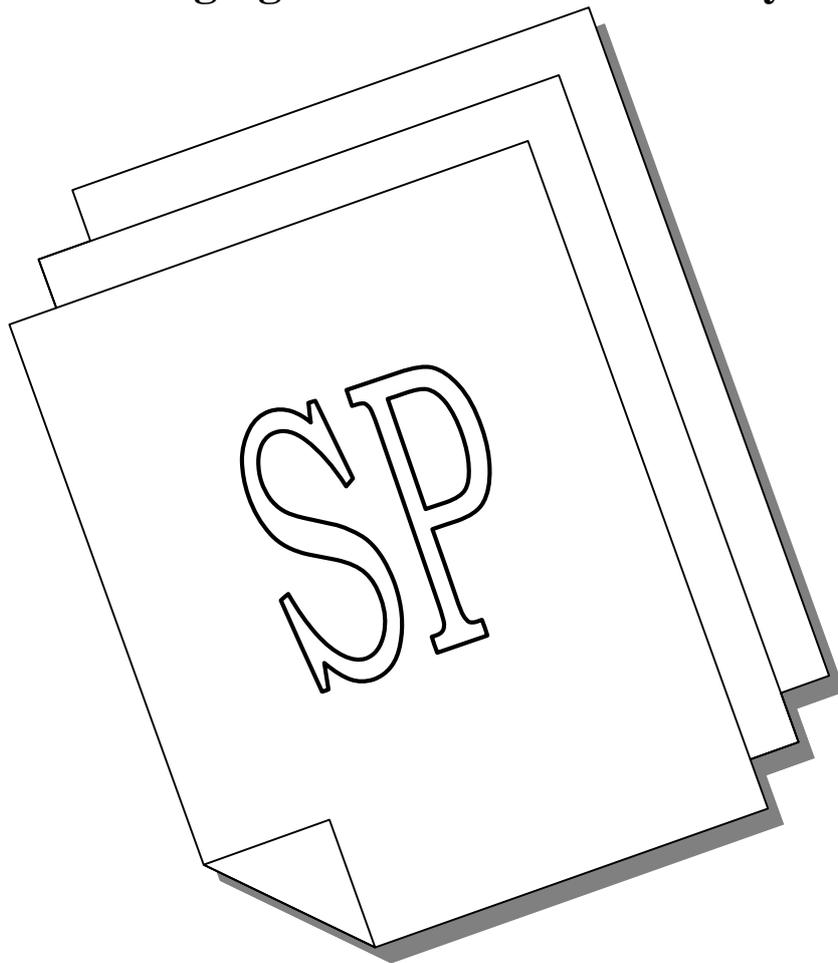


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# **‘I’ve Never Been to the Theater:’ Cultural Preferences of ‘Russian’ Internet Generation in Israel**

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## **Abstract**

The paper presents the results of a survey conducted in 2008 that examined the cultural practices and preferences of ‘Russian’ youth in Israel. Data was collected via structured questionnaires (187) and semi-structured in-depth interviews (21). Respondents were aged 16-24 and represented both the youths born in Israel to immigrant parents and those who immigrated before age 12. The results suggest that the cultural integration of ‘Russian’ youth in Israel does not follow a linear process. There is a large group of youngsters who choose to preserve their mixed or Russian cultural identity (e.g. in social networking, music tastes, and entertainment) for reasons other than Hebrew language difficulties.

## **Introduction**

The past two decades have witnessed a growing number of publications on the integration of first and second generation young immigrants. *The New Second Generation*<sup>1</sup> by Alejandro Portes<sup>1</sup> became a turning point in the field by evoking the discussion on whether the integration process of today differs from that of the ‘old immigration’ (that before US immigration reform of 1965).<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> The conventional model of assimilation was primarily based on empirical generalizations of early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration which predicted that new immigrants and their descendents would be fully absorbed into the political, social and cultural institutions of the new country over the course of one or two generations.

The position stressing the differences between the old and new immigration emphasizes two main points. First, integration has now become more difficult than in the past. Immigrant youth today confront a pluralistic, fragmented environment that

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<sup>1</sup> Alejandro Portes, *The New Second Generation* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Herbert J. Gans, ‘Scenarios for the Economic and Ethnic Futures of the Post-1965 American Immigrants’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.15, No 2 (1992), pp.173-192.

<sup>3</sup> Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Foner, *From Ellis Island to JFK. New York's Two Great Waves of Immigration* (New Haven, CT and London, Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Roger Waldinger and Joel Perlmann. ‘Second Generation: Past, Present, Future,’ *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.24, No.1 (1998), pp.5-24.

offers a wealth of opportunities while also presenting major challenges to their successful adaptation.<sup>6 7</sup> This duality is much more prominent today as compared to the early twentieth century. In this context, the central question is not whether the second generation will assimilate to the host society, but rather to what segment of that society. Thus, there is an increased risk that the children of immigrants, especially those entering the lower levels of the social hierarchy, will fail to climb up the social ladder in the way that second generation immigrants did in the past. One of the first scholars to predict a 'second-generation decline' was Herbert Gans.<sup>8</sup> The second point refers to the effects of globalization, whereby the children of immigrants are now less likely to assimilate. Rather than adopting the majority identity, they may develop bicultural or hybrid identities.

The historians and social scientists advocating the view of today's immigration as not very different from that in the past, argue that our image of past integration is both too homogeneous and too rosy. Such observers tend to be less pessimistic, hoping for ultimate assimilation as a possible outcome for new immigrants<sup>9 10</sup>. One notable development is the re-evaluation of the concept of assimilation itself.<sup>11 12</sup> Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou offered an alternative conceptualization of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation's adaptation process known as 'segmented assimilation theory.'<sup>13</sup> This hypothesis assumes that there is no unitary pattern of assimilation; rather, different immigrant groups, depending on their personal and social resources, as well as the adjustment conditions in the receiving country, demonstrate consonant (upward), dissonant (downward), or selective (mixed) assimilation.<sup>14</sup> The segmented assimilation model suggests that immigrants may achieve academic, professional, and economic success in the receiving country while preserving their cultural identities and cultural practices.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, discrimination and economic difficulties may lead to

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<sup>6</sup> Waters, Mary C., 'Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 28, No.4 (1994), pp.795-820.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, 'Social and Cultural Capital in the Urban Ghetto: Implications for the Economic Sociology of Immigration', in Alejandro Portes (ed.), *Economic Sociology* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1995), pp.213-247.

<sup>8</sup> Gans, 'Scenarios', p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger 'Second Generation Decline? Immigrant Children Past and Present - a Reconsideration', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 31, No.4 (1997) pp. 893-922.

<sup>10</sup> Waldinger and Perlmann, 'Second Generation', p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> Nathan Glazer, 'Is Assimilation Dead?', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol.530 (November), (1993), pp.122-36.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers W. Brubaker, 'The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Immigration and its Sequels in France, Germany and the United States', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.24, No.4 (2001), pp. 531-548.

<sup>13</sup> Alejandro Portes, Min Zhou, 'The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and its Variants', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol.530 (November) (1993), pp.74-96.

<sup>14</sup> Alejandro Portes, Patricia M. Fernandez-Kelly, and William Haller, 'Segmented Assimilation on the Ground: the New Second Generation in Early Adulthood', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.28, No.6 (2005), pp.1000-1040; Alejandro Portes, Ruben G Rumbaut, 'Introduction: the Second Generation and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.28, No.6, (2005), pp. 983-912;

Min Zhou, Yang Sao Xiong, 'The Multifaceted American Experience of the Children of Asian Immigrants: Lessons for Segmented Assimilation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol.28, No 6 (2005), pp.1119-1152.

<sup>15</sup> Portes et al., Introduction to Special Issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2005, Vol. 28. No 6).

the development of an 'oppositional' cultural identity, which includes resistance to the norms and values of the dominant ethno-cultural group.<sup>16 17</sup>

For the last twenty years, newcomers from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) have been the largest immigrant group in Israel.<sup>18</sup> The initial economic adjustment of these immigrants in Israel was difficult and characterized by high unemployment and a decrease in professional and social status; however, ten years from the onset of the mass immigration, their employment and earnings nearly equaled those of native-born Israelis.<sup>19 20</sup> Yet, the immigrants' integration into the Israeli economy is only partially successful, as most of them have not secured jobs that match their education. Even among those who came to Israel at a younger age (31-40), only a minority succeeded in realizing their professional aspirations.

The social integration of the new immigrants from the FSU has also been difficult for a variety of reasons. About one third of the veteran citizens of Israel express negative attitudes towards this wave of immigration. They doubt their Jewish identity and think that the 'Russians' bring crime and alcoholism to the country.<sup>21</sup> The data on first-generation immigrant adolescents from the FSU is quite disturbing as well: this group demonstrated higher school drop-out rates<sup>22</sup> and lower rates of receiving matriculation certificates.<sup>23</sup> However, as time in the country increases, the gap decreases, and in some measurements of math proficiency immigrant adolescents even surpass Israelis.<sup>24</sup>

## **The two cultures meet: "Little Russia" in Israel**

The cultural adaptation of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel has been rather complicated. Israeli society prefers an assimilative or, to a lesser degree, an integrative approach to immigrant absorption<sup>25</sup>. However, immigrants from the FSU tend to see Russian culture and language as a major factor in their identity and are determined to preserve this part of their lives. They also believe Russian culture to be one of the most important values not only for themselves, but also for their children,

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<sup>16</sup> John U. Ogbu, 'Lower Performance as an Adoption: The Case of Blacks in Stockton California', in Margaret A. Gibson and John. U. Ogbu (eds.), *Minority Status and Schooling*, New York, Grand Publishing, 1991, pp. 249-285.

<sup>17</sup> Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> ICBS - Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (2008). Statistical Abstract of Israel. [www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>20</sup> Elazar Leshem, *Absorption of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (1990-2005): A Basic Multidisciplinary Research* (Jerusalem: Joint-Israel, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Asher Arian, Michail Philipov and Anna Knafelman, *The 2009 Israeli Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: The Gutman Center of Israeli Democracy Institute, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Shmuel Shamai, Zinaida Ilatov, 'Acculturation Models of Immigrants: Soviet Adolescents in Israel', *Adolescence*, Vol.40, No.159 (2005), pp. 629-644.

<sup>23</sup> Yitshak Kadmon (ed.) *Immigrant Children in Israel – 2009*. National Council for the Child [www.children.org.il](http://www.children.org.il)

<sup>24</sup> Tamar Levin and Elana Shohamy, 'Achievement of Immigrant Students in Mathematics and Academic Hebrew in Israeli School: A Large-Scale Evaluation Study', *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, Vol. 34 (2008), pp. 1-14.

<sup>25</sup> Eliezer Ben Rafael, 'Multiculturalism in sociological perspective', in Rainer Baubock, Agnes Heller and Aristide L. Zolberg (eds.) *The Challenge of Diversity* (Vienna: Alderhost, 1996), pp.133-154.

and consider the language as part of it. In fact, the Russian community in Israel can be an illustration of a competition (conflict) model of cultural change.<sup>26</sup>

The FSU immigrants perceive themselves as the bearers of European culture in Israel, and 87% of them would like cultural life in Israel to be similar to that of Europe. Only 9% believe that this is indeed the case in Israel. Most immigrants perceive Russian culture and language as superior to Hebrew culture and language. Eighty-eight percent of the immigrants evaluate the impact of their arrival on the cultural life in Israel as positive or very positive, while only 28% evaluate the impact of cultural life in Israel on them as positive or very positive.<sup>27</sup> 'Little Russia' created by the immigrants in Israel includes the Russian-language media, theatres, educational projects for children, internet and other social services, although, with few exceptions, it attracts little attention of Hebrew speakers and is seen by them as a temporary ethnic phenomenon.

## Youth culture

Youth culture presents a symbolic system shared by young people that is, to some degree, distinctive from that of their parents and other adults in their community. Youth culture encompasses music, entertainment hubs (clubs, bars, etc.), fashion, language (youth slang), consumption habits, and other elements.

Surprisingly, there has been relatively little research on the cultural expression of immigrant youth from the FSU in Israel. The evidence gathered thus far suggests that first-generation adolescents from the FSU preserve their ethnic cultural identity and practices, including the language, social networks of 'Russian' friends, and media consumption.<sup>28 29</sup> At the same time, Israeli identity and cultural practices have been found to be positively correlated with the length of time in Israel, while Russian identity and cultural practices are negatively correlated with it.<sup>30 31</sup>

## Cultural consumption and immigration youth

### Television and internet

We live in a society dominated by various forms of mass media. From TV and radio, to printed materials and the internet, information and entertainment are a button click away. While all types of the media reach young people, two in particular are worth specific note: television and the internet. These are the primary sources for news, information and entertainment. An average young person spends 11.5 hours online a week, shopping, chatting, playing games and more.<sup>32</sup> Internet and television are important not only for the effects they have on young person's attitudes and behaviors, but also for signifying inclusion and access to knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world.

The few studies that have dealt with the role of the media in reshaping the young immigrants' identities have mainly focused on traditional media and mostly on

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<sup>26</sup> Eliezer Ben Rafael and Stephen Sharot, *Ethnicity, Religion and Class in Israeli Society* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 110-116.

<sup>27</sup> Leshem, 'Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union', pp 36-47.

<sup>28</sup> Leshem, 'Absorption of immigrants', p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Larissa Remennick, 'The 1.5-generation of Russian immigrants', pp 60-66.

<sup>30</sup> Tartakovsky, 'The Psychological Well-being', pp. 180-189.

<sup>31</sup> Niznik 'How to Be an Alien?', pp. 70-75.

<sup>32</sup> 'Harris Interactive poll and Teen Research'. <http://docs.yahoo.com/docs/pr/release1107.html>

television. These studies found that various television formats originating in the former homeland play an important role in the construction of immigrants' ethnic and gender identities and helped the young people to cope with the various tensions they experience as youngsters in their new country.<sup>33</sup>

The Israeli and global research literature suggests that the internet tends to replace the traditional media in the process of immigrants' cultural adaptation and social integration. It provides a space in which immigrant communities can develop efficient communication channels for spreading information that is vital to their survival and empowerment.<sup>34</sup> In addition, immigrant websites play an important role in the search for a new cultural identity while preserving the old one. They not only enable immigrants to maintain online contact with their homeland, but also allow them a channel where they can redefine their changing identity,<sup>35</sup> share their immigrant experiences and express feelings of alienation towards the host society.<sup>36</sup> Due to its nature, the internet can simultaneously serve as a 'source of information, a cultural resource, and the only safe area for trying on new social roles and identities (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age) without fear, typical to immigrant adolescents, of being punished due to inappropriate behavior or unaccepted appearance.'<sup>37</sup> However, there has been little inquiry on the internet preferences and habits of non-native (specifically Russian) youth in Israel; the recent work of Ellias and Lemish (2008, 2009) started filling in this void. These researchers found that, in contrast to the popular idea that the internet serves mainly as a 'playground' for young people, its role is more serious and positive rather than negative. The internet enables the young immigrants to support several identities at the same time and to balance them one against another.<sup>38 39</sup>

### **'Old fashioned culture' – literature and theatre**

Reading books and going to the theater are less popular leisure activities among the young generation. However, since literature and theatre have almost a symbolic meaning in Russian culture, it is worth researching whether these cultural forms are still relevant for the new generation of Russian immigrants and what their preferences are.

### **Social networking**

The existing research in North America and Europe suggests that first-generation immigrants have more co-ethnic friends and less local friends than the second-

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<sup>33</sup> Vicki Mayer, 'Living Telenovelas/Telenovelizing Life: Mexican American Girls: Identities and Transnational Telenovelas', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 53, No.3, (2003). pp. 479-495.

<sup>34</sup> Nelly Elias and Dafna Lemish, 'Spinning the Web of Identity: Internet's Roles in Immigrant Adolescents' Search of Identity', *New Media & Society*, Vol.11, No.4 2009, pp. 533-551.

<sup>35</sup> Ananda Mitra, 'Diasporic Websites: Ingroup and Outgroup Discourse', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1997), pp. 158-81.

<sup>36</sup> Maria Yelenevskaya, 'A Cultural Diaspora in the Making: Former Soviets in Israel and in Germany', in Wolf Moskovich and Svetlana Nikolova, *Jews and Slavs: Judaeo-Bulgarica, Judaeo-Russica et Paleoslavica*, Vol. 15 (2005), Jerusalem, Center for Slavic Languages and Literatures, pp. 265-79.

<sup>37</sup> Nelly Elias, Dafna Lemish, 'When all Else Fail: The Internet and Adolescent-Immigrants', in Kirsten Drotner (ed.), *Informal Learning and Digital Media*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 142-160.

<sup>38</sup> Ellias and Lemish 'Spinning the Web of Identity', pp.540-543.

<sup>39</sup> Elias and Lemish 'When all Else Fail', p. 148.

generation immigrants and local adolescents.<sup>40</sup> Similar findings have been reported by Israeli authors.<sup>41,42</sup>

## Music

Those who argue that pop music is 'just music' do not take into account that for adolescents pop music is no less influential than television, movies and computers. For young people 'music probably has the most important role in the mapping of social networks, determining how and where they meet and party.'<sup>43</sup> On average, surveys show that modern youth listen to music and watch music videos from three to four hours a day.<sup>44</sup> However this estimate does not take into account music that serves as a constant background to many adolescent's life routine, as they go through the day with players and earphones. Music alters the moods of young people and controls their emotional state, inspires much of their slang, facilitates friendships, shapes identities, and provides information about the adult world. Music stars serve as models for how youngsters behave and perceive reality. Differences in musical taste are not random but shaped by one's social, ethnic and educational background.<sup>45</sup> Ellias, Lemish and Kvorostianov (2010) who examined the roles of popular music in the lives of immigrant adolescents from the FSU in Israel found that different types of popular music not only serve as a marker of the evolving cultural identity of the young immigrants but also as indicators of social and psychological adaptation<sup>46</sup>. Club culture is ethnically demarcated in many immigrant societies,<sup>47</sup> and Israel is no exception.

## The present study

Unfortunately, there is little research available on Russian-Israeli youth culture which encompasses music, clubs, and other cultural forms. Youth cultures or subcultures (some researchers use this term to stress the subordinate nature of this culture)<sup>48</sup> have emerged in most Western societies with large immigrant populations and became an arena for reshaping identities and tastes, as well as creation of new social networks. However, Russian youth culture in Israel is rather invisible in the media, not to mention academic literature.

This paper aims to partially fill in this gap, presenting the results of a survey supplemented by in-depth interviews that examined cultural practices and preferences

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<sup>40</sup> Sean E. Cavanagh, 'Peers, Drinking, and the Assimilation of Mexican American Youth', *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol.50, No.3, 2007, pp. 393-416.

<sup>41</sup> Remennick 'The 1,5 Generation', pp.57-66.

<sup>42</sup> Julia Lerner 'By Way of Knowledge: Russian Migrants at the University'. Shaine Working Papers No 5. (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1999 (Hebrew)).

<sup>43</sup> Simom Firth (1992) cited in Sunaina Maira, 'Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City'(Temple University Press, 2002).

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey J. Arnett, 'Adolescents' Use of Media for Self-Socialization', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol.24,1985, pp.519 -533.

<sup>45</sup> Christensen, P. G. and Roberts, D.F. *It's Not Only Rock & Roll: Popular Music in the Lives of Adolescents*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1998.

<sup>46</sup> Nelly Elias, Dafna Lemish and Natalia Khvorostianov, 'Britney Spears Remained in Russia: Dynamics of Musical Preferences in the Integration of Immigrant Adolescents in Israel', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (in press).

<sup>47</sup> Christensen & Roberts, p.182.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Brake, *Comparative Youth Culture: The Sociology of Youth Cultures and Youth Subcultures in America, Britain, and Canada* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.3-18.

of Russian youth in Israel. The study focused on the media, including the use of the internet, television, social networking, leisure practices, and preferences in popular music and clubs among young Russian-speaking Israelis.

## Method

### Target population

The present study focused on the first and second generation young immigrants from the FSU living in Israel. All the respondents were aged 16-24, the age bracket usually referred to as 'youth.'<sup>49</sup>

### Sampling

The present study included 187 young immigrants and was conducted in 2008. The participants were recruited in the major cities representing Israel's North, Center, and South: Haifa (26.2%), Tel-Aviv (48.5%), Beer-Sheba and Eilat (25.2%). Fifty five percent were female; 45 percent were male. Regarding the age of arrival to the host country, the research literature usually distinguishes between three groups: *first generation youth* - those who immigrated as older adolescents or young adults, *1.5 generation* - a relatively new term that was coined to refer to people who immigrate to a new country before or during their early teens (usually until age 13), and *second generation* - native born children to foreign born parents.<sup>50</sup>

Since for this study the issue of language competence was rather central, another division slightly different from the one outlined above was used. The participants were divided into three groups. 1) Born in Israel or immigrated before elementary school age of six; these participants acquired their initial literacy skills in Hebrew. 2) Arrived between the ages of 6 and 12 with certain reading and writing skills in Russian. 3) Arrived after the age of 12 and had had at least half of their schooling in Russian.

One-third of the participants in the present study arrived to Israel younger than 6 (12% were born in Israel to Russian-speaking parents); 53% immigrated between 6 and 12, and the remaining 14% immigrated at age 12 or older. All the participants under age 18 were school students; those older were either in the military, studied in college or worked. Their main countries of birth were Ukraine (37%), Russia (31%), Israel (12%), and Central Asian FSU republics (11%).

### Procedure

Participants were recruited as a convenience sample through friends, colleagues and relatives. An attempt was made to reach young immigrants from different geographic locations and socio-economic backgrounds to diversify the sample, yet it is not really representative in the formal sense. Bilingual structured questionnaires designed by the author have been distributed to potential participants, along with a self addressed stamped envelope. Out of 230 questionnaires sent, 187 were correctly filled out and returned (150 in Hebrew and 37 in Russian). At the qualitative phase of the study, the author conducted 21 semi-structured in-depth interviews (7 informants from each of

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<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Lee, Min Zhou, *Asian American Youth: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.13.

<sup>50</sup> Lee and Zhou, *Asian American Youth*, p.10.

the three age groups); these were taped and fully transcribed. The interviews took place in participants' homes; they were conducted mainly in Russian with Hebrew translation when needed.

## **Findings**

As the study used both quantitative and qualitative methods, the results will be presented by topic, drawing on both types of findings.

### **Language proficiency and the mass media: television and internet**

Language proficiency was a crucial factor shaping the use of television and the internet, albeit not the only one. The vast majority of participants, according to their self-reports, have basic oral proficiency in both Russian and Hebrew (Figure 1), but with longer life in Israel Hebrew becomes more dominant (Table 1).

### **Television**

Gabi (17, born in Israel) expresses the influence of language proficiency on his TV choices:

*I was born in Israel, grew up in an Israeli kindergarten and school. I remember watching Russian cartoons and listening to my granny reading to me in Russian. But when I went to school, I was the only Russian and I very much wanted to be like the others. Though I had learned the Russian alphabet, I almost forgot it later. My parents insist on speaking Russian at home and we do so, but the rest of my life is in Hebrew. The language we speak at home is definitely not enough to understand even TV movies. It is too much effort for me and I watch TV in order to rest and for pleasure. From time to time I do watch something in Russian, though very rarely.*

For those who consider themselves bilingual content was the determining factor and not the language: *'I prefer watching Russian channels,'* says Sasha (16, 7 years in Israel) *'they are much more appealing, dynamic and professional. There are more entertaining programs for youth.'*

Anna (17, 6 years in Israel) who speaks and reads Russian and claims she has no problem understanding the language at any level, hardly watches anything in Russian: *'I am not very interested in their life. I don't understand their slang, their jokes are not funny for me. I don't have much time for TV, but if I do, I prefer watching something in Hebrew or to see a good Hollywood movie.'*

Family can be another factor influencing the choice. Lena (18, 14 years in Israel) is one such example: *'When I have time and my mum is at home I like to watch 'Modniy prigovor' [a fashion reality show - MN]. I trust my mother's taste, we often buy clothes together.'*

In 18 year old Vera's case (6 years in Israel), it was her family that determined her negative attitude towards Russian-language TV:

*Every day I see my parents reading Russian, watching Russian and breathing Russian. There is no way I will follow this handicapped choice! For me only Hebrew, sorry. I came here at the age of 12; it was a hard time I don't even want to remember, but now things have worked out, thanks to the effort I made to learn Hebrew. I have a TV set in my room and it never speaks Russian.*

Vera's attitude is the exception rather than the rule. The questionnaires show that 90% of the respondents watch Russian TV from time to time and more than half watch it on a permanent basis.

## **Internet**

Most respondents (97%) are connected to the internet at home. They spend on average 3.5 daily hours on-line. As for their net preferences, there is a huge difference between those who immigrated as teens and, hence, left behind their fellow friends and relatives, and those who were born in Israel or immigrated at an earlier age. Many respondents who immigrated at a younger age speak Russian only at home; their writing and reading skills crucial for internet consumption are poorer than those of the more recent immigrants (Table 1).

The data on the first group fully supports the findings of Elias and Lemish (2009) who claim that web-based communication allows newcomers to seek and reinvent their own Russia, preserving those parts of their homeland they miss most. It also provides support for immigrant adolescents by offering interpersonal interactions with peers experiencing similar problems. As such, it serves as a valuable resource for personal growth and empowerment during a critical period of their lives, when they are engaged in adjusting to a new society.<sup>51</sup> Twenty-three year old Dani's (5 years in Israel) narrative exemplifies this:

*I have no idea how they [the earlier waves of newcomers-M.N.] survived without internet. I came here 5 years ago and the first clubs, discos and parties I went to I found on the net in this or that way. I am from St. Petersburg and we, you know, are different from others. There are few of us here. We formed an on-line group and keep in touch with each other.*

Those who came to Israel as teens and feel more comfortable in Russian surroundings favor using the Russian social network called *Odnoklassniki* (Classmates). Marina (18, 6 years in Israel) says: *'Had it not been for Odnoklassniki, I would have lost all my friends from Russia long ago. Thanks to it we grew up together on-line, though sometimes facing different problems, but being able to share them from time to time.'*

The favorite portals for those who prefer to surf in Russian are *mail.ru* and *rambler.ru*. Young immigrants' use of the internet encompasses their interests in pop music, news, sports and entertainment activities. The second group, those who use mostly or only Hebrew for Net surfing and communication, look for the same type of information, but use mainly *walla.com* and *yahoo.com* portals. As a social network, they prefer *Facebook*, though there were a few who mentioned *Twitter* as well. Slava (23, 17 years in Israel) believes that the choice of social network is quite revealing: *'Those who use Facebook feel Israeli and those who choose Odnoklassniki are Russian, and the latter will stay like that. By choosing your network you choose your friends, and not only for now.'*

## **Literature**

Five percent of the participants claim they do not read books; some others do it only as part of schooling. For those who read books for pleasure, there are two determining

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<sup>51</sup> Elias and Lemish 'Spinning the Web of Identity'; 'When all Else Fails'.

factors: age of arrival, crucial for language proficiency, and family pressure. The example of Katya (17, 9 years in Israel) is very typical:

*I don't read books. Reading is not dynamic enough for me. I don't have time and patience for it. It upsets my parents very much. They keep telling me that you can't be a really educated person without reading books. I don't think they are very updated, but I don't want to argue with them. So from time to time I pick a book from our home library just to make them happy.*

Ilan (23, 20 years in Israel) recalls and regrets:

*When I was still in school I hated reading. I read only when it was absolutely necessary to catch up at school. And even in these cases I did my best to escape it somehow. I picked up reading in the army. I served in a non-combat unit close to home and sometimes had absolutely nothing to do. I read a lot of Russian stuff - the Hebrew translation, of course. I regret now I can't read 'Master and Margarita' in Russian, but it's too late. My Russian is very basic, I can talk to you, but reading is another story.*

Anna (24, 7 years in Israel), still finds it difficult to read in Hebrew. She explains: 'Russian is my mother tongue and will always be. I have to read a lot in Hebrew in the University and it's still torture. I read a lot for fun, but only in Russian.'

## **Theatre**

Fifty-five percent of respondents have never attended a play at a theatre. Language competence is less crucial for those who do attend (see Table 2), as Russian performances in Israel often run with Hebrew subtitles. Family pressure and school policies are much more determining, as many youngsters must see theatre shows as part of the curriculum, or with the family members, but almost never with their peers.

*'I prefer to go to the theater with my parents, it's more fun. First, if it's in Russian, there are many things I simply don't understand, and second, I love to discuss with them what I've seen. Not to mention that few among my friends are really interested in theatre,'* says Lev (19, 9 years in Israel).

Alon, (17, 4 years in Israel), expressed a different opinion:

*It's my parents who first took me to the theatre. It was in Gesher [a Russian theatre company in Israel- MN], and I didn't like it very much. I don't see what is so great about it. I didn't want to upset them, but I think that theatre belongs to the previous century. I think it's for people who can't adjust to another era. I wouldn't go there for fun with my friends. Cinema is about the same, but much cooler.*

Vicki (18, 15 years in Israel) is somewhere in the middle: 'I went to the theatre with my class, around two years ago. It was something about the Holocaust. I doubt I would go again; not that it was that bad, but there are more interesting things for young people to do.'

## **Social networking**

The present research only partly supports the assertion that first generation immigrants have more co-ethnic friends and less local friends than second-generation

immigrants and local adolescents. Remennick's (2003) conclusions seem more attuned to the Israeli case: she has found that 1,5 generation immigrants with fluent Hebrew do mix with their Israeli peers in various institutional contexts but prefer other Russians for close friends and dates.<sup>52</sup> The number of youths who socialize only with non-Russians is under 10 percent in all three groups by age of arrival, while more than half of the informants have friends of mixed origin (Table 3).

The data collected in the interviews offers an interesting interpretation of these figures. Many do not see any difference between Russian and Israeli youth as potential friends. Lilia, (16, 12 years in Israel) explains: *'There are good and bad guys among Russians as well as among Israelis. It's the family that makes a difference, not the origin. All my friends are from good families, maybe not rich, but cultural and educated.'*

Many claimed that living in a neighborhood heavily populated by FSU immigrants made it easier to choose their friends among the co-ethnics rather than from the locals. *'I spent my school years in Ofakim [a small peripheral town in the South – MN], explained Edic (21, 16 years in Israel) 'You know what sort of locals live there? Naturally, my close friends were Russians. It slightly changed in the army. Had I lived in Tel-Aviv, it would have been different, I believe.'*

Some respondents were very critical of 'Russians' as a category, whereas others had a more positive opinion. *'They drink more and curse more,'* opined Edic (18, 5 years in Israel). *'They are much more aggressive,'* says Sonya (16, 10 years in Israel). Alona (21, 11 years in Israel) claimed that *'Israelis are more sincere, friendly, open and easygoing.'* At the same time, *'Russians are much better friends, friendship is one of the central values for them,'* believes Ilya (23, 13 years in Israel). *'Russians are much more cultural and educated,'* said Darya (17, 16 years in Israel). *'Of course there are primitive and stupid people among them too, but those who are educated are really erudite. They know more from various fields. My dad, who is a chemistry engineer, is a much better expert in history than our history teacher,'* concluded Dima, (18, 12 years in Israel).

Kobi (24, 20 years in Israel) shared one of his own observations:

*Have you ever been to a theatre or show? If you are sitting in your place and somebody is advancing to his seat in the same row, well, if he is going with his back to your face, he is an Israeli, and if he is going with his face to you, he is Russian. You'll never mistake one for the other.*

Denis (22, 19 years in Israel) feels more comfortable with his Russian peers. He explains:

*I realized it even more during the army service. Of course not with all Russians, only some of them. I am from Moscow, I feel good with those who came from capital cities in the early nineties. We have the same upbringing, our families are very much alike. Some of my best friends are children of my parents' friends.*

Some informants had deliberately chosen the Israeli milieu for the pragmatic reason of faster socialization in the new society. Kostya (22, 18 years in Israel) explains his choice:

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<sup>52</sup> Remennick, 'The 1.5-generation'.

*I remember while being a child I used to look at my dad asking myself the same question: What did he come here for? He goes on watching Russian TV, reading Russian books, having only Russian friends.... Nothing Israeli.... We immigrated from St. Petersburg, not the worst place in the world. What for? I understand him, but I don't want to follow his way. It's a blind alley.*

Relations with the opposite sex become very important at this age as well. There was no question concerning the dating preferences in the questionnaire. Israeli and Russian cultural traditions regarding dating differ from each other.<sup>53</sup> Dana (18, 11 years in Israel) is sure that *'Russian guys are more gallant and generous, even when they have less money than Israelis they give better presents and pay for a girl while eating or drinking out.'*

Maksim, (20, 5 years in Israel) prefers dating Russian girls: *'Russian girls are less demanding and more feminine, they are smarter and more friendly. They smile at you. Israeli girls, at least at our age, think they are princesses, but frankly, I don't think they are something special.'*

Conversely, Ksenya (25, 20 years in Israel) prefers Israelis as more genuine and dislikes some demonstrative features of Russian-style gender roles:

*I am dating only Israeli guys and most of my friends are Israelis. For Russians, the form is often far more important than the content. I don't like this. I don't like the fact that you should always look great, you cannot go out without make up and mascara, no way. You should be always sexual, feminine.... And if I am not in a mood now... There is a competition between Russian girls, it's not only because of the guys, it's between themselves as well, it's part of the culture...*

Thus, social and romantic preferences of young 'Russians' differ, but generally in a predictable way: with longer time in Israel and less exposure to 'Russian' ethnic enclaves the Israeli peers tend to predominate in their social circle.

## **Music**

As the data suggests, language proficiency plays a minor role in the music preferences of the respondents. They prefer songs in English and in Russian, but there is a relatively high percentage (39%) of those who listen to musicians in all three languages. For the recent newcomers, listening to Russian music is a sort of nostalgia. Tanya (18, 7 years in Israel) confesses: *'Listening to Russian music brings me back to my home town in Ukraine, to my friends and childhood.'* At the same time Stas (23, 21 years in Israel) discovered Russian music while living in Israel:

*My parents took me a few years ago to a 'Mashina Vremeni' [a popular Russian rock group –MN] concert here in Israel. I was very much against going with them, but I didn't want to upset them. It was sort of a shock for me. I liked everything there – the music, the atmosphere...I hardly understood the words, but ever since I started listening to Russian songs, mainly from the 70s-90s. I discovered a new world for myself.*

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<sup>53</sup> Larissa Remennick, 'Cross-Cultural Dating Patterns on an Israeli Campus: Why Are Russian Immigrant Women More Popular than Men?', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, Vol.24, No.2, (2005), pp. 435-454.

Many respondents share a hesitant attitude towards Israeli music: 'Too Mizrachi [oriental- MN] for me,' says Ira (19, 11 years in Israel). 'It's either music for elderly people like the songs of Shlomo Arzi, or Mizrachi and Mediterranean, I don't like it,' says Michael (17, 6 years in Israel)

Singers and albums in English (mostly British and American) are considered by most respondents a world standard. Sasha (20, 17 years in Israel) explained his choice: '*Why should I consume a fraud or something second-rate while I can easily enjoy the first-rate original work?*'

Those who listen to 'Russian music' usually mean the music written in Russia. Only 40 percent have ever heard an Israeli musician or a group of Russian origin. Among these, four names are the most popular: Arkadi Duchin, Vulkan, Sadyle, and Los Caparos, and they deserve a special note.

Arkadi Duchin, one of the most successful Israeli musicians, was born in Byelorussia in 1963 and moved to Israel with his family as a child. Hebrew has been his primary language, but over the 1990s he rediscovered Russian and even composed songs in it. Along with three other musicians, he had founded a popular band *Ha-Khaverim Shel Natasha* ('Natasha's Friends'). In 1989, Duchin released his first solo album dedicated to the popular Russian poet and singer Vladimir Vysotsky. As of today, over 700,000 of Duchin's albums have been sold in Israel alone. In 2009, Arkadi took part in a project called *Tarbut.ru* aimed to help broadcast young promising musicians of Russian origin and initiate cooperation between them and well-known Israeli artists. The informants who mentioned Duchin were not only his fans, but greatly appreciated the fact that he has never denied his Russian roots. Arkadi is a positive model for those who dream of a musical career.

*Vulkan* is a rapper. He is 28, was born in a small town near Moscow. He began his career playing hard rock, but then in 1997 he switched to rap. He started writing lyrics in Russian, then turned to Hebrew with an intentionally heavy Russian accent. His real name is Zurab, but he prefers to be addressed as Vulkan. His clip for the song *Aliya* became very popular overnight. It is a very bitter story of those of his generation who failed to find their place in the new society.

*Sadyle* is a hip-hop group headed by Anton Ostrovsky better known as Klin. Their style and themes are very similar to those of Vulkan. Sadyle became popular after winning the second place at a rap festival in Moscow in 2008. One of their hits bears a self explanatory title: 'Nas vospitala ulitza' ['We were brought up by the street' in Russian].

*Los Caparos* presents a different story. There is no protest in their songs, but a festive mixture of styles, cultures, and languages. Starting their career in 2004 by playing in pubs and clubs associated with the Russian community of Tel-Aviv, the band has quickly outreached to native Israeli audience and in parallel became more international than Russian. The band includes both Russian and Hebrew speaking musicians and takes part in musical events in both countries. Some of Los Caparos' members are now well known on the Israeli music scene. Thus, successful Israeli-Russian musician and bands also develop bi-cultural musical style and attract young audiences across cultural lines.

## Clubs

Israeli club culture is ethnically demarcated, as it is in other immigrant societies. Russian-only clubs usually have a short life due to financial reasons; *Rodeo* club in Haifa mentioned by some respondents is rather an exception. The most popular are so-called 'Russian lines' that recently opened in various Israeli clubs, like *Mehoga* or *Lima-Lima* in Tel-Aviv. Those 'lines' are defined as private parties accessible to select public only. *'Israelis are not welcome there, unless they come with their Russian friends,'* explains Dima, (22, 10 years in Israel) *'There is a club doorman, he knows whom to let in and whom not.'*

However, not only native-born Israelis may have a problem entering such a club. *'They don't let in Russian trouble-makers either. They know who may be problematic. That is what I like about these parties. They are safe,'* says Tanya, (17, 4 years in Israel). It is easier for girls to get in than is for boys. Another important thing is dress code. *'Here you can't show up in jeans and old T-shirts,'* explains Lena, (18, 10 years in Israel) *'nobody will let you in.'*

One would assume that in Russian clubs Russian music would prevail, but it does not. *'If it is a disco, the music will be mostly Anglo, the kind Russians love,'* explains Kostya (22, 19 years in Israel) *'and the DJ very often has nothing to do with Russia, and so is the barmen. Doesn't seem to bother anybody on either side.'* *'I like these parties,'* says Tanya, 18, *'there is a special atmosphere there. Russians know how to entertain themselves.'* Danny (24, 6 years in Israel) goes to Russian parties to look for a date: *'A normal Israeli girl would never go out with me. I have a heavy Russian accent, live in a poor neighborhood, my parents are in Russia. Russian girls are less picky, especially newcomers. Here I might have a chance.'*

About 40 percent of the sample do not attend clubs at all, which can be explained by the minimal age restrictions (usually 18 for girls and 21 for boys), entry fees or lack of interest. Yet, the data shows that this choice is ultimately determined by the length of time in Israel – those who immigrated when they were 12 or older simply do not like Israeli clubs (Table 4). Thus, the club scene remains more segregated than other cultural scenes, but mainly in terms of the patrons rather than music or staff.

## Conclusion

This article examines some of the cultural preferences and practices of Russian youth in Israel, revealing a rather complex picture. Our findings suggest that cultural integration of Russian youth in Israel does not reflect a linear process. The younger their age at migration to Israel the greater their Hebrew proficiency, yet all informants have retained some basic communication skills in Russian. Less than eight percent in the first two groups (those who were born in Israel or came before age 12) can neither read nor write in Russian. Significant segments - 18 percent in the first group (born in Israel or came before age 6) and 40 percent in the second group (arrived between ages 6-12) - prefer watching Russian TV. In the second group, 29 percent surf the Net mainly in Russian. More than half of the whole sample prefer listening to Russian pop music; 18 percent attend only or mainly Russian clubs and discos.

Thus, there is substantial evidence that a large group of immigrant youngsters chose to preserve their Russian cultural identity for reasons other than Hebrew language difficulties. The data on social networking also shows that the majority of informants prefer a Russian or a mixed milieu over a native Israeli one. At the same time, the participants in this research demonstrated double attachments to both the host society

and their heritage culture. While often reproaching their parents for their Russian cultural interests, young immigrants do not completely sever their own ties with Russian media, music, and cyberspace. About 40% in the first two groups (i.e. younger at arrival) regularly watch TV in both languages and more than half watch Russian TV at least sometimes. About 40% surf the Net in both Russian and Hebrew; 44 percent listen to music in two or three languages. Popular 'Russian' musicians and bands drift towards bi-cultural and multilingual styles and audiences.

These findings suggest that a large group of immigrant youth became bi-cultural or globalized rather than assimilated into the dominant Hebrew culture. These findings are in line with segmented assimilation theory and also exemplify 'limited' or 'selective' acculturation scenario - another common interpretation of this theory. This type of acculturation is viewed by many researchers as beneficial for the immigrants,<sup>54,55</sup> while also matching the policy of multiculturalism and cultural diversity proclaimed by many Western societies.

The present study is only a first step in investigating the cultural preferences of young immigrants of Russian origin in Israel. Although some features of the sample are characteristic of the target population in general, others reflect the convenience sampling procedure. A larger and more representative sample is needed to make more comprehensive conclusions. Important components of youth culture such as fashion, slang, and consumption habits were not included in this study and may shed additional light on this population. The current findings may be useful for generating hypotheses for further research on young immigrants and their cultural practices. Among other issues, it can compare cultural choices of immigrant youth and their parents, and longitudinal studies can follow the changes in this behavior over time.

Note: An earlier version of this paper has been published in the Special Issue of *Israel Affairs*, 2011, V. 17(1), pp. 89-107.

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<sup>54</sup> Carl L. Bankston and Min Zhou, 'Effects of Minority-Language Literacy on the Academic Achievement of Vietnamese Youths in New Orleans', *Sociology of Education* 68(1) 1995, pp.1-17.

<sup>55</sup> Alejandro Portes, and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), Chapter 2.

Table 1: Language use patterns as function of age at immigration

Age	Reading & Writing (%)			Speaking (%)		
	0 – 6	6 – 12	12 and older	0 - 6	6 – 12	12 and older
<b>No Russian</b>	5.9	7.3	0	0	0	0
<b>Mainly Hebrew</b>	70.6	21.8	14.3	55.9	27.3	7.1
<b>Both</b>	17.6	38.2	28.6	32.4	36.4	14.3
<b>Mainly Russian</b>	5.9	32.7	57.1	11.8	36.4	78.6

Table 2: Language used in cultural and media consumption as function of age at immigration

Age	Type of Media											
	TV			Reading Books			Internet			Theatre		
Language	0-6	6-12	12+	0-6	6-12	12+	0-6	6-12	12+	0-6	6-12	12+
<b>Only Hebrew</b>	9	2	0	38	18	7	44	15	0	21	16	0
<b>Mainly Hebrew</b>	32	16	0	44	9	7	15	15	7	6	4	0
<b>Both</b>	41	40	36	9	16	21	38	40	14	29	9	36
<b>Mainly Russian</b>	15	33	36	3	35	29	3	18	50	3	4	7
<b>Only Russian</b>	3	7	29	3	16	29	0	11	29	0	2	7
<b>None of the above</b>	0	2	0	3	5	7	0	2	0	41	65	50

Table 3: Origin of friends as function of age at arrival

Age	Origin of friends (%)		
	0 – 6	6 – 12	12 and older
Israelis	8.8	9.1	7.1
Both	58.8	61.8	57.1
Russians	32.4	29.1	35.7

Table 4: Type of disco clubs attended as function of age at immigration

Type of disco clubs	Age of immigration		
	0 – 6	6 – 12	12 and older
Only Israeli	9%	4%	0%
Mainly Israeli	18%	13%	0%
Both	15%	16%	36%
Mainly Russian	9%	15%	21%
Only Russian	9%	11%	7%
None of the above	41%	42%	36%

Figure 1: Language preferences of the respondents

