am I?” in *Evrei v SSSR*, Larissa Bogoraz, the wife of Yuli Daniel, and herself a democratic dissident, confessed that she did not feel herself to be a Jew (though she could not really feel herself to be Russian either). Mikhail Klyachkin remembered that “Jew” was a strange and uncomfortable epithet spoken of in whispers, with laughter or with shouts. Jewish identity was not easy to accommodate within general Soviet society, or even within democratic dissidence. Klyachkin’s essay, like those of others appearing

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24. Gelfond was one of the first to distribute materials by and about Jews unofficially. See the description of his activity and other instances of samizdat circulation in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Ro’i, Struggle, 280–82.


26. Zvi Gitelman described Soviet Jewish identity as being fraught with the “psychological dissonance” created by “being forced to become Russian culturally (because Jewish culture was not available), while being forced to remain Jewish legally and socially.” See Gitelman, “Soviet Jews: Creating a Cause and a Movement,” in A Second Exodus: The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews, edited by Murray Friedman and Albert D. Chernin (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), 86.

under this rubric, demonstrate that Soviet Jews in this place and this time often lacked the words or the voice to assert Jewish identity.

Here, dissident “struggle” and “opposition” take on more potential faces. Voronel himself felt that taking up Jewish activism entailed rejecting a type of dissidence in which he no longer believed; he could not feel comfortable with a movement that was always in some sense “fighting for others.”

He had some critical things to say about the dissident elite, and he was not the only one to do so. As a Jew, he felt that his particular interests arising from his status as a Jew were marginalized in the democratic movement. Feminists also complained that their concerns were trivialized or judged to be in “bad taste” by democratic dissidents, just as they were in Soviet society at large.

This criticism of a dissident establishment might be compared with Nancy Fraser’s objection to the established theory of a modern public. Jürgen Habermas’s original model of the “public” depended on modern liberal understandings of subjectivity and civic society, which have also shaped democratic dissidence as presented to and apprehended by Western observers. These understandings rely on a strict division between private and public selves, and private and public issues. Such dichotomous and

28. Voronel reported putting the question to Sakharov in friendly conversation: “Why does the Soviet intelligentsia always fight for other people?” Voronel admired Sakharov’s desire to fight for others as a rare example of the realization of a Christian ideal of self-sacrifice. However, the conflation of idealism and the practical interests of Jews in Zionism attracted Voronel more. Interview with Voronel, July 1, 2007.


30. See Nancy Fraser’s influential discussion of the problems of the ideally universal, but actually exclusive, “public” as initially described by Jürgen Habermas, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Habermas and the Public Sphere, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 109–42.

31. Benjamin Nathans argued that Western observers have been too keen to see in dissidents “surrogate soldiers” of liberal Western ideas, a keenness reflected in some cases by the dissidents’ discourse about themselves. See Benjamin Nathans, “The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights under ‘Developed Socialism,’” Slavonic Review 66, no. 4 (2007): 633.

32. The modern Jewish imagination of self appealed also to such a modern dichotomy; witness Judah Leib Gordon’s admonition to “be a man abroad and a Jew in your tent.” See Judah Leib Gordon, “Awake My People!” (1866), in The Jew in the Modern
strictly hierarchical understandings have been more or less pervasive in Western treatments of Soviet sociology.

Implicated in this Western liberal prism on dissidence is a particular shape of historical development that runs in linear progressive fashion from formation of the conscious self, largely on the basis of private reading and discussion of belles lettres, to fulfillment of that subjective potential in public action—this is the story of the development of modern intellectuals, and it also shapes the biographies of Soviet dissidents. A similar story was told about how samizdat matured: “During the last few years samizdat has evolved from a predominant concern with poetry and fiction towards an ever greater emphasis on journalistic and documentary writing. . . . [samizdat] . . . has begun to fulfill the functions of a newspaper,” read the overview of samizdat in a 1969 issue of the Chronicle of Current Events, the long-running Moscow human rights bulletin.33 Similarly, one of the first known KGB memos on samizdat highlighted the significance of the phenomenon in these terms: “If five years ago we noted the distribution from hand-to-hand of mainly ideologically flawed artistic works, at the present time more and more documents of a programmatically political character are being circulated.”34 The story told this way helps justify the urgency of the Chronicle’s mission, along with the repressive efforts of the KGB.

This most obvious public dynamic is not the only one that should interest us, however. Part of the problem from a critical historical perspective is that this trajectory, inasmuch as it corresponds to a familiar ideological imagination of history, tends to take over the whole story, squeezing out or obscuring that which does not fit and eliding the plurality of groups, editions, and events linked on a complex field involving collaboration and contention, art and politics, and private and public modes of being, writing,

The emergence of a Jewish cultural movement in the mid-1970s is one outstanding example of a phenomenon that does not fit the dominant progressive linear trajectory: The turn to “apolitical” history, philosophy, tradition, and language study after a period of overt political struggle (however strategic that turn may have been) constitutes an outstanding peculiarity of Jewish samizdat, one that demands more scrutiny for a critical history of the Jewish national resurgence and the larger field of samizdat and dissidence within which it arose.

Jewish Samizdat and Imagining (National) Community

The questions about a history of the Jewish movement as we see it through samizdat have to do with the emergence of organization and the development of different streams. Yaacov Ro’i pointed out that it was samizdat that helped transform “sporadic, unorganized Jewish activism into a full-blown movement.” Once we see this movement established, the question becomes one of communication among Soviet Jewish activists and with their supporters in Israel and the Diaspora, and also of the way a renewed Jewish community is imagined through samizdat.

The tensions within the mature Jewish movement in the Soviet Union between the so-called culture activists (kul’turniki) and the emigration activists (emigratsionnisty or politiki) are well known, though perhaps the split is more starkly drawn in retrospect than it seemed in practice at the time. Misunderstandings arose, too, between the American organizations committed to giving Soviet Jews a choice of where to go once they got off the plane in Vienna and the Israeli authorities interested in circumscribing the option to getting on the next plane to Israel. Zvi Gitelman pointed out that there was a consensus on at least one point:

35. E.g., the recent Anthology of Samizdat gave short shrift to Leningrad literary culture. Most Jewish, and Rock, editions are excluded from the capacious, though not in fact comprehensive, Radio Liberty collection and publications. See the discussion of some of these limitations and the proposal for modeling an agonistic “field” by Ann Komaromi, “The Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture,” Slavic Review 67, no. 4 (2007): 605–28.

36. On the importance of Samizdat for establishing a movement in the Soviet Union, and for establishing lines of communication between that movement and Israel and other foreign supporters, see Ro’i, Struggle, 287–88.
The movement began as one for aliya, and although in the 1980s the overwhelming majority of emigrants did not go to Israel, it always remained an Israel-oriented movement. Those who went to the United States did not set up a separate or even allied movement, nor did they make emigration to the United States or elsewhere a public goal. Rather, the decision where to immigrate was treated as a private one, with the public agenda being to establish the right to leave the country.37

On the basis of her analysis of memoirs, Hoffman concurred: Jewish activists wrote or spoke about the desire to go to Israel.38 At the level of discourse or ideology, the movement seems unified in looking to Israel, and on this basis there is good reason to characterize it as a national movement. However, when we compare the Jewish national movement with other national movements in the Soviet Union, the plurality of potential locations for realizing frustrated impulses for Jewish identity and the lack of a single Jewish country and a single Jewish language stand out as characteristics of a movement that was not simply “national” in the modern sense of this term.

The appearance of Jewish samizdat periodical editions reflects the emergence of a mature Jewish movement in the Soviet Union (see table 10.1). These editions show an unexpected, “unorthodox” evolution away from a public, openly Zionist and political agenda to something else.39 Early editions were manifestly politically engaged: The Riga axis played a role in the seminal edition Iton, while Iskhod (Exodus) and its successors—Vestnik iskhoda (The Herald of Exodus) and Belaia kniga iskhoda (The White Book of Exodus)—reflected the influence of democratic dissidence generally, and of the Chronicle of Current Events in particular. Like the Ukrainskii visnyk (Ukrainian Herald) and the Herald of the Lithuanian Catholic Church, the Jewish edition Iskhod was modeled on the Chronicle. The title page of Iskhod featured two epigraphs, one in the upper left, from Psalm 136:5–6, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,” and one in the lower right, a quotation from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “Everyone has the right to

39. More detailed information on Jewish and other periodical editions is available in the following database covering the years 1956 to 1986: Ann Komaromi, Soviet Samizdat Periodicals (Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, forthcoming), http://samizdat.library.utoronto.ca.
### Table 10.1. Jewish Samizdat Periodicals to 1986

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Translated Title</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Editors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td><em>Iton</em></td>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Nos. 1(Alef)–2(Bet)</td>
<td>Historical and literary journal</td>
<td>B. Maftser, L. Korenblit, I. Mendelevich, V. Boguslavsky, M. Gelfand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970–71</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td><em>Iskhod</em></td>
<td>Exodus</td>
<td>Nos. 1–4</td>
<td>Collection of documents on struggle for emigration</td>
<td>V. Fedoseev, I. Averbakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–72</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td><em>Vestnik iskhoda</em></td>
<td><em>The Herald of Exodus</em></td>
<td>Nos. 1–3</td>
<td>Collection of documents on struggle for emigration</td>
<td>V. Meniker, Yu. Breitbart, B. Orlov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972–73</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td><em>Belaia kniiga iskhoda</em></td>
<td><em>White Book of Exodus</em></td>
<td>Nos. 1–2</td>
<td>Collection of documents on struggle for emigration</td>
<td>R. Rutman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td><em>Evrei v SSSR, Spetsial'nye vypuski</em></td>
<td>Jews in the USSR, Special Issues</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>Collection of materials on case of B. Penson</td>
<td>V. Buiko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Riga</td>
<td>Evreiskaia mys'l'</td>
<td>Jewish Thought</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>Collection of articles on Jewish culture</td>
<td>A. Tsinober</td>
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<tr>
<td>1978–81</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td><em>Evrei v sovremennom mire</em></td>
<td>Jews in the Contemporary World</td>
<td>Nos. 1–6</td>
<td>Collection of translated items from Western press</td>
<td>E. Likhterov, V. Fulmakht</td>
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<td>1979–80</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Vyezd v Izrael’: Pravo i praktika</td>
<td>Nos. 1–8</td>
<td>Collection of documents on emigration by M. Ryabkina, I. Tsitovsky, M. Berenfeld, MOGlУS</td>
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<td>Riga</td>
<td>Din umetsiut (Zakon i deistvitel’nost’)</td>
<td>Nos. 1–6</td>
<td>Collection of documents on refusenik cases by Ya. Aryev, A. Maryasin, G. Shadur, V. Sulimov</td>
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<td>1981</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Magid</td>
<td>No. 1</td>
<td>Thick journal—culture, history, philosophy of Judaica by I. Begun</td>
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<td>1981–85</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>Daidzhst</td>
<td>Digest</td>
<td>Collection of Soviet press items on Jewish themes by A. Begun</td>
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Sources:
Most Jewish Samizdat periodical editions are covered in the following:

Other information has been taken from these sources:
Yosif Begun, “Memoirs,” manuscript.
Viktor and Irina Brailovskie, interview, Tel Aviv, July 2, 2007.
Sobranie Dokumentov Samizdata (Radio Liberty, Munich), nos. 1–30 (1972–78).

Finally, these archives were consulted:
Collection of the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry. Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP) at Hebrew University, Givat Ram Campus, Jerusalem.
Samizdat collection at the Historical Archive of the Research Center for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen (Bremen, Germany).
Association “Remember and Save”—Archive of the Jewish Aliya Movement in the Soviet Union (Assotsiatsiia “Zapomnim i sokhranim”—Tsentr dokumentatsii evreiskogo national’nogo dvizhenia v sovetskom soiuze). Haifa, Israel.
Museum of Jews in Latvia, Riga.
Samizdat archive at Vaad-Russia (Vaad-Russia, 117334 Moscow, Varshavskie shosse, d. 71).
leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” Reading the page from left to right and from top to bottom, as one customarily reads a page in Russian, frames Iskhod firmly within the trajectory from the particular and national (and ancient, religious) to the universal (and contemporary, secular). These Jewish editions, including Vestnik iskhoda and Belaia kniga iskhoda, are what we might expect to see if we looked at the Jewish movement in terms of the public focus on aliya, within the framework of human rights dissidence.

At a certain point, however, the open struggle for aliya was perceived to be counterproductive. Moreover, as we saw in the case of Voronel, some Jewish activists defined themselves and their activity in contrast to the democratic dissident mainstream. If the above-described “public” editions possessed a clearly political agitational agenda, those that followed them chronologically generally did not: Voronel’s Evrei v SSSR shows a move away from democratic dissidence. Curiously enough, although discussion of Jewish identity and issues in Evrei v SSSR did not focus on abuses by the Soviet authorities the way material in other human rights editions did, Voronel’s edition was deemed by many in the Jewish movement to be too political. Perhaps this was because of Voronel’s relatively high profile within dissident circles, or because of his journal’s orientation to both Soviet Jewish readers and Westerners. In any case, despite the more literary character of the journal under further editorial groups, the KGB treated it as a political threat—it confiscated issues 7 and 8 from Voronel’s apartment, and declared the journal “illegal” and “anti-Soviet” in 1975, after which a case dedicated to suppressing the journal was pursued, until at last Viktor Brailovsky, the editor of Evrei v SSSR’s later issues, was arrested for his work on it.

The journal Tarbut (Culture), by contrast, was designed to be absolutely “kosher,” that is, to avoid anything that could be perceived to be critical of the Soviet regime. Nevertheless, Tarbut began its life as a cultural supplement to Evrei v SSSR. In fact, by a strange logic, it was exactly the difference between the two that made it necessary to link them. Tarbut’s first

40. Voronel explained that the group putting out Evrei v SSSR had two aims: to express the problems and ambitions of Soviet Jews so that they could recognize themselves as Jews; and to give the West a view of Soviet Jews based on their own words, rather than on those of Western Russian experts. See Alexander Voronel, “Budusheche russkoi alii,” 22, no. 2 (1978): 188.

editor, Feliks Dektor, did not want the existence of his new, inoffensive edition to give the Soviet authorities an excuse to repress *Evrei v SSSR*. He explained to Vladimir Prestin before consenting to put out *Tarbut*:

This is what’s bothering me: There will be two journals— *Evrei v SSSR* will be deemed anti-Soviet and Zionist in contrast to what we are doing, a pure, nice little journal, not anti-Soviet, not Zionist—kosher. Then they will imprison those putting out *Evrei v SSSR* and leave us alone. And they will say, “We did not arrest them because they are Jews.”

Thus, they agreed to begin *Tarbut* as part of *Evrei v SSSR*. Subsequently *Tarbut* became a stand-alone organ of the movement’s cultural current. Other cultural editions that tried to “legalize” Jewish identity, the Hebrew language, and other Jewish cultural topics without any hint of critique of the Soviet regime included the journal *Ivrit / Nash ivrit* (Hebrew / Our Hebrew) about Hebrew and teaching Hebrew; the collection of items about Jews in various countries *Evrei v sovremennom mire* (Jews in the contemporary world); and, judging from what little we know about it, the “thick” journal *Magid* (Storyteller). These editions, along with activities and materials associated with the 1976 Cultural Symposium and with Hebrew language teaching, were part of the cultural core or “mainstream” of the Jewish movement in Moscow in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Other editions bear a less clear relation to this cultural mainstream. We learn from the series *Evreiskii samizdat* about editions appearing in the later 1970s: *Vyezd v Izrael’*: *Pravo i praktika* (Emigration to Israel: The law and common practice), and *Din umetsiat* (Law and reality) devoted to various administrative and practical aspects of the emigration process. Other sources tell us that Jewish samizdat also picked up in Riga again with *Evreiskaia mysl’* (Jewish thought), devoted to materials on Jewish religion, culture, and philosophy. Beginning in 1979, the literary-social journal *Khaim* (Life) also appeared out of Riga. In 1982, A. Razgon began to put out *Daid-

42. I.e., the KGB would use the existence of Tarbut as cover for its repression of Evrei v SSSR; interview with Feliks Dektor, March 2008.

43. The “thick journal” played a particularly important role in Russian intellectual and cultural life in the nineteenth century. Emerging in the 1830s and 1840s, thick journals typically featured a literary section, vigorous literary criticism, and a structure designed to reflect a particular “line” or ideology. See Robert A. Maguire, *Red Virgin Soil: Soviet Literature in the 1920’s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 43–44.
zhest, a periodical collection of Soviet press items on Jewish themes. Yosef Begun’s collection of materials on Jewish history, philosophy, and religion, *Nashe nasledie* (Our heritage), was seized before Begun’s arrest and apparently did not circulate widely. The collection *LEA* (the Russian acronym for Leningrad Jewish Almanac) occupies a place apart and will be dealt with in greater detail below. There was another collection, *Evreiskii ezhegodnik* (Jewish yearbook), that began in Moscow in 1986, before the much more open atmosphere of perestroika, but it is difficult to say whether and how this edition related to the Moscow-based cultural mainstream of the Jewish movement, if indeed that “establishment” still had anything to do with the production of samizdat periodical editions at that time.

I use the term “establishment” advisedly; there is quite a bit of evidence that a leading group of kul’turniki emerged to coordinate activities in the Jewish movement by the mid-1970s, and that the members of this group did this with significant financial support from the Israeli Nativ bureau. Certainly, the production and circulation of samizdat editions associated with the cultural movement were centrally coordinated. It was the movement leader Vladimir Prestin who asked Feliks Dektor to edit and produce *Tarbut*. Pavel Abramovich, who put together the first collection *Ivrit* based on a week of Hebrew-themed activities in 1978, enlisted the editorial assistance of Dina Zisserman to make it a regular journal under the title *Nash ivrit*. Prestin asked Viktor Fulmakht to take over editing *Evreii v sovremennom mire* when Emmanuil Likhterov was no longer able to do it. Abramovich proposed to Fulmakht and Zisserman the idea for a thick journal named *Magid* to replace *Evreii v SSSR* when the latter became defunct. Due to KGB pressure on Abramovich, the journal *Magid* was stopped.44 In addition, centralized funding and coordination made possible large production pools for Hebrew textbooks and other samizdat editions. Yuli Kosharovsky described a samizdat production team directed by Vladimir Mushinsky in Moscow at the end of the 1970s. By 1980 this team involved about seventy people working as editors, typists, photographers, binders, couriers, and storage curators. Prestin met Mushinsky through a mutual friend in the days leading up to the 1976 Cultural Symposium. Subsequently, Prestin—and

44. Information about the initiative and editing of these journals came from interviews with Feliks Dektor and Vladimir Prestin, November 2007; Dina Zisserman, June 2007; and Viktor Fulmakht and Pavel Abramovich. Abramovich said the first issue of *Magid* did circulate, though it was not reproduced anywhere and has not been found in any archive.
others including Kosharovsky, Viktor Fulmakht, and Zeev Geizel—would bring Mushinsky money and orders for samizdat editions.\textsuperscript{45}

Although typing was the method usually used to reproduce journals and other original literature, photograph reproduction was the logical choice for printed texts in Russian brought in from abroad. It was also the preferred method for reproducing Hebrew textbooks—although the photo paper made for a much thicker text, such a text withstood the heavy use typical for a textbook.\textsuperscript{46} The more rarefied skills and equipment associated with photographic production were sought among professionals and qualified amateurs, who were not necessarily refuseniks. Mikhail Nudler found a highly skilled Russian photographer who had drying machines at home and could turn out large orders on short notice based on a library of microfilms he assembled; for example, when a visitor from Baku needed forty copies of the Hebrew textbook \textit{Elef milim}, he got them in two days.\textsuperscript{47} Photograph technology was employed for reproducing tamizdat editions, like those from the Israeli Russian-language publishing series Biblioteka Aliya. Viktor Fulmakht specialized in reproducing those books. He spoke of working with four different samizdat production groups in Moscow from whom he commissioned orders at various times.\textsuperscript{48} The relatively “large scale” of this work was confined by the primitive technology used; like almost everyone else producing Soviet samizdat, the Jewish movement eschewed photocopy machines and underground presses as far too risky. Nevertheless, the Jewish movement appears to have been more than commonly well organized and funded for production at scale, such as this scale was.

Was this remarkable level of organization due to Nativ coordination, and did the cultural movement reflect a strategic Nativ agenda to facilitate \textit{aliya} of Soviet Jews to Israel? Reducing agency for a complex movement to one organization is a crude way of realizing the monology of a Zionist ideology—while the question of Nativ’s involvement is a valid one for a critical history of the movement, it also provides a backdrop against which to explore a more pluralistic, and less reified, historical view. Surely, Soviet activist leaders and the rank and file had their own ideas and motivations, their own individual ways of enacting and understanding the resurgence of Jewish identity. Looking back, we know that mass emigration would

\textsuperscript{45} See the interview with Mushinsky by Kosharovsky, My snova evrei, 2:382–85.
\textsuperscript{46} Kosharovsky explained this distinction in usage between samizdat “literary” items, and textbooks: interview with Kosharovsky.
\textsuperscript{47} See the interview with Mushinsky by Kosharovsky, My snova evrei, 2:378–79.
\textsuperscript{48} Interview with Fulmakht.
become a reality. But people then could not be sure of this. The prospect of years of waiting as a refusenik must have made it difficult for individuals, who might or might not have been aware of Nativ’s role, to be sure of their prospects for aliya. Nor did all those engaged with Jewish activism choose aliya. There were those who stayed to build the Jewish community in Russia, like Mikhail Chlenov. There are those like Dektor who chose to work in both the Jewish community in Russia and in Israel after this became possible. Is a strict Zionist interpretation adequate for analyzing the dynamics of the late Soviet Jewish movement in its development and its impact?

Simply put, it seems unlikely that any single entity could harness the spontaneity inherent to samizdat and dissidence. Even assuming that Nativ provided direction as well as support to cultural movement activities, what about the editions from that era and later that were produced in Leningrad and Riga? Furthermore, how do we account for the evidence of editions and groups that do not appear in the regular published sources of information about the movement? Such “renegade” editions hint at what may be more or less significant chaos or conflict beneath the smoothly documented surface. A mystery surrounds Lekhaim (Za zhizn’, To life), issue no. 2, from 1981, which turned up in files from Nativ’s Center for Research and Documentation. He edition must have given Nativ agents pause. Issue 2 is openly, even floridly, anti-Soviet: “Sixty years after the October coup, living human thought, tormented by an ideological terror of unprecedented scope, humiliated and trampled by the hooves of subservient beasts, is still struggling, still thrashing about and suffering.” The tone is so out of character for Jewish samizdat of this period as we know it that one wonders if the edition was a KGB provocation. Whether it was or not, it was certainly kept out of the record of Jewish samizdat editions presented in the publication Evreiskii


50. From the editor’s foreword, “Zhurnal ‘Lekhaim’ v usloviiakh sovetskoi deistvitel’nosti,” Lekhaim, no. 2, from the Collection of the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (Ha-Arkhion Ha-Merkazi L’toldot Ha-Am Ha-Yehudi), file 1412 (typescript, p. 1). No personal names nor even place appear on the edition, which was composed of essays, letters, and poetry, intended for a Jewish audience as well as others interested in vibrant national self-expression, as the foreword stated.
samizdat from the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry (and no record of it has been found in other Jewish or democratic sources).

Other items illustrate the spontaneity of samizdat textual (re-)production by virtue of their dubious character as editions; one of these is the Evrei v SSSR, Spetsial’nye vypuski (Special Issues), put out by V. Buiko in 1975 in Riga, and reported in the Chronicle of Current Events. As he explained in the editor’s note prefacing the edition, Buiko intended to do a whole series of these special issues based on materials deposited with but not appearing in the samizdat journal Evrei v SSSR. Was this undertaken with the blessing and support of the editors of the journal whose name Buiko borrowed, or not? There also exists, buried in the unpublished samizdat files of Radio Liberty, a curious edition from 1982 titled Blizhnii vostok (The Near East), which announces itself to be an exact duplicate of Din umetsiut, no. 10.51 It is not possible to compare the two editions, but taking the Riga editors at their word, why would they do an exact duplicate under a different title? Can we consider these to be “reflector” editions, examples of the uncontrolled spontaneity of reproduction (and of the characteristic reproduction with a difference) of samizdat? In their relationship to known endeavors and editions, these problem editions suggest the disordered, possibly collaborative, and potentially antagonistic relationships that resist a rigid understanding of a homogeneous and disciplined movement, even as they challenge our methodology for dealing with them.

Does Jewish samizdat illustrate this plurality that resists unification and ideological explanation better than other types of samizdat? I think it does, in part simply because it was relatively highly developed within the major phase of development of samizdat. As compared with other “national” samizdat, there were more Jewish periodical editions—approximately eighteen—than those of any other group, apart from Lithuanian editions, of which there were about twenty-five during the same time frame. Lithuanians benefited from the alternative authority and network of the Lithuanian Catholic Church as well as from strong ties to democratic movement activists in Moscow.52 Also outstanding about the Jewish case is that all its editions


52. By contrast, there were three Armenian editions, nine Belorussian editions (surprisingly), three Crimean Tatar editions, nine Estonian editions, four Georgian editions, possibly only one Latvian edition, one Soviet German edition, and at least seven Ukrai-
were in Russian—even those with Hebrew titles, including *Iton*, *Tarbut*, and *Magid*. There were no Jewish editions in the “national” language of Hebrew. Nearly all other ethnic groups produced samizdat periodical editions in the relevant national language, in addition to Russian-language editions or Russian translations of these editions.53 Moreover, the Jewish editions, unlike other national samizdat, reflected neither territorial claims within the USSR nor particular territorial concentration of the Jewish people.

The resources and organization directed within the Soviet Jewish movement at supporting *aliya* (i.e., national territorial aspiration), and modern Hebrew (*a single* national language), were considerable, as we have seen. However, I propose that we also keep in mind the not insignificant preparatory and parallel expressions of motivation and imagination of Jewish identity—those that do not fit the modern, national, strict Zionist mold. Further, I want to propose that we use the Jewish nation’s resistance to modern ideological straitjacketing to draw out new perspectives on samizdat and dissidence more generally. The article by one Danyl Fish (reportedly a pseudonym for Ruth Okuneva54) on Yiddish in the third issue of *Nash ivrit* is provocative for these purposes. Fish argued for not dismissing “jargon,” as Yiddish was called in pre-Soviet Russia. Fish articulated the background of the common—that is, Zionist activist—view, according to which “time has shown that only Hebrew is the national language of the Jews.” “Stop!” wrote Fish. “Yiddish—a mistake? But can a person really run away from himself, from his past? And is it in fact the past?” Fish reviewed the simultaneous flourishing of Hebrew alongside Yiddish and Russian as languages of Jewish expression in the early part of the twentieth century, recalling the battles of Hebraists and Yiddishists of those times. Although both Hebrew and Yiddish gave way to Russian among assimilated Soviet Jews, history has a way of repeating itself, Fish insisted. Moreover, to dismiss Yiddish as a supposedly dead jargon would impoverish Jewish history: “Let’s leave in that history a place for the language of our past, the language of our joys and sorrows—Yiddish.”55 Fish’s discussion of Yiddish argues for the balance of multiple perspectives implied by a nonlinear history and multiple

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53. Crimean Tatars, as far as we know, produced only part of the journal *K”asevet* (poetic texts) in the Tatar language. The abortive Soviet German journal Re Patria appeared in Russian for the sake of publicity.


languages. This approach to history and language resists the tendency to exclude and unify inherent to any ideology, whether that ideology is an insistent Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment) Hebraist universalism, a socialist Yiddishism, or a resurgent Zionist nationalism focused exclusively on one language and one land.

A similar subversion is enacted, rather than argued, in the final section of issues 2 and 3 of Nash ivrit, “Without Commentary,” which implicitly (and thus cleverly) subvert the official hegemony of progressive time and monologic historical truth. In issue 2, for example, on the left side of the page we see a quotation from the February 1976 issue of the official Soviet Literaturnaia gazeta about the lack of justification for modern Hebrew: Hebrew has not become an effective instrument for artistic and scientific creation, and it has boasted no significant literature, that article claimed. On the right side of the page, there appears a quotation from the same paper from April 1967 (i.e., before the Six-Day War) about the 1966 Nobel Prize in Literature awarded to Shmuel Yosef Agnon and Nelly Sachs. Agnon wrote in Hebrew, a language that “has become in the last decade a living national language,” as the Soviet paper then enthused. The reversal of historical time in this juxtaposition of official Soviet newspaper excerpts exposes the autocratic and highly politicized character of the “truth” according to the Soviet press. The segment makes use of the essentially subversive characteristic of samizdat as a mode of existence of the text in which the meaning of content is displaced or pluralized in its uncontrolled reproduction. By placing the earlier official evaluation of Hebrew after the later dismissal, the segment effectively undermines the “progressive” perspective of the original texts and the strictly linear history and epistemology officially governing them, according to which the past and its truth are obscured (“sublated,” to use the Hegelian term) into the ever-better new. Samizdat challenges in this fundamental way both official Soviet authority and any modern ideology that attempts to arrogate to itself exclusive control over the past and knowledge.

I want to suggest for the purposes of writing a history of the Jewish national revival that we draw the dominant discourse of a Zionist nationalism into a pluralized perspective by materializing its ideal hegemony via the dynamics of a dissident culture. This will be part of a postideological re-imagination of Jewish community in the USSR, one that does not fit a total

or homogenizing modern paradigm. The type of postideological creation of national community I have in mind might better come into view if we compare it with Benedict Anderson’s widely cited theory of the modern imagination of national community. Anderson linked the rise of the modern perception of nation to print capitalism. He began his account by outlining how new markets for printed matter formed on the basis of vernacular languages. Printed matter sold to consumers fostered the sense of a contiguous social entity coinciding with a given market; in particular, the novel and the newspaper supported new social imaginations, because together they represented the homogeneous empty time associated with secular modernity, a time that linked dispersed members of a social entity through artful simulation of simultaneity. The date on the top of the newspaper is in Anderson’s description the “single most important emblem” signifying the homogeneous calendrical time through which the paper and its imagined community move.

Samizdat periodicals were, by contrast, irregular. Official repression and the noninstitutional existence of these editions meant it was practically impossible to achieve anything like regular periodicity. Even the relatively regular bimonthly appearance of the Chronicle of Current Events was only approximately on schedule. The notable hiatus between October 1972 and May 1974, due to an intense campaign against Chronicle editors, highlights the element of risk and, thus, of personal investment required. Less sensationally, in the case of the Chronicle and of numerous samizdat editions not subject to intensive campaigns of state repression, the large amount of mostly unremunerated labor that went into producing and circulating editions underscores the fact that we are not talking about a capitalist enterprise. Samizdat editing, production, and distribution were really laborious. Rounding up contributions, typing them for unified presentation, typing multiple copies (up to just seven or eight legible copies per typed set), finding enough copy paper and carbon sheets, or photographic paper, and carrying it around, was risky and simply physically demanding. Yosef Begun, for example, said that he became known as “the man with the backpack.”

58. Ibid., 33.
because he was always hauling around large bundles of precious paper. As compared with profit-driven or state-planned enterprises, these samizdat editions represent less quantifiable and more spontaneous subjective, personal, and private energy. They required a major investment of self on the part of those who realized and supported them. The successful production of multiple issues of an edition looks in this light to be (sometimes quietly) heroic, and anything but run-of-the-mill.

Samizdat periodical editions highlight in their irregularity the alterity and individuality of people and communities involved. The dating of a particular samizdat edition could reflect the values of the given community. The first issues of the Chronicle in 1968 announced the “Year of Human Rights in the Soviet Union.” Subsequent issues featured this banner: “The Year of Human Rights Continues.” On the almanac Zhenshchina i Rossii (Woman and Russia), which began to circulate in September 1979, feminist dissidents marked the date December 10, 1979, connecting their efforts to International Human Rights Day. The dates on various religious samizdat editions frequently coincided with religious holidays. Each alternative community measured time on its own calendar. Even if events on that calendar were expressed in terms of a greater human community, this community in no way coincided with the state or its regular, “universal” time. The samizdat writer and editor Tatyana Goricheva spoke out against the emptiness of that modern time:

Today the liturgical conception of time is as badly threatened as that of space. We “never have time.” We live in an age of rapid action. . . . Our arid souls can be revitalized by means of the Church calendar, which is decked out with numerous festivals and events. Here time does not run in a homogeneous monotonous gray, where an individual is either at work or is forgetting himself in senseless enjoyment.

Goricheva’s comments underscore the difference between an alternative (dissident) time (and space) and the homogeneous empty time of a modern society, whether that time underpins the hegemonic order of a socialist or of a capitalist society. Of course, Soviet official time was hardly empty, but

60. From Begun’s memoirs, see the chapter “Evreiskii kul’turtreger: Opasnaia professiia,” manuscript, provided by the author in December 2007.
Goricheva’s understanding of it that way suggests a significant foil for her own construction of time that resonates with Anderson’s—and Walter Benjamin’s—understanding of the ideal modern type of time. Goricheva’s terms are religious, and she expresses a “premodern” or “extramodern” attitude to time. The principle may be extended beyond her specific discursive framework. The important distinction is not religious versus secular time per se, but a universalized homogeneous time coinciding with the state, versus a chronotope inflected with significance for the identity, values, and behavior of a particular group within (and beyond) that state.

Within Jewish samizdat, we will note a variety of ways of creating alternative time—including through the ancient history of the Jewish people, its modern history in Russia, the events of the Holocaust, the creation of Israel, Israeli news, and news from contemporary diaspora communities—all of which were ignored, downplayed, or demonized in official Soviet accounts. Traditional Jewish time also provided a powerful way of imagining Jewish community. The first issue of Tarbut reviewed the names of Jewish lunar months, and explained the natural basis of the Jewish day, which begins 18 minutes before sundown. Jewish holiday calendars appeared at the back of issues of Tarbut, not unlike the holiday calendars regularly published at the end of Baptist samizdat bulletins. Issue 10 of Tarbut included a more extensive discussion of the Sabbath. At this point we may find evidence of an agonistic plurality within the Jewish movement: The journals Nash ivrit and Magid were motivated at least in part by what Dina Zisserman characterized as the “sharp tilt of the journal Tarbut under the editorship of Il’ia Essas from a general cultural position in the direction of religion.”

The religious mode of expression has proved to be particularly problematic for modern, secular ideologies of nation, public, or community (for this reason, Goricheva’s Orthodox feminism was incomprehensible if not outright offensive to Western feminists). Religious expression appears not to have been congenial to the mainstream of the Jewish cultural movement, either. We might then wonder, is this why Begun’s collection Nashe nasledie was left out of Evreiskii samizdat? Although Begun’s collection consisted of translated materials and would not be reprinted in full for that reason, its

title, contents, and editorial foreword should have been reproduced for the record. Apparently, the KGB rounded up most copies. Is it possible that Nativ did not get a copy? One copy was preserved at the archive of Vaad in Moscow,64 and it reveals an utterly surprising focus on the Torah. “The Bible has an unsurpassed significance also as the beginning of all beginnings of the spiritual life of the whole Jewish people,” read Begun’s foreword. “The five sections of this collection tell about the fundamental role of the Bible and Torah . . . in Jewish history, religion, philosophy, literature, and social life.”65 Although Begun’s edition, addressing itself presumably to secular Soviet Jewry, presented the Torah in a “culturological,” rather than religious way, perhaps it seemed undesirable or insignificant for Nativ’s purposes. One wonders: Are there religious editions about that we do not know? It seems possible. Zvi (Grigory) Vasserman of Leningrad said that Israeli agencies refused to provide support for new activism there in the early 1980s, as soon as they realized “that our people seriously believed in God, seriously studied Torah.” They got support from other quarters, from Chabad and Agudath Israel of America.66 Nativ apparently coordinated efforts with various Orthodox groups. What were the coalitions of support, how did they realize their support, and how might this have affected activities in the USSR?

What is the interplay of individual and organizational agency in specific instances, and what does it say about the shape, complexion, and development of the larger Jewish movement in any given period? Again, moments of conflict can be useful for posing such questions. Tarbut no. 4 did not appear in Evreiskii samizdat beyond some illegible photos of purportedly illegible microfilm. There was no table of contents. Issue no. 4 was the last one Feliks Dektor edited. He spoke of disagreement that arose over his inclusion of Thomas Venclova’s article “Jews and Lithuanians.” Other members of the editorial board considered the piece too politically risky, because it took on the topic of Lithuanians’ role in the Holocaust, a touchy, if not taboo topic from the official Soviet point of view.67 Venclova’s article ap-

64. Vaad is also known as the Federation of Jewish Organizations and Communities in Russia (Federatsiia evreiskikh organizatsii i obshchin Rossii), http://www.wcrj.org/organizations/409/.

65. From the “Predislovie sostavitelia,” Nashe nasledie, vyp. 1, typescript, Archive of VAAD-Rossiia, fond 1, opis 2, delo 8, p. III.


67. Interview with Dektor.
peared in the West, but the issue of *Tarbut* that included it simply disappeared, and no copy has been located. Did someone make a decision to suppress it? If so, who, and at what stage? Who was empowered to “censor” the issue, if indeed that is what occurred?

Much has been made in the larger samizdat context of the split between Moscow “politics” and Leningrad “poetry.” In the case of *LEA*, the Leningrader Mikhail Beizer spoke of seeking support in Moscow and being turned down: “When I raised the question [of financing *LEA*] in Moscow, they said, ‘It’s your affair, you handle it.’” Beizer secured other support; at first the duplication and distribution of *LEA* was financed by Yakov Gorodetsky, and later by Aba Taratuta.68 Where did that support originate, and how was the decision made to support *LEA* (or not)? Did Moscow leaders turn it down because the edition cultivated a sense of local Jewish history and community, thus contradicting the Nativ agenda for *aliya*? Or was there simply less funding available at this time? Was the early 1980s clampdown on dissident activities by the KGB the main reason? We may note that although *LEA* did not get support through Moscow, the edition was well represented in the final volumes of *Evreiskii samizdat*. Beizer described a highly disciplined edition, one that managed to run a long time thanks to strict protocols of secrecy, and also achieved relatively high “print runs,” of 50 to 100 copies per issue. Contributions to the almanac were thoroughly edited, and under Beizer’s editorship, contributions took shape first as presentations in Beizer’s Seminar on Judaica, benefiting from that preparation and feedback.69

*LEA* stands out as a bright spot in the generally repressive era of the early 1980s. Can we also meaningfully cast *LEA* as a remarkable Leningrad initiative independent of and alternative to the Moscow-centered, Nativ-supported cultural “mainstream”? Does this reflect a productive way of framing a critical history of the Jewish movement in terms of the development of a coordinated Moscow cultural center, with unity and plurality measured in reference to it?


69. Yuri Kolker “literally rewrote the amateur materials” collected for initial issues from people without a humanities background, said Beizer, who specified that seminar participants were expected to work up further materials they presented for inclusion in the journal. See Michael Beizer, “Kampf um die Alijah: Die Otkazniki-Bewegung der 1980er Jahre am Beispiel Leningrads,” *Menora* (Berlin) 15 (2005): 73–94. My references are based on the Russian version of this article, kindly provided by the author.
Conclusion

One of the questions study of samizdat must raise is what we know, and how we know it.70 Knowledge about Jewish samizdat, and particularly about Jewish samizdat periodicals, which are the expression of a mature Jewish dissident movement in the Soviet Union, has been dominated by the series Evreiskii samizdat and the publications of the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, an institute established at the initiative of Shaul Avigur, head of Nativ. The academic principles underlying research at the center aimed to produce objective, scientific, and neutral knowledge, of exactly the kind made possible by modern print culture. We are not dealing with print culture, however, or with its supposedly neutral context for the dissemination of texts and knowledge.71 However, the inaccessible nature of Nativ documents, many of which remain classified, and the dispersal of the center’s materials compound the problem of determining the scope of Nativ’s role and influence on what knowledge got produced.

The point of imagining Nativ’s role, however, is precisely to challenge the notion that any one agency or actor, any single idea or motivation, could drive a complex dissident movement. The vibrancy of the movement for Jewish national revival in the Soviet Union is apparent when we compare Jewish samizdat with that of other movements. Taking Jewish samiz-

70. That the essence of samizdat textual culture as compared with modern print culture consists of its epistemological uncertainty is an argument I make; see Komaromi, “Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon.” The characteristic uncertainty of samizdat extends to details about the editions. See the note to the Vestnik Iskhoda sources in table 10.1.

71. Nehemia Levanon wrote about Nativ’s creation of a Jerusalem institute called Yeda (Hebrew, knowledge) with people from Hebrew University to support the Tel Aviv office with up-to-date information from Soviet newspapers and other relevant literature. This would be: “a small institute . . . with knowledgeable and devoted historians building the academic base for our work.” See Nehemia Levanon, “Israel’s Role in the Campaign,” in Second Exodus, ed. Friedman and Chernin, 70–83, 74. Mordechai Altshuler, who worked at Yeda almost from its inception, described the scientific principles behind their efforts: a massive search of official Soviet press for articles about Jews had been undertaken, and it was felt that the same approach should be applied to the unofficial press; interview with Mordechai Altshuler, June 2007. Set up under the auspices of the Historical Society of Israel as the General Archive for the History of the Jewish People, it later became the Association for Research of the Jewish Diaspora, and, finally, as the Center for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, it was transferred to the Hebrew University in 1971.
Jewish Samizdat

dat to be more than a fixed collection of texts, we can find in the plurality
of perspectives it supports a salutary example for dissident historiography
as a whole. Samizdat, understood as an alternative to modern print culture,
as a textual mode defined by uncontrolled and differentiated reproduction,
should help us destabilize fixed understandings of “dissidence” or “the
Jewish movement,” whether these are understood in terms of binary op-
position to the regime, or exclusive service of one or another ideology. The
vitality of a given opposition movement appears much more provocatively
to depend on a restless dynamic of dissent—visible in the successive estab-
lishment of dominants within a movement and the appearance of pluralistic
opposition contesting the hegemony of a dissident “establishment.” Such
dynamics are signs that the alternative field is in fact a productive site for
(re-)creating meaning, value, and identity.

The story of the Jewish national revival as told through samizdat texts is
not yet final. This story should reflect somehow the fact that the samizdat
text, unlike the paradigmatic Gutenberg text of modern print, pursues its
independent life—it seeks always to cross borders and to be transformed in
that crossing whether authors will it or not, similar to the various ways that
Jews in the Soviet Union sought to leave the USSR, and to accede to a place
(or places) where they could live as Jews.