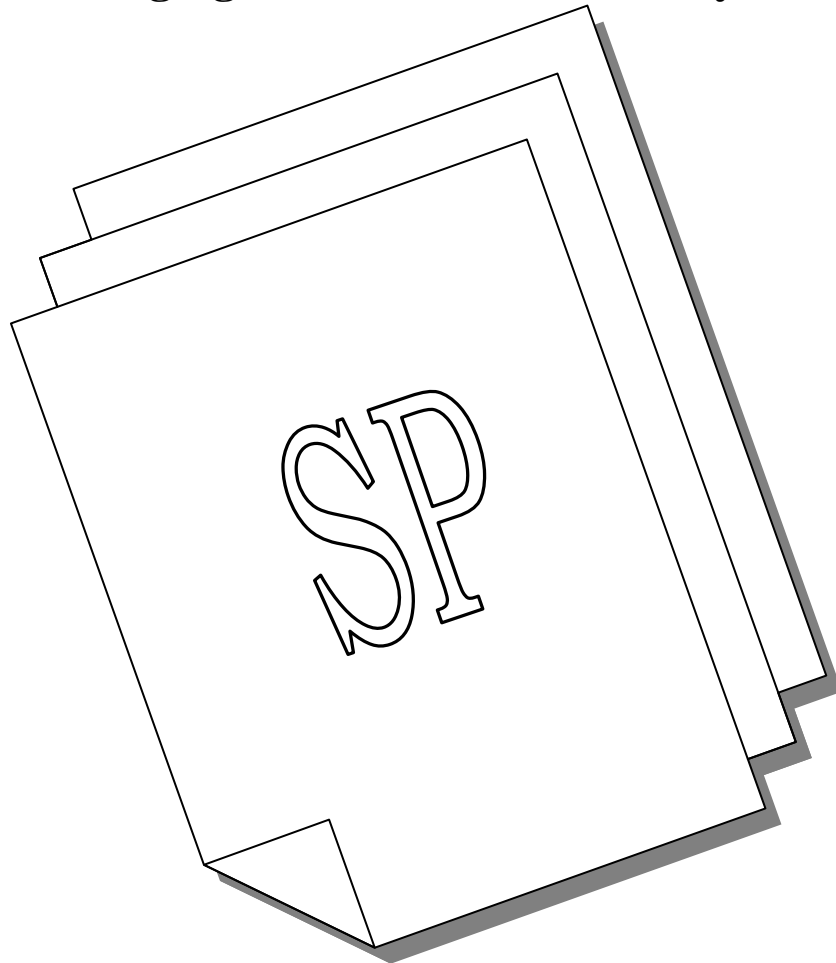


*Sociological Papers*

# **The Russian 1.5 Generation in Israel: Between Protest and Belonging**

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**Volume 18, 2015-2016**

**Sponsored by the Leon Tamman Foundation for  
Research into Jewish Communities**



**SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY STUDIES  
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

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# **Ethnic Awakening among Russian Israelis of the 1.5 Generation: Physical and Symbolic Dimensions of Their Belonging and Protest**

**Anna Prashizky and Larissa Remennick**

Over the last decade, a new voice has entered the Israeli political and social discourse, belonging to the so-called Generation 1.5 of the former Soviet immigrant wave of the 1990s and early 2000s (Remennick, 2003). These young adults (today around 25-40 years old) came to Israel as older children or adolescents carrying with them the legacies of their early socialization in Russia, Ukraine and other ex-Soviet countries but came of age in Israeli schools, military units and colleges. Their increasing visibility in different public arenas sparked the interest of the Hebrew and Russian media, with many press and TV reports and interviews with the activists of this emerging identity group. An umbrella NGO catering to the different issues on the collective immigrant and minority agenda in Israel's South (*Atid ba-Midbar* headed by a veteran American immigrant Debby Goldman Golan and her Russian counterpart Irena Kudman) was instrumental in consolidating the forces of civic activism on the 'Russian Street' of Israel. Two special sessions of the Knesset Committees (in July 2014 and March 2016) were dedicated to the social issues raised by the young Russian immigrants, the last one in an attempt to establish the 1.5 Russian-Israeli Lobby headed by MK Konstantin (Yoel) Razvozov. These events were followed by heated debates on Facebook and other social media about the true identity of young Russian Israelis, questioning their belonging to the mainstream and specific integration problems they still face after 20+ years of living in Israel (Remennick, 2007, 2011).

A full-length documentary *New Israelis* produced in 2015 by Channel 10 pitted against each other its director, an Israeli documentary filmmaker Rodion (Reuven) Brodsky who had immigrated as a young man from St. Petersburg, and an iconic Israeli celebrity Haim Yavin, a veteran Hebrew TV anchor. The film presented a head-on collision between the old school Zionism of the Israeli elite and a much more nuanced and open-ended attitude towards Israel and their own future in it expressed by the young Russian immigrants. In the film Haim Yavin, an ultimate representative of the ideologically-committed founders' generation, sternly interrogates his young informants about their lingering Russianness and apparent reluctance to enter the (in)famous Israeli 'melting pot' – emerging from it as proper Israelis like himself. The opposing narrative sounded by the young 1.5ers asserts their right to be Israeli in their own way, without asking anyone's permission to weave the threads of Russianness into their current Israeli lives. Their more articulate representatives (like journalist Lisa Rozovsky, Jerusalem pundit Marik Shtern, doctoral candidate studying the 1.5 generation Vicky Shteinman, and NGO activist Katia Kupchik) argue in the film that adding Russian-Soviet traits to the extant Israeli cultural mosaic does not threaten Israeli identity but rather makes it more colorful and attractive. Few of them subscribe to the pledge of eternal loyalty to the State of Israel (that has failed them in many respects); many declare open their options for future mobilities in the global world. Yet most of them are willing to fight for a better life in their adopted homeland for themselves, their parents and children.

Wishing to consolidate their group identity, young Israelis of Russian origin have established several communities, both virtual and physical. The first one was *Fishka* club in Tel-Aviv

(started in 2007); then over the last five years appeared Facebook groups *Generation 1.5*, *Parents to Sabras*, *Generations*, *Culture Brigade*, *Humorless Russian Women*, and more (some groups are active only online while others also run actual events for the members). Standing out among these associations, is the new group *Russian Israel* that emerged in the summer of 2015 with a kind of a political manifest published by the Russian-language news website IZRUS. Despite clear differences between the agendas of these groups (to be discussed below), together they express a new phenomenon in the field of Israeli identity politics: the claim at visibility, belonging, and at times political protest of young Russian Israelis – 15-20 years after their arrival in Israel.

These nascent groups manifest active physical presence in the urban space, organizing street festivals, celebrating Russian-Soviet holidays (e.g. Women's Day on March 8<sup>th</sup>, Victory Day on May 9<sup>th</sup> and Gregorian New Year on December 31) and cultural events (poetry readings and translations between Hebrew and Russian, performing drama, etc.) with clear Russian and Soviet legacies running across these events. At the same time, they celebrate Jewish and Israeli holidays (*Pesah*, *Purim*, *Shavuot*, *Chanukah*) and memorial days (e.g. the Holocaust day) in novel ways, making these local rituals more understandable and pleasurable for ex-Soviet immigrants. We agree with the assertion by Bronfman and Galili (2013) that these expressions of group identity, despite their small-scale nature, signify a growing openness, diversity of political outlooks and readiness to social activism among young Russian Israelis that were not really typical for their parents, the 1<sup>st</sup> immigrant generation. The active minority of the Russian 1.5ers promote the new dialogue between Russian Israel and the veteran Israeli elites, challenging social conventions and local rules of the game. While their parents, who often experienced social and occupational downgrading as immigrants during the 1990s (Remennick, 2012), typically kept silent, the youngsters are ready to protest the status quo and claim their full social and political rights as Israelis.

In this introduction, we discuss ethnic awakening among Russian Israelis, focusing on three organizations recently formed by this cohort of young adults: *Fishka* club that functioned for eight years in Tel-Aviv, online platform *Generation 1.5*, and the group *Russian Israelis*. Before presenting each, let us briefly explain the main challenges that Russian Israelis perceive as barriers to full social and political inclusion in their adopted homeland.

**The first** set of issues reflects the religious control of marriage, divorce, burial and other matters of personal status in Israel (Ben-Porat, 2013). Since over half of young Russian Israelis are of mixed ethnicity (e.g. have a Jewish father or grandfather and non-Jewish maternal ancestry) and are not recognized as Jews by Chief Rabbinate, they cannot get married in Israel. Even for those born of a Jewish mother, rabbinic courts demand additional proof of Jewishness when they apply for marriage. Hence all Jews with a Russian accent in Israel are collectively treated as suspects and are estranged by the religious establishment. For the same reason, many ex-Soviet Israelis cannot be buried in regular Jewish cemeteries (including fallen soldiers not recognized as Jews), and their non-Jewish parents and siblings cannot join them in Israel since the Law of Return covers only the Jews. Only a small minority of non-Jewish or partly Jewish *Olim* (new immigrants) were willing and able to undergo full Orthodox conversion (*giyur*) and acquired full matrimonial and burial rights as Jews. Thus the matters of Jewish status often serve as a source of humiliation for Russian Israelis and remind them of their second-class citizenship in the Jewish State (Waxman, 2013).

**The second** block of issues reflects downward economic mobility of many middle-aged and older Russian immigrants, especially as they approach retirement age and discover that they have not earned any real pensions. Most of them cannot receive their Soviet pensions at all or

get negligible payments of \$50-100 per month. Since their pre-migration work is not counted for Israeli pensions and their low Israeli salaries did not allow them to save for retirement, they are destined for poverty after having worked for all their lives. Many 1.5ers cannot count on their parents' help in paying for their education and getting economic foothold (by contrast to many Sabras with wealthier parents); moreover, they themselves would need to help their parents to pay off their mortgages, cover increasing health care costs, etc. Thus young Russian Israeli adults demand from the state to find a solution to the problem of the impending poverty of the older generation of ex-Soviet *Olim*.

**The third** block of issues on the agenda of these new groups has to do with perceived discrimination of young Russian-speakers on the labor market, including their thwarted upward mobility in Israeli organizations, the so-called 'glass ceiling'. Some groups also raise the issue of police violence, legal biases and unfair media coverage of Russian *Olim* suspected of deviance and crime (e.g. the contested case of Roman Zadorov sentenced to a long prison term for the murder of an Israeli teenager Tair Rada).

**The fourth** segment on the agenda of Russian 1.5ers has to do with their cultural rights in the increasingly multi-cultural Israel. While in the early years of their Israeli re-socialization and immersion in Israeli schools and military they had strong incentives to downplay or sever their Russianness, by their 20s many 1.5ers felt the need to get back to their roots and fill the Russian half of their split identity with real cultural and linguistic content. Hence the Russian cultural renaissance among these young adults, many of whom resume speaking their first language (albeit with difficulty and accent), reenter the realms of Russian literature, music, cinema and the internet. The groups like *Fishka* put the legitimacy of Russian-Soviet cultural artifacts and bridging/translation between them and contemporary Hebrew culture in the center of their organizational agenda. Another group called *Parents to Sabras* helps 1.5ers raise their Israeli-born children at the intersection of the Russian and Israeli-Jewish cultural traditions (e.g. by arranging holiday and birthday celebrations in a hybrid way). After this brief exposition, let us turn to the specific activities of the three selected groups.

### ***Fishka***

The name *Fishka* means in Russian a game token (dice) also symbolizing luck. *Fishka* appeared on the social scene of Tel-Aviv in 2007, first as an art-cinema club, then as a framework for the (secular) study of Jewish heritage, and since 2010 as a full-fledged NGO with a multifaceted (but mostly cultural) agenda. It was founded by two young Israeli women of Russian origin: Lena Buchmensky, with a mixed background in high-tech industry and rock music, and Rita Brudnik, a social worker. This NGO was supported by a mix of private donors, including the New Israel Fund and Genesis Philanthropy Group founded by a Russian-Jewish business mogul. Because *Fishka* was not funded by the state or municipal authorities, it did not get a solid material footing and was never fully institutionalized. In its peak years it had a staff of about 25, mostly part-time or volunteer, and hundreds of members who participated in its projects and events. Hence, *Fishka* was a typical grass-roots association, i.e. locally based, significantly autonomous, run by volunteers, and non-profit (Smith, 2000).

*Fishka's* projects included community volunteering (e.g. visiting and entertaining Russian-speaking elders in local senior homes), novel forms of celebrating Jewish and Russian holidays, and a range of interest-based classes and groups (Hebrew-Russian drama troupe, tango class, Hebrew-Russian literary translation group, etc.). The goal of social cohesion of the Russian 1.5ers has been rather central (albeit implicit): *Fishka* served as a meeting place for young Russian-Israelis looking for friends and dates. Together they organized the community

events, went for trips and hikes in Israel and abroad, and brought their own friends to the club, making it grow like a snowball. Gradually they formed a natural support network helping each other with job search, housing, professional development, and more. A significant chunk of *Fishka's* patrons belonged to creative and self-employed professions – the arts, design, architecture, theatre, music, journalism, etc. In these precarious occupations with free-lance work and unstable income, support offered by community of 'pals in need' became really essential for many *Fishkers*.

The stance taken by *Fishka's* leaders and patrons towards their Jewish heritage was rather pluralistic. Its early activities drew on the Jewish Renewal Movement at Tel-Aviv's first secular Yeshiva, *Bin'a*, and over time *Fishka* devoted more effort to creative ways of celebrating Jewish holidays (project *Mahogim*). Some of its leaders (e.g. Nadia Greenberg) spent their formative years in religious schools and kept observing Jewish traditions to some extent, while others had fully left religion or were never interested in it to begin with. Hence it was not always easy to reach consensus as to the right extent of inclusion of the Jewish religious symbols and activities in *Fishka's* agenda. Some secular and atheist patrons were drawn away from the organization due to its excessive (in their mind) focus on the Judaic content, partly driven by the agenda of its sponsor, *Genesis*. Notably, many *Fishkers* were of mixed ethnicity and their Jewish identity was rather weak. On the other hand, arguments about how much should *Fishka* engage in purely Russian-Soviet themes and activities, while being an Israeli NGO, was another point of contention. Typically these disputes, reflecting the hybrid cultural basis of this immigrant association, were solved by compromise and/or change of leaders of specific projects. One overarching feature of *Fishka's* vision and agenda was its focus on the socio-cultural rather than political domain and clear avoidance of the contested Israeli issues that could divide and alienate its members (more on this below).

In 2010-2013 *Fishka* rented a building in South Tel-Aviv's *Eilat St.* near Jaffa. This neighborhood is rather poor and rundown, dominated by small trade shops and warehouses but with the signs of nascent gentrification. The club's premises featured a hall for events and dances whose walls were lined by the bookshelves containing hundreds of Russian books – classic and modern fiction, history, biography, philosophy, Jewish Studies, etc. An opposite wall was used for temporary art exhibits. A small patio was used as a café and for public events. The very design and layout of the premises attested to the intellectual and artistic ambitions of *Fishka's* core.

In May 2013, *Fiska* had to abandon its house on *Eilat St.* because of rental and financial problems, and since then it has been looking for a new permanent home, while holding its club activities in various city locations (e.g. *Gagarin* pub). Over the last two years of its existence, the club became a vibrant hub of bilingual cultural events attracting a mixed crowd of Russian 1.5ers, local residents and tourists. As of today, *Fishka* maintains an active website ([www.fishka.org.il/en/](http://www.fishka.org.il/en/)) and a Facebook group. Both its founders (Lena and Rita) have left *Fishka*, and a new leadership is slowly emerging from the ranks of its activists.

## Generation 1.5

Although this group is in many ways *Fishka's* descendant and heir, their mission statement embraces a broader and more ideological vision of identity politics in the specific Israeli context. This is how they present themselves on their Facebook website (in our free translation from Hebrew): <https://www.facebook.com/dorlvahetsi?fref=ts>

*The Israeli Jewish identity discourse that emerged along with the State and stayed unchanged until the beginning of the 21st century is currently redressed to incorporate and respect our cultural diversity, along with the search for a common denominator. A community of Russian-speaking Israelis must enter this novel discourse, not only to safeguard its place on the map of Israeli identities but also to actively shape this dialogue, so that our story of immigration and inclusion is heard and becomes an integral part of the national Israeli narrative. As active Israeli citizens who completed their education and military service here, we know that the attempts to improve Israeli society should come not only from the national political institutions but also from within ethnic communities, each with its specific histories and needs. We assert that, while acting in line with our unique identities and cultural sensibilities, we nevertheless contribute to the common good, express our solidarity with other ethnic communities and aspire to the unity of the Israeli nation. We see this permanent dialog between the community-based and national goals as the essence of the new Israeli politics. Therefore, we support active, and often critical, citizenship among Russian-speaking Israelis; we call our co-ethnics to break their own shell and start working for the universal Israeli causes while using the many tools offered by Israeli democracy including social media, cultural programming and political activism.*

*Most of us experienced as children the ideological and economic crisis in the wake of the USSR demise, and in Israel, we witnessed another transition – from the monolith, 'melting pot' to the post-modern, pluralistic concept of Israeli identity and culture. For the last 25 years and until this day, veteran Israelis and the establishment cannot agree on whether the Great Russian Aliyah was a problem or a blessing for Israel. Russian Israelis are alternatively construed as an educated and productive workforce, a large sector of voters, a demographic fortification of the Jewish majority, a threat for the Jewish identity of the state, a collective prone to deviance, and an impediment to peacemaking with the Arabs. Collectively we have often been used by Israeli politicians and policy-makers as a means to achieving their goals and not as an independent actor on the political and socio-economic arena. It's about time to change this manipulative relationship between the Israeli mainstream and Russian Israelis, including both our parents and our own 1.5 generation, the young adults who had started their biographies in the FSU but came of age in Israel. Today we speak up from our unique position of bridging between Russian-Soviet and Israeli cultures, with the call for mutual respect, solidarity with other ethnic communities and minorities of Israel, while working together for common good in our adopted homeland.*

This new voice comes from the Facebook platform *Generation 1.5*, which is **not** a registered NGO but rather a virtual social-media community of volunteers, bloggers and activists. This group is loosely associated with *Shaharit* Institute in Jerusalem, which periodically refunds its expenses for specific live events, but none of its leaders gets actual salary. Most of its activists live either in Jerusalem or in Greater Tel-Aviv, so most of its gatherings take place in ad-hoc rented venues in these two cities. The group started to consolidate during the events of the Youth Social Protest in the summer of 2011, in response to the questions raised in the Hebrew media covering these dramatic events – where are the Russians? Why don't we see and hear them in the tent towns that spread across Tel-Aviv and other cities to protest the skyrocketing housing and living costs that push young Israelis to the margins or out of the country? A small group of Russian 1.5ers who joined their Sabra peers in the tent towns lumped together in the wake of these protests to discuss their common pains. For a year after the protest (that faded

away without major achievements) they met at the premises of *Shaharit* in Jerusalem for study groups and workshops to form a common agenda, and by the end of 2012 they opened a Facebook group *Generation 1.5*. This website is a thriving space for posts, blogs, responses to current events and their coverage by the Hebrew media. The group includes over 30 members with varying levels of activity, many of them specializing in coverage of certain topics (e.g. economy, employment and pension reform; culture and the arts; legal and police affairs; ethnic conflicts, etc.).

Members of this group share some common features: most have a background of social and political activism for different causes in liberal Israeli NGOs or have worked in different capacities (staff, project leaders, envoys) for the Jewish Agency in Israel and/or the FSU. This experience had honed their 'social skills' and political instincts and made them articulate and effective communicators, both in live and online contexts. As opposed to *Fishka's* creative and artistic core, *Generation 1.5's* key figures often have a background in social sciences, policy, communications, and management. All but few of them are secular and support religious and political pluralism, while politically leaning to the liberal Left. Although *Generation 1.5* has no declared political platform, the range of opinion expressed by its members and bloggers attests to their universalist outlook, albeit respectful of alternative voices and views. However, this group is clearly more ideological and politically engaged than was *Fishka*. The third group presented below also manifests clear political proclivities, but of another variety, driven by the agenda of Russian Jewish ethnic particularism.

## Russian-Israeli Platform

This is the most recent addition to the map of organizational activities of the 1.5 generation. The group appeared in 2015, simultaneously at several online venues: on Facebook by the name of *Russian-Israeli Platform* (in Hebrew and Russian versions), on a website [www.doctrina.co.il](http://www.doctrina.co.il) (now expired) and as permanent columns on the Israeli-Russian news portal IZRUS. In all of these venues, the group places similar posts and comments, stressing its bilingual nature but primarily addressing those 1.5ers who prefer to consume media in Russian. The group embraces the Institute for the Study of Russian Israel that keeps a small office in Rishon le-Zion and is allegedly supported by private donors from the FSU. The Institute has published compilations of Israeli statistical data on Russian-speaking Israelis and their original research study of the 1.5 generation, although the specifics of the research methods and sources of funding are not disclosed in their publications. *Russian Israel* basically includes four key activists: Alexander Goldshtein, Alina Bardach-Yalov, Marina Gal and David Eidelman, who write most of their materials and present the group at public events. They came to Israel at different ages (some are closer to the 1<sup>st</sup> rather than 1.5 immigrant generation) and have educational backgrounds in social, political and communication sciences.

While members of *Generation 1.5* identify with the Central-Left political agenda (and several of their leaders had worked for the Israeli Left parties in the past), the Russian-Israel Platform clearly stands to the right of the political center, reflecting the views of *Israel Beiteinu* (Our Home Israel – OHI) party headed by Avigdor Lieberman (although they deny any direct association or support from this party today). *The Concept of Russian Israel* that this group published on IZRUS homepage in June 2015 clearly stipulates its agenda of Russian Jewish ethno-cultural superiority/elitism and posits that Russian-speaking Jews are destined to play a special role in Israel's future as its 'saviors' from the current political and economic downturn. This political manifest (published only in Russian and thus targeting the insiders) highlights the historic role of Russian-speaking Jewry both in Russian-Soviet history (as political and industrial-technological elites of the superpower) and as the core of the Zionist movement and



Israel's founding elite. It reminds the role of Soviet Jews as fighters (and not just victims) during the war and their contribution to the defeat of the Nazis and foundation of the State. It further asserts the 'natural entitlement' of Russian-speaking Jewry for the leading role in modern Israel's economic development and government that has not been accomplished so far.

This failure to live up to Russian Jewry's historic mission is explained in the manifest by the problems of absorption during mass *Aliyah* of the 1990s, as well as the lack of appreciation (or outright discrimination) of Russian *Olim* by the ruling Israeli elites at all levels. The *Platform/Concept* asserts that the young Russian-speaking adults of the 1.5 generation are now emerging on the historic scene to correct the mistakes of the sectorial politicians (like N. Sharansky and his *Israel-be-Aliyah* party) and solve the social and economic problems that still aggravate the lives of their parents (e.g. the pension crisis) and their own generation (e.g. the glass ceiling in careers and social mobility). Their Hebrew page on FB is less active than the Russian forums; recently it has featured the events and comments around the accession of Lieberman's party to the Likud-headed coalition and his appointment as Minister of Defense.

*Russian Israel* is in clear opposition to *Generation 1.5* and often challenges their ideas and projects as marginal and irrelevant for the majority of Russian Israelis. Firstly, they oppose the use of the terms *immigrants* and *Russians* because they allegedly marginalize all ex-Soviets in Israel and diminish their status as legitimate citizens and owners of this country; the correct terms, in their view, are *repatriates* (*Olim*) and *Russian Jews*, as in official Israeli vernacular. Secondly, they criticize the constant reference by both *Fishka* and *Generation 1.5* to the symbols of Russian-Soviet (rather than Russian-Jewish) culture in their public events, modes of dress and self-presentation. They criticized the recent events organized by *Generation 1.5*, such as immigrant poetry and song festival or celebrations of the Gregorian New Year on 31/12, deeming them as counterproductive for the collective image and community causes of Russian *Olim* (more on this below).

## The common denominator

All these groups are formed by members of the same social and demographic cohort of young adults, who immigrated to Israel 15-25 years ago during their school years. Admittedly, they comprise a small, socially-active minority of the 1.5ers who managed to put themselves on a path of upward social mobility by completing good high schools, excelling in the military and college, and starting professional careers in Israel. Many of them chose educational tracks in humanities and creative professions or worked in Israel's large non-profit sector or in education and social services. In other words, they are more idealistic and socially engaged than the bulk of young Russian immigrants, who typically opted for pragmatic educational tracks in technology, high-tech, medicine, finance, etc. (Krenzler and Alon, 2015) and are focused on their jobs, families and mortgages. The majority of their 1.5 peers still live in Israel's periphery with cheaper housing or in the new yappy towns like *Modi'in*, *West Rishon* or *Kfar-Saba* (if their incomes allow). The 1.5 activists stand out of their 'generic cohort' not only in their vocational choices in 'soft' social and creative domains but also by delaying marriage and childbearing, living in the major metropolitan areas rather than residential towns, and generally being less materialistic and consumerist in traditional sense than most young Russian Israelis (Rozovsky and Almog, 2010). Most of them had moved from Israel's social periphery (where they grew up and where their parents still live) to Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem's trendy central neighborhoods. With skyrocketing housing costs in Israel, few could afford buying an apartment, so they spend most of their disposable income on inner-city flat rentals, entertainment and personal growth. In that sense, the leaders of these groups belong to the new urban middle classes (Ben-Porat and Feniger, 2009) like many other Russian 1.5ers, but are

different from most of their peers by choosing non-material forms of gratification and social activism. They both consume and produce high culture (art exhibits, drama, poetry); they also take an active part in shaping contemporary urban multicultural milieu by organizing public events, concerts, street festivals, etc. (to be discussed in detail in this collection).

These young adults often construe themselves and their groups as ethnic elites that have a special role in leading the majority of their peers to a better place in Israeli society. Thus, *Fishka*'s activists clearly saw themselves as continuing the cultural project of Russian Jewish intelligentsia in Israel, while leaders of the two other groups clearly claim their space on the Israeli political arena aiming to procure greater social justice for their own group and other Israelis. Small local groups like *Parents to Sabras* resemble self-help associations assisting their members to learn the ropes of Israeli parenting; it is led by two young mothers with postgraduate degrees in social sciences. An active minority positioning itself as a locomotive of change is by no means new or special to the group in question, since many social movements of the past and present have been initiated and headed by young intellectuals (Aronowitz, 1992). Apparently, the young generation of Russian Israelis is more active in building the structures of civil society, at both local and national levels, than were their parents – first generation ex-Soviet immigrants (Remennick, 2007).

## Our ethnographic research on the 1.5 generation

We first paid attention to the nascent organizational efforts by young Russian Israelis around the year 2010, when *Fishka* was in its prime and gained publicity thanks to its open events in Tel-Aviv. Back in the early 2000s, one of the authors (LR) had introduced to the Israeli academic discourse the term '1.5 immigrant generation' (Remennick, 2003), which proved to be catchy and recently entered the general Israeli vernacular and media spotlight. Over the last 2-3 years, Russian 1.5ers (and to some extent their Ethiopian peers) have been the heroes of several documentaries and many news reports on primetime TV, as well as numerous online forums. This is not accidental, since in Israel the demographic cohort of Russian 1.5ers is large (120-150,000), homogeneous (as opposed, for example, to their ethnically and socially diverse counterparts in the US and Canada), and its group identity is shaped by many common problems described above. It was only a matter of time to see them mature, socially and economically, to the extent enabling them to self-organize and claim their place in the local discourse. *Fishka* was the pioneer on this front, followed by a series of other groups, some of which are short-lived, while others survive and evolve into more impressive endeavors.

Our field work at *Fishka* (mostly conducted by AP) included over 18 months of **participant observation** during its peak years 2012-2013, when *Fishka* sponsored dozens of public events, concerts, holiday celebrations, street weddings, and more. Since early 2015 we started following the online forum and live events organized by *Generation 1.5*. Across these years, we also conducted **personal interviews** with the key actors at *Fishka* (23) and *Generation 1.5* (10) – project leaders, blog writers, and other activists. Since late 2015, we started following the third group, *Russian Israeli Platform*, and interviewed its chief ideologues – A. Goldshtein and A. Bardach-Yalov. We also interviewed Vika Shteinman, head of *Parents to Sabras* (*Horim le-Zabarim*), and a few single activists or blog writers not affiliated with groups. **The goal in all these interviews** was to collect individual immigration narratives of these activists and understand how their private experiences in Israel inspired them to take part in the collective identity project of the 1.5 generation. As new actors are emerging in this field, we try to follow their ideas, modus operandi and achievements, so this study is ongoing.

In this Introduction, we overview our ethnographic data collected over the last years to examine the common topics in the emerging group narrative of Russian 1.5ers in Israel. These topics revolve around the matter of their **belonging to** and even **ownership of** Israel (and specifically the major cities they inhabit) and the **protest** against the Israeli establishment (and some segments of the veteran population) that deny these rights to the young Russian Israelis. The claims of belonging pertain to the two domains: the **physical** urban space inhabited by the immigrants and the **symbolic** cultural space to be explored and eventually appropriated by them. In real life, these two dimensions of belonging are closely intertwined and can only be separated for analytical purposes. Below we illustrate these two aspects of belonging with examples from our field work.

### The physical belonging and ownership of urban space

Young immigrants express their intimate belonging to the physical urban space by means of close exploration of their urban habitats in walking tours, learning about the city's past and present in the archives, and participation in the projects of urban conservation and rejuvenation. These acts of learning and discovery are typical for both *Fishka* in Tel-Aviv and *Generation 1.5* in Jerusalem. The two articles on *Fishka* published in this issue cast a close look at the urban projects, the street weddings and holiday celebrations, as well as walking tours in Tel-Aviv and vicinity, trying to connect the participants to its Russian-Jewish past.

As for Jerusalem urban activists, they are represented in our study by Marik Shtern and Shalom Boguslavsky (both from *Generation 1.5*). Both men are part-time Jerusalem tour guides who organize trips to important historic sites of the city, typically those less known and lying off the beaten tourist path. As opposed to the usual promotional focus on "Jerusalem, the city of three world religions", they are interested in the more recent city history, starting in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and unfolding to the turbulent events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their tours focus on the changes in the urban civil and religious architecture, the residential history of the large and small ethnic communities, the complex relations between Jewish West and Palestinian East Jerusalem, the conflicts around recent commercial development projects, conservation of historic buildings, and more. Let us introduce these young men.

Marik Shtern (36) was born in Moscow but raised in Jerusalem; his late father Yuri Shtern was a prominent economist, politician and Knesset member from *Israel Beitinu* party. Marik is a doctoral candidate in politics and government at Ben-Gurion University; he works at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, a liberal think tank. Like his father, he has always been socially active (albeit on a different flank of a political field). Along with his other engagements, he is the head of the Jerusalem Movement, an NGO that promotes pluralism, ties between religious and secular residents, and community leadership in the city. Although he himself is closer to the second generation (having migrated at age 2), Marik was one of the organizers of the *1.5 Generation* platform. His personal ties to Jerusalem come to the fore both in his day job at Jerusalem Institute and in his activism that covers history, geography and culture of the capital. Along with Shalom Boguslavsky, he administrates the Hebrew website *Al ha Makom* (About this Place) where they post and comment on historic photos of Jerusalem at different periods and organize free city tours for the public. Here is an excerpt from this site:

*Marik: Already in middle school I was fascinated by the old Jerusalem photos. At age 14, I spent hours in the library flipping time and again through old photo albums exploring the city that was here long before my time and where my family has no roots (as I come from Moscow and my parents – from Ukraine). You can call this a strange nostalgia or an obsession with an imagined past, but back then I started collecting old pictures of life in Jerusalem, common city scenes with nothing heroic about them. Recently this passion*

*awakened again and led me to opening this site and sharing my personal collection (and passion) with others...I will focus here not on historic events but on our crazy, ever-changing neighborhoods that undergo a makeover every decade or so when different populations (Palestinians, secular and religious Jews of different strands) take control of them – exemplified by Old and New Katamon... [in the text that follows Marik shows deep local knowledge about this neighborhood's history]*

More on Marik Shtern and his deep connection with Jerusalem can be found in the recent interview with him on the website [www.peoplefromhere.com](http://www.peoplefromhere.com). Among other ideas, he said that the attractive side of the city's social fabric is the diversity of its residents but this is also what makes it so challenging. His vision of the city's future strongly depends on the ability of community activists and local politicians to build bridges between different neighborhoods and ethno-religious groups in order to reduce the mutual prejudice and make diversity our strength rather than weakness.

Shalom Boguslavsky also writes his blog about difficult relations between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem and the failure of national and local politicians to foster more equality and social ties between them. They criticize severe negligence by the united municipality of East Jerusalem neighborhoods, the low level of hygiene and social services in these areas, breaches in law enforcement and police avoidance of these areas, and more. Thus, both writers-activists of *Generation 1.5* are closely involved in the political discussion of the conflict, calling for more social justice towards Palestinians. This is a far departure from a neutral, apolitical stance of *Fishka* that never got explicitly involved in the matters of concern for the Arab residents of Jaffa – while its premises were located very close to it.

### **The symbolic dimension of belonging to the cultural urban space**

In the two articles on *Fishka* included in this volume, we present a detailed account of the hybrid (Russian-Soviet + Jewish-Israeli) cultural production by the members of this association in Tel-Aviv. Below we offer a few additional examples of this cultural endeavor with deep symbolic load that were initiated by *Generation 1.5*: the Holocaust Memorial Day, the Victory Day on May 9, and the Jerusalem festival of Russian culture.

### ***Memories of the Holocaust and the Victory over Nazis***

While the Holocaust Memorial Day has long been present on the Israeli calendar, the celebration of the Soviet and Allied Forces victory in WWII (marked in the Soviet Union on May 9) has been added to this calendar by the Red Army veterans who settled in Israel during the 1990s (Roberman, 2007). The groups discussed in this article were organized by the grandchildren of these veterans, who made it their goal to raise the awareness among both young Russian Israelis and the Sabra majority about the tragic history of WWII on the Soviet territory, the tale of Jewish suffering, mass extermination and heroic resistance. They do it both by organizing public events that present the Russian-Soviet version of the *Shoa* (the way it was done by *Fishka* – see the article in this volume) and by creating the rich online narrative about the biographies of the elderly Russian Jews as both victims and fighters. In 2016 when we write these lines, the entire month of May was dedicated by *Generation 1.5* to telling the stories of their grandparents, some of them already dead, illustrated by old black and white Soviet photos from family albums. Many were fighters in the regular army or in partisan units, others worked 16 hour shifts in the Soviet arms industry producing tanks and bombs; many were decorated by medals for their courage in combat and work effort. While in the USSR the

status of the War Veteran entailed multiple symbolic and material benefits, in Israel these elderly immigrants slipped into oblivion and marginality (Roberman, 2007). It became an important task for the 1.5ers to remind the Israeli society about the heroic resistance by Soviet Jews during the war and their contribution to the Allied forces' victory that ultimately made possible the foundation of Israel. This is what Lisa Rozovsky, a journalist and an activist of this group, wrote on her FB page:

*We witness an absurd situation in Israel: while the State has for many years cultivated the Holocaust Cult in its official ceremonies, media and schools, thousands of children and youth who came from the FSU (and often their parents) have a vague idea about their own family story of surviving Nazi occupation, mass killings, evacuations from major cities to remote areas, and the military effort by their grandparents who lived through these events. The Israeli narrative of the Shoa does not touch on their family story, practically ignores the Soviet chapters of the Holocaust, and thus excludes multiple Russian Israelis from being part of this founding national narrative.*

Therefore, the 1.5ers make an organized effort to make their grandparents' story an integral part of the collective memory of the *Shoa* for all Israelis. To join the national narrative, these stories and materials have to be translated into Hebrew and presented in the accessible online format. This is exactly what 1.5ers like Nadia Aizner are trying to do by publishing on FB her Hebrew translation of an iconic Soviet song *Sacred War* (*Sviashennaya Voina*) to make its lyrics understandable for the grandchildren whose Russian is not good enough. Another kind of contribution to the collective memory and a tribute to Russian-speaking elders is ethnographic research about Red Army veteran movement in Israel by a social anthropologist Sveta Roberman (2007). Based on dozens of interviews with the veterans and participant observations at the local museums and events they organized in many Israeli towns, she underscores the deep ties between older and younger generations of ex-Soviet Jews and makes their story known to Israeli and international readers.

### ***The Jerusalem festival of Russian-Soviet culture***

The initiative to organize a three-day festival of Russian-Soviet culture in Jerusalem belonged to Alex Rif, Rita Kogan, and a few other activists of *Generation 1.5*. On three consecutive evenings (31/3-2/4.2015) a mixed crowd of local 1.5ers, visitors from Tel-Aviv, and curious tourists gathered in a popular café *Tmol'-Shilshom* in the city center to listen to the poems and songs performed in Hebrew but inspired by the Russian-Soviet legacies and immigrant experiences. On the first evening called *shirat ha-hagira* (poetry of migration) several 1.5ers read their own verses in Hebrew relating to their experiences and traumas as young immigrants. On the second night, the program included karaoke (led by two professional singers) of the old Russian and Soviet songs well-known to the older immigrants but a not so much to their children. On the third night, there was a showing of a classical Soviet-era film *Zerkalo* (The Mirror) by renowned director Andrei Tarkovsky with a following discussion. The group of Russian 1.5ers writing poems in Hebrew that consolidated around Alex Rif has later performed poetry readings in other venues, such as a conference on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Russian *Aliya* at Ruppin Academic Center in June 2015, a slum party by the name of *hafla rusit* in Jerusalem last November, and a recent evening of Russian poetry and songs in Haifa. Below we describe in more detail the first night of the Jerusalem festival that attracted a rather large crowd, most of them young Russian-speaking immigrants.

Alex Rif (29) who initiated this event spent most of her life in Israel (since age 5). She studied public administration and works in the Ministry of the Economy, also devoting time to her creative interests like screen writing and poetry. She is a key figure in the cultural initiatives of *Generation 1.5* and an energetic lobbyist for the promotion of Russian-Soviet culture in Israel. Alex hosted the poetry evening and also read her own verses. Several dozen listeners, who gathered in this historic Jerusalem café, partly comprised the friends and pals of the poets who came to support them, but others were unrelated young folks who read the FB post about the event. Those who arrived earlier sat at round tables but the latecomers had to stand by the walls or sit on the floor. A small stage with a microphone, from which the poets were reading their verse, was placed in the center of the room. The public kept coming, and by the end of the evening about 50 persons were in the room. The organizers tried to cast this event in the Russian-Soviet style, drawing on the traditional symbols of hospitality. The seated guests were offered shots of vodka with familiar Russian-Soviet snacks (*zakuski*) like *Olivie* (potato salad), rye bread with bits of herring, and more. At the opening, Alex Rif, dressed in an elegant nightgown and red stiletto shoes, presented the participants and asked each of them to say a few words about their immigration story. This is how she explained to the audience the special character of this event:

*...You are about to listen to the poems written by the young immigrants, members of the 1.5 generation of Russian Israelis, who are currently building their own community. It started from a few people who felt that their narrative is not really part of the Israeli discourse and wanted to have their voice heard... Who are essentially these 1.5ers? Are they Russians? Not really, because many of them grew up in Israel and their Hebrew is much better than Russian. But are they Israelis? Not in the full sense. Take me, for example. I was 5 when my parents brought me here from Ukraine, and for 15 years I was trying hard to forget about my origin and pass as a regular Israeli girl... Only in my 20s did I try to return to my Russianness, realizing that I was never fully Israeli despite all the effort... I guess you would ask - why does this evening happen only now, 25 years later? I think, earlier we were not ready to touch this open wound; it's only now that it starts healing.*

The whole evening the audience was exposed to the perfect, rich and unaccented Hebrew – the language in which all the participants chose to express themselves in a public venue in Israel's capital. They either wrote their own verses in Hebrew or translated their favorite Russian poets into Hebrew. Their perfect command of Hebrew was a strong statement of belonging of these young Russian immigrants. The content of the poems, though, suggested that the process of becoming Hebrews was highly loaded and at times traumatic, spicing their verses with bitter scorn and black humor. Thus, the two poems recited by Alex at the beginning were titled *Zionism* (in a rather ironic sense) and *My Mother was a Whore*.

The next reader was Rita Kogan (38), who immigrated from Russia in the early 1990s at the age of 12. Rita recited her poem followed by two translations from Anna Akhmatova. Written in a flat conversational mode, Rita's poem (in our translation from Hebrew) is a chain of questions an Israeli man hurls at an immigrant woman. It ironically reflects the series of clichés and stereotypes imposed by native Israelis on 'Russians' generally and young women specifically:

*You look like you're from here; You look like you're from there; You're Russian, so why are you cold? You're from Israel, you have no accent; Actually, you do sound*

*foreign; Are you Jewish on both sides? How long have you been here? 20 years in Israel and still not acclimated? Where're you from (I mean back there)? And here? Are you a Leftie? That's weird...you're a Russian; Do you have a boyfriend? No? Strange, you're Russian... Won't you fuck me? No? Weird, given you're Russian... Did he fuck you? He sure did, you're Russian after al...*

The protagonist clearly voices common stereotypes of ex-Soviet immigrants as foreign, poorly adjusted, not 'kosher' Jews, Right-wing politically, and on top of that - fair skinned, blond Russian women as sexually loose and always on the lookout for an Israeli man. This tainted sexual reputation of Russian-speaking women was a hot topic in the media and social research of the 1990s (Remennick, 1999; Lemish, 2000), but we discovered that the negative sexual stereotypes were still around, now applied to the daughters' generation. The theme of sexual harassment and exploitation, experienced by these young women (as their mothers before), is a common trope that runs through the artistic oeuvre by young Russian Israeli women (a propos, the title of the 2<sup>nd</sup> poem by Alex Rif, *My Mother was a Whore*). Another example from the poetry evening were the verses read by Zoya Pushnikova, who wryly presented herself as a feminist "who belongs to the famed cohort of Russian sluts who came here to steal local women's husbands and therefore get what they deserve when men harass them in the street". Similar motifs appeared in the poem by Sivan Baskin 'Alternative Adolescence'. Many visual examples of the uneasy encounter between 'Russian' women and Israeli men (typically of Mizrahi origin) are found in the work by a cartoon artist Zoya Cherkasskaya who came to Israel at the age of 15 from Kiev. Another 1.5er – Lena Russovsky – maintains a FB group called 'Russian Women without Sense of Humor and their Friends' (*rusiyot lelo hush umor ve havreihen*) where immigrant women of different ages can voice their grievances and discuss the solutions.

Perhaps not surprisingly, young women were the majority of poets who recited their work this night. Some of them had already been published (e.g. Nadia Aizner) while others are new to the poetry scene. Young men who read their verses or sang their songs included Petia Ptah and Alex Averbuch, the latter also reading his translations from Osip Mandelshtam. Shmuel Zaltser sang his Hebrew versions of the songs by Vladimir Vysotsky and Victor Zoi, popular Soviet underground singers. In the end of the evening, two native Israelis performed their verses in a 'poetry slam' style. One of them, Alon Yissahar, spoke about his Russian grandfather, a war veteran, and recited his ironic poem about *Novy God* (Gregorian New Year) celebrations in his Russian friend's family.

The last performance was by a 22 year-old Anastasia Yermolov who moved many in the room to a mix of tears and laughter. Before reading the verse, she explained what made her write it. Anastasia works at a restaurant in a big Jerusalem hotel, side by side with several Jewish chefs and many kitchen aids – Palestinians from East Jerusalem. The kitchen manager had repeatedly asked her (and the Palestinians) to never cook any hot meals (even scrambled eggs) when the Jewish chef is not around but always call her to do it. This is because their non-Jewish hands cannot touch any hot meals served to kosher Jews in the restaurant, nor even touch the utensils with which they are cooked. Anastasia was clearly hurt by these blatant references to her ethnic and religious inferiority, and by writing the verse, she tried to get even with her boss. The poem opens with a dialog:

*Don't you dare to open the wine; Don't touch the skillet; Hey – have you already washed your hands [meaning netila - ritual hand cleansing]?- Actually I did, so didn't I wash my 'goyish' dirt away?*

The poem incorporates many Hebrew puns and ironic references to symbols of normative Sabra appearance that this immigrant girl tries hard to imitate but is still denied full acceptance. The pain of young women who have a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother and are not recognized as Jewish in Israel is reflected in Anastasia's poem. While living in Israel from age 7, speaking fluent Hebrew and having passed all the social 'entry exams' into proper Israeliness, Anastasia (and her children) will be never equal in the Jewish state ruled by the Orthodox establishment. This anger and ambivalence of many 1.5ers ran as a red thread across many of their poems and songs. Despite their full linguistic and social immersion in the Hebrew mainstream, many of these young Israelis (particularly women) often feel inferior by the references to their compromised Jewish identity.

### **Alternative interpretations of belonging and ownership**

Now we will present an alternative vision of the immigrants' identity and sense of entitlement in their adopted homeland, drawing on the example of Alexander (Sasha) Goldshtein, a political activist, journalist and blogger in his mid-30s who has long been connected to A. Lieberman's party *Israel Beiteinu* (Our Home Israel). He came to Israel at the age of 9 from a small town in Moldova, completed high school, BA and MA degrees and served in the IDF. For a few years now, Alex has administered his Russian-language news portal IZRUS, where a small group of Russian Israelis that are close to national politics published a programmatic statement called *The Concept of Russian Israel*. Below we present a long quote from his recent interview with AP that revealed some deep disagreements in the ways this group construes their place and role vis-à-vis their peers from the other groups discussed above. Alex was somewhat reticent during the interview and was quite reluctant to discuss his own biography, particularly the specifics of his education and career in Israel. When asked if he worked in the past for OHI (Lieberman's party) or represents its interests today, he avoided answering directly but said that their group is independent and supported by private Jewish donors in the FSU. Most of Alex's monologue (delivered in response to the general question about their group's origin and goals) revolved around his objections to the ideas and initiatives presented by other groups, particularly Alex Rif and *Generation 1.5*. Text in square brackets is our comments.

*We've had ideological schisms with Generation 1.5 before, but they got worse after their social media campaign to celebrate Russian New Year on December 31 and promote it among our Sabra friends. This is so typical of their activity – to focus on marginal issues and ignore the important ones. They keep pushing Russian cultural symbols [he mentions the elements of Russian folk costume and songs that Alex Rif often includes in her performances] that are foreign to most Olim who identify as Jews, not Russians... The funny thing is that most of them don't even speak or write in Russian, while positioning themselves as such – and many of them came here as teenagers, after years of schooling in the FSU. All their blogs and events are in Hebrew only!.. It isn't accidental that Alex and her crowd call themselves 'immigrants' – while we are Olim, repatriates, we returned to our homeland, which belongs to us on par with other Israeli Jews. They are not really connected to Israel, despite their perfect Hebrew – tomorrow, if opportunity comes by, they'd leave for Canada or US without looking back. And this is because they have no roots in this land. Israel is not really dear to them, as it is to me – whose great-grandparents in Bessarabia for years donated money for the Zionist settlement in Palestine and dreamed of moving there... That is why I belong here and they do not! They want to tell Israelis that we came from the country of nested dolls and*



*kokoshniks. [cites several cliché icons of Russianness], while I want them to know that we came from the country of Zhabotinsky, Ahad haAm and Pinsker [prominent Russian Zionist writers]!*

*On top of this, all these 1.5ers - celebrating Novy God and serving Russian potato salad to their Sabra guests - in fact represent the ideas of the Israeli Left, even its most radical flank. And this is also connected to their full transit from Russian to Hebrew. Because they don't really function in the Russian-language political and media community [which is nationalist, 'patriotic' and Right-wing]; they have long been coopted by the Israeli leftist NGOs and parties as their agents in the Russian community... They don't really have any clear idea about who they are; their self-identity is a mess! That's why they cannot tap on the actual serious issues that matter for the lives of Russian Israelis – such as economic downfall of our parents upon retirement or the barriers to our own careers in the Israeli organizations, the so-called glass ceiling. We are going to address these matters and try to foster some real changes for the better. **But in order to tackle these problems head-on, you have to believe that you are an equal Israeli citizen who is entitled for the full social and political rights** [our emphasis]... We are also working now on the issues of higher education for the children of Russian Jews in Israel – they experience barriers to the universities and colleges, and we want them to be an educated and capable generation that will continue the best traditions of their parents and grandparents. We want our children to be in touch with their roots and be proud of their origin; they should know that they originate from the largest Jewish country in the world [meaning Russian Empire and USSR] and not some remote Polish village. This is our credo and we are going to act on it.*

This agitated monolog attests to the hurt ego due to the perceived rejection by the ruling Israeli Ashkenazi middle class (allegedly coming from "some remote Polish village") and the wish to get even with it for the many humiliations suffered by ex-Soviet immigrants as newcomers in Israel. Alex stresses the historic legacies of grand Russian-Jewish narrative ("the largest Jewish country in the world", references to the icons of Russian Zionism in Palestine), which is the main inspiration and source of legitimacy for young Russian Jews in Israel and their political appeal. His speech also reveals the basic discordance between the political leanings of his group towards the nationalist secular Right (that claims to represent the majority of Israel's Russian speakers) and the groups of 1.5ers associated with the Israeli Left or Center. In other words, Goldshtein and his allies argue that they are the true, representative voice of the Russian community and a serious political force aiming to solve its many practical (rather than symbolic) problems in Israel.

### **The matters of Jewish identity and marital rights**

It is hardly surprising that the matters of Jewish status and the entitlement to marry in the rabbinical court are rather central for the Russian-Israeli 1.5ers, who are precisely in the age bracket when young adults start families of their own. Some activists of *Generation 1.5* took up the rights of 'non-marriageable' Israelis (*psulei hitun*), their possible conversion and alternative ways to marry as their primary topic in writing and organizing. One of these is Katia Kupchik (32), who came from Ukraine at the age of 17, completed in Israel her MA degree in advertising and now works in PR for several Russian-Israeli NGOs. Katia is married to a fellow immigrant and has a small daughter, who will not be recognized as Jewish because Katia has a Ukrainian maternal grandmother (while all her other grandparents are Jewish).

Katia had studied for the Orthodox conversion but did not complete this tedious process and later on converted within a Reform movement. Katia said:

*...When I made Aliyah after high school, everyone kept pressing me first to serve in the IDF in order 'to belong' in Israel, and then (when they heard that I'm not considered Jewish here) to convert - for the same reason. I realized then that I had to keep my dirty secret (i.e. having a non-Jewish grandma) closeted if I didn't wish to get in trouble... In our group Generation 1.5 were decided not to keep silent anymore and reject the local conventions, to raise public awareness and find ways to solve this problem. Over time, more paternal half-Jews will join our protest, and it will eventually expand the existing boundaries of Jewishness in Israel.*

So Katia is not accepting the status quo and insists on fighting for her own and her daughter's future in the Jewish state. She refers to tens of thousands of Israelis whose father (and not mother) is Jewish, as a source of a future mass protest movement. Possible solutions 1.5ers suggest include ending the monopoly of the Orthodoxy in conversions (i.e. recognizing Reform conversions) and/or establishing civil marital courts for *psulei hitun* and all other Israelis uninterested in religious marriage. Either way, the young generation of Russian Israelis is going to fight for their marital rights more consistently than did their parents' generation. This topic is discussed in our article (included in this volume) on the alternative 'city square weddings' organized by *Fishka* in Tel-Aviv for three years in a row, as a form of protest against rabbinical monopoly in marital rites, and hence basic civil rights, of many Israelis.

### **Learning from the experience of the Mizrahi protest movements**

Concluding this overview, we'd like to ponder some lines of conversion between the protest movements by Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews - that date back to the mid-1970s and still continue today - and the nascent protest movement by Russian Israelis. During the interviews with the activists of *Generation 1.5*, we heard time and again the comparisons between their own *modus operandi* and those of *Keshet ha-Mizrahit* or *Ars Poetica* – the communities of Mizrahi intellectuals challenging the lingering Ashkenazi dominance in many Israeli institutions. Some 1.5ers mentioned that they often discuss their organizational ideas with their Mizrahi pals whom they met in social movements or at the university. Some Russian 1.5 bloggers published their columns (e.g. on Russian rock music and *Novy God* celebrations) with *Café Gibraltar*, a popular website run by Mizrahi intellectuals. In the more recent projects by *Fishka*, we also found the attempts to bridge social gaps between Russian and Mizrahi Israelis, e.g. by the joint celebrations of *Memuna* with Moroccan sweet pastry and Russian pancakes, ended with a traditional Middle-Eastern belly-dance performed by a Russian immigrant woman Julia Kislev (more on this in the article on memory and belonging). Another example of cultural hybridization is the Russian *hafla* (Arabic for wild party) recently organized by *Generation 1.5* in Jerusalem. These recent examples of Russian-Mizrahi intercultural bridging are especially interesting given the long-term hostilities and mutual negative stereotyping between the two communities during the 1990s and early 2000s (Lomsky-Feder, Rapoport and Lerner, 2005). Given that three generations of Mizrahi Jews have accumulated a lot of experience in resisting the Israeli establishment and achieved significant upward mobility in many social arenas (Cohen and Leon, 2008), their protest know-how may be rather valuable for the leaders of the Russian 1.5 generation. With all the differences in the backgrounds and social trajectories between ex-Soviet and Mizrahi Jews, this mutual learning and cooperation in social activism can advance the agendas of both communities in the future.

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# Cultural Capital in Migration: *Fishka* Association of Young Russian-Speaking Adults in Tel-Aviv, Israel<sup>1</sup>

Anna Prashizky & Larissa Remennick

## Abstract

Migration scholars are increasingly interested in the integration experiences and identity dilemmas of the 1.5 immigrant generation. This article examines the activities of *Fishka*, an association of young Russian Israelis living in Tel-Aviv and vicinity, who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union as older children or adolescents. Our empirical analysis draws upon the concepts of social and cultural capital in immigration and explores how the hybrid forms of cultural production emerge at the intersection between various tiers of Russian culture and Israeli realities that surround them. The article explores the acts of cultural translation of various activities and genres from Russian to Hebrew and vice versa. By introducing these hybrid forms of cultural capital to their native peers, the 1.5-ers take pride in their heritage, elevate the prestige of Russian culture in Israel and ultimately reinforce their feelings of belonging to the new country. Our findings highlight ethnic hierarchies (imported from the country of origin or created in Israel) that shape the practices of distinction and boundary building among young Russian Israelis.

Keywords: Migration; Cultural Capital; Cultural Translation; Hybridity; Russian Israelis; 1.5 Generation

## Introduction

Young adults of immigrant background are increasingly in the spotlight, allowing migration and ethnicity scholars a fascinating inquiry into transitional forms of social identity and cultural expression. Although definitions somewhat differ, the 1.5 generation usually embraces adolescents and young adults who moved to the receiving country in their formative years (roughly between the ages of 8–10 to 18–20 years), usually with their families. Linguistically and socially, the 1.5-ers are located at the crossroads between their home and host cultures: some of them opt for expedient assimilation, others (the majority) emerge as competent bilingual/bicultural individuals and yet others may fall in the cracks between the two cultures, living in a chronic limbo (Steinbach 2001; Remennick 2003; Waldinger 2005). Research on the 1.5 generation in Europe, the USA and Israel indicates that these alternative trajectories reflect the age at resettlement (with younger migrants usually having a stronger drive for assimilation), geographic and social locations in the host society (such as living in ethnic enclaves or among the locals), economic mobility achieved by the parents, and perceived hierarchy between the cultures of origin and destination. Many young immigrants have lived through mixed scenarios, seeking rapid inclusion and rejecting their home culture at the outset,

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but later (typically by their early 20s) discovering the attractive sides of their origin culture and getting back to the fold (Remennick 2003, 2012). In any case, cultural scripts adopted by young immigrants are often hybrid, an admixture of languages, forms and content borrowed from both sources.

Due to the size of the ex-Soviet immigrant wave of the 1990s (forming 20 per cent of the Jewish population), Israel is particularly interesting for the study of 1.5-ers who now comprise a 'critical mass' among its young citizens. After spending 15–20 years in Israel and sharing common experiences and narratives, young Russian-speaking adults apparently feel the need to connect and express their specific forms of activism and creativity. This article casts light on one civic association that reflects the drive of young Russian Israelis to organize and establish their common (hybrid) identity – a club and community center called *Fishka* in Tel-Aviv. We anchor our empirical analysis in the theoretical frame of immigrant cultural capital and its role for immigrants' self-assertion in the receiving society. Following this framework, our discussion centers on various forms and expressions of cultural capital in the lives of young Israelis of Russian origin. We argue that creating new forms of cultural capital based on Russian legacies signifies their search for legitimacy and prestige in the new society. As a side effect, this cultural enterprise may affect the internal ethnic and social hierarchies between various subgroups of ex-Soviet and other Israelis.

### Cultural Capital in Migration

The sociological discussion of creation and transformation of cultural capital by immigrants (Erel 2010, 2012) draws on the Bourdieusian paradigm. Bourdieu distinguished between three forms of capital: economic capital that is convertible into money and may be institutionalized as property rights; cultural capital that is convertible into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications, membership in intellectual and artistic associations, etc.; and social capital made up of social connections and convertible into economic capital and social mobility (Bourdieu 1986). Following Bourdieu, Lamont and Lareau (1988: 156) defined cultural capital as 'institutionalized, widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials)' that may be 'used for social and cultural exclusion from jobs, resources and high status groups'. The power exercised through cultural capital grants legitimacy to the claim that specific cultural norms and practices are superior and institutionalizes these claims to access valuable resources (1988: 159). In migration research, the focus has often been on the conversion of cultural and social capital – such as migrant/ethnic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and informal networks – into economic capital by means of educational and occupational mobility (Zhou 2005; Waldinger 2005; Erel 2012). Although this process is somewhat relevant to the case study at hand – for example, social ties developed at *Fishka* help young immigrants find jobs and some of them are partly employed by this organization – in this article, we focus on the meanings and uses of the cultural capital produced by this migrant association.

Cultural capital appears in three forms: the embodied (as mind and body practices of demeanor, dress, etiquette and speech, together known as *habitus*), the objectified (cultural goods, such as musical records, pictures and books) and the institutional, including formal educational credentials (Bourdieu 1986). Cultural capital is also accrued in the process of informal education transmitted through the family, social networks and cultural associations. Cultural capital is mobile and crosses borders along with its carriers. Institutional forms of migrant cultural capital (especially educational and professional credentials) are often discounted in the new context; its physical vessels (books, pictures, etc.) are often left behind

in the old country, but the embodied capital is an inherent part of migrants' identities and lifestyles (Erel 2010). It is an especially valuable asset for the migrants who lack substantial financial resources or social connections in the receiving country and can only use their knowledge and skills as vehicles of social mobility. Recent Israeli (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2012; Lerner and Feldhay 2013), the USA (Zhou 2005, 2009) and European (Erel 2010, 2012) studies show that migrants always import their cultural capital from the country of origin but it seldom remains intact. Reflecting new experiences, their cultural tastes and consumption patterns evolve; over time they embrace multiple local elements, re-emerging in new, hybrid forms. Thus, Erel (2010, 2012) shows how educated Turkish women living in Britain and Germany creatively turn their imported skills (refurbished under new circumstances) into transnational cultural capital, both for themselves and their children.

Active cultural entrepreneurship is typical of many immigrant communities, taking the form of ethnic press and other media; ethnic food and music festivals; heritage language schools and enrichment groups for the children; adult classes of performing arts and spiritual practices. Russian and Chinese immigrants in both hemispheres are particularly well known for their prolific cultural industries and the drive for transmitting their cultural legacies to the children growing in the host country (Remennick 2007; Min Zhou 2009). If seen through the lens of ethnic social capital in diverse urban settings (Putnam 2002; Waldinger 2005), these enterprises usually pursue two related goals: reifying ethnic identity and fortifying internal community cohesion (bonding social capital) and outreach to the hegemonic majority and/or other ethnic groups in the host country (bridging social capital). These tasks may be equally important or one of them may supersede the other at different stages of immigrants' insertion in the host society.

Thus, the frameworks of social and cultural capital can really be intertwined for the study of immigrant cultural production. Applying this combined lens, our ethnography explored the novel forms of self-expression and organizational building among young Israelis of Russian origin. We tried to trace how various forms of hybrid cultural production helped empower the young immigrants allowing them to challenge the majority's cultural dominance and take pride in their Russian heritage. Before describing our fieldwork, a brief introduction of the Russian 1.5-ers in Israel is due.

### **Young Israelis with Russian Roots**

Most young adults of Russian origin resettled in Israel over the last 25 years as 'reluctant migrants', due to their parents' decision to emigrate from the deteriorating post-soviet states. Over two-thirds of the adult immigrants failed to get adequate returns on their soviet education and work record and experienced occupational and social downgrading. Due to the soaring costs of living in Central Israel, many immigrant families had settled in the outlying towns with poor educational resources and few occupational opportunities. Most youths had a difficult time learning Hebrew, adapting to Israeli schools and negotiating local peer culture. Many were raised by single mothers, reflecting high divorce rates among ex-Soviets before and after migration. Their parents were often of little help and guidance during this painful transition, immersed in their own problems, socially disoriented and working long hours (Remennick 2012). The studies among young Russian immigrants during the 1990s have signaled multiple problems of inclusion: uneven performance at school, high truancy and drop-out rates, lack of enthusiasm for the military service, and troubles with the law (Mirsky 1997; Fishman and Mesch 2005).

By the early 2000s, most young 'Russians' have outgrown these 'pains of adjustment', learned to navigate Israeli institutions and play by the local rules (Rozovsky and Almog 2011). Reflecting the forces of social stratification and variable economic mobility of their parents, the 1.5-ers with a Russian accent are now found in all social strata (Remennick 2011). The majority of those raised in the families of ex-Soviet intelligentsia, followed their parents' 'ethnic script' of social mobility via higher education (Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder 2002; Remennick 2003), and by the time of our research found themselves in the ranks of Israeli creative or professional class. Their higher education and professional identities (even those unrealized in Israel) have also served many Russian immigrants as a leverage to improve their status in the local ethnic hierarchy, surpassing veteran Mizrahi immigrants and on many levels merging with Ashkenazi middle class (Lerner et al. 2007; Gvion 2011). In a sense, this research can be seen as a follow-up on these earlier Israeli studies among Russian immigrant students and aspiring professionals in the domain of cultural production.

The story of Russian 1.5-ers in Israel is rather unique due to the size of this community and the existence of a thriving Russian subculture. It can be argued that such a 'critical mass' of same-origin migrants in a small country, where their language and culture have gradually gained acceptance and higher social status, may by itself lead to sociocultural retention. Yet, a similar tendency has been found among Russian immigrants in other host countries, where they comprise a much smaller minority. The studies among the former Soviet 1.5-ers in the USA, Germany and other Western countries (see, for example, Steinbach 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2001; Remennick 2007) have found a tendency to preferential social networking with co-ethnics, regardless of the extent of socio-economic adjustment in the new country. Most Israeli Russian 1.5-ers are bicultural (or intercultural); typically, they construct their own distinct pathway between the home and host cultures, augmented by the new transnational opportunities (Horowitz 2001; Remennick 2013). As a result, a new hybrid cultural bubble has emerged in Israel, typified by a hyphenated identity (Russian–Israeli), lifestyle (rock bands, clubs and fusion musical genres) and a mixed lingo called HebRush (Remennick 2003; Niznik 2011).

## Current Research

We focused on one non-profit cultural association of young Russian Israelis, by the name of *Fishka*, literally meaning in Russian a dice used in board games and in youth slang referring to a peculiarity, a fluke or a brush of luck. This name hints at both the uniqueness and an ironic twist entailed in the 1.5 Russians' identity in Israel. *Fishka* appeared about 8 years ago on the social scene of Tel-Aviv, first as an art-cinema club, then as a framework for the (secular) study of Jewish heritage, and since 2011 as a full-fledged NGO with a multifaceted agenda and its own premises in South Tel-Aviv. This NGO is supported by a mix of donors, one of which is the Genesis Philanthropy Group founded by a Russian–Jewish business mogul M. Friedman. This is how this organization presents itself on its website (<http://fishka.org.il/en/about/>):

*Fishka's community is primarily comprised of young Russian-speaking adults, who immigrated to Israel as children and teenagers from the Former Soviet Union. Consequently, these young people may be dealing with complex questions regarding their identity: they are Soviet-born, Russian-speaking immigrants, Jewish and Israeli – all at the same time. The questions that concern us are: How would our different and conflicting social identities merge with the multi-cultural society of the State of Israel? How can we be an active part of contemporary Israeli culture and society, based on our 'Russian' roots and Jewish heritage? Fishka's mission is to support and expand the young Russian-speaking community*

*based on the values of creativity, cultural influence, and social engagement – in the context of the Jewish heritage and Israeli society.*

This mission statement underscores two related goals: the cultivation of the Israeli Russian identity as an asset, focusing on its creative potential, and building cultural bridges to the Israeli Jewish mainstream, with all its ethno-cultural diversity; combining and eventually merging the two forms of ethnic social capital. *Fishka*'s projects include community volunteering – such as visiting Russian-speaking elders in local senior homes – a range of interest-based classes and groups – Russian drama troupe, tango class, Hebrew-Russian literary translation group, etc. – as well as novel, secular forms of celebrating Jewish and Russian holidays. Since 2009, *Fishka*'s leaders took part in conducting alternative civic marriage ceremonies in Tel-Aviv's urban spaces for young Russian immigrants who cannot (or would not) marry in Israeli rabbinical courts. This activity signifies a challenge to the dominant religious establishment and joining the liberal agenda of civil marriage and divorce in Israel.

The club's premises feature a hall for events and dances where walls are lined with bookshelves containing hundreds of Russian books. An opposite wall is used for temporary art exhibits. There is also a patio with coffee tables, a conference room, a small kitchen and staff offices. The premises feature modern pragmatic design, pasting in multiple elements of the local, Middle Eastern flavor (furniture, fabrics, etc.), which merge the spirit of its renovated Ottoman-period building and the adjacent mixed Arab–Jewish neighborhood of Jaffa.

Our fieldwork with *Fishka*'s staff, project leaders and patrons included 20 months of participant observation of its various events and activities, as well as 23 in-depth interviews with the key informants. The goals of the study included understanding the rationale for *Fishka*'s appearance, the characteristics of its audience and activists, the evolution of its projects (including the reasons for their success or failure), and a close study of the hybrid cultural forms created by *Fishka*'s participants. Due to size limitations, we will leave out the description of the public events sponsored by *Fishka* which we observed or participated in and focus on the selected interview findings and related narrative analysis. These semi-structured interviews highlight the personal intercultural journeys of the immigrants, the reasons for their attachment to the *Fishka* community and their roles in creating new forms of cross-cultural expression. Since both authors are Russian–Hebrew bilinguals, all interviewees were offered the choice of language, and two-thirds opted for their mother tongue. Yet, all of these interviews featured fragments of Hebrew idioms to enable more efficient expression. One-third felt more comfortable speaking Hebrew, but still pasted in multiple Russian words and expressions. Thus, in the best tradition of the 1.5 generation of Russian Israelis (Remennick 2003), our interviews were conducted in the language locally known as *IvRus* or *HebRush*.

## **Selected Findings**

### **Being Russian–Israeli: *Fishka*'s Place in the Immigrant Narratives**

*Fishka*'s members belong to the 1.5 generation: they came to Israel as older children or teenagers and are now in their late 20s or early 30s. Most are either single or divorced and appreciate the chance at social networking with young 'Russians' like themselves in search of new friends and partners. The interviews therefore started with the request to tell the informant's story of resettlement and adjustment in Israel. The resulting narratives underscore the ambivalent and non-linear nature of the young migrants' experiences of inclusion-exclusion, attraction-deterrence and other facets of their uneasy encounter with the Israeli



society. The informants exposed the complex dynamic of their evolving identities merging the Russian, Jewish and Israeli elements, featuring self-representations sometimes as migrants or sojourners and sometimes as locals, almost natives, with the combinations and order of these elements always in flux. Virtually all narratives described the initial years in Israel are marked by a psychological turmoil and forceful rejection of one culture (old or new) while sticking with the other in search of integrity and belonging. Longer tenure in Israel and personal maturation typically brought back the other (rejected) half; eventually, our informants found ways to peacefully incorporate both segments of their identity. They manifested a remarkable self-introspection regarding these shifts and locations vis-à-vis the Israeli mainstream. The bicultural, syncretic nature of the *Fishka*'s vision and modus operandi perfectly fitted into their fluid sensibilities and nurtured the kinds of imagination that led to creation of hybrid genres and forms of expression.

The interview quotes below illustrate highly variable reactions of the young immigrants to their initial encounter with the Israeli society. Their narratives show that both perceptions and personal adaptation strategies of young immigrants vis-à-vis hegemonic cultural norms are constantly evolving. The bicultural model represented by *Fishka* helps its participants validate their complex identity and normalize their belonging to this cultural borderland. Deena and Lena, two project leaders at *Fishka*, arrived in Israel at different ages but had experienced a strong drive for rapid 'israelization'. *Fishka* helped them discover an attractive side of the Russianness that they had tried to abandon before. Deena (30), a physical therapist who came to Israel as elementary school pupil, told that, until recently, she had completely rejected her Russian origins and saw herself as a local – according to looks, perfect Hebrew, and general demeanor. She discovered *Fishka* by chance and fell in love with its style and crowd.

*I always felt at ease with 'hidden' Russians like myself – the kids who grew up in Russian homes but tried to downplay their origins, look and act like Sabras (Israeli natives). With them I could speak Hebrew but didn't have to explain everything about my cultural roots, my parents' problems of adjustment, etc. – we understood each other by default. Like them, I used to be embarrassed by my Russian side [...] but all this started to change at the university (where I met other 'hidden' Russians) and especially at Fishka. Here I could tackle my 'backstory' as an immigrant from its positive end, meeting the intelligent, confident and successful young Israelis who proudly identified as Russians [...]. They made me wish to learn more about Russian literature, cinema, my own family story [...]. Now I am glad that my Russian got back on track and I am not ashamed to speak it in public – although my Hebrew is still much better.*

Lena (30) works in the high-tech industry; she came to Israel at the age of 18 but, just like Deena, strived to leave her Russianness behind:

*Upon resettlement, I made a strong effort to switch into Hebrew in everything – reading, media use, and friends. Even my first steady boyfriend was a Sabra [...]. But at some point I felt that all my hanging out with Israelis was kind of superficial and limited to 'having fun' together at bars and clubs, not going much beyond small talk. I missed a deeper substance I guess, and this brought me to Fishka. Here I met the 'Russians' of a special kind, unlike those square, hardnosed types that I used to associate with 'being Russian' and distanced myself from. Fishka's crowd is different – the intelligent, thinking and creative kind, a real pleasure to be with [...] I got back to speaking Russian and enjoy it, although I still largely think*

*of myself as an Israeli. Here I realized that one doesn't have to choose between these two identities, but may feel comfortable right in the middle.*

Natasha (31), an actress working at a Russian repertoire theatre *Gesher* and a curator of *Fishka*'s art exhibits, represents a different trajectory. She came to Israel with her parents at the age of 13, largely against her will, and had a very hard time finding her place in the new country.

*I had been very happy in my native city, spending most free hours at the drama studio, where I was loved and got to play major parts. When my parents decided to leave, I was desperate, but couldn't stop them [...]. I remember being utterly miserable during my initial years in Israel, feeling completely foreign to this place, hating the people, the language, the way of life [...]. I'd learned enough Hebrew to manage at school, but refused to speak it anywhere else. All my school friends were other 'Russian' kids, united by our dislike of Israel and of the suburban town where we were living [...]. All the time I looked back with nostalgia to my old life and old friends [...]. Things changed radically for me when I moved to Tel Aviv and got admitted to the Moscovich Theatre School. There I met another kind of Israelis – living and breathing theatre like myself; we truly belonged together. I started reading modern Israeli drama and fiction and fell in love with the Hebrew language. Etgar Keret became my favourite author [...]. More recently, I found the same kind of affinity at Fishka – it became a true home for me, my ex-husband, and many others like us who felt dispossessed of their identity and lonely in Israel. A great place to invest your intellectual energy, to meet like-minded people, and celebrate holidays together [...]. I keep thinking that if Fishka had appeared in my life back in the 1990s, when I was struggling and lonely, I could be spared these early years of misery [...]. I am fluent in Hebrew now, but I still need a place where I can speak Russian. We aren't really Russians anymore but neither are we true Israelis; we are in-between, and we serve as a bridge between these two cultures. This is a unique role our generation has to play.*

All three narratives describe the journey of self-discovery by these immigrant women who had pitted their Russian and Israeli identities against each other as an insolvable dichotomy, only to find out later (and with the help of *Fishka* community) that they can be happily settled together in their mind and lifestyle. Natasha also reflects on the more general meaning of her peers' intercultural condition and concludes that the 1.5-ers have a special mission of bridging between the Russian and Hebrew cultures in Israel. Thus, joining *Fishka* community helped these cultural sojourners make sense of their lives, build a coherent self-narrative, and even discover a salient role in the new society.

### **A Journey Back Home: Reinventing the Habitus of Russian 'Intelligentsia'**

Many narratives, including those quoted above, implied a complex relationship between our informants and their image of 'all things Russian'. Many of them had internalized the negative stereotypes of ex-Soviet newcomers circulating in the Israeli mainstream during the 1990s, the years of mass Jewish immigration, Aliya, from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) (Lemish 2000). Stereotypical images of these immigrants as Homo Sovieticus unfit for living in a democracy, of mafia men and drunkards, sex industry workers and welfare-dependent single mothers – took a toll on the young minds of our informants, who had been called names by their classmates and street pals. Like Lena and Deena, many informants spoke about their eager wish to pass as native Israelis and erase any external signs of their Russianness. At *Fishka*,

they encountered a very different kind of Russianness: articulate, intellectual, creative, seeking high standards of artistic self-expression. This constellation represented the best qualities of Russian–Jewish intelligentsia of their parents' generation who cherished European and Russian high culture and contributed a lot to its creation (Remennick 2007). The above-cited Deena (30, a physiotherapist) said:

*At Fishka I met the people who want to spend their leisure in a meaningful, creative way, just like me. Most of my Israeli pals would go out for drinks and a little soul talk; they may go to a rock concert or a movie, but nothing much 'heavier' than this. If you wish to see a serious play or, G-d forbid, a ballet – they'll think you're nuts, acting like an 'old Polish lady' [...]. At Fishka you can try things that require some effort, not just light entertainment. For example, most of my co-workers at the clinic find it weird that I wanted to learn how to dance tango; this is simply beyond their imagination. Or, say, many Israelis believe that Russian food is dull and tasteless, so we wanted to prove them wrong and organized Russian pancakes and sweet pastries festival on Memuna day [Passover's end celebrated by Moroccan Jews with abundant sweet dishes]. We're showing to the locals that Russians have many great things to offer, including the food.*

Deena's words underscore the group boundary building of *Fishka* patrons as consumers of high cultural genres like ballet and tango (elements of the 'embodied cultural capital' and perceived 'habitus of Russian intelligentsia') vis-à-vis their superficial and parochial native Israeli peers. Yet, she is also glad to prove the merits of her cultural inheritance to the prejudiced locals by introducing them to tango classes or offering them Russian sweet pastries at the Moroccan–Jewish *Memuna* celebration (trying to bridge these cultural and social gaps).

Many informants stressed the high quality of *Fishka*'s entertainment and classes that they had never found before in other 'Russian' cultural venues and its unique brand of Russian–Jewish–Israeli merger of styles and themes. Thus, *Fishka* became the setting of the symbolic encounter between the values and practices of the previous generations of Russian intelligentsia and their current reincarnation, as young migrants in Israel. For some patrons, *Fishka*'s library, cinema club and musical events became the first real encounter with their 'heritage' high culture, which they had left behind as children and experienced in Israel only second-hand, via their parents. Of course, at *Fishka* Russian cultural references (plots, images and texts) are reinvented and often poured in the new vessels of (post)modern culture – in the works of conceptual and video artists, song and poetry writers, stage directors and interior designers. Thus, *Fishka* supports a new branch of contemporary Israeli culture that borrows from the cultural repertoire of Russian–Jewish intelligentsia.

The 'ethnic script' of the parental generation (Epstein and Kheimets, 2000; Remennick 2007; Lerner et al. 2007) includes urban lifestyle (indeed, most *Fishka* participants have moved to Tel-Aviv from Israel's peripheral towns); higher education (most are professionals in the high-tech industry, medicine, education and a range of creative areas – journalism, design, theatre, etc.); broad cultural literacy (including history, art and philosophy), and the love for Russian and European high culture with concomitant attempts at artistic self-expression.

What are the foundations of the immigrant cultural capital cultivated and developed at *Fishka*? What does the ensuing cultural tool kit look like in terms of its components, sources and genres? It draws rather heavily on the traditional high cultural genres like drama, poetry and visual arts that are deemed prestigious by Russian–Jewish intelligentsia, with a more recent drift towards global and popular forms of cultural production (ethnic dance; jazz, rock and

fusion musical performances; karaoke; food festivals, etc.). Signaling generational change, popular Soviet-time cultural genres like intellectual contests, humor festivals and trivia quizzes (KVN<sup>1</sup>, Brain Ring, *Chto-Gde-Kogda*), as well as bard song festivals widely popular among the parental generation (Remennick 2007: 114), are present but less prominent on the club's agenda. In line with its above-stated mission, various forms of Jewish learning and traditional performance are another permanent item on the *Fishka*'s schedule. Thus, the 'classical' components of the Russian–Jewish intellectual habitus are augmented by novel activities in response to *Fishka*'s expanding audiences and local urban fashions. Some constants, however, are carefully maintained. First and foremost, it is the quality of spoken Russian (articulation, lexicon, accents) that signals the origin in the FSU (Moscow and other capital cities vs. smaller towns of Southern Russia and Ukraine) and social origins of the speaker (more or less educated family). Most interviewees stressed the role of their *Fishka* experience in the improvement of their spoken Russian, often broken or rudimentary for those who had switched to Hebrew in childhood. At the same time, fluent Hebrew free of a heavy Russian accent is also central in *Fishka*'s milieu; thus, the ideal patron is a symmetrical bilingual who can effortlessly switch language and cultural codes.

Second, *Fishka*'s members show interest, and some basic erudition, in the world of classic and modern Russian literature; its importance is made evident by the size of the in-house library. Many of the center's cultural events focus on literary texts – meetings with Israeli and Russian poets and writers, translation workshops, staging Russian drama, etc. A basic competency in Russian theatre, music and visual arts is certainly a plus – many of *Fishka*'s project leaders and patrons are artists, stage designers, singers, band players, etc. This literacy implies a fairly broad time range, including both the classic riches of the Russian culture and its current trends and icons. Thus, it requires being 'plugged in' by means of libraries, electronic media, and actual visits to theatre festivals, book fairs and the like – assuming a transnational lifestyle and keeping dense ties with former homelands and other branches of the post-Soviet diaspora. Although not all our informants pay regular visits in the FSU, most of them follow current political and cultural developments there, read new Russian authors, watch old and new films, attend performances of Russian bands when they tour in Israel: so, for them the connection to various tiers of contemporary Russian culture is real and tangible although their interests and choices are clearly different from those of their parents.

Some informants also mentioned the importance of cultivated and fashionable looks when appearing at *Fishka*'s events, particularly for women who typically wear makeup, professional haircuts, polished nails and elegant shoes. This emphasis on groomed feminine looks hints at the casual (or unisex) appearance of many Sabras who come to *Fishka*. A couple of successful Tel-Aviv fashion designers (Frau Blau label) are among the club's patrons who also supply the stage costumes and clothes for project leaders, concert anchors, etc. Altogether, these manifestations of cultural finesse and good taste make a claim at these young immigrants' special place in the ranks of Tel-Aviv bohemia, their stake in creation of the city's thriving habitus, and at least parity (if not superiority) with other young creators who are native Israelis. This attitude is also supported by *Fishka*'s main donor – the Genesis Foundation for Russian Jewry. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Sana Britavsky, head of Genesis Tel-Aviv branch:

*This initiative [Fishka] looked unique from the outset, that's why we decided to support it. It attracted young and trendy Tel Aviv crowd that was interested in its Jewish and Russian roots. Not the ardent Zionist kind that you find in Jerusalem but a bohemian kind, professional, confident and well-adjusted in Israel. These were not the people crushed by immigration and looking for a shoulder to cry on.*

*Most had received their degrees from good universities and started promising careers [...] Even if they hadn't made it in Israel yet and worked as janitors or guards, they aspired to become film directors and artists and found here the outlet for their creativity. From the outset, Fishka's leaders kept to certain standards that resulted in self-selection: the rogue folks interested in loud music and a glass of beer dropped out quickly.*

Later, she mused:

*In fact, Fishka is a post-migration phenomenon; its patrons are very much the locals now [...] they remind me of the 2nd and 3rd generation of the White Russian immigration in Paris. Already French, but of a special kind, they cherished their Russian roots, sang Russian songs and ate in Russian restaurants [...] Now this 'ethnic' tweak became fashionable also in Israel, so it attracts young Sabras of a certain kind who like hanging out with Russian 1.5ers [...]. Thus Tel-Aviv slowly recovers its historic Russian roots – most of its founding intelligentsia had come from Russia and built the city from scratch [...] this lingering imprint helps young Russian Israelis feel at home here.*

Sana's words evoke two elitist associations: one with the noble White Russian émigrés in Paris who never severed their ties with the Russian culture, and the other with the Russian Jewish founders of Tel-Aviv in pre-state Palestine – iconic figures like poets Chaim N. Bialik and Alexander Penn, actress Hanna Rovina, the reformer of modern Hebrew Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and many others whose names feature on many Tel-Aviv streets. She notes with pride that, thanks to *Fishka* and other similar groups, Russianness came into vogue among some Tel-Aviv's natives, which helps redress earlier negative stereotypes about the immigrants and bridge remaining social gaps. The invocation of historic Russian cultural icons of early Israeli statehood adds additional facets to the cultural capital construed by the immigrant leaders and fortifies their sense of belonging to Tel-Aviv's urban milieu. Sana's attitude (admittedly rather elitist) is shared by some other opinion leaders among Russian 1.5-ers and may reinforce feelings of superiority over both the natives and other ex-Soviets, of the provincial and unsophisticated kind, whose interests 'do not go beyond loud music and beer'. It may both reinforce the internal boundaries along educational and ethnic lines within Israel's 'Russian Street' and add political and personal advantages to these opinion leaders, both formal and informal.

Arguably, elitism is part and parcel of Russian–Jewish intelligentsia's self-concept and is seen as a virtue rather than a flaw. In this worldview, elitism implies strife for achievement and excellence, the hard work of cultural learning and self-improvement. Higher education, professionalism and broad cultural literacy form the main axes of this identity, with a special appreciation of self-made men and women, who excelled despite their meager origins and hostile milieu (as most Soviet Jewish professionals are descendants of poor and illiterate Jews of the Pale). In the last 30 years of state socialism marked by ubiquitous institutional antisemitism, Russian–Jewish intelligentsia developed a peculiar self-concept of a 'discriminated elite' (Remennick 2007: 31). Upon migration to Israel, many Russian–Jewish intellectuals continued to feel as a kind of 'unrecognized' elite in their new homeland, due to their stifled occupational mobility, the language barrier, and perceived social exclusion by Israeli elites (Lerner et al. 2007; Remennick 2007: 109; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007: 89, 239).

Yet, other informants felt uncomfortable or ambivalent about the elitism sustained by *Fishka*'s habitus. This sensibility is exemplified by Ania (33), Israeli for 24 years, who works in information technology and is also an amateur painter:

*I think this self-image of many at Fishka as 'Russian intelligentsia' is snobbish and patronizing. The very term is probably irrelevant by now, or too vague [...]. They try hard to ward off the 'simple folks' who speak with Southern accents, the women with tacky clothes and bleached hair [...] their worst fear is becoming a kind of a community center for this low-income area.*

Yet, Ania continues under the same breath:

*On the other hand, this highbrow pose is empowering; it helps us feel superior and insiders to the great culture unfamiliar to the locals. Fishka is one of the few places where you can bring your Sabra friends and enjoy their bewilderment and admiration at the images and texts they don't really grasp. But it also makes me uneasy at times, because I am not sure I belong to the ranks of 'intelligentsia' myself; I am not always up to the standard.*

Ania dislikes the Centre's tendency to isolate the outsiders, to avoid extending its welcome to unselected locals and immigrants. Yet, at the same time, she finds its elitist outlook empowering vis-à-vis her Israeli friends, allowing her to 'get even' with their former patronizing and looking down at the Russian newcomers. She is unsure if she is up to *Fishka*'s standard herself (despite her being from Moscow, well-educated, and with the art streak). Ania's words attest to the tendency of *Fishka*'s leaders to use their cultural capital as a symbolic tool to demonstrate superiority over native Israelis – at odds with its declared goal of bridging the cultural gap and attracting the Israeli peers to *Fishka*'s activities. Aware of this critical undercurrent, in recent years *Fishka* has developed a more inclusive policy – not by giving up its high-brow workshops but by adding more popular, open-door events like food festivals, singing contests and holiday celebrations.

### **The Bridges between Russian and Hebrew Culture at *Fishka***

Several projects at *Fishka* aim at building intercultural bridges by introducing contemporary Hebrew culture to the 1.5-ers. One of them is called Chronicus (from Chronos – Greek for time); it includes meetings and readings of Hebrew writers, poets, stage directors, as well as field trips to culturally important sites in Tel-Aviv and beyond. Chronicus leader is Nadia (33), one of the key figures at *Fishka*, who came to Israel 22 years ago from Moscow, graduated from a theatre school and works as drama teacher and stage director. Nadia shared her thoughts on intercultural learning:

*Most Fishka guys speak fluent Hebrew and feel Israeli, but they are not always familiar with contemporary Israeli culture and its evolvement over the 20th century. Chronicus seeks to fill in the gaps of their knowledge and help them feel more connected to Israel [...]. We started from the trips to several important museums and memorial homes, e.g. of C. N. Bialik [a Hebrew poetry classic originally from Odessa], and proceeded to learning urban history and architecture in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. We used any opportunity to invite different men of letters, working both in Hebrew and in Russian, and the translators of drama and poetry, like Peter Kriksunov who translated Bulgakov's 'Master and Margarita'*

*into Hebrew and Ro'i Chen, a Sabra who learned Russian perfectly; he translates and adapts Russian drama at the Gesher theatre. All of these events were sold out and some resulted in new projects, for instance poetry translators' workshop.*

Nadia added later:

*One of our activists is a professional tour guide who works in both languages and she really made us look at the city we live in differently. Our field trips in Tel Aviv made a deep impression on the Fishka guys. The stories of young Russian-Jewish pioneers who had built the city in the 1910s–1920s remind them of their own journey 100 years later: back then, as now, the city scene is in flux and we can contribute our fair share to its current history and cultural scene [...]. These pioneers also felt being in the gap between the two cultures and slowly learned to fill it with the new content. This historical parallel makes us feel stronger and more relevant in this place on the map.*

Nadia's reflections underscore the role of *Fishka* in the fortification of young immigrants' feelings of belonging to this country and city, their stake at and entitlement for a fair part in its on-going creation. The parallel between the earlier waves of Aliya from Russia and today's Russian 1.5-ers helps cement the intergenerational ties and a common vision of Israel's history and its culture as a complex tapestry with a significant Russian thread running across it. They claim their unique place as creators of Israeli, locally embedded cultural capital drawing on the Russian language and traditions.

Nadia's story also evokes the theme of cultural translation; it is not accidental that so many of the events revolve around translating and interpreters – of drama, poetry, bilingual city guides and the like. Lerner (2013: 35) argues that the whole process of immigrant integration in Israel can be seen through a metaphor of intercultural translation, combining both symbolic and pragmatic elements bridging between immigrants' past and present. Immigrants employ their 'old' knowledge and frames of reference as a lens to scrutinize and interpret new realities of Israel, thus creating unique cultural hybrids, products of intercultural translation. The act of translation occurs both literally, in the events and workshops discussing Hebrew–Russian literary translations, and metaphorically, for example interpreting Jewish and Israeli holidays into the cultural and symbolic language understandable for ex-Soviet immigrants who were raised without any Jewish traditions at home. The following quote (from Nadia's narrative) illustrates how cultural translation is deployed during celebration of the Passover Seder at *Fishka*:

*The project Mahogim is about celebrating high Jewish holidays – in novel ways that make them enjoyable and meaningful for our participants. First, we asked them which elements of Seder they like and dislike and why [...] most folks disliked tedious reading of the Aggadah [a long traditional text describing Jewish slavery and exodus from Egypt] before starting the meal, making everybody edgy. On the other hand, we didn't want to reduce this important evening into a mere dinner party. So it was decided not to read the Aggadah but discuss instead the major issues it raises – slavery, the cost of freedom, and leadership – in the form of a brain storm game, with two competing teams tackling the questions. It took about an hour and the folks got all excited about this dispute, which continued over the meal. What did we do about traditional singing of Seder songs in obscure Aramaic language? A kind of karaoke – we posted the words on a screen so that everyone could follow. Then we switched to singing familiar songs of Russian bards – Vysotsky, Okudzhava, Gorodnitsky, Vizbor – mainly those devoted to journeys,*

*roads, and personal transitions, and there are many such songs in the familiar Russian repertoire. So everybody could connect to the deeper meaning of Passover and also enjoyed themselves, including my 70-years old mother.*

Apparently, the Seder night at *Fishka* stood far from its traditional Orthodox format, but its symbolic message was clearly delivered by means of familiar cultural genres; a brain-storm game and singing Russian songs about freedom. This act of cultural translation made an ancient Jewish tradition more legible and meaningful to the secular patrons of the club, both young and old.

## Conclusion

In this article, we present the selected findings from our on-going ethnographic project on identity and community building among young Russian Israelis, looking at it through the lens of cultural and social immigrant capital. Hopefully, it contributes to several related research streams: understanding immigrant cultural production as a tool of their social mobility; the ambivalent place of Russian immigrants in Israel's ethnic hierarchy; cultural legacies and innovation in integration scripts of the 1.5 generation. Participant observations and interviews with the leaders of *Fishka* club – arguably the most prominent NGO of this kind in Israel – depict the creative reinvention of the habitus of Russian–Jewish intelligentsia emerging in the novel, hybrid, and rapidly evolving cultural forms. An association like *Fishka* could not have appeared during the 1990s, when the first generation of Russian immigrants tried various forms of self-organization. Its bicultural agenda and a distinctly Israeli *modus operandi* could only be implemented by the 1.5-ers educated and socialized in Israel. In the original venues designed by *Fishka*'s leaders, the cultural capital imported by the immigrants from the FSU is poured into new vessels and forms prompted by the current Israeli realities and timeless Jewish traditions (like karaoke singing of Russian freedom songs instead of traditional Passover chants). Creatively combining Russian and Hebrew forms and effortlessly switching codes in between, young 1.5-ers give rise to the new genres and expressions of contemporary Israeli culture, in which immigrant narratives have always played a salient role.

Looking at this organization through a Bordieusian lens, we argue that *Fishka*'s participants successfully merge and trade social and cultural forms of capital: drawing on their co-ethnic social network as a resource they produce new forms of high and popular culture, which in turn helps reinforce their social ties and hybrid identities. Their cultural work-in-progress sustains the special habitus of this immigrant association, stressing high cultural competence of its members made tangible by the impressive library, modern drama productions, choir and tango class, and educational trips to the important cultural and historic sites. Discovering together the historic Russian roots of urban Israeli culture, these young immigrants reinforce their feelings of ownership and belonging to the local narrative. Other signs of migrant cultural capital at *Fishka* include its members' formal educational credentials and professional occupations, setting high standards for both languages spoken in its walls, and multiple projects aiming at cultural translation, literal and symbolic, between the Russian–Soviet and Israeli–Hebrew texts and traditions.

These signs of particular habitus and social locations of *Fishka* manifest its orientation towards the country's Ashkenazi elite, to which many of its leaders aspire to belong. In their outreach efforts, the association's leaders wish to attract a higher tier of the Hebrew-speaking patrons whom they construe as their social peers – the young professional and artsy Tel-Aviv crowd. Bringing their Sabra friends to the club, the Russian 1.5-ers can take pride in their high cultural



production, educate and even somewhat patronize these locals, ‘getting even’ for their exclusionary or down-looking attitudes towards the Russian newcomers in the initial years after migration. Thus, the tendencies to sustaining boundaries and opening up to the cultural outsiders are closely intertwined; they create a complex and ambivalent dynamic between this immigrant organization and its surrounding milieu. The specific *Fishka*’s projects that we explored in our fieldwork but could not describe here (e.g. writing Hebrew poetry, outreach to the local youth centers and senior community, celebrating a folk Moroccan–Jewish holiday, etc.) aim at bridging the social and ethnic hierarchies of the Israeli society generally and the city of Tel-Aviv specifically.

We conclude that *Fishka*’s agenda and practices merge and reconcile ostensibly different branches of immigrant social capital, the one seeking to reinforce internal cohesion and demarcate group boundaries and the other reaching out to the host majority and adopting local practices. Their hybrid cultural production borrows from Russian texts and images and weaves them into Israeli (and global) cultural tapestry. *Fishka*’s volunteer and social-change projects targeting the social issues relevant for Russian Israelis (fostering intergenerational ties and support of lonely immigrant elders, alternative weddings for ethnically mixed couples) simultaneously express the immigrant 1.5-ers’ drive for active citizenship in its very indigenous forms. The overall impact of this community for its members is often described by them as personal empowerment and resolution of identity conflict on bicultural grounds. While admittedly manifesting elements of elitism and selectivity at the outset, over time the drive for openness and outreach to ethnic and cultural others in Tel-Aviv’s urban space has reshaped *Fishka*’s declared agenda, the style and content of their events. The follow-up study of this organization’s trajectory may engender interesting insights on the future of biculturalism, immigrant cultural production and ethnic stratification in Israel.

## Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Sociological Institute for Community Studies at Bar-Ilan University. The authors are grateful to the founders and leaders of *Fishka* (particularly to Helen Buchumensky, Rita Brudnik and Nadia Greenberg) for their welcome and support of our fieldwork. We appreciate the time and cooperation of our informants who frankly shared with us their immigration stories and experience at *Fishka*. The responsibility for the interpretation of these narratives rests with the authors alone.

## Note

- [1] KVN – loosely translated from Russian as ‘The Club for the Merry and Ingenious’ – is a popular humor contest, usually between two teams, including both scripted stand-up items and improvisations, on-the-spot quizzes, musical parodies and other genres. KVN shows were arranged as national and local league competitions, usually between college student teams, and were shown on national TV in both Soviet and post-Soviet times. KVN was molded into a unique cultural genre that was exported by ex-Soviet immigrants to Israel, USA and other receiving countries, so that KVN contests are staged in local clubs, community centers and broadcast on immigrant radio stations across the Russian-speaking diaspora (Remennick 2007).

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# Weddings in the Town Square: Young Russian Israelis Protest the Religious Control of Marriage in Tel-Aviv<sup>1</sup>

Anna Prashizky and Larissa Remennick

## Abstract

The article discusses alternative wedding ceremonies staged in urban spaces as a statement of protest among immigrant couples that cannot marry in rabbinical courts, because they are not recognized as Jews. These public weddings are organized and sponsored by the *Fishka* association of young Israeli adults of Russian origin. Our fieldwork at *Fishka* included participant observation of its various events during 2013–2014, as well as in-depth interviews with the key informants, promotional materials, and video recordings of their public wedding ceremonies held in the streets of Tel-Aviv in 2009–2011. Embedded in the social history of the city and framed in the concepts of urban diversity and the politics of belonging, our ethnographic data juxtapose “Russian” street weddings with other public festivals sponsored by *Fishka* and other protest actions by minority groups. Alternative, civil weddings emerge as a form of active and critical citizenship among young Russian immigrants, seeking solidarity of other Israelis in the joint effort to reform the status quo and enable civil alternatives to Orthodox marriage. The active political stance and cultural activism of *Fishka* members challenge native Israelis’ monopoly on communal public space; young immigrants are thus carving a place for themselves in the iconic sites of the city’s public cultural sphere.

## Introduction

The heroes of this article are members of the 1.5 generation of Russian-Jewish immigrants who moved to Israel during the 1990s and today are young adults between the ages of 25 and 40. Due to the size of the ex-Soviet immigrant wave (forming 20% of the Jewish population), Israel is particularly interesting for the study of these 1.5ers who now comprise a “critical mass” among its young citizens. Sharing common experiences and narratives, young Israelis of Russian origin apparently feel the need to connect and ex-press their specific forms of activism and creativity. This article casts light on one civic association that reflects their drive to assert their common (hybrid) identity—a club and community center called *Fishka* in Tel-Aviv. Our empirical analysis is informed by several theoretical perspectives: the politics of belonging in the urban space (Berg and Sigona 2013; Yuval-Davis 2011), performance studies (Eyerman 2006), cultural theory of alternative lifestyles, street protests, and urban festivals (Firat and Kuryel 2010; Giorgi et al. 2011; Hetherington 1998; Melucci 1996). The article will present and discuss the aesthetic and festival forms of public protest events organized by the young immigrants in Tel-Aviv, their spatial and temporal dimensions, their specific locations and meanings, and their role as a vehicle of social recognition and visibility of Russian-Israeli subculture in Israel’s most fashionable and trend-setting city. We will explore two main questions: How do the children of immigrants make claims to iconic public space in their new society? How are social performances deployed to make those claims visible and legitimate?

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## Theoretical Framing

### Urban Diversity and Performance of Belonging

The presence of immigrants and ethnic minorities is evident in every major metropolitan area; they became an integral part of the social landscape also beyond the traditional gateway cities like New York, London, or Melbourne. Urban sociologists have produced multiple local studies about, for instance, Pakistani immigrants in Manchester (Werbner 1996), young Turkish immigrants in Berlin (Soysal 2002), Russian immigrants in Haifa (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2011), and generally about diverse immigrant groups in Europe (Martiniello 2014) that examine the specific forms of their participation in these cities' public spaces. A key question often posed in this context is "how diversity, in its various dimensions, is experienced locally, and what new forms of local belonging emerge in contexts where places are closely connected to so many non-proximate 'elsewheres,' either through migration, trade links or other ways" (Berg and Sigona 2013:5). Yuval-Davis (2011:10) examined the urban diversity and inter-cultural encounters as "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries." These boundaries are often spatial and relate to concrete locality.

Researchers pointed to the importance of the cultural sphere in the period of dramatic global transformations spearheaded by economic and humanitarian migrations currently occurring around the world. They examined the relevance of popular art forms, such as music, cinema, theater, dance, literature, urban festivals, and street shows in diverse post-migration urban settings (Delhay and Van de Ven 2014; Martiniello 2014; Salzbrunn 2014; Sievers 2014). The idea is that the cultural sphere and specifically street-level arts can help to build bridges, facilitate the encounters among different populations sharing the same urban space, and reinforce the immigrants' belonging to the new place. In other words, arts, culture, and rituals can become a means of communication and dialogue between different individuals or groups sharing the city or its neighborhood, facilitating integration and social cohesion (Martiniello 2014; Vanderwaeren 2014). Moving from the margins to the center, migrants sustainably influence mainstream artistic culture and the public sphere; however, this cultural power does not necessarily lead to profound political changes. For example, Salzbrunn (2014) wrote about the participation of immigrants in the frame of Cologne carnival in Germany. According to her, this leads to a blurring of boundaries, whereby mainstream popular culture becomes more and more influenced by multicultural elements. This festive event offers migrants different ways to express themselves on a local, global, and trans-local level. Delhay and Van de Ven (2014) underscore public recognition of cultural pluralism in the Netherlands, analyzing the practices of two Amsterdam-based cultural institutions: Paradiso and De Meervaart. They witnessed artists of various ethnic backgrounds performing before diverse audiences: cabaret performers of Turkish descent attracted an audience composed of native Dutch and people with a migrant background; a Caribbean stand-up comedian gained an overwhelmingly black crowd while a Moroccan stand-up comedian performed in front of mostly white fans; a mixed-ethnic dance company attracted a similarly mixed public. Sievers (2014) found that despite the minimal funding invested in the cultural activities of immigrants and their descendants, the visibility of artists of immigrant origin has increased in Vienna over the last decade. These new artists have explicitly criticized Viennese cultural life for excluding immigrants and their descendants, both as artists and as audiences. Often their works envisage cultural change by including multicultural teams of artists and re-writing traditional Austrian culture to include the voices of immigrants and their descendants.

Following this line of research, our article examines public events initiated by young Russian immigrants in Tel-Aviv as performative acts of belonging and as localized forms of ethnic diversity that are likely to become a means of intercultural dialogue. Urban ethnographers are increasingly interested in the spatial dimensions of the politics of difference, showing how belonging and diversity relate to social and spatial practices of inclusion and exclusion. The public events examined below illustrate how young Russian Israelis negotiate their unique place in the complex social mosaic of Tel-Aviv. We assume that young Russian immigrants aspire to belong to the urban Israeli landscape (or rather its specific Tel-Aviv brand), to become independent and active agents within it, thus creating and sustaining their visibility (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2010).

Some Israeli sociologists describe the belonging aspirations of Russian immigrants as active, varied, and full of contradictions; they are founded on a nonbinary epistemology, breaking the dichotomy, dominant in the earlier Israeli immigration literature, between their assimilation and segregation (Lerner 2011; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008, 2012; Roberman 2007). The term “belonging by criticism” coined by Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2012) describes the dual process experienced by these immigrants: Belonging doesn’t imply their unconditional adoption of the local ethos whereas criticism doesn’t mean its rejection. Instead, they exhibit attempts at active participation and empowerment, thus enacting the dual mechanism of belonging and diversity.

### **Performing Protest in the Cultural Public Sphere**

Performance studies are at the epicenter of today’s cultural anthropology and certain strands of sociological analysis. Their emergence is linked, among others, to the names of Victor Turner (1988), Richard Schechner (1988), and Jeffrey Alexander (2006), who contributed to the novel analytical framework of social performance theory. Turner defined performance as a practical mode of behavior, an approach to lived experience expressed in various forms—as a play, a sport, an aesthetic trend, a ritual, a theater play, and other genres of experience. Cultural performance is a dynamic and reflexive process, a complex sequence of symbolic acts. Thus, public rituals could function as performative acts of resistance.

The theoretical anchors for this article include performance and cultural theory of alternative lifestyles, counterculture and street protests, new social movements and cultural activism (Eyerman 2006; Hetherington 1998; Melucci 1996; St John 2015). These researchers have shown that nowadays most street actions or open-air events include colorful elements, carnival touches, have a strong expressive character, and manage to attract attention by challenging the existing order. A universal characteristic of contemporary activist practices is the attempt to create gateways to a more libertarian society (Firat and Kuryel 2010).

We explore public weddings organized by *Fishka* participants as a kind of urban festival (Giorgi et al. 2011). According to Boissevain (1992), the upsurge in prevalence of various festivals and street events in European cities reflects the recent influx of immigrants and growing ethnic diversity, as well as secularization and democratization of urban culture. One common feature of contemporary manifestations of group pride or protest is that they tend to be creative, colorful, joyful, and carnivalesque. Researchers use the term carnival to label these oppositional events at which flamboyant costumes, dance, puppets, and folk music bands can be seen (Firat and Kuryel 2010). Protestival is the additional term used to emphasize the carnivalesque character of the contemporary activism, which evolved since the early 1960s and experienced an explosive resurgence from the late 1990s (St John 2015). These events constitute a creative response to the traditional forms of protest with steer marches, speeches,

and placards. These new protestivals make a unique contribution to the cultural public sphere, which is a place where private citizens come together to debate issues of public and national significance. The cultural public sphere of late modernity operates through various channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment, facilitated by mediated aesthetic and emotional reflections on how we live and imagine the good life. It refers to the articulation of politics, both public and personal, through affective, aesthetic, and emotional modes of communication (McGuigan 2011).

Beck (1997) argued that in late modernity the truly political content disappears from the political system and reappears in the alternative action fields and various social sites that were previously considered un-political, such as technology, medicine, law, workplaces and organizations, supermarkets, streets, and other settings of everyday life. Citizens dissatisfied with their government performance can search for new political channels of influence and choose to act in what Beck defined as “sub-politics”: a non-institutional form of politics, outside and beyond the representative political institutions of nation-state, enacted anywhere citizens seek to fill the political vacuum and take responsibility for their life (Ben-Porat, 2013:21). We suggest including the contemporary urban forms of protest, such as festivals, cultural activism, and counterculture, as another expression of “sub-politics” in the cultural public sphere.

In our previous study, we explored the public holidays and festivals organized by *Fishkers* as manifestations of both their belonging to and difference from the “mainstream” Israeli urban life (Prashizky and Remennick in this volume). Expanding this framework, we will now examine the public weddings in Tel-Aviv sponsored by *Fishka* as a new form of performative protest held by these immigrants as an expression of their “sub-politics.” In some ways, *Fishka*’s weddings project resembles other urban festivals organized by young immigrants, for example by the second generation Turks in Berlin, whose street rap performances and graffiti contests during the 1990s were largely driven by an anti-discrimination and inclusion agenda (Soysal 2002). However, as members of the Jewish majority, Russian Israelis feel more entitled for active Israeli citizenship than do German Turks, children of labor migrants. Although Russian Israelis present themselves mainly as culture brokers, their claim on visibility and respect can also be read as an expression of identity politics.

## **Our Field Work at *Fishka***

We focused on a nonprofit cultural association of young Russian Israelis called *Fishka*, meaning in Russian a game token also symbolizing luck (see [www.fishka.org.il](http://www.fishka.org.il)). *Fishka* appeared in Tel-Aviv about 8 years ago, first as an art-cinema club, then as a framework for the (secular) study of Jewish heritage, and since 2010 as a full-fledged NGO with a multifaceted agenda. It is supported by a mix of public and private donors, one of which is the Genesis Philanthropy Group. *Fishka*’s projects include community volunteering (e.g. visiting Russian-speaking elders in local senior homes), novel forms of celebrating Jewish and Russian holidays, and a range of interest-based classes and groups—Russian drama troupe, tango class, Hebrew-Russian literary translation group, etc. In 2010–2013 *Fishka* rented a building in South Tel-Aviv’s Eilat St. near the sea shore. The neighborhood is rather poor and rundown, dominated by small trade shops and warehouses but with the signs of nascent gentrification. The club’s premises featured a hall for events and dances with the walls lined by bookshelves containing hundreds of Russian books—classic and modern fiction, history, biography, Jewish Studies, etc. The premises’ design with multiple elements of the local, Middle Eastern flavor merged with the spirit of its Ottoman-period building and the adjacent mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhood of Jaffa. In May 2013 *Fishka* had to abandon its house because of rental

problems, and since then it has been looking for a new permanent home, while holding its club activities at various city venues.

*Fishka* can be described as a grassroots association (Smith 2000), i.e., a locally based (also in terms of member residence and/or workplaces), rather autonomous, volunteer-run, nonprofit group. All of its leaders and most patrons belong to the 1.5 immigrant generation and espouse bilingual and/or bicultural values. One of its key organizational features is civic engagement, i.e., manifestations of civic responsibility and reaching out to other segments of Israeli society. As we will show, *Fishka*'s public activities, including street events, emphasize its members' belonging to Tel-Aviv urban space and their claim for active citizenship. A notable feature of *Fishka* is that both its founders and most project leaders are women—who were also more outspoken and cooperative as informants (hence the predominance of female voices quoted below).

Our field-work with *Fishka*'s staff, project leaders, and patrons included participant observation of its various events and activities during 2013–2014, as well as 23 in-depth interviews with the key informants (conducted in Hebrew or Russian) and video recordings of their public events. The street weddings described in this article actually took place earlier, during 2009–2011. Initially, we were attracted to *Fishka* as an institutional expression of biculturalism and evolving identities among young Russian Israelis (Prashizky and Remennick 2015, forthcoming). Only after collecting the bulk of our ethnographic materials did we realize the significance of the weddings project—that surfaced time and again in the stories told by *Fishka*'s leaders and regular members who construed these street events as a form of political protest. Several *Fishkers* who recently got married mentioned this older project as an inspiration for their own alternative wedding ceremonies. Tracing these narratives back, we retrieved the videos of all three weddings, as well as their promotional materials, and interviewed the organizers and the wedded couples to learn more about these happenings. Thus, for this article we drew mainly on the subset of all interviews (ten altogether) that were relevant for the wedding events. We use actual names of our interviewees because of the public nature of the described events with a wide online and press coverage at the time. Before describing our findings, a brief introduction on the Russian Israelis of the 1.5 immigrant generation is due.

### **Young Israelis with Russian Roots**

The 1.5 generation usually embraces adolescents and young adults who moved to the receiving country in their formative years (roughly between the ages of 9–10 to 18–19), usually with their families. Linguistically and socially, the 1.5ers are located at the cross-roads between their home and host cultures: Some of them opt for expedient assimilation, others (the majority) emerge as competent bilingual/bicultural individuals, and yet others may fall in the cracks between the two cultures, living in a chronic limbo (Remennick 2003; Steinbach 2001; Waldinger 2005). Many young immigrants have lived through mixed scenarios, seeking rapid inclusion and rejecting their home culture at the outset, but later (typically by their early 20s) discovering the attractive sides of their origin culture and getting back into the fold (Remennick 2003, 2012).

Most young adults of Russian origin resettled in Israel over the last 25 years due to their parents' decision to emigrate from the deteriorating post-Soviet states. Due to the soaring costs of living in Central Israel, many immigrant families had settled in the outlying towns with poor educational resources and occupational opportunities. Most youths had a difficult time learning Hebrew, adapting to Israeli schools and local peer culture. Many were raised by single



mothers, reflecting high divorce rates among ex-Soviets before and after migration. Their parents were often of little help and guidance during this painful transition, immersed in their own problems, socially disoriented, and working long hours (Remennick 2012). The studies among young Russian immigrants during the 1990s have signaled multiple problems of inclusion: uneven performance at school, high truancy and dropout rates, low motivation for the military service, and troubles with the law (Fishman and Mesch 2005; Mirsky 1997). By the early 2000s, most young “Russians” have outgrown these “pains of adjustment,” learned to navigate Israeli institutions, and play by the local rules. Reflecting the forces of social stratification and variable economic mobility of their parents, the 1.5ers with a Russian accent are found today in every social stratum (Remennick 2011). The majority of those raised in the families of ex-Soviet intelligentsia followed their parents’ “ethnic script” of social mobility via higher education, and by the time of our research found themselves in the ranks of the Israeli creative or professional class (Lerner et al. 2007; Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder 2002).

The story of Russian 1.5ers in Israel is rather unique due to the size of this community and the existence of a thriving Russian subculture. It can be argued that such a “critical mass” of same-origin migrants in a small country, where their language and culture have gradually gained higher acceptance and social status, may by itself lead to socio-cultural retention. Most Israeli Russian 1.5ers are bicultural (or intercultural); typically, they are breaking their own distinct pathway between the home and host cultures, augmented by the new transnational opportunities (Horowitz 2001; Remennick 2013). As a result, a new hybrid cultural bubble has emerged in Israel, typified by a hyphenated identity (Russian-Israeli), lifestyle (rock bands, clubs and fusion musical genres), and a mixed lingo called *HebRush* (Remennick 2003; Niznik 2011).

### **Russian Immigrants and Orthodox Marriage in Israel**

As part of the recent wave of post-Soviet immigration, about 330,000 non-Jews came to Israel as spouses of Jews or partly Jewish offspring of ethnically mixed families (Cohen and Susser 2009). An on-going controversy surrounds the host of social issues stemming from the definition of Judaism as the state religion and pertaining to the statuses and rights of non-Jewish residents, particularly in marriage, family reunification, and burial. An inherent conflict between civil and religious (Halachic) definitions of Jewish identity caused a paradox situation, whereby thousands of immigrants have been granted citizenship by the Law of Return, but at the same time are denied some basic civil rights, because the religious establishment does not recognize them as Jews (e.g., if their father, not mother, was Jewish or when proofs of Jewishness are deemed insufficient). Israel stands alone among Western nations, not allowing civil marriage and having personal status regulated exclusively by religious law (Ben-Porat 2013; Triger 2012). Until recently, only two partners from the same state-recognized religion (Jews, Muslims and Christians) could legally marry, each in their own religious framework. In 2010, the new law was passed, allowing two non-Jews (and other Israelis without religious affiliation) to marry in the civil court, solving only part of the problem—because most couples consist of a Jew and non-Jew or partial Jew (Fogiel-Bijaoui 2013). If one of the spouses is Jewish and the other is not, they have to be buried in different cemeteries, often located far apart.

The authority granted to the rabbinate over marriage and divorce was part of the so-called Status Quo reflecting the historic agreement between the secular government and the orthodox religious parties in the beginning of the State. Ex-Soviet immigrants became a major factor undermining the Status Quo, because they created a new reality in which a large number of Israeli citizens not recognized as Jews could not marry in Israel (Ben-Porat 2013). The monopoly of Orthodox rabbinic marriage has been further challenged by the recent trends

among some native Israelis to avoid traditional wedding rituals and conduct their own nonorthodox, custom-designed weddings. These trends among young Israelis with secular identity reflect growing consumerism and novel lifestyles, the value of self-expression, and opposition to the monopoly of religious authority (Triger 2012). Nonreligious Israelis who marry outside the auspices of State Rabbinate reject the state's Orthodox religious establishment more than they reject Jewish religion or tradition as such (Tabory and Shalev Lev-Tzur 2009). Indeed, most of such alternative weddings are characterized by the strong connection to Jewish orthodox rituals and include most of the traditional components with some alterations and innovations (Prashizky 2014).

The barrier to marriage is very relevant for the young Russian Israelis of 1.5 generation, among them the members of *Fishka*. Among *Fishka* participants, there are both Jews and persons who identify as Jews but are not recognized as such by Halachic Orthodox definition (mostly children of Jewish father and non-Jewish mother). Significant numbers of them cannot get married in Israel and are forced to marry abroad (since the state recognizes foreign marital certificates) or to cohabit without marriage. The most popular places for civil weddings abroad between young Russian Israelis are Cyprus, Prague, and cities in Italy, due to their lenient legislation that allows fast registration and attractive honeymoon opportunities in tourist-oriented venues. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, in the year 2000, almost 10% of newly married Israelis got married by civil marriage abroad. Among them, 42% are couples of immigrants from the FSU, which is six times higher than their share among newly married Israeli Jewish couples (Dobrin 2006). Upon civil registration abroad, most such couples have an alternative quasi-religious ceremony, with a reform rabbi, local celebrity, or family member officiating, indicating their wish for belonging (and certain conformity) with Israeli Jewish traditions (Prashizky 2014).

The uniqueness of the project "Weddings in the Town Square" is in its demonstrative, active protest appealing to broad urban audiences and taking place in central and fashionable locations of Tel-Aviv. By contrast, native Israelis who choose the alternative path typically have a quiet private, indoor event not involving an officiating state rabbi. They are usually not interested in declaring their political protest; as one Israeli-born, secular groom told one of us in an interview, "our wedding is a private event, not a demonstration" (Prashizky 2013:48). Earlier precedents of public protest against Orthodox monopoly for Jewish weddings were organized by the *New Family* association, a NGO that provides legal and logistic aid to Israelis interested in civil union registration (also for same-sex couples). In 2002, it conducted a wedding ceremony for two Russian immigrants to call attention to the problem of their lack of common marital rights. Yet the weddings performed by *Fishka* leaders stepped up the caliber and visibility of this protest and added a special urban-festival quality to these street events.

### ***Fishka* in Tel-Aviv's Urban Landscape**

*Fishka* is located in Tel-Aviv, the second most populous city in Israel and the hub of its largest metropolitan area. It is known as the city "that never sleeps" or a "non-stop metropolis." It is the first modern Jewish urban space and Hebrew-speaking city in Palestine founded by the Zionist settlers from the Russian Empire in the early 1900s and later receiving waves of Jewish refugees before and after two world wars. It is the most multicultural city in Israel: In addition to native and immigrant Jewish residents and Arabs from Jaffa, most labor migrants from Africa, the Philippines, and Eastern Europe have also settled there.

In the local Israeli lore, Tel-Aviv is often likened to Paris of the 1930s or New York and London of the 1980s. In July 2003, UNESCO announced the listing of "the white city of Tel-

Aviv” as a world heritage site because of its dominant Bauhaus architecture (introduced by German Jewish immigrants in the 1930s). The “white city” brand invested Tel-Aviv with the prestige of a prominent cultural center on the global scale (Azaryahu 2012). The young and fashionable crowd (including multiple tourists) appreciates Tel-Aviv for its stylish cafes, elegant seaside promenade, music and art festivals, and thriving night life.

Most *Fishka* participants had moved to Tel-Aviv from Jerusalem and Israel’s peripheral towns after finishing their education, in search of professional and personal advancement in the big city. Although most of their parents arrived in Israel with higher education, the majority experienced occupational and social downgrading upon migration (Remennick, 2007). Tel-Aviv with its thriving cultural life and denser labor market is construed by these youngsters as the only attractive place to live in Israel in order to make something of their lives. Despite soaring housing costs in this metropolis, *Fishka* patrons live in rented apartments in central Tel-Aviv or in suburban Gush-Dan towns. *Fishka* association became the setting of the symbolic encounter between the values and practices of the previous generations of Russian intellectuals and artists and their current reincarnation, as young migrants in Israel. The “ethnic script” of Russian Jewish intelligentsia (Lerner et al. 2007; Remennick 2007) includes urban lifestyle; higher education (most are professionals in the high-tech industry, medicine, education, and a range of creative areas—journalism, design, theater, etc.); broad cultural literacy (including history and philosophy); and the love for Russian and European high culture with concomitant attempts at artistic self-expression.

Along with their move to Israel’s cultural center, they are experiencing rapid bourgeoisification and integration into urban consumer society. Their lifestyle and leisure habits evolve accordingly and include meeting with friends in popular city cafes (Rozovsky and Almog 2011), visits to art exhibitions, theater and cinema, organization of and participation in urban cultural festivals. Thus, outdoor street events with multicultural flavor become part and parcel of the new middle-class lifestyle to which our informants aspire to belong.

A couple of successful Tel-Aviv fashion designers (*Frau Blau* brand) are among the club’s participants and patrons, who also supply the stage costumes and clothes for project leaders, concert anchors, etc. Altogether these manifestations make a claim at these young immigrants’ special place in the ranks of Tel-Aviv bohemia, their stake in the creation of the city’s high culture, and at least parity (if not superiority) with other young creators who are native Israelis (Prashizky and Remennick 2015). This elitist attitude is also supported by *Fishka*’s donor—the Genesis Foundation for Russian Jewry (the quote below belongs to Sana Britavsky, head of its Tel-Aviv branch).

*This initiative [Fishka] looked unique from the outset, that’s why we decided to support it. It attracted young and trendy Tel-Aviv crowd that was interested in its Jewish and Russian roots. Not the ardent Zionist kind that you find in Jerusalem but a bohemian kind, professional, confident and well-adjusted in Israel. These were not the people crushed by immigration and looking for a shoulder to cry on. Most had received their degrees from good universities and started promising careers. . . . Even if they hadn’t made it in Israel yet and worked as janitors or guards, they aspired to become film directors and artists and found here the outlet for their creativity. From the outset, Fishka’s leaders kept certain standards that resulted in self-selection: The rogue folks interested in loud music and a glass of beer dropped out quickly . . .*

Later, she mused:

*In fact, Fishka is a post-migration phenomenon; its patrons are very much the locals now . . . they remind me of the 2nd and 3rd generation of the White Russian immigration in Paris. Already French, but of a special kind, they cherished their Russian roots, sang Russian songs and dined in Russian restaurants. . . . Now this 'ethnic' tweak became fashionable also in Israel, so it attracts young Sabras of a certain kind who like hanging out with Russian 1.5ers. . . . Thus Tel-Aviv slowly recovers its historic Russian roots—most of its founding creative class had come from Russia and built the city from scratch . . . this lingering imprint helps young Russian Israelis feel at home here.*

Sana's words evoke two elitist associations: one with the noble White Russian emigres'' in Paris who never severed their ties with the Russian culture, and the other with the Russian Jewish founders of Tel-Aviv in pre-state Palestine—the iconic figures like poets C.N. Bialik and A. Penn, *Habima* actress H. Rovina, the reformer of modern Hebrew E. Ben-Yehuda, and many others, whose names carry multiple Tel-Aviv streets. She notes with pride that, thanks to *Fishka* and other similar groups, Russianness came into vogue among some of Tel-Aviv's natives, helping redress the lingering stereotypes of the immigrants and bridge the gaps to the Israeli Jewish mainstream.

Several projects at *Fishka* aim at building intercultural bridges by introducing contemporary Hebrew culture to the 1.5ers. One of them is called *Chronicus*, and includes readings of Hebrew writers and poets, meeting Hebrew stage and film directors, etc., as well as field trips to culturally important sites in Tel-Aviv and beyond. *Chronicus*'s leader is Nadia Greenberg (33), one of the key figures at *Fishka*, who came to Israel 22 years ago from Moscow, graduated from a theatre school, and works as teacher and stage director. She shared her thoughts on intercultural learning.

*Most Fishka guys speak fluent Hebrew and feel Israeli, but they are not always familiar with contemporary Israeli culture and its evolvement over the 20th century. Chronicus seeks to fill in the gaps of their knowledge and help them feel more connected to Israel. . . . We started from the trips to several important museums and memorial homes (e.g., of H.N. Bialik), and proceeded to learning urban history and architecture in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. . . . Our field trips in Tel-Aviv made a deep impression on the Fishka guys. The stories of young Russian-Jewish pioneers who had built the city in the 1910–1920s remind them of their own journey almost 100 years later: Back then, as now, the city scene is in flux and we can contribute our fair share to its current history and cultural scene. . . . These pioneers also felt being in the gap between the two cultures and slowly learned to fill it with the new content. This historical parallel makes you feel more relevant in this place on the map. . . . You realize your own entitlement for it and your role in creating its current history. Tel-Aviv's young intellectuals of the 1920s were also new to Palestine and had to invent themselves and the town from scratch. We can follow in the same path— to do new things that are interesting and inspiring for us, and nobody can tell us, this city isn't yours, you don't belong here. . . . We do belong and we want to inhabit Tel-Aviv in the ways that suit our own cultural and mental tastes . . .*

The historic image of Tel-Aviv as the first Hebrew city is dominant in the stories of Sana and Nadia, who compare *Fishka* participants to the first Tel-Aviv residents in the early 20th

century. This symbolic meaning may be the most prestigious one because it invokes the mythical beginnings of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Tel-Aviv's growth as a Jewish urban center was inseparable from the creation of a vernacular Hebrew literature, fine arts, and photography by Jewish practitioners. This aspect of cultural life in Tel-Aviv is relevant to the current cultural activities of *Fishka* participants and is actively extended and reinterpreted by them. Nadia's reflections underscore the role of *Fishka* in the fortification of young immigrants' feelings of belonging to this country and city, their stake in and entitlement to a fair part in its on-going creation. The parallel between the earlier waves of *Aliya* from Russia and today's Russian 1.5ers helps cement the intergenerational ties and a common vision of Israel's history and its culture as a complex tapestry with a significant Russian thread running across it. They claim their unique place as creators of Israeli locally embedded cultural capital drawing on the Russian language and traditions. So they adopt, use, and reinterpret symbolic and mythical meanings of Tel-Aviv as a cultural center, the "White city," and a thriving metropolis, all of which are shared by native Israelis (Azaryahu 2007, 2012).

Other leaders of creative projects at *Fishka* also stressed that Tel-Aviv attracted them as a cosmopolitan, secular, and culturally diverse city where everyone is different and therefore can be what they want. That's why a group like *Fishka* could only emerge in this city, where like-minded young adults of Russian origin got together to build novel venues for their bicultural creativity. Due to Tel-Aviv's multicultural *modus vivendi*, Russian Israelis could legitimately claim their own place in the diverse urban landscape and see their unique contribution accepted and appreciated by the natives and other immigrants alike.

Tel-Aviv is also the main hub of social protests and street rallies in Israel. It is famous for its annual Gay Pride parade and other LGBT community events often supported by the Tel-Aviv–Jaffa municipality. In the summer of 2011, tents mushroomed along Rothschild Boulevard, becoming the first site of the movement protesting against rising living costs that later on spread to other cities. Rabin Square adjacent to the Town Hall (re-named so after 1995 Yizhak Rabin's assassination) has been the focal point for various political demonstrations, including recent protests of labor migrants and asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea demanding basic social rights.

### **Tu B'Av Festivals and Town Square Weddings**

*Tu B'Av* indicates the 15th day of the Hebrew month Av (occurring in July–August), traditionally celebrated since Biblical times as a day of love and affection. In modern Israel, it is celebrated as a sort of Jewish Valentine's Day. One of the projects initiated by *Fishka* was "Town Square Weddings, aka *Tu B'Av* Festivals"—public weddings for Russian immigrant couples in central locations of Tel-Aviv during three years, 2009 to 2011. Choosing one couple a year, *Fishka* organized public celebrations for them while also covering all the wedding costs, including the couple's garments designed by *Frau Blau*. The first wedding for Olga and Niko was held in August 2009 in Dizengoff square, Tel-Aviv's iconic public spot.

The couple met online via one of the Russian Jewish websites and they have lived together for the last year. Olga immigrated to Israel from Ukraine in 1995 with her Jewish mother. A secretary in a Tel-Aviv law firm, she is able to prove that she is Jewish and would be entitled to marry in an Orthodox wedding. Niko immigrated from Moscow to Israel alone in 1995. He served in the Israeli army and currently works as a computer technician. Although both his parents are Jewish, he cannot prove it because their original birth certificates have been lost and no living witness testimonies are available. Thus the couple is not entitled to marry in an Orthodox ceremony [from <http://www.fishka.org.il/tubeav2009>].

The second ceremony took place in July 2010 in the square near Tel-Aviv Cinematheque, a modern complex with cinema halls and art exhibitions in the lobby that often hosts local and international film festivals. The wedding couple was Julia and Stas; she is an actress and he is a high-tech worker. They have a little daughter Emili. Both are Halachic Jews from Ukraine. They could get married in the rabbinical court, but rejected the religious ceremony and the hypocrisy involved, given they already have a child together.

The third wedding was celebrated in August 2011 in *Gan Ha'hashmal* in Southern Tel-Aviv, a trendy park plaza with fashion boutiques, coffee shops, and clubs. The wedding couple was Inna and Pavel, both so-called “seven-eighths” (7/8) Jewish, that is, all their grandparents were Jewish except one maternal grandmother. They also have a little daughter Noa. Pavel was born in Moscow, Inna in St. Petersburg. Previously he worked in a high-tech firm and she was a journalist, but today they are working together on a new online project.

All three wedding locations are central cultural, social, and commercial venues in Tel-Aviv. Their deliberate choice symbolized the know-how on what is “cool” in the city, asserted the urban lifestyle of *Fishka* participants, and highlighted the performative aspects of identity and protest by young Russian immigrants living in Tel-Aviv. All the events got formal permits from Tel-Aviv municipality and police. All the couples identified them-selves as Jews and intended to have a Jewish wedding ceremony. This is the example of press release about Inna and Pavel’s wedding in 2011 that carries a clear political message (see our italics in the bottom):

*Tu B’Av Festival - Gan Ha'hashmal, an Israeli Wedding Party.*

*The ceremony will be held in Tel-Aviv’s Gan Ha'hashmal. . . . Everybody is welcome to join the bride and groom on the happiest day of their life, dance to live music by “The Apples” band, take part in workshops and learning sessions on love and marriage in Israel, enjoy art and fashion exhibits, and celebrate well into the night at the Levontin club.*

*Inna Zyskind and Pavel Kogan have lived together for three years and have 8-month-old daughter Noa. Pavel was born in Moscow, Inna in St. Petersburg. . . . The circumstances that led the couple to this public wedding are rather compelling—Inna and Pavel are amongst approximately 300,000 Israelis nicknamed “psuley hitun” (unmarriageable)—they are not eligible for legal (religious) marriage in Israel despite paying taxes, serving in the IDF, and living their life in the land of our fore-fathers. “In Moscow, I could not advance my career as a journalist because of the ‘glass ceiling’ for the Jews,” says Inna. “All my life I knew I was Jewish, until I came to Israel.” Inna and Pavel are both so-called “seven-eighths” (7/8) Jewish, that is, all their grandparents are Jewish, except one maternal grandmother. “The state suggests that I convert but why—if I’m Jewish?” wonders Inna. In the State of Israel, the Orthodox rabbinate has a monopoly over Jewish marriage. . . . Therefore, the marriage ceremony of Inna and Pavel will not be recognized in the Jewish state. . . . In order to gain legal recognition as a married couple by the Ministry of the Interior, Inna and Pavel will need to marry in a civil ceremony abroad. The aim of our festival is to raise public awareness to marriage alternatives and strengthen the sense of their cultural legitimacy and validity . . . [from the event site:  
<http://www.fishka.org.il/tubeav2011/>]*

In all three cases, the weddings were advertised in local press and on the radio; the couples also released video clips in which they and their kids introduced themselves and told their story, explaining their decision to marry in a public venue. Many internet articles in Russian, English, and Hebrew, blog comments, photos, and YouTube videos were posted following the weddings, stirring an active public discussion in the virtual space. This modus operandi can be seen as a sort of synergy between political and media activism. Below we present some interview quotes from *Fishka*'s leaders (all of them women) who reflected on the problem of marriage in Israel and the idea behind the project.

Helen, 33, a high-tech industry worker, is a mother of two little sons cohabiting with their father because he is not recognized as a Jew, so no rabbi would marry them. Helen, who immigrated from Kishinev in 1990 and later became one of *Fishka*'s founders, described feelings of humiliation that she personally experienced because of her inability to be legally married to a man of her choice in Israel. In protest, she decided not to marry at all, while insisting on her right to be wedded in her own country, not abroad:

*Denis and I cannot get married because his father is Jewish but his mother isn't. For both of us this is very unfair. Denis is very devoted to Israel: he made Aliya alone during high school and then served in Golani [an elite combat unit of the IDF]; now he does his reserve duty every year. His reserve army unit is like his family . . .*

*he volunteered for the 2nd Lebanon war despite not being drafted . . . there was even a TV story about it. . . . Why is he good enough to risk his life for Israel but not eligible to marry here?*

She continued:

*This drives me mad . . . our young men are treated like everyone else until the moment they want to start a family—and then this harsh realization dawns on them. . . . The problem with burials is even worse, we witnessed cases when fallen soldiers with Russian mothers were denied a military grave next to their Jewish pals. . . . We live together as a family without getting married and it doesn't bother us too much, but we are still waiting for the day when the law changes and we can get married in Israel.*

Helen framed her criticism in the republican citizenship discourse often used in connection to the FSU immigrants, who serve their adopted country in the army, work and pay taxes but are not recognized as Jews and are hence prevented from marriage. Russian immigrants are giving to Israel on par with its native citizens but do not receive their fair share or rights in exchange. A similar tenet of unfairness merging on outrage is often put forward regarding non-Jewish soldiers who fell in battle for Israel but won't be buried in a Jewish cemetery (Ben-Porat 2013). In this context, Helen explained the idea of their public weddings project:

*This is terrible when such a large group of young people committed to Israel is treated like second-class citizens. In important personal matters—be it a wedding or a burial—we are given no choice and have to comply with ridiculous religious rules. Of course people find private solutions to this collective problem, but they feel humiliated. . . . Israel is losing these talented young people who are willing to contribute so much to its wellbeing—as professionals, as soldiers, as law-abiding citizens. If they feel unwanted here, they will go abroad rather than organize for political struggle to change Israeli realities. . . . When mass media discuss*

*emigration of young Israelis with Russian roots, they typically mention economic problems and security issues, but in fact their lack of belonging is as important, and this is a great potential loss for the country.*

Later she added:

*Most of us at Fishka experienced this either in person or via family and friends but we hate to discuss it. The same goes for giyur (conversion to Jewishness)—if most young people cannot comply with the Orthodox procedures, let them be, but open some alternative channels so we can feel as equal citizens. . . . That's why we came up with this project of public city weddings, trying to bring this out in the open and turn their pain into joy. . . . It wasn't a protest demonstration as such but rather a way to legitimize alternative ways to get married in Israel and to set an example that other couples who can't or won't marry in the rabbinical court could follow. It was a clear, and rather political, statement on our part: if the Orthodox establishment rejects you, we will help you—and the alternative we offer is actually more attractive! You can have a colorful public wedding in the most remarkable places of the city, with municipal officials and local celebrities to greet you as a couple. Our goal was to empower these young Russian Israelis, to show them that they can have a beautiful wedding also when they aren't recognized as Jews. If there are many public events like this, they will eventually have some impact on public opinion and people will demand to change current rules. Until now, Russian Olim [newcomers] preferred to solve their problems quietly and not to challenge the authorities by loud protests, but this may change in the future—at least I hope it will. This is also our attempt to demonstrate our power as a collective and our belonging to the Jewish majority, to assert our entitlement to marry as citizens . . .*

Another explanation of the idea behind the weddings project was stated by Sveta, 35, who immigrated to Israel from Minsk in 1991 and now works as director of human resources in a financial company. Sveta had participated as an organizer in all three public weddings and was recently interviewed for this study. She was recently married herself in a civil procedure in Prague, followed by an “alternative” wedding in Tel-Aviv conducted by one of *Fishka* staffers.

*Town Square weddings organized by Fishka were a kind of a manifesto, but a quiet one, without crying out loud mottos and holding placards. We preferred to put together a happening, a street celebration in which every passer-by could partake and enjoy. . . . We wanted to show everyone that there is an alternative, and beautiful, way to marry. . . . Let me stress it again— it wasn't a protest rally, although you can't deny there was a protest motive present— but of a different kind, a constructive and positive protest that points to an alternative. . . . It is more common here to block roads, stop traffic and yell loud mottos, but we chose another way to show our resentment. I am sure it made many people think about the issues with Orthodox marriage in Israel and consider the need for a change . . .*

Sveta seconds Helen's assertion that Russian Israelis hate to turn personal into political and never express their protest in loud and disruptive forms common in Israel. At the same time, they can no longer keep silent in the face of humiliating practices of the Orthodox establishment excluding many Russian immigrants as non-kosher Jews or gen-tilers. They use *Fishka* as a platform to stage their “constructive” protest in the form of alternative civil weddings for those who cannot legally marry in Israel. Many couples are unaware that in the case of divorce they will still have to apply to rabbinical courts that have full jurisdiction over



divorce for all Israeli Jews, including those who married civilly abroad or had an alternative (nonorthodox) wedding in Israel (Triger 2012).

### A Case Study: Julia and Stas

We will now zoom in on the wedding of Julia and Stas, the second of the three, which took place at the stairs and plaza of Tel-Aviv Cinematheque in July 2010. A red carpet was rolled out over the stairs. Clowns, dancers in colorful costumes, and women dressed in extravagant *Frau Blau* brand garments, with multicolor feathers and periwigs on their heads, entertained the crowd. The wedded couple's garments were designed in the Sixties style. The wedded couple arrived at the site on motorbikes decorated with colorful balloons and accompanied by Elvis Presley songs. The ceremony was performed under the hupa (a canopy fixed on four poles) according to the Jewish tradition. Yet, contrary to the Orthodox wedding led by men, the ceremony was egalitarian and *kidushin* (blessing) was performed by both groom and bride. A personalized form of *ketubah* (traditional marital contract) was written as a testimony of mutual commitment rather than a legal "wife purchase" agreement. Instead of an orthodox rabbi, the wedding was conducted by Moti Zeira of *Midrashet Oranim* in north Israel, one of the leaders of the Jewish renewal movement and an expert on alternative Jewish rituals. The traditional Seven Blessings to the newly-wed couple were replaced by the new, alternative texts and orations. The Seven Blessings recited at orthodox weddings usually follow a uniform pattern in all prayer books with the words of praise and gratitude to God. In this alternative wedding, the following public figures delivered the blessings: (1) Orli Vilnai, a popular Israeli TV journalist, (2) Eran Baruch, Tel-Aviv Secular Yeshiva head, (3) Helen Bushminsky, the co-founder of *Fishka*, (4) Asaf Zamir, a deputy mayor of Tel-Aviv-Yafo, (5) Jay Shofet from the New Israel Fund, (6) Lucy Dubinchik, an Israeli actress and Russian immigrant, and (7) Moti Zeira, who sang the traditional version of the Seventh Blessing along with all the participants.

All these people—the journalist, the media celebrity, the actress, NGO leaders, and Tel-Aviv municipal officials—support the freedom of choice in marriage; they were carefully chosen to enhance the public impact of this issue. Some of their blessings carried a clear political message, exemplified by J. Shofet from New Israel Fund: "*We came here tonight not only to celebrate this truly exciting wedding; we joined Havaya, Fishka and other Jewish pluralistic organizations to demand a change in state-religion connection— as Jewish people living in our own state. Mazal Tov! Mabruk! Gor'ko!*" Or the blessing by M. Zamir from Tel-Aviv municipality, who said: "*Tel-Aviv is the only city in Israel where everyone can live according to their beliefs and customs. Unfortunately it is still not like that in other Israeli cities.*" Again, belonging to Tel-Aviv was mentioned as very central to this event.

Thus, this wedding followed the traditional script but filled it with a new personalized content, which is typical of most alternative weddings in Israel (Prashizky 2014). The uniqueness of the three weddings staged by *Fishka* was in their public and political character, as well as their cultural symbols and festival style. *Fishka* weddings merged various cultural elements, including flamboyant dress design, live music, and street shows with clowns and balloons. The political statement embedded in their alternative wedding included equal roles for women and noninvolvement of the Orthodox Rabbinate. It was a Jewish and Israeli but a secular wedding, a performance of an altered, egalitarian version of the patriarchal ceremony.

After the ceremony, there was a concert of Israeli rock band Boom Pam from Tel-Aviv, which plays a mixture of Mediterranean, Balkan, rock, and surf music. On the improvised stage, the artists took turns entertaining the crowd with loud and rhythmic music. The dances to the

sounds of the band continued through the night, while the Cinematheque screened Israeli and foreign films about weddings. At the adjacent plaza, various Jewish renewal institutions advertised their activities; a round-table discussion was held on the topic of pluralistic Jewish weddings. Other weddings organized by *Fishka* included a street circus show and a workshop presenting liturgical poetry by Mizrahi (Eastern) Jews—a symbolic gesture of an intercultural dialogue.

Thus, the content and performative style of these public festivals offers a venue for self-expression for these young immigrant urbanites. In the brief history of *Fishka*, the town square weddings represent a peak in their public visibility and an expression of political protest against extant marital laws which they view as injustice. These events also make a symbolic claim on the local belonging and manifest these young immigrants' drive for building their unique niche in multicultural Tel-Aviv. Such methods of confronting the ruling regimes or established local elites by the newcomers entail cultural activism, creativity, and imagination, notions usually associated with members of the creative social and professional classes (Firat and Kuryel 2010).

## Summary and Discussion

Focusing on a group of young Russian immigrants living in Tel-Aviv, this ethnographic study examines their quest for active belonging to the host society and their collective protest action aimed at the status quo with (religious-only) marriage. Their association *Fishka*, which was initially founded as an in-group social and cultural venue for the Russian 1.5 generation (Prashizky and Remennick 2015), has gradually expanded its mission to embrace active outreach efforts that would place this immigrant cohort on the local and national map, making it visible and appreciated by other Israelis. The young immigrants manifested great creativity in designing the tools—performative and artistic—for expanding their public visibility. The organizers and participants of Town Square Weddings pick and merge various cultural elements as signs of their collective belonging, including popular music, media, fashion, cinema, and some carnival features, such as street shows with clowns, circuses, and balloons.

These open weddings have to be viewed in the context of other public events and festivals recently organized by *Fishka* as demonstrations (or even celebrations) of both their belonging to and difference from the “mainstream” Israeli urban life. These include, for example, International Women's Day Parade, Passover Seder, *Mimouna* celebrations, and Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony described in detail elsewhere (Prashizky and Remennick forthcoming). The expression of young immigrants' identities, that represent equal shares of belonging and criticism/protest, is achieved through event performances near iconic urban sites, such as Dizengoff square, Tel-Aviv Cinematheque, and *Gan Ha'hashmal*.

During the last two decades, political parties representing ex-Soviet immigrants in Israel (in coalition with other liberal parties) have made promises to resolve the problem of marriage for couples not recognized as Jews, but in practice little has changed. Since 2010, civil courts register so-called spousal covenants (*brit-hazugit*) between Israelis without religious affiliation, but only a few dozen couples a year have used this venue so far. This is because most couples consist of a Jew and a non-Jew (by Halacha), and for them no civil venue for marriage exists (Fogiel-Bijaoui 2013). It can be concluded that the political struggle for civil marriage has failed so far (Triger 2012), thus passing the torch to the sub-political settings such as young immigrants' civic associations. As a collective, Russian Israelis usually avoid head-on political confrontation or loud public protests against their discrimination by religious bodies, looking instead for personal and practical solutions like civil marriage abroad or

cohabitation. Still influenced by Soviet political legacies, Russian immigrants imported to Israel a more passive and skeptical civic ethos; they typically express a lower drive for active citizenship than veteran Ashkenazi Jews (Lerner 2011). However, the perception of local laws and practices as immutable is more typical of older ex-Soviets, while their children may be more willing to fight for reforms (Philippov and Knafelman 2011). They adopt the republican discourse on citizenship and construe their entitlement for all civil *rights* because they fill all their civic *duties* towards their adopted country as soldiers, workers, and tax-payers.

*Fishka*'s active resistance against the status quo in state-religion domain reflects its members' demographic features (young adults of marital age, many of whom are of mixed Russian-Jewish origin), but also the cultural capital they are endowed with. *Fishka* can be seen as the setting of the symbolic encounter between the values and practices of the old and new generations of Russian intelligentsia (Prashizky and Remennick 2015). Most *Fishka* participants are professionals in the high-tech industry, medicine, education, and a range of creative areas—journalism, design, theater, etc. They combine their love for Russian and European high culture with attempts at artistic self-expression. At the same time, these young Russian Israelis are emerging as “critical citizens” dissatisfied with sectarian Israeli marital laws and seeking to reform them in the more egalitarian and inclusive direction. The expansion of “critical citizenship” is characteristic of contemporary post-industrial societies; it reflects popular distrust of traditional government institutions that are unable to solve many social and economic problems (Norris 1999). Their criticism is manifested as a cultural performance and calls for participation and solidarity by other middle-class Israeli Jews.

The culturally refined and festival character of the Russian weddings project, which combines political message with performance and entertainment, has the potential of attracting street crowds and feelings of solidarity. Further proof of this welcome is the patronage and sponsorship of their public events by Tel-Aviv municipality, including the presence of the deputy mayor at their more visible events. Its additional goal is reaffirming critical and active citizenship of young Russian 1.5ers, now full-fledged Tel-Aviv residents, which is a new and still uncommon behavior among ex-Soviet immigrants (Ben-Porat 2013). The active political stance and cultural activism of *Fishka* members challenge native Israelis' monopoly on communal public space; young immigrants are thus carving a place for themselves in the iconic sites of the city's public cultural sphere. The example of the initial town weddings described above inspired dozens of similar public events in the following years among young Russian Israelis and other residents who are not eligible for the Orthodox ceremony.

The comparative studies among young immigrant adults and their civic associations are an important emerging stream of migration research, as well as political and urban sociology. We believe that our findings contribute to current theoretical debates on the performance of belonging; they illuminate the cultural, expressive, spatial, and temporal dimensions of urban diversity (Berg and Sigona 2013; Fortier 1999). This study provides context and texture to one specific urban site of multicultural interactions that facilitate new, unexpected social coalitions and fortify immigrants' sense of ownership and belonging to their adopted country.

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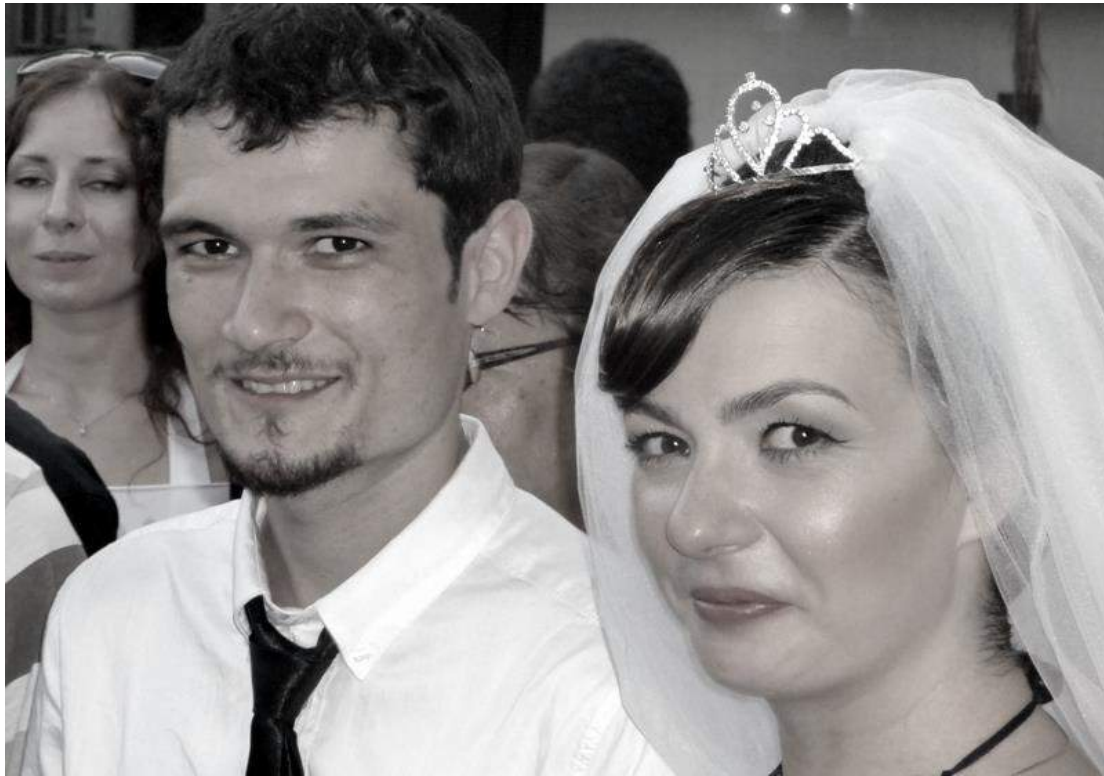
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**Alternative wedding of Julia and Stas, Cinematheque square , Tel-Aviv, 2010**



















**Alternative wedding of Inna and Pavel, in Tel-Aviv's Gan Ha'hashmal, 2011**















# Celebrating Memory and Belonging: Young Russian Israelis Claim their Unique Place in Tel-Aviv's Urban Space<sup>1</sup>

Anna Prashizky and Larissa Remennick

## Abstract

Drawing on the theoretical concept of collective memory and migration, and politics of belonging, this article explores performative belonging enacted in the series of holidays and commemorative rites organized by young Russian immigrants in Israel's major metropolis. Our ethnography is based on 18 months of participant observation at the cultural association *Fishka* in South Tel-Aviv. As part of our field work, we documented public celebrations of Jewish and Russian-Soviet holidays organized by *Fishka* as acts of public performance seeking to elevate the prestige of Russian culture in Israel. These events reinforced visibility of Russian Israelis in Israel's cultural capital and helped reach out to other urban communities, both native and immigrant. The article discusses the unique contribution of these bicultural young adults to Tel-Aviv's diverse and dynamic urban scene. Our main argument is about the importance of collective memory in migration, whereby holidays and commemorative rites reinforce feelings of belonging and fortify the immigrants' claim on the respectable place in the receiving society.

## Introduction

Young adults of immigrant background are increasingly in the spotlight, allowing migration and ethnicity scholars a fascinating inquiry into transitional forms of social identity and cultural expression. Although definitions somewhat differ, the 1.5 generation usually embraces adolescents and young adults who moved to the receiving country in their formative years (roughly between the ages of eight to ten and eighteen to twenty), usually with their families. Linguistically and socially, the 1.5-ers are located at the crossroads between their home and host cultures: some of them opt for expedient assimilation; others (the majority) emerge as competent bilingual/bicultural individuals; and yet others may fall in the cracks between the two cultures, living in a chronic limbo (Steinbach 2001; Remennick 2003a; Waldinger 2005; Niznik 2011). Many young immigrants have lived through mixed scenarios, seeking rapid inclusion and rejecting their home culture at the outset, but later (typically by their early twenties) discovering the attractive sides of their origin culture and getting back to the fold (Remennick 2003a, 2012). In any case, cultural scripts adopted by young immigrants are often hybrid, an admixture of languages, forms, and content borrowed from both sources.

Because of the size of the ex-Soviet immigrant wave of the 1990s (forming 20% of the Jewish population), Israel is particularly interesting for the study of 1.5-ers, who now comprise a "critical mass" among its young citizens. After spending fifteen to twenty years in Israel and sharing common experiences and narratives, young Russian-speaking adults apparently feel the need to connect and express their specific forms of activism and creativity. This article casts light on one civic association that reflects the drive of young Russian Israelis to organize and establish their common (hybrid) identity—a club and community center called *Fishka* in Tel-Aviv. Our empirical analysis is informed by several theoretical perspectives: performance's

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role for immigrants' self-assertion in the receiving society (Bell 1999; Berg and Sigona 2013), collective memory and migration (Creet and Kitzmann 2011; Glynn and Kleist 2012), and the politics of belonging in the urban space (Fortier 1999; Yuval-Davis 2011). The article will present and discuss the spatial and temporal dimensions of public events organized by young Russian immigrants, their specific locations and meanings, and their role as a vehicle of social recognition and visibility of Russian-Israeli subculture in Israel's most fashionable and trend-setting city. We argue that holidays serve as an important vehicle of collective memory imported by immigrants from their homeland and sustained in the host society. Holiday celebrations evolve and attain local cultural elements, expressing immigrants' hybrid identity and enabling their feelings of belonging in the new urban space.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Performance Theory**

Performance studies are at the epicenter of today's cultural anthropology and certain strands of sociological analysis. Their emergence is linked, among others, to the names of Victor Turner (1988), Richard Schechner (1988), and Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen and Jason Must (2006), who contributed to the novel analytical framework of social performance theory. Turner defined performance as a practical mode of behavior, an approach to lived experience expressed in various forms—as a play, a sport, an aesthetic trend, a ritual, a theater play, and other genres of experience. Cultural performance is a dynamic and reflexive process, a complex sequence of symbolic acts.

Drawing on this framework, we will examine the public events sponsored by *Fishka*—a cultural association of young Israelis of Russian origin (to be described in more detail below)—as cultural performances of these immigrants in an urban arena of Tel-Aviv. We will examine the symbolic meaning of these events focusing, in particular, upon the construction of collective memory and identity of its participants. We explore the events and festivals organized by *Fishka* participants as manifestations (or even celebrations) of both their belonging to and difference from the “mainstream” Israeli urban life. From a wide array of the club's activities, we chose to present four recent public events and holidays: International Women's Day Parade, Passover Seder, Memouna celebrations, and Holocaust Memory Day ceremony. These events typify various facets of *Fishka*'s agenda; they are to be read as a collage rather than an organized plot. Some of these events were relatively small-scale (twenty to fifty participants) while others included a few hundreds. All events were noncommercial and supported by different donors; some were free and others involved a symbolic fee. As performative acts, these events constitute signifying practices of self-representation and belonging of the immigrants in the host society.

### **Collective Memory and Migration**

Collective memory is shared by the members of a community, constructs their identity and heritage, differentiates them from members of other communities, and defines the key events of the collective past. The classical study by Halbwachs (1992) showed that collective memory is a dynamic concept: as collectives change, so does their memory, as performed expression of group identity.

Two recently published books (Creet and Kitzmann 2011; Glynn and Kleist 2012) have significantly advanced our understanding of the connections between migration and collective

memory. In the past, scholars have rarely combined migration studies and memory studies, to consider, for example, how perceptions of the past affect migrants' social incorporation or how they identify with the new society that has histories and memories markedly different from their own. Both books strongly claim that memory in all its forms plays a crucial role within the context of migration. Moreover, by contrast to the assertion by Nora (1989) that memory is usually a product of stability, they claim that migration gives a strong impetus to new memory formations. Resettlement makes a potent imprint on how and what we remember, and displacement intensifies our investments in memory. Memories contribute to and are used by migrants to negotiate belonging in the receiving society. Collective memories are relevant to migration in several ways, and in this article we explore how they may influence belonging and the ensuing relationship with the receiving society.

All public events presented below are holidays—vessels of collective memory that can be described as “temporal rites” from Russian-Soviet, Jewish, and Israeli calendar. These calendrical rites occur periodically and predictably in different cultures, giving socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time. Calendrical rites can be distinguished in terms of seasonal and commemorative celebrations (Bell 1997). Seasonal celebrations are usually rooted in the annual cycle of agricultural and pastoral activities, while commemorative ones explicitly recall important historical events, whether or not the date is accurate. The holidays analyzed in this article are mainly celebrations of ancient Jewish, modern Soviet, and Israeli collective memory, although some of them, such as Passover Seder and Memouna, had a seasonal meaning in the past. Commemorative ceremonies are frameworks provided by the group to individuals, within which their memories are contextualized, mapped and transferred to next generations. Social images and recollected knowledge of the past are conveyed and sustained by canonical ritual performances (Connerton 1989).

We consider holidays organized by *Fishka* as public forms of expression of their memory and identity-building process in the context of migration. The aspect of place has to be added to the discussion of memory in migration (Creet and Kitzmann 2011). Place matters in shaping our memories, “as memory is always migrating, generating its own topological demand” (ibid., 11). The belonging of recent immigrants is expressed in their forming attachment to a new, real place, like the city of Tel-Aviv in our case. We will argue below that the hybrid seasonal holidays and commemorative rites invented and performed by the young immigrants reveal the process of exploration and gradual domestication of the new urban space and eventually help them claim their own stake in belonging to it.

### **Performance of Belonging in the Context of Urban Diversity**

Applying another analytical lens, we analyze public events organized by *Fishka* participants as urban festivals (Giorgi, Sassatelli, and Delanty 2011). According to Boissevain (1992), the recent explosion of festivals in European cities is connected and stimulated by secularization, immigration, democratization, and in general by increased mobility and change. In global terms, the presence of immigrants and ethnic minorities is evident in every metropolitan area; they became an integral part of social landscape in capitals as in suburbs. Therefore, studies about Russian immigrants' presence in Jerusalem and Haifa, Israel (Roberman 2007; Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2011), Pakistani immigrants in Manchester, England (Werbner 1996), or young Turkish immigrants in Berlin, Germany (Soysal 2002), etc. are examining the immigrant's participation in public spaces of these cities. A key question in this context may be “how diversity, in its various dimensions, is experienced locally, and what new forms of local belonging emerge in contexts where places are closely connected to so many non-proximate ‘elsewheres,’ either through migration, trade links or other ways” (Berg and Sigona 2013, 5).

The politics of belonging “comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries” (Yuval-Davis 2011, 10). These boundaries are often spatial and relate to concrete locality and place.

Researchers pointed to the importance of the cultural sphere in the period of dramatic global transformations spearheaded by economic and humanitarian migrations currently occurring around the world. They examined the relevance of popular art forms, such as music, cinema, theater, dance, literature, rituals, urban festivals, and street shows in diverse post-migration urban settings (Salzbrunn 2014; Sievers 2014; Martiniello 2014; Delhay and Van de Ven 2014). The idea is that the cultural sphere and specifically street-level arts can help to build bridges, facilitate the encounters among different populations sharing the same urban space, and reinforce the immigrants’ belonging to the new place. In other words, arts, culture and rituals can become a means of communication and dialogue between different individuals or groups sharing the city or its neighborhood, facilitating integration and social cohesion (Martiniello 2014; Vanderwaeren 2014). Moving from the margins to the center, migrants sustainably influence mainstream artistic culture and public sphere; however, this cultural power does not necessarily lead to profound political changes. For example, Salzbrunn (2014) wrote about the participation of immigrants in the events of Cologne carnival in Germany that leads to a blurring of boundaries, whereby mainstream popular culture becomes more and more influenced by multicultural elements. This festive event offers migrants different ways to express themselves on a local, global, and trans-local level. Delhay and Van de Ven (2014) underscore public recognition of cultural pluralism in Netherlands, analyzing the practices of two Amsterdam-based cultural institutions. Sievers (2014) found that despite the minimal funding invested in the cultural activities of immigrants and their descendants, the visibility of artists of immigrant origin has increased in Vienna over the last decade. These new artists have explicitly criticized Viennese cultural life for excluding immigrants and their descendants, both as artists and as audiences. Often their works envisage cultural change by including multicultural teams of artists and re-writing traditional Austrian culture to include the voices of immigrants and their descendants.

Following this line of research, our article examines public events initiated by young Russian immigrants in Tel-Aviv as performative acts of belonging and as localized forms of ethnic diversity that are likely to become a means of intercultural dialogue.

Urban ethnographers are increasingly interested in the spatial dimensions of the politics of difference, showing how belonging and diversity relate to social and spatial practices of inclusion and exclusion (Berg and Sigona 2013; Martiniello 2014). The public events examined below illustrate how young Russian Israelis negotiate their unique place in the complex social mosaic of Tel-Aviv. We assume that the aspiration of young Russian immigrants is to belong to the urban Israeli landscape (or rather its specific Tel Aviv brand), to become independent and active agents within it, thus creating and sustaining their visibility (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2010). The term “belonging by criticism” introduced by Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport (2012) describes the dual mechanism of belonging and challenge. It relates to the duality of immigrant locations, whereas their belonging doesn’t imply unconditional adoption of the local ethos, while criticism doesn’t mean its total rejection. The new approach of Israeli sociologists posits that the belonging of Russian immigrants in Israel is a complex process full of contradictions that is founded on a nonbinary epistemology, breaking the dominant dichotomy in the older Israeli literature on immigration between assimilation and segregation (Roberman 2007; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008, 2012; Lerner 2013).

Bhabha (1994) used a concept of cultural hybridity that described migrants' position as in-between cultures. By means of live public events, holidays, and their extended online presence, new, hybrid forms of Russian-Israeli culture are created by young Russian Israelis at the intersection between Russian cultural legacies and Israeli realities that surround them. Before describing our field work, a brief introduction on the Russian Israelis of the 1.5 immigrant generation is due.

### **Young Israelis with Russian Roots**

Most young adults of Russian origin resettled in Israel over the past twenty-five years as "reluctant migrants," due to their parents' decision to emigrate from the deteriorating post-soviet states. Because of the soaring costs of living in Central Israel, many immigrant families had settled in the outlying towns with poor educational resources and occupational opportunities. Many youths had a difficult time learning Hebrew and adapting to Israeli schools and local peer culture. Their parents were often of little help and guidance during this painful transition, immersed in their own problems, socially disoriented, and working long hours (Remennick 2012). The studies among young Russian immigrants during the 1990s have signaled multiple problems of inclusion: uneven performance at school, high truancy and drop-out rates, lack of enthusiasm for the military service, and troubles with the law (Mirsky 1997; Fishman and Mesch 2005).

By the early 2000s, most young "Russians" have outgrown these "pains of adjustment," learned to navigate Israeli institutions and play by the local rules (Rozovsky and Almog 2011). Reflecting the forces of social stratification and variable economic mobility of their parents, the 1.5-ers with a Russian accent are found in all social strata (Remennick 2011). The majority of those raised in the families of ex-Soviet intelligentsia, followed their parents' "ethnic script" of social mobility via higher education, and by the time of our research found themselves in the ranks of Israeli creative or professional class. Thus, this research can be seen as a follow-up on the earlier Israeli studies among Russian immigrant students, for example, by Rapoport and Lomsky-Feder (2002); Remennick (2003a); Lerner, Rapoport, and Lomsky-Feder (2007).

The story of Russian 1.5-ers in Israel is rather unique because of the size of this community and the existence of a thriving Russian subculture. It can be argued that such a "critical mass" of same-origin migrants in a small country, where their language and culture have gradually gained higher acceptance and social status, may by itself lead to sociocultural retention. Yet, similar tendency has been found among Russian immigrants in other host countries, where they comprise a much smaller minority. The studies among the former Soviet 1.5-ers in the United States, Germany, and other Western countries (e.g., Steinbach 2001; Kasinitz et al. 2001; Remennick 2007) have found a tendency to preferential social networking with coethnics, regardless of the extent of socioeconomic adjustment in the new country. Because many of these immigrants are partly Jewish (e.g., from a paternal side) and are not recognized as Jews for religious purposes, they have a tense relationship with the Orthodox rabbinical authorities (Ben-Porat 2013). Most Israeli Russian 1.5-ers are bicultural (or intercultural); typically, they are breaking their own distinct pathway between the home and host cultures, augmented by the new transnational opportunities (Horowitz 2001; Remennick 2013). As a result, a new hybrid cultural bubble has emerged in Israel, typified by a hyphenated identity (Russian-Israeli), lifestyle (rock bands, clubs, and fusion musical genres), and a mixed lingo called HebRush (Remennick 2003a; Niznik 2011).



## Our Field-Work at *Fishka*

We focused on one nonprofit cultural association of young Russian Israelis, by the name of *Fishka*, meaning in Russian a game token (dice) also symbolizing luck. *Fishka* appeared about eight years ago on the social scene of Tel-Aviv, first as an art-cinema club, then as a framework for the (secular) study of Jewish heritage, and since 2010 as a full-fledged NGO with a multifaceted agenda and its own premises in South Tel Aviv. This NGO is supported by a mix of private donors, one of which is the Genesis Philanthropy Group founded by a Russian-Jewish business mogul. Because *Fishka* was not funded by the municipal authorities, it did not get a solid material basis and permanent staff and was never really institutionalized.

*Fishka*'s projects included community volunteering (e.g., visiting Russian-speaking elders in local senior homes), novel forms of celebrating Jewish and Russian holidays, and a range of interest-based classes and groups (Russian drama troupe, tango class, Hebrew–Russian literary translation group, etc.). In 2010–2013, *Fishka* rented a building in South Tel-Aviv's Eilat St. near the sea shore. The neighborhood is rather poor and rundown, dominated by small trade shops and warehouses but with the signs of nascent gentrification. The club's premises featured a hall for events and dances whose walls are lined by the bookshelves containing hundreds of Russian books—classic and modern fiction, history, biography, philosophy, Jewish Studies, etc. An opposite wall was used for temporary art exhibits. There was also a patio with coffee tables, a conference room, a small kitchen, and staff offices. The premises featured modern pragmatic design pasting in multiple elements of the local, Middle Eastern flavor (furniture, fabrics, etc.)—merging with the spirit of its renovated Ottoman-period building and the adjacent mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhood of Jaffa. In May 2013, *Fishka* had to abandon its house on Eilat St. because of rental and financial problems, and since then it had been looking for a new permanent home, while holding its club activities in various city locations.<sup>1</sup>

*Fishka* is a typical grassroots association, that is, is locally based, significantly autonomous, run by volunteers, and nonprofit (Smith 2000). Immigrant cultural activities are examined from both a grassroots perspective and a policy-institutional perspective, although there is no sharp distinction between the two perspectives (Martiniello 2014). Our article privileges a grassroots perspective, describing the initiatives taken by the migrants them-selves to organize calendrical holidays and street events in Tel-Aviv. At the same time, it is important to mention that *Fishka*'s sponsors (especially Genesis foundation) encouraged them to be involved in the field of Jewish identity, holidays, and traditions. The directions of *Fishka*'s activities did not always took shape easily and compromises often had to be reached between the sponsors, leaders, and other participants. Since Genesis and other Jewish foundations offered their support specifically earmarked for Jewish education and leadership projects, *Fishka*'s leaders had to find creative ways to introduce traditional Jewish content to the club's agenda, for example, by celebrating Jewish holidays in novel ways. Some of *Fishka*'s leaders who had studied in religious schools and still observed some Jewish traditions gladly embraced these initiatives, while the secular majority of Fishkers were less interested in these projects. Usually consensus was reached by splitting ways: different participants chose for themselves alternative projects and events that reflected their outlook and interests.

Our field work with *Fishka*'s staff, project leaders, and patrons included eighteen months of participant observation of its various events and activities, as well as twenty-three in-depth interviews with the key informants. The goals of the study included understanding the rationale for *Fishka*'s appearance, the characteristics of its audience and activists, the evolution of its projects (including the reasons for their success or failure), and a close study of the hybrid

cultural forms created by *Fishka*'s participants. These semistructured interviews highlight the personal intercultural journeys of the immigrants, the reasons of their attachment to the *Fishka* community, and their roles in creating the new forms of cross-cultural expression. Since both authors are Russian-Hebrew bilinguals, all interviewees had been offered the choice of language, and two-thirds opted for their mother tongue. Yet, all of these interviews featured fragments of Hebrew idioms to enable more efficient expression. One third felt more comfortable speaking Hebrew, but still pasted in multiple Russian words and expressions. Thus, in the best tradition of the 1.5 generation of Russian Israelis, our interviews were conducted in the language locally known as *IvRus* or *HebRush* (Hebrew+Russian) and could only be transcribed and analyzed by the community insiders. Most informants are quoted below under their actual names (unless they asked to use an alias) because they are publicly known via *Fishka*'s events and online forums.

Our analysis of this rich ethnographic data was informed by several different theoretical frameworks and goals. One article was about cultural capital in migration based on the biographic interviews with *Fishka* participants (Prashizky and Remennick, 2015) and another one about alternative weddings performed by *Fishka*'s leaders in the streets of Tel-Aviv for its members who cannot have a religious marriage in Israel (Prashizky and Remennick, 2016). The present article is focused on the performative aspects of public events (holidays, rituals, and festivals) organized by *Fishka*'s leaders and participants. We start presenting our ethnography from explaining the specific relevance and meaning of Tel-Aviv as the scene of *Fishka*'s performances and then turn to the analysis of the four selected events that typify different facets of the association's agenda.

## ***Fishka* in Tel-Aviv's Urban Landscape**

### **Why Is *Fishka* Located in Tel-Aviv?**

Greater Tel Aviv is the second most populous city in Israel and its largest metropolitan area. Tel-Aviv City has several symbolic connotations in Israeli public imaginary (Azaryahu 2007, 2012), reflecting different phases in the social history of Tel-Aviv. Its founding myth focuses on the "first Hebrew city", which lasted from its foundation in 1909 through the 1950s. According to it, Tel-Aviv was the first modern Jewish urban space and Hebrew-speaking city in Palestine founded by the Zionist settlers from the Russian Empire and later receiving waves of Jewish refugees before, in between and after two world wars. The key period figures included the first Tel-Aviv mayor Meir Dizengoff, the poet Haim N. Bialik, and actors of the Habima Theater.

The second chapter unfolds in the 1960s and 1970s when the city's central commercial venue named after Dizengoff became a metonym of Tel-Aviv as a large and modern city. The third one originates in the 1980s and 1990s, when the celebration of Tel-Aviv as a "city that never sleeps" or a "non-stop metropolis" represented the hype around the new, vibrant Mediterranean cosmopolis, the liberal, secular, and free city. The fourth trope addresses the "White City" as a contemporary expression of Tel-Aviv's architectural heritage. In July 2003, UNESCO announced the listing of "the white city of Tel-Aviv" as a world heritage site because of its dominant Bauhaus architecture (introduced by German Jewish immigrants in the 1930s). The "white city" brand invested Tel-Aviv with the prestige of a prominent cultural center on the global scale (Azaryahu 2012). In the local Israeli lore, Tel-Aviv is often likened to Paris of the 1930s or New York and London of the 1980s. The young and fashionable crowd (including multiple tourists) appreciates Tel Aviv for its stylish cafes, elegant seaside promenade, music and art festivals, and thriving night life. It is the most multicultural city in Israel: in addition to

native and immigrant Jewish residents and Arabs from Jaffa, most labor migrants from Africa, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, etc. have also settled there.

As we will see, *Fishka* participants use all four mythical tropes of Tel-Aviv in some pragmatic way, even if unconsciously, to reinforce their legitimacy as Russian immigrant residents of the city. Most *Fishka* participants had moved to Tel Aviv from Jerusalem and Israel's peripheral towns after finishing their education, in search of professional and personal advancement in the big city. Most live in rented apartments in central Tel-Aviv or in suburban Gush-Dan towns. *Fishka* organization became the setting of the symbolic encounter between the values and practices of the previous generations of Russian intellectuals and artists and their current reincarnation, as young migrants in Israel. The "ethnic script" of Russian Jewish intelligentsia (Remennick 2007; Lerner, Rapoport, and Lomsky-Feder 2007) includes urban lifestyle; higher education (most are professionals in the high-tech industry, medicine, education, and a range of creative areas—journalism, design, theater, etc.); broad cultural literacy (including history and philosophy); and the love for Russian and European high culture with concomitant attempts at artistic self-expression.

A couple of successful Tel Aviv fashion designers (Frau Blau label) are among the club's participants and patrons, who also supply the stage costumes and clothes for project leaders, concert anchors, etc. Altogether, these manifestations make a claim at these young immigrants' special place in the ranks of Tel-Aviv bohemia, their stake in creation of the city's high culture, and at least parity (if not superiority) with other young creators who are native Israelis. This elitist attitude is also supported by *Fishka*'s donor—the Genesis Foundation for Russian Jewry. Here is an excerpt from an interview with Sana Britavsky, head of Genesis Tel-Aviv branch.

*This initiative [Fishka] looked unique from the outset, that's why we decided to support it. It attracted young and trendy Tel Aviv crowd that was interested in its Jewish and Russian roots. Not the ardent Zionist kind that you find in Jerusalem but a bohemian kind, professional, confident, and well adjusted in Israel. These were not the people crushed by immigration and looking for a shoulder to cry on. Most had received their degrees from good universities and started promising careers. . . . Even if they hadn't made it in Israel yet and worked as janitors or guards, they aspired to become film directors and artists and found here the outlet for their creativity. From the outset, Fishka's leaders kept a certain standards that resulted in self-selection: the rogue folks interested in loud music and a glass of beer dropped out quickly.*

Later, she mused:

*In fact, Fishka is a post-migration phenomenon; its patrons are very much the locals now . . . they remind me of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of the White Russian immigration in Paris. Already French, but of a special kind, they cherished their Russian roots, sang Russian songs and dined in Russian restaurants. . . . Now this "ethnic" tweak became fashionable also in Israel, so it attracts young Sabras of a certain kind who like hanging out with Russian 1.5ers. . . . Thus Tel-Aviv slowly recovers its historic Russian roots—most of its founding creative class had come from Russia and built the city from scratch . . . this lingering imprint helps young Russian Israelis feel at home here.*

Sana's words evoke two elitist associations: one with the noble White Russian émigrés in Paris who never severed their ties with the Russian culture, and the other with the Russian Jewish

founders of Tel-Aviv in pre-state Palestine—the iconic figures like poets Chaim Bialik and Alexander Penn actress Hanna Rovina, the reformer of modern Hebrew Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, and many others, whose names carry multiple Tel-Aviv streets. She notes with pride that, thanks to *Fishka* and other similar groups, Russianness came into vogue among some Tel Aviv's natives, which helps redress previous negative stereotypes toward the immigrants and bridge the remaining social gaps.

Several projects at *Fishka* aim at building intercultural bridges by introducing contemporary Hebrew culture to the 1.5-ers. One of them is called *Chronicus* (from *chronos*—Greek for “time”); it includes readings of Hebrew writers and poets, meeting Hebrew stage and film directors, etc., as well as field trips to culturally important sites in Tel-Aviv and beyond. *Chronicus*'s leader is Nadia Greenberg (thirty-three), one of the key figures at *Fishka* who came to Israel twenty-two years ago from Moscow, graduated from a theatre school, and works as teacher and stage director. Nadia shared her thoughts on intercultural learning.

*Most Fishka guys speak fluent Hebrew and feel Israeli, but they are not always familiar with contemporary Israeli culture and its evolvement over the twentieth century. Chronicus seeks to fill in the gaps of their knowledge and help them feel more connected to Israel. . . . We started from the trips to several important museums and memorial homes (e.g., of H. N. Bialik) and proceeded to learning urban history and architecture in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. We used any opportunity to invite different men of letters, working both in Hebrew and in Russian, and the translators of drama and poetry, like Peter Kriksunov who translated Bulgakov's “Master and Margarita” into Hebrew and Ro'i Chen, a Sabra who learned Russian perfectly; he translates and adapts Russian drama at Gesher theatre. All of these events were sold out and some resulted in new projects, for instance, poetry translators' workshop.*

Nadia added later:

*One of our activists is a professional tour guide who works in both languages and she really made us look at the city we live in differently. Our field trips in Tel Aviv made a deep impression on the Fishka guys. The stories of young Russian-Jewish pioneers who had built the city in the 1910s-1920s remind them of their own journey almost 100 years later: back then, as now, the city scene is in flux and we can contribute our fair share to its current history and cultural scene. . . . These pioneers also felt being in the gap between the two cultures and slowly learned to fill it with the new content. This historical parallel makes you feel more relevant in this place on the map. . . . You realize your own entitlement for it and your role in creating its current history. Tel-Aviv's young intellectuals of the 1920s were also new to Palestine and had to invent themselves and the town from scratch. We can follow in the same path—to do new things that are interesting and inspiring for us, and nobody can tell us, this city isn't yours, you don't belong here. . . . We do belong and we want to inhabit Tel Aviv in the ways that suit our own cultural and mental tastes.*

It is not coincidental that the first mythical meaning and memory of Tel-Aviv as the first Hebrew city is dominant in the stories of Sana and Nadia who compare *Fishka* participants to the first Tel-Avivians. This symbolic association is loaded with prestige because it refers to the

mythical beginnings of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Tel-Aviv's growth as the Jewish urban center was inseparable from the creation of a vernacular Hebrew literature, fine arts, architecture and photography by Jewish practitioners (Mann 2006). This historic aspect of life in Tel-Aviv is relevant to the cultural activity of *Fishka* participants and is actively reinterpreted by them. Nadia's reflections underscore the role of *Fishka* in the fortification of young immigrants' feelings of belonging to this country and city, their stake at and entitlement for a fair part in its ongoing creation. The parallel between the earlier waves of *Aliya* from Russia and today's Russian 1.5-ers helps cement the intergenerational ties and a common vision of Israel's history and its culture as a complex tapestry with a significant Russian thread running across it. They claim their unique place as creators of Israeli, locally embedded cultural capital drawing on the Russian language and traditions. This is one example of how the collective urban memory of Tel-Aviv is adopted and used by Russian immigrants in order to negotiate their belonging to this place.

Other leaders of creative projects at *Fishka* also stressed that Tel-Aviv attracted them as a cosmopolitan, secular, and culturally diverse city where everyone is different and therefore can be what they want. Most informants stressed that they felt at home in Tel-Aviv much more than in other Israeli towns where they grew up. Despite drastic economic gaps between the poorer Southern and wealthy Northern Tel-Aviv neighborhoods, an immigrant feels much freer in Tel-Aviv than in Jerusalem, with its holiness, religion, and the breath of history at every corner ("you can never live up to this Holy City's standard of virtue, especially as a non-believer," said one ex-Jerusalemite). Tel-Aviv is also the hub of creativity where many young talents are showing their work, meet their peers, and support each other. While dozens of cultural events take place in Tel-Aviv every night, every venue is full and booming in the "city that never sleeps" because Tel-Aviv residents are ardent consumers of music, theatre, stand-up comedy, the club scene, etc.

That's why the group like *Fishka* could only emerge in this city, where like-minded young adults of Russian origin got together to build novel venues for their bicultural creativity. Because of Tel-Aviv's multicultural *modus vivendi*, Russian Israelis could legitimately claim their own place in the diverse urban landscape and see their unique contribution accepted and appreciated by the natives and other immigrants alike. "Together we are a force, a Russian-speaking intellectual magnet of Tel-Aviv," summed proudly one female informant.

In sum, *Fishka* participants are members of the educated and productive stratum of generation 1.5 who abandon the peripheral areas of the country and flock to Tel-Aviv in search of better employment opportunities and a more vibrant cultural life. Along with their move to the center, they are experiencing rapid bourgeoisification and integration into the mainstream consumer society (Rozovsky and Almog 2011). This process reflects changes in patterns of their leisure-time activities, for example, socializing in the cafes of the Greater Tel-Aviv area, visits to art exhibitions, theaters and cinema festivals, organization of and participation in cultural urban festivals. *Fishka* manifests its orientation toward the country's Ashkenazi elite, to which many of its leaders aspire to belong. In their outreach efforts, the association's leaders wish to attract a higher tier of the Hebrew-speaking patrons whom they construe as their social peers—the young professional and artsy Tel-Aviv crowd. Thus they adopt, use, and reinterpret symbolical and mythical meanings of Tel-Aviv as a cultural center, "White city", and modern metropolis, all of which are widely accepted in Israeli mainstream (Azaryahu 2007, 2012). On the other hand, the image of the "Black city", the term that Rotbard (2005) uses to describe the adjacent Arab town of Jaffa that was partly annexed and rebuilt by its expanding "White city" neighbor, is almost absent in the discourse of young Russian immigrants, as is the general reference to the Israeli -Palestinian conflict in their activity.

## Public Events

### International Women's Day Parade

International Working Women's Day is celebrated on March 8 in many countries, especially those with socialist legacies. It started at the dawn of the twentieth century in the United States, Europe, and Russia in the form of demonstrations demanding equal rights for women in the workplace (Kaplan 1985). March 8 was an official holiday in the Soviet Union, but during the last decades of State Socialism it lost its ideological pitch and became, ironically, a general Women's Day celebrating femininity, beauty, and motherhood, that is, rather traditional gender values. On March 8, Russian men congratulated their mothers, wives, daughters, and coworkers with chocolates and flowers and symbolically relieved their house workload (one day a year) by washing the dishes and taking out trash. As opposed to FSU, in Israel, March 8 is not an official holiday and public awareness of the event is very low. Its proxy in Israel is Mothers' Day (also called a Family Day) celebrated in early February. According to the typology suggested by Bell (1997), March 8 is generally a calendrical celebration (it is neither fully seasonal nor really commemorative) and is a salient part of a collective memory of former Soviet citizens.

A group of *Fishka* activists decided to refill the Women's Day with its original political load and organized the street march to foster contact between different ethnic and social layers of Tel Aviv's working women. On the early Friday afternoon of March 8, 2013, a few dozen *Fishka* activists, most of them female, met at the heart of old and wealthy Tel-Aviv, the Habima Theatre Square. Their plan was to march from that area through Rothschild Boulevard, one of the fanciest streets with restored Bauhaus buildings, large trees along the promenade and beautiful cafes, to the Old and New Tel-Aviv Central bus stations, representing the opposite end of the socioeconomic scale, the refuge of many illegal African immigrants and the domicile of the working poor. From there, the group proceeded to the adjacent Hatikva neighborhood, with its old houses with peeled walls, piles of trash, and general neglect. The young women wore beautiful summer dresses, high heels, and makeup. Some carried bunches of balloons that they gave out to oncoming women. One woman brought her two little dogs tied together with belts and colored balloons. A couple of *Fishka* participants holding huge bouquets of red carnations joined the crowd later, giving out flowers to women in the streets. They also offered stickers with *Fishka*'s logo to the curious onlookers. The interactions of this colorful young company with the people in the streets were cheerful: people, especially women and children, enjoyed receiving flowers and balloons, smiled back, and asked questions about March 8 and the purpose of *Fishka* organization. All of them were invited to join the march, and some indeed joined for a short while. Greetings and conversations that occurred during the parade were at least in three languages—Russian with Russian tourists and immigrants, English with migrant workers from Africa and Philippines (especially near the bus stations), and Hebrew with other Israelis (even two ultra-orthodox women dressed in long black dresses received flowers with smiles). Typical questions asked time and again by the people in the streets were: Who you are? What holiday is it today?

We interpret this public appearance of young Russian immigrants in the Tel-Aviv streets as their claim for social recognition and a wish to contribute their own strand to the rainbow of local traditions and street events. The Women's Day Tel-Aviv parade served as an arena of immigrant identity politics, public visibility and to some extent a pride in their ex-Soviet cultural heritage and collective memory with its strong emphasis on women's equality and universal employment.

This is how Marina, thirty-five, a journalist and an event participant, commented on it:

*For me it was a celebration of women's power in Tel-Aviv: all the women who live and work here, from upscale Ashkenazi ladies of the Rothschild Boulevard all the way down to female African migrants in the Bus Station area. All our girls wore beautiful outfits to attract glances in the streets, and they proudly carried their beauty from Tel-Aviv's North to South, to make a statement on the continuity of Tel-Aviv's urban space from poor to rich areas, to brighten up the day of poorer residents and migrant laborers in the rundown parts of town. African women were particularly moved by our gifts of flowers and smiles because they don't get much attention, let alone congratulations with a Women's Day . . . they have bleak lives here and we wanted to show solidarity with their cause and human rights. A few local men also joined the march and we had a chance to explain them its meaning. . . . By this act we make the voice of young Russian Israelis heard in Tel-Aviv.*

Thus, *Fishka* participants construed the importance of this event on several planes that were both pragmatic and ideological. One was overriding the socioeconomic gradient between wealthier and poorer segments of Tel-Aviv's residents and inclusion of refugees and migrant workers in the urban fold, building a live bridge between the upscale and neglected Tel-Aviv domiciles and thus creating symbolic continuity of the urban space. The other was reclaiming the working women's rights agenda in the neoliberal age and solidarity with the ploy of illegal migrants in South Tel-Aviv (a hot issue on Israel's internal political agenda).

In the informal conversations between the participants, this event has often been praised as a success. The colorful, flamboyant beauty of this women's group created a strong presence in the cityscape and led to positive encounters with passersby in the streets of Tel-Aviv, thus causing the feelings of high self-esteem and pride among the participants.

### **Passover Seder**

Passover is a high Jewish holiday celebrating the Exodus of ancient Hebrews from Egypt; it symbolizes the emancipation of the Jewish people from slavery to freedom and sovereignty and hence clearly resonates with the Zionist paradigm. The traditional ritual (Seder Pesah) includes reading of the *Agadah* (a poetic depiction of the Exodus events originally written in Aramaic), drinking four cups of wine, eating matzoth, tasting symbolic foods placed on the special Seder plate, and singing traditional chants. In the full-scale religious Seder, the ritual part can take hours, and only after it's over are the participants allowed to proceed to festive dinner. It is an enduring cultural rite rooted in both seasonal and commemorative traditions. The holiday is the combination of two ancient festivals, the pastoral festival of Pesah and the seven-day spring agricultural festival of matzah. The core of the Jewish identity is established by the reference to a sequence of historical events, one of which is the Exodus.

Seder Pesah is celebrated in all but few Jewish homes, but secular Israelis typically modify the ritual elements using an adapted *Agadah* and proceeding to dinner more quickly. Most Russian immigrants came from a secular and assimilated background, and few of them were familiar with Passover rituals before coming to Israel. Thus, teaching Russian newcomers how to celebrate Pesah was seen by the hosts as an important element of their Israeli resocialization (Remennick and Parshizky 2012). Since reinforcement of Jewish heritage among young

Russian Israelis is one of *Fishka*'s declared goals, novel forms of Jewish holiday celebrations gradually took the shape of the Mahogim (clock hands) project.

In the Passover Night event of April 2013 at *Fishka* House, about fifty Russian immigrants were present. Most were *Fishka* regulars, their friends and family members, but some were accidental immigrant visitors who wanted to celebrate Pesah at the club. Since Pesah celebrations symbolize Israeli family-centered culture, *Fishka* wanted to serve as a proxy family to lone Russian immigrants having no relatives to celebrate with. One of the *Mahogim* coordinators explained the concept behind this event:

*Mahogim is about celebrating together Jewish holidays—in novel ways that make them enjoyable and meaningful for our secular patrons. . . . Most folks disliked tedious reading of the Agadah before the meal, making everybody edgy. The compromise was not reading the Agadah itself but discussing instead the major issues it raises—slavery, the cost of freedom, and leadership—in the form of a brainstorm game, with two competing teams tackling the questions... How did we handle traditional Seder songs in obscure Aramaic language? As a kind of karaoke—we posted the words on a screen so that everyone could follow. Soon we switched to singing familiar songs of Russian bards (Vysozky, Okudzhava, Vizbor)—mainly those devoted to journeys, roads, and personal transitions, and there are many such songs in the familiar Russian repertoire. So everybody could connect to the deeper meaning of Passover and also enjoyed themselves, including my 70 year-old mother. . . . Thus we ended up having a Jewish holiday that everyone could internalize as their own.*

This story evokes the theme of cultural translation. It is not accidental that so many of *Fishka*'s events revolve around translation—of drama, poetry, bilingual city guides, etc. Lerner (2013, 35) argues that the whole process of immigrant integration in Israel can be seen through a metaphor of intercultural translation, combining both symbolic and pragmatic elements bridging between immigrants' past and present. Immigrants employ their "old" knowledge and frames of reference as a lens to scrutinize and interpret new realities of Israel, thus creating unique cultural hybrids, products of intercultural translation. The act of translation occurs both literally, in the events and workshops discussing Hebrew–Russian literary translations, and metaphorically, for example, interpreting Jewish and Israeli holidays into the cultural and symbolic language understandable to ex-Soviet immigrants. Apparently, the Seder night at *Fishka* stood rather far from its traditional Orthodox format, but its symbolic message was clearly delivered by means of familiar cultural genres—a brain-storm game and singing Russian songs about freedom. This act of cultural translation made an ancient Jewish tradition more legible and meaningful to the secular patrons of the club, both young and old.

The relevance of Jewish religion and its rituals and holidays is not a unique question for Russian Israelis at the beginning of the 21st century. Back in the 1920s, Zionists who built the first agricultural settlements in Palestine faced the challenge of suitability of Jewish traditions to their secular, collectivist way of life (Zeira 2002). We interpret the creative modification of Seder rituals by young Russian immigrants as another expression of Israeli secular culture in the modern urban context.

As already mentioned, the Mahogim project was supported by the Genesis Foundation and targeted communal celebration of holidays, both Russian-Soviet (e.g., March 8) and Jewish. During our study period, these celebrations included Hanukah party, Purimshpil, Shavuot



festival, and the Passover Seder described above. Placing the issue of Jewish identity at the center of *Fishka*'s agenda caused disputes between its members. Some informants (e.g., Misha, one of the coordinators of the drama project) said that they were uninterested in this subject and attended *Fishka*'s Jewish events because they were held in a special Russian cultural space. Others spoke about the importance of Judaism for them: these included Nadia, one of the club's leaders, who received religious education in Israel and used to be observant. She was a central node of the pro-Jewish identity group, with most of its participants formerly religious (including Galina, a tourist guide and co-coordinator of *Chronicus*, and Masha, a former coordinator of *Mahogim*). Another round of arguments around *Mahogim* was caused by the *Genesis*'s 2014 decision to cut down its funding to a single Jewish holiday—the Shavuot festival and study of the related Jewish texts. Masha quitted her position as *Mahogim* coordinator in protest against this policy change, while many others welcomed it. Generally, our field observations indicate that *Fishka*'s Jewish festivals and holidays succeeded to attract secular Tel-Aviv audience because of their entertainment aspects. Those events typically included food, music, dancing, and poetry readings, thus moving far away from the Orthodox customs.

### Culinary Workshop and *Memouna* Celebration

Food—taste and smell, tangible signs of ethnicity—plays an important role in the encounters between immigrants and locals in the host society. In the multicultural reality of contemporary cities, they are a part of the sensory experience of difference in the urban space. As a universal human need, cooking and food-sharing rituals also help bridge social gaps and broker friendships between neighbors and coworkers belonging to different cultural traditions (Rhys-Taylor 2013). Israeli Jews coming from dozens of different countries use their ethnic cuisines as salient identity markers and social boundary signifiers. Hence, promoting Russian-Jewish cuisine and getting to know and like the cooking habits of “other Jews” was seen by *Fishka* leaders as an efficient way of transcending local ethno-social boundaries.

When Vova (thirty-one), a professional chef, joined the club's volunteer group, a decision was made to start an intercultural cooking workshop named “NOT in MY Grandma's Kitchen.” At every meeting, the fifteen to twenty participants were taught a new recipe from one of the many Jewish cooking traditions—Moroccan, Yemenite, Iraqi, Greek, Polish, and, naturally, Russian. The workshop was subsidized by a Tel-Aviv municipal grant to *Fishka*, so that amateur chefs had only to cover the costs of cooking ingredients. In the beginning, Vova introduced the dish of the day, its cultural origins as part of local geography, history, and lifestyles of various diaspora communities. Although most participants were of Russian origin, Vova encouraged local residents to join classes with their unique know-how learned at home. He saw this workshop as a vivid expression of *Fishka*'s intercultural mission:

*I see myself as a chef and a culinary entrepreneur, a sort of cultural broker . . . so this workshop aimed at breaking the barriers between Russian, European and Middle-Eastern culinary traditions. People are often prejudiced against other groups' food, mainly because they know little about it . . . cooking and tasting each other's dishes is the easiest way of bringing strangers together, fostering interest and mutual trust. Me as a host and my guests tried to show the participants how rich and wonderful are different Jewish dishes and how many of them are essentially versions of each other.*

The pivotal event at the end of the workshop was a walk-in, free Memouna celebration at *Fishka*. It is a traditional festival of North African Jews held at nightfall on the last Passover day marking the return to eating *chametz*, that is, leavened bread and pastry forbidden throughout the previous week. Its central ritual is kneading of the first bread dough—marking the separation from the Passover—with subsequent eating of traditional sweet butter-and-honey pastry called *Mofleta*. In the Arab countries, Jewish families invited their Muslim neighbors to sweet Memouna party, thus cementing their good neighborly relations. In recent decades, the increased social inclusion and upward mobility of Eastern (Mizrahi) Jews has redefined Memouna from a tribal Mizrahi custom to part of Israel's national holiday canon, with televised Memouna parties attended by politicians and celebrities. During the 1990s, families of recent Russian immigrants were invited to Mizrahi Jewish homes to celebrate Memouna together as part of their “acculturation project” (Sharaby 2009).

At the nightfall on the last Passover day of 2013, about one hundred guests gathered in the courtyard of *Fishka* building, young Russian immigrants joined by their native Israeli friends and local residents invited to join free of charge. In the yard with installed tables and ovens, cooking workshop participants made *Mofleta* side by side with traditional Russian *bliny* (blintzes) and served both to the guests. Everyone could see that the two foods belonging to very distant Jewish cultures (Russian and Moroccan) are in fact very similar in look and taste. Vova orchestrated over the cooking workshop. A variety of Russian, Israeli mainstream, and Mizrahi-style music was pouring from the loudspeakers. Augmenting the Mizrahi flavor, the evening was concluded with belly dance performed by Julia Kislev, a Russian immigrant who was earlier on *Fishka's* staff. She studied belly dance in Israel, fell in love with the Middle Eastern culture and nowadays produces commercial parties in this style.

An interesting confrontation occurred during and after the party when some Russian immigrant women in the audience complained that the belly dancer became too provocative by the show's end. They felt embarrassed in front of their native Israeli friends whom they invited to the party. This exemplifies an intercultural conflict, when an Eastern cultural genre is construed as indecent by ex-Soviet women (especially when performed by a fellow Russian). They may have a more feminist (or puritanical?) perception of women's decent public appearance and their role as entertainers exhibiting their semi-naked bodies.

Reflecting over the nature of this successful cultural project, Vova said:

*We are doing Memouna party for the 2nd year now and it's only getting better. I think that it reflects the very core of Fishka's vision and purpose: demonstrating that Russian Israelis are an indispensable part of the Israeli social makeup. It feels very good to change the role of guests and newcomers to Israel to that of the hosts and masters of the place. The Russian community that was known for its inward orientation is widely opening its doors to invite everyone to join us on our own turf, to try our foods and compare them with your own. . . . We are no longer strangers in the strange land but full-fledged owners of the place.*

Thus, playing generous hosts to the diverse crowd in *Fishka's* courtyard helped foster immigrants' self-confidence and build bridges to the local urban community. The event's novelty was in combining two different culinary traditions—Russian/East European and Jewish/Middle-Eastern that are often perceived as antagonistic, thus creating a new hybrid and local form of Russian culture in Israel.

A more critical opinion was expressed by Dasha (an alias), a former *Fishka* member now connected to another immigrant group named Generation 1.5 ([www.facebook.com/dor1vahetsi/](http://www.facebook.com/dor1vahetsi/)). She interpreted the Memouna celebration at *Fishka* as an attempt to pass as locals, to put a show of well-integrated “good Russians,” which she saw as forced and artificial. Instead, she wanted the 1.5 generation to demand from the Israeli society to accept Russian immigrants as they are, without trying to convert or localize them.

The connection to Jewish holidays in the spirit of secular Judaism is not incidental on *Fishka*’s agenda and could not be explained only by the donors’ funding policies. *Fishka*’s activity started from cooperation with Bina—the secular Yeshiva (which offers unorthodox Torah study) in Tel-Aviv, and its first events were held in Bina building. Today Tel-Aviv is the epicenter of the so-called “Jewish renewal movement” or “Jewish renaissance” (Azulay and Verzberger 2008). Israeli prayer house, Bina-secular Yeshiva, Alma-center for Hebrew culture, and Havaya—Israeli Center of Life Cycle Rites are among the central organizations of this movement, all located in the Greater Tel-Aviv area. Young, secular, middle-class Israelis attend Jewish secular prayers, study groups, and festivals in Tel-Aviv. *Fishka*’s secular Jewish events in Tel-Aviv and its cooperation with other similar organizations can be interpreted as an additional expression of belonging to the current urban zeitgeist. Notably, after her recent resignation from *Fishka*, Rita Brudnik (*Fishka*’s cofounder and head) was hired as the head of Bina, a secular Yeshiva in Tel-Aviv.

### **Holocaust Memorial Events**

Holocaust Day (Yom Hashoa) is an official memorial day in Israel. It falls five days after the end of Passover and a week before two other state holidays—Fallen Soldiers Day and Independence Day. This day commemorates the murder of 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazis, the destruction of Jewish life in Europe, and the heroism of the Jews who struggled against the Nazi oppressors. The opening ceremony is held at Yad Vashem—the Memorial Holocaust Center in Jerusalem—and is televised live. During the ceremony, Holocaust survivors light six torches symbolizing the six million Jewish victims and Rabbis recite prayers. Smaller ceremonies and services are held at schools, synagogues, and community organizations while all entertainment venues are closed. Synchronized sirens sound throughout the state at 10 a.m., all traffic stops, and all Jewish citizens stand up in silence.

For Russian Israelis, this Memorial Day is very meaningful, as most families have lost some of their members during the Great Patriotic War, the Nazi occupation of the USSR, and mass killings of the Jews in the occupied Soviet lands (an estimated 2.7 million). At the same time, about 700,000 Soviet Jewish soldiers fought the Nazis in the ranks of the Red Army, many Jews joined the partisans in the woods of Ukraine and Belorussia. Thousands among the elderly Russian immigrants took active part in the combat or military industry, many being awarded medals for their heroism and work effort.

The Russian World War II veterans association is spread across Israeli towns; among other activities, it organizes an annual Victory Day parade on May 9 (when it was celebrated in the USSR/FSU). The pride over the Soviet-Jewish soldiers’ contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany, and through this, to the founding of the Jewish State, forms a salient component in the collective identity of older Russian immigrants. This pride is often transmitted to the younger generations through family events and memories.

The ceremony at *Fishka* took place on the eve of the Holocaust Day of 2013 and was conducted mostly in Hebrew (with a few parts in Russian) to cater to a broader local audience. The event was scripted around the story of Russian Jews during the Holocaust, their suffering,

resistance, and contribution to the victory of the Soviet Army. The audience consisted of bilingual *Fishka* regulars, their friends and family members, as well as some local residents and a few tourists. The ceremony was opened by a minute of silence in the remembrance of the victims with the audience (around forty people) standing up. After this, six *Fishka* participants lighted six candles symbolizing the six million murdered Jews, and each of them read excerpts from poetry, stories, and memoirs of Russian Jewish survivors. The ceremony ended by singing of the Israeli anthem Hatikva. It was followed by the monodrama “The Apples” based on a short story by Russian-Israeli writer Dina Rubina, staged and directed by *Fishka*’s leaders—the director Nadia Greenberg and actress Anna Glantz-Margulis. The play invoked the war memoir of an elderly Russian-Jewish veteran told to a young author; it was previously staged in Russian and now for the first time in Hebrew. The play was followed by Nadia’s talk about the history of Russian Jews, their destiny during the War, and a personal family story of resistance and survival during the war.

Members of the audience asked questions, commented on the lecture, and some joined in telling their family’s wartime stories. Thus, this event merged between elements of the familiar Israeli script with the added layers of Russian-Jewish historic and personal narrative. Through the theatrical representation of the unique facets of the Russian-Jewish war experience, young Russian immigrants added an important perspective to the collective Holocaust narrative. This grand narrative makes a solid foundation of Israel’s very existence and legitimacy among other nations; it is based on the twin images of the victim and the fighter. Yet, the six million Jewish victims (among them 2.5 million children) form the core of this narrative, while partisans and ghetto fighters represent the resisting minority. Multiple books, movies, museums, and ceremonies reiterate and fortify this narrative of victimization and heroic (yet futile) resistance attempts.

By contrast to Israel and the West, the notion of the Holocaust did not exist in the official Soviet discourse on the Great Patriotic War (June 1941–May 1945) that was dominated by the collective memory of the Nazi army atrocities on the occupied territories toward all Soviet civilians without referring to their ethnicity or religion. The postwar attempts to document Jewish victimization by the Nazis and their local collaborators were banned by soviet censorship for political reasons. The heroic combat effort and the final victory of the Soviet army over Nazi Germany formed the core of the Soviet war narrative, and most elderly Jews prefer to underscore this side of the story rather than Jewish victimhood (Roberman 2007; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2012). In Israel too, the role of the 1.5 million Jewish soldiers fighting in the Allied armies of World War II has been marginal in the official historiography until the early 1990s, when elderly Soviet veterans started annual Victory Day Marches on May 9 (Roberman 2007). The synthesis of these two aspects of Jewish history during World War II in the collective memory of Israelis characterized the Holocaust Remembrance Day event at *Fishka*. By changing the accents in this familiar tale, the young Russian Israelis asserted their right to reshape the foundational narrative in light of historical truths previously overlooked in Israel.

The Victory Day 2014 was also celebrated by *Fishka* members together with the elderly war veterans, underscoring the strong intergenerational ties among Russian Jews. The young immigrants walked with colored balloons and posters side by side with the veterans wearing their military regalia. The parade started from Tel-Aviv’s Rothschild Boulevard and finished at the Russian Cultural Center on Geula St. with collective singing of the old war-time songs beloved by most ex-Soviets.

## Summary and Discussion

Focusing on a group of young Russian immigrants living in Tel-Aviv, this ethnographic study examines their quest for active belonging in the host society. Their association *Fishka*, which was founded as an in-group social and cultural venue for the Russian 1.5 generation (Prashizky and Remennick, 2015), has gradually expanded its vision to embrace active outreach efforts that would place this immigrant cohort on the national and local map, making it visible and appreciated by other Israelis. The young immigrants manifested great creativity in designing the tools—performative and artistic—for this public outreach, both in terms of content (Jewish and Russian holiday celebrations, food festivals, street shows and wedding parties) and forms (in-house vs. street marches, large and small, in Hebrew, Russian, English, and their admix). These public events, rituals, and festivals can be seen as affirmations or even celebrations of belonging and diversity in their adopted and beloved city of Tel-Aviv. The events discussed above attest to the ongoing processes of cultural hybridization, whereby young Israelis fully embrace the cultural and historic legacies of their adopted homeland but also take pride in their Russian-Soviet heritage, want to make it known to a broad local audience and elevate the prestige of Russian culture in Israel. As many 1.5-ers came of age trying to hide or downplay their Russianness (construed as a negative social label in 1990s Israel; Remennick 2003a), after reaching adulthood and greater self-confidence in the new country they are willing to reassert their cultural roots and make all things Russian a legitimate (and attractive) part of Israeli and especially Tel-Aviv identity. Designing hybrid scripts for celebrating high Jewish holidays with Russian immigrants is one example of self-assertion. Redressing the historic balance in presenting the Russian-Soviet version of the “Holocaust versus Resistance” narrative is another. This process of cultural hybridization is not always seamless and smooth and has a potential for conflicts over the club’s agenda and *modus operandi*. The controversy and polemics voiced by some participants, even if relatively mild, around the Memouna celebration and other Jewish holidays at *Fishka*, show the diversity of its membership. The key issue at stake is the proportion between the Russian, Soviet, Jewish, and Israeli components of these public events and celebrations, which are often intertwined and not easily separable, as they are in the identity of these young immigrants.

The events described in this article are holidays and commemorative rites that convey the collective memory of Jewish, Russian-Soviet, and Israeli identity and represent the new forms of a hybrid calendar. Cultural hybridization clearly occurs as relatively new Russian immigrants in Israel try to negotiate the competing demands of staying connected to their culture of origin and embracing their new environment. These new holidays enable young immigrants to keep simultaneous connections to Judaism and Russian-Soviet culture and to become locally based Israelis. In this sense, holidays and commemorative rites become chief anchors of their collective memory, playing a decisive role in the context of resettlement and integration.

These experiments with cultural forms also reflect an ongoing search of contact and understanding with other large communities inhabiting Tel-Aviv’s urban spectrum – veteran Israelis of Middle Eastern origin and labor migrants and refugees from Asia and Africa who live side by side in South Tel-Aviv. Judging by their recent public activities, most *Fishka* leaders share democratic and human rights agenda and try to build social bridges to other Tel-Aviv residents, especially those living on the margins, in the poorer part of town where the club is located. The Women’s Day march and Memouna open-door party merging Russian and Mizrahi tastes are two examples of this trend to build new cross-cultural coalitions. Thus, most events sponsored by *Fishka* have two components: one inbound (targeting fellow Russian

immigrants of different ages) and the other outbound (reaching out to Israeli natives and other migrants).

*Fishka* participants are experiencing rapid bourgeoisification and integration into the consumer society, manifesting orientation towards the country's Ashkenazi elite and fashionable groups of Tel-Aviv cityscape. As homecomers (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008), they aspire to belong to the Jewish majority in the urban space. This aspiration, in a sense, neutralizes their subversive voice and reduces their capacity to undermine the constitutive national values. In this sense, the public events organized by *Fishka* are welcome as performances of belonging to the host society and are not considered a public threat (e.g., compared to recent demonstrations of African and Asian labor migrants). Proof of that is the patronage of Tel-Aviv municipality given to most of their public events (Parshizky and Remennick, 2016). The cultural and festival character of these events has the potential of attracting diverse street crowds; it rather neatly aligns with the new urban lifestyle of Israel's educated middle class.

By performing public manifestations of their belonging and claiming their place on the urban diversity scale, Russian Israeli 1.5-ers emerge as creative agents of their identity. While *Fishka*'s public events involve certain separation between the performers and other immigrants as audience (more so vis-à-vis native Israeli spectators), their aspiration is to embrace the spectators and create some level of performative interface. The immigrant performers address the audience as a community and not as a number of individual strangers. The goal of these events is both education and fun (edutainment), while temporally erasing boundaries between the performers and the audience. The resulting events are in fact new genres of collective celebration, enacted both within the Russian immigrant community and outside it, including Israeli natives and other urbanites. These spontaneous public encounters foster mutual cultural curiosity and may eventually foster greater trust. They create a unique hybrid between the Russian customs and holidays, Jewish traditions, and modern Israeli realities and civil rituals, using a range of performative, theatrical, musical, and artistic means. Together, they redraw the established social boundaries and declare a new calendar of urban events initiated by Russian-Jewish immigrants in Tel-Aviv—now as hosts rather than guests in this young and fashionable city.

One of the central characteristics of *Fishka* is its apolitical agenda and the focus on the cultural and creative domain, including the meaningful organization of leisure for its patrons. *Fishka*'s leaders try to avoid clear political identification with either the Right or the Left and to not take sides in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Public celebrations of Russian, Jewish, and Israeli holidays were aimed at intercultural education and high-quality entertainment for its members rather than expressing any political agendas. Avoidance of clear political identification can be explained by the wish of organization's leaders not to lose potential members. The only project that could be construed as a political or protest-driven action during our observation period was the project of “city square weddings” directly connected to the very current problem of marriage rights for non-Jewish Russian immigrants in Israel (Prashizky and Remennick, 2016). However, during the last years of *Fishka*'s activity, and especially after its suspension in 2014, several other grassroots associations of young Russian Israelis that emerged in its wake (e.g., the online platform “Generation 1.5”) took its cultural agenda further, touching upon interethnic conflicts, discrimination of Russian speakers in Israel, and other issues that extend to the domain of the social and political rights.

We believe that this research contributes to current theoretical debates on the intersections between memory and migration (Creet and Kitzmann 2011; Glynn and Kleist 2012). Collective memories, expressed in the form of holidays organized and celebrated by the young migrants,

are invoked to negotiate their belonging in the mosaic and immigrant-based Israeli society. On the one hand, the imported memory ensures continuity of the immigrants' social identity and family legacies (e.g., by challenging the balance between Jewish victimization and resistance during WWII), and on the other, the newly adopted memory of their resettlement enables their feelings of belonging. The new hybrid calendar adopted by these immigrants incorporates the Victory Day on May 9 in the series of Israeli memorial days; it thus emerges as an anchor of belonging and a symbolic home for these Russian Israelis. We hope that our findings will stimulate future research on the place and meaning of holidays and collective memory in the context of immigration. After *Fishka*, several new organizations of young Russian Israelis emerged that, among other issues, discuss Russian and Soviet holidays, for example, the Gregorian New Year on December 31 (as opposed to the Jewish one in September). Our follow-up study will focus on the salience of holidays as markers of immigrants' identity, collective memory, their old and new belongings. More generally, this study adds empirical reinforcements to the importance of the cultural sphere in the period of dramatic transformations spearheaded by economic and humanitarian migrations around the world (Martiniello 2014).

## Note

By the end of 2014, most of the club's activities had to be suspended because its leaders could not find a new permanent home; the Tel-Aviv municipality did not allocate them suitable premises. Our observation period reflected in this article fell on the last two years of *Fishka*'s normal activity (2012–2013), which were very intense and multifaceted. Since its reemergence in the field of Russian Israeli cultural life is still possible, we use the present tense in describing our findings.

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**International Women's Day celebration in South Tel-Aviv, March 8<sup>th</sup>**



**Passover celebration at *Fishka*, April 2013**



**Culinary workshop and *Memouna* celebration at *Fishka*, April 2013**





**New Year (Novy God) party at *Fishka* on December 31, 2013**





## Celebrating Victory Day on May 9<sup>th</sup> with the veterans



### הון תרבותי בהגירה: ארגון פישקא של צעירים דוברי רוסית בתל-אביב

מטרת המאמר לבחון את פעילות ארגון פישקא, ארגון מהגרים צעירים דוברי רוסית בישראל, נציגי דור וחצי של העולים מברית המועצות לשעבר. בעזרת המשגה תיאורטית של הון תרבותי בהגירה אנו בוחנות כיצד הון תרבותי מובנה ומיוצר בשדה הגירה ייחודי של מהגרים דוברי רוסית צעירים בתל אביב. אנו מבקשות לענות על שלוש שאלות: כיצד יוצרים המהגרים, משתתפי פישקא, צורות חדשות של הון תרבותי בהגירה (הכוונה להון תרבותי של תרבות רוסית תוצרת הארץ) מהם מרכיביו של אותו הון תרבותי חדש, ומה תפקידם של יחסי הכוח האתניים והמעמדיים ביצירת פרקטיקות של היבדלות. המהגרים לא רק מייבאים את ההון התרבותי שלהם מארץ מוצאם, אלא יוצרים צורות חדשות והיברידיות של הון תרבותי במדינת מגוריהם, בין השאר באמצעות תרגום מהשפה הרוסית לשפה העברית ולהפך. הם משתמשים במשאבים שהביאו מארץ המוצא, מפתחים אותם לכדי הון תרבותי חדש ומעניקים לו תוקף במסגרת פעילות הארגון. בעזרת ההון התרבותי הזה זוכים משתתפי פישקא, לתפיסתם, ביוקרה חברתית וביתרון חברתי, משפרים את מעמדה של קבוצת המהגרים הרוסים שהם משתייכים אליה ומפתחים תחושת גאווה בתרבותם. יתרה מזו, הם מפתחים תחושת השתייכות ותחושת בעלות על המקום החדש — ישראל — ובמיוחד על המרחב האורבני של תל אביב, שהם פועלים בו.

### חתונות בכיכר העיר: ישראלים צעירים דוברי רוסית מוחאים כנגד השליטה הדתית על מוסד הנישואים

המאמר בוחן את טקסי החתונה האלטרנטיביים שנערכו במרחב האורבני בתל-אביב כביטוי למחאה של צעירים דוברי רוסית, שאינם יכולים להינשא ברבנות משום שהם לא מוכרים כיהודים לפי ההלכה האורתודוקסית. חתונות ציבוריות אלו אורגנו ומומנו על-ידי ארגון פישקא של צעירים עולים מבריה"ם לשעבר. עבודת שדה שלנו בפישקא מבוססת על תצפיות משתתפות באירועים השונים של הארגון שנערכו בין השנים 2012-13, ראיונות עומק חצי מובנים עם משתתפי הארגון ומייסדיו, וכן צפייה בהקלטות וידאו וסרטונים של החתונות הציבוריות שהם עשו ברחובות העיר תל-אביב בין השנים 2009-11. הרקע התיאורטי של המאמר מבוסס על המשגה תיאורטית של פוליטיקת השייכות ואקטיביזם התרבותי. טענת המאמר היא שטקסי חתונה אלטרנטיביים פומביים אלה מהווים ביטוי לאזרחות פעילה וביקורתית של צעירים אלה, שניסו לגייס את הישראלים ילידי הארץ למאבקם, במטרה לשנות את הסטטוס קו ולהביא לידי יצירת מסלול לנישואים אזרחיים בישראל. האקטיביזם התרבותי והעמדה הפוליטית הפעילה של צעירים דוברי רוסית מאתגרת את השליטה של הישראלים ילידי הארץ על המקומות הציבוריים ברחבי העיר, ומסמנת את בעלותם על המקומות המרכזיים והאופנתיים בתל-אביב ועל הזירה התרבותית שלה.



## **עיצוב של זיכרון ושייכות: ישראלים צעירים דוברי רוסית טוענים לבעלות על המרחב התל-אביבי האורבני**

בהתבסס על הרקע התיאורטי של הזיכרון הקולקטיבי בהגירה ופוליטיקת השייכות, המאמר בוחן את מופעי ההשתייכות הפרפורמטיבית במסגרת סדרת חגים, מצעדים ואירועי הזיכרון שנערכו בעיר תל-אביב על-ידי קבוצת עולים צעירים מבריה"ם לשעבר מארגון פישקא. טענת המאמר שמגוון האירועים, כגון החגים הרוסים-הסובייטים, היהודיים והישראלים הממלכתיים שאורגנו על-ידם, מהווים מופעי ביצוע ציבוריים של העולים. מטרתם להפוך אותם לנראים בזירה האורבנית הציבורית, לחזק את היוקרה והלגיטימציה של התרבות הרוסית בישראל ולבנות גשרים עם מהגרים אחרים ונציגי הקהילות השונות בתל-אביב. ישנה חשיבות רבה לזיכרון הקולקטיבי בהגירה שמשמש כעוגן של העולים במדינה החדשה, שמקשר בין העבר וההווה, כשהחגים ואירועי הזיכרון שהם מארגנים מחזקים את תחושת השייכות והבעלות שלהם על המרחב האורבני שבו הם חיים.

## About the Authors



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Larissa Remennick was born and educated in Moscow, Russia (Ph.D. from the Institute of Sociology, 1988) and immigrated to Israel in 1991. She joined Bar-Ilan faculty in 1994 and is currently professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. She is also Director of Sociological Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities and Editor of *Sociological Papers* series published by the Institute. Among other subjects, she studied extensively the immigration and acculturation experiences of post-Soviet Jewry in Israel and in the West. Prof. Remennick has authored over 80 articles and three books in English (as well as three books in her native Russian), multiple book chapters and encyclopedia entries. Her book *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict* (Transaction, 2007, paperback 2012) became a popular reference in sociology of immigration and in Jewish studies.



### **Anna Prashizky**

Anna Prashizky immigrated to Israel in 1991. In 2006 she received Ph.D from Sociology and Anthropology Department at Bar-Ilan University. She is a lecturer in Multidisciplinary and Sociology Departments, at Western-Galilee Academic College. She is managing editor of “Sociological Papers” series published by Sociological Institute for Community Studies, at Bar-Ilan University. Her research interests are in the area of cultural anthropology, Jewish ritual studies, and former Soviet immigrants and their integration in Israel.