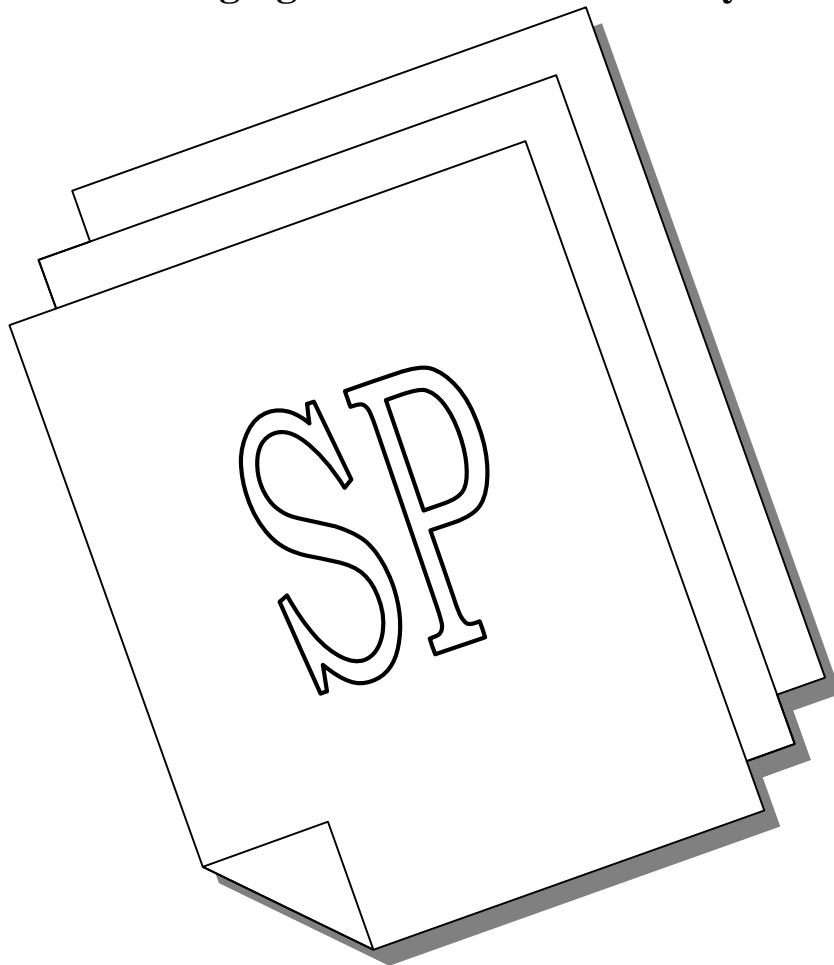


Sociological Papers

From State Socialism to State Judaism: 'Russian' Immigrants in Israel and their Attitudes towards Religion

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Evolving Attitudes and Practices in the Religious Field among Former Soviet Immigrants in Israel¹

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Abstract

This volume of “Sociological Papers” reports on the findings of the recently-completed research project that examined the array of attitudes and behaviors related to religion among former Soviet immigrants of the 1990s in Israel. The study included a survey in a national sample of Russian-speaking Olim and a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews with 50 informants representing different locations on the scale between secularism and religiosity. The main study report occupies most space of this volume; after some background on the place of religion in the lives of Russian/Soviet Jewry, it presents the study participants and methods, followed by the main findings. The findings of the survey and the qualitative phase are reported in an integrated fashion, reflecting the key themes that informed this research: Participants’ self-identification on the religious scale; Jewish and Christian practices in their everyday lives before and after immigration; their attitudes towards Israeli-Jewish traditions, religious and civic; control of personal status laws by religious authorities; minority rights and conversion (*giyur*) for non-Jews. Following the main report, three additional papers (vignettes) offer a closer look at the minority segments among Russian Israelis: religious Jews (mostly Orthodox *baalei-tshuva*), practicing Christians, and non-Jewish (mostly Russian) women married to Jewish men who moved to Israel with their families. The overall picture that emerges from this multi-level study gives an insight into multiple ways, by which former Soviet immigrants, raised in the ultimate secular society, have adjusted to the ethno-national regime of Israel guarded by the principle that we call State Judaism.

¹ The paper is based on the recently completed study funded by Bar-Ilan University and conducted by the Sociological Institute for Community Studies. The authors are grateful to Alex Zibenberg, Ph.D. candidate at Haifa University, for his assistance with data collection and processing. The authors also appreciate the contribution of two research assistants – Lana Eisenstadt and Dmitri Skulsky, who have conducted and transcribed most interviews for this study. Dr. Natalia Khvorostyanov of Ben-Gurion University has also conducted several interviews with Christian immigrants.

Introduction: Identity and Religion among the Jews in the Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Period

While for most people calling themselves Jewish the *ethnic* and *religious* aspects of their identity are closely intertwined, the Russian/Soviet reality has separated between the two, also by using different words (*evrei* – Hebrew as ethnic label, *iudei* – Jew, i.e. of Judaic faith). Starting from the turn of the 20th century and especially after the 1917 Revolution, the trends towards secularism and reliance on the Russian and Yiddish-based secular literature, press, theatre, etc. have swept the majority of Russian Jewry (Slezkin, 2004, Gitelman, 2001). The generation born between 1900 and 1930 has largely left the small Jewish towns of the former Pale of Settlement (*shtetls*) to take active part in the ‘communist construction,’ get higher education, and become part of the urban working class, political functionaries, and intelligentsia. Thus the traditional Jewish lifestyle based on religious observance has been destroyed; after seven decades of state socialism, most Soviet Jews raised in the major cities defined themselves as *atheists or agnostics*. They spoke Russian as their first primary language and were socialized by the Soviet system of education and youth movements - Pioneers and Komsomol. Few of them maintained some remnants of the Yiddish lore, Jewish holidays, and domestic habits from their youth; but these were typically kept private and never shown to the outsiders to avoid anti-Semitic backlash (Shternshis, 2006). By the late 1940s, the old system of Jewish education and Jewish cultural institutions (theaters, books and press in Yiddish) have been completely destroyed, and pursuing any Jewish activities (including the study of the Jewish languages) was defined by the state as subversive and punishable. Thus, already the first Soviet Jewish generation has lost its ties with religion and traditions of their ancestors and manifested deep ignorance in these matters, for instance saying *kaddish* for their dead husbands in an Orthodox church rather than synagogue, a foreign place for most (Shternshis, 2007). The children and grand-children of these elders were even more remote from Judaic education, cultural interests and practices; many of them married non-Jews and changed their patronymics and last names to pass as Russians or Ukrainians (Brym and Ryvkina, 1994; Ro’i, 2003).

From the late 1960s on, a small minority of Jewish dissidents driven by political Thaw in the USSR and Israel’s victory in the Six Day War, lumped together to study Hebrew, basics of Judaism and distribute Israeli materials, but their interests were mainly directed towards emigration (not necessarily to Israel) rather than recovering Jewish religion and tradition. Most Jews were rank-and-file Soviet citizens, largely urban, educated (despite anti-Semitic policies preventing them from entering the best schools) and employed in white-collar occupations. Some of them have reached prominent positions in their professions - particularly in science, medicine and the arts - but most could not extend their careers beyond mid-tiers due to their ‘ethnic disability.’ Their stifled professional ambitions, poor prospects for the children, and stagnant political atmosphere of late socialism propelled many to emigrate, while some others engaged in intense search of spiritual outlets on the fringe of the mainstream Soviet society. From the early 1980 on, interest in religion emerged as a popular form of dissidence among urban intelligentsia, including the Jews, but they mostly turned to Orthodox Christianity as a source of spiritual stimulation, following charismatic pastors such as Father Alexander Men’ (himself of Jewish origin). In an Orthodox country, churches and pastors, as well as familiar Christian cultural

references in the arts and literature, have been more accessible, offering an attractive escape from the bleak socialist reality. Synagogues, on the other hand, were few (and closely surveyed by the KGB); the Jewish Orthodox ritual there was unfamiliar and remote; the practices of separating men and women and checks into Jewish 'purity' of the visitors were also perceived as alienating (Shternshis, 2007). As a result, Jewish individuals inclined to spiritual search would more often drift towards Christianity in its Russian-Orthodox version rather than Judaism. This was even truer for multiple half- and quarter-Jews, whose ethnic and religious identity was split by definition; their Jewish component was typically weaker and often suppressed in the anti-Semitic milieu (Deutsch-Kornblatt, 2003; Nosenko-Shtern, 2009).

The evidence on the Jewish life and identity during state socialism comes, on the one hand, from personal documents such as memoirs, letters, and diaries and, on the other, from the analysis of the state policies and Soviet media documenting anti-Semitic policies and propaganda (Ro'i, 2003). Large-scale social research of the Jewish topics, particularly the one involving western scholars, became possible only in post-Soviet years. The largest single source on the subject still is the survey by Cherviakov, Gitelman and Shapiro (2003) conducted in the major cities of Russia and Ukraine in two waves: in 1992 and 1997, using the best possible sampling technique and face-to-face interviews with 3.300 respondents in each wave. Commenting on this survey, Zvi Gitelman (2009: 249-250) reflects on the nature of Russian/Soviet Jewish identity: *"Judaism has little to do with Jewishness which is secular and ethnic, although people are uncertain whether one can practice another religion and still be a Jew. Judaism as organized religion plays no role as a "façade for ethnicity" among Russian and Ukrainian Jews. This does not mean that they are without faith. They are without religion. Contrary to official Soviet hopes and expectations, belief in God was not eliminated, but religion as systematic theology, doctrines and practices was largely repressed, and hence is unknown. Substantial proportion of our respondents believe in God, but even those who believe do not draw a connection to behavior or even beliefs prescribed in Judaism."* When asked about the main components of their Jewish identity, the majority of respondents named "being proud of your nationality" (23-34%), followed by "defending Jewish honor and dignity" (17-27%) – clearly the legacy of living in anti-Semitic milieu. Two other tangible components were "remember the Holocaust" (7-22%, its weight growing between two survey waves), "helping other Jews (4-7%), and "feeling a tie to Israel" (3-6%). Only 0.8-1.8% said it was important to marry a Jew. Asked about their attitude toward religion, just between 22 and 31% of respondents stated that they "do not Believe in God", while the rest were dispersed between "a more definite faith" (18-31%) and "an inclination to believe" (24-29%), while the remainder (20-25%) were "not inclined to believe" or "did not know." At the same time, the percentages of those reporting any kind of Jewish religious and traditional practices were miniscule, between 0.1% to 1%. When asked about general attractiveness of various religions for them, between 37% and 26% of respondents chose Judaism (in Ukraine more often than in Russia), while 10-15% named Christianity and 4-6% other faiths, while 36-44% answered "none" (p.251). Between 1992 and 1997 surveys, the share of those choosing Judaism has fallen by 5-7% in both countries, while the share of those choosing Christianity remained stable in Russia (around 13%), but increased among Ukrainian Jews (from 10 to 15%). The youngest and the oldest segments of the population are more prone to interest and practice of Judaism than the middle-aged Jews; the former probably due to the influence of the newly active "religious entrepreneurs" (such as *Chabad* and

Hillel) and the latter due to the lingering elements of their early socialization in the Jewish towns of the former Pale.

Ethnic identities generally are known to be malleable and shaped by the changing circumstances; in this sense, Soviet Jewish identity was a product of the Soviet environment. To cite Gitelman (2009: 260) again, “*In the USSR, state-imposed identity and governmental anti-Semitism combined with grass-roots anti-Semitism to maintain boundaries between Jews and others, long after Jewish content had largely disappeared from Jewish ethnicity.*” State anti-Semitism has largely vanished after Socialism, while social attitudes towards the Jews became more varied and flexible, especially given their apparent success in the post-communist economy and politics. Being Jewish became useful again, as a ticket for emigration for those wishing to start from a scratch abroad or a grapevine venue to the new business world for those inclined to stay. Jewish ancestry and elements of the Jewish tradition are now construed as enticing and exotic by some younger offspring of mixed couples, half or quarter Jews (Remennick, 2009).

It is interesting to note that in the post-Soviet times very few Russian and Ukrainian citizens, including the Jews, are willing to call themselves atheists or fully secular persons. Atheism is clearly out of fashion; it is closely associated with forced demolition of religious institutions by the Soviet Power, with mandatory college courses of 'Scientific Atheism' and ultimately – with shallow materialism and lack of spiritual meaning in life. Yet, only a small minority joins established faiths (so-called *explicit or public religions*); the more recent surveys among Russian and Ukrainian Jews conducted over the last decade (Ryvkina, 2005; Remennick, 2009) suggest that only about 10-20% are interested in Judaism (not necessarily meaning any regular observance), while about one third are inclined towards Orthodox Christianity (again, with varying degree of observance). The drift towards Judaism, especially among younger generation, was more pronounced in the mid to late 1990s – the period of peak activity of American and Israeli Jewish organizations (JOINT, the Jewish Agency, Hillel, and especially Chabad) trying to revive Jewish education and community life in the post-Soviet space (Horwitz, 2003). Yet, the social and cultural programs offered by these organizations, as well as their computing and sports facilities, have been much more popular among Russian Jews than purely religious services; synagogue attendance has remained very low. Among those interested in Judaism and attending Jewish organizations (an estimated 15-20% of the Jews in Moscow, St.Petersburg, Kiev and Minsk), the most commonly reported activities included participation in organized celebrations of High Holidays (Rosh ha-Shana, Passover, and Channukah), attendance of concerts and film festivals, and taking free trips to Israel by the youth. Fewer respondents in these surveys celebrated Jewish holidays at home (and if they did, both bread and *matsoth* were on the table during *Seder Pesah*) or contributed their time and money to any charitable projects such as aid to the Jewish elders or orphans [personal communication of the leaders of Jewish organizations to LR]. Those of younger Jews who got immersed in Israel-related programs and/or religious life (including *baalei-tshuva*) have typically left Russia and Ukraine, making Aliya or emigrating to the west, where Jewish life is more established. All the activities along the Jewish spectrum seem to have dwindled over the last decade, along with diminishing western funding; opportunities for local funding and grass-root Jewish activism from bottom up have remained rather weak (Khanin et al., 2008; Remennick, 2009).

As already mentioned, Soviet Jews have long been assimilated into urban middle classes, and, as a result of massive emigration over the 1990s, those with more prominent Jewish identity have left for Israel or for the West. The remaining Jewish population (typically of mixed ethnicity) is largely assimilated into Russian culture; some witnessed with interest and others participated in the Orthodox Christian revival of the post-Soviet times. However, a vast majority espouse diffuse and unspecified beliefs in Higher Being, Destiny, and Providence guiding one's life, supplemented by individually chosen rituals and lifestyle practices (such as various diets and physical exercises, cherishing Mother Nature and its forces, etc.) that are 'spiritually-loaded' for their practitioners. These ideas and practices together form so-called *implicit or private religions* – vessels of personal search for the sacral, not conforming to any established theology and rituals of organized religions and often merging ritual elements of monotheistic faiths and pagan cults. The ritual practices on the menu of such quazi-religions are diverse, ranging from meditation and mantra-chanting borrowed from Buddhism to body-cleansing or purging practices (fasting, vegetarianism, enemas, and various diets), celebrations of lunar phases, the search of UFOs and other extraterrestrial phenomena. Often these New-Age style groups have their spiritual leader who prescribes the ideological doctrine and behavioral rules for the members; even more often individuals pursue their ideas and practices in solitude or with their spouses, children or friends. Within this frame of belief, it is unimportant whether one addresses G-d in a church or a synagogue – because Deity is one and does not belong to any specific confession, and formal ritual is of secondary, if any, importance. Alternatively, one can pray (in a self-fashioned way) in a beautiful nature spot or in any other place – direct dialog with the Deity is what matters, not the formal context. The ideas of universalism and inwardly-looking faith rather than mechanic adherence to approved rituals permeate implicit religion; this theme was often voiced by the elderly Jewish women interviewed by Anna Shternshis (2007). Some individuals who practice this kind of private religion get disappointed or lonely and join the collective frameworks of explicit (public) religions (Christianity, Judaism or syncretic movements such as *Jews for Christ*) – mainly in search of social affiliation and pastoral guidance. Many personal stories of this kind have been collected by social anthropologist Elena Nosenko-Shtern (2004, 2009) in her field work among Russian citizens of Jewish origin (mostly half- or quarter-Jews) in larger and smaller Russian cities over the last 15 years.

While historically Jewish converts to Christianity (*vykresty* in Russian) have been surrounded by contempt and hatred of other Jews (Gitelman, 2001), over the last three decades the attitudes toward them became much more lenient and accepting. This reflects mental separation between ethnic and religious components of Jewishness very prevalent among Russian/Soviet Jews. They do not perceive any conflict between Jewish ethnicity and Christian faith: many would say in the interviews that they did not choose their Jewish ethnicity (*natsional'nost'*) being born of Jewish parents, but it is their full right to choose their religious affiliation. Being Jewish is a matter of birth, but being Christian is a matter of mature spiritual decision. Thus, so-called Russian Orthodox Jews (*provoslavnye evrei*) do not stop seeing themselves as Jewish after baptism; some even assert that their Jewish self-consciousness grew stronger upon conversion (Nosenko-Shtern, 2004, 2009). Many emphasize the historic and theological continuity between Judaism and Christianity, seeing one as a version or an extension of the other, often referring to Jewish origins of Christ and his disciples. However, they chose Christianity in its Russian Orthodox version construing it as a more spiritual faith not preoccupied (like Judaism) with mundane

regulation of everyday life and lesser emphasis on the ritual observance. Given close historic ties between the two religions, some Jews interested in the sacral join the groups such as *Messianic Jews* or *Jews for Christ* (Deutch Kornblatt, 2003, Gitelman, 2009).

So-called 'civil (or civic) religions,' usually sponsored by state ideologies and institutions, offer common moral framework - or grand narrative - for the member-citizens in lieu of the vanishing traditional religiosity (Weed and Von Heyking, 2010). They are typically framed by invented rituals (such as ceremonies, street rallies and parades, as well as memorials and museums) and comprise an alternative venue of spiritual self-actualization. Although becoming much less popular in late modernity, typified by demise of all macro-ideologies, some forms of civil religion are still commonly found in many nation-states. For many Russians and Jews in the first half of the 20th century, Communism or its milder versions ('socialism with a human face,' social democracy) played a role of civil religion, with its multiple rituals and symbols of faith. For Western Jews in the second half of the 20th century, the Holocaust and its commemoration became a form of civic religion. For intellectuals and educated masses on the Left flank of political spectrum (Goldberg, 2009), Liberal (Progressive) ideology, drawing on the basic premises of 'post-colonialism', lingering sense of 'white guilt' about poverty, racial disadvantage, and all other social ills, and belief in their alleviation by social reform, has been a form of civil religion for the last fifty years or so. By contrast, Conservative/Republican/Right-leaning public cherishes the notions of free market, economic deregulation, and individualism as their own 'holy trinity.' Other macro-ideologies claiming the role of civic religion in recent history include Fascism and Eugenic Movement (Goldberg: 250-251), Suffrage and Feminism and, more recently, Environmentalism, Anti-Globalism, and Global Warming Movement.

In post-Socialist Russia, the obsessive wish to regain national pride of a former superpower has led to the search of the 'new national ideology' that would help dispel its recent humiliation, both domestic and global, due to broad income disparities, unstable political regime, weakened military, etc. – 'to raise Russia from its knees' (*podniat' Rossiyu s kolen*). In line with this strife, multiple nationalist movements, often belonging to the fascist spectrum, have risen in contemporary Russia (Laruelle, 2009). The 'historic mission' of regaining and developing the Biblical Land of Israel has inspired thousands of Jewish settlers (including secular ones) to reside in Judea and the West Bank under permanent security threats. Thus, messianic nationalist ideologies may replace religion for some especially involved and 'patriotic' citizens. Israeli political scientists Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya (1983) defined civil religion as "*the ceremonies, myths and creeds that legitimize the social order, unite the population, and mobilize the society's members in pursuit of its dominant political goals. Civil religion is that which is most holy and sacred in a political culture. It forges its adherents into a moral community* (p. ix)." As will be shown later, civil religion of State Zionism became rather popular among many secular Russian Jews who moved to Israel over the 1990s.

Attitudes towards Judaism and Organized Religion among Russian-Jewish Immigrants

During and after the demise of state socialism, mass Jewish emigration became possible again, resulting in some 1.6 million Jews and their non-Jewish family members leaving the former Soviet Union (FSU) to resettle in Israel or in the West

(Remennick, 2007). This great exodus, along with the on-going demographic decline, has greatly depleted the ranks of Russian and Ukrainian Jewry, while at the same time fortifying the Jewish communities in the receiving countries. More specifically, the Jewish communities of Israel, North America, and Germany have received substantial demographic increment, but the Russian-speaking newcomers have been largely a disappointment as co-religionists and community members. The organic conflict between Russian Jewish immigrants of the last 20 years and the receiving communities (both in Israel and in the West) drew on the very different understandings of what it means to be Jewish. As was shown above, Judaism and traditional practices were not part of socialization and lifestyle of the post-war generations of Soviet Jews, whose main basis for self-identity was negative, i.e. suffering from both state-sponsored and everyday antisemitism in their homelands. Invisible social *boundaries* definitely existed between Jews and non-Jews, but the *content* of Soviet Jewishness was 'thin' and diffuse, not drawing on elements of religious (Hebrew-based) or secular (Yiddish-based) culture (Gitelman, 2009). Rather, the sense of ethnic pride among Russian/Soviet Jews drew on their high professional and intellectual achievements, both historically and during Soviet period. Their personal pantheon (or civil religion) had little to do with rabbis and Jewish sages; instead, it included images of Jewish Nobel prize winners and cultural icons – Russian poets, artists, and scientists of Jewish origin.

Like other immigrants, Russian Jews resettled in Israel, America and Germany in search of economic success and better lives for themselves and especially for their children. The Jewish communities and their leaders on the receiving end expected the newcomers to develop interest in religion and contribute to organized community life the way they understood it, and show gratitude for support and material aid they had received from the Jewish organizations. However, Soviet Jews, unfamiliar with the concepts of organized Jewish community and charitable work, perceived HIAS and various Jewish Community services as an arm of the US government. On the one hand, they were glad to get help and guidance, but, on the other, they expected to be accepted for who they were, as equals, without being patronized or taught how to be 'proper Jews'. They perceived local Jews as wealthy, arrogant and exclusive, and for the most part stuck to their own social circle. Only a minority have joined local Jewish organizations, mostly the secular ones (like Jewish Community Centers), and even fewer became fee-paying synagogue members or contributed to traditional Jewish charities, with the notable exception of Israeli causes. A tiny minority has embraced Orthodox Judaism as *baalei-tshuva* or became 'Jewish professionals' on the 'Russian Street' of Berlin and New York, but the majority remained indifferent and uninvolved. Reform Judaism and other liberal denominations most common in America did not comprise an attractive alternative to secularism, being perceived by many Russian Jews as artificial and inauthentic. As always, the hosts and the newcomers construed their encounter rather differently, but it is fair to say that the estrangement between former Soviet Jews and the established American and European Jewish communities has been built and sustained on both sides (Remennick, 2007).

Let us turn now to the Israeli context, given that over 60% of former Soviet Jewish immigrants have resettled in the Jewish state. The receiving community in this case was society as a whole, given that “even street cleaners and bus drivers in Israel are Jewish” (in one newcomer’s surprised comment), let alone state bureaucrats and employers. By and large, the disappointment in the tenuous Jewish identity of the

Russian-speaking crowds flooding Israel in the early 1990s has been rather common among veteran Israelis. Most Israeli public opinion makers (including the press and immigrant-aid institutions) have found Russian and Ukrainian Jews lacking in many respects, first and foremost in terms of both Zionist sentiment and traditional observance. Russian immigrants, in turn, were often disappointed by their lukewarm reception by the old-timers and the lack of tangible social solidarity towards the newcomers, making it difficult for them to experience this immigration as 'homecoming' (Remennick, 2007).

It is a statistical fact that about one-third of former Soviet immigrants (over 300,000) are non-Jewish by the Halachic definition, i.e. were not born of the Jewish mother or converted to Judaism by Orthodox rules. Yet, many of them see themselves as Jews - having Jewish fathers or grandparents, or at least as part of Jewish families. Based on this demographic reality, the rabbinical establishment and conservative Ministry of the Interior insinuated on multiple occasions that most Russian Jews were in fact gentiles, and many of them came to Israel under false pretences (Cohen and Susser, 2009). Given that all bearers of a Russian accent are suspects by default, rabbinical courts have introduced diligent check-up procedures when these immigrants wanted to get married or register their newborns. Needless to say, a Jew and non-Jew can only get married abroad, with a recent mitigation for two non-Jews, who can now register their union in an Israeli civil court. The burial of non-Jews remains a difficult trial for their family members, both due to scarcity of non-Jewish cemeteries and the additional costs involved. These allegations and barriers have poisoned the air around many newcomers, especially those with Russian-sounding names and more Slavic appearance. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of Russian Olim have undergone 'social conversion' into Israeli 'civil religion' - merely by the fact of their being law-abiding, tax-paying citizens, speaking Hebrew (to some extent at least), serving in the military, and contributing to every aspect of economy and social life in the country (Leshem, 2009; Cohen and Susser, 2009). Thus, the gap between the strict religious definition of 'kosher Jewishness' and a broader view of proper 'Israeliness' has remained a high-profile social issue for Russian Olim, not to be solved in the near future, given the lack of progress in Jewish civil marriage and conversion legislation in the Knesset over the last decade.

Despite high social tension around the issues of religion and social inclusion/exclusion in the discourse on the 'Great Russian Aliyah' of the 1990s², little is known about the evolution of religious beliefs and practices among this large chunk of Israeli Jewish population (20% nationally and over 50% in many localities). A single comprehensive study of the religious identity and attitudes towards religion-state relations among former Soviet immigrants dates back to the end of 1993, i.e. the end of their initial mass influx (Leshem, 2001). This survey in a representative sample of 817 Olim compared their religion-related characteristics with those of the general Jewish population as reported in the classical early-1990s survey by Levy, Levinson and Katz (1993). Reflecting the demographics of the early wave of the FSU Aliya, about 85% of the respondents were Halachic Jews and the rest were of mixed or non-Jewish origin. The findings have confirmed earlier sources of data (Brym and

² The quotes refer to the ideological loading of the term *Aliyah* – meaning immigration of Jews to the Land/State of Israel. In fact, Jewish immigrants have come to Israel for a host of different reasons besides Zionism and/or Judaism and have experienced multiple barriers to their social inclusion and economic success, just like other international migrants. We prefer neutral terms 'migration' and 'immigrants,' but also use the words *Aliyah* and *Olim* as part of Israeli Hebrew vernacular.

Ryvkina, 1994; Gitelman, 2001, 2003) showing that former Soviet Jews were predominantly secular and did not practice any Jewish rituals in their daily lives. When offered a 5-point self-identification scale between 1-religious (*dati*) and 5-secular (*hiloni*), only 8.2% chose 1 or 2, with 16% in the mid-scale and 75% choosing 4 or 5. This compares with just 21% of all Israelis who define themselves as fully secular and not observing any Jewish traditions. When 'Russians' were compared to all Israeli Jews in terms of specific behaviors, the following picture has emerged: Fast on Yom Kipur (32% vs 71%), keep strictly kosher (9% vs. 64%), never drive on Shabat (8% vs. 26%), regularly pray in a synagogue (2% vs. 8%). 'Russian' Jews have also expressed much more 'radical' positions on the state-religion relations: 64% disagreed with the need to preserve "the religious-Jewish nature of the State" and 78% agreed that "religious laws in Israel should be revoked or significantly limited". Full or partial support for *giyur* for non-Jewish Olim was found among 39%, while 47% did not support this project, and 14% had no opinion. Over 95% of Olim agreed that "People who considered themselves Jews should be buried in Jewish cemeteries regardless of their Halachic status" and that "Civil marriage and divorce should be introduced in Israel." Opening of commercial and entertainment outlets on Shabbat was supported by 87% and 62% did not object free sales of pork in the stores. Across these survey items, there was no significant difference of opinion between Halachic Jews and others and no variance by education, age, gender, or tenure in Israel. Summarizing these findings, Leshem identified five clusters among his respondents: *Secular Universalists* (no interest or respect of Jewish observance, anti-clerical views); *Secular Nationalists* (some observance on national rather than religious basis; want Israel for Jews only; support *giyur* for non-Jews); *Traditionalists (masoratim)*, with partial and irregular observance, more common among Jews from the Caucasus and Central Asia); *Religious* (observant of most mitzvot but less attached to a synagogue than Israeli Orthodox); and *Peripheral Jews* (partly Jewish or married to Jews; secular and anticlerical). Leshem (2001) concluded that secular and anti-clerical Russian immigrants would significantly redress the balance between the existing religious and political camps in Israel. This proved to be true in the years after this survey, at least in terms of demographic composition and fortification of the political Secular Right, represented by the parties such as short-lived *Shinui*, *Likud*, and *Israel Beiteinu*. The existing pillars of Jewish identity have also been affected by the influx of 'Russians', with the ethno-historic grounds (such as the Holocaust) being more prominent for them than for native Israelis and the religious-ritualistic aspects less prominent (Levy, 2009).

Since the early-mid 1990s, the main thrust of social inquiry has been directed towards the issue of conversion (*giyur*) for non-Jewish Olim, with the overall discouraging finding that only about 5% of this group have successfully converted via Orthodox procedure, the only one legally accepted in Israel. Among some 4,000 converts per year (the average for 2000-2003), just under 1,000 are Russian-speaking Olim, mainly women (80%). There is little doubt that rigorous demands of Orthodox *giyur*, with its explicit obligation to lead highly observant life in the future, are unacceptable for most former Soviet Jews. What they seek is social inclusion and becoming full-fledged citizens, not Orthodox Jews. The existing estimates as to the numbers of Russian Olim wishing to convert via Orthodox *giyur* range between 5% and 25%, depending on the rigidity of the terms and conditions (Machon Tsomet, 2003). The recent controversy over possible revocation by Chief Rabbinical Authority of IDF-based conversions completed by 5-7 thousand Olim soldiers may put the whole project to the halt. Since it is hardly possible to convert all resident Olim non-Jews

under the existing procedures, they and their children are prone to remain second-rate citizens in the Jewish state.

Non-Jews aside, little is known about the Jewish majority among last-wave Russian immigrants in terms of their attitudes and lifestyles vis-à-vis Judaism and the everyday routine of the Jewish state, including expressions of its 'civil religion'. In line with the above-cited earlier survey by Leshem (2001), a few local studies and everyday experience suggest that, with the exception of Bukharan, Georgian and Caucasus Jews (who had been traditional back in the USSR/FSU and often became more observant in Israel), most Olim remained uninvolved in synagogues and religious life in their new communities. Yet, on a deeper level, having spent about 20 years in the Holy Land with its peculiar historic, political and religious ambience – have they become more religious? Have they embraced Judaism in its Orthodox version prevalent in Israel or drifted towards few liberal Jewish communities and rabbis? Or have they largely remained secular and uninterested in organized religion the way they used to be in their homelands? How many of them have embraced Christian faith, living in the cradle of the Christian civilization? How do they relate to Israeli official ceremonies and civil holidays? How do they relate to the civil rights of the non-Jewish minorities? The current study set out to explore these issues, combining a survey in a national sample and in-depth personal interviews.

Current Study: Beliefs and Practices in the Religious Field among Russian Israelis

Methods and participants

The first phase of the study was a survey in a national sample of 507 immigrants (Olim) who arrived in Israel after 1990; the second phase included 50 personal interviews with Olim representing different outlooks towards religion in order to get a closer look at their identity and beliefs. Both the survey and the interviews have been conducted by social science graduate students from Haifa, Bar-Ilan, and Ben-Gurion Universities in Israel's North, Center, and South. Informants for the qualitative phase have been recruited by several channels, including survey respondents who volunteered for a personal interview, with subsequent 'snowballing.' The bulk of interviewees were drawn from regular social and occupational venues (universities, work places, community centers, etc.); to represent minority groups, interviewees were also sought in religious communities and societies, including Christian churches. Interviews were on the average 2 hours long; they were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the interviewers. The analysis of the transcripts drew on the Grounded Theory (Strauss, 1987) and was based on repeated scanning and thematic analysis performed by the two authors in tandem.

Survey sample

Building representative samples among Russian Olim is a well-known challenge for researchers and pollsters due to high residential mobility (making over 30% of registered addresses irrelevant) and low response rates, among other reasons. Many researchers turn to mixed sampling schemes drawing on a combination of residential areas, workplaces, social venues, and researchers' personal contacts. The diversification of sampling venues helps ensure outreach for different subgroups of Olim. Our sampling scheme drew on the towns with large representation of Russian Olim (Haifa and Krayot in the North; Rishon-le Zion, Bat-Yam, Modi'in and other

towns in the Center; Beer-Sheba and near towns in the South), looking for eligible respondents in all possible venues. Eligibility criteria included arrival after 1990, at least 3 years of life in Israel, and meeting established gender and age quotas. We tried to recruit equal numbers of men and women and to focus on the working-age adults (ages 25-60). While trying to build a representative sample, we also wanted to reach out for less typical groups and identities, such as Orthodox Jews and practicing Christians. To find them, we disseminated the questionnaires in a few specific locales where these groups reside; for example, Jerusalem and Maale Adumim have a low weight of the general Olim population, but many religious Russian Jews chose to live there, as well as in a few West Bank settlements. To find Christians, our research assistants visited Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches where they congregate.

The resulting *purposive, cluster-based sample*, although far from perfect, was rather typical for the total Russian-speaking Olim population in terms of social and demographic characteristics, but over-represented some small groups (*baalei tshuva*, practicing Christians), while somewhat under-representing others (non-Jewish and less educated Olim). On hindsight, we may assume that Olim interested in religion and spiritual matters were more willing to fill in the survey, while non-believers refused to participate upon hearing of the topic connected to religion, biasing the final sample towards the more religious individuals.

Tools

The questionnaire in Russian was developed by the authors, drawing on their previous research and personal experience as immigrants in Israel. It included 50 structured items, framed both as questions and responses to opinion statements on 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was administered to respondents by paid research assistants – sociology majors, mostly face-to-face (75%) or by e-mail (25%). About 80% of eligible candidates contacted by the assistants agreed to participate and completed the survey. The survey findings have been processed by means of SPSS package, using mainly descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, tests of variance, and regressions. Informants for the qualitative phase have been recruited both from the ranks of survey respondents and independently, drawing on a similar approach, i.e. trying to diversify them by geographic location, socio-economic characteristics, and religious outlook. The interviews (conducted in Russian) typically lasted about two hours, were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The names of the informants have been changed to protect their privacy.

Socio-demographic characteristics of survey respondents (N=507) and interviewees (N=50)

As often happens in social surveys, women outnumbered the men among the respondents (56.6% vs. 43.4%). The mean age of the sample was 44.06 years (+/- 11.75); 13% were younger than 30; 30.2% were aged 31-40; 22.3% 41-50; 26% 51-60, and 8.1% were 61 or more. The sample was deliberately biased towards economically-active younger and middle-aged respondents – our main subject of interest – while retirees aged 65+ were under-represented (they comprise about 15% of the general Olim population). Average tenure in Israel for the whole sample was 14.43 years (+/- 4.97); less than 4% arrived 3-4 years ago, 18.1% 5-10 years ago, 27.4% 11-15 years ago, and 50.3% - 16 years ago or more. This distribution means that the majority arrived in the early and mid-1990s – the period of most intense influx of Russian Jews into Israel. In line with its source population, one-third arrived

from Russia, one-third from Ukraine, and one-third from other FSU republics. Most respondents had lived in the major cities of the FSU: 19% in Moscow or St. Petersburg, 26% in other capital cities, and 25% in other largest cities; the rest (30%) came from smaller towns. In Israel, they lived in the towns of Gush Dan (33%), Beer-Sheba, Arad and other Negev towns (33%), Haifa, Krayot and the North (17%), Jerusalem, Maale-Adumin and Modi'in (15%), and West Bank settlements (2%).

Socio-economic integration of the immigrants is largely a function of their occupational success, i.e. finding jobs in line with their former education and experience or retraining into another, more demanded, line of professional work. Between half and two-thirds of Russian immigrants of the 1990s could not do either and downgraded into manual or service occupations in order to make a living (Remennick, 2007). In this sample, levels of education were very high, with 63% having a full college degree and 12% also a post-graduate degree; the remaining 25% reported having a technical or vocational diploma. The largest occupational category in the sample, both before and after immigration, were science, engineering and technology workers (35% and 32%, respectively), followed by civil service and administration personnel (31% and 16%), teachers (12% and 8%), doctors (4% and 3%), and others. The share of unemployed or those having part-time and temporary jobs (including homecare) was 20.5%. To assess perceived professional and social mobility, respondents were asked about the change in their occupational status after moving to Israel, compared to the last 5 years before emigration. Much or somewhat lower status in Israel was reported by 37.5%; 25.5% said that their status did not change, and 37% asserted that their current employment conferred them a somewhat or much higher status than they had in the FSU. Hence, similar shares of our respondents have experienced an upward and downward occupational mobility, while about one quarter preserved their former status. This pattern is somewhat more favorable than average for the Russian immigrant community (Remennick, in press). Overall satisfaction from their current jobs (on the 5-point scale) was higher than average (3.54 +/- 1.05); the aspect of their working life causing most satisfaction was relations with colleagues and bosses (4.21 +/- 0.97) and the least satisfactory was pay (3.04 +/- 1.19). Answering the item about their personal income, 47% said it was much or somewhat below Israel's average, 40% considered it to be average, and 13% described their income as much or somewhat higher than average. Over 61% owned their homes, while 39% rented; the mean level of satisfaction with the housing conditions on the 5-point scale was 3.63 (+/-0.99).

Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents were married and only 8% divorced – somewhat fewer than is typical for Russian Olim at large (10-15%). Household composition was rather typical: 57% lived with their spouse and child(ren), 5% with their nuclear family plus parent(s) or other relatives; 20% with a spouse/partner, 5% with child(ren), and 7% lived alone (the remainder encompassed other combinations). The average number of children was 3.2 (+/- 1.32), which is significantly higher than average among Russian immigrants (around 1.7), probably reflecting a higher weight of religious couples. Over 22% had children living outside Israel (usually in the FSU). Thus, the family composition in the sample was dominated by normative nuclear families with a relatively high number of children and infrequent co-residence with the older generation (vs. general statistics for the Olim population – at least 10-12%).

The weight of Jewish respondents in this sample was somewhat higher than on average among Russian Olim: 80% were born of a Jewish mother, 71% were registered as Jews in their Soviet documents, and 73% self-identified as Jewish.

Among those born of non-Jewish mothers, 17% had a Jewish father and mostly identified as Jews. Thus, the share of non-Jewish Olim in our sample was lower than the often-cited 30-35%. About 60% of respondents were married to a Jewish spouse and 27% to non-Jews; the rest had no partner.

The main characteristics of the informants *in the qualitative phase* (N=50) are summarized below.

Gender: 55% women, 45% men

Age: Mean 46 (+/- 4.5), age range 29-70

Ethnicity: 45% Jewish on both sides; 20% Jewish mother; 15% Jewish father; 20% non-Jews

Years spent in Israel: mean 12 (+/- 6.7); range 5-20 years

Marital status: 75% married + 2.7 children (+/- 1.7); 20% single; 5% divorced/widowed

Education: 80% post-secondary; 20% secondary or technical

Occupation in the FSU: 80% white-collar/professional; 20% technical or clerical

Occupation in Israel: 35% white collar/professional; 45% unskilled/manual; 20% students, retirees, unemployed

Religious identity: 60% secular; 20% Jewish believers (non-observant); 10% observant Orthodox or Reform Jews; 10% Christians.

Below we report on the main findings arranged by the principal themes and topics, weaving together quantitative and qualitative materials. As an addendum to this volume, three additional vignettes are presented, describing in more detail qualitative findings on the three minority groups of interest among Russian Olim: Ultra-Orthodox Jews (usually *baalei tshuva*), Christians, and Russian wives of Jewish husbands.

Being Jewish in the Soviet Union

“Being Jewish means a lot to me: it shapes how I live, think, spend my time, communicate with others, what goals I wish to achieve... At the same time, I am part of the Russian culture - thanks to the language I speak, the books I love, the jokes I tell...Being a Russian Jew is an intertwined identity, you can’t separate between the two...” (Moshe, 30, religious)

“My dad is Jewish, my mother Ukrainian, but the difference between them never mattered in our family... Mother had learned to cook gefilte-fish, tsimes and kugel even better than my Jewish grandma... Yet, she never took father’s last name, so that we, the kids, could be registered as Ukrainians after her, to have less trouble with authorities.” (Irina, 35, secular)

The ‘soft’ issues of Jewish identity have been explored in personal interviews. By and large they confirm the view that most Soviet Jews (with the rare exception of *baalei tshuva*) perceived their Jewishness as an ethnic or national category rather than a

religious affiliation. Religion played minor, if any, role in the lives of Soviet Jews, raised in the atheist milieu by the parents, and often grandparents, for decades detached from their Judaic roots. (Several informants mentioned their surprise at learning that in Hebrew there is a single word *yehudi* that refers to both religion and ethnicity). Most informants told stories of their alienation from their Russian, Ukrainian, and other non-Jewish peers while growing up. Many perceived their ethnicity as a flaw or deficiency vis-à-vis Slavic majority. Thus, Marina (45), who is Jewish and married to a Russian man, recalled how upset she had been by her otherness that she (and her mother) construed as almost equivalent to a physical disability:

In Russia, I have always felt as a second-rate person, tainted by a secret flaw. I often brooded about my bad luck: why everybody around me is normal and I am a Jew. I absorbed a lot of teasing and humiliation at school... and then they flanked me at college admissions despite my good grades. I remember crying when I learned that a boy from my class whose grades were much lower had been admitted while I had failed...And then my mom said trying to console me: 'Hey girl, you are not the most miserable person in the world...there are children around who were born without a limb and other bad flaws and they still live...but you are only Jewish, not such a great deal...we all can manage in the end' ...So you can imagine how glad I was to marry a Russian guy a few years later and change my last name...now I could pass as Russian.

Some informants mentioned how their parents tried to conceal or downplay their Jewishness by altering their patronymics and last names to sound more Russian and how they tried to fortify their sons and daughters against possible humiliation and even bullying by their future classmates, neighbors and teachers. For example, Larissa (36), whose mother was Jewish and father Russian, recalled her discovery that “something was wrong with her mother” as a child:

I felt that my mother is embarrassed by her real name, that's why she changed it, like her own mother before her [both had Russian names and patronymics]...I was a curious child and I snooped into their passports and saw different names from the ones they used in their daily lives...But they never mentioned this discrepancy...it was kept quiet. Another sign of my mum's otherness was matzoth that appeared in the house somewhere around April, and in the fall [Rosh ha-Shana season] my grandma baked a special cake with apples and honey. And these weird words they used sometimes between themselves...and my grandma's friends' names that did not sound Russian...I sensed some kind of secret...but the word Jew was never said in our home.

When asked how did the Jews differ from other Soviet citizens (i.e. how were the social boundaries demarcated), most informants mentioned Jewish strife for higher education and solid occupational standing; the strength of family ties and the importance of quality parenting; a few also mentioned a healthier lifestyle compared to most Russians (e.g. less smoking and heavy drinking), as well as a clear in-group social preference in friendships and marital ties. Thus, Konstantin (49) mused about his coming of age as a Jewish young man in Khar'kov, Ukraine:

On the one hand, I have always thought of myself as Jewish, i.e. foreign and different. I often reflected on Israel and the Jewish people and felt my

being part of them. On the other hand, I felt affinity with the western culture, with Europe, and wanted to emigrate there, if it ever became possible. And at the same time, I also identified as a 'Russian intelligent,' part of this noble cultural line... So you see how this split identity made me stand out as different in my social milieu of Russian and Ukrainian teenagers, and they often signaled that I wasn't one of them... My close friends have always been Jewish, not because I chose them on purpose – we simply drifted towards each other because we felt better together. This reminds me of an idea, I think expressed by Jean Paul Sartre, that Jews have been 'created' by antisemites – in the sense that they are always reminded by the 'mainstream' that they do not belong... despite all their attempts to integrate and to pass... I agree that Jewishness is partly a reaction, a response to rejection... which leads to curiosity about who you are, what is this special group all about, where does it come from... That's how my parents and me got interested in the Jewish history and in Israel.

Some informants said that although being Jewish entailed many additional problems in everyday life, they nevertheless felt belonging to the elite group of high achievers, both in Russia and internationally. A few, like the above-cited Konstantin, also mentioned their pride for the State of Israel and extra interest in the political and military events in the Middle East (regardless of the anti-Israeli bias of the Soviet media).

Clear differences in the social identity and self-perception have emerged between informants with two Jewish parents and half-Jews. Those with Jewish fathers more often identified with their Jewish side due to their Jewish last name and the dominant role of fathers in shaping family lifestyle. In line with their perceived gender role, the wives in ethnically-mixed couples typically did most accommodations. Russian wives of Jews often made an extra effort to conform to any remaining Jewish traditions in the family (most often by learning to cook Jewish dishes) and otherwise appease their Jewish in-laws. In turn, Jewish wives of Russian husbands often severed or downplayed their ethnic roots, so that the children grew up feeling more Russian than Jewish. In Israel, these half-Jews experienced a reversal of their perceived identities: Russified children of Jewish mothers have been recognized as 'kosher' Jews, while children of Jewish fathers, who had thought of themselves as Jews, have not been recognized as such. The emotional account by Lilia (38), born of a Jewish father and Russian mother in a Siberian industrial town, exemplifies the identity crisis and hurt feelings of many such immigrants:

When I was a child, around the age of six, I often amused family guests by telling them that I am a 'yiddisher kinder' – a phrase I heard from my Jewish grandma... At school the kids made fun of my Jewish patronymic and last name (Lilia Yakovlevna Lasovskaya) which was a rarity in this all-Russian town... in brief I've always leaned to my father's Jewish side, this was my own choice from a very young age, and I've paid a price for it... Fast forward to my arrival in Israel – my whole world has turned upside down, from the very first encounter with Israeli authorities. When I applied for Israeli ID card, the Russian-speaking clerk said: 'I see that your mother is Russian, so I am entering your ethnicity [leom in Hebrew] as Russian.' I was shocked and tried to object: 'I've considered myself Jewish for my whole life, was registered as a Jew in Russia, why should I become a 'Russian' in Israel? I was not baptized and have no

religion.’...And she goes, ‘Your past and your father don’t count here, what matters is only your mother’s nationality... If you don’t like the word ‘Russian,’ I can just leave it blank [le rashum in Hebrew].’ And that was it for me; in the Jewish state I had to change my identity and become, in fact, a nobody.”

Lilia’s personal story has influenced her choice of occupation in Israel: she is now program coordinator in the Association of Ethnically-Mixed Families – a national NGO representing half-Jewish and other ‘non-kosher’ Olim and their offspring and helping them build bridges to the Israeli mainstream. Lilia’s feelings are shared by many paternal half-Jews, who continue to think of themselves as Jews despite the official labeling and almost never opt for conversion (*giyur*) offered to them in different Israeli settings (including the military).

Notably, ethnically Russian spouses of the Jews, who immigrated with them to Israel, in the interviews often expressed positive views and feelings about the country, sometimes sounding more patriotic and better adjusted than their Jewish spouses more (more on this in the vignette on ‘Russian wives’).

Evolving religious identities

The initial section of the questionnaire addressed religious and traditional practices in respondents’ families (parental and marital) before emigration. As expected, the level of Jewish ‘performance’ had been rather low: just 8% of respondents said that in their family of origin they “regularly observed most Jewish traditions,” while 42.4% said that they “sometimes observed selected Jewish traditions.” About 6% of parental families observed some Christian (mainly Russian Orthodox) traditions, and 43.4% did not observe any religious traditions. When asked to specify which Jewish traditions did their family observe, 7% mentioned some *Shabat* customs, such as lighting candles and/or refraining from certain types of work (mostly as ‘sometimes’); 11% mentioned dietary laws of *kashrut* (of them only 2.4% strictly); 18.5% celebrated Passover (among them 10% with both *matzoth* and bread); 7.7% celebrated *Rosh ha-Shana*, and 18% chose unspecified answer “various Jewish holidays.”

In the interviews, many informants expressed their understanding of Jewish traditions mostly as kitchen rules and food-related activities (special holiday meals and kosher cooking). They stressed that Jewish traditions had been retained mostly by the grandparents, who had also been responsible for holiday preparations, cooking, etc. Most of these elders hailed from the smaller towns of the Pale (where the remnants of the Jewish traditions and Yiddish culture had survived) and later moved with their adult children in larger cities. Seen in this context, Jewish customs were often perceived by younger Jews as something obsolete, pertaining to the past. Many perceived Jewish customs observed by their elderly relatives (e.g. keeping dairy and meat cooking utensils separately or going to a *shoihet* to slaughter a chicken) as *everyday national traditions* from the olden days rather than *Judaic religious rules*, of which they knew nothing. Some others mentioned celebrating both Jewish and Christian holidays (e.g. both Passover and Easter) and/or exchanging traditional gifts and holiday food (*matzoth* and Easter pie and colored eggs) with the Christian neighbors. This was viewed as expressions of inter-group openness and neighborly amicability, and interpreted as the lack of anti-Semitism on the part of Slavic neighbors (one should not forget that several generations had been raised in the spirit of ‘proletarian internationalism’).

Over 25% of the respondents (N=125) stated that their relatives had attended synagogue services (of those, 30% mentioned grandparents, 10% father, and 4% mother). Of all male respondents, 6% had been circumcised back in the FSU and 5% had had bar/bat mitzvah there (both events were largely found among the oldest or the youngest respondents). About one-half had been involved in the activities of Israeli and Jewish organizations in their former home cities (26% more regularly, 21% sometimes). The most commonly attended activities included: various *Sochnut*-sponsored events (53%) and Hebrew or Jewish tradition/culture classes (37%); a minority mentioned cultural events and sports facilities in Jewish Community Centers, as well as volunteering for the community causes (2-3% in each category).

The next question, rather central as it was later used as an independent variable, referred to respondents' current self-definition in relation to faith and religion (these two notions are treated separately by most former Soviets). Although this item was not offered directly, most respondents would probably place themselves in the category of *hiloni* (secular) with a minority identifying as *masorati* when facing the familiar Israeli scale used by Leshem (2001) and most pollsters (*haredi-dati-masorati-hiloni*). This largely means that they are not affiliated with any *religious institutions* and do not follow strictly *religious rituals and prescriptions* in their daily life. This says little, though, about their *faith*, i.e. perceptions of Deity and the sacral. As we see below, only around one third define themselves spiritually as atheists or agnostics. The scale of answers was designed to account for both explicit and more implicit (diffuse) types of religiosity. The distribution of answers was as follows:

	<u>Respondent</u>	<u>Spouse</u>
* Orthodox Jew observing most or all <i>mitzvot</i>	9%	8.5%
* A Jewish believer but not observing <i>mitzvoth</i> or only some of them (most often <i>shabat</i> and/or <i>kashrut</i>)	35.6%	32.8%
* An observant Christian (church-going)	3%	3.5%
* Christian believer but not church-going	3%	3.3%
* Believe in G-d but not belong to any specific confession or church	20.2%	17.7%
* Not a believer (atheist, agnostic)	29.4%	34.2%

Thus, the share of religiously-inclined persons (with different extent of ritual observance) was probably higher in this sample than in the general Olim population, reflecting a higher weight of Halachic Jews and intentional sampling from the areas where religious Jews tend to settle. Among those who identified as strictly-observant Orthodox Jews, only 73% had two Jewish parents, 15% had only a Jewish mother, and 5% only a Jewish father, while 7% were not Jewish at all by birth (i.e., converts). The highest share of respondents with two Jewish parents (85%) was found among those who identify as 'Jewish believers' with partial observance of *mitzvoth* or non-observant but 'ideologically Jewish' (32-35%). These respondents would most typically try to keep kosher, observe some Shabat rules, and fast on Yom Kippur, but do not pray or attend synagogue services. The large weight of this category in the

sample supports the argument that secular-religious dichotomy does not really capture the social context of Israel, with most citizens (even among 'Russian' Olim) observing Jewish customs to some extent (Yonah and Goodman, 2004). The share of Christians was in line with the existing estimates (5-6%), but only half of them were church members. Among the Christians, about 8% had two Jewish parents, 46% had a Jewish father, 15% had a Jewish mother, and 31% had no Jewish lineage. At the same time, the share of respondents with implicit and diffuse approach to the sacral, disconnected from specific religions and ritual observance, was also high (around 20%). Like in the FSU today, only a minority (29%) admit having no faith in the Supreme Being as such (atheists) or its intelligibility and expression by formal religions (agnostics). The ethnic lineage of the latter two groups was quite different: atheists/agnostics more often had two Jewish parents (66% vs. 43% among those 'implicitly religious'), while the share of non-Jews among them was lower (4% vs. 18%). Thus it seems that persons of mixed parentage are more prone to diffuse or implicit patterns of religiosity than are those ethnically Jewish (who are either Orthodox, Jewish believers or atheists). The religious attitudes of the spouses (as reported by respondents) followed a similar pattern, suggesting that couples often tend to stick to a similar outlook and lifestyle; otherwise their union would be conflicted and fragile.

Multivariate analysis did not show any significant differences between these religious identity groups in terms of education and income, with the only exception of the Christians, who less often had academic degrees and more often reported much below-average personal income (80% of all Christians who answered the income item). Also notable was the high share of persons with postgraduate academic degrees among Orthodox Jews (29.3%), probably pointing to the highly educated Jewish professionals from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other major cities who discovered Orthodox Judaism as adults and now live in Jerusalem area or the religious settlements. Analysis by gender showed that the two groups with male majority were Orthodox Jews (57% male vs. 43% female) and atheists (again, 57% male and 43% female). In the groups with more diffuse ideas about faith and religion, and among Christians, women were predominant (59-72%). These distributions could reflect either some traits of female and male religiosity or accidental features of this particular sample.

Religion and spirituality

It should be noted that spiritual worlds of our informants were often ambivalent and inconsistent, mixing elements of Judaism, Christianity, and atheism. Thus, Andrey (38), the son of a Jewish mother and Russian father, mused aloud:

I think that the very fact of my moving to Jerusalem, the holy city where every stone has witnessed long years of Jewish history, has changed me. Now I came to understand Jewishness as a religious destiny, not just ethnic origin... In my previous life, I was not really an atheist but somewhat of an Orthodox Christian, just by virtue of being raised as Russian...As of now, my Jewishness is very important for me, although I do not sever my Russian side either...I hope I can merge them in a coherent way...Since I came to Israel in 2001, I decided to learn as much as possible about Judaism, its history and traditions. I visited a synagogue in my neighborhood, spoke with wise people, and tried to observe the main mitzvot. In fact, in our entire extended family I am the only one who

took this rout. Neither my Jewish mother, nor my wife or their relatives took interest in studying Torah and observing the rules... Although I still do not consider myself a religious man, my exposure to the Jewish sources and traditions left a clear mark on me. While remaining in the depth of my soul a Russian skeptic and non-believer, I have respect for religion not only as a philosophy but also as a ritual practice.

Andrey sounds somewhat uneasy trying to paste together different aspects of his identity and his nascent interest in Judaism, although he sees it as a positive development in his life. He belongs to a segment of the former Soviet immigrant community (probably a minority, judging by the way he describes his extended family) that took the path of active spiritual search and exploration of the religious sources, augmented by the spirit of the Holy Land.

Another example of diffuse but positive attitude towards Judaism was provided by the above-cited Konstantin (49), Jewish by both parents, who lives in Israel since 1996.

I am not religious in the sense that I do not belong to any defined religion. At the same time, all religions are of interest to me, and especially Judaism...By no means would I call myself an atheist: I do acknowledge the existence of a higher creative force and meaning in the Universe.

Q. Is your Jewishness important to you?

Yes, by all means. For me, Judaism is an integral part of the Jewish traditions and culture, and I respect it at two levels. First, all national traditions are worthy of respect, but second – this is my own people's national traditions. Observant Jews ensured historic survival and continuity of the Jewish people...That's why I was pleased when my son started his studies for the giyur [K's wife is Russian].

The transformation of the Russian Jewish identity transplanted to the Israeli soil was colorfully illustrated by Leonid (35), who arrived in Israel in 1994 and described himself as a firm atheist.

What it meant to be Jewish among Slavs? Always taking a social distance, feeling different both in a negative and a positive way...Kind of belonging to a closed club of intellectuals and high achievers – making you feel privileged in some way, by association... When it turned out later, in the 1990s, that Jews also have a religion and a defined way of life – I was shaken and upset, it challenged my old view of myself...When I learned that in Hebrew there is just a single word 'yehudi' merging religion and nationality – I was astonished and tried to find linguistic forms to separate between the two. For Russian-speaking Jews, it is important to use two different terms, otherwise I have to describe myself as observant of Judaic faith, which I am not. I even tried to write 'atheist' in the item 'religion' when we applied to Israeli embassy, but was scolded by the clerk who said that I was asking for trouble... I was concerned about this issue (no split in the language meaning no difference in the way of life and every Israeli being religious?) till I landed on a kibbutz and met many secular Jews like myself... Until this day I try to explain the difference between being Jewish and Judaic to my Israeli colleagues and many fail to understand...Later I tackled another problem – being seen and defined by native Israelis as 'rusi' (Russian), while being 100% Jewish... till I

realized they simply meant the origin country. But this further highlighted out difference, and I understood how much I was actually attached to Russian culture and language ... I knew then that my close friends and dates, and a future wife, can only be of Russian origin, otherwise we will lack common language in a cultural sense... So I have made a full circle in my identity trip, as you can see.

Leonid's identity journey is rather typical for many members of Russian-Jewish intelligentsia, who find it hard to internalize the fusion between the ethno-national and religious aspects of being Jewish. While expressing respect to the Jewish calendar and traditions that frame the everyday lives of most Israelis, they rarely adopt them as their own and remain psychologically distant from the religious circles and practices (especially from synagogues as closely knit faith communities where most Olim sharply feel their otherness). Feeling like outsiders to the mainstream Israeli narrative (rather permeated by religious motives), many seek shelter and meaning in the familiar Russian social and cultural world. A smaller fraction among the Olim develop deeper personal affinity with Judaic ideas and practices; for most novices, this journey starts and ends at intellectual exposure to the Jewish sources and better understanding of the ritual and tradition, while for a few pious ones the path leads to *tshuva* and full observance.

In the interviews, informants mused about complex ties between spirituality (the hard-to-translate Russian word *dukhovnost'*) and religion, particularly Judaism and its spiritual load. Quite a few non-religious and non-observant informants said that they felt 'spiritually uplifted' when they attend a synagogue on a special event (bar-mitzvah or memorial service) or on Yom Kippur; they also ascribe deep spiritual meaning to the Jewish rituals of fasting and mourning for the dead (*shiv'a*) and believe in the Higher Force or Deity in the Jewish sense (i.e. not as Jesus or Allah). Another category of non-believers are atheists (e.g. above-cited Leonid) who perceive Judaism as a cultural tradition rather than a source of spirituality and interpret it from the standpoint of secular humanism. Half-Jews and spouses of the Jews present with an interesting mix of ideas about religion and spiritual life: they respect and superficially observe some Jewish traditions (e.g. High holiday celebrations with special meals), but also observe some Christian traditions and beliefs (e.g. consider Jesus a true Messiah). Self-proclaimed Christians repudiate Judaism as a 'dead religion' that has very little to offer in the spiritual sense and only demands from its adepts to observe endless mundane rites and regulations "*which have little to do with true faith or spiritual search.*" Most informants, regardless of their religious identification, have visited Christian Holy Places in Jerusalem and across Israel and felt very impressed and inspired by being able "*to set foot on these holy stones.*" Some felt the need to return to these holy sites or to attend churches of their special liking. The amalgam of ideas about faith and spirit was expressed by Elena (35) who is Jewish on the maternal side and married to a native Israeli:

Q. How do you feel about Judaism as religion?

I am very interested and keep learning new things about it. I am not really observant of course, but I am making steps in the right direction, e.g. not mixing milk and meat products, not buying pork anymore... This reflects both my husband's habits and the moral norm... When I am abroad and see people in the hotel eating bacon I kind of shudder... I also started

lightning candles on Friday nights, but I still drive on Shabat. I think I am living a more Jewish life now...

Q. And your relations with Christianity?

I do have elements of Christian faith in me, because of my Russian past, my paternal grandmother who took me to the church as a child...Like I believe till this day that Jesus is the true Messiah who has already come... so it's pointless to wait for another one...

Q. How do you understand the link between spirituality and religion? Does the life of the spirit necessarily draw on religious faith?

For me, these are not identical notions. Spiritual life is measured by my ability to connect to the deity and find moral rights and wrongs in the everyday life; it shapes my relation to myself and the people around me. Spiritual life is impossible when you don't have any idea of the higher power, something beyond our mundane reality...But I know some people who are very religious in terms of observing the rules but very undeveloped spiritually. They pray and fast and all that but do not ask complex moral questions, do not reflect about their own place in the world. So formal religion is not necessarily spiritual.

Q. Have you personally turned to religion as a source of spiritual growth?

Yes, I have, especially after coming to Israel. I was not a real Christian in Russia, but I read the New Testament and pondered all these issues...I think that Judaism and Christianity are closely related and their spiritual messages are rather similar.

Like Elena, Andrey (38), non-religious son of a Jewish mother and a Russian father, felt that religion is important but not a sole source of spirituality.

Q. Are spiritual pursuits important in your life?

They were at a certain point. When I came to Israel, I tried to study Jewish texts and traditions, but it was probably too late for me to change my outlook as a secular person, I am all too critical to accept the tenets of any faith without doubt. Yet, in general, I do ask myself questions about the meaning of life, try to look for some answers in my reading...What's more important, I am trying to keep my personal integrity and also live in peace with a society that surrounds me. I guess I've learned enough about Judaism as the framework of life in Israel; I accepted it as legitimate and this helped me come to terms with my new homeland... But religion doesn't occupy me anymore. I am not a Yeshiva boy; I live in the real world and have to make a living and tackle everyday problems.

Q. How do you perceive the interference of religion into everyday life in Israel?

At first, I was really angry about all the limitations that state religion imposes on the citizens (like the lack of transportation and closed stores on Shabat). But over time, I came to realize the basis of these traditions and accepted them as legitimate for the only Jewish state in the world.

Thus, Elena and Andrey (both half-Jewish) exemplify the process of gradual social learning and the growing acceptance of the Jewish religious and traditional framework

as a status quo in their new country of residence. If for Andrey it manifests a quite compliance with the situation he cannot change, Elena took more active steps towards becoming an organic part of this new life and her milieu on the side of her Sabra husband. Elena and Andrey perceive acquaintance with Judaism mainly as an instrument of social integration in Israel and pursue first and foremost their personal integrity and good relations with the people who surround them. For both, religion and spiritual life are related but far from identical; both do not perceive religious faith as the sole (nor even major) source of human decency and moral behavior.

Intermarriage

Both demographic data, with over 60% of ex-Soviet Jews intermarried, and social survey findings (Gitelman, 2003, 2009) point to the fact that endogamy is not a common value among Russian-speaking Jews. Both historically and currently, out-marriage has been more prevalent among Jewish men than Jewish women. We broached the subject of the family and Jewish continuity in the interviews, which further endorsed this known trend. About half of our interviewees were intermarried themselves or were partly-Jewish/non-Jewish. Most of them asserted that love and shared values, not ‘blood,’ is the basic principle in marital partner choice. At the same time, several Jewish men (but not women) recalled their parents persuading them to date and marry Jewish partners – not for the sake of Jewish continuity as such, but because of better understanding and shared values and practices among in-group partners. Others referred to deep-seated antisemitism among Russians and other Slavs that would inevitably surface in marital life. Thus, Konstantin (49) recalled his father telling him when he started dating in college: *“The problem with marrying a Russian woman is that some day, under certain circumstances, she will call you a dirty kike. This would happen regardless of how much you loved each other; she just won’t be able to help her nature and express her true feelings. With a Jewish wife you are spared this kind of pain.”* Some fathers even threatened their sons to withhold their support if they brought home a Russian bride, usually causing their anger and resentment rather than compliance. However, this kind of family mentoring was relatively uncommon; the wish to find a partner who is a kin spirit and a true friend regardless of ethnic background usually predominated. For example, Marina (60) answered the question about mixed couples and Jewish continuity: *“I couldn’t care less about ethnically mixed couples. In my own family there were people of so many nationalities – Russians, Bielorusians, Armenians, you name it... We had been raised as internationalists and chose partners on their human qualities, not ethnicity. She added: “I had no inferiority complexes as a Jew – since I’ve never experienced much trouble due to it, thank G-d. Maybe that’s why I don’t mind Jews marrying Slavs or any other nationals.”*

Several younger informants mentioned that they were looking for dates and potential spouses in the ranks of fellow Russian immigrants, regardless of their Jewish ‘purity’ – seeking common language and cultural background rather than rabbinical approval. For example, Leonid (35) opined: *“I believe that two former Moscovites from educated circles, one Jewish and another Russian, have more in common than a Moscow Jew and a Jew from Bukhara or Caucasus. Cultural affinity and shared interests are more important in marriage than Jewish genes, if they exist at all.”* Thus, both in the FSU and in Israel, intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews is not perceived as a problem by most, although many Jewish informants would prefer Jews as spouses, when other essential expectations (relational, cultural, etc.) are being met.

Current religious practices: Holidays and mitzvot

The interviews show that most informants adopted the elements of Israeli Jewish traditions under external social influence – that of their Ulpan teachers, neighbors, coworkers and other veteran Israelis who invited them to *Seder Pesah* and *Rosh-ha-Shana* meals and explained them what to do on the major holidays. Another important push in the direction of traditional practices came from the children who underwent 'Jewish re-socialization' at school and expected their parents to conform to some key local norms. Interestingly, most informants perceived these holidays as national/ethnic traditions or features of Israeli lifestyle rather than religious rituals or expressions of faith. They mimicked some holiday customs rather superficially in order to avoid standing out too much or being labeled as aliens by the locals, i.e. as the means of social conformism or mimicry. Most informants said that they bought relevant food items (*matzoth* for Pesah, *Oznei-Oman* for Purim, etc.) and/or cooked some traditional dishes (e.g. *gefilte-fish* for Rosh-ha-Shana), seeing these holidays as an opportunity for the family or friends' gathering at a festive meal. Few informants (except the religious ones) understood in detail the history and meaning of various Jewish holidays, sufficing with the general, pragmatic 'bottom line' (e.g., Pesah celebrates freedom and end of slavery when you display matzoth and put away bread; Purim is a merry festival that entails costumes for the kids and some masquerade for adults; Chanukah is about lighting candles and eating doughnuts; Yom Kippur means not displaying food in public and no transport or driving). The attitude of many Olim towards holiday practices was expressed by Vitaly, 40, Jewish on both sides and non-religious.

Q. Do you fast on Yom Kipur?

V. I do, but not for religious reasons... For me religious customs reflect local Israeli culture, to which I wish to get closer, to become Jewish in the local understanding of the word. I won't like to remain an immigrant or an alien for the rest of my life, I am trying to get closer to the majority... So for me not eating bread during Pesah or fasting on Yom Kipur is a symbol of my belonging to the Jewish majority in some tangible way... That is to say I do not do it out of religious motives but rather the social ones... Like in the FSU we made some effort to buy matzoth for Pesah to show our belonging to the Jewish group, or to stress our 'dissidence' – rather than express our religious piety.

Another quote from Maria, a 60-year old Jewish woman asked about whether she perceived Jewish holidays as her own now.

Q. What has changed in Israel?

In my family, we celebrate Pesah every year, and every Rosh-ha-Shana, and light Chanukah candles too – just for fun, we like doing this. It shows that we are living amongst our own community now, and I like being its member.

Q. Do you respond emotionally to the Jewish holidays with the same pleasure as, say, to Russian New Year?

I do, why not? If all my loved ones got together at the Pesah table, and we drank some, got merry, had a great time together? We do basically the same for the New Year... For Pesah I bake a large, rich cake [laughs] and place matzoth on a plate next to it; I also make Russian potato salad and

all the usual meals. But – mind it – I do prepare all the traditional Pesah elements on the special segmented dish, I really do... Yet all this is just for fun – an excuse to get together and have another holiday.

By contrast, Yuri (42), a secular Jew, felt rather alienated from all Jewish holidays:

When you did not grow up with these traditions, it's very hard to treat them seriously or take them close to your heart... While living here, you can't help learning about the holidays, watching your Sabra neighbors celebrate, catching special TV shows on these days – so you come to accept some of it as facts of life in Israel. And even make some right moves – buy the foods, put some meal together with the family – why not if you have a free day? But for me these holidays are still void of meaning, and for the same reason I can't pass any of it to my children – it would be fake. They'll have to decide what to celebrate and how – by themselves.

It is fairly clear from these examples that the immigrants try to follow the local behavioral script during Jewish holidays in order to pass the test for 'Israeliness' or feel less alienated from the host society, but few of them internalize these traditions. They often mix their old customs into the newly learned practices (like Maria's baking a rich cake for the Passover and placing this ultra-*khametz* next to matzoth and the segmented dish with all the 'right elements'), creating an amalgam that would anger any Judaic purist. On the other hand, these new opportunities for family consolidation and making friends with both locals and co-ethnics are perceived by most as a positive development or at least as a neutral one, 'just another free day to relax and get together.'

Let us go back to the questionnaire that assessed the quantitative patterns of traditional Jewish practices. When asked about celebrating Jewish religious holidays at home, 52.3% responded that they usually celebrate all the major holidays, while 47.7% celebrated some holidays sometimes (among them, 12% said seldom or never). Passover (*Pesah*) was the most commonly celebrated holiday: 93% participated in some kind of a holiday gathering (*Seder*) at home or at friends'/relatives' place. Among them, 23% participated in a *Seder* with full *Hagaddah* reading and no *khametz* in the house; 27% with partial adherence – a shorter version of *Haggadah*, not cleaning the house of *khametz*, and possibly having bread on the table; and 43% celebrate it free-style, as a merry party with all kinds of food plus *matzoth*. *Seder Pesah* in some form is celebrated by Russian Israelis of all persuasions, including 47% of self-proclaimed atheists and 26% of the Christians. *Rosh-ha-Shana* was celebrated by 54% and *Sukkot* by 20% of respondents, mainly those more closely identifying with Judaism.

Dietary laws (*kashrut*) were observed strictly or partly by 12.4% and 12.8% respectively, while almost 75% did not practice any of it. Most respondents (85%, including some religious ones) bought familiar Russian foods in non-kosher Russian groceries from time to time, but many of them practiced greater discretion about the kinds of products to bring home. About one-third noted that they stopped eating pork and tried not to mix dairy and meat products in a very explicit way, especially in public settings. In Vitaly's words, "*I can no longer add a slice of cheese to a bologna sandwich, it just doesn't feel right to mix these elements... On the other hand, when I am offered a beef stew cooked with sour cream or a chunk of butter is added to a meat dish – I won't mind since it's not so obvious...*"

Sabbath reception (*Kabalat Shabbat*) ritual was performed by 17% always and by 13% sometimes or partly; 9.5% refrained from driving and doing other prohibited work on *Shabbat*, and only 7% attended synagogue for the Sabbath prayers. In the interviews, most non-religious informants (largely women) explained that they liked the beauty of the candle lighting ceremony and often performed it when having visitors on Friday night. In most cases, they lighted candles without saying the prayer or covering their head; only about half always had a special Shabbat bread (*khallah*) and wine for the ceremony. As for the other Shabbat traditions, quite many informants disapproved of the lack of public transportation that they perceived as discriminatory against poorer Israelis having no private cars. "*We all work very hard, and Saturday is the only day when we could go to the beach or have a picnic in the forest as a family. But we can't do it without a car, which doesn't feel right,*" – said one male informant. By contrast, some others voiced their support for maintaining Shabbat as a common day or rest with lighter traffic on the roads and no commercial activities. "*This is how the Jewish State should differ from other countries. We have enough fuss and rushing around during six days a week, let us stop at least for a while,*" – said another informant, secular but respectful of Jewish traditions.

A rather high percentage among survey respondents (41%) reported fasting on *Yom Kippur* and 27% also said they attended a synagogue service – both practices being more common among the category of 'Jewish believers' than the rest. In general, only 15% reported synagogue attendance (regular or episodic) for High Jewish holidays. About half of all respondents (46.7%) said that they do not observe any prescriptions of Judaism in their everyday life. A significant share of respondents in this sample reported activities aimed at Jewish learning at some point of their lives in Israel, mainly as an intellectual or spiritual endeavor rather than a religious journey of *tshuva*. To learn more about Judaic traditions, 27% took various classes and courses, among them almost half in religious settings sponsored by *Chabad* or *Bnei Akiva*, and the rest in community centers (*matnasim*), University/college based classes, etc. The *Giyur* (conversion) classes were mentioned by 14% of respondents who reported any Jewish learning activity during their post-migration lives.

Thus, we see that most respondents do participate in some form in Jewish holiday celebrations, and a tangible minority also adheres to *mitzvot* such as *kabalat Shabbat* and keeping kosher. The majority of younger parents (70% of those defined as *Halachic Jews*) have circumcised their sons, and over half of those eligible had some kind of bar mitzvah celebration for their sons. (Due to the dominant Orthodox doctrine, bat-mitzvah for girls is less popular in Israel than in North America – less than a half of native Israelis and Russian Olim report having it for their daughters). The interviews show that for most new Israelis with a Russian accent conforming with the prescribed Jewish lifestyle markers serves as a route of social accommodation rather than return to the lost religion. Only a minority of 15-20% remain completely untouched by any Jewish traditions and holidays in their everyday life. Along with this, participation in communal activities, such as synagogue attendance, remained very low.

Civic traditions

Having been socialized by the strong and omnipresent State, most former Soviets respect the expressions of 'civic religion,' in our case State Zionism. So we turned next to civil holidays and traditions of Israeli society – a kind of framework former Soviets are well familiar with (in fact, there is a lot of similarity between Soviet and

Israeli military and civil ceremonies). The civil holiday celebrated by most respondents (85%) is Independence Day, followed by Holocaust Remembrance Day (56%), and Fallen Soldiers Day (52%). The latter two memorial days do not imply any special activities for most citizens, except for those who visit military cemeteries or participate in official ceremonies. As opposed to these 'mental attention and respect' days, Independence Day is work-free and filled with festive activities – outings, picnics, watching air parade, etc. – which Russian Israelis gladly join along with the natives. The distribution of answers by religious identity shows that Independence Day is the common ground for all, celebrated by 76% of Orthodox Jews, 70% of Christians, and between 78% and 93% of the less religious or non-religious respondents. In the interviews, many participants expressed a greater liking for the civil holidays than religious ones, attributing greater personal meaning to these events. Thus, Ludmila, a Russian woman who converted to Judaism, said *"I was so deeply moved by the visit to Yad va-Shem [Israel's Holocaust Museum]... it was quite overwhelming for me, I did not know all of this before... Ever since I watch all the programs and films about Jewish suffering during the Shoa Day on TV, to the point of crying and being unable to take any more of it... Now I see differently the experience of my husband's family during the Great War. "*

Interestingly, the official ceremonies that had caused boredom or scorn during Soviet days (e.g. military parades or politicians' speeches) were often construed positively in the Israeli context: e.g., many informants went to see air force parade every Independence Day or watched the Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony at Yad va-Shem museum on TV. Several informants asserted that, by contrast to the Soviet holidays that referred to false or empty ideological dogma, Israeli civil traditions draw on actual historic experiences and tragedies of the Jewish people and Israel as a young nation struggling for its existence. All informants voiced their respect for the Fallen Soldiers Day, and many stressed that they refrained from any entertainment or partying on this day despite having free time. Many others mentioned that the siren sounded from street loudspeakers on the national memorial days makes them freeze, stop whatever they were doing, and causes strong emotional response to the point of tears. The only group that was critical of official Israeli holidays were Orthodox Jews, who perceived them as the means of state propaganda that are rather artificial and foreign to the Jewish traditions of remembering the dead (by prayer, candle lighting, etc.).

Given that all respondents have been socialized in the FSU, we asked next if they kept celebrating familiar Russian/Soviet civil holidays in Israel. About 85% said they keep celebrating the New Year on December 31-January 1, the only non-political, family-based holiday in the USSR/FSU loved by all citizens. Under Soviet rule, it had been symbolically detached from Christmas and over time lost any religious connotation, the only trace of the pre-revolutionary tradition being the New Year Fur Tree (no longer called Christmas Tree). The people started hoarding produce and liquor for the festive meal weeks ahead (given permanent shortages) and then happily consumed it in just one night, surrounded by family and friends. Official celebrations included staged and televised parties and concerts and included the traditional New Year congratulations by the Number One talking head on the TV screen (General Secretary, later the President). The advent of the New Year was marked by the strike of the Great Clock on the Kremlin's *Spassky* Tower at midnight; at this point millions of Soviet citizens raised their champagne glasses to toast and congratulate each other saying *"S novym godom - S novym shastjem!"* (New Year – New Luck!). Certain

rituals had been invented by the citizens for their own private use on the New Year night: exchange of special gifts, festive clothes, etc. (according to the popular omen, the more fun one has had on the New Year night, the luckier the new year will be, and vice versa).

Both the survey and interviews show that most Russian Israelis still have sentimental connection to their gentile New Year, and there is no decline in this custom with the increasing period of life in Israel, nor any substantial variance by the level of education and income.

Thus, Lev (35), a secular man working in high-tech, offered his thoughts:

New Year is the main nostalgic holiday we still have, the only one that was sincere, joyful and free of ideology. There is no other holiday that I expect with such a pleasure – including all the Jewish holidays that have not become my own, even after many years in Israel... Of course we keep a small synthetic tree for this occasion (that I had bought in Jerusalem's Old City), the children select decorations, we buy presents to each other, and everyone is happy...I may be wrong, but it seems to me that Israelis recently became more tolerant of our New Year celebrations and fur trees. Some 10-15 years ago, they associated this only with Christian symbols and typically reacted with an angry question: "Are you a Christian or what?" I remember being embarrassed, trying to avoid visitors in the house during the holiday season, explaining that this custom is unrelated to any religion - but they didn't believe me then. And recently I noticed that my visitors and neighbors exclaim – 'Eize Yoffi! [how nice – Hebrew] – it looks like in American movies... Where did you get this tree and decorations?' I don't know how to explain this: either Israelis have become less narrow-minded or 'Russians' have become more confident and don't ask permission to live the way they like...but the overall tone has changed.

Like Lev's family, 45% of Russian Israelis celebrate New Year with a decorated fur tree, either a synthetic one or imitated by some ever-green potted bush. Among Christians, 72% put on the tree; among atheists and those of unspecified 'faith in universal God' over 50%, and even 35% among those leaning to Jewish Orthodoxy still place their children's presents under the tree. The minority of respondents who do not celebrate gentile (Gregorian) New Year in any way (about 15%) are all religious Jews, often *ba'alei tshuva*. Thus, Ludmila (59), ethnic Russian who went through *giyur* mused: "I think celebrating Russian or Soviet holidays in Israel is silly. The New Year celebrations make sense when they are surrounded by the winter atmosphere, lots of snow, and a real fir tree. And what do we have here? – summer and more summer. It is ridiculous to have New Year parties in the heat! When do you have winter and snow deduced, what's left? Nothing...Since we moved here we stopped celebrating any Russian holidays, with no sense of loss at all..."

As January 1 is a work day in Israel, some determination is required to spend this night awake, partying at home with friends or going out to a bar or club. Many entertainment venues use commercial opportunity and offer parties that night, called by Israelis *Silvester*, after an obscure Christian saint. After initial angry outcry by the veteran Israelis about "Russians importing their Christian customs" (as Lev has noticed above), by the late 1990s many commercial outlets (mainly in the Christian Arab sector but not only) started selling fur trees and colorful decorations in

December. Young Israelis increasingly jumped at another chance for a fun night out and started partying with their Russian friends to celebrate *Silvester*. Yet, the semantic taboos are carefully guarded on both sides: neither do Russians buy and decorate a 'Christmas Tree' nor do Israelis call the outings 'New Year parties' (since Jewish New Year starts in September, and, by official ideology, Gregorian calendar is used in Israel along with the Jewish one for purely technical reasons).

As for the other Soviet holidays, 56.6% still celebrate March 8, the International Women's Day, when men bring gifts and flowers to their mothers, wives and lovers and symbolically spare them from domestic chores (yes, for just one day a year!). About 39% celebrate the Victory Day on May 9 (in line with the Soviet tradition, and not on May 8 like in Europe), as most families have the elders who fought in the Great Patriotic War against the Nazis. These two holidays were more often mentioned by the less religious respondents, although over 20% of observant Jews and 75% of Christians also celebrated them from time to time. The rest of the former Soviet holidays fell into obscurity among all Russian Israelis.

Attitudes towards ethnicity, religion, and minority rights

The final section of the survey consisted of several statements on ethno-national and religious issues, with which respondents were asked to express their degree of consent on a 5-point scale (1 totally disagree, 5 fully agree). These statements (shown here both in the Russian original and English translation) reflected common elements of public discourse and opinions circulated by the Hebrew and Russian-language media, as well as prevalent beliefs regarding Russian cultural continuity, relations between religion and state, Jewish learning (including *giyur* for non-Jews), status of various minorities in Israel, and the respondents' intentions to stay in Israel. Although we did not include a direct question on respondents' political stance in the survey, the combination of these attitudes allowed allocating them within the Israeli political spectrum with a certain degree of confidence. The majority identified with the Center-Right positions, probably voting for *Kadima*, *Likud*, and *Israel Beiteinu*, while the religious respondents voted for various religious parties. A minority, including some Christians, were leaning to the Center-Left. A similar distribution of informants was found in the interviews, although many, especially women, said they were indifferent to politics and either ignored elections or voted the way their husbands told them.

The tables below present the means of the answers, first in general (above each table, along with the number of respondents for this item and standard deviation) and then split by selected socio-demographic characteristics. The comments following the tables relate to the variance in the answers by both socio-demographic characteristics and religious self-definition of respondents as shown on p. 17. The means below 2.5 (midpoint) signify the tendency to disagree with the statement, while the means above 2.5 show various levels of support (up to 5 – full agreement). Most categories are self-evident; *SES* stands for perceived change in socio-economic status upon migration (compared to the last 5 years in the FSU); *Occupation* is for the current or last job in Israel. For significant differences between the means, P values are stated in the last column; NS stands for non-significant differences.

Russian and Jewish identities

1. Мне важно, чтобы мои дети и внуки хорошо знали русский язык
It is important for me that my children and grandchildren know Russian well

N = 494, mean = 4.45, std = 0.87

Gender	Men (4.44)	Women (4.46)			NS
Education	Secondary (4.11)	Some college (4.61)	Undergraduate degree (4.46)	Postgraduate degree (4.30)	P<0.05
SES	Descend (4.66)	No change (4.32)	Ascend (4.34)		P<0.01
Income	Below average (4.54)	Average (4.54)	Above average (4.28)		P<0.05
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (4.39)	At least one Jewish (4.52)	Non-Jews (4.69)		N
Age	Under 40 (4.44)	41 – 60 (4.46)	61+ (4.49)		N
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (4.24)	Capitals of FSU (4.52)	Other largest cities (4.51)	Smaller towns (4.50)	N
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (4.50)	5 – 10 (4.55)	11 – 15 (4.54)	16+ (4.36)	N
Occupation	Professionals (4.37)	Others (4.57)			P<0.05

If there is one matter on which most Israeli Russians agree, it is the wish for the Russian linguistic and cultural continuity for the second generation. As we see, the general mean is close to the high end of the scale, expressing full agreement, with little variance by socio-demographic characteristics. The religious identity group with somewhat lower interest in all things Russian is Orthodox Jews (3.95), while the highest interest is expressed by the Christians (5.0). This difference is significant at P<0.01.

In the interviews, most respondents, regardless of their religious affiliation, spoke about realizing how Russian language and culture they took for granted while living in the FSU became salient for them after moving to Israel; how they increasingly appreciated Russian literature, cinema, TV and how they wished to transfer these values to their children. This was true even of a few Orthodox informants who fully observed Jewish commandments and lifestyle. Thus, Moshe (30), single *baal tshuva*, said: *"What language am I speaking to you now? Russian! This is who I am and this is not going to change... You can never feel equal among Israeli Haredim, especially if you are of Russian origin and was not born Ultra-Orthodox. They dismiss you and your children as potential marital partners. Most of my friends are Russian baalei tshuva and I can only find a bride among them... I read Russian classical literature, I appreciate it more now, and I want my bride and future children to share it with me."*

2. Я освоил иврит по необходимости, но этот язык никогда не станет для меня основным и естественным
I have learned (some) Hebrew out of necessity but it will never become my primary language

(N = 493, mean = 2.77, std = 1.46)

Gender	Men (2.83)	Women (2.73)			NS
Education	Secondary (3.0)	Some college (2.84)	Undergraduate degree (2.85)	Postgraduate degree (2.19)	P<0.05
SES	Descend (3.35)	The same (2.93)	Ascend (2.31)		P<0.01
Income	Below average (3.09)	Average (2.82)	Above average (2.51)		P<0.01
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (2.75)	One parent Jewish (2.72)	Non-Jews (3.24)		NS
Age	Under 40 (2.23)	41 – 60 (3.14)	61+ (3.57)		P<0.01
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.59)	Capitals of FSU (2.72)	Other largest cities (2.92)	Smaller towns (2.79)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (2.32)	5 – 10 (2.90)	11 – 15 (2.97)	16+ (2.66)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (2.69)	Others (2.90)			NS

There was less agreement as to switching to Hebrew as one's primary language: the respondents who disliked Hebrew (and probably had low proficiency) were those with lower income and occupational status, pointing to their low perceived need in the host language as unskilled workers having few contacts with the natives. Other subgroups that spoke basic Hebrew only when needed (and Russian at all other times) included older respondents and the ones who were not ethnically Jewish. Respondents who identified with Judaism typically disagreed with this opinion, i.e. felt greater affinity with Hebrew, while Christians more often expressed agreement (1.90 vs. 3.62, P<0.01). Longer period of life in Israel did not affect these tendencies in and by itself, meaning that immigrants establish their language attitudes and practices early upon migration, with little change over time (see the above quote by Moshe).

3. Еврейство – это национальная, этническая категория не связанная напрямую с иудейской религией

Jewishness is an ethnic category unrelated directly to religion (Judaism)

(N = 495, mean = 2.98, std = 1.41)

Gender	Men (2.93)	Women (3.02)			NS
Education	Secondary (3.16)	Some college (3.15)	Undergraduate degree (2.97)	Postgraduate degree (2.76)	NS
SES	Descend (3.14)	The same (2.98)	Ascend (2.82)		NS
Income	Below average (2.98)	Average (3.03)	Above average (2.93)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (2.91)	One parent Jewish (3.10)	Non-Jews (3.05)		NS
Age	Under 40 (2.77)	41 – 60 (3.14)	61+ (3.18)		P<0.05
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.79)	Capitals of FSU (2.91)	Other largest cities (3.31)	Smaller towns (2.84)	P<0.05
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.05)	5 – 10 (3.0)	11 – 15 (3.0)	16+ (2.96)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (2.95)	Others (3.01)			NS

As was already mentioned in our discussion of Jewish identities in the FSU, most secular Russian and Ukrainian Jews understood their Jewishness as an ethnic category defined by the fact of birth. We see that this view is no longer universal among Russian-speaking Jews in Israel: the average (2.98) is close to the midpoint of the scale. Those, who still lean toward this traditional Soviet view, include older respondents (3.18), and on the religiosity scale – those calling themselves atheists (3.54) or partly-observant ‘Jewish believers’ (3.68). As expected, the group with the least agreement with the ethnic view of Jewish identity were observant Orthodox respondents (1.48, the differences between them and all the other groups significant at $P < 0.01$).

Thus, Michael (31), an Orthodox man who studies for a programmer after completing a yeshiva, mused: *“There is no Jewish identity without religious component – otherwise it becomes just a racist or a nationalist ideology... Jews are not a race, they come from all different ethnic groups...this is why nationalism does not make sense for us – there is nothing national left without our religion, Judaism. Under the same breath, I am saying that Judaism should be prone to compromises and bear ‘a human face’ towards others, including half-Jews...which is not always the case.”*

Apparently, Michael’s view is at odds with the Zionist doctrine of the Jewish people and leaves no place for secular Jewish nationalism and statehood. But his is definitely a minority view, even among religious Israelis (with the exception of some Ultra-Orthodox streams).

4. Неверующий ассимилированный еврей остается евреем в полной мере, независимо от мнения раввинов по этому поводу

A Jew who is assimilated and non-religious is still a Jew, regardless of what the rabbis think about it

(N = 495, mean = 3.97, std = 1.17)

Gender	Men (4.02)	Women (3.94)			NS
Education	Secondary (3.88)	Some college (4.01)	Undergraduate degree (3.95)	Postgraduate degree (4.09)	NS
SES	Descend (3.92)	The same (4.0)	Ascend (3.98)		NS
Income	Below average (3.93)	Average (4.04)	Above average (3.97)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (4.01)	At least one Jewish (3.90)	Non-Jews (4.05)		NS
Age	Under 40 (3.97)	41 – 60 (3.97)	61+ (3.97)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.96)	Capitals of FSU (3.85)	Other largest cities (4.16)	Smaller towns (3.80)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.95)	5 – 10 (3.81)	11 – 15 (3.95)	16+ (4.00)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (4.05)	Others (3.93)			NS

The above analysis applies here too, but overall agreement with this position is higher (3.97), without much socio-demographic variance. After all, most former Soviet Jews belong to the described category, and they would never accept as legitimate the rabbinical allegations that Soviet Jews are almost equal to gentiles (*goyim*) because they are ignorant of Judaism. Even a large share of Orthodox respondents agreed with the above statement (3.68), let alone atheists (4.32, significant at $P < 0.05$). The next statement expressed the opposite view, with the following results.

5. Только верующие евреи соблюдающие мицвот принадлежат к еврейскому народу
Only believers observing the mitzvot truly belong to the Jewish people

(N = 497, mean = 1.45, std = 0.89)

Gender	Men (1.4)	Women (1.49)			NS
Education	Secondary (1.65)	Some college (1.69)	Undergraduate degree (1.36)	Postgraduate degree (1.36)	P<0.01
SES	Descend (1.57)	The same (1.46)	Ascend (1.39)		NS
Income	Below average (1.52)	Average (1.36)	Above average (1.4)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (1.32)	One parent Jewish (1.64)	Non-Jews (1.74)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (1.42)	41 – 60 (1.49)	61+ (1.45)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (1.39)	Capitals of FSU (1.39)	Other largest cities (1.42)	Smaller towns (1.50)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (1.55)	5 – 10 (1.6)	11 – 15 (1.54)	16+ (1.34)	P=0.53
Occupation	Professionals (1.34)	Others (1.54)			P<0.05

Within the same ideological stance, most respondents disagreed with the above statement (1.45), with little inter-group variance; even Orthodox Jews and ‘Jewish believers’ chose answers below 2.0. Thus, most respondents share a broader view of Jewish peoplehood not solely based on religion. Here are several interview quotes to endorse this finding:

“No one can decide for me if I am Jewish or not, this is a matter of self-definition. I have also paid a high price for carrying a Jewish last name, that of my father” (Lilia, 38, born of a Russian mother and Jewish father)

“Former Soviets see Jewishness differently from Israeli religious authorities, and it is not a matter of being right or wrong, nor a matter of choice – you are simply born Jewish, for better or worse. There are all kinds of Jews in the world, and most of them are non-religious” (Genady, 60, Jewish).

Minority rights

6. Израиль должен любой ценой оставаться «этно-демократией» с еврейским большинством, даже за счет ограничения в правах нееврейских меньшинств (арабов, друзов и пр.)
Israel must remain an ‘ethnic democracy’ with Jewish majority, even at the expense of limiting civil rights of the minorities (Arabs, Druze etc.)

(N = 485, mean = 3.34, std = 1.42)

Gender	Men (3.53)	Women (3.19)			P<0.01
Education	Secondary (3.46)	Some college (3.31)	Undergraduate degree (3.3)	Postgraduate degree (3.49)	NS

SES	Descend (3.25)	The same (3.27)	Ascend (3.38)		NS
Income	Below average (3.15)	Average (3.23)	Above average (3.54)		P<0.05
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (3.56)	One parent Jewish (2.93)	Non-Jews (2.95)		P<0.01
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.13)	Capitals of FSU (3.49)	Other largest cities (3.43)	Smaller towns (3.41)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (2.79)	5 – 10 (2.90)	11 – 15 (3.31)	16+ (3.57)	P<0.01
Occupation	Professionals (3.55)	Others (3.13)			P<0.01

This statement reflects one of the hottest and ever-present topics of Israeli political discourse – the price to be paid for keeping the Jewish character of the State. In general, most respondents tend to agree with the thesis stated above (3.34), more so if they themselves belong to the Jewish majority by birth (3.56 vs. 2.95 for non-Jews), are professionals with higher income (3.54 vs. 3.15 for lower income), and have lived more years in Israel (3.57 vs. 2.79 for recent arrivals). Religiosity adds to the strength of the ethno-national stance: observant Orthodox respondents averaged 4.17, while Christians averaged 2.11, with ‘diffuse’ believers and atheists in the middle (3.67 and 3.29, respectively; both differences significant at P<0.01). Apparently, being a religious minority, Christians have their reasons for questioning the rule of the Jewish majority.

The interviews endorse the theme of near-universal support for the Jewish majority regime (or ‘ethnic democracy’) – with the exception of non-Jewish and Christian Olim who are more ambivalent on this issue. For example, Andrey (38), non-religious Jew and Likud voter, said:

The issue with Israeli Arabs is complex. I realize that they have reasons for hating Israel and wishing to eradicate it from the region; these negative feelings are often heated by political entrepreneurs and transformed into actions of protest and even terror. They see their war against Israel as national and liberating. But I am a Jew and an Israeli, and I am determined to live on this land and see my children staying here and having a good life. That’s why I expect our state to look for solutions to the conflict; for one – by paying monetary compensations to Arabs who agree to emigrate...But as long as the conflict lasts and relations between the two groups are tense, it is impossible to treat Arabs as equal citizens.

Other voices called for more effort toward peaceful and respectful coexistence with the Moslems, on religious grounds. Thus, Michael (31) seconded by Jacob (37) – both Orthodox men who had studied in yeshiva and voted for religious parties, said:

Our Arab neighbors could live peacefully side by side with the Jews; there is no basic conflict between our religions and lifestyles. Peace can be promoted by the effort of religious authorities on both sides. Jews should respect Islam: of all monotheistic faiths it is the closest to Judaism. Many Jewish sages came from the Moslem world...In fact, the antagonism between us is endorsed by politicians, as well as an on-going contest for land, water and other resources. But when you look at the essence, we are indeed second cousins and could live in peace side by side.

Q. Do you recognize the signs of discrimination against Arabs?

Not really...I know Arabs who work as physicians, lawyers, and in other respected occupations. But I cannot really judge from my side – they may see it differently.

Rita (42), a Modern Orthodox woman who voted for Sharon and Netanyahu in the last two elections, said that she is afraid of Arabs, sees them as a liability for both Israel's and her own existence, and wishes they would not be part of Israeli society. She continued:

Those Arabs who live here should be loyal to the State; they have no right for resistance and hate they often show towards the Jews. Those who are openly disloyal should be denied Israeli citizenship. Like, take us, Soviet Jews: we had lived in the USSR that was hostile and foreign to us in many ways, but we had remained loyal citizens... As for discrimination towards the Arabs, I assume that it exists on many levels, but I have no positive knowledge on this and hence cannot comment... nor am I really interested in this.

A few interviewees who leaned to the political Left (exemplified by Leonid, 35; Vitaly, 30 and Zhenia, 50) expressed more compromise-driven ideas towards Arab-Israeli conflict and their dislike of discrimination of the Arab minority. They stressed their good relations with some Arab co-workers or service providers in their communities and felt no hostility to the Arabs as a people. Yet, they too often qualified their dovish attitudes by understanding the inevitability of the status quo towards the Arabs, as a price to be paid for the Jewish character of the State.

**7. Поскольку Израиль еврейская страна, то вполне допустимо ограничение в правах репатриантов-неевреев - русских, украинцев и др.
Since Israel is the Jewish State, some limitations in civil rights for non-Jewish immigrants (Russians, etc.) are inevitable**

(N = 492, mean = 1.99, std = 1.29)

Gender	Men (2.15)	Women (1.87)			P<0.05
Education	Secondary (2.46)	Some college (1.76)	Undergraduate degree (1.99)	Postgraduate degree (2.12)	NS
SES	Descend (1.72)	The same (1.96)	Ascend (2.27)		P<0.01
Income	Below average (1.85)	Average (1.97)	Above average (2.23)		P<0.05
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (2.19)	One parent Jewish (1.66)	Non-Jews (1.43)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (2.18)	41 – 60 (1.85)	61+ (1.86)		P<0.05
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.06)	Capitals of FSU (2.00)	Other largest cities (2.01)	Smaller towns (1.98)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (1.9)	5 – 10 (1.6)	11 – 15 (1.97)	16+ (2.15)	P<0.01
Occupation	Professionals (2.07)	Others (1.86)			NS

Here the range of opinion again corresponded with respondents' personal status and lived experience. The mean was close to 2.0 (i.e. below mid-scale), meaning that most respondents disapproved of discrimination of non-Jewish Olim (while not minding

too much the same policy toward the Arabs in Q.6). Most opposition to discrimination was found among non-Jews themselves (1.43 vs. 2.19 for the Jews), as well as among downwardly mobile (1.72 vs. 2.27), low-income (1.85 vs. 2.23) immigrants. Longer life in Israel somewhat inclined respondents towards accepting discrimination as inevitable. Orthodox Jews (3.20) agreed with this stance more often than 'Jewish believers' and 'diffusely' religious (2.05, 1.54), atheists (1.97), and much more than Christians (1.48; $P < 0.01$).

In the interviews, a similar range of attitudes towards non-Jewish Olim was expressed. Most informants opined that partly-Jewish and non-Jewish Olim are not really different from the Jewish ones, and those who came here as part of Jewish families should be fully entitled for all social rights. For example, Emilia (39), Jewish and non-religious, said:

Non-Jews from the FSU, and indeed from France, America or any other country, if they decided to come to Israel – this means they are willing to live here, contribute to this society, serve in the army – there is no difference between them and other immigrants. If religion was not merged with the state institutions in Israel, these people could be just regular citizens, an integral part of the Israeli society...Which cannot be said about the Arabs. There is a big difference.

Marina (45), who is Jewish but married to a Russian man, told about her family problems:

I do not see much of an issue for non-Jewish Olim, exemplified by my husband Sasha and many others I know. In every individual case, there is no extra prejudice or rejection of non-Jews among coworkers or neighbors... at least no more than other 'Russians' who stand out due to their accent, looks, and behavior. Most Israelis cannot really tell the difference, we are all 'rusim' for them. My Sasha has never experienced discrimination here, as opposed to my parents and me when we lived as Jews in Russia... But on the more general level, as a group, non-Jews face some barriers, I can't deny that. And this makes me very angry, this state-sponsored treatment of non-Jews as second-rate citizens, which also spills over to popular talk, TV shows, Internet blogs - relating to non-Jews as if they are less human... this is repulsive. We felt this kind of attitude towards Sasha's parents, who came here to visit and we tried to get them a legal permit to stay. They are old and have no one to support them in Russia, but since they are both Russians, the Interior Ministry refused to give them a residence permit... We did not ask for the health care coverage or a pension, just a legal right to live here with their children – and have been refused, even after suing the Ministry... So the message is – it is only the Jewish parents that matter and get respect; Russian parents do not count. I can't stand this kind of policy."

Marina's story underscores her ambivalence: on the one hand, her Russian husband is rather well settled in Israel but, on the other, he was unable to help his parents join his family because of their ethnicity. The conflict with the Ministry of Interior that regulates visas for family members made Marina realize the injustice and bias towards non-Jews as a group. Like Marina, Leonid, Zhenia, Inga, and many other informants were very critical of the barriers non-Jews face in Israel in sensitive private matters such as marriage, family reunification, and burial of Jewish and non-Jewish family

members in different cemeteries. The latter was perceived as especially painful and unfair since it split many immigrant families after death, besides the fact that most civil or Christian cemeteries are far away and rather costly.

On the other hand, there were voices that justified the existing practices by the need to preserve the Jewish character of the state and prevent assimilation. Some observant converts, exemplified by ethnically Russian Ludmila (59), even opined against letting in too many non-Jewish immigrants (if they refuse to convert) as a future demographic threat to the Jewish state. In a similar vein, religious Rita (42) said: “*All newcomers should be loyal to this state. As for the civil rights of non-Jews, this is inevitable in the Jewish national home. Israel is different from the US, Canada or Australia. If someone wants to live in the free, all-citizens state, they should go there and not to Israel. The discrimination of non-Jews is unpleasant but necessary.*”

Religion and politics

8. Следует существенно ограничить влияние религиозных партий в политике и роль Рабанаута в вопросах личного статуса граждан
Political influence of religious parties and the role of rabbinical courts in marital law should be limited

(N = 496, mean = 4.08, std = 1.21)

Gender	Men (4.02)	Women (4.13)			NS
Education	Secondary (3.92)	Some college (4.06)	Undergraduate degree (4.12)	Postgraduate degree (4.05)	NS
SES	Descend (4.20)	The same (4.16)	Ascend (3.92)		NS
Income	Below average (4.18)	Average (4.10)	Above average (4.02)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (4.05)	One parent Jewish (4.05)	Non-Jews (4.24)		NS
Age	Under 40 (3.94)	41 – 60 (4.18)	61+ (4.21)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.72)	Capitals of FSU (3.98)	Other largest cities (4.22)	Smaller towns (4.16)	P<0.05
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.8)	5 – 10 (4.1)	11 – 15 (4.15)	16+ (4.16)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (4.04)	Others (4.13)			NS

We see that most respondents share the anti-clerical stance typical of former Soviet Jews, the average being much above the midpoint (4.08) and little variance showing in the table. The only significant difference was found between the observant Orthodox group (2.76) and the rest (3.93 for partly-observant ‘Jewish believers,’ 4.42 for ‘diffusely’ religious, 4.19 for Christians, and 4.44 for atheists, P<0.01). Another group showing higher anti-clerical tendency is non-Jewish Olim (4.24) who experience problems with rabbinical authorities in marriage and other matters of personal status.

The issue of non-separation between religion and State and control of religious bodies over personal and family law (with the lack of civil alternatives) has also been raised in the interviews. The opinions were split, but most informants justified the existing

system to some extent as a salient instrument for sustaining Jewish character of the state and curbing assimilation. Many informants mentioned that in the early years of their Aliya they had been shocked by the 'backwardness' of Israeli family laws and legal procedures controlled by Chief Rabbinate, but later on came to accept them as a necessary element in the larger picture of the only Jewish country. For instance, secular and Jewish Leonid (35) spoke about his understanding of the state-religion entanglement:

I am bothered by the fact that the ultra-religious minority can impose its rules and shape the way of life for the majority... but at the same time I realize that otherwise Israel might cease to be the Jewish state rather quickly... When you hear about a divorce story of a couple you know when the rabbinical court has granted custody of the kids to the father just because he is 'baal tshuva' and mother is secular... or a Shabbat stoning of passing cars in Bar-Ilan Street in Jerusalem...and other such stories of Haredi chutzpah... you can't help feeling angry. But this is not against Judaism as such; like any religion, it is a package of many things that can be used for good or bad purposes. Rather, I am angry about Israel's political situation when fundamentalist minority can rule the game...

Q. How do you feel about Rabanut controlling marital rites?

It is very wrong. Any normal state should fulfill its basic duties towards the citizens, one of which is registration of marriage. And Israeli state ignores the whole layer of its citizens who serve in the military, pay taxes, abide the laws ... but cannot get married here, at home... Why should Israelis travel to Cyprus or Prague to get their marital license? Do they pay taxes there? If the state basically sends them abroad to marry, it should at least refund their expenses... This stance is also hypocritical: on the one hand, Rabanut won't marry non-kosher Jews, but on the other – the state would recognize foreign marriages... If rabbinical courts had actual competitors (civil procedures in Israel) they would relax their rules about who is Jewish in order to protect their clients and revenues... This system is corrupt because of its exclusive status in the country.

Religious Moshe (30) was also against full monopoly of rabbis in the matters of marriage, but for a different reason:

In principle, I support religious marriage for the Jews, but they have to choose it themselves, not to be coerced into it. It is wrong to ban a secular alternative, for Jews and non-Jews alike. If Israelis had a choice about it, I am sure that most would prefer to marry under huppa with a rabbi. But the dictate of the Rabanut only seeds negative feelings about religion among secular Jews. I see this ultimately as a disservice to Judaism.

Secular and half-Jewish Andrey (38) also disapproved of the current double standard of marriage in Israel (the rabbis looking the other way when Israelis get married abroad and the state not interfering) and advocated for the secular alternative. He said:

When both options are there, more couples will opt for the religious marriage. But on the whole, I do not really object Israel's somewhat theocratic nature at this time. One should understand its reasons: Israel is a young nation, composed of immigrants and living in a hostile milieu.

Hence, the alloy of religion and Zionism is the only basis that solidifies this nation, for the time being. I think that in the future religion will separate from the state structures, like in other democratic countries. But so far it is not possible, and I am OK with that.

9. В государственных школах следует уделять меньше времени еврейским дисциплинам и больше внимания наукам, математике и языкам
In state schools, less time should be devoted to the Jewish subjects and more to math, science and languages

(N = 491, mean = 3.57, std = 1.4)

Gender	Men (3.43)	Women (3.68)			P=0.55
Education	Secondary (4.04)	Some college (3.97)	Undergraduate degree (3.51)	Postgraduate degree (3.11)	P<0.01
SES	Descend (3.88)	The same (3.56)	Ascend (3.33)		P<0.01
Income	Below average (3.8)	Average (3.5)	Above average (3.37)		P<0.05
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (3.41)	One parent Jewish (3.85)	Non-Jews (3.75)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (3.57)	41 – 60 (3.57)	61+ (3.68)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.9)	Capitals of FSU (3.61)	Other largest cities (3.87)	Smaller towns (3.7)	P<0.01
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.53)	5 – 10 (3.7)	11 – 15 (3.77)	16+ (3.41)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (3.29)	Others (3.83)			P<0.01

Fairly high support (3.57) was expressed by all subgroups regarding the need to reform Israeli schooling system in favor of universal curriculum at the expense of Jewish subjects. Many parents are unsatisfied with the value of secondary education their children are getting in terms of their future educational prospects, particularly the weakness of the scientific and humanistic curriculum that was traditionally strong in the FSU. As expected, the only group protesting against this stance was observant Orthodox (1.85), manifesting wide gap with the rest (3.37 for partly-observant ‘Jewish believers,’ 4.01 for ‘diffuse’ believers, and 3.88 for atheists (P<0.05).

10. Ультра-ортодоксальное население тормозит развитие израильского общества и паразитирует за его счет
Ultra-Orthodox population lives at the expense of Israeli taxpayers and pulls our society back

(N = 497, mean = 3.85, std = 1.31)

Gender	Men (3.89)	Women (3.82)			NS
Education	Secondary (4.12)	Some college (4.2)	Undergraduate degree (3.77)	Postgraduate degree (3.69)	P<0.05
SES	Descend (4.0)	The same (3.87)	Ascend (3.81)		NS
Income	Below average (4.01)	Average (3.8)	Above average (3.73)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (3.78)	One parent Jewish (4.03)	Non-Jews (3.79)		NS

Age	Under 40 (3.76)	41 – 60 (3.95)	61+ (3.78)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.33)	Capitals of FSU (3.92)	Other largest cities (4.14)	Smaller towns (3.89)	P<0.01
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.47)	5 – 10 (3.98)	11 – 15 (3.86)	16+ (3.83)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (3.74)	Others (3.96)			NS

A similar pattern typified responses to this statement, defining *Haredim* as one of Israel's social problems potentially impeding its future. With the average of 3.85, a higher support for this view was expressed by the atheists and 'diffuse' believers (4.20), as well as Christians (3.89), while observant Orthodox respondents were largely against it (2.15; P<0.01).

11. Я готов/а отдать своих детей/внуков в религиозную школу, если там предлагают хорошие материальные условия
I would send my children/grandchildren to a religious school if it offered good conditions (transportation, free tuition, etc.)

(N = 474, mean = 1.88, std = 1.26)

Gender	Men (1.93)	Women (1.84)			NS
Education	Secondary (1.63)	Some college (1.83)	Undergraduate degree (1.85)	Postgraduate degree (2.19)	NS
SES	Descend (1.78)	The same (1.81)	Ascend (1.99)		NS
Income	Below average (1.95)	Average (1.86)	Above average (1.92)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (1.88)	One parent Jewish (1.90)	Non-Jews (1.62)		NS
Age	Under 40 (1.97)	41 – 60 (1.81)	61+ (1.79)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (1.98)	Capitals of FSU (1.92)	Other largest cities (1.83)	Smaller towns (1.93)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (1.79)	5 – 10 (1.96)	11 – 15 (1.94)	16+ (1.84)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (1.83)	Others (1.97)			NS

Caution towards religious authorities was also expressed in the low willingness to send children to religious schools (1.88), even when they offered preferential terms versus secular public schools. This statement showed no variance at all by socio-demographic variables, e.g. between ethnic Jews and non-Jews or Olim with various levels of education and economic success in Israel. This probably reflects both the apprehension of children's religious indoctrination and demands for observing *mitzvot* at home, and a lower level of teaching of universal secular subjects in most religious schools. Again, observant Orthodox were the only subgroup showing readiness to send their children to religious schools (3.74), compared to 1.55 for the atheists and 1.51 for 'diffuse' believers and 2.04 for the Christians (P<0.01). During the 1990s, some Russian Olim have been in fact lured by good material conditions in private religious schools, as well as presumably better treatment of recent immigrants by religious teachers and students. Yet, this affair did not last long, and typically by middle school most Russian immigrant students have moved to regular public schools.

12. Я хочу расширить свои знания о еврейской религии, философии и традиции путем самообразования
I would like to learn more about Judaism by independent study

(N = 492, mean = 3.49, std = 1.37)

Gender	Men (3.47)	Women (3.51)			
Education	Secondary (2.42)	Some college (3.19)	Undergraduate degree (3.62)	Graduate degree (3.66)	P<0.01
SES	Descend (3.60)	The same (3.45)	Ascend (3.45)		NS
Income	Below average (3.37)	Average (3.51)	Above average (3.65)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (3.50)	At least one Jewish (3.31)	Non-Jews (3.82)		NS
Age	Under 40 (3.37)	41 – 60 (3.51)	61+ (4.03)		P<0.05
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.81)	Capitals of FSU (3.37)	Other largest cities (3.45)	Smaller towns (3.45)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.90)	5 – 10 (3.49)	11 – 15 (3.36)	16+ (3.52)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (3.63)	Others (3.34)			P<0.05

Quite many former Soviet Jews, aware of their ignorance in all matters Jewish, took active steps towards sources of Jewish knowledge, both independently and as part of organized curriculum. A relatively high agreement with the above statement (3.49) has been expressed across the socio-demographic spectrum, but particularly among the better educated respondents (3.66 vs. 2.42). Observant Orthodox (4.63) expressed the highest interest in Jewish self-education (despite being already more knowledgeable), followed by the ‘Jewish believers’ (3.66), the ‘diffuse’ believers (3.55), the Christians (3.33), and the atheists (3.04). The two latter groups are particularly remarkable, as presumably most distant from the Jewish traditions. Their expressed interest in Jewish knowledge may to some extent reflect social desirability but also living in Israel’s Jewish milieu that may spark intellectual curiosity and/or desire to belong. Many informants in the qualitative study mentioned their attempts at Jewish self-education (by means of reading, TV and radio programs, and talking to native Israelis) during the initial years after immigration. Yet, the majority sufficed with the general knowledge about Jewish holidays, dietary laws and Shabbat rules, supplemented by some introduction to the Bible, its main heroes and plots. A minority, usually religiously inclined, continued to pursue a deeper layer of knowledge by joining some Judaic educational frameworks.

13. Я заинтересован/а в получении более формального еврейского образования (с посещением занятий)
I would like to get more formal Jewish education (attending classes)

(N = 477, mean = 2.45, std = 1.41)

Gender	Men (2.33)	Women (2.55)			NS
Education	Secondary (1.91)	Some college (2.38)	Undergraduate degree (2.56)	Postgraduate degree (2.13)	P<0.05
SES	Descend (2.64)	The same (2.44)	Ascend (2.36)		NS
Income	Below average (2.31)	Average (2.42)	Above average (2.52)		NS
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (2.61)	At least one Jewish (2.11)	Non-Jews (2.33)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (2.26)	41 – 60 (2.53)	61+ (3.06)		P<0.01
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.53)	Capitals of FSU (2.22)	Other largest cities (2.56)	Smaller towns (2.48)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (2.89)	5 – 10 (2.43)	11 – 15 (2.36)	16+ (2.47)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (2.36)	Others (2.49)			NS

Fewer respondents expressed their interest in joining formal Jewish educational networks (2.45), probably due to time pressures (which is indirectly confirmed by a higher interest among the retirees – 3.06). Again, the observant Orthodox group showed higher readiness (3.72), with a wide gap to other groups (2.87 for the ‘Jewish believers,’ 2.35 for the Christians, 2.21 for the ‘diffusely’ religious, and 1.81 for the atheists).

Giyur and perceived discrimination

The following three statements were offered only to the *respondents who are not Jewish* by the Orthodox rules (i.e. not born of a Jewish mother). They tested attitudes toward different *giyur* options and the feelings of estrangement from the Israeli mainstream.

14. Я заинтересован/а в прохождении гиюра по полной Ортодоксальной программе

I would like to convert to Judaism according to the regular Orthodox procedure

(N = 111, mean = 1.43, std = 0.93)

Gender	Men (1.16) n=37	Women (1.57) n=74			P<0.05
Education	Secondary (2.0) n=2	Some college (1.35) n=31	Undergraduate degree (1.52) n=67	Postgraduate degree (1.00) n=10	NS
SES	Descend (1.47) n=59	The same (1.15) n=20	Ascend (1.52) n=27		NS
Income	Below average (1.23) n=35	Average (1.7) n=33	Above average (1.29) n=28		P<0.05
Ethnicity		One parent Jewish (1.37) n=63	Non-Jews (1.44) n=34		NS
Age	Under 40 (1.56) n=50	41 – 60 (1.32) n=56	61+ (1.4) n=5		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (1.13) n=16	Capitals of FSU (1.41) n=17	Other largest cities (1.59) n=29	Smaller towns (1.35) n=26	NS
Seniority	Under 4 (1.92) n=13	5 – 10 (1.43) n=40	11 – 15 (1.39) n=36	16+ (1.24) n=21	NS

Occupation	Professionals (1.47) n=38	Others (1.36) n=67			NS
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15. Я был/а бы готов/а пройти реформистский гиюр в одной из либеральных общин, если бы он признавался религиозными властями Израиля
I would convert to Judaism under more lenient Reform procedure, if such giyur was officially recognized in Israel

(N = 112, mean = 1.97, std = 1.37)

Gender	Men (1.46) n=37	Women (2.23) n=75			P<0.01
Education	Secondary (2.0) n=2	Some college (1.55) n=31	Undergraduate degree (2.28) n=67	Postgraduate degree (1.36) n=11	P<0.05
SES	Descend (1.93) n=60	The same (1.95) n=21	Ascend (2.08) n=25		NS
Income	Below average (1.72) n=36	Average (2.38) n=34	Above average (1.96) n=27		NS
Ethnicity		One parent Jewish (2.11) n=64	Non-Jews (1.97) n=35		NS
Age	Under 40 (2.22) n=51	41 – 60 (1.75) n=56	61+ (2.0) n=5		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.31) n=16	Capitals of FSU (1.56) n=16	Other largest cities (2.50) n=30	Smaller towns (1.5) n=26	P<0.05
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (1.62) n=13	5 – 10 (2.15) n=41	11 – 15 (1.97) n=36	16+ (1.76) n=21	NS
Occupation	Professionals (2.03) n=38	Others (1.97) n=68			NS

Apparently, neither Orthodox (1.43) nor Reform (1.97) *giyur* comprise attractive options for non-Jewish or partly-Jewish respondents, although the latter may seem somewhat more realistic. There is no tangible variance of responses by socio-demographic group, with the single exception of gender. For both versions of conversion to Judaism, women are seemingly more interested than men, since they have higher stakes in becoming legally Jewish and transferring their status to the children. It is known, indeed, that women form a majority in most *giyur* classes, be they offered in a regular or military framework (*Machon Tsomet*, 2003). Still, even the highest level of expressed interest in both cases (2.23 for Reform *giyur* among women) is still rather low, especially given the item's conditional wording (assuming that Reform *giyur* was officially recognized). This may also indicate that many respondents are not aware of the substantial differences between Orthodox and Reform conversion procedures and the amount of effort and commitment required to pass. One could assume that a more student-friendly Reform *giyur* that does not impose strict rules and commitment to Orthodoxy should attract higher numbers of Olim as a venue to join the mainstream – in case it was legally accepted by the religious establishment.

In the interviews, some non-Jews and partial Jews (almost all of them women) reflected on the possibility of conversion for themselves and/or their children. Most

perceived it as the act of social inclusion rather than a religious renewal and were not ready to commit to the religious way of life implied by the Orthodox conversion. Some informants expressed moral qualms as to the honesty of this process that involves a certain amount of pretence on both sides: the future converts allegedly intending to stick to religious way of life after passing the tests and the rabbis allegedly believing in these intentions. Many immigrants found this make-believe situation fake and unacceptable. For example, Sasha (49), the above-mentioned Russian husband of Jewish Marina, told about their first years in Israel spent in a secular kibbutz:

The guys on the kibbutz suggested that I convert to avoid potential problems with the state. I made inquiries with a local rabbi and he told me that, if I converted, I won't be able to work the Saturday shifts on the kibbutz farm nor eat in the common canteen that wasn't kosher enough. When I returned with this answer to my kibbutz bosses, they laughed at my naiveté: giyur, they said, is just a formality, nobody expects you to stick to these rules... I considered it and said, 'No way; as a sworn atheist, I am not meddling with G-d. If I make a promise I must stick to it... Which member do you prefer to have in your ranks – an honest Russian or a fraudulent Jew? They laughed and gave up, and so did I.

Some other informants considered the very idea of changing your nationality as ridiculous: “*You are born of certain parents whom you do not choose, and this makes you who you are. You cannot live most of your life as a Russian or Ukrainian and then one day turn into a Jew, after performing certain ritual and symbolic acts. This doesn't make any sense for me, so I prefer to suffer the inconvenience of being a Russian in the Jewish country*” (Nina, 45). The few women who did go through this process from beginning to end, usually explained it by the wish to help their children integrate and feel equal to their Israeli peers at school, in the military, and in their contacts with the rabbinical authorities (i.e. for future marriage). Ludmila (59) provides an example of this category: she is a Russian woman married to a Jew whom she followed to Israel and then to a religious settlement he chose for his family. “*The conversion process was very hard for me since I was not a young woman when I started it and had to change all my life as a result...But I made a decision to endure everything for the sake of my children – to help them be and feel full-fledged Israelis. After I have converted, I have observed all the rules like other religious women around me. I am part of the community here. But still...these rituals are not really mine; I adhere to them by routine, without thinking. This is simply my life here and I comply.*”

A few other women had started the process (e.g., signed up for the conversion course) but soon enough quitted upon realization how demanding and protracted it was going to be. Some mothers of teenagers decided it was too late to change their status by means of their own conversion and that the children themselves should decide about the matter when they grow up and wish to marry and have children. This is indeed what happened to Luda (51), a Russian woman married to a Jew, whose daughter later met an Israeli man and underwent a full Orthodox conversion in order to marry him (on his family's demand). Yet others, usually half-Jewish on the paternal side, were offended by the very idea to assert their Jewishness that for them was tangible and obvious. The example of the earlier-cited Lilia (38) working for intermarried families association was typical. She said:

It is ridiculous that half-Jews like me should undergo the giyur process of the same length and scope as, let's say, South American tourists or Pilipino wives of Sabra men. How can they compare between them and me - who have lived all of my life with a Jewish identity! Yet we have to sit in the same class. This is unfair and unacceptable. Reform movement accepts paternal half-Jews as equal, and one can convert under a Reform rabbi rather easily, but this conversion would be of purely symbolic value, as it is not recognized by the Orthodox Rabbanut. So most people like me go on living in Israel as people without clear ethno-national status.

16. Я нередко чувствую себя человеком второго сорта в еврейской стране, особенно при контактах с официальными инстанциями и полицией
I often feel like a second-class citizen in the Jewish country, especially in encounters with police and state officials

(N = 116, mean = 2.69, std = 1.6)

Gender	Men (2.79) n=38	Women (2.64) n=78			NS
Education	Secondary (2.0) n=4	Some college (3.26) n=31	Undergraduate degree (2.55) n=69	Postgraduate degree (2.36) n=11	NS
SES	Descend (2.98) n=62	The same (2.55) n=20	Ascend (2.07) n=27		P<0.05
Income	Below average (3.14) n=37	Average (2.8) n=35	Above average (2.25) n=28		NS
Ethnicity		One parent Jewish (2.7) n=66	Non-Jews (2.71) n=34		NS
Age	Under 40 (2.17) n=52	41 – 60 (3.03) n=59	61+ (4.0) n=5		P<0.01
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg(2.12) n=17	Capitals of FSU (3.22) n=18	Other largest cities (2.80) n=30	Smaller towns (2.81) n=26	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (2.5) n=12	5 – 10 (3.17) n=41	11 – 15 (2.51) n=37	16+ (2.32) n=25	NS
Occupation	Professionals (2.5) n=40	Others (2.93) n=69			NS

The good news in responses to Statement 16 is that not too many non-Jewish Olim harbor feelings of discrimination and estrangement in the ethno-national context of the Jewish state. The average response was 2.69, which is somewhat above the midpoint, but still rather low. Contributing to the sense of displacement may be downward occupational mobility and low income (lines 3, 4 and 9), but having one Jewish parent vs. none does not seem to make a difference (line 5).

The qualitative data reasserted this finding: most non-Jewish informants who moved to Israel as part of Jewish families did not feel their special status vis-à-vis other Olim on a daily basis. Since all of them had full citizenship, they could work, learn Hebrew, serve in the military, study and vote like everyone else. Socially, they were part of the 'Russian' community and most native Israelis could not even tell the difference

(unless they made special inquiries), so basically they were treated like any other bearer of a Russian first name and broken Hebrew. Problems arose mainly in the transactions with religious authorities, but since the issues for the non-Jews were well known and expected, relevant bypasses were being used (e.g. marriage in Prague with a subsequent party and formal registration in Israel). Moreover, most informants who experienced these difficulties and extra expenses did not object too much, interpreting them as inevitable constraints for an ethnic minority in the Jewish state. Some Russians made a great effort to integrate (for example by investing much time in Hebrew studies), and as a result succeeded even better in the workplace, studies and social contacts with the natives than their ‘kosher’ Jewish spouses. The illustrations of this paradox regarding Russian wives will be presented in a separate section of this volume.

Plans to stay in Israel

Two final statements (offered to all respondents) addressed their intentions to stay in Israel and their attitude towards their children’s future in this country.

17. Я не уверен/а, что останусь жить в Израиле надолго/навсегда
I am not sure if I’ll stay in Israel for good

(N = 452, mean = 2.33, std = 1.39)

Gender	Men (2.3)	Women (2.35)			NS
Education	Secondary (2.65)	Some college (2.53)	Undergraduate degree (2.34)	Postgraduate degree (1.81)	P<0.05
SES	Descend (2.58)	The same (2.27)	Ascend (2.17)		P<0.05
Income	Below average (2.54)	Average (2.34)	Above average (2.11)		P<0.05
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (2.11)	One Jewish parent (2.69)	Non-Jews (2.89)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (2.51)	41 – 60 (2.22)	61+ (1.94)		P<0.05
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (2.05)	Capitals of FSU (2.29)	Other largest cities (2.52)	Smaller towns (2.24)	NS
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (2.65)	5 – 10 (2.76)	11 – 15 (2.47)	16+ (2.07)	P<0.01
Occupation	Professionals (2.09)	Others (2.57)			P<0.01

18. Если мои дети/внуки захотят уехать из Израиля, чтобы учиться или работать в лучших условиях, я буду только за
If my children or grandchildren would leave Israel for better education or work abroad, I would not mind

(N = 443, mean = 3.61, std = 1.35)

Gender	Men (3.52)	Women (3.68)			NS
Education	Secondary (3.91)	Some college (3.85)	Undergraduate degree (3.61)	Postgraduate degree (3.14)	P<0.05
SES	Descend	The same	Ascend		P<0.01

	(4.03)	(3.54)	(3.21)		
Income	Below average (3.96)	Average (3.69)	Above average (3.20)		P<0.01
Ethnicity	Both parents Jewish (3.46)	One Jewish parent (3.77)	Non-Jews (4.21)		P<0.01
Age	Under 40 (3.44)	41 – 60 (3.73)	61+ (3.8)		NS
City of origin	Moscow and St. Petersburg (3.21)	Capitals of FSU (3.88)	Other largest cities (3.54)	Smaller towns (3.66)	P<0.05
Yrs in Israel	Under 4 (3.63)	5 – 10 (3.83)	11 – 15 (3.64)	16+ (3.50)	NS
Occupation	Professionals (3.41)	Others (3.79)			P<0.01

For statement 17, higher means point to respondents' stronger intent to leave Israel and in No 18 higher means indicate acceptance of children's intent to leave the country. Apparently, the respondents are more certain about their own future in Israel (2.33) than about their children's future (3.61). The possibility of leaving Israel and looking for better fortune elsewhere seems more real to younger (2.51 vs. 1.94 for older ones) and non-Jewish Olim (2.89 vs. 2.11 for the Jews) and to those less successful in terms of occupational status and income, although the differences are very moderate. The group most committed to Israel is observant Orthodox (1.38), followed by 'Jewish believers' (2.13), while the Christians are less certain (2.64), and so are the 'diffusely' religious (2.66) and the atheists (2.50). As for the children's mobility outside Israel for the sake of improving their education and work status (Q.18), few respondents expressed total rejection of this idea, and the parents who were not very successful themselves (judging by the SES decline and lower income) were even more positive than the rest. Non-Jews (4.21) and Christians (4.0) were the most inclined to see their children succeed elsewhere, while the observant Orthodox were the least enthusiastic about this option (2.10), and other categories were in between these extremes (3.9 for the atheists and 'diffuse' believers).

In the interviews, many informants spoke about their general satisfaction with their lives in Israel that turned out better than they had expected embarking on emigration. After the turmoil and shock of the initial years of 'absorption,' most immigrants and their families got settled, found jobs, reached relative economic security, and watched their children grow up and become Israelis, at least to some extent. Many narrators, including non-Jews, underscored that, when they traveled back to their places of origin in the FSU to visit their parents and friends, they no longer felt at home and wished to return to Israel as soon as possible. Comparing themselves with the relatives and neighbors who stayed behind, they realized how much their lives in Israel have improved. Their main regret often was that they could not bring their non-Jewish parents and other kin to Israel to give them a chance for a better life. Some other Olim, who did not manage to learn Hebrew well and find jobs relevant for their education and past experience, regretted that they did not come to Israel while being younger. Andrey (38), a son of a Russian father and Jewish mother, worked as a lawyer in Russia but had to switch to a small business in computing in Israel. Yet, he summarized his Israeli experiences (since 2001) as largely positive.

By and large, I am satisfied, particularly with my spiritual life. I can say that in Israel I have discovered my real self, got closer to my Jewishness

and understood our historic role as Jews. This doesn't mean that I am denying my Russian half – I will always think and speak in Russian, read Russian books. But Israel has become more than just a place of residence for me - I feel comfortable, at home... In terms of practical issues, life is getting better – despite my inability to work here as a lawyer. My friend and I have started a small computing business and we do make a living – not so bad actually... The only thing I regret is that I did not immigrate earlier in life and did not get Israeli education. But this is the story of most adults who changed their country of residence. I hope my children will do better and fully realize their potential.

Even those informants who immigrated at an older age and could not find suitable jobs have eventually found their place and peace of mind after the years of initial struggle. Marina (60), a former programmer now working as an industrial worker, recounted:

When we came to Israel in 1992, we stayed in Bat Yam [Tel-Aviv suburb], and our greatest fear was becoming a financial burden on our children. The housing costs were galloping, we had no real jobs, and the state housing subsidy was running out. We even considered living in a tent on the beach in the summer – to save money 'wasted' on the rental... and we couldn't dare thinking about buying the place of our own... But look at us now, seventeen years down the road – we've made it! We had moved to Dimona [a southern industrial town] because we found jobs there – they are not skilled but decent and stable, thank G-d. And that's why we could afford a home of our own without an oppressive mortgage, and even buy a used car! The children grew up and got college degrees, they both work and started families of their own. What else can one ask for?

At the same time, several informants voiced their concern about the children's future in Israel, given its unstable security situation, military duty (including reserve service) and limited labor market opportunities. They could easily imagine their children moving elsewhere for studies or work and perceived this mobility as legitimate in the contemporary global world.

Conclusion

This study explored some key practices and attitudes in the area of religion and ethnicity among former Soviet immigrants in Israel. Our cluster-based sample, although non-random, is fairly representative in terms of socio-demographics (age, gender, family composition, places of origin in the FSU, tenure in Israel), but somewhat biased in terms of Jewish origin (over 80% being *Halachic* Jews vs. some 65-70% in the general Olim population). Importantly for the topic of this research, the sample manifests excessive presence of highly educated (and often upwardly mobile high earners) immigrants who are observant Orthodox or ideologically leaning in this direction. While in the general population of ex-Soviets in Israel the share of observant Orthodox Jews probably does not exceed 5% (Leshem, 2001; Remennick, 2007, Levy, 2009), in this sample 9% identified as Orthodox fully observing *mitzvot* and another 35% as 'Jewish believers' respecting and partly observing *mitzvot*. This bias in the sample composition reflected our efforts, perhaps too zealous, to sample Judaic-oriented immigrants in the main locales of their residence (e.g. Maale Adumin and Modi'in) or congregation (e.g., members of *Machanaim* society some of whom are in the process of *hazara be-tshuva*). Combined with higher response rates of these

individuals, this resulted in their over-representation and specific leanings in the answers. Although this may somewhat distort the general picture, we appreciated a unique chance to take a closer look at this segment of the Russian-speaking population (see also a special vignette in the end of this volume).

One of our goals was to compare pre- and post-migration practices in the Jewish field. Most respondents grew up in secular families, had scant knowledge of Judaism, and did very little in terms of 'performance' of their Jewish identity before emigration (with less than 3% keeping kosher, 4% observing *Shabbat* to some extent, 6% of men circumcised, and 5% who had had a bar-mitzvah in the FSU). Yet, over time spent in Israel, most have learned to comply with the Jewish calendar and lifestyle norms of the mainstream Israeli society and celebrate in some form the main religious holidays. Most Jewish respondents also comply with the local traditions regarding children and life-cycle rituals (circumcision, bar/bat mitzvah). Yet, for the majority of these immigrants these are probably the manifestations of general acculturation and social conformism rather than expressions of their newly discovered Judaic piety. Just like their brethren remaining in Russia (mostly half or quarter Jewish) lean towards Russian Orthodoxy (Nosenko-Shtein, 2009) reflecting the predominant religious milieu, Russian Jews in Israel drift towards mainstream Israeli norms shaped by the Jewish calendar, holidays and customs. This assumption is supported by the fact that, outside the self-proclaimed Orthodox minority, relatively few respondents observed the key behavioral rules: dietary laws and Sabbath regulations, and even fewer had any regular link to a synagogue (visited by a small minority even on high holidays). Judging by these indicators, the situation has not evolved much since Leshem's survey conducted in 1993, soon after the entry of the 'Great Aliya.' For those few who had developed Jewish religious interests back in the USSR/FSU, living in Israel has led to their fortification, and for some – transition to full Orthodox observance.

A large segment of respondents (over one third whom we called 'Jewish believers') expressed respect and moral affinity with the norms of Judaism while largely remaining non-observant on a daily basis. This category probably includes a spectrum of individuals (from purely ideological supporters to those partly-observant) who have added a religious facet to their ethnic Jewish identity. This distribution underscores the continuous and overlapping nature of the common social labels of religiosity, with large numbers of former Soviets (initially indifferent to Judaism) drifting towards greater respect of spiritual and behavioral aspects of religion in Israel. At the same time, most have retained a negative view of Ultra-Orthodoxy, its political power and exclusive control of personal and family laws. Contrary to our expectations, there was no clear association between levels of religiosity and socio-economic indicators, such as education and social mobility upon migration, at least not among the Jews. However, a small group identified as Christians exhibited a clear tendency to lower education and income. It remains to be seen if they have migrated with poorer personal resources or experienced downward mobility in Israel, perhaps reflecting their discrimination as religious 'others'. Most of them perceived Israel as the Holy Land and became more religious over time. Others, particularly non-Jews, may have sought spiritual home in religion as a result of their failed integration in Israel (see more on this group in the special essay on the Christians).

In the last decades, the post-secular perspective becomes rather popular in the social science discourse on religion and spirituality. The paradigm of expanding secularization is challenged now by the scholars of religion and society (Casanova, 1994; Goodman and Yona, 2004; McLennan, 2007; Shenhav, 2008). Distinction

between secularity and religion conceived for years as binary, linear and essential has come to be questioned, and many new phenomena in the spiritual field are redefined as post-secular. This term implies a fluid, non-binary division in which secularity and religion are not antinomies, but rather interwoven with each other (Shenhav, 2008). Such new phenomena as unorthodox prayer houses (Azulay and Tabory, 2008), secular Batei-Midrash, alternative unorthodox rites of passage (Prashizky, forthcoming), which recently appeared in Israeli society, are best understood from the perspective of post-secularism. The overarching consensus among Jewish Israelis about the need to keep the matters of 'ethnic purity', family law, and body-related functions (control of food production, coming-of-age and burial rites) in the hands of Orthodox religious authorities is yet another manifestation of implicit respect for religion. The strong alloy between Zionism and Judaism that underlies the mainstream Israeli ideology curbs the expressions of consistently secular outlook and behavior. In fact, most Israeli Jews belong to the continuum of *kiyum mitzvot* – some on the extremely observant end, others in the middle, and yet others sticking to only a few principal ones (Goodman and Yonah, 2004).□

In this study, well over half of all respondents preserved their secular lifestyle while at the same time paying symbolic dues to the local traditions, such as a family gathering on Passover or candle lighting with children on Chanukah. Although most respondents did not fast on Yom Kipur and only a minority went to a synagogue, they marked it as a special day for quiet reflection, remembering the dead, and atonement for misdeeds (*heshbon nefesh*). Thus, most respondents made clear distinction between their material lifestyle (with little or no ritual performance) and spiritual inclinations that often amounted to 'diffuse' or implicit religiosity, a loosely defined faith in the Supernatural and the Sacred. Just under one-third identified as non-believers (atheists or agnostics), but many respondents in this group still took part in Jewish religious celebrations to show respect for the local customs. The modes of Jewish holiday celebrations by most 'Russians' increasingly resemble those among Israeli who call themselves *hilonim*, i.e. with minimal or symbolic adherence to the ritual and mainly using holidays as an excuse for a family gathering, fun and socializing (Deshen, 1997; Fruman, 2004). By and large, the distribution of 'Russian' Olim along the religious spectrum starts to resemble the mainstream Israeli pattern typical of the post-secular era (Shenhav, 2008), with only a minority (about 20%) identifying as consistent secularists and the rest partaking in various forms of Jewish traditions, studying Cabbala or searching for spirituality in non-Jewish domains: remote Hindu/Buddhist ashrams and New Age movements (Yonah and Goodman, 2004).

As for Israel's civic traditions, most respondents gladly celebrated the Independence Day and also identified with the main memorial days, as an expression of their national affiliation. At the same time, an absolute majority continued celebrating Gregorian New Year (almost half – with the decorated tree), Women's Day on March 8, and Victory Day on May 9. By and large, Russians' attitude towards holidays was pragmatic rather than ideological – if we are given a day off and everybody around us celebrates, why decline a chance for rest, good food and some fun? This perception of holidays, both religious and civil, among Russian immigrants is also drifting towards the Israeli norm that combines nationalist sentiments, love of family unification at a festive meal, and commercial opportunity for all retailers and service providers (Deshen, 1997; Fruman, 2004). Like other Israelis, Russians happily use the holidays to ambush supermarkets and malls in search of sales, ride to outdoor picnics to

barbeque tons of meat, and host loud gatherings of relatives and friends with larger than usual (for Israelis) amounts of alcohol. Regardless of their personal practices on Yom Kippur, all immigrants stopped using vehicles and shunned any forms of entertainment in line with the accepted Israeli behavioral code.

The second half of the questionnaire explored respondents' attitudes about political aspects of religion and ethnicity in Israel, in abstract and as applied to themselves. Although we did not address directly political orientations, the responses to the opinion statements gave clear indication of the Center-Right position of most respondents, in line with their source community of former Soviets (Philippov and Knafelman, 2011). If typology proposed by Leshem (2001) were to be applied to this study, most of them would probably fall in the category of *Secular Nationalists*. While most Olim came to Israel for pragmatic reasons and knew little about Zionism, years of exposure to the hegemonic, threat-and-security driven Israeli discourse (augmented by the Russian-language media) has turned many of them into Jewish nationalists and Israeli patriots. At the same time, political outlook of these immigrants is far from being coherent and contains many mutually exclusive components. Thus, most believed that Jewish majority of the state should be maintained at any cost, including discrimination of Moslems and other religious minorities. Under the same breath, most respondents rejected discrimination of non-Jewish Olim who were construed as 'part of the Jewish mainstream'— indeed, in line with the perception of most liberally oriented Israelis (Cohen and Susser, 2009). Most wanted their children and grandchildren to speak fluent Russian, but did not protest strongly enough against the secondary place of languages (as well as math and sciences) in public schools' curriculum. Only a minority would agree to place their children in religious schools, despite many material benefits they usually offer. Reflecting a significant weight of Orthodox religious and 'ideological Jews' in the sample, the statements reflecting anti-clerical stance received less support than they probably would have in a more representative sample of Russian Olim. For the same reason, many respondents expressed their interest in the study of Jewish culture and traditions, more by independent learning than in formal classes.

The non-Jewish Olim in this sample manifested relatively low interest in religious conversion - even within a more liberal Reform framework, let alone Orthodox *giyur*. This issue has also been explored in greater detail in the interviews; suffice it to say that most Olim do not expect to glean much personal benefit from this great investment of time and effort. Former Soviets are used to solving their personal problems (such as marriage, divorce or burial) by bending the rules and building bypasses, such as trips to Cyprus for a marital license, rather than tackling problems head-on by means of political activism. And since most of them do not really intend to become *baalei-tshuva*, they may reason that Orthodox *giyur* is the least practical of all solutions to their compromised status in Israel. On the other hand, those who have Jewish fathers may consider themselves Jewish enough and find it insulting to start formal procedures to certify their Jewishness. In any case, the demand for *giyur* services among this group of Olim seems to be rather low. This conclusion is in line with the findings of a single study aiming to explore the knowledge about and interest in *giyur* among former Soviets conducted by *Machon Tzomet* for the Rabbinical Courts Authority in 2003. In their survey, 80% of respondents did not intend to convert, and the most common reason why was "I do not need this," followed by "It is too difficult and demanding." The remaining 20% were willing to consider it under favorable circumstances. The respondents believed that the most common reason for

giyur is social (better integration in Israel) and not religious or spiritual. Reflecting their low interest in this matter, most respondents manifested poor knowledge about the existing terms and rules of *giyur* in Israel (Machon Tsomet, 2003).

The final statements addressed respondents' future intentions about living in Israel or leaving, regarding themselves and their children. By and large, most respondents see themselves living in Israel, but are less certain about the younger generations, who may find wider opportunities elsewhere. Younger and non-Jewish respondents manifested higher readiness to leave Israel or see their children going elsewhere. Respondents who scored higher on the religiosity scale were more certain about their life-long ties with Israel and expressed stronger rejection of their children's possible change of country. These findings are in agreement with those reported in recent surveys in representative national samples by Leshem (2009) and Philippov and Knafelman (2011).

To conclude, the evolution of the attitudes and practices in the religious and ritual field undergone by former Soviet immigrants in Israel can be described as an expression of their *selective acculturation*. Arriving in Israel with a secular, ethnic Jewish identity and very little experience in Jewish religion and traditions, the newcomers are typically shocked by the semi-theocratic nature of Israeli institutions and way of life. They are surprised and angered by the excessive intervention of religious forces both into politics and citizens' private lives and interpret the merger of state and religion as backward and undemocratic. However, over time, the forces of social learning and adaptation set in: 'Russians' gradually adopt the everyday customs of the natives, including celebration of most Jewish holidays, compliance with Shabbat limitations, and even diminishing consumption of non-kosher food. Thus, *on the level of everyday performance*, Russian Israelis come to accept and imitate what most of them perceive as 'local customs' and a minority – as meaningful religious rites and duties.

However, changes occur also *on the level of ideological assimilation* into Israel's ethno-national regime dominated by the principle of "Jewish majority and control at any cost" – that Russian Jews eagerly adopt as new members of this majority. After prolonged exposure to Israeli political and media discourse, marked by the constant fights between the Right and Left ideologies, most Russians have joined the camp of Jewish nationalists that they construe as both patriotic and more pragmatic/realistic (while the Left is perceived as naïve, driven by wishful thinking, and ultimately self-defeatist). As part of the Center-Right ideological package, most Olim come to legitimize the discrimination of Arabs, Christians, and other religious minorities – as an inevitable price to be paid for sustainability of the Jewish state in the hostile Middle East. Under the same breath, they object discrimination of non-Jewish Olim, perceived as part of the extended 'Jewish camp,' politically, militarily and socially. These attitudes manifest a 'healthy mix' of political pragmatism and self-serving bias.

The anticlerical zeal that was corollary to 'Russian politics' of the 1990s and early 2000s and fuelled the agendas of *Israel be Aliyah*, *Israel Beiteinu*, and a few smaller Russian parties (as well as the mass Russian vote for the late *Shinui*) has largely abated. The chronic impasse of civil marriage legislation, promoted by both 'Russian' politicians and the Israeli Left (*Meretz*), as well as conservative policies of the Ministry of the Interior regarding Jewish identities and legal statuses, are seen by most Olim as another proof that religious control of politics is here to stay. Although

'Russians' still detest the Orthodoxy and its political entrepreneurs, they have grudgingly accepted the rabbinical control of personal and family laws as a necessary price to pay for maintaining the Jewish character of Israel. Olim not recognized as Jews by the Rabbinate use the established bypasses to solve their personal problems; their anger and pain (e.g., when their parents are not allowed to stay in Israel or when spouses are buried in different cemeteries) is not transformed into political mobilization to change the status quo. They no longer wish to rock the boat and challenge the state that offered them shelter and relative economic security. Thus, one can assert that Russian Israelis have become part of the national consensus on the controversial matter of state-religion merger – despite the fact that they are the party most directly affected by it. In other words, after two decades in Israel, Russian Jews have completed – with partial success – their transfer from State Socialism to State Judaism.

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