**Abstract**: Israel is a multicultural immigration country that since its creation accepted millions of Jews from all over the world. One of the largest immigrant groups in Israel is that of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), about one million of whom arrived in the 1990s. The present chapter reviews the empirical and theoretical literature on the historical and sociocultural characteristics of FSU immigrants as well as on their adjustment in the Israeli society. Specifically, the chapter describes how first and 1.5 generations of FSU immigrants had been affected by the multicultural Israeli society, and how they in turn affected Israel on the economic, social and cultural levels. The perspective of acculturation as a two-way process is proposed to analyze the reciprocal cross-cultural exchange of the FSU immigrants and the majority groups in the Israeli society.

Running Head Right-hand: Acculturation as a Two-Way Process

Running Head Left-hand: Evgeny Knaifel

Chapter 24

Acculturation as a Two-Way Process

Immigrants From the Former Soviet Union in Israel

Evgeny Knaifel

Introduction

Israel is a multicultural immigration country that since its creation accepted millions of Jews from all over the world. Most Jewish citizens that live in the country have a personal or familial background of migration (ICBS, 2021). Together with Arab Israelis and other ethno-national minorities who live in Israel, this country’s population comprises a rich and varied cultural, ethnic, national, religious and lingual fabric. One of the largest immigrant groups in the country are immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU). To date, more than 1.2 million Russian-speaking first- and second-generation immigrants live in Israel (ICBS, 2021). They came in the largest wave of migration in the history of the country and increased the Jews population of Israel by about 16% (Konstantinov, 2015).

The huge scope of their migration, together with their unique cultural capital, provides the group of FSU immigrants with visibility, presence and a voice that they translated into social, cultural and political power that affects the Israeli society. Yet at the same time, FSU immigrants were affected by the Israeli majority society. The present chapter reviews empirical and theoretical literature on the acculturation of FSU immigrants in Israel 30 years after their mass arrival.

The chapter focuses on three issues:

• Processes of integration of FSU immigrants into the Israeli society.

• Changes that occurred in this immigrant group in the course of their interaction with the Israeli society.

• Changes that occurred in the Israeli society in the course of its interaction with FSU immigrants.

Acculturation Processes in Migration

Migration and cross-cultural transition have in the past decades become normative and common life events. Such transitions force immigrants to disconnect from personal, social, emotional and cognitive sources of support and to adjust to a new and unfamiliar social environment.

The term “acculturation” is used to describe changes that immigrants go through in the transition from one country to another and changes that occur in the majority group as a result of the encounter with immigrants (Sam and Berry, 2010). These changes may be expressed on the group level in physical, biological, political, economic, cultural and social spheres. On the individual level, they may be expressed in behavior, values, attitudes, skills, motivations as well as in personal and ethnic identity. Adaptation to the new society is the positive outcome of acculturation. The negative outcome may be social marginalization of immigrants, exclusion and accompanying acculturative stress and psychological distress (Berry, 1997; Kim, 2001).

Although the original definition of acculturation relates to changes of the original culture patterns of either or both groups as a result of continuous first-hand contact between them (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1936, p. 149–52), most popular acculturation models focus only on changes in the immigrant groups (Berry, 1997; Kim, 2001; Schwartz, Montgomery, and Briones, 2006).

This one-sidedness has been recently corrected by the cultural fusion theory (Croucher and Kramer, 2017). The authors argue that as the newcomer and the dominant cultural groups are interacting together, in an open system, it is impossible for the dominant culture to not be affected to some extent by the introduction of new cultural practices, beliefs, norms and so forth.

This chapter embraces this integrative perspective to address changes in the group of FSU immigrants and in the Israeli majority society in the course of the cross-cultural encounter between them.

Immigrants From the Former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel – Historical Background

Three major waves of immigration arrived in Israel from Russia, the Soviet Union (USSR) and the former Soviet Union (FSU). Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel (1881–1948), 120,000 immigrants arrived and comprised about a fifth of all immigrants to the land of Israel (Sikron, 2012). Some of them were pioneers, with socialist-liberal beliefs, inspired by the Zionist ideology and became the founding fathers of the Jewish state. Others fled the rising waves of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe.

In the first two decades following the establishment of the State of Israel (1948–69), only 20,000 immigrants arrived from the USSR as the Soviet regime did not allow the Jews to leave (Gitelman, 2001). This changed dramatically in the 1970s, when 163,000 USSR Jews were allowed to immigrate to Israel and an additional 65,000 to the USA (Sikron, 2012). Many of these immigrants were motivated by an ethno-national reawakening and reconnection to their culture, tradition and religion. Only 40% came from large cities in the European part of the USSR, such as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev. Most came from the Soviet “periphery” such as Georgia, central Asia and West Ukraine, where the connection to the Jewish tradition and Zionism prevailed in spite of the efforts of the regime to extinguish it (Gitelman, 2001). It is likely that this background contributed to the relatively smooth integration of these immigrants in the country (Remennick, 2015a).

Since 1989 until the 2015, over one million immigrants from the FSU came to Israel (Sheps, 2016). This is the largest ethnic group that ever immigrated to Israel (Sikron, 2012). Considering the size of the local Israeli population – to date 9, 289,800, with 6,873,900 Jews (ICBS, 2021) – this is an exceptional number of immigrants in comparison to other immigration countries.

Unlike in the previous waves of immigration, few of these immigrants were motivated by Zionism or the sense of affiliation with Jewishness. Most of them were pushed out by the political, economic and physical insecurity that reigned in their homeland at the end of the Soviet era (Remennick, 2015a; Smooha, 2008). This migration wave began by the end of the 1980s, following political changes in the USSR that eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet regime. Democratization processes in the USSR (“glasnost” and “perestroika”) brought about economic deterioration and a raise of anti-Semitism, which motivated most of USSR immigrants to seek a safer and better future for their children outside their homeland (Al-Haj, 2019). Restrictions on their immigration to the USA, due to Israeli government’s pressure, directed an increasing stream of immigrants to Israel (Smooha, 2008). The peak of this wave of immigration took place in the years 1990 and 1991, when within one and a half years, 320,000 immigrants arrived in Israel. Altogether, 1.6 million Soviet Jews and their family members emigrated from the FSU between 1989 and 2006. About one million (979,000) arrived in Israel, 325,000 in the USA, 219,000 in Germany and the rest in other countries (Tolts, 2009).

Demographic and Cultural Background of Immigrants From the FSU in Israel

Several characteristics make immigrants from the FSU in Israel a unique group. Especially noticeable is their human capital: in the early 1990s, this was a very highly educated group with 58% of immigrants holding academic education, as compared to only 25% in the Israeli local population at that time (Remennick, 2013). This brought to the country thousands of physicians, engineers, architects, teachers, actors, writers, journalists, scientists etc.

In terms of family structure, the most prominent characteristics of FSU immigrants (primarily of those from the European parts) is the small family unit. Most of these families have one or two children (average 1.7), while local Jewish families in Israel are much larger (average 2.9) (Tolts, 2009). A high rate of single-parent families also typifies this group: 14% of FSU immigrant children under the age of 17 were living in single-parent families, typically headed by women, while only 8% of their peers in the local population. (Sheps, 2016). In the 1990s, 20% of immigrant families from FSU lived in multigenerational households (children, parents and grandparents) with high involvement of elderly parents in the lives of their children and grandchildren (Lowenstein, 2002).

In terms of culture, many Jews who immigrated from FSU regard themselves as belonging to “intelligentsia” – the social class of educated people in the academic, intellectual and cultural professions, who were adept in the Russian culture and lead the shaping of this culture (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2012). This cultural identity, and the affiliation with the cultural elite in their homeland, is the main component of the cultural capital of FSU immigrants. It is shared by immigrants who came from different former republics of the USSR, young and old, men and women and those who immigrated to Germany, USA and Israel (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2012).

Two additional features mold their worldview after emigration: generations’ long socialization to the Soviet regime and cultural collectivism (Mirsky, 2001). This background produces ambivalence toward the establishment: fear and suspicion on the one hand, and dependence and an external focus of control, on the other hand. The ambivalence reflects their experience in a totalitarian socialist society that attempted to create unity and equality among people through mechanisms of oppression and force.

Despite shared features, FSU immigrants are far from a uniform group and there are differences among them in ethnicity and culture. Three differentiating factors may affect these immigrants’ adjustment in the Israeli society.

More than 30% of FSU immigrants are not recognized as Jews by the Jewish law and jurisprudence (Halacha), which guides the recognition of nationality in Israel (Al-Haj, 2019). By the Halachic definition, a Jew is one born to a Jewish mother or undergone an orthodox conversion. These immigrants were allowed to come to Israel based on the “Law of Return,” passed soon after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1950. According to this law, those entitled to immigrate to Israel are Halachic Jews as well as their children and immediate family members. In 1970, the law was expanded to include the grandchildren of Jews. Among these immigrants, there are indeed many non-Jews with little independent motivation to adapt in Israel or sense of belonging to its people or culture. However, there are also many among them who in the FSU, where nationality was defined by the father, were raised as Jews, considered Jews by their environment and discriminated against because of that. The fact that they are not recognized as Jews in the Jewish state is highly frustrating and insulting for them (Cohen and Susser, 2009; Lerner, 2015).

Another difference within the group of FSU immigrants is between the Jews of European (Ashkenazi) origin and non-European Jews (Sephardi). The former, who came from the Slavic and Baltic lands, such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, make up about 85% of the total FSU immigrants. They are the bearers of the Russian-European culture and rather removed from their Jewish roots. The small group of Sephardi Jews who came from Central Asia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the North Caucasus were more closely connected to their Jewish identity (Remennick, 2015a). It would be plausible to assume that the acculturation patterns of these two ethno-cultural groups would differ.

A very important factor that differentiates between FSU immigrants is the time of their arrival in Israel. Those who immigrated at the beginning of the 1990s (1989–95) differ in their characteristics from those who came in the late 1990s and beginning of 2000s. With time, the rate of immigrants with academic education dropped as did the rate of those coming from the central cities such as Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev, and the rate of non-Jews and those coming from the periphery rose (Sikron, 2012). The rate of those who suffered from familial and social problems prior to their immigration also rose among the later immigrants because of the economic crisis and chaotic reality that prevailed in the post-Soviet era in the 1990s. The present chapter focuses mostly on immigrants who arrived in Israel in the beginning of the 1990s and represent the more “classical” profile of Jews from FSU.

The Adjustment of FSU Immigrants in the Israeli Society

In the first decades of its existence, Israel practiced a “melting pot” policy toward new immigrants. On the official and nonofficial levels, new arrivals were pressured to promptly adopt Israeli values, modes of behavior and thought and “become Israelis.” With time, this policy changed and by the 1990s was characterized by a multicultural approach with a lesser involvement of the state in the process and a higher legitimization of cultural variety (Smooha, 2008).

These changes affected the adjustment of immigrants from the FSU. On the occupational level, the adjustment of FSU immigrants was fast because of their education and commitment to values of work. However, because of language barriers and the lack of social connections, a competitive structure of the Israeli labor market as well as its small size, many of them were forced to accept employment not in their profession, to work for long hours in odd menial jobs, often without minimal social benefits (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2011). Only one-third of FSU immigrants with academic education continued working in their original professions, while others suffered a decline in their occupational status (Remennick, 2013).

Even at the present, 30 years following the wave of immigration from the FSU, the average income of immigrant families is 30% lower than that of native Israeli families (Kushnirovich, 2018). One of the factors that contribute to the intensification of economic difficulties for all immigrants in Israel is the high cost of living and the lack of public housing. Immigrants who succeeded in acquiring an apartment or obtaining public housing typically report a better adjustment and economic status than those who are forced to continue renting housing in the free market (Konstantinov, 2015).

On the cultural level, most FSU immigrants preserve the culture of their country of descent while gradually adopting cultural characteristics from their present social environment. Maintenance of their culture of origin is expressed first of all in the preservation of their language – Russian is the main language used in the family and they consume Russian language media (Ellis and Lemesh, 2011). Second, they remain loyal to the high value of education that characterized their home culture and have established special kindergartens and schools for their children. Political parties funded by FSU immigrants and addressing this constituency, such as “Israel be-Aliya”[[1]](#endnote-1) in the past and “Israel Beiteinu”[[2]](#endnote-2) in the present, have become part of the political life in Israel (Al-Haj, 2019). And to maintain their consumption patterns, FSU immigrants established in Israel marketing and food networks unique to their community (Bernstein, 2010).

Generally, in the first years following immigration, FSU immigrants conserve more their culture of origin, but with time, they gradually adopt the Israeli culture, language and traditions and become integrated in the occupational, social, cultural and political spheres (Al-Haj, 2019; Amit, 2012; Smooha, 2008).

This integration processes – the preservation of the culture of origin and parallel acquisition of the new culture is reflected in the cultural identity of FSU immigrants in Israel. By the end of the 1990s, most FSU immigrants defined their main identity as “Russian” (47%) or “Jewish” (45%), and only 8% defined themselves as primarily “Israeli” (Lissitsa and Peres, 2000). In 2010, however, 42% considered themselves primarily “Jewish,” 38% primarily “Israeli” and only 20% primarily “Russian” (Konstantinov, 2015). Jewish identity was stronger among the older immigrants, and the Israeli identity was stronger among the younger immigrants. Interestingly, 41.5% of non-Jewish immigrants chose to define themselves as primarily “Israelis” and 12.8% as Jewish (Leshem, 2008).

Looking at the adaptation of FSU immigrants through the lenses of Berry’s (1997) acculturation model, it was found that they opt for the integration strategy (involvement in the host culture while preserving their culture of origin) and do not at all apply strategies of assimilation (total assimilation in the new culture) or marginalization (rejecting both cultures) (Lissitsa and Bokek-Cohen, 2012. It was also found that mainly young immigrants, women, immigrants with academic education and a longer time of stay in the country chose the integration strategy. Men, older immigrants and those with lower income chose the strategy of segregation (clinging to the culture of origin and rejecting the new culture).These choices differ from those of Soviet immigrants in the 1970s, who typically preferred “assimilation” – rejection of the old culture and adoption of the new one (Remennick, 2015a).

In recent years, many studies focus on the 1.5 generations of FSU immigrants, those who came in the 1990s as children or adolescents (ages 5–15) and are now in their 30s and 40s. Studies indicate that 1.5 generations of FSU immigrants in Israel feel “integrated but distinct” (Remennick and Prashizky, 2019). The process of their adaptation is fragmented: in some areas, they act according to local norms and show good adjustment skills as well as educational, occupational and social mobility. In other spheres, they hold on to “Russian” models of behavior and norms. The focus on 1.5 generations helps explore areas where intergenerational changes occurred or did not occur among FSU immigrants during their prolonged interaction with the local Israeli society.

Acculturation as a Two-Way Process

This chapter adopts the two-way model of acculturation that postulates a reciprocal process of change of the minority group and the majority society. Described will be changes that took place among FSU immigrants during their encounter with the Israeli society and changes that took place in the majority Israeli culture in the course of the encounter with FSU immigrants.

The Impact of the Israeli Society on FSU Immigrants

Cultural changes in the FSU immigrants’ community are particularly noticeable among 1.5 generations of immigrants, who unlike their parents lived most of their lives in Israel. These changes relate to parental practices, attitudes toward Jewish traditions and religion and toward the culture of Mizrahi[[3]](#endnote-3) Israelis.

Parental Practices

Studies on parents in immigrant families from the FSU in Israel reveal their adherence to educational values and models from their homeland (Shor, 1999; Slonim-Nevo, Shraga and Mirsky, 1999; Yakhnich, 2016). Scholars suggest that even after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the relationships between parents and children in FSU families reflected in many ways the relationships between the state and citizens in the totalitarian-collectivistic societies: cohesion, closeness and mutual assistance on one hand, and authoritarian parental style, with high level of control and low level of child autonomy, on the other hand (Mirsky, 2001; Slonim-Nevo et al., 1999). These attitudes were expressed in over-involvement of parents in their children’s life, disapproval of the expression of negative emotions, expectations for high accomplishments and conformity and sometimes – physical punishment (Shor, 1999). Authoritarian-authoritative parental style and rigid parental practices with an emphasis on high academic achievements were also found among post-Soviet immigrants in recent studies (Yakhnich, 2016).

In contrast, in the past 50 years, the Israeli society has given preference to the values of individualism, self-actualization and autonomy of the child over obedience and conformity. The shift from the initially collectivistic values occurred in Israel during the 60s and the 70s, much under the influence of social movements and changes that took place at that time in the US (Roer-Strier and Rivlis, 1998). Scholars suggest that the relationships between parents and children in Israel are typified by permissive parental style: low level of control and high level of child autonomy, with minimal supervision of child’s behavior (Roer-Strier and Rivlis, 1998; Slone, Shechner, and Farah, 2012).

The gap between the authoritarian parental style of FSU immigrants and the liberal-permissive one in most of the Israeli society created difficulties in parent-child relationships in immigrant families (Dwairy and Dor, 2009). Yet while preserving elements of parenting from their homeland, over time, immigrants adopted new elements from the new society.

Studies on FSU immigrants from 1.5 generations illustrate this process. Parents from 1.5 generations were shown to have adopted an integrative parenting style that combines high involvement in their children’s academic work but at the same time encourages and supports their independence (Remennick, 2015b). This, although their own parents were still clinging to the authoritarian-authoritative style. The fact that such changes occurred within the same family supports the proposition that the changes in 1.5 generations were affected by cultural factors outside the family. Other studies also support the notion that 1.5-generation immigrants from FSU tend to adopt a more liberal and permissive style of parental practices that is typical in Israel (Shein, 2016). It appears that having lived in the Israeli society from childhood, 1.5-generation immigrants from the FSU internalized local norms through their contacts with major socialization agents such as native-born friends, the educational system and the Israeli army (IDF).

Attitudes Toward Jewish Traditions and Religion

The Soviet regime practically succeeded in the abolition of religion producing a secular-atheistic society (Gitelman, 2001). FSU immigrants who arrived in Israel in the 1990s were indeed secular and very few felt any affinity with religion. In a survey held in 1993, a very low level of religious observance was found among FSU immigrants (Leshem, 2001): 76% of respondents defined themselves as “secular,” observing no religious rituals in their daily lives, 16% defined themselves as “traditional,” observing some Jewish commandments and 8% defined themselves as “religious,” observing all or most Jewish commandments and rituals. In contrast, most of Jewish Israelis at that time reported a close affinity with tradition or Judaism, and only 21% reported that they were “secular” (Leshem, 2001).

More recent studies shed light on how life in an ethno-religious society such as Israel may affect religious beliefs and practices of FSU immigrants. In a survey 25 years after their immigration (Sheps, 2016), most FSU immigrants reported that they were “secular” (67%), 25% reported being “traditional” and 8% “religious.” In the general population, the rate of “secular” was lower (40%), of “traditional” similar (24%) and of “religious” much higher (36%). Although most FSU immigrants are still secular, there is a decrease in this category (from 76% to 67%) and a noticeable increase in those who define themselves as “traditional” (from 16% to 25%).

In a study that explored in detail the variety of FSU’s immigrants’ perceptions of Jewish tradition and religion, more than half (55%) reported that they maintained a secular lifestyle but also some affiliation with Jewish traditions such as lighting Hanukkah candles and participating in Passover traditional meal (Remennick and Prashizky, 2012). Most emphasized their interest in the spiritual contents rather than in the ritual aspects of Jewish traditions. Similar results were obtained in survey of first-generation (Sikron, 2012) and 1.5-generation FSU immigrants in Israel (Remennick and Prashizky, 2019).

In fact, the distribution of FSU immigrants on the religious–secular continuum begins to resemble the typical Israeli distribution in the age of “post-secularism”(Ben-Porat, 2013). Only a small minority consistently define themselves as secular (or atheists). But many in this group participate, out of respect, in everyday Jewish traditions observed in Israel. The rest define themselves as “spiritual” and take a more active part in practicing Jewish traditions; for example, they may study Kabbala or join New Age movements (Remennick and Prashizky, 2012).

These changes can be hardly attributed to an increase in religiosity of FSU immigrants and need be rather interpreted as an attempt to adjust and be part of the Jewish-Israeli society. Acquaintance with Jewish traditions and observance of some common rituals play a major role in the structuring of Jewish-Israeli identity. It appears that many FSU immigrants adopt these aspects into their identity to belong to the Israeli collective (Lerner, 2015).

Attitudes Toward the Mizrahi Culture

When they arrived in Israel in the 90s, many FSU immigrants held orientalist[[4]](#endnote-4) attitudes toward Jews from Arab countries whom they met in Israel (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2004; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, 2012; Shumsky, 2004). This position was supported by the patronizing Western-European model that developed in the Russian imperialistic culture especially toward peoples of Caucasus and Middle Asia (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, 2004). In the eyes of the Jewish-Russian “intelligentsia,” the culture of Jews from Mediterranean and Islamic countries appeared inferior and primitive as compared to the Russian-European culture (Shumsky, 2004). FSU immigrants held on to their orientalist perspective, in the hope of finding their place and gaining upward social mobility in the very much split and multicultural Israeli society (Lerner, Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder, 2007). Mutual hostility and conflictual relationships between them and Mizrahi Jews, often covered in the media in the 90s, fed this attitude.

However, in the past two decades, FSU immigrants began creating affinity with the Mizrahi culture. This trend is especially visible in 1.5 generations, who have discarded their parents’ hostility and fear and opened themselves to close interactions with Mizrahi Jews. This transition is expressed among other things in increased rate of marriages between FSU immigrants of 1.5 generations and Mizrahi Israelis (Lomsky-Feder and Leibovitz, 2010) as well as cultural collaborations between FSU-immigrant and Mizrahi intellectuals and artists (Prashizky, 2019). Another manifestation of FSU immigrants’ rapprochement with the Mizrahi culture is manifested in their adoption of Mizrahi cultural components into their culture. For example, 1.5-generation FSU immigrants celebrate “Russian Mimouna” – a term borrowed from a traditional celebration of Jews descending from North-West Africa, where they combine Russian and Moroccan food and music (Prashizky, 2019).

Researchers suggest that this transition was induced by the fact that many young FSU immigrants grew up in the geographical and social proximity of Mizrahi Israelis, especially in the periphery of the country and developed identification with them and their culture (Idzinski, 2014). Other scholars submit that this affinity is also an expression of solidarity and of the awareness that both FSU immigrants and Mizrahi Israelis suffer discrimination and exclusion (Prashizky and Remennick, 2016). Moreover, they suggest that many 1.5-generation activists see the Mizrahi protest of the 1970s[[5]](#endnote-5) as a model for the “Russian Ethnic” protest that started rising recently against religious procedures of marriage and burial as well as the generally racist and sexist attitudes toward women of Russian origin in the Israeli society (Lemish, 2000; Prashizky and Remennick, 2016).

The Impact of FSU Immigrants on the Israeli Society

The impact of FSU immigrants on the Israeli society is apparent on the political, economic, social and cultural levels. The phenomena underscored here will be their impact on the economy, on secularization in the public spaces and introduction of new commemoration days and holidays.

Market Economy

The educational capital of FSU immigrants significantly affected the market economy in Israel. In the Soviet society, where economic capital was ideologically “cancelled,” education provided social status, prestige and access to symbolic and cultural assets, and higher education institutions became the arena where Jews could prove their skills and talents (Lerner et al., 2007).

In Israel, FSU immigrants were highly motivated to succeed in the competitive local labor market (Remennick, 2013). At the same time, the state had a substantial interest to integrate high quality and educated manpower that could strengthen its economy. This was especially crucial as from the mid-1980s, Israeli economy was in a deep crisis with high inflation rates: in 1985, the monthly inflation rate was 27.49% (Ben-Bassat, 2002). The economic crisis was resolved by government intervention and by the end of 1990, the inflation rate dropped to 10% and in 2000, it was close to 0%. However, some economists claim that FSU immigrants contributed to this transition from crisis to growth (Ben-Bassat, 2002; Eckstein and Weiss, 1998).

In a short time, the Israeli economy grew by 20% (Bar, 2012), much thanks to the human and professional capital of FSU immigrants. This trend is especially visible in the high-tech industry, medicine and science. For example, one-third of those employed in Israeli high-tech are FSU immigrants (Cohen-Goldner, 2006), and this industry is the main growth engine of the Israeli economy (Bar, 2012).

Another professional field where the influence of FSU immigrants is noticeable is medicine and paramedical professions. In the 1990s, 14,000 physicians came to Israel from FSU, doubling the number of physicians in the country (Nirel, 1999). About 8,000 immigrant physicians were integrated in their profession in Israel. The cost of training a physician is about $50,000 therefore, this saved the Israeli economy about 4 billion dollars (Bar, 2012). It can be argued that the present crisis in the Israeli health system has to do with the exit of this cadre of FSU physicians from the labor force as they have reached the retirement age.

The influence of FSU immigrants is also felt in the field of science. Only between 1989 and 1991, 6,000 scientists from FSU immigrated to Israel, while at this time local scientists numbered 8,000 (Geva-May, 2000). The contribution of FSU immigrant scientists to the Israeli academia was found to be larger than that of any other ethnic group (Davidovitch, Soen, and Sinuany-Stern, 2010).

Secularization in Public Spaces

Israel was established as a Jewish and democratic state.

. Due to political agreements at the time, parallel to democratic-liberal structure of the state, a considerable power over the everyday life of Israelis is in the hands of the religious establishment. This is reflected in the designation of Shabbat (Saturday) as a day of rest, with a mandatory shutting down of stores and public services, the mandatory observance of Jewish dietary rules (kashrut) in the public space and the Orthodox monopoly over burial, marriage and divorce (Ben-Porat, 2013; Cohen and Susser, 2009).

Yet in the past two decades, secularization processes have taken place in the public domain in Israel, and they have undermined the status quo[[6]](#endnote-6) that was observed until the 1990s. Tens of shopping centers are open on Shabbat, hundreds of stores sell non-kosher foods, thousands of couples get married outside the orthodox rabbinical establishment, gay parades take place in major cities and civil graveyards make alternative burial possible. All these constitute major changes in daily life in the country.

Ben-Porat (2013) claims that in addition to universal trends in Western societies of increase in democratic-liberal values and human rights movements that encourage secularization, in Israel, FSU immigrants contribute to this process. Because of their large numbers, and a high rate of non-Jews among them, as well as their culture consumption and leisure habits, they challenged the religious conservatism, changed the power relations in the society and contributed to the development of cultural pluralism in central public spaces.

One conspicuous example is the food stores that FSU immigrants opened during the 90s. These stores sell nonkosher products, standard in Russian cuisine. It was argued in a study of food consumption habits of FSU immigrants in Israel and Germany that the foods offered in these stores reflect not only their habitual products but also a challenge to the collective Jewish (kosher) identity (Bernstein, 2010). The “Russian” stores also affect food preference of the local population. The transformation of the largest nonkosher supermarket chain in Israel, “Tiv Taam,” illustrates this process. From a single store opened in Tel Aviv in 1989 to cater to the needs of the Russian-speaking community, it grew into a chain of supermarkets all over the country and became well known and prestigious among secular Israelis as well (Ben-Porat, 2013). It provides public legitimization to the consumption of nonkosher foods and to the opening of additional stores and chains on Shabbat (Bernstein, 2010).

Other secularization processes take place due to lack of an alternative. For example, civil marriages outside Israel are the only path to get married for FSU immigrants who are not recognized as Jews by the rabbinical establishment (Prashizky and Remennick, 2016). At the same time, more and more Israel-born secular couples who could have gotten married in Israel, opt not to do so, as a protest against the religious ritual or in search for an alternative and a meaningful one. These tendencies at secularization of marriage forced the state to grant some acknowledgment to civil marriages. Some scholars suggest that the inspiration for resisting religious coercion and struggling for the freedom of expression and for basic civil rights was to a large degree the contribution of FSU immigrants (Ben-Porat, 2013; Cohen and Susser, 2009).

In fact, the social dispute around FSU immigrants awoke old secular ideological battles that were previously silenced for political reasons. But they could not be silenced any longer as they had to do with everyday survival needs of the immigrants. For example, immigrants’ economic inability to purchase a car reawaked the dispute around public transportation on Shabbat and led to local initiatives that started operating public buses on Shabbat. It appears that the cultural and contextual background of FSU immigrants challenges the status quo arrangements and the monopoly of the orthodox religious establishment in Israel. This encourages not only secularization processes in modern Israel but also cultural pluralism vis-à-vis various social minorities such as for example, the LGBQT community.

New Commemoration Days and Holidays

The Holocaust is an essential part of the collective traumatic memory in Israel. It is inseparable from the narrative of Jewish history and provides practical and moral legitimization to the existence of Israel as the National Home of the Jewish people (Zerubavel, 1995). The Israeli society perceives the Holocaust as a matchless event of anti-Semitism, persecution, victimization, suffering and genocide of the Jews and discards any attempt to render it a universal symbol (Levy and Sznaider, 2005).

In contrast, in the collective Soviet memory, the Holocaust holds a different place with emphasis on heroism and resistance and the victory over the Nazis in what was termed in the USSR “The Big Patriotic War.” About 700,000 Jewish soldiers fought in the ranks of the Red Army or the Partisans during WWII and half of them were killed (Prashizky and Remennick, 2018). Many Jews served in commanding positions in the Red Army, and thousands were decorated for bravery. But despite this involvement of Jewish soldiers, the 9th of May – the Victory Day, when the capitulation agreement was signed by Nazi Germany and has been celebrated as one of the central holidays in the FSU – was never celebrated in Israel. Scholars suggest that one of the reasons for this may have been the exclusive claim of Zionism on heroism of Jewish soldiers (Roberman, 2007).

FSU immigrants led in Israel a transformation regarding public commemoration of the Holocaust toward an emphasis on the heroic involvement of Soviet Jews in the victory over Nazi Germany and through it, in the establishment of the State of Israel three years after WWII ended. Jewish Veterans of WWII who had immigrated to Israel initiated this transformation. They refused to adopt the hegemonic Israeli Holocaust memory and the passive identity of victims. Instead, they centered the discourse on the strength and heroism of Jewish soldiers and demanded recognition and inclusion through the establishment of museums and monuments (Roberman, 2007). They started to hold parades on the 9th of May in central Israeli cities.

The grandchildren of these veterans, 1.5-generation FSU immigrants, picked up this struggle in the years 2012–16 (Prashizky and Remennick, 2018). They demanded that the 9th of May become a public Israeli commemoration day to remind of the importance of the victory over Nazi’s Germany to the Israeli context. Through social networks, these young immigrants disseminated family narratives that commemorated the heroism of their relatives and put before the Israeli public a different narrative on Jews in the Holocaust. Finally, in 2017, the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) recognized the 9th of May as a state commemoration day.

Like the 9th of May, other holiday days that were popular in the Russian-Soviet culture are becoming familiar and more widely celebrated in Israel, such as the New Year (Novyi God) on December 31 and the International Women’s Day on March 8.

Final Thoughts

The present chapter reviews empirical and theoretical literature on the sociocultural adjustment of FSU immigrants in Israel and describes how these immigrants were affected by the Israeli society, and how they in turn affected Israel.

Although acculturation is in its essence a two-way process (Redfield et al., 1936), most of acculturation research explores changes in the immigrant or minority groups and not in the majority society (Berry, 1997; Kim, 2001). This chapter is in line with the growing academic and public discourse on the two-way effects of cultural encounters (Croucher and Kramer, 2017).

Indeed, 30 years after the big immigration wave of the 1990s, it is hard to say who influenced whom more: the Israeli society – the immigrants, or the immigrants – the Israeli society? The impact appears to be reciprocal and demonstrates the cultural fusion model (Croucher and Kramer, 2017).

However, it important to note that although most FSU immigrants adapt well in Israel, there are several groups of risk – such as single mothers, the elderly and youth (Konstantinov, 2015). Economic difficulties, lack of housing and risk behaviors may push less resilient immigrants to the margins of society and cause mental health problems (Mirsky, 2009**).** Therefore, cultural-lingual access and instrumental and emotional support are crucial for these immigrants. The Israeli society also needs to solve the burning issues that occupy FSU immigrants such as civil marriage and burial, pensions for the elderly as well as racist attitudes toward Russian women. The absence of proper solutions may in the future lead to social protest of FSU immigrants, led by the second-generation immigrants, born and raised in Israel and aware of their civil rights. The buds of this protest can be already observed among 1.5 generation (Prashizky and Remennick, 2016). Yet if supported, the continuing positive adjustment of FSU immigrants may consolidate the pluralism, multiculturism and the cohesion of the contemporary Israeli society.

האם המשפט האחרון מספיק מובן? (יבגני)

Notes

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1. “Israel be-Alia” (Israel in Immigration) was established before the 1996 elections by Nathan (Anatoly) Shiransky, a former political prisoner in the USSR. The party gained seven seats (out of 120) but later lost its power and dissolved into the Likud (right-wing) party. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Israel Beitenu” (Israel Our Home) was founded in 1999 by an FSU immigrant, Avigdor Liberman and has been on the Israeli political map ever since with four to eight seats and senior government positions. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mizrahi Jews/Mizrachim (also Sephardi), constitute one of the largest Jews’ ethnic divisions among Israeli Jews. They are descended from Jewish communities in the North Africa, Middle East and Central Asia and tend to be more traditional in their faith and conservative in their political preferences. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Orientalism: since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, much academic discourse has begun to use the term “Orientalism” to refer to a general patronizing Western attitude toward Asian and North African societies. Said, E. (1978). Orientalism. New York: Vintage Books. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. “Black Panthers” were the leading protest group of second-generation Mizrachi immigrants in Israel. Established in 1971 to protest two decades of exclusion and discrimination of the Mizrachim in the country, they succeeded in raising the awareness to poverty and social injustice. Their primary leaders eventually joined political parties and were elected to the Israeli Parliament (Knesset). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. “Status quo” in Israel refers to a political understanding between secular and religious political parties not to alter the communal arrangement in relation to religious matters, in a predominantly secular population. The status quo was established before the creation of the state and relates to religious legislation, education, marriage and burials, kosher regulation and Shabbat. It was a part of all coalition agreements between the ruling and religious parties until the 1990s. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)