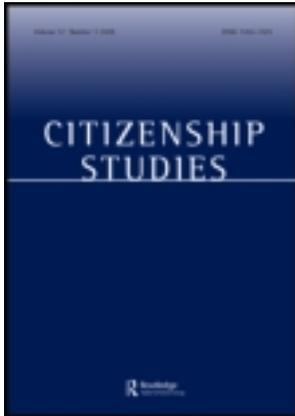


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Gender and cultural citizenship among non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Israel

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About 330,000 of partial Jews and gentiles have moved to Israel after 1990 under the Law of Return. The article is based on interviews with middle-aged gentile spouses of Jewish immigrants, aiming to capture their perspective on integration and citizenship in the new homeland where they are ethnic minority. Slavic wives of Jewish men manifested greater malleability and adopted new lifestyles more readily than did Slavic husbands of Jewish women, particularly in relation to Israeli holidays and domestic customs. Most women considered formal conversion as a way to symbolically join the Jewish people, while no men pondered over this path to full Israeli citizenship. Women's perceptions of the IDF and military service of their children were idealistic and patriotic, while men's perceptions were more critical and pragmatic. We conclude that women have a higher stake at joining the mainstream due to their family commitments and matrilineal transmission of Jewishness to children. Men's hegemony in the family and in the social hierarchy of citizenship attenuates their drive for cultural adaptation and enables rather critical stance toward Israeli society. Cultural politics of belonging, therefore, reflect the gendered norms of inclusion in the nation-state.

Keywords: non-Jewish immigrants; cultural citizenship; conversion; civil religion; integration

Introduction

This paper discusses the case of non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel and the gender aspects of their cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship is expressed by their modes of participation in the local cultural discourse, their feelings of belonging to the dominant Israeli collective, loyalty to the state, and the quest for identity in the new society. The perceptions of proper citizenship by non-Jewish immigrants, who do not belong to the dominant collective, highlight the symbolic mechanisms of minority integration in Jewish national state.

As part of the recent immigration from the FSU, over 300,000 partial Jews and gentiles came to Israel as spouses of Jews or offspring of ethnically mixed families¹ (Cohen and Susser 2009). An ongoing controversy surrounds the host of social issues stemming from the definition of Judaism as state religion and pertaining to the statuses and rights of non-Jewish residents, particularly marriage, family reunion, and burial. An inherent conflict between civil and religious definitions of Jewish identity causes a paradox situation: 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 authorities do not recognize them as Jews (e.g., if their father, not mother, was Jewish). Many immigrants are

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frustrated by their inability to bring to Israel their non-Jewish relatives – elderly parents or children from previous marriages. If one of the spouses is Jewish and the other is not, they have to be buried in different cemeteries, often located far apart. On top of that, non-Jewish immigrants may face tacit discrimination in different social contexts and negative stereotyping in Israeli public opinion and mass media (Sheleg 2004; Cohen and Susser 2009).

The purpose of this article is to examine the experiences of non-Jewish (Slavic) immigrants: women, wives of Jewish husbands, and men, husbands of Jewish wives, who came to Israel after 1990 under the Law of Return. This article stems from a larger narrative-based research that aimed to explore these immigrants' experiences of being married to Jews in the FSU and their lives in Israel as non-Jewish citizens. Theoretically the article is focused on the gendered experiences of migration and cultural transition (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Remennick 2005). We juxtaposed men's and women's experiences and interpretations of their evolving identification with the Jewish collective, feeling at home in Israel, attitudes toward conversion to Judaism (*giyur*), Jewish and Israeli holidays, and military service of their children as salient signifiers of Israeli-ness. All these issues reflect different dimensions of symbolic and cultural integration in Israeli society and may be viewed as components of cultural citizenship (Turner 2001; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008; Joppke 2010). It embraces the symbolic dimensions of belonging, emotional attachment, community membership, loyalty to the state, and gradual reshaping of one's personal and social identity. These motives surfaced repeatedly in the narratives and their apparent salience for our informants called for a deeper exploration of their perceptions of membership in the Jewish state.

Theoretical framing

Gender and immigration

The gender lens is becoming increasingly central to migration research. Drawing on different national contexts, researchers have argued that immigration process is gendered at every step and analyzed the different ways in which immigrant men and women decide to migrate, enter the labor market, and build social networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003; Remennick 2005; Lister, Williams, and Anttonen 2007; Ghorashi and Vieten 2012). Some researches pointed to the faster integration of immigrant women in the host society (Remennick 2003, 2005), while others reported an opposite trend (Pessar 2003); apparently integration outcomes reflect not just gender but also men's and women's socio-economic locations – education, work experience, family size, and more (Moch 2005; Lev Ari 2008). Two studies on the gender differentials in the adaptation process of Russian-Jewish immigrants in the USA (Gold 2003) and in Israel (Remennick 2005) concluded that women and men manifest different modes of adjustment: men succeed more on the labor market, while women develop new social ties and cultural interests. In light of these earlier findings on the gendered paths to integration, this article discusses the experiences of non-Jewish immigrants in the pursuit of cultural integration in Israel.

Cultural citizenship and symbols of integration

Citizenship is defined as the legal and political framework for achieving full membership in society and aims at incorporation of new groups into the national state (Shafir and Peled

2002). In nation-states based on common ancestry (*jus sanguinis*), citizenship is derived from the natural membership defined by birth in the ethnic community (Turner 2001; Joppke 2010). This principle is predominant in the ethno-national polity of Israel, where citizenship is a function of being Jewish, i.e., having a Jewish mother (regardless of being born in Israel or elsewhere); thus, gender, nationhood, and citizenship are all intertwined (Yuval-Davis 1997; Kravel-Tovi 2012). Turner (2001, 11) describes significant cultural dimensions of citizenship as follows:

Although citizenship is formal legal status, it is a consequence of nationalism and patriotic sentiment, intimately bound up with the sentiments and emotions of membership . . . Cultural citizenship can be described as cultural empowerment, namely the capacity to participate effectively, creatively and successfully within a national culture.

The integration of new immigrants to the host society is a complicated and a multidimensional process shaped by the size and composition of the immigrant wave, as well as by political framing of its entry. The process of social inclusion of co-ethnic immigrants, allegedly returning to their historic homeland and granted citizenship upon arrival (e.g., Russian Jews in Israel or ethnic Germans in Germany), is shaped by rather different forces vis-à-vis other types of migration – labor, family, or humanitarian (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008). Based on the findings of a large national survey, Remennick (2003) proposed four main indicators of integration among first-generation Russian immigrants in Israel: (1) the improving proficiency and broader usage of Hebrew, (2) skilled occupation in the mainstream (rather than ethnic) economy, (3) inclusion of native Israelis in immigrants' social networks, and (4) shifts in the cultural and media consumption from co-ethnic (Russian) to the mainstream (Hebrew). The evolving response of veteran Israelis to the mass influx and social mobility of the newcomers forms a 'context of reception' shaping the pace and quality of integration. Drawing on this framework, current study considers integration process of a large segment within this migration wave – non-Jews who settled in Israel as part of mixed families. We evaluate lived experiences of these Russian Israelis, shedding light on how gentile immigrants 'read the national ethos and participate in the local cultural discourse' (Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008).

Based on the integration criteria under conditions of mass co-ethnic migration (Remennick 2003), non-Jewish immigrants are often described as one of the least integrated groups. Indeed, being foreign to Jewish religion and traditions, these immigrants are mostly secular but culturally attached to Christianity; they are often less educated than their Jewish counterparts, work in unskilled jobs, have poor command of Hebrew, rely on Russian-language media, and have weak if any ties with native Israelis (Raijman and Pinsky 2011). However, this group of immigrants may seek (and find) alternative paths to integration on the symbolic and cultural levels, expressed in their wish to convert to Judaism, feeling at home, and general satisfaction with life in Israel, perceived by them as vast improvement over their lives in the impoverished ex-Soviet periphery (where they largely come from). Other expressions of belonging may include celebration of Jewish and Israeli holidays and supporting the military service of their children. These perceptions and practices can be seen as alignment with the hegemonic ethos of the Jewish state, where the status of ethno-religious minorities is defined by their loyalty and contribution to national security and economic prosperity (Goodman 2008; Sasson-Levy 2006; Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983). We will argue that subjective feelings of belonging and having a new home may be seen as legitimate expressions of immigrant integration.

Participants and methods

The study is based on the qualitative analysis of 38 semi-structured interviews with non-Jewish FSU immigrants recruited via researchers' social networks and snowballing from the towns of Central Israel, Beer-Sheba, and Haifa area. The informants were 22 women and 16 men aged between 35 and 65 who moved to Israel as non-Jewish spouses of Jews, on the average 13 years ago. Nineteen women were married to Jewish men (two were divorced and one widowed) and had one to four children. Fifteen men were married, one was divorced, and all had one to five children. Twelve out of 22 women, especially older and less educated ones, worked in unskilled jobs, such as cleaning, elder-/childcare, and sales. The younger and better educated informants worked as professionals in the high-tech industry, as hospital nurses or social workers. Nine men out of 16 had secondary or technical education and worked in unskilled jobs as welders, truck drivers, and factory workers. Seven others had higher education from the FSU (mostly in engineering or computing) and were employed in the high-tech industry. Thirteen informants came originally from Central Russia, including Moscow and St. Petersburg, the rest were from Ukraine (11), Siberia (3), and other ex-Soviet territories.

Most informants had some cultural ties to Christianity: had been baptized as children and kept some Orthodox traditions in their family of origin. However, most defined themselves as secular or even anti-religious. Only one man and three women were active Christians and belonged to a church or religious community. Most informants described the motives for their emigration from the FSU as economic and admitted that they moved to Israel in search of higher living standards and better future for their children.

The semi-structured interviews (in Russian) took place at different locations: informant's homes and workplaces, parks, etc. Interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and then transcribed in full. The questions related to the two different periods of their lives: before and after immigration to Israel. The interview opened with the informant's personal background, their marriage to a Jew, social attitudes toward Jews and mixed marriages, and encounters with anti-Semitism in the FSU. The second part addressed the informants' current lives: employment, social integration, children's situation, and general satisfaction with life in Israel. They were also asked to relate to conversion to Judaism (*giur*), Christianity, and Israeli traditions and holidays. Since we did not approach our informants with clear-cut questions or hypotheses but rather facilitated their free narratives, the analysis of the transcripts drew on the Grounded Theory (Strauss 1987) and reflected dominant themes and topics appearing in the interviews.

Selected findings

Intermarriage among Soviet Jews

As elsewhere, marriage to members of the dominant majority (Slavs in this case) has been the sign of ongoing secularization and assimilation of the Jews under Soviet regime. Despite social anti-Semitism, the marriages between Jews and Non-Jews had been widespread and socially acceptable in the USSR/FSU since the 1920s, and continued to increase during the post-Soviet period (Remennick 2007). In the younger cohorts of Russian/Soviet Jews, more than 60% have non-Jewish spouses, with exogamy being more common among Jewish men. Thus, in 1979, 51% of married Jewish men and only 33% of the women had spouses from another ethnic group; by 2002, the share of non-Jewish

spouses among Jewish men and women has reached 72% and 53%, respectively (Tolts 2006).

After the war, Soviet Jews have completed the process of assimilation to the urban middle class, were mostly secular, and did not differ much from other educated Soviet citizens in their lifestyles. The traces of old Jewish habitus (holidays, food, and Yiddish lore) were found mainly in the household with the grandparents coming from provincial Jewish towns (Remennick 2007, 32). Our gentile informants expressed different opinions on the pluses and minuses of being married to a Jewish spouse. Most women (20 out of 22) spoke about the advantages of being married to a Jewish husband in Russia. In the context of high divorce rates, often due to male violence and alcoholism, Jewish males were known, by contrast, as reliable partners, non-drinkers, and family men. For instance, Luda, 59, a former geologist from St. Petersburg, said:

Jews differed from others only positively: they were better educated and more culturally refined. They were the best professionals, and others sought their advice and services.

Q. Was marrying a Jew considered a right move?

Tacitly, yes, although few people would admit this openly. Generally, back in these years, we were distant from the issues of nationality, they were ostensibly unimportant. For the 10 years of my schooling in Leningrad, I've never heard the word Jew, although now I realize that we had several Jewish students in my class. I never encountered open anti-Semitism. Once I overheard my father defending some Jew who had been insulted, because all the best doctors in his clinic were Jewish and he respected them. Jews were the best workers in every field; like, when the store manager was Jewish, everyone knew that this store was well-run and had more produce than others. The moment the Jew was removed from this position, the store fell apart. But nobody ever said these things openly.

Q. So how did your parents respond when you married a Jew?

Very positively, no problem at all.

This comment attests to the social milieu where Jews were viewed in the favorable light (particularly as professionals) and construed as committed family partners. Having internalized the socialist tenet of 'internationalism' (implying irrelevance of ethnic and religious origins for people's social value), the families and friends of these women accepted their marriages to the Jewish partners. This attests to the variability of the local contexts and individual differences in the Jewish–Gentile relations despite common Soviet anti-Semitism (Remennick 2007). Indeed, in many other cases, the families, coworkers, neighbors, and others did not view these marriages so favorably. Some Russian women who chose to marry Jews suffered because of their marital Jewish last names. The story of Nina, 51, a senior librarian from Minsk, underscores the paradoxes of ethnic labels in the USSR and Israel:

Our last name is Kogan – a typically Jewish name. So, when I applied for the post of library director, it came up strongly against me ... the previous director was also Jewish, and officials were always irked by the Jewish names, especially in a public organization in the center of Minsk ... So the boss, who had to decide on this appointment, barked, 'What – a Jew again?!' Hearing that it was only my husbands' name, that I was Russian, he retorted – 'Same difference, they'll leave for Israel together.' And this is indeed what happened ... So, there I was considered Jewish by association, and here in Israel I became Russian again, despite my last name ...

Contrary to Slavic women's stories about advantages of Jewish husbands, non-Jewish men did not mention the advantages of Jewish wives. They simply asserted their internationalism and no concern about the ethnicity of their wives. These men did not face

overt anti-Semitism because they did not change their last names after marriage and their children officially passed as non-Jews. Lev, a 50-year-old Ukrainian now living in Holon, expressed this attitude:

Lev: We lived in a small town in South Ukraine and spoke Ukrainian at home. Twenty-seven years ago I married a Jewish woman, and my family did not mind it at all. Most families in our town knew each other; our fathers had worked in the same organization, and later my mother and wife met in the same workplace.

Q. Was it considered OK to marry a Jew?

Lev: The religion or ethnicity didn't matter back then. We simply liked each other and decided to start a family. My parents knew hers as decent and hard-working people just like us, and it was enough ... Later, when the USSR fell apart and living in the Ukraine became difficult, I suggested that we emigrate to Israel. My wife prepared all the necessary papers and we got Israeli visas ... My workmates used to joke that I became Jewish myself, or behaved like a Jew (especially when I excelled in something or tried new things). They said you learned this from your in-laws ...

Lev did not suffer from his Jewish family ties, but rather benefited from the positive image of Jews as good workers. Across our sample, men were less assimilated into the Jewish families of their wives vis-à-vis deeper immersion of Russian wives in their adopted Jewish environs. If the Jewish in-laws or the husband himself were keeping some Jewish traditions, it was more likely that a gentile wife would adopt them and learn to cook and run her household Jewish-style. Thus, Nadia, 52, a Russian widow who immigrated six years ago with her Jewish family, now lives in Israel's North and works in eldercare. She recounted:

Nadia: When I married my husband as a 19-year-old, I took his Jewish name because I was willing to fully share my life with him. We lived for many years with his parents, and I became really close to them; I cared for my mother-in-law before she passed away, and then my husband also died at the age of 50 ... I was married to him for over 30 years and literally became inseparable from his family. My views and practices had been strongly influenced by the Jewish traditions, and I am trying to keep them till this day, when my Jewish relatives are all gone.

Q. Did you follow any Christian traditions back in Russia or now?

Nadia: Not really. I made a commitment to the Jewish family with traditions of its own and I was loyal to their lifestyle. It would be unethical for me to underscore my Christian background. I learned to celebrate Jewish holidays and cook Jewish dishes back in Russia and do so also in Israel. Like, I never work on Yom Kippur despite being offered a good pay (many families need a sitter for the holiday) ... I think my husband and in-laws won't approve of this, and I feel that they watch me from the heavens ... That's why I keep with the same Jewish routines and try not to transgress.

Nadia felt that her marriage to a Jewish man implied consent to assimilate to his family lifestyle. She was practically adopted by her in-laws at a young age and stayed with them for most of her life. She accepted Jewish religious customs as her own (without formal conversion) and still keeps them in Israel, even after all of her Jewish relatives have left this world. By contrast, no similar examples have been found among the gentile husbands who participated in this study. Moreover, some of them tried to stress that their Jewish wives did not fall short of their Russian and Ukrainian peers. Thus, two Ukrainian men told proudly that their Jewish wives or mothers-in-law used to cook excellent borscht – a traditional Ukrainian beet soup also common in Russia.

The themes and attitudes exemplified by these quotes recurred in most interviews with Slavic men and women. Thus, the gendered nature of gentile spouses' inclusion in their

Jewish marital families is rather apparent. Non-Jewish women were more willing to assimilate and adopt their in-laws' lifestyles than were their non-Jewish male counterparts. We turn now to the next question ensuing from this finding: did this pattern of gendered response continue upon migration to Israel?

Living as Russians in Israel

Ethno-religious alterity and conversion

In Orthodox Judaism, Jewishness of children is determined by the mother, contrary to the Soviet tradition where ethnically mixed children usually followed the paternal line. Hence, sons and daughters of Jewish fathers (and gentile mothers) often tended to identify and behave as Jews, often suffering from anti-Semitism as a result (Remennick 2007). Many of them were offended by the fact that in Israel they had to convert by the Orthodox rules in order to be officially recognized as Jews. Many Russian mothers had not known that their children would not be recognized as Jews in Israel and were really shocked by this discovery upon arrival. The situation of children of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is better because they are recognized as Jews.

Since the early mid-1990s, the social discourse around non-Jewish immigrants has revolved around the issue of conversion (*giyur*), with the overall finding that only about 5% of this group has successfully converted via Orthodox procedure, the only one legally accepted in Israel. Apparently, rigorous demands of Orthodox *giyur*, entailing a long study, rabbinical exams, and an explicit pledge to lead a highly observant life, are unacceptable for most former Soviets raised as atheists (Remennick and Prashizky 2010). What they seek is social inclusion and becoming full-fledged citizens, not Orthodox Jews. Most ex-Soviet converts (80%) are women whose motive is often to confer their Jewishness to children. Thus, the conversion motivation (and procedures) are clearly gendered (Sheleg 2004; Goodman 2008; Kravel-Tovi 2012).

Although only 4 out of 22 women in this study have actually converted, almost all of them had pondered over the *giur* option soon upon arrival in Israel. This was often in response to the comments made by various state agents (immigration officials, etc.) and veteran Israelis (neighbors, coworkers) indicating that non-Jews, especially the women, should convert to Judaism. These officials and laypersons, most of whom were secular, served as gatekeepers and promoted the hegemonic view that Israel is the place for Jews only. Over time, these women realized that *giur* was not a true necessity; normal life and work in Israel were possible without converting. Notably, both the women who underwent *giyur* and those who decided against it explained their decision by the interests of their children. As immigrants to the new society, these mothers saw *giur* as an entrance ticket to Israeli mainstream. Apparently, social expectations of conversion are directed to non-Jewish women married to Jewish men, but not vice-versa. Let us hear what these women and men had to say about their deliberations.

Nina, 51, came from Minsk 16 years ago and lives in a small Northern town. After some hesitation, she finally decided not to convert:

I came here with some apprehensions about my being Russian, maybe even facing discrimination as ethnic minority. When my sister saw me off at the airport, she gave me a small golden cross, and then a man on the same flight saw it on my neck and uttered, with contempt, 'Do you know where you're going? You better take this off.' From this moment, I had these doubts and fears in my head . . . Then we started our life on the kibbutz, which was a secular place, and all its members were non-religious . . . but one of the bosses said to me that I should do my best to convert. So I decided that I would do it for the sake of my kids. Soon I

met with a rabbi who explained the process to me . . . I was already 36 and my kids were past their 13 birthday, so I kept thinking – maybe it was too late for me . . . I went to see this rabbi again, and he confirmed my doubts about our age. He said that my children were considered adults by religious law, so it would be up to them whether to convert or not.

Nina's first experiences during and soon after her arrival to Israel were suggestions (almost demands) to change her appearance and identity – from a passerby's comment about her cross to kibbutz official's suggestion to convert. The intolerance of Israeli society to the non-Jewish newcomers was expressed rather directly and appeared in many narratives (18 out of 22). Nina has two children, the twins of different sex, and their subsequent story is rather typical. Her daughter fell in love with an Israeli man from a traditional Mizrahi (Eastern) family, which opposed their relationship from the outset. Despite this, she eventually married him after undergoing the Orthodox *giur*, complying with her fiancé's wish. Nina supported her daughter during this tedious process that 'took much time and effort.' At the same time, Nina's son is not circumcised and does not even think about *giur*. In our small sample, four daughters of Russian mothers have converted via Orthodox *giur* and three married native Jewish men, indicating that such partnerships between young Sabra men and non-Jewish women are rather common.

Another example of conversion for the children's sake was provided by Mila, 59, who lives in an Orthodox religious settlement with her family:

Mila: I am Russian and went through full Orthodox *giyur* for the benefit of my children. My daughter has also converted when she was 16, and my son became Jewish automatically after my conversion, since he was only 7. We started the process soon upon arrival, and I was intent on completing it to secure an equal start for my children in the new country. As we live in the Jewish state, the children should be Jewish. So I endured a long and difficult process of learning and changing every aspect of my lifestyle.

Q. So how do you identify now?

Mila: As a Jew with proper papers.

Q. What it means for you to be Jewish?

Mila: To feel at home in this country, unlike most other Russians, who after living in Israel for 20 years still stick together, self-isolate, and face the same problems which they had hoped to leave behind in Russia.

Mila's motivation for conversion was initially purely social and not religious, although she has persisted in her observance ever since. At the outset, she tried to achieve better social integration for herself and her children by means of *giyur*. She feels now 'as a Jew with proper papers,' stressing the official aspect of her conversion and upgrading of her status vis-à-vis the state and its agents. The wish for normalizing their relationship with the state is typical for most former Soviets, reflecting their past experience of differential treatment of various ethnicities and the ensuing importance of the ethnic designation in their Soviet documents (Remennick 2007, 19). An alternative view was stated by Irina, 55, a high-tech firm employee. Her objection to converting was very resolved:

Soon upon arrival, I have learned that my children would be considered Russian in Israel. My husband's relatives are religious Jews, and when we first met with them, his cousin said to me, 'You should think about *giyur*, because you children will suffer here.' I said – no way! I was not going to convert to Judaism for administrative reasons, just to satisfy local officials . . . It will be up to my children, I said, to decide if they wish to convert . . . Maybe my attitude has influenced them too, and so none of us has converted till this day.

Irina resisted the bureaucratic attitude toward conversion and believed in essentiality of self-identity regardless of state categorization. So, while for some women (a minority)

conversion was the only right way of joining Israeli society, others saw it as a betrayal of their true self, even if the price was remaining a stranger.

While all 22 female informants had been advised to convert, only 2 out of 16 male informants had ever heard such suggestions. Sasha, 49, a hi-tech engineer who immigrated from Moscow 20 years ago, experienced a mild pressure while living with his family on the kibbutz. The irony of secular kibbutznics pushing religion on a gentile newcomer was not lost on him:

We had a funny episode on a kibbutz. When we asked to become members, I was told that as an ethnic Russian I should convert. I said that if I convert and wish to be true to my new status I won't be able to eat non-kosher food in the canteen or work on Shabbat, as is common on the secular kibbutz. Meaning that, as a convert, I should leave. Kibbutznics scorned my naiveté: 'Are you silly or what? Nobody intends to comply with all the mitzvot – just convert formally, pick the right papers, and get on with your life.' I answered that I was fed up with pretension in my old Soviet life ... I can't play the same trick in the face of G-d: if I promise to stick to certain rules I should deliver. So whom do you prefer, I said – a honest Russian or a fraudulent Jew? They laughed and chose the former. Hence I never converted.

Other non-Jewish men (14) told that they never wished to convert, nor were they advised to by veteran Israelis. Their refusal to convert was more clear-cut than that of the women most of whom recounted their deliberations and doubts, conversations with rabbis, or even starting conversion classes. Conversely, men had little to say on the matter beyond their sheer lack of interest; some, like Sasha, recalled this episode as a joke. Another typical joking response to the question about *giyur* (that requires circumcision) came from Nikolai, 62:

Me!? To cut my dear body part and thus become a Jew and eat kosher? No, thanks. I love pork and I will eat it till I expire. Why should I pretend to be somebody I am not? This is pure hypocrisy ... My son underwent circumcision when he was 15 – but he wished for it and that's OK. But at my age ...

The motive of downplaying or hiding the informants' real identity from the locals could be traced in several women's stories, exemplified by Nina's necklace with the cross (above). To downplay their otherness, some women decided to convert and circumcise their sons (4), while most others (16) altered their appearance (dress, hair style). A minority (like Irina and three to four others) felt that this mimicry is pointless, unacceptable, and false. Men simply chose to ignore their ethnic difference; an adage: 'I am not Jewish and have no intention to hide it. Local people have to get used to it' – was voiced by them repeatedly (14 out of 16). Not a single male informant expressed his wish to become Jewish because of either moral/spiritual or bureaucratic reasons. Aleksey, 41, who retrained from policeman in Russia to social worker in Israel, explained as follows:

Q. How do you feel about being non-Jewish in the Jewish state?

Aleksey: This is not a topic I dwell on too much. As social worker, I see all kinds of people living in Israel – Bedouins, Moroccans, immigrant from Africa, Latin America and Russia, you name it. If they are legal residents here, I should offer them the best service I can regardless of their identity. Over my 10 years in Israel, I never felt that people dislike me because I wasn't Jewish, and nobody ever suggested that I convert. For most people I meet here – as clients, friends or neighbors – it's unimportant if I am Russian or Jewish. As a citizen of Israel, it's important that I work for a living, pay taxes, and park my car in a legal spot. I am very grateful to Israel that it gave me citizenship and all civil rights, most importantly – the right to work, make a decent living and thus keep my dignity. I comply with all the rules of the land and feel protected, like any other Israeli ... As long as you don't break the law, you don't even feel the strong hand the state here, unlike in Russia.

Aleksey emphasized civic aspects of his citizenship: he considers himself a normative Israeli obeying the law, working hard, and paying taxes. He construes Israel as a liberal, multicultural society where his own ethnic alterity resonates with many others and is thus rendered irrelevant. The next example is from interview with Pavel, 46, who immigrated 15 years ago and works at a roof tile factory:

Pavel: At work they call me *nozri* [Christian] because they know I am not Jewish. Our factory employs men of different ethnicities, and our boss once suggested that Muslims get a day off on Fridays, Jews on Saturdays, and me on Sundays, if I wish. I didn't really care one way or the other. Everybody knows who I am and take it for a fact. Our director made a point of not discriminating against any group.

Q. Are you upset to be called *nozri*?

Pavel: Not really. Since I had been baptized, I am *nozri*, but so what? I am not interested in religion and think of myself just as a Russian man.

Both men sound rather content with their lives in Israel and have no intention to change or hide their ethnic alterity from the locals. Notably, none of the interviewees, male or female, told about actual episodes of discrimination on the labor market or in social relations due to their non-Jewishness. Some of them asserted that all ex-Soviets living in Israel, Jewish or not, experience certain prejudice from the natives due to their accented Hebrew, different demeanor, and work ethic (which many described as superior). Thus, the feelings of alienation (when present) were largely based on the 'soft' social markers, such as hostile comments, jokes, hints, and glances of state officials and other natives. Women were more sensitive to their othering by the natives and more willing to assimilate or at least not to stand out visually. Notably, none has alluded to episodes of sexual harassment by Sabra men – a topic rather common in the earlier research on Russian women in Israel (Remennick 1999; Lemish 2000). This may reflect our informants' older age and family status; alternatively, it suggests that the times of exoticization and sexualization of 'Russian blondes' in Israel are over, as these women became a regular feature of Israel's ethnic tapestry.

Pathways to integration and citizenship

All the interviewees saw their lives in Israel as an improvement over their pre-immigration lives due to higher economic security and tangible signs of material well-being (apartment and car ownership, being able to travel, and access to quality health services). Many of them mentioned social, political, and economic instability in Russia and Ukraine that had pushed them to leave and their unwillingness to return there. Virtually none regretted their emigration, complained of discrimination, or wanted to leave Israel because of it. Without being prompted, several Russian women stressed in the interviews that they saw Israel as their new homeland. Despite all the difficulties they have experienced upon resettlement, many emphasized their loyalty to the Jewish state. Masha, 45, a mother of two working in high-tech industry, said she feels Israeli and is a great patriot of her adopted country:

We've lived in Israel for 18 years now, and when I go back to Russia to see my parents, I no longer feel at home there ... We are all Israeli patriots - more so than many natives, by the way; when we are in Russia, we always defend Israel from all its critics ... My son served in the IDF, he was on the Lebanon border during the last war and he never asked for a leave, even when his grandpa in Russia died and we all went to the funeral. He said he couldn't leave when the country needs him so badly ... My daughter dates a local guy who observes Jewish traditions – and he is not bothered by my daughter's Russianness.

Masha's integration in Israeli society draws first and foremost on the experiences of her children – the military service of her son in a combat unit and her daughter's native (and traditional!) boyfriend. These two themes – children's military service and their ties (dating and marriage) with native partners – appear in most women's stories (15) and are usually colored by pride. The military service, as the most tangible sign of her four sons' integration and selfless giving to Israel, was also underscored by Olga, 50, who works as office cleaner:

Olga: My oldest son has already completed his military service, the other two are in the IDF now; when they demobilize, the youngest son will be drafted.

Q. What do you think of the IDF?

Olga: By and large, this is a positive force. The service is often dangerous, but these soldiers defend their homeland, their own families and the loved ones. *This is how the notion of motherland becomes real for them* [authors' emphasis].

Q. Do you see this country as your homeland?

Olga: I think that homeland is where the person and their family feel secure and good. This is what homeland means to me. I was born in the Ukraine but spent most of my life in Uzbekistan; do these countries need me? No. Do I need them? No. Maybe my sons and I can do some good for this country, and then it will finally become our home.

Military service plays an important role in the process of Israeli nationalization and is intended to serve the patriotic ideal (Sasson-Levy 2006). The integrating role of the army is especially potent for new immigrants, who gain there both military and civic skills, such as Hebrew and other classes toward their high school matriculation (if needed) and, recently, also a *giur* course. These skills are meant to enhance the immigrants' potential in the subsequent civil life. The children's military service and their 'upgrading' in the army ranks makes these mothers proud and reinforces their own symbolic citizenship.

At the same time, the ambivalence of these women's experiences as ethnic others makes them feel like 'strangers in the new homeland.' Most Russian women regularly visit their parents and other family members in Russia or Ukraine. The dualism of being a stranger while in Israel, especially in contacts with the natives, and being an Israeli while visiting FSU, was often mentioned by the interviewees. Tanya, 35, a programmer and mother of two boys (11 years in Israel), expressed this ironic twist in her position inside and outside the country:

Tanya: I understand that Israel is for the Jews; I will never feel fully local because I am not Jewish – so I see myself as a Russian expatriate. Yet, I raise my children to be Israeli patriots ... In 2005 we visited our former homes in Russia, meeting with the parents and old friends. The kids did not feel good there and were really happy to return. My husband and I also felt strange – many things we took for granted look nasty now, from our new standpoint ... Russians always take the Arab side in this conflict. Even my friends believe that Israelis are responsible for their troubles – because Jews oppress the Arabs and they have the right to resist. They would never understand us, how it feels to live under constant threats.

Q. Did you try to defend Israeli politics there?

Tanya: I did, I had to – because I live here and take Israeli problems as my own. Although I am not Jewish, I am Israeli citizen and I have no doubt about who is right in this conflict.

Tanya identifies with political views of the Right and tries to convince her Russian friends that justice is with the Jews. Thus, she sees herself as an insider who has to defend Israel from external attacks. Yet, she is a stranger among native Israelis, both as an immigrant and a non-Jew. Her emphasis on citizenship and loyalty to the State may serve as

partial compensation for her marginal ethnic status and the ensuing identity qualms. Similar motifs of ‘compensatory Israeli patriotism’ appeared in over half of women’s narratives.

The contentment with life in Israel and the sense of finding new home was common also among the men. Valery, 59, is Ukrainian living in Israel with his wife for 12 years. He has two married children and works at a meatpacking factory. In Ukraine he had been a skilled grinder and later worked as a foreman and production manager. His occupational downgrading in Israel surfaced time and again in his interview.

Valery: When we arrived I had to find a job right away, without taking a Hebrew class, because we had to pay our rent and bills. I took the first unskilled job at a metal factory I could find, but after 4 months the factory moved out of town and I had to quit. I realized that at my age then (47) it would be hard to find work – none of my calls and applications were answered . . . We were desperate and I was ready to take any job, just to make a living . . . So this meat factory is my third workplace and I really hate it – I only stay on for lack of other options. All our workers are Russian immigrants who couldn’t find jobs in their original occupations, and all the managers are local Israelis. I cut frozen meat with chain-saw for hours on end and my hands are frost-bitten. It’s very hard work but I have to endure till retirement for another eight to nine years . . .

Q. Don’t you regret having moved to Israel?

Valery: Not really, especially when I compare our life to the lives of our relatives in the Ukraine (we visited three times). My younger brothers look older than me – they live from hand to mouth. There are no stable jobs, the pay is low and costs of living go up every year. Here we work hard but at least we can afford living in good conditions and have everything we need. We feel at home and try to make the best of what we have. Home is where your children are and where you can make a living with dignity.

Despite his hard work, Valery is glad to live in Israel near his children. Most other male informants (13) perceived their lives in Israel as more settled and comfortable than the lives of their significant others in the FSU and, like Valery, they considered Israel their home. Most men connected to Israel mainly via the pragmatic, material channels, achieving financial security and ensuring good living standards for their families. The issues of citizenship, nationhood, or contribution to the common good often voiced by the women were less typical of men’s narratives. Most men were also disinterested in Israeli politics and did not make explicitly political comments (e.g., about their take on the Arab–Israeli conflict) the way many women did. Feeling little discomfort about their non-Jewish ethnicity, men did not need to offset this ‘flaw’ by expressing patriotic views. The men’s relative civic alienation in this small sample may also reflect their lower levels of education and toiling in manual workforce. Yet, most men related in some way to common Israeli topics of the military conflict, Arab animosity, etc. Lev, 50, a cement-mixer driver who came to Israel 15 years ago from a small Ukrainian town, said:

In Israel, one feels much more protected by the state in every possible sense – military, social and medical. I am glad we moved here, especially because of my wife’s poor health. I think in the Ukraine she’d already be dead because she needed complex surgery and we couldn’t afford it there . . . Our children also have better lives here, and if they work hard they can advance and find good jobs . . . On balance, our life here is much better. I do care about what happens in Ukraine – this is my old home and my relatives live there. But I would never go back there. I am proud to be Israeli and always stress this when I go online and talk to other Russian-speakers from different countries. I try to explain to them our complex politics, and who is right in the conflict. *My wife Raya is a great Israeli patriot and also active on Internet forums. When she was ill and stayed at home she spent hours on-line telling all her Internet friends from Ukraine, Russia and America about what was going on here during the Lebanon war, tried to offset the anti-Israeli bias of both Russian and Western media . . .* [our emphasis]

The solidarity with the Jewish collective against the Arabs construed as an ultimate Enemy was expressed time and again in the interviews. Most informants voted for right-wing political parties such as Likud and Our Home Israel. Like the above-cited women, some men also mentioned their pride in their children's army service. However, men held more critical and pragmatic views of the Israeli army based on their own Soviet military service. Some spoke about their children's bad experiences in the military that cooled their patriotic drive. The above-cited Lev told about his son who insisted to serve in a combat unit (despite being drafted for a maintenance job). The lad was transferred to a rocket platoon where he had to carry heavy ammunition and injured his back. Pavel's son was denied a place in an elite combat unit due to failed security clearance and ended up serving in a military prison. There he guarded Arab inmates and hated every day on the job. He sent countless requests for transfer which were denied and suffered of a nervous breakdown. It took his parents a great effort to help him demobilize and recover psychologically. Both men concluded that Israeli army did not meet their and their son's expectations.

A few other male informants compared between their own military service in the USSR and that of their children in Israel. They described the Soviet army as well organized, with strong discipline and clear line of command, while Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was described as disordered and wasteful of soldiers' time and ability. Yet others opined that the lack of clear separation between the military and civic spheres – when soldiers spend every other weekend at home and travel across the country with their guns, while parents too may visit them at their bases and call their commanders – further weakens the discipline and order. The lack of clear boundaries, they said, makes soldiers lazy and unfit for quick response to unexpected attacks and other challenges. Yet, none of these critics doubted the very need to serve in the IDF for their sons – as both regular and reserve duty soldiers at war time – although more doubts were voiced as to the daughters' IDF service.

The militarism and the warrior ethos are very strong in Israeli society, although the criticism of this 'sacred cow' is becoming more common (Sasson-Levy 2006; Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport 2008). Combat service is conceived as the ultimate contribution to the nation and common good. The adoption of the military discourse, support, and pride of the children's military service reflect these immigrants' aspirations to achieve full symbolic citizenship. By and large, they do not challenge the hegemonic military discourse of Israeli society. While women in this study stressed their patriotic motherhood, men were more reserved and critical in their perceptions of their children's service. Because the military duty is conceived as essentially masculine, male immigrants felt more entitled to criticize Israeli army. Although some men criticized certain aspects of the Israeli military (actually making it more humane than the Soviet army but possibly compromising its efficiency), this criticism was driven by the wish to improve and fortify it in the face of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Culinary *Giyur*: Jewish holidays and local food

Jewish traditional and Israeli national holidays play a significant role in shaping the lives of Israeli Jews; some scholars see them as rituals of Israeli civil religion, 'ceremonials, myths and creeds which legitimate the social order, unite the population and mobilize the society's members in pursuit of its dominant political goals' (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1983, ix). By valorizing traditional Jewish holidays – Rosh-Hashana (Jewish New Year), Sukkot, Pesah (Passover), Shavout, and Hanukkah – the State seeks to enhance Jewish solidarity and reinforce Jewish peoplehood across the Diaspora. Serving the same goals

are civic national holidays with adjacent ceremonies, such as Independence Day, Fallen Soldiers Memorial Day, and the Holocaust Memorial Day. All new immigrants regardless of their religiosity are expected to integrate to the local society through adoption of these holidays – as an act of symbolic conversion to Israel’s civic religion. Upon arrival, all newcomers are enrolled in Hebrew classes (*Ulpanim*) financed by the state, where they learn not just the language but also highlights of Israeli history, holidays, and traditions.

Thus, complying with the lifestyle shaped by the Jewish calendar is an important aspect of cultural citizenship in Israel and an arena for construction of patriotism and loyalty to the state. The gender differential in this expectation is apparent because in most societies women’s key social functions include care for the family, cooking, and cleaning. While in Soviet times almost all women worked full-time on par with men, they were still responsible for most household and childrearing tasks. Since many Russian immigrant women, including former professionals, experienced occupational downgrading in Israel, they often refocused their attention on traditional feminine roles as mothers and homemakers as the source of meaning and satisfaction (Remennick 2005). Moreover, these domestic and family-related roles often served them as a venue for integration into Israeli mainstream. Adopting local cuisine and learning to cook traditional Israeli dishes was a particular source of pride for many female informants. Thus, Valentina, 67, an atheist and a mother of four adult children, two of whom still lived at home, spent a lot of time cooking. She prided herself on familiarity with local dishes:

My youngest son studied in a religious boarding school and knows all about the Jewish household rules; he teaches the rest of us how to do things right ... The students often spent weekends in religious families, and he learned from them which dishes are served for Shabbat and holidays ... He also got me the Israeli cookbook in Russian, making it so much easier! I’ve learned to cook khamin [a traditional meat, beans, and potatoes stew for Shabbat slow-cooked in the oven] ... I collect cooking recipes from everyone I meet here – I mean veteran Israelis ... My daughter knows how to cook gefilte-fish and she serves it for the Passover meal we have every year ... We celebrate all Jewish holidays; in Ulpan they taught us about Rosh ha-Shana, Sukkot, Purim – everything ...

Valentina is the matriarch of a large (by Russian standards) extended family, which gets together for both the Jewish and Russian holidays. All those holidays are celebrated by eating what is regarded as traditional meals prepared by her and her daughter. Russian women usually learn about local food customs through their children (who learn Hebrew faster, go to local schools, and befriend native kids and their families), as well as teachers, friends, and cook books. Thus, many immigrants develop the sense of home in the host society via adopting local cuisine and starting to cook and eat ‘like proper Israelis.’ With a trace of irony, we can call this ‘a culinary *giyur*’ – a conversion much more accessible and joyful for many than a purely religious one.

Another example is Luba, 44, a former engineer and divorced mother of two:

Luba: When my daughter was studying for *giyur*, we lighted candles on Shabbat, she said the prayer and I just watched her in awe ... so thanks to my daughter’s *giyur* I’ve also learned something.

Q. How do you feel about Jewish religious traditions? What about Christianity?

Luba: Very positive to both, no problem at all. My family roots are Christian, naturally; my mom always celebrated Easter (also when it was unwelcome in Soviet times); we baked kulichi [Easter pastry] and colored eggs, and slaughtered a hog for the meal ... But since we moved to Israel, we also started doing all the Jewish holidays. Thus, we have it twice as good: first kulichi and eggs for Easter and then matzoth for the Passover ...

Q. Did you keep any Jewish traditions before moving to Israel?

Luba: Not really. My husband respected my Christian leanings (we always celebrated Easter in the Ukraine), and that's why I respect his Jewish roots when we finally moved to Israel. When our son was born here, we had him circumcised, and our daughter had been baptized before we came here – so what?

Q. Over time spent in Israel, have you adopted Jewish traditions as your own?

Luba: To some extent, yes. Since you live here, you get used to the local customs and try to be respectful ... I love Israel and see it as my adopted homeland; my children are half-Jewish and we are grateful for the chance for a new start that we got here ...

Q. Do you still keep Shabbat rules?

Luba: Like I said, when my daughter was in the *giyur* process, we went to a synagogue and lighted candles, but now that she is already *gera* [convert] we stopped. She's got proper papers and learned all she wanted to know about Judaism.

The ease of combining Judaism and Christianity appeared in the narratives of most informants (seven out of eight) who keep some Christian traditions in Israel. They often construed celebrating holidays and keeping customs of different religions as 'having it twice as good' rather than deviance or heresy. Like Luba, many of them felt that adopting Jewish practices around food and eating (without renouncing old traditions) expressed their gratitude and loyalty to Israel. Yet, one can see how shallow these new habits are: the moment Luba's daughter has passed *giyur* tests and got 'proper papers,' their visits to synagogue and other Shabbat practices were abandoned. Luba and her daughter clearly saw a chance to learn some basics of Judaism as a useful asset in Israel, but none of them really aspired to Judaic observance.

Thus, for most Russian women in this study (19), the process of getting closer to the Israeli society often occurred via embracing local culinary customs and specific holiday foods. Adopting national culinary traditions and holiday practices made these women feel more connected to Israeli citizenship, at least in its cultural and lifestyle expression. While women adjusted to the local customs 'from within' (as immediate actors who learn to cook and serve Israeli-style), men often remained outside observers of the holidays and other local traditions. Nikolay, 62, a factory worker, 20 years in Israel, said:

On Pesah we get together with our children and grandchildren – the holiday is important for them. We hide *afikoman* [a small gift] in line with the local custom, but otherwise it is a usual family meal. On Purim we enjoy buying costumes for the little ones ... so we sort of comply with the external side of the holidays. But they aren't really part of our home routine; for example I never fast on Yom Kippur (as I never did during Christian fasts) but I don't drive. My son chose to fast and it's up to him. I was raised in the communist tradition and religion is foreign to me; you can't teach old dog new tricks.

Peter, 58, a welder from Ashdod (17 years in Israel) and a father of two adult children, answered the question about celebration of Israeli civic holidays:

I don't really identify with these holidays as I wasn't part of this country's history. They mostly have to do with the war losses, but I have no close relatives or friends who died here, no graves to visit in the cemetery. I do stop and get out of the car during the Holocaust Day siren, like everyone else. But the only real holiday for me is the Independence Day in May, when we have a barbeque with friends.

Most men in this sample work in hard physical jobs and are not responsible for home chores, which are women's responsibility (despite also working full-time). As a result, women's integration in Israeli society is accomplished through the adoption of local foods and holidays, while men do not really identify with these events and act as passive

onlookers or guests rather than participants. While most informants, men and women alike, became familiar with Israeli customs and ‘civil religion’ at some level, the women were generally more active and enthusiastic and invested more effort into celebrating local holidays, feeling more confident about the local ‘know-how.’

Conclusions

This study explored the experiences of the gentile informants – the wives and husbands of Jewish partners who came to Israel in the recent wave of immigration from the FSU. On the general level, these newcomers, an ethnic minority within the Jewish majority, compare their current living standards to those of their impoverished co-ethnics in the FSU and feel content with their improved well-being in the new country. Socialized in the polity where the privileged status of titular nations versus ethnic minorities was inherent in most state policies, they did not come to Israel expecting equal treatment on par with the national majority. Hence, they were grateful to the Jewish state for enjoying most economic and social rights and seldom complained of discrimination or exclusion. In contrast, the Jewish immigrants, as members of the hegemonic majority endowed with the sense of entitlement, adjust their frame of reference, comparing their work situation and living standards to those of native Israeli Jews and often feeling disadvantaged (Remennick 2005).

The gendered nature of cultural citizenship as construed by these immigrants stands in the center of the study, showing that Russian (and other Slavic) women are generally more flexible and adaptive to the local culture than are co-ethnic men. The plurality of non-Jewish women unequivocally identified with Israel’s Jewish majority, mirroring their willing immersion in the everyday habitus of their Jewish families-in-law before migration to Israel. These Slavic women, who had socially and culturally converted to Jewishness, construed their relations to Israeli society first and foremost via motherhood and responsibility for their families. Concern for the children’s future lies at the heart of their deliberations about conversion: the main reason for some of them to comply with the rigorous demands of Orthodox *giyur* was to improve their children’s integration in the new society. According to Goodman (2008), *giur* in today’s Israel is not only a religious matter, but a venue for ‘nationalization’ of non-Jewish immigrants turning them into complete citizens. The state is closely involved in the conversion project of Russian immigrants as its funder, supervisor, and promoter (Waxman 2013). Because there is no separation between state and religion in Israel, citizenship is mediated by membership in religious community, which for Jews is determined by mother’s religion thus shaping the lines of Israel’s bio-politics (Krael-Tovi 2012). Hence, the women’s experience of citizenship and deliberations on conversion are refracted through the lens of motherhood, while men typically feel exempt of this responsibility when mothers of their children are considered Jewish. The perception of Israel as the new homeland is also mediated through motherhood: most women were proud to be mothers/grandmothers of the combat soldiers, and of the daughters who entered relationships with native Jewish men. The perceived success of the children, who became increasingly Israeli, projected on the mothers’ feeling that Israel was gradually becoming their true homeland. Since Russian immigrant women were often construed by the Israeli media and broad public as a threat to the sexual mores of local men (Remennick 1999; Lemish 2000), our informants (who are older and married but still fair skinned and blonde) may try to offset these implicit allegations by stressing their maternal and domestic virtues.

It is therefore not surprising that another tangible gender-related sign of these women’s integration in the new society was their learning to cook local dishes, especially those

symbolically entangled with Jewish High Holydays. Thus, many Russian women discovered and joined Israeli-ness via Jewish cuisine and domestic customs (such as deep cleaning of the house before Passover), undergoing a kind of a 'culinary conversion' to Judaism. On the other hand, this adaptation is inevitably partial and selective, whereby only some traditions are adopted while others are avoided (e.g., bread is widely present in the homes during Passover week). The style of celebrating Jewish holidays by the immigrant families is apparently hybrid, mixing the elements of Russian, Christian, and Jewish/Israeli customs. Yet, most women emphasized in their narratives the utmost effort they were making to align their family lives with the Jewish calendar and Israeli traditions – as one of the key markers of their successful social integration in the new homeland and a testimony of their genuine citizenship.

Contrary to the women, the integration of the immigrant men occurs mostly in pragmatic rather than symbolic ways. Their manhood is constructed through their roles as breadwinners and they evaluate their lives in Israel mainly drawing on their economic standing, improved vis-à-vis their premigration lives. While most men mentioned their children and grandchildren as a source of pride and connection to Israel, the work and income-related aspects of their lives came to the fore as more central. By contrast to the women, few men ever considered conversion or tried to hide their ethnic identity in order to merge with their new environment. Arguably, immigrant men's social identity in the new context is more autonomous and static, while women's is more malleable and relational (similar conclusions were made by Remennick 2005). A similar gendered script of adaptation to the host society (more instrumental for men, more symbolic for women) has been found in other immigrant communities, particularly among Pilipino, Chinese, and other Asians in America (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003), East Europeans in West Europe (Moch 2005), and Israeli immigrants in the USA (Gold 2003; Lev Ari 2008).

Gender differences in perception of Israeli institutions came to the fore in the comments about IDF. While women were rather enthusiastic about Israeli army and believed that the service was beneficial for their children's maturation and social inclusion, some men (who had served in the Soviet army) made critical remarks, specifically about the lack of clear separation between the military and civic life. Like the women, they underscored their loyalty to the state via patriotic fatherhood, but also felt free to question the way IDF service is organized and managed. At the same time, Slavic men in this sample manifested low interest in political or civic engagements, feeling no need to offset their ethnic alterity or prove legitimacy of their citizenship in Israel. They stressed the multiethnic nature of Israeli social settings (the army, workplace etc.) and felt accepted on their own terms by most natives. In their view, many secular Israelis (particularly on the kibbutz) relate to the matters of religion and ethnic status as bureaucratic formality and see *giyur* as a venue for social normalization rather than religious sacrament. Goodman (2008), Sheleg (2004), Krael-Tovi (2012), Waxman (2013), and other Israeli scholars who have closely studied *giyur* practices may actually endorse that view.

The men's stance toward Jewish and Israeli holidays can be described as more detached and passive in comparison to the women's more active and involved one. Most men observe these celebrations and preparations for them (cooking, cleaning etc.) as onlookers who find it difficult to identify with these events. However, both men and women make an effort of participation in these new rituals, particularly the civic ones – also when they personally do not feel deep attachment to Israeli national narrative and recent history. We conclude that the overall marginal position of these non-Jewish immigrants in the ethno-national polity of Israel can explain their search for some form of

belonging and loyalty to the State. Since gentile women are more often perceived by the locals as ‘others’ and hear suggestions to align themselves with Israeli norms (by conversion, hiding their religion, etc.), they often respond by underscoring their loyalty and belonging more ardently than do the men. Some recent studies in Europe have also shown that immigrant women belonging to visible minorities are ‘othered’ by the native majority more strongly than their male counterparts (Ghorashi and Vieten 2012). Hence, the defensive or compensatory response (i.e., the wish to prove their normality and belonging) seems to be more typical of ethnically different women than men. Pursuing this symbolic path, they aim at the inclusion in the dominant Jewish collective and receiving full cultural citizenship. Men’s higher gender status in the family and in the social hierarchy of citizenship allows them to be less adaptive and more critical of their new society. Thus, our findings underscore the gendered nature of citizenship and its close relationship with the gender norms of ethno-national collectivity previously shown by Berkovitch (1997), Yuval-Davis (1997) and Suad (2000) in the Middle East and by Lister, Williams, and Anttonen (2007) in Western Europe.

Note

1. We use the terms ‘ethnically mixed’ or simply ‘mixed families’ instead of ‘inter-faith families’ used in the American literature, since Jewishness was defined as ethnicity in the FSU and most spouses in such unions (Jewish and gentile) were secular, i.e., of no faith. The number of *gentiles without any Jewish roots* who immigrated to Israel with their Jewish spouses is estimated at 70,000–100,000 (exact figures are unavailable).

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