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Gendering the Struggle: Women's Voices of Resistance and the Jewish Movement in the Soviet Union

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Abstract: This article analyzes the contribution of women to the Soviet Union's Jewish movement. We argue that an assessment of the personal stories of Jewish female activists in the former Soviet Union reveals a uniquely meaningful impact on the exodus of Jewry from the Soviet Union, the image of the Soviet Jewish struggle in the international arena, and the establishment of a human rights movements in its support. We explore who these women were, their personal identities, and through what factors they became so successful as prominent leaders in their communities as well as within international organizations. More broadly, by highlighting the link between women's human rights activities and personal life stories, this article emphasizes a more nuanced analysis concerning the complexity of heroism within national freedom movements through its impact on their careers, mental health, and future destinies.

Keywords: Jewish movement in the USSR; Jewish women resistance; Jewish identity; Soviet Jewry

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1. Introduction

In a windowless prison cell surrounded by old green paint stands Silva Zalmanson, a former prisoner of conscience who spent 4 years in the Russian women's prison camp, Potma. "When I was at your age", Silva motions to her daughter, Anat, an Israeli filmmaker, "I was already in prison" (*Operation Wedding*, Documentary—Official Website 2019). She continues, "It was cold in prison, I was constantly jumping so as not to freeze" (Operatsiya Svadba 2016).

In 1970, Zalmanson was imprisoned by Soviet authorities for participating in an aircraft hijacking attempt while trying to flee the USSR (Zablocki et al. 1986). She was the only woman (Becker 1971, p. 5) who took part in the "Wedding Operation"—the objective of which was to hijack an empty plane and escape by air to Israel (Beermann 1971). All 16 participants in the operation were arrested before even boarding the plane. They had expected such an end in advance, knowing it was a unique opportunity to instigate a wide public response and attract the attention of the global community (Operatsiya Svadba 2016).

During her imprisonment, she was allowed 30 min outside of her cramped cell (Operatsiya Svadba 2016). Standing with her daughter, Zalmanson demonstrated how she would fill those precious few moments with dance. Later in the film, she recalled two kittens who would visit her courtyard (*Operation Wedding*, Documentary—Official Website 2019). She imagined them as a mother and child. As a young woman in prison, she looked at "family" and wondered if she would also one day see freedom and become a mother. For her, that memory became symbolic of her willingness to make sacrifices for her people on the one hand but also of her deep uncertainty about what exactly those sacrifices would entail for her on a personal level. Alongside hundreds of other Soviet Jewish women, Zalmanson was willing to give up her future, her freedom, and even her life for a greater cause (Jewish Action 2023). However, the nagging fear of what that sacrifice actually meant would follow her and others as they built their future lives in Israel.

In this regard, female Jewish activists in the former Soviet Union offer salient examples of national and cultural resistance against Soviet repression. This resistance, however, would come at the expense of their mental and physical well-being. While Soviet authorities tended to underestimate the role of women in Jewish resistance, this female struggle was certainly quite visible in the world arena (Rich 2015).

This article will demonstrate the contribution of women to the Soviet Union's Jewish movement. We argue that Soviet Jewish female activists had a critical impact on the struggle for Jewish national and cultural freedom in the Soviet Union and the establishment of a human rights movements in its support. That is to say, the Jewish resistance in the USSR understood that Soviet authorities would be far more reticent to employ brutal and repressive tactics against Jewish women than they would against men. The methodology employed for this research involves a comprehensive examination of primary sources in English and Russian, including autobiographies, interviews, and archival materials, to illuminate the role of women in the Soviet Union's Jewish movement. By centering on the personal narratives of Jewish female activists, we aim to uncover the nuanced contributions of these women to various aspects of the movement, including the facilitation of the exodus of Jewry from the Soviet Union, the enhancement of the movement's image on the global stage, and the advancement of human rights advocacy. Through qualitative analysis, we delve into the personal identities of these women and the factors that enabled their ascent as prominent leaders both within their communities and in international media. Moreover, we employ a female lens to explore the intersections between women's human rights activism and their individual life stories, shedding light on the multifaceted impacts of their engagement on their careers, mental well-being, and future trajectories. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of heroism within national freedom movements and underscores the significance of women's agency and experiences in shaping historical narratives.

2. The Jewish Question in the Soviet Union

Historically, the Soviet Union discriminated against its national minorities (Stern 1944). Regarding Soviet Jewry specifically, governmental policy engaged in regular campaigns against traditional Jewish life, uprooting populations and forcing resettlement, which later transformed into anti-Semitism, reinforced by Stalin's repressions (Levin 1988). Therefore, Jews in the Soviet Union were consistently harassed for being different and systematically made to feel like foreigners and outsiders, despite the diversity of ethnic groups that comprised the USSR, where they were born. Constantly in search of a solution leading to a better life, the Jewish movement offered Soviet Jews a cohesive ideological package. For Soviet Jews, this movement meant more than the political struggle for Jewish statehood in the Land of Israel. Rather, the Jewish movement was their mode of expressing Jewish pride and identity and, in a practical sense, pointed to the movement to actively emigrate to Israel. The Jewish movement as a national one, of course, was illegal in the Soviet Union (Shapiro 1972).

A strong incentive stimulating interest in the Jewish movement occurred in 1967, after Israel's Six-Day War (Buwalda and Buwalda 1997). Inspired by the stunning victory and bravery of their brothers and sisters in Israel, Soviet Jews began to publicly demand the right to emigrate from the USSR to Israel (Dinstein 1974). However, the process of emigration was largely limited by the severe migration policies of the Soviet government (Schroeter 1972). Jews were frequently denied exit visas for a range of different reasons: military obligation, applicant contact with classified materials, demand for repayment of higher education degree costs, and the economic importance of retaining technically trained personnel (Altshuler 1988).

Those who were deprived of exit visas to Israel became known as "refuseniks" (Beizer 2007). Many of them were dismissed from their employment, shunned by social circles, arrested on fabricated charges of narcotics or weapons possession or trafficking, accused of malicious hooliganism, or even incarcerated in mental health institutions (Loeffler 2018).

These imprisoned activists gained the monikers "prisoners of conscience" (Organizations USCHC on IRS on I 1976). With memories of the Jewish Holocaust still fresh, dozens of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations around the world mobilized their efforts to help Soviet Jewry, and many new organizations were established to address this matter (Altshuler 2005).

To be sure, the scope of research into the Jewish Soviet freedom movement is quite broad. Most of this scholarship has focused on the heroic resilience of some central resistance figures—usually men (Beckerman 2010). That is, scholarship has primarily looked for masculine Soviet Jewish heroes and, in so doing, elided the very humanity of the "heroes" themselves (Zisserman-Brodsky 2005; Stern 2021). In this way, the difficulties that gender aroused in the struggle for Soviet Jewish freedom have not been properly explored. Likewise, the personal fears and perhaps forgotten desires of female activists have been lost to historical investigation. This paper raises these issues by offering a critical look at the roles certain key Jewish women took in resisting Soviet anti-Jewish oppression.

3. Women's Role in the Struggle for Emigration

While the main focus of pressure from the Soviet government against the Jewish refuseniks was targeted at men, a unique role in the successful outcome of this historical resistance was played by women, whose personal stories, participation in human rights movements, appeals to world politicians, protests, and hunger strikes compelled the attention of the international community (Segal 1996).

Despite the fact that Soviet Jewish women were active at all levels of Jewish resistance, the Soviet authorities regarded them as playing only an auxiliary role (Brier 2017). Women were primarily involved in routine support activities, such as retyping and binding publications of the underground Jewish press (Gerlis 1996), hosting refuseniks and activists at their homes, organizing Jewish cultural events and kindergartens for children, etc. (Zakharova 2013).

There existed an unspoken rule in the Russian government on the position of women in the Soviet bloc: to not use physical violence or imprisonment against women (Magarik and Ratner 2017). This unwritten rule was particularly applied to married women with children, the violation of which could worsen the already problematic image of the Soviet Union on the world stage. In situations where the activism of women was too conspicuous, and after the issuance of several cease-and-desist warnings, authorities resorted to arrests. Regardless of these tactics to break the female contributions to the Jewish movement, the arrest rates of Soviet Jewish women were markedly lower than those for Jewish men (Remember and Save 2019).

Despite the fact that Soviet Jewish activism gained particular prominence after 1967, we find it important to provide a historical overview and share the stories of women who became activists in the Jewish struggle even before this movement reached a significant scale. The first women participating in Jewish Youth Organizations were arrested in 1924 in Belarus: Tamara Gleiberman and Sarah Rosmaha. Gleiberman was first arrested for Jewish activism at the age of 19. In total, she was arrested four times and spent 22 years in prison camps, including an exile to Siberia (Remember and Save 2019). She emigrated to Israel in 1978. Sarah Rosmaha's destiny was different—she was arrested twice but was sent to Palestine in 1926 as part of an exchange program, thanks to the efforts of Ekaterina Peshkova, a Soviet human rights activist and the wife of Maxim Gorky, the famous Russian author (Yedlin 1999).

Starting in the mid-1920s, arrests of female Jewish activists became increasingly common. In 1928, among seven persons arrested for anti-state activity, five were women: Esther Gluskina (Mintz), Sima Zidman, Sima Telesina, Zaf Kuntz, and Fannya Tsipora Esterlis. In 1929, among six new prisoners, three were women: Polina Segal (Pruzansky), Dora Fisher, and Nechama Shivic-Liszewska. During the period from 1924 to 1978, more than one hundred women became prisoners of conscience (Remember and Save 2019).

Taking into consideration that the female role in the Soviet Union in the 1920s was quite clear—to take care of children and housework (Shternshis 2006)—the movement showed the "unsuspected activist potential of Jewish women" (Rich 2015). Their professional

activity in translating and transmitting information abroad, persistence in prison camps, hunger strikes, demonstrations, and the struggle for the future of their families forced the Soviet government to take Jewish women's resistance seriously and even change their tactics (Gerlis 1996).

Hundreds of Jewish women throughout the Soviet Union actively participated in the Jewish movement. To date, there is still no objective statistical data on the number of participants in the Jewish movement, including refuseniks and prisoners of conscience. In this article, our reference point is the archives compiled by Abby Taratuta, an activist in the movement (Remember and Save 2019). Based on these and other sources we consulted, we have concluded that married women were significantly more prevalent compared to unmarried women. The majority were married and had children. In instances involving married couples, men often assumed more prominent roles in the movement, while women took on responsibilities such as organizing covert childcare facilities, offering support to their husbands (frequently detained), aiding women from families facing challenges, and, leveraging their specific professional skills, often serving as translators or educators. They crafted lessons on Jewish traditions for children and orchestrated festive occasions (Genzeleva 2013). Notable figures among them include Maria Slepak, Inna Kosharovsky, Natalia Ratner, Inna Taratuta, Tatyana Edelstein, Leya Slovina, and many others (Kosharovsky 2017).

To protect themselves and their families and resist and struggle for individual and community rights, women had to learn two languages—a language for communication with the government and a language for communicating at the international level (Schroeter 1979). Being wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters, they had to use all possible emotive tactics to achieve results. Quite often, these tactics were to place a sympathetic female image on news stories, as this was the way to be heard (Rosneck 2002).

Contrasted with the challenges encountered by families and married women, the struggle for single, unmarried women frequently required even more effort and resilience. Nevertheless, in the absence of a husband and children, they could wholeheartedly devote their time to the cause, with the Jewish community often serving as their extended family. We analyzed who these women were, as well as the factors that influenced decisions to place them in positions of leadership by their communities and international organizations. Here, we examine three case studies illustrating the struggle of women in the Jewish movement—the stories of Ida Nudel, Raiza Palatnik, and Nadezda Fradkova. Each of their stories is individual and unique, yet commonalities exist between their experiences, exemplifying the foundational elements of their shared struggle.

The first factor was a sense of belonging to the Jewish world. The life-changing journey of these women started from an understanding of the different nature of their national identity and Jewish identity. It was rooted in family ties alongside childhood and adolescent experiences. In many cases, it was also urged by anti-Semitism, quashing an unwillingness to remain silent and stay in the Soviet Union and promulgating the need to make known their plight.

The second factor was the absence of family and children, which contributed to a feeling of existential responsibility for the present and future of the community as a broader family. It was an unspoken agreement that Soviet authorities made every possible effort not to deal with married women, especially with women who had children. First, it was much easier to suppress the initiative of a single woman as nobody would act on her behalf. Second, the presence of children would cause a larger resonance on the world stage. Certainly, it was quite expected that women who had families and children could not act too noticeably, which irritated Soviet authorities, who were reticent to be seen imprisoning Jewish women. Therefore, single women took a significant action—to speak on behalf of the Jewish community in general and Jewish women in particular. Often, these were the only voices that were heard. While singlehood and a lack of family might have helped these women in their struggle, it would prove to be a challenge in their future lives outside of the Soviet Union.

The third factor was a high level of education. Higher education and English proficiency allowed these women to function at an effective level within the country and communicate in a foreign language with representatives of world organizations by writing petitions and appeals as well as translating and transferring important information. These actions provided undeniable advantages for the resistance efforts of the Jewish movement.

Together, these factors played a significant role in the destinies of these female protagonists and in the outcome of the Soviet Jewish movement as a whole. Oftentimes, these women were viewed as heroes within Jewish communities in the Former Soviet Union and Israel. Heroism is a sociologically complex phenomenon that does not simply refer to exceptional individual action but rather to the wider social and moral contexts of civic and personal virtue (Franco et al. 2011; Baumel-Schwartz 2010). That is to say, alongside fame on the world stage and in the local community exists an undercurrent of loneliness and the need to overcome countless obstacles and humiliations. Underlying the link between women's human rights activities and their personal lives during the struggle and the decades after, we emphasize here the impact of heroism on their careers, mental health, and destiny.

The Jewish movement in the USSR adeptly understood the strategic implications, realizing that the targeting of Jewish women would likely provoke a stronger and more widespread global response, which Soviet authorities were keen to avoid. This strategic paradigm is exemplified in the meticulous examination of three compelling case studies presented within this study. Moreover, we assert that these case studies serve to complicate and enrich scholarly interpretations of "heroic" narratives within historical contexts. Heroism, as depicted through these narratives, extends beyond individual acts of exceptional courage; it encompasses the broader sacrifices individuals make within the context of their actions, shedding light on the intricate interplay between personal agency and larger sociopolitical dynamics. Through these nuanced analyses, we aim to challenge conventional understandings of heroism and provide deeper insights into the complexities of resistance and sacrifice within the context of historical struggles for justice and freedom.

4. Case 1. Raiza Palatnik

> "I do not wish to hide behind anyone's back. I have permitted myself the luxury of thinking—and this, evidently, is not permitted. I ask the Court to give me the verdict that I deserve." Raiza Palatnik (lcn1c13 2020)

The story of 35-year-old Raiza Palatnik, a librarian from Ukraine, changed the lives of Jewish housewives around the world, inspiring the establishment of a new women's human rights movement (Rich 2015). For the world community, Palatnik became the symbol of the revival of Soviet Jewry with a brightly expressed Jewish identity—an intelligent, educated, erudite woman, she grew up in a Yiddish-speaking house with strong Jewish traditions. From childhood, she clearly demonstrated her Jewishness. In the eighth grade, she refused to learn Ukrainian, insisting that her mother tongue was Yiddish, which definitely confounded the school authorities (Shaffer 1974, p. 191).

On 1 December 1970, Palatnik was arrested and charged with disseminating over fifty pieces of samizdat—or Jewish underground literature (Komaromi 2012)—and fabrications of a slanderous nature that defamed the Soviet State and Social Order (Beermann 1971, p. 24). Palatnik refused to talk to KGB interrogators, announcing that she would answer only in her native tongue—Yiddish (lcn1c13 2020). After that, the Soviet propaganda machine began to act. After a series of intimidations typical of the Soviet system, Palatnik's fate could have gone in one of two ways—punitive medicine (forced psychiatric treatment) or imprisonment. In her case, both options were applied (Cohen 1971, p. 73). Palatnik was sent to a mental hospital for examination, but the psychiatrists reported that she was quite sane. After that, Palatnik was sentenced to a women's labor camp for two years (Gilbert 2014, p. 36). In the labor camp, Palatnik worked in a sewing room with 200 women prisoners. The work involved sewing gloves, overalls, underwear, jackets, and quilt covers. In 1968, the norm for jackets had been 100; in 1972 it was 145—using the same 10-year-old

equipment. There was no ventilation, first aid equipment, or disinfectant. If an accident occurred, the victim had to walk back to the residential zone for treatment (Amnesty International 1975, p. 76).

Palatnik's fate became known around the world due to the numerous actions of her sister Katya, who applied to the International Red Cross and different human rights organizations. She talked to the British press, joined (Gilkes 1989) hunger strikes on behalf of her sister, and became her voice around the world (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2015a).

Palatnik's prison sentence prompted housewives of Great Britain to be united and organize protests for her case, starting in May 1971 (Rich 2015). A group of thirty-five women, decorously dressed in black and all aged thirty-five or thereabouts, held a 35 h vigil outside the London Soviet Embassy for their counterpart from the Soviet Union—thirty-five-year-old Raiza Palatnik (Orbach 1978, p. 22).

The following week, one thousand women in black from all over the UK marched along Whitehall to the Foreign Office. This thus grew into a movement that was called "the 35's" or, more formally, "the 35's women's campaign for Soviet Jewry" (World Jewry 1972, p. 11).

The organization was heavily influenced by the women's liberation movement, which was at its height at the time (Schulz 2017). They did not have the numbers to organize massive rallies, but their unorthodox methods often landed them on newspaper front pages. The 35's made ironic use of various traditional stigmas that often defined the role of women, particularly housewives, in Western society (Borchorst and Siim 1987).

Their style was special—in addition to black clothes, participants often used shock to attract public attention. Using the description of the daily diet that they received from Ekaterina, Palatnik's sister, they organized a "prisoners" banquet on an ongoing basis. Prominent public figures were invited to partake in a ceremonial meal of the type that a dissident would eat every day while in prison (Gerlis 1996).

Another staple of the 35's demonstrations was the stage invasion of public events where Soviet cultural delegations of musicians, athletes, or dancers were performing. However, despite these numerous actions in her support and close influence from the world community, Palatnik served her entire prison term (Schroeter 1979, p. 92).

She was finally released after two years in December 1972 and was soon allowed to emigrate to Israel. She emigrated to Israel on 21 December 1972 and moved to Jerusalem (Eisenberg and Globe 1977, p. 177). Palatnik found work at the National Library, continuing the path that she started many years ago in Ukraine. Colleagues at the library characterized her as a professional in her field, a strikingly impressive, strong-willed woman, who never shied away from voicing her opinion and who was highly respected for her courage and successful struggle to reach Israel (The Librarians 2019). Despite this, after her arrival in Israel, Palatnik effectively disappeared from public view.

5. Case 2. Ida Nudel

"I just sat there as he ranted at me until the storm subsided. . . I said, 'Look at you. You're a man. You have a gun. You have many aides here who can kill me. Why are you shouting?' My manner and my spirit were my only weapons.. . . He was no fool. He calmed down and turned toward the window. A big, very strong man who had shouted hysterically at a small-town woman. However, I had bested him, and he knew it, and he let me go." Ida Nudel (Na'amat Woman: Magazine of Na'amat USA, the Women's Labor Zionist Organization of America 1986).

Ida Nudel, the "Guardian Angel" (Segal 1996) and "Angel of Mercy" (Zeiger 2017) of the Soviet Jewry Movement, became one of the most famous and prominent female prisoners of conscience. Her strong stand on Jewish rights for emigration and the presentation of the strict definition of its form as presented to the Soviet Government were widely known among activists, politicians, and public figures in the USSR and far beyond Soviet borders. She was a woman who stood up against a powerful and oppressive government during a time when it was not common for women to be involved in political activism (Segal 1996).

After losing her parents, the closest people to Nudel were her younger sister Elena and Elena's family—her husband and son (Nudel 1990). They all felt like strangers in a country where Jews were criminals by virtue of their very birth, surrounded by constant anti-Semitic attacks, persecution, and harassment. One of the key moments in their decision to leave the Soviet Union was Yasha, Elena's son. One day, Ida took Yasha out of kindergarten, as he was extremely stressed. He was running around the room hysterically and asked to be told that he was not a Jew (Nudel 1990, p. 12). Unable to tolerate anti-Semitism any longer, in 1972, Ida and her sister Elena applied for exit visas. However, Elena and her family received visas, but Ida did not. Her sister left for Israel, continuing to fight for Ida's rights (Affairs USCHC on F 1982, p. 35). Ida Nudel then joined the Jewish movement in Moscow. Her apartment became a headquarters for refuseniks and prisoners of conscience. She corresponded regularly with prisoners and their families and supporters; constantly visited camps; sent them parcels, food, or medicine; and advocated on their behalf with Camp Administrations and Soviet authorities (Affairs USCHC on F 1982, p. 24).

Nudel was a highly educated person (economist) with great skills in the English language, due to which she became a bridge between Jews in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and Jewish communities around the world, translating dozens of telephone calls, letters, and other important information as a voice of the Russian Jewish community (Dinstein 2020, p. 283). From foreign visitors across the world, Nudel asked for medicine, warm underwear, pens, chocolate, cigarettes, three-dimensional postcards, and other sought-after items. All these she used in order to bribe prison guards to protect Jewish prisoners to make their difficult life in jail easier; for example, to get them out of solitary confinement, ensure they received medical help when needed, and prevent them from being assigned hard labor tasks (Fishman-Duker 2013).

Inspired by the success of Jewish American women's human rights organizations, Nudel organized a women's group that conducted several demonstrations in 1977 against Soviet policy—"Jewish women against refusal" (Nudel 2015). One of these demonstrations was described by Galina Nizhnikova, a group activist, in her monograph, clearly indicating the special female nature of the event.

> We gathered ten women-refuseniks. I dropped my jacket and stayed in a yellow t-shirt with a star of David on my chest and on my back. In our hands were posters: "Let us go or put us in the coffins!" [. . .] We attached our posters to thin wooden sticks from baby cots (Nizhnikova 2014).

The Soviet government's reaction to Nudel's activity was remarkably exaggerated and cruel in its intimidation and pressure—she was dismissed from work, her apartment and person were frequently searched, she was followed by KGB agents, her mail was constantly censored and stolen, she was subjected to numerous arrests and beatings, she was humiliated by accusations of alcoholism and prostitution, and she was isolated from friends and other activists of the movement and even separated from the family (Singer and Elkind 1979).

On 1 June 1978, Ida Nudel hung a placard from her apartment balcony that said "KGB, give me a visa to Israel" (Beizer 2007). This action was determined by the Soviet Government as malicious hooliganism (Sharlet 1978) and she was sentenced to four years of internal exile in the village of Kryvosheino, Siberia, famous for its cruel winters and awful labor camps (Cotler 1991).

For several months in the camp, she was the only woman in a factory dormitory with criminals, murderers, and rapists (Stoltzfus 1981). She slept with a knife under her pillow to protect herself. She was struggling for food, warmth, and safety (Nudel 1990). No one in the village would help her since the KGB repeatedly warned the residents to stay away from her. Not one of her neighbors seemed to care if she lived or died (East USCHC on FAS on E and the M and Organizations USCHC on FAS on HR and I 1985, p. 59).

With her small stature (less than 1.5 m tall) and slim build (Kampeas 2021), Nudel was nevertheless a force that the Soviet regime had to contend with (Feldstein 2021) due to involvement and active campaigns to support her by politicians and media people

around the world—such as President Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz, actress Jane Fonda, film critic Judith Crist, and dramatist Alan Sillitoe—and international women's organizations—such as the Committee of 35's and Hadassah (Segal 1996, p. 82).

After being released in 1982, she was banned by Soviet authorities from returning to Moscow, suffering hardships in the Moldavian town of Bendery for five years (Daily Report: Soviet Union 1987, p. 47). She emigrated to Israel on 15 October 1987, receiving a hero's greetings at the Ben Gurion airport in Israel. She arrived to a red-carpet welcome, with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, and dozens of other Israeli officials and international celebrities, including actress Jane Fonda, US state Assemblyman Tom Hayden, and, of course, her sister Elena, waiting on the tarmac to greet her (Ross 1987). Nudel held her new identity card over her head so that a crowd of several thousand people watched the ceremony over closed-circuit television in another part of the airport (Ross 1987). This event had a great impact on the world community, marking the success of the international struggle for the freedom of Soviet Jews (Troen and Pinkus 2020).

Nudel's struggle and fate became a symbol for many women who participated in the Jewish movement; she has been called the "mother," the "guardian angel", and the "heart and soul" of the refusenik movement because of her tireless efforts on their behalf (Segal 1996). After emigration to Israel, she did not create a family, her only relatives being her sister and a nephew. Although she published memories of her experiences in the Soviet Union (Nudel 1990), she never seemed to comment in writing on her experiences in Israel. However, Nudel continued to struggle for the well-being of her community. In 1992, she established the nonprofit organization "Mother to mother", which was focused on promoting the education of the children of immigrants from Russia, especially among vulnerable populations (Karesh and Hurvitz 2005, p. 361). She died in 2021 at the age of 90 in Israel. Well-known politicians, including the President and the Prime Minister of Israel, commented on her heroism in the struggle for Soviet Jewry, yet the details of her life in Israel continue to elude attention (Kampeas 2021).

6. Case 3. Nadezhda Fradkova

> "I am a woman, [they say] so I do not know how to fight and struggle politically."
> Nadezda Fradkova (Jewish Women's Archive 2018).

The name of Nadezhda Fradkova from Leningrad, another prisoner of conscience, became known due to its association with the Soviet system of punitive medicine (Congress US 1986, p. 10255). During her active resistance to government policy—hunger strikes, appeals, and demonstrations—she was forcibly interned in psychiatric units in prisons and hospitals, where she was tortured with mind-altering drugs, and later was transferred to prison in 1984 for two years (Soviet Jewish Affairs 1984, p. 95).

Following her family's tradition, Fradkova pursued undergraduate and graduate degrees. She studied mathematical linguistics at Novosibirsk University before transferring to Leningrad University, from which she graduated with honors (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2015a). Later, she took a postgraduate course at Moscow State University (Nadezhda Fradkova Obituary—Brookline, MA 2018). She studied mathematical linguistics, which was not common among women in the USSR (Yanowitch and Dodge 2017).

Fradkova's first application for an exit visa was denied in 1978. She was subsequently fired from her job as a computer analyst (Congress US 1986). After waiting 4 years for a response to her request, she began a hunger strike in March 1983 to protest Soviet inaction. Her hunger strike lasted 6 weeks, during which time Jews from the Soviet Union and abroad became aware of her situation and petitioned the Soviet Government to grant her the right to emigrate. The authorities responded on 13 April 1983 by breaking into her apartment and taking her to a hospital where she was drugged and force-fed intravenously (Kozodoy et al. 1989).

Fradkova was thus periodically confined to a psychiatric hospital because authorities insisted that "she must be suffering from hallucinations since she insists on receiving an exit visa for Israel" (Congress US 1986). However, she continued to struggle for her right

to leave the Soviet Union. Symbolically, on 8 March 1984, on International Women's Day, she sent a statement to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR renouncing Soviet citizenship. In addition, she conducted a few more hunger strikes, some of them lasting approximately 40 days (Kozodoy et al. 1989). Due to these actions, on 25 April 1984, she was sentenced to two years after being found guilty of parasitism, a Soviet criminal offense for people without jobs (East USCHC on FAS on E and the M and Organizations USCHC on FAS on HR and I 1985, p. 38).

Aware of the parasite law and possible imprisonment, Fradkova unsuccessfully tried to find an appropriate job, despite her strong mathematical skills, years of study, and work experience. Soviet authorities, as often happened in such cases, issued strict orders against her hiring, leaving her a chance to find only work such as that of a babysitter or home cleaner (Congress US 1986, p. 10255). Thanks to the efforts of friends and the Jewish community, Fradkova's calls to the international community were published outside the Soviet Union (Kosharovsky 2017, p. 334). In her letters, she described in detail her difficult conditions and compulsory medical treatment. In one of her appeals published in the newsletter of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews in Washington on 3 November 1986, she wrote the following:

"When I was kept in the intensive ward, in Hospital No. 9, I was naked there. Everybody is naked there because it is a special ward. People are dying there so women and men are together. Sometimes I was naked and tied to the bed". In the same open letter, she recalled how once she woke up in the mental hospital: "I was naked with a KGB man near my bed. I tried to come up to the sink to rinse my hair only the KGB man was trying to prevent me from doing it. I was fighting with him, naked and quite wet, and truly quite delirious because of these narcotics" (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2015b).

The fact that such punishments were inflicted on a woman drew special attention from the American student movement. In the strategic meeting of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry in November 1986, led by its founder Yaakov Birnbaum, Nadezda Fradkova and Yosef Begun, another prisoner of conscience, were chosen as symbols of the Student struggle: "We should organize campaigns for two people: Nadezhda Fradkova because she is a woman we can identify with, and Yosef Begun, because he is the "greatest hero" of Soviet Jews" (Himmelfarb and Singer 1984, p. 248).

Fradkova also received support from other international organizations, including the Committee of 35's and the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews. However, despite demonstrations and actions on her behalf, her case was not reconsidered by the authorities, and she served her entire prison term (Kosharovsky 2017).

Completing her two-year labor camp sentence on 9 August 1986, she returned to Leningrad. Upon her return, she discovered that Soviet officials had appropriated her apartment while she was in prison. Fradkova repeatedly applied for permission to emigrate but was refused (Hannibal 1986, 1987).

Ultimately, Fradkova arrived in Israel on 20 June 1987 and was the first woman prisoner of conscience who emigrated from the USSR (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 2015a). A few years later, she moved to the Boston area of the USA, where she died on 15 June 2018 (Jewish Women's Archive 2018).

The hardships she experienced—Soviet anti-Semitism and oppression, her time in Soviet prison, labor camps, and inhumane mental hospitals—inevitably took a toll on her, both physically and mentally. She left no family, and her life, especially in later years, was overshadowed by depression, and likely other conditions that went undiagnosed and untreated. Natasha Ratner, a former Jewish activist in Moscow and the best friend of Fradkova, said at her funeral ceremony, "I'm saddened to think what she might have become: an outstanding scientist, a loving wife and mother, a friend enriching the lives of many; such great potential, stolen from her by the dark cloud of depression and anxiety" (Nadezhda Fradkova Obituary—Brookline, MA 2018).

7. Conclusions

In this article, we analyzed the contribution of women to the Jewish national resistance movement in the Soviet Union and drew a parallel between the destinies of prominent female activists. In addition, we explored the reasons that they became symbols of heroism and inspired many international organizations to protest and take active steps in favor of Soviet Jews (Altshuler 2005). Each of these women had a unique story, yet a deep exploration shows that their stories have many similarities, such as multiple denials of their requests to emigrate to Israel, loss of jobs, imprisonment, and, as a result, troubled personal lives. None of them created a family or had children. In contrast to their male refusenik counterparts in Israel, none of them spoke about fulfilling professional career goals despite excellent educational backgrounds. Examples include the political and public success of Natan Sharansky, Yuli Edelstein, Yuri Stern, and Yuli Kosharovsky (Linde 2016).

The uniqueness of women's resilience in this struggle stemmed from the specific challenges they faced, which often required a unique set of personal characteristics and coping mechanisms. They developed a range of tactics, including seeking support from other women and engaging in collective action with different international human rights activists. These "heroic" mechanisms were useful in terms of political protest but at the same time may have been stumbling blocks in their own personal lives. Going out on their warpath, these women had to learn how to speak several languages, both the language of the Soviet government that appealed to the laws and regulations of the Soviet State and the language of international relations to make one's message relevant beyond Jewish circles. Most critically, however, they had to learn to speak the language of local Jewish activism and resistance. That is, lacking personal family connections, these women had to cultivate the skill of building a collective means to disseminate their message. This was a social skill critical for resistance, but not one that can be translated easily to one's personal life. Notably, upon arrival in Israel, many of these women resistance leaders lived very solitary lives—such as Yehudit Nepomniashy, Ruth Alexandrovich, and Raiza Palatnik (Kosharovsky 2017). These women stood up against a powerful and oppressive government during a time when it was not common for women to be involved in political activism.

We have shown that female activism represented a dual phenomenon that was at one and the same time both heroic and sacrificial. Activism deeply affected different aspects of their lives. It included social, cultural, and economic barriers; persecution; and threats to their personal safety and well-being. On the one hand, they were inspiring leaders for their communities; on the other, they paid a high personal cost. They fought for the better future of Soviet Jews but did not succeed in the fight for their own happiness or personal self-fulfillment.

Upon arrival in Israel, many of them received a warm welcome at the airport and gave solo speeches in Parliament and interviews in well-known newspapers and magazines. However, then came the routine life of ordinary citizens. Indicative in this case is a video interview with Tina Brodetskaya, a prisoner of conscience from Moscow, who tells about unsuccessful attempts to be active in a new country after an incredible history of heroism in the USSR (*Interviews with Soviet Jewry Activists*, 2015–2018). She explained that this became useless in Israel.

The impact of women's activism in the Soviet Jewry movement was significant and visible. The difficulties they had to go through as women resonated strongly on the stage of world politics. The government of the Soviet Union knew this and, in order not to spoil its image in the international arena, tried in every possible way to avoid confrontation with Jewish female activists. Indeed, according to some refuseniks themselves, women's resistance caused the establishment of new organizations such as the Committee of 35's and increased awareness of existing ones (Heitman 1992). That is why prison sentences for these women were made on only rare occasions. Their voices were heard.

Importantly, the wave of activism and solidarity by different Jewish organizations around the world, driven by the personal stories of Ida Nudel, Raiza Palatnik, and Nadezda Fradkova, pushed various governmental institutions to take a more active role in the

defense of Soviet Jewry, manifested by increased pressure on the Soviet government as well as informational, political, and legal support for the Jewish movement (Hirsch 2010).

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