

# Chapter 1. Israeli Towns through the Eyes of Russian-Speaking Israelis

## **Place, Identity and Identification**

The ultimate dream of an immigrant is to find a better life and feel at home in a new country. Home often serves as a metaphor for a familiar territory and activity, an embodiment of a place where one feels safe and comfortable. Yet almost inevitably immigration is associated with the feeling of loss, be it separation from family and friends, inability to conduct a habitual way of life, or speak one's native language. In addition, migration presupposes that a person abandons familiar places, including one's favorite places. Although for contemporary people space is primarily functional and secular, and a relative desacralising and desymbolising of the environment seems undeniable, in particular in everyday life, for many psychological links with familiar places remain strong. Moreover, these links may become apparent only under conditions of stress (Relph 1976: 65). No wonder then that overcoming the longing for the old place and adapting to a new one is an essential part of integration processes for immigrants.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the evolution of place identity among Russian-speaking Israelis, immigrants of the last wave. Place identity is understood as an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolize or situate identity. Place identity answers the question, "Where do I belong?" (Cuba & Hummon 1993: 548). Following Korpela we see place identity not as a chaotic mix of images and feelings about physical settings, but as cognition with its own internal logic and coherence as a result of active self-regulation.

The main basis of place identity is some sort of emotional attachment to place (Korpela 1989: 245). Since place has both physical and social aspects and is viewed as a social category, place identity is not an isolated or separate part of identity concerned with place, rather all aspects of identity, to a greater or lesser extent have place-related implications (Twigger-Ross & Uzell 1996: 206; Dixon & Durrheim 2000: 27).

A person's identity is not a frozen construct but keeps evolving under the influence of the environment and events in which one participates. Similarly, places have to be regarded in relation to the world. They are continuously produced and reproduced in interaction with their surroundings, and as a result may acquire new meanings for individuals and groups (Massey 1994: 155; Gustafson 2001: 6). What is of a particular interest when we consider immigrants' place identity is whether newcomers experience places in their new country as insiders or outsiders, and how the shift from an outsider's to an insider's perspective is manifested in the discourse. In other words, we adopt the approach of studying the city "from within" as it is experienced by its inhabitants (Schneider 1986).

Place identity and attachment can be investigated using different spatial ranges, from a house to a country (Hidalgo & Hernández 2001). Before emigration, Soviet Jews were predominantly city dwellers, and in choosing their new domicile they also gave preference to urban areas. In our previous projects related to immigration it became clear that the city of origin was an important part of our subjects' self-description. Moreover, in talking about the perception of space in the new country, it was the native town, the city where subjects studied or liked to visit that were often used as the basis for comparing the quality of life and life styles in the old and the new countries (Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2002; Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2007: 174–180). Our more recent ethnographic observations suggest that for those who immigrated over 20 years ago, as well as for the greenhorns, the city remains the main reference point for place identification.

## Material

The material for this chapter is drawn from three different sources. The first body of data is interview-based. In our study of immigrants' personal narratives we conducted 123 in-depth unstructured interviews with 143 respondents who immigrated to Israel between 1989

and 1999. Among the many themes that emerged were perception of space, meanings of places and cities. We did not ask our interviewees specific questions about their towns of origin or the towns where they settled in Israel, yet many of them addressed this theme. In 2006 we added 10 focus interviews with young people who had immigrated as small children or adolescents, and whose time in Israel ranged from 6–18 years. We were interested to know whether these young people felt at home in the towns where they live now and whether memories of their towns of origin influenced their perception of Israel's urban life. We also wanted to check what symbolic values are attributed to cities by young Russian-speaking Israelis and whether they have inherited the perception of urban life from the generation of their parents who had spent part of their adult life in the USSR. While analyzing focus interviews we compared the interviewees' opinions and observations of urban life with those that had been expressed in personal narratives about immigration in our earlier project (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2007: 157–180; Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2006).

The second source of material that we have used is articles about city life in the Russian-language press and electronic media. Although compared to the peak in the late 1990s, the number of the Russian-language newspapers has dwindled, those that have survived without turning into mere digests of the Russian and Ukrainian press still give extensive coverage of city life. Thus, the daily *Vesti* (News) and the weekly *Novosti Nedeli* (News of the Week) publish supplements providing chronicles of events in various Israeli towns, especially those where the concentration of Russian speakers is high, e.g., Haifa, Upper Nazareth, Ashdod, Netanya, and so on. The newspapers inform the readers about local building programs, educational and social projects, as well as cultural events, such as festivals, concerts and exhibits. They interview municipal officials and discuss city problems, in particular those that concern Russian-speaking residents and various NGOs launched by immigrants and catering to their needs and interests, e.g., Veterans' organizations, Associations of Scientists, communities of fellow-countrymen<sup>1</sup>, and so on. Besides information about current events in Israeli towns, newspapers publish essays about towns in the FSU. The titles of the columns publishing such materials are either reminiscent of the Soviet press: *Stone Jungles*, *The Country of Facades*, or mobilize cultural memory alluding to Russian culture and folklore: *Pharmacy, Street, Lantern...*, (an allusion to Alexander Blok's poem *The Night, the Street, the Lantern, and the Pharmacy*),

*Whose Are You, Aliya?* (an allusion to Iosif Heifets' screen adaptation of Boris Vasiliev's novelette *Whose Are You, Old Guys?*), and so on. These texts present a collage of nostalgic memories of the past, ironic chronicles of the Soviet era and travelogues, in which authors report on their trips to post-Soviet towns emphasizing the mix of novel trends and idiosyncrasies of the past: "Wow, Ukhta, Wow, Kargopol" (Davidovich 2012), "It Happened, It happened in Odessa" (Kerdman 2001), "The Intoxicated Empire, Or a Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow (Biased Notes)" (Kotliarskii 2003) Not all of these articles are written by professional journalists. Thus in 2003, on the eve of tercentenary of St. Petersburg, the newspaper *Vesti* and the association Israel-Russia held a contest "This beloved city". The jury considered over 100 texts in prose and verse, and some of them were later published in the newspaper (Vasilieva 2003).

In recent years, the Russian-language press has increased the number of articles devoted to historical monuments and memorial places in Israeli towns. Journalists invite the reader to explore Israeli towns, discover nooks and corners that are not included in the standard repertoire of guided tours or trace Russian presence in Palestine and the role of Russian Jews in its modernization and urbanization. The following titles may serve as an illustration of this trend: *The Parallel World of Jerusalem* (Palant 2012); *At the Whaling Wall. Russian Travelers and Pilgrims* (Brio 2012), *I am from the street of I: From the Cycle "Strolling in Tel Aviv"* (Rybalka 2011). In addition, newspapers publish translations of the articles that appear in the Hebrew-language press about the "Russian" contribution to city life in Israel (such as Russian-speaking buskers in Tel Aviv (Birnberg 2012), about twin city ties between FSU and Israel: *Our Man in Ramle* (Badalov 2011) and impressions of Russian visitors of urban life in Israel: *The Jerusalem Bus through the Eyes of a Muscovite* (Slovin 2011), etc.

City life is also covered in the Russian-language electronic media. Two of the news portals have whole sections devoted to towns. One of them, the portal *Izrus – News of Russian Israel* (<http://izrus.co.il/>) puts the heading "Towns" in its main menu. This section of the portal is divided into *News of the Center* providing links to 19 towns, *News of the North*, 16 towns, *News of the South*, 13 towns and *News of Jerusalem* which is subdivided into Jerusalem, the town of Modiin and settlements in Judea. Search for specific articles can also be carried out on the basis of thematic categories: *crime, events, culture and municipal information*, and at the end of each text there are links to

other articles published on the portal that deal with similar themes. The second portal providing city news is *israelinfo.ru* – *Israel in full view* (<http://israelinfo.ru/>). Besides news, each city section of this portal posts interviews with city officials and public figures, photo reports of local events, ads and catalogs of businesses. Each one is also linked to the city forum and to the booking office “Bravo”, which posts repertoire of the shows, concerts and other cultural events in Russian all over Israel. When we monitored *israelinfo.ru* in 2005–2006 it gave users access to more than 20 city publications. Today their number has dropped to 17, although one can still access archives of five other local electronic papers that stopped posting new information in 2009–2011. The most active electronic paper is *News of Haifa*, with several news items appearing every day. These are followed by talk-backs and are also discussed in the city forum and in the facebook group (<http://www.facebook.com/groups/228377432160/>, last accessed on 18 Sept 2012<sup>2</sup>).

Our third source of material was discussions in 25 city forums of *israelinfo.ru* and posts in life journals. Discussion threads in internet forums are similar to unstructured interviews in which subjects may deviate from the line of conversation planned by the researcher and thus bring up unexpected twists and show a hierarchy of values by the very choice of topics. Monitoring the forums enabled us to have access to a larger number of voices and thus validate conclusions made on the basis of our interview analyses.

The most active city forums are in Haifa (3,772 discussion threads and 79,039 posts), in Ashdod (1,033 threads, 16,391 posts), and in Beer Sheva (1,019 threads, 36,225 posts (last accessed on 15 Sept 2012). Importantly, the number of viewings always far exceeds the number of posts. When analyzing messages in the discussion forums, we have to take into account that the average age of the contributors is gradually going up, because most young people belonging to one-and-a-half and second generation immigrant groups find it difficult and/or uninteresting to communicate online in Russian. They may still prefer their co-ethnics as friends, but they tend to speak Hebrew to each other. While in 2007 Evgenii Finkel, the editor of *israelinfo.ru* told us in a private conversation that the average user of the Russian news portals was male with an academic degree and aged 35–45, the poll conducted by the portal *Zahav.ru* in July 2012 revealed a different demographic profile of its users: the majority are over 45, and women make more than half of the users. The only position that remains unchanged is the prevalence of people with higher education.<sup>3</sup> Material about city

life in blogs was found through links in talk-backs and city forums, and with the help of key words *my/our+name of the town*, e.g., my Ashkelon, our Haifa.

Our purpose in using different sources was to check whether the topics raised in the interviews reflect issues important for the community as a whole. Although our study is not really longitudinal as we did not conduct repeated interviews with the same subjects, the archives of electronic papers, forums and blogs enable us to view the evolution of the Russian-speaking immigrants' place identity and changes in their attitudes to urban life.

## Immigrant-Settling Policy in Israel

Studies of urban life often show controversial effects of immigration waves on city life. On the one hand, an influx of newcomers stimulates economic activities and requires creation of new jobs. Immigrants enrich the life of host societies, contributing to the development of new branches of industry and introducing elements of their traditional culture, such as crafts, cuisine, applied arts and music. In the era of "knowledge" economy national and city governments seek to attract highly educated and skilled migrants and their resources of creative capital (Wood et al. 2005: 15). At the same time immigration waves cause tougher competition in the labor market, destabilization of existing employment niches, and as a result often trigger xenophobia and an increase in crime (Ley 1999; Waldinger 1996).

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel has one of the highest urbanization rates in the world, although among 1,183 localities only 202 are classified as urban (with population of 2,000 or more) and 981 are rural (Yaffe 1999). Despite this ratio, in 2009, urban localities were home to 91.7 % of Israel inhabitants ([http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/isr\\_in\\_n10e.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/publications/isr_in_n10e.pdf): 6, last accessed on 22 Jul 2012). As mentioned earlier, prior to resettlement the majority of immigrants from the FSU were residents of large and middle-size industrial cities, and in Israel they also showed preference for urban localities.<sup>4</sup>

Since the early years of the existence of the State of Israel, governments have made attempts to encourage immigrants to settle in peripheral areas, creating the so called "development towns". Yet, these programs saw little success, as the main infrastructure needed for integration could be found primarily in the center of the country.

This factor was particularly relevant for immigrants from the FSU, who had a high percentage of university graduates. Prior to immigration, about 60 per cent of the FSU immigrant labor force worked in academic professions (Leshem & Lissak 1999: 144).

As a result, those who succumbed to the lure of privileges promised to the residents of development towns found it difficult to benefit from their cultural capital (Lewin-Epstein et al. 1997; Tzfadia 2000).

Already in the first years after the State of Israel had been proclaimed, its government was confronted with the problem of how to provide housing for new arrivals. A book devoted to Jewish immigration and settlement shows that throughout its short history, building housing for immigrants has been one of the primary challenges of the young Israeli economy (No Author 1973: 125–131). Although a special agency, a branch of the Ministry of Labor was established to build houses for new immigrants, and land in various parts of the country was put at its disposal, it was difficult to meet a burgeoning demand – in the first two decades the population tripled. It was necessary to build quickly, overcoming shortage of financial resources, building materials, equipment and skilled work force. Some of the immigrants were given accommodation in the houses abandoned by Arabs who had left voluntarily or had been ousted (Yazbak & Weiss 2011). Yet, on many occasions there was no choice but to resort to temporary solutions putting up barracks and shacks and using whatever was at hand – wooden planks, asbestos boards, corrugated iron, or even canvas stretched over wooden frames.<sup>5</sup> Quite often immigrants who had no previous experience in building were employed to construct their new houses. The quality of permanent housing erected in the first years was pitiful: they were built of the cheapest materials and with methods suitable for the relatively unskilled workers. Apartments were often handed over to the eagerly waiting tenants barely finished, sometimes without internal doors. The quality of building improved only in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s. By that time, however, many old Arab and some of the hastily built new houses had deteriorated, turning whole neighborhoods into slums. In the 1960s most of the state building projects were conducted for immigrants, about half of them in the development towns in peripheral regions. After the Six-Day War incomes grew and the general standards of living improved. Demand for housing was still higher than supply despite the application of more advanced building technologies and methods (No Author 1973: 125–131). In the 1970s and 1980s the state housing policy underwent



several changes, and since the late 1960s assistance to immigrants has been provided in the form of mortgages, financial help in paying rent in the general housing market and the rental of public apartments. In the early 1990s, in order to meet the huge demand for housing caused by mass immigration from the FSU and Ethiopia, the Ministry of Housing built about 103,000 apartments, however, due to the insufficient demand for apartments built in peripheral areas (the Galilee in the north and the Negev in the south) more than 40,000 remained unoccupied for a period of two years (Dadon 2000: 8–9). As Feldman aptly remarks, the state settlement policy met the opposition of immigrants from the FSU because in their system of priorities employment prevailed over privileges in obtaining housing (Feldman 2003: 50–51). As the study conducted in the 1990–1992 showed, 71% of the FSU immigrants rented their apartments from private owners. Like immigrants in other countries, the majority tried to settle in the core of the country, in metropolitan area of Tel Aviv where job opportunities are considerably better than on the periphery, in particular, for professionals. But shortly afterwards, gradual dispersal from the core to periphery began (Hasson 1996: 170–171). Government subsidies for rented housing were provided for three years, and the burden of living in the expensive center proved too heavy for immigrants' incomes.

Despite the high level of education, ex-Soviets who came to Israel in the 1990s were poorly informed about the labor market or the housing market, so choosing their first domicile in Israel many tried to settle close to friends and relatives – the tendency typical of immigrants everywhere in the world. Demographic surveys conducted in the 1990s are confirmed by the corpus of personal narratives we have collected. In the first stage, for many of our informants potential support of friends and family seemed to be more important than economic considerations. Some immigrants stayed with friends while looking for apartments for rent, others moved into the apartments found for them by friends and relatives who had arrived earlier. One of our interviewees tells a story of her family's nomadic experience which was not uncommon in the early 1990s:

**Marina, 31, emigrated from Moscow in 1988, a single parent, at the time of the interview was an M.A. student and lived in Kiryat Yam [a town in metropolitan Haifa]<sup>6</sup>**



Yes, and then we arrived. In fact we still travelled via Vienna. Well, so we arrived and were brought directly to Haifa. There used to be a hotel in Hertzl street, I think it was called *Hertzlia*... or something of the sort. It's on the corner, now there is a *beit-avot* [Hebrew for an "old people's home"]. We stayed there for a week or two, and then we moved... Our relatives put us up in their house in Migdal ha-Emek [an industrial town in the north of Israel]. My grandfather's sister has lived there since the 1970s. Then we moved again to some other relatives in Ariel [a town in the vicinity of Jerusalem, beyond the Green Line<sup>7</sup>], and then again and stayed with some other relatives in Kiryat Yam. And there we lived for a whole year. And then we filed an application for this, what is it called? *Amigur*, yeah, I think it's *Amigur*. And we received a three-room *Amigur* apartment, not far from the place where we lived then. And this is where we settled and since then we have lived there. Several years later we bought it, with grandpa's help. Thank God we did, and so there are no *mashkantás* [Russified Hebrew for a "mortgage"] to pay. My grandpa worked here as a dentist, and he moonlighted. And this is how we live<sup>8</sup>.

Since the private housing market reacted to a mounting demand by a sharp increase in prices, many families chose to pool resources and rent apartments together with close and distant relatives, sometimes with friends and even with mere acquaintances, thus reproducing the ill-famed phenomenon of communal apartments. About 38.3 per cent of the immigrants surveyed in 1992 rented apartments together with others (Hasson 1996: 170). Such arrangements enabled new arrivals to settle in more or less prestigious areas for the period when rental was subsidized by the state. When it came to buying apartments for permanent residence, the picture changed. Immigrants could afford to buy in less expensive areas, e.g., in Yaffo or southern zones of Tel Aviv (Menahem 1996: 156), or move to more peripheral localities in the north and south of the country. The same tendency could be observed in Haifa, where immigrants moved from the prestigious areas on Mount Carmel to the neighboring Krayot (see the excerpt above), or the towns of Nesher & Yokneam which also belong to metropolitan Haifa (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2011: 145).

Socio-economically weak immigrants who could not afford to buy apartments or rent in the private sector applied for public housing maintained and managed by eight companies, including *Amigur* mentioned in the excerpt quoted above. Lacking information about government housing policy, FSU immigrants tended to overlook that the majority of subsidized public houses were in low-prestige neighbor-

hoods and in peripheral towns. Moreover, many public houses were old and in bad need of repairs. Those who moved to development towns found that jobs, in particular those requiring high-occupation skills, were scarce. This made people who were determined to integrate in the labor market using their professional qualifications look for jobs far away from their new homes and spend considerable sums of money for commuting; others reconciled with low-paid unqualified jobs or long-term unemployment. As a result of internal migration from the core to the periphery, 13 enclaves emerged in which FSU immigrants make from 25 to 40 per cent of inhabitants (Feldman 2003: 50–51).

More than 20 years after the beginning of the big wave of immigration from the FSU affordable housing remains one of the sore points for the community. The Russian-language media regularly inform the readers about changes in the real estate market and in the rules of obtaining public housing. They monitor activities of parliamentary committees concerned with building social housing and interview Russian-speaking politicians involved in their work. The web site of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption provides detailed explanations in Russian about different types of public housing and lists categories of citizens eligible for it. This site enables new immigrants to download all the necessary application forms and monitor applicants' progress on the waiting list ([http://www.moia.gov.il/Moia\\_ru/Diur/WaitingList.htm](http://www.moia.gov.il/Moia_ru/Diur/WaitingList.htm), last accessed on 20 Jul 2012). Some of the explanations target those who have not yet immigrated to Israel but are only considering this step. Relevant information with the definition of terms used in bureaucratic procedures can be also found on web sites of Russian-speaking lawyers (see, e.g. <http://www.femida.co.il>, last accessed on 23 Jul 2012), in Internet communities (Jewish Internet Club, <http://base.ijc.ru/repkv.html>, last accessed on 25 Jul 2012) and in live journals (<http://israel.at.ua/index/zhile/0-12>, last accessed on 25 Jul 2012). Yet many immigrants are still unaware of their rights. Thus, according to the survey "Housing of Russian Israelis" conducted by the portal <http://newsru.co.il> in Jul 2011, 57 per cent of the respondents admitted that they didn't know what categories of citizens were eligible for public housing ([http://newsru.co.il/realty/10jul2011/dom\\_opros\\_103.html](http://newsru.co.il/realty/10jul2011/dom_opros_103.html), last accessed on 15 Jul 2012).

With few exceptions, Internet publications and posts in discussion forums are highly critical of the state housing policy, blaming the government for artificial deficit of affordable housing, profiteering at the expense of the socio-economically weak and indifference to the

plight of the old and the sick. Another frequent complaint addresses the shortage of public housing in the center of the country, which increases the gap between the prosperous center and the poor periphery, the urban and the rural localities. Notably, among the respondents of the Internet survey quoted in the previous paragraph, 48.8 per cent prefer to live in large cities, 33.3 per cent favor small towns and only 10.5 per cent are in favor of rural localities.

### **Urban Life through Immigrants' Eyes: Points of Interest and Concern**

As mentioned earlier, in 2006 we conducted 10 focus interviews in seven towns: Jerusalem (1), Tel Aviv (1), Rehovot (1), Haifa (1), Kiryat Yam (2), Upper Nazareth (2), and Eilat (2). Two subjects had emigrated from Moscow, two from Tashkent in Uzbekistan, one from St. Petersburg, two from Kiev, one from Orgeev in Moldova and one from Petropavlovsk in Kazakhstan. Their families range from middle class to those hardly above the poverty line. None has a history of delinquency. All of them are secular and do not observe the Jewish tradition, which does not allow Jews to use transport on the Sabbath and religious holidays. At the time of the interview one informant worked as a teacher, two combined work and university studies, three were full-time university students, three were high school students and one was temporarily unemployed after an accident. Despite the diversity in the respondents' backgrounds, socio-economic status of their families and the degree of their integration into Israeli life, there are clear-cut tendencies in their perception of Israeli cities. The overall attitude to Israeli towns expressed by our young interviewees was clearly negative. Evaluating urban life they raised the following topics:

- opportunities for work and studies
- availability of entertainment
- the social status of their towns/neighborhoods
- the quality of public transport
- security
- the quality of architecture
- attractiveness of the city/landscape
- Israeli towns as compared to European cities

Since the interviews were conducted in the format of informal conversations in which we allowed the subjects to take the lead expressing their attitudes to the towns where they live and urban life in general, the themes listed earlier did not emerge as discrete blocks but came up reflections of the interviewees' preferences and concerns. Thus, discussing the architecture of the towns and neighborhoods where they live, the subjects touched upon the issues of ethnic segregation and socio-economic statuses of various districts; the theme of opportunities for entertainment was combined with the problems of mobility and public transport, and so on.

The relevance of the majority of these themes for the entire community was confirmed by the study of newspaper material. We selected the weekly supplement "News – Northern Region" of the daily newspaper *Vesti* and analyzed 20 issues of the year 2006. City news reports were classified into 15 thematic categories.<sup>9</sup> Five of them appeared in every issue and were covered most extensively: cultural news and opportunities for leisure; crime and law violation; building and infrastructure development projects; education for children and adults; the ecological situation in towns.

In 2012, monitoring of the electronic papers of Haifa, Ashdod and Ariel (100 news items in each town<sup>10</sup>) showed that the same thematic categories remained prominent in the coverage of city news, although the emphasis has shifted: the news about cultural events, primarily those organized by members of the Russian-speaking community moved to the top of the list in Haifa (30) and in Ashdod (34). News items related to education were salient in Ariel (14), sports fared well in Ashdod (13) and new building and infrastructure development projects in Haifa (12). Ariel, located beyond the Green Line, is concerned with the issues of relations with Arab neighbors (10).

## **New Towns, New Neighbors**

In analyzing immigrants discourse on towns we rely on the vision of place as a qualitative total phenomenon which cannot be reduced to separate properties (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 6–7). Moreover, people's experiences of places are direct and often unselfconscious. The component parts are experienced in the fullness of their combinations and form the basic material out of which the identity of places are structured (Relph 1976: 46). Indeed, in the interviews and in Internet discussion

forums we find that towns are described in terms of “settlements” and “landscape”. Some narratives make use of space-defining categories dealing with the size and borders, but the emphasis in the analyzed material is on “character” which denotes the atmosphere of the place, which according to Norberg-Schulz is the most comprehensive property of a place (Norberg-Schulz 1980: 11–12). Immigrants’ reflections about towns are rich in adjectives which explicitly or implicitly form dichotomous pairs: large-small, beautiful-ugly, friendly-alienating, safe-dangerous, quiet-noisy, boring-lively, etc. Furthermore, attitudes to towns are often formulated with the help of symbolic meaning of colors. Their towns’ location is evaluated in terms of proximity to the sea and abundance or dearth of plants. Consequently, blue and green have strong positive connotations. Gray describes shabby houses and monotonous cityscape reminding our informants of “rows of boxes” – a standard metaphor for prefabricated apartment houses; yellow is associated with heat and desert, which is almost unanimously disliked; white is linked to the districts inhabited by the affluent European Jews while black is used to refer to neighborhoods belonging to other communities, Ethiopian and Moroccan Jews, as well as ultra-orthodox religious Jews. We have to admit that both xenophobic tendencies and a militant anti-religious spirit are observed among many Russian-speaking Israelis of all generations. Among other manifestations of intolerance of others is the unwillingness of a considerable percentage of Russian-speaking Israelis to have Arabs and religious people as neighbors. According to a representative sociological study by Al-Haj and Leshem, who interviewed 707 respondents, only 18.2 per cent FSU immigrants are willing to live next to Arabs, 49.6 per cent next to religious Jews, and 26.6 per cent to have Ethiopian Jews as neighbors (Al-Haj & Leshem 2000: 39). An earlier study conducted in Haifa (200 participants) showed the same tendency: nine per cent of the respondents did not want to live close to religious Jews, 25 per cent close to Arabs, 13 per cent with neither of them, and 40–45 per cent said that they did not care who their neighbors were (Amir & Carmon 1993: 15). The latter number may have different interpretations: one is a cosmopolitan mood of this group of respondents, another, and a more plausible one, is that FSU immigrants, in particular those who emigrated from large industrial cities, are more used to building their social networks on the basis of common occupation, interests and values, rather than on proximity of residence (Walmsley 1988: 61). Urbanites, especially residents of apartment blocks do not form close

relations with neighbors, but as our interviews and discussions in internet forums show, immigrants evaluate the status of their towns and neighborhoods depending on which ethnic groups prevail in them.

**Ekaterina, 29, and Anatolii, 21, emigrated from Tashkent in 1990 and live in Eilat. At the time of the interview Ekaterina worked as a school teacher and Anatolii was a university student in Beer-Sheva**

**Ekaterina:** In Israel, society is broken into triangles, rectangles and other patterns that all fit together. Most often, if you are a Moroccan, you are poor. If you are poor, you live on the periphery. And if you are a Moroccan, you are poor and you live on the periphery, and you don't have higher education. And, well, there is just one institution of higher learning [in Eilat] that was founded five years ago. The majority of the students are people from the north who want to get cheap education and come here to moonlight.

**Anatolii:** Because the majority of Eilat residents who want to study leave the town.

**Ekaterina:** They leave because that paper-thin layer of intellectuals that can be found here, it's really... very few people. These are white, educated Russian-Polish... err, American-speaking...

**Anatolii:** They all leave.

**Ekaterina:** They all leave. Because *arsy* and *frekhi* [Russified Hebrew, pejorative for "Moroccan males and females"] driving around with shrieking music in red cars start irritating you, say, when you reach the age of 15.

**Anatolii:** And most of them [those who leave] don't come back.

The contrast between "white" and "black" towns and neighborhoods emerges in other interviews as well. Desire to live among the Ashkenazi Jews is viewed as a natural wish to improve one's standards of living. Notably, two young mothers among our interviewees expressed concerns as to their children's upbringing among the people with cultural backgrounds and behavioral patterns different from theirs.

**Liudmila, 26, emigrated from Orgeev (Moldova) in 1988, at the age of 9, single, a bank teller and a student of the Open University, lives in Kiryat Yam**

**Interviewer:** Well, if you compare Kiryat Yam and Haifa, do you like Kiryat Yam better?

**Liudmila:** Yes.

**I:** And why?

**L:** Haifa is a very noisy city, and here it's very quiet. And also there are many Arabs there. In my neighborhood it is quiet and clean.

**I:** In what neighborhood do you live?

**L:** In *Dalet* [In some Israeli towns new districts are named by the characters of the Hebrew alphabet: *alef*, *bet*, *gimel*, *dalet*, etc.].

**I:** Is it where Marina lives?

**L:** No, it's a bit farther. Her *shchuna* [Hebrew for a "neighborhood"] is *Dalet*, the old *Dalet* [inaudible]. The houses there were built just 10 years ago. (...)

**I:** So it's newer...

**L:** Yes, it's newer.

**I:** It's newer and closer to the sea. Probably the houses are of better quality, aren't they?

**L:** Yes, and the public is ...

**I:** And what public can you find there?

**L:** Primarily either Russians or, say..., there are no [inaudible] Caucasians.

**I:** Are they in *Gimel*?

**L:** Yes, they are in *Gimel*.

**I:** Do you ever go to *Gimel*?

**L:** Yes, my grandma lives there.



**I:** How do you feel when you get there?

**L:** I don't often go there, I don't feel comfortable there, because there are always hooligans there. It's not very pleasant, you know.

**Marina, 31** (compares her neighborhood with others in her town): At least, it is better than old *Dalet* in Kiryat Yam, and it's better than *Gimel*. Have you been to *Gimel*?

**Interviewer:** No, though I may have passed it.

**M:** But it is HORRIBLE. These [apartment blocks] are simply HEN COOPS. These are two-storey houses, and I call them hen coops. They make me furious, I simply cannot... I see them. First, most of their inhabitants are from the Caucasus. I've got nothing against them. But I'm against the people who are rude, tough and vulgar. They live in these hen coops. It's as if you came to some [pause] *aul* [a mountainous village in the Caucasus or Central Asia]. I have never seen an *aul*, but from the stories, from what my mum and grandma say this is exactly what happens there. In fact, these houses were built still under the British mandate. That is, it's something, it's simply terrible. I passed there, and there were CHICKENS walking along the street and GOATS, and COCKS. And I think: WHERE am I? Aren't we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? (...) It's horrible. I simply cannot [stand it]. When I pass there, it simply makes me furious. And they, the way they are dressed. Oh boy! And this *Dalet*... of course, it's also a hole. But it's a bit quieter. In fact, all the inhabitants of Kiryat Yam are Caucasians, Moroccans and Russians who didn't come from the Caucasus but from some other places. Well, too bad.

Both Marina and Liudmila speak about the same neighborhoods. While Liudmila, who comes from a small town seeks peace and quiet, an ex-Muscovite, Marina prefers the vivacity of a large city. Neither of the two conceals discontent with having members of other ethnic groups as their neighbors. Not only Moroccan Jews are classified as *others*, but also Russian-speaking immigrants from the Caucasus are excluded from the interviewees' reference group. In their attitude to the neighbors Liudmila and Marina demonstrate familiar patterns of intolerance to the *other*. Liudmila juxtaposes her quiet and clean "Russian" neighborhood with Haifa, where there are many Arabs, thus implicitly blaming them for making the city noisy and dirty. Marina claims that she is unbiased in her attitude to the immigrants from the Caucasus (we find similar assurances in the excerpts quoting other interviewees and participants of internet forums), but attributes to

them those very qualities she detests. In other interviews thoughtlessness in relation to others and impolite behavior of the residents are also quoted as indicators of the status of towns and neighborhoods:

**Ekaterina:** (comparing Jerusalem and Eilat) ... I saw a different layer of society there. (...) It is a very beautiful city (...) and there are plenty of intellectuals there. They don't push you that much in the streets, they don't pester you as much or use foul language and so on. Well, nobody would pour coffee all over you when you walk.

**Interviewer:** Does it ever happen here?

**Ekaterina:** Here? Easily, any minute.

**Rita, 27, emigrated from Kiev in 1990, lives in Jerusalem, at the time of the interview was a graduate student of the Hebrew University, separated and has a child (interview conducted over the phone and the transcript checked by the interviewee)**

**Rita:** I have a feeling that there is nowhere to go. When I am in the streets with the kid, I try not to get into a crowd, I want to get away from the crowds.

**Interviewer:** Because of fear of a terrorist attack?

**Rita:** Not only. All this shouting, waving of the hands and screaming. This is all unpleasant. People treat you tactlessly.

A heated discussion about Kiryat Yam, where Marina and Liudmila live, was conducted on the Haifa city forum in June-July 2012 in the thread "Living in Kiryat Yam" (202 posts and 9,437 viewings). Initiated by the user who was considering moving to the town and wanted to know the opinions of its residents about the quality of life in their town, the thread sparked a heated debate as to the advantages and disadvantages of living in a small multiethnic locality. One of the users summarized these arguments saying:

**Rakdanit, 13/06/2012**

I think a lot depends on where people come from. If you are from Moscow or Peter [diminutive of St. Petersburg], then surely Kiryat Yam will look as a small provincial village. I, for one, come from Biisk in

Altai, and I don't like big and noisy cities. I like it when there are many plants, when it is quiet, the air is clean and everything is conveniently nearby. And this is what I have in Kiryat Yam. Besides, my relatives and friends are here, my whole network is here, and my life here is already well organized.

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=46425&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=15>, last accessed on 18 Jul 2012.

Where participants of the discussion had few disagreements was annoyance about the presence of other ethnic groups and boredom. While our interviewees castigated behavior of the Jews coming from the Caucasus, forum participants complained about Ethiopian Jews, blaming them for allegedly violent behavior among children and adolescents, noise and stench in the air around their houses – all the stereotypical complaints against the unwanted *other*.

Our interviewee Marina formulates a negative attitude to the described neighborhood comparing it with a village: the houses remind her of hen coops, and the streets are open to domestic birds and animals. Complaints about de-urbanization of Israeli towns are also voiced in discussion forums, in most cases blaming non-Jewish ethnic groups for it. Thus in July 2009, one of the residents of Karmiel, a town in Galilee shared his discontent with the neighbors in the city forum. The title of the thread was “A Bedouin wedding” (20 posts and 8,943 viewings). The first post was relatively amicable:

**Ulitka:** We are having fun here... A Bedouin wedding has just started right outside our house. Music typical of such events can be heard all over the place. May they be happy, but why is a large part of Ramot Rabin [a Jewish neighborhood] obliged to participate? The children want to go to bed, and adults have to go to work tomorrow. There are numerous banquet halls in this country for such occasions. Is it part of their tradition to celebrate in the open? But why do numerous people who have nothing to do with this tradition are coerced into being part of it?

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=34233&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0>, last accessed on 20 Jul 2012.

Users who responded to this post were more emotional in expressing hostility against non-Jewish neighbors. There were angry remarks about the Bedouin village with its “stinking cow sheds” preventing a new Jewish neighborhood from developing “properly”. While our interviewee Marina used the Turkic word *aul*, making it pejorative,

in the analyzed discussion thread the Bedouin's village was ironically referred to as a *khutor* [Ukrainian for a "croft"]. Several posts in this thread lament the growing "Arabization" of their town which leads to turning it into a *kfar* [Hebrew for a "village"]. Bedouins and Arabs are also blamed for increasing the level of crime because of shooting during festivities and knifing each other. Similar complaints were expressed in the non-focus biographic interviews in Upper Nazareth:

**Dmitrii, 53, emigrated from St. Petersburg in 1996, lives in Upper Nazareth, an engineer by training, employed as a worker**

**Dmitrii:** [about Arab neighbors] They studied in our country [the USSR] and they learned Russian there. Well, but if you look at their life [in Israel], things are not too bad. They have families with lots of children, yet nobody starves. In every courtyard, there is a... Right across our house there is a village where they shoot all the time.

**Interviewer:** They shoot?

**Dmitrii:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Are these skirmishes, I mean, among them, or do they...?

**Dmitrii:** They shoot into air, but they shoot from automatic guns, and I don't like it at all. You know what I mean. Look, here is this village, right over here [goes to the window to point to the village]. There were two terrorist attacks planned in this village. But they failed. One failed in *Tveria* [Tiberias], the other one in Haifa. The car was from Haifa, so two representatives [apparently he refers to policemen] came to the village. Naturally, the village said, that, "We", they say, "We don't know anything about them", that "They are bad people, and we are all good." But shooting is regular here, all the time.

Suspicious that their neighbors can be active participants or accessories to terrorist attacks underlie many statements expressing Russian-speakers' attitudes to life in mixed localities. Authors of the posts in the discussion thread in Karmiel are not only angry but also pessimistic. They don't discuss any advantages of social and cultural diversity that have evolved to be traditional urban values (Zukin 1998: 826), rather they see full ethnic and cultural segregation as a welcome alternative:

**DBD:** It's a real drama when people with absolutely different mentality, belonging to mutually hostile religions with completely different

way of life try to unite in one enclave. The outcome can be seen when we observe, for example, the neighboring *kfary* [Russified Hebrew for “villages”] with Muslim and Christian Arabs, Druze and Bedouins, and so on. There is no peace there and there will never be any. Intense Arabization of the town provokes inevitable clashes.

The belief that Israeli towns are undergoing “Arabization” which came up in several interviews and discussion threads clashes with the analyses of left-wing Israeli researchers who claim that Judaization and de-Arabization of space has been a key strategy of the state since its inception (Yiftahel & Yacobi 2003: 679–680). In fact, delegitimizing Arab presence in their towns, immigrants legitimate their own presence as it “improves” the demographic situation, consolidating the Jewish character of the mixed localities.

A good portion of criticism expressed in the Karmiel discussion targeted state authorities not only for their inability to impose rules on the level of noise permitted during festive events, but also for their failure to oust the unwanted neighbors from their territory, which according to the media and the rumors reproduced by the discussants, was occupied illegally. One of the participants wondered ironically why the authorities were unable to show as much decisiveness as they did when forcing settlers in the West Bank to leave their houses. Such discussions also emerge in other city forums where Jews and Arabs live together, including Haifa which boasts the greatest interethnic tolerance in the country. Some posts are farcical, suggesting solutions well familiar to Russian Jews from their past history and worded like old Soviet slogans:

**Nathan:** Up with the Pale of Settlement for non-titular nationalities!

Others show elements of siege mentality and are adamantly xenophobic:

**Murky:** We want to live in a Jewish town. It’s enough that there is a sea of huge Arab villages around us. Let them live there. It’s enough that crowds of Arabs come to our stores, clinics, banks and offices. We want to live in a NORMAL town, not in an Arab one. Arabs... from our town!

9/02/2008, discussion thread “Zeev Boym: Arabs will live in Karmiel, and no obstacles should be created for them”<sup>11</sup> <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=26535>, last accessed on 20 Jul 2012.

And as a refrain that can be heard in such discussions on interethnic relations Internet users speak in favor of tough policies, because “only

brute force is respected in the Middle East". The term "political correctness" is often sneered at in the Russian-language media in Israel, and, as a rule, Internet users are even less inhibited by its norms. As shown in the previous excerpts, they don't shy away from voicing extremist views.

Living among the Ashkenazi elites has been the goal of immigrants from the FSU throughout the past two decades. It has been noted in studies dealing with different immigrant communities that in the initial stage the most preferable neighbors for newcomers are co-ethnics because of commonality in mentality and life styles and reliance on social networks for solidarity and support (see, e.g., Logan et al. 2002; Trovato 1988). Yet for some FSU immigrants it is not a matter of choice but of economic limitations. Social upward mobility in many cases presupposes leaving "Russian ghettos". This is what followed from the interview with Marina quoted earlier, and was even more radically expressed in the discussion threads about Kiryat Yam (see above) and about Ashdod. Like the Kiryat Yam discussion, the Ashdod thread (32 posts and 14,359 viewings) was started by a newcomer to the city who wanted to consult members of the forum about buying an apartment. She admitted that the only thing she knew about the neighborhood was that it was virtually completely Russian but couldn't figure out whether it was good or bad. The attitudes of the authors of the response posts differed, although the prevailing mood was that it's bad because it was synonymous with "cheap". Only one discussant was convinced that choosing co-ethnics was natural:

**Femina:** ... almost all repatriates prefer to live among their own people. I've never seen anyone who would like to have Ethiopians, *datishniki* [Russified Hebrew for "religious"], or Moroccans nearby. (Please do not consider me a nationalist: it's just about the difference of mentality.)

All the participants took it for granted that the prestige of the neighborhood and of the town itself was inseparable from its ethnic composition. The most blunt classification with the pronounced Eurocentric bias typical of Russian-speaking Israelis was expressed by one of the active forum participant:

**Ursego:** Ashdod is not such a great town and Gimel' is its worst district (only Bet might compete with it). If someone had shown me photographs of this slum a la Seiful'-Muliukov [Farid Seiful'-Muliukov, a well-known Soviet journalist who used to cover events in the Middle-East], I may have refused to come [immigrate] to Israel. If Brooklin is Little

Odessa<sup>12</sup>, then Gimel is Little Addis-Ababa. And now about Russians / non-Russians. The most valuable and prestigious districts are those where you cannot find (in the descending order) Ethiopians, the blacks [Sephardi Jews], religious, and Russians; that is the neighborhoods inhabited by local Israelis – Ashkenazi Jews. Note that the housing prices themselves filter the composition of the population. What is cheap is rotten, isn't it? So Ashdod (despite the gorgeous architecture of the new neighborhood – hats off) is not something..., you know what I mean...

posted on 23 Sept 2004, discussion thread – *Iud-Gimel District*, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=7118&sid=80396af85be1cf014ea4e95de117d9>, last accessed on 27 Jul 2012.

In the last several years the number of “undesirable neighbors” in Tel Aviv and some southern towns has increased due to an influx of thousands of illegal immigrants from war-torn Southern Sudan and Eritrea. In May 2012 tensions over their growing numbers and media reports about their criminal behavior led to violent demonstrations in southern Tel Aviv demanding expulsion of the illegal African migrants. Although government policies towards them and the scope of the problem for the country were widely discussed on the Israeli Russian-language Internet sites, city forums we monitored have very few threads on this subject.

## A Big City or a Small Town?

Among the motifs repeatedly coming up in the interviews and in the Internet discussion forums is the opposition of large cities and small towns. This is not so much about the size but about the quality – big cities are viewed as bustling and full of opportunities for those who are ready to take them. Big cities promise that things will happen; by contrast, small towns are seen as stagnant and “dead”, having little to offer the young and ambitious in terms of studies, jobs and entertainment. As was agreed in the online discussion about Kiryat Yam, which we mentioned earlier, small towns in Israel are ideal places for retirement and for those who need peace and quiet. Even Jerusalem and Haifa are seen by some young people as stagnant and “sleepy”.

**Interviewer:** And how did Jerusalem impress you after Kiev and Budapest? It's also a relatively large city.



**Rita:** In Kiev and Budapest I had a feeling of wide space, while here I feel confined. I always felt that something might happen there, it was life. Here, everything is stiff.

**Interviewer:** And what about terrorist attacks? Can they happen?

**Rita:** No, I don't mean terrorist attacks. I always know that something terrible may happen. But it may also happen in a small room. I mean, the feeling that space promised something unknown, something seductive. Here this doesn't exist.

Attractiveness of the city is often associated with mystery and the lure of the unknown. This is particularly important for the young who need events and new discoveries rather than orderly and well-organized life. This is a frequent theme in literature, and it also came up in our interviews.

**Miron, 25, emigrated from Moscow in 1994 at the age of 13, at the time of the interview was convalescing after a car accident, lives in Upper Nazareth**

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, what is a good and what is a bad town?

**Miron:** As far as I am concerned, a good town is a place where you can find everything, where everything is nearby. It's a place where you can study and go out, and you don't have to go 50 kilometers away to get this. A place where there are jobs available and not too far away. This is how I see it. And of course, it's a place where there is air to breathe.

**Interviewer:** And which of the Israeli towns meets these criteria?

**Miron:** Well, it's somewhere near Tel Aviv.

Although Miron seems to be more down to earth in his requirements of a "good" town than Rita, note his mentioning of "air to breathe". Air in Upper Nazareth is fresh and is clearly less polluted than in metropolitan Tel Aviv, but like Rita, who feels "confined" in Jerusalem, rendering his search for a dynamic place, Miron resorts to a metaphor in order to express his need for vivacity and action which he lacks in Nazareth.

Our young interviewees who live in provincial towns perceive them as "cut off" from the world and civilization. Only four cities are viewed as exceptions: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and to a lesser extent Haifa and Netanya. Paradoxically, this does not mean that the interviewees express their wish to live in these towns. Tel Aviv repels because of the

noise, congestion and alleged snobbishness of its residents; Jerusalem because of the limitations imposed on secular people by the religious community, Haifa because of a lack of jobs, and Netanya because of jealousy: the young find it difficult to work and study watching vacationers enjoying themselves all year round.

As a refrain in almost all the focus interviews we heard that there was nothing to do in the towns where our informants live, the only exception being Tel Aviv.

**Evdokia, 17, emigrated from Simferopol (Ukraine) at the age of nine, in 1998, a high-school student, lives in Rehovot**

Compared with other places, I like it that it [Rehovot] is green, but it annoys me that it looks terribly small. Sometimes I have a feeling that I live in a village (laughs). It could be because of the main street and this center, beyond which there is nothing interesting. This annoys me.

**Interviewer:** So what do you think an ideal city should look like?

**Evdokia:** Well, it's this equilibrium that I've mentioned before. It should have enough greenery, well, and nature should be slightly different – fewer palm trees and more variety, as far as I am concerned, [inaudible] and naturally, it shouldn't be boring. If you want to relax, to enjoy yourself, it should offer you enough opportunities. It should have enough places for me to go out, and not always the same place. Something like this... And naturally it should be on the coast...

During the first years of life in Israel Evdokia's family moved from a small southern town of Sderot to Beer Sheva and then to Rehovot, where her mother was offered a job. Evdokia did not get attached to any of the three towns and admitted that she did not know them well. The most vivid memory of Sderot was vacant plots between houses which she had to cross while going to school. According to rumors circulating among the children, there were snakes' nests there, and Evdokia was haunted by images of confrontation with the reptiles. Beer Sheva left better impressions, although Evdokia said that she had seen little of the city, as she "wasn't taken to places". Our other young informants also admitted that they were not well familiar with the towns where they live or the towns where they go in search of entertainment. It is a well known phenomenon that children and the elderly tend to have limited impressions of the city because their routes are restricted to just a few and they reflect their daily routines (Walmsley 1988: 14–16).

In our small sample of focus interviews, even those who entered adulthood did not display curiosity and desire to explore Israeli towns. On the other hand, some interviewees were very enthusiastic about their native towns (Marina and Miron about Moscow, Rita about Kiev) and about the towns they visited during their trips abroad (Tamara, Rita, Marina and Evdokia). Interestingly, Evdokia's memories of her native town of Simferopol seemed to be much more vivid than those of Sderot and Beer Sheva, although she had left it at the age of nine. Like other members of her family she still misses the Crimea. The family did not integrate well in Israel, and frequent conversations about possibilities of re-emigration or return to Ukraine may have intensified our interviewee's negative attitude to Israeli towns.

**Gennadii, 19, emigrated from Petropavlovsk (Kazakhstan), in 1997 at the age of 10, a high school student, lives in Upper Nazareth**

**Interviewer:** What do you like and what do you dislike about Nazareth?

**Gennadii:** Well, what I like, I don't know, I sort of got used to living here. There are many things I like. Well, it's sort of boring here. There is no place to go out with friends. If you want to have fun, you have to go to another town, to the center or to Haifa. (...) The majority of the people who live here are the elderly. Life is quiet, that is, if you don't take those, if you don't take Arabs into account. (...) I don't like quiet towns. I like it when there are things to do, when it's not boring. Otherwise what: come out to sit on a bench. Sit and talk. Well, you know, it can be interesting to talk, but sometimes you are sick of it, when every Friday the only thing for you to do is to come to the bench and sit there.

The proverbial "sitting on the bench" symbolizing placelessness and boredom in leisure hours was also mentioned by a resident of Haifa, Tamara. What our interviewees did not reveal in their narratives was that quite often groups of Russian-speaking adolescents spend a large part of their leisure time in the streets, because they have either little or no pocket money, which prevents them from going to cafes or discos frequented by their peers from more affluent families. Gennadii also remarked that places of entertainment in his town were either for children or for adults, with nothing fitting the interests of teenagers. None of our young interviewees participated in community centers, clubs, sports societies, etc., either due to financial constraints and lack

of mobility or because they did not find anything appealing to them. The non-involvement of young immigrants in activities organized by city administration was confirmed and partially explained by a participant of the Ariel city forum in the discussion thread “Premises for the Young” (6 posts and 4024 viewings).

**Mamontionok**, 23/08/2006, Ariel’s eternal problem is a lack of place for the young people to meet. While adolescents can choose between hobby groups, an amateur theater, and guided tours, what is there for a soldier, a student, and a young proletarian to do? Finally, there is a chance for us to get hold of a place that would be our own. We know how to use it. No longer would we have to celebrate birthdays and spend holidays in parks, out of town or on parking lots. If there are enough people willing to participate, we’ll be able to launch music bands and hobby clubs. There is enough room for everything. The most important thing is to have walls to shield us from the wind, a roof to protect us from the rain, and electricity. At the moment what is required is to collect as many signatures as possible. I mean young people of 17-18 and older (not suitable for pensioners.) If you are interested, call my *As’ka* [Russian computer slang for ICQ].

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=16260>, posted on 2 Oct 2006, last accessed on 2 Aug 2012.

Judging from the lack of response to Mamontionok’s appeal, Russian-speaking youth in Ariel were not enthusiastic about claiming their rights to have a place for leisure activities. Our interviewee Gennadii and his friends, as they emerge in his narratives, seemed to suffer from apathy and were just dreaming of leaving Nazareth in search of better places. Neither did other interviewees mention any initiatives on the part of young people to make their leisure time more interesting. But there are counter-examples as well. One of them is the non-profit organization “Fishka” created in 2007 by young immigrants from the FSU Rita Brudnik and Elena Bushumenskaia. This organization targeting young adults who immigrated to Israel as young children sees its mission in maintaining and expanding the young Russian-speaking community promoting the values of creativity, cultural influence, social engagement and involvement. It seeks to help its members deal with complex issues of hybrid identities and search for ways of integrating in the contemporary Israeli culture without abandoning Russian roots (<http://fishka.org.il/ru/about/>, last accessed on 24 Aug 2012). Without denying the ingenuity and perseverance of the young people who conceived of this project, one has to mention that it took off thanks to the

support of various national and international organizations and the municipality of Tel Aviv/Jaffa. In some way, “Fishka” testifies that our interviewees are right when they speak about the vitality of life in Tel Aviv that is incomparable with other Israeli cities.

Our interviewees’ complaints about boring urban life are similar to what was stated by respondents in a multi-faceted sociological study in the small northern town of Katzrin. Immigrants of various ages interviewed for that project said that life in Israel was boring and they felt that the cultural space available to them had shrunk compared with the FSU (Horowitz, Shamai & Ilatov 2003: 146–147). Our interviewees characterize life that does not satisfy their cultural needs as provincial or rural. Scornful attitudes to everything “provincial” typical of the worldview of contemporary Russian speakers has been confirmed by the Israeli experience. Notably, when complaining about petty bourgeois life styles, boredom and lack of cultural events, participants of city forums label their cities with the same words “province” and “provincial”, e.g., “Ashdod is an out-of-the-way province”, “Kiryat Yam is a small provincial village”, etc. According to the journalist Anna Isakova, this is one of the things in which both Russia and Israel differ from the West, where contemporary provinces are not associated with the failure of public institutions, deprivations in everyday life, cultural backwardness, narrow-mindedness and boredom. Differing from the urban center in many respects, provincial life has important values to offer: attachment to the place and tradition, careful attitude to Nature, lack of haste, thoughtfulness and spontaneity in interpersonal communication (Isakova 2007). While none of the informants in both of our interview samples complained of deprivations in managing everyday life, other negative aspects of provincial life listed by Isakova, including higher unemployment levels than in the center are still associated with Israel’s periphery. As a result, residents may develop the feeling of alienation. Our interviewee Marina kept repeating that she couldn’t stand her town of residence. Miron contemptuously said that the only new building projects taking care of the residents’ needs in Upper Nazareth were “*beit avot* and *beit kvarot*” (an old people’s home and cemetery). A more reserved **Ekaterina** remarked:

You see, I don’t live in the town. I live in my house. By definition (...) I want to live where I feel comfortable, I mean the comforts of my private life. It could be even in the Antarctic. It [the place] is not crucial for me, or almost not at all. Well, it is crucial, but I’ll survive, it won’t solve my main problems.

Urban studies show that residents of a metropolis tend to suffer from cognitive overload and excessive stimulations that can make it difficult for urbanites to adapt and cope with the environment. Our material shows cognitive underload which contributes to stress and poses a major problem for the young (Pacione 1990: 5–6).

The institution that is believed to raise the status of a town and make it more desirable is a university.

### **Anatolii, 21**

**Interviewer:** How do you perceive Beer Sheva?

**Anatolii:** I don't like it. Compared with Eilat, it is very gray. It's ugly, and the people are not too amiable. But there is a university there [inaudible]. I don't need anything else from that town. It's my apartment, my university, my apartment, my university. I don't need anything else. I'll get a degree, then the second degree, and then I'll leave. Because to live in Beer Sheva is absolutely... well, probably I could consider working there but living?! NO WAY! There is a theater there, I have friends there, but everything rotates around the university. Remove the university and Beer Sheva ceases to exist. (...) It's a gloomy, oppressive town where the young do not want to live.

The university was mentioned among the more attractive and friendly spaces in towns by other interviewees as well. Rita said, "The university is my place. I've got used to it", and Marina echoed her: "I like it. I like the atmosphere itself, and I feel young there. I like the environment there, and, I don't know, but, the UNIVERSITY IS MY PLACE. And even the people there are normal."

The significance of the university and the stimulating presence of students in town also came up in the Beer Sheva city forum in which participants compared the value of different neighborhoods (801 posts and 96,724 viewings). Proximity to the university was considered to be "strategically important" not only because it boosted real-estate prices in the nearby areas and gave access to the sports facilities of the university but primarily because it was believed to affect the general atmosphere:

### **Vova Z. (posted on 8 Jan 2010)**

Yes, *Dalet* has changed a lot. In 1990 I lived in Shprintsag together with the jobless youth. In the evening I would come back home after work when the kids were already in good mood after a good dose of dope.

They used to treat me to sunflower seeds and explain that my way of life was wrong. And recently I passed by and could see only students staring into their laptops there... Well, well, the neighborhood is gone.

Discussion thread "*Dalet*". <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=36673>, last accessed on 25 Jul 2012.

The irony of the last sentence does not conceal the satisfaction with the change that students brought to the neighborhood. In fact, the number of young drug addicts is a matter of concern for many adults and often comes up in the city forum discussions.

The importance which Russian-speaking Israelis attribute to living in a university town was recently demonstrated by the struggle around the academic university center in the town of Ariel. Founded in 1982, it was the first Israel's institution of higher learning beyond the Green Line. The Ariel college gradually expanded, and in 2007 the government decided to upgrade it and grant it a temporary status of a university center with the option of transforming it into a fully-fledged research university under the condition that it would meet all the requirements of such an institution. This decision stirred controversies on the political arena and in the academic circles. The left wing perceived the possible upgrade as further legitimization of the settlements, and many in the academia, including presidents of the existing research universities, saw this move as an unreasonable use of limited financial resources allocated for higher education. The Russian-speaking politicians of the party "Israel is our home" were among the most vocal supporters of the Ariel Academic Center (Briman 2012; <http://izrus.co.il/obshina/article/2012-07-03/18357.html>, last accessed on 25 Aug 2012). The Russian-language media closely followed the unfolding conflict and displayed sympathies for Ariel's cause; so did many bloggers (see e.g., an appeal to support Ariel in <http://pinchas.livejournal.com/> which was reposted by other bloggers and <http://xaxam.livejournal.com/487207.html> followed by numerous comments, last accessed on 25 Aug 2012). One of the reasons why members of the Russian-speaking community showed great interest in this battle was that during the media campaign it became known that 16 per cent of the faculty of the Ariel Academic Center were immigrants, primarily from the FSU. The rector was also an FSU immigrant of the 1990s, and thanks to this the college had established various ties with academia in the FSU (Kogan 2012; Markov 2012; Mikhalchenko 2012). Our analysis of the Ariel city forum demonstrated that the college and its prospects for the upgrade were frequently discussed in various discussion threads. First,



government support of this move diminished fears of the discussants that their town might be dismantled. The college was also mentioned as one of the biggest employers and as a contributor to the positive image of the town as “cultured and educated”. Here is one exchange which illustrates this motif:

**Leonid G. (posted on 18 Jul 2012)**

This is not unequivocally good: on the one hand, it means government subsidies; on the other hand, while in colleges tuition fees are higher than in universities, the passing grade is lower. So if there is money, a college is more accessible. (...) The “niche” of the college is in its accessibility to wide masses. And for the town the more students there are the better; so because of the university the number of students may drop.

(...) As a university it will have to compete against more serious institutions.

**Ded Murloz (posted on 20 Jul 2012)**

And so it will! It will try harder where it still lags behind. (This also depends on the money, although not only on the money.) As a university it will get better students. In addition, there will be work places at the university and around it. And the entire atmosphere in the town will become more cultured and intellectual. Now we are a proper university town.

**Mariet (posted on 20 Jul 2012)**

And all the uncultured trash should be sent to exile beyond the 101<sup>st</sup> kilometer [in the Soviet period, ex-prisoners, dissidents and other so-called “anti-social elements” were prohibited to live closer than 100 km from big cities].

Discussion thread “The University in Ariel”, 41 posts and 15,993 viewings. <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=37595&start=30>, last accessed on 25 Aug 2012.

Mass occupational downgrading and as a result social downward mobility of the FSU immigrants (Dubson 2007; Remennick 2007: 73–93) had little effect on the high value attributed to culture and good education among the first generation FSU immigrants. The disappointment of the parents in the system of education<sup>13</sup> makes them



**Figure 1.** “Russian” kindergartens of the 1990s, in which communication between teachers and children was conducted in Russian, gradually gave way to bilingual kindergartens. Many parents want their children to be prepared for the Israeli school and at the same time maintain the Russian language and culture.

look for alternative or complementing solutions in the Russian sector of the educational system. To the surprise of the ministry of Education and the Hebrew-language newspaper *Maariv*, private kindergartens run by Russian-speaking educators keep gaining popularity among co-ethnics despite the adoption of a new law granting free pre-school education from age three. And it is not only the more convenient hours (unlike most Israeli kindergartens, finishing work at 1 p.m., many Russian ones are open until 7 p.m.) that attract parents. It is also their orderliness, bi-lingual instruction and the diversity of activities offered to the children that make parents prefer kindergartens, where they have to pay, to free state-run institutions (posted on 17 Oct 2012, <http://izrus.co.il/obshina/article/2012-10-17/19333.html>, last accessed on 10 Nov 2012).

No wonder then that the quality of education is among the most popular themes in the city forum of a young city of Ariel. Parents and grandparents express hopes that if the schools are good, if the academic center continues to flourish, and if the project promoting new technologies, “The Smart Town”, is fully implemented, the young will stop “running away” from their town (discussion threads “Ariel: A city of the future” (30 posts, 5,798 viewings) <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=43981>; “Isn’t Ariel a smart town anymore?” (81 posts, 71,328 viewings) <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?t=42427>, last accessed on 25 Aug 2012). Yet, availability of jobs and opportunities to study do not seem to be enough for the young to be satisfied with urban life.

**Yulia, 25, Upper Nazareth, emigrated in 1990 from Leningrad, at the time of the interview was a student at Tel Aviv University**

**Yulia:** I believe there is only one city in Israel.

**Interviewer:** And this city is...

**Yulia:** Tel Aviv. That is, the way I perceive the city should be, it’s only Tel Aviv. Because Haifa and naturally, *Natseret* [the Hebrew pronunciation of “Nazareth”] too, I don’t consider them to be cities.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Yulia:** Err, because [smiles], well, *Natseret*, this doesn’t even need an explanation. Because [pause] I think there is simply nothing here. There is no night life, no opportunity to study and no jobs. Besides, it is a very small town. It’s a small town, few people and well...

**Interviewer:** There is no choice...

**Yulia:** Yes, and it’s not a city. Haifa is larger but still, it is not enough. I know there is nothing here for the young. I mean, no careers, no night life. There is nothing there. And Jerusalem is again something completely different. Well, those of my friends who live in Jerusalem are not content either.

**Interviewer:** Not content?

**Yulia:** No.

**Interviewer:** How come?

**Yulia:** Well, Jerusalem, that's different. It's a difficult city because there are plenty of *datishniki* [Russified Hebrew, "religious people"]. And this..., one feels uncomfortable, it's unpleasant. And again, there are few young people there. They have nothing to do there. In the evening, there is no...no, it's not like in Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv you can choose all the time and find what suits you.

It is well known that making choices requires responsibility and may be difficult for the young. Yet, our interviewees find such challenges much more attractive than their absence. Reflections about opportunities for work and studies and comparisons of career prospects in various towns are mentioned in all focus interviews, yet it is a lack of entertainment that is central in the young people's discontent with the towns. Among different types of entertainment, disco-clubs and pubs are most popular. Museums and theaters are also mentioned, although from the interviews and from our ethnographic observations it is clear that young theater goers consider themselves an exception among their peers. Moreover, some are even embarrassed to admit their exposure to high culture to their friends. This type of entertainment remains part of the family culture and is not easy for the parents to cultivate (see Niznik 2011; Remennick 2012).

The emphasis on entertainment does not appear unexpected. The city was born as a square where festivities were held and temples were constructed. It was associated with festivals during which taboos were lifted; the city was a place where hierarchies were not relevant and where solutions to life's contradictions could be found. For the *village* the city is associated with festivities because traditional culture perceives the city as a place of endless festival (Levinson 2004: 26–27). Today, a developed entertainment industry is an economic asset, and many leading cities in the world base their future prospects on their role as cultural and tourist centers (Jabareen 2009; Kotkin 2005: 151; Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2011).

In European towns, spiritual life, commerce, and entertainment are concentrated in the center. The town center has a marketplace and a town hall, symbolizing civil authority; it has a church or a cathedral symbolizing religious authority; it has monuments honoring history and a square or open space through which many cross-town routes pass. The center organized like this is an indispensable part of the European town's image (Augé 1995: 65–69). Like in Central and

Western Europe, there is hardly a town or a village in Russia where one cannot find a center with institutions of power, whether religious or secular. In pre-revolutionary Russia this was a church; in the Soviet period power was symbolized by city or village Soviet. As Monica Rüthers remarks, early Soviet city planners of the 1920s-1930s made pioneering attempts to create an ideal socialist city markedly different from all the existing urban models. Most of these projects, however, were shelved, and socialist realism prevailed. It chose classicism as its vocabulary, and center-peripheral structure became a major principle of planning. While in the 1920s a socialist city was viewed as a city without a center, in the later years the center became the core of political and social life (Rüthers 2006: 197–200). This is how Soviet authorities saw the center, and it is this model of city planning that was internalized by ex-Soviets.

Despite Eurocentrism that prevails in the mentality of contemporary Israelis, most towns were not designed with this concept in mind. Currently only Tel Aviv and Jerusalem are close to the European urban model. Jerusalem has always featured as a world religious center and accordingly attracts pilgrims and tourists. The Old City is familiar, even to a newcomer, through literature and art, and many of its memorial sites are familiar to ex-Soviets from literature and are mythologized (see e.g., Epstein & Kheimets 2001; Fialkova 1999; Tolstaia 1999). Besides memorials of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Jerusalem offers a wide range of cultural activities for the secular, such as theater, museums, libraries, and the like. Tel Aviv cannot compare to Jerusalem in terms of sanctity, but as the country's center of commerce and entertainment it attracts residents from the rest of the country with employment opportunities, the abundance, and luxury of shopping malls, and bustling night life. Both Jerusalem and Tel Aviv have centers that form the core of each city's image. On the mental map of Russian-speaking Israelis Jerusalem and Tel Aviv form a parallel with two Russian capitals forever competing for supremacy of their role in the life of Russia.<sup>14</sup> In an article devoted to the images of Tel Aviv and St. Petersburg in Hebrew literature Vladimir Papernyi (2003) suggests that since many Israeli writers are émigrés from Russia, the myth of St. Petersburg formed the foundation of the myth of Tel Aviv. An essential element of the Tel Aviv myth is that it is the antithesis to Jerusalem. This antithesis is based on several oppositions: a rationalized utopian project v. history; a coastal city, where the sea forms a natural border, v. a city in the center; a city built on the lowland, where humans have

to conquer empty flatlands, v. a city on the mountain, located in the center of vertically lying space. All these oppositions are the same as the oppositions of St. Petersburg and Moscow in Russian mythology. The relevance of the city images has not lost its importance among the young Russian-speaking intellectuals in Israel. One proof of it is the novel *Jerusalem* by the young writer, an immigrant of the 1990s, Denis Sobolev. Allusions to St. Petersburg are an essential part of the narrative (Sobolev 2005).

In their desire to have better opportunities and enjoy a more comfortable life style many young immigrants hope that moving to a more prestigious neighborhood or town may solve the problem. This wish was expressed by our young interviewees from Upper Nazareth, Rehovot, Beer Sheva and Haifa.

### **Tamara D., 17, emigrated to Israel from Kiev in 1991 at the age of two, lives in Haifa**

**Interviewer:** How do you feel about the neighborhood where you live?

**Tamara:** Well. I detest it because it is, it is, you know there are some districts which used to be beautiful, but ours, I don't know. It may have been considered beautiful but by people with very peculiar tastes. Mostly it's houses-boxes and in very bad shape too. And nobody fixes them because nobody likes them. All the people who live here feel they want to escape. No money, no opportunity, but one has to escape and swiftly. I mean, nobody plans to stay in this district. There isn't a single person who would say: "I like this area." Say, I have a friend and she lives on Hertzel street, the street with plenty of stores. And a girl from a more affluent neighborhood once asked: "So what, you live in a store?" I mean, people don't even understand how come one can live here. Isn't it strange, why should one live here if it's possible to live somewhere else?

Tamara feels that everyone living in her neighborhood wants to "escape". The motif of escape also sounds in the interviews recorded in Upper Nazareth and in the discussion thread in the Ashdod forum quoted earlier. The excerpt from Tamara's interview suggests that because of the social stratification of neighborhoods, adolescents suffer badly, in particular, if their parents decided to send them to good schools often situated in prestigious districts. Although it incurs considerable expenses straining modest incomes, some families chose this way, because good education ranks among the primary values of Russian-speaking Jews (Remennick 2012). Finding themselves among

native Israeli peers, immigrant adolescents are often confronted with snobbishness and tactlessness of their fellow-students and sometimes teachers too.

Considering segregation of urban districts in Israel, sociologists Mesch and Stier indicate that the place of residence affects the socio-economic status of individuals and social groups. Opportunities for employment and acquisition of quality housing, income and taxation levels, as well as the quality of utilities and communal services differ from district to district. Stratification of places is used by the elites to distance themselves from less affluent and socially undesirable compatriots. Stratification of space which is gradually transformed into status stratification of districts appears to be stable and durable. Among its results is emergence of economic and social barriers, making some groups in society impenetrable for outsiders, especially for members of minority groups. In addition, stratification mechanisms affect the distribution of unemployment, poverty and crime. Clearly, affluent groups are better equipped to cope with demographic changes and economic activities (Mesch & Stier 1997: 61).

Yet one has to admit that the social composition of the FSU immigrant group that came to Israel in the 1990s, first of all a high educational status of the newcomers, caused positive changes in the status of some urban localities and districts. Socially upward mobile immigrants aspiring to occupy a niche in the middle class try to move to more comfortable and more prestigious neighborhoods. One of the solutions for them is moving to districts that undergo early stages of gentrification – the process of reconstruction of neglected but historically and architecturally interesting or ecologically advantageous urban quarters. The process of gentrification is usually accompanied by ousting of socio-economically weak residents and small businesses and an increase in housing prices.

In this respect, Haifa is an interesting example. Often called the “capital of the north”, it is an industrial center with numerous high-tech companies. Being the home of a university and the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, it attracts young people, at least for the period of studies. Unlike most of the cities, Haifa does not have a distinct center. Hadar, described in the quoted excerpt from Tamara’s interview, played that role in the past when it was the site of government offices, and a religious and commercial center. The municipal theater, several museums, and a market are situated there. Veterans of Haifa remember this area as prosperous and attractive for businesses and real-estate owners. But neglect has made the majority of once elegant





*Figure 2. Inviting residents of Haifa to enjoy a promenade on the seaside, Haifa municipality addresses the public in the four languages that are most often spoken in the city.*

houses shabby. The wealthier among the inhabitants have moved to new neighborhoods. Apartment prices dropped, and the population changed. In the 1990s the rising of several shopping malls in newer districts of the city deprived Hadar of its clientele, and many shops had to close down. Finally, the exodus of civil servants, whose offices moved to newly built high-risers close to the port, struck the district its coup de grace. While Hadar lost its status as the center, none of the other districts took over. Inexpensive, although often rundown apartments, proximity of residential blocks to shops, banks, and a market, and the concentration of public transport attracted low-income families, including new immigrants from the FSU. Among the Russian-speaking Israelis who settled in Haifa in the 1990s, 30 per cent chose Hadar. They returned a substantial part of the abandoned apartments to the real-estate market and re-invigorated the district. Many had their apartments renovated: about 30 per cent reported doing it before

moving in, and 20 per cent afterwards (Amir & Carmon 1993: 6, 12). But few immigrants could afford major remodeling in the first years after immigration. Moreover, reinforcing the structure of the houses, painting the walls, fixing the roofs and renovating staircases often proves impossible not only because of financial problems but due to difficulties in achieving consensus with neighbors. As a result, some of the immigrants who advanced socio-economically preferred to move to more prestigious districts rather than investing money and efforts in the real estate of a declining district.

Several times the city authority announced that Hadar would be reconstructed. But only in the aftermath of the Second War in Lebanon which scarred Haifa did these plans become a reality. In September 2006 the municipal company in charge of infrastructure and public transport in the city began renovation of the two streets once considered to be the architectural gem of the area; others followed suit. The city has also invested nine million shekels in the renovation of the water supply system, sewage, reconstruction of the fences and new pavements. Special attention is given to the preservation of the architectural style of the houses that have historic value, stripping them of terraces, canopies made of corrugated metal or plastic and other elements added by tenants. New restaurants and bars, as well as antiquity shops opened their doors to clients, attracting the young and the affluent. Real estate in the area is in demand again, and those Russian-speaking Israelis who had bought apartments in Hadar in the period of its decline finally saw their investments justified.

Another successful project aimed at reviving the once bustling area adjacent to the port and encourage the young to live in Haifa is creation of *Kampus ha-Namal* [Hebrew, the "Port Campus"]. This project also driven by the desire to help citizens of the north to overcome the destruction and trauma incurred by the war was initiated by the Municipality in collaboration with the University of Haifa. The Port Campus branch of the university opened in March 2009 in a renovated Customs House of the 1930s. It offers courses in the popular fields of Occupational Therapy, Creative Arts Therapies, Tourism, Pilgrimage and Recreation Research, and so on. Wizo Design College and Tiltan Academic College for graphic design, animation and communication have also moved to the new campus. Their students display their work in outdoor exhibits and are involved in the renovation projects aimed at rejuvenation of the derelict district. Like members of other ethnic groups, FSU immigrants are involved in the restoration of historic

buildings, sometimes in an unexpected way. An interesting example is the St. Mary's Greek-Catholic church, whose icons and some of the interior frescos were painted by immigrants of the 1990s. Among them is St. George with a spear, Virgin Mary on her deathbed and a replica of Andrei Rublev's "Trinity". Moreover, on the fresco in the central apse one can see inscriptions in Arabic, as well as in Church Slavonic (Poltorak 2005: 19–20).

The municipality also initiated and partially financed renovation of run-down office buildings that were turned into students' dormitories. By the beginning of the academic year 2011-2012 over 700 students had moved into comfortable apartments fully furnished, equipped with household appliances and provided with wireless internet connection. In order to attract students to the city the municipality offers them various long-term grants, 70 per cent reduction of the city tax, free parking for the entire period of studies, subsidized subscription to the local theater, and so on. Moreover, the municipality offers additional support to those students who are involved in voluntary public activities in the city (<http://palm.newsru.co.il/realty/16aug2011/hifa505.html>, [http://www.mignews.com/mobile/article.html?id=170112\\_173629\\_14058](http://www.mignews.com/mobile/article.html?id=170112_173629_14058), last accessed on 19 Aug 2012). In June 2012 the renovation project "Port Campus" competed against 40 municipal programs and was awarded the prize in the contest "City Design 2012".

The newly renovated area became the site of weekly summer festivals for the youth known as *Kalabat Shabbat*. The name is a pun on the Hebrew *Kabalat Shabbat*, the Friday evening prayers that welcome the Sabbath at sunset. This is a street event with free live shows, food stalls and craft fairs. They start at 16:00 with programs for children and later in the evening offer entertainment for youth audiences. The annual program of the festival is advertised on the web site of the Haifa Municipality, on news portals, including those in Russian, and on the sites providing information for domestic and international tourists (see e.g., <http://mama.zahav.ru/Articles/1631/kabalatshabat>, <http://www.krayot.ru/20110807759/культура-и-отдых/schedule-of-summer-events-in-hayfe.html>, last accessed on 27 Jul 2012). To hold public entertainments on Friday evening is unusual in Israel, where most businesses in the Jewish sector are closed for Sabbath. Therefore, *Kalabat Shabbat* attracts young people from various urban and rural localities of the north and promotes Haifa's popularity among the secular, both Jews and Arabs. Its popularity among the Russian-speaking Israelis is testified by the variety of web

sites reporting on the events, ranging from the Russian version of the official web site of the municipality and electronic papers to the association of Israel's consumers and blogs in which festival goers share their impressions and post photographs (see e.g., <http://kot-bayun.livejournal.com/170141.html>, last accessed on 19 Aug 2012). Like some other cultural events in Israel towns, announcements of the *Kalabat Shabbat* program have crossed the borders and the festival is advertised on the Russian-language tourist sites in the countries of the FSU, for example, in Ukraine and Kazakhstan (<http://lenta.mk.ua/article/1298244.html>, <http://www.turistu.kz/blog/gremsi/kalabatshabat-kampus-kha-namal>, last accessed on 19 Aug 2012).

Our respondents, as well as participants of the Haifa city forum, view the main attraction of Haifa in its topography and greenery: it is situated on Mount Carmel and overlooks Haifa Bay. The sites frequented by tourists are dispersed throughout the city. The most imposing of them is the World Bahai Center and gardens, stretching from the bottom to the top of the Carmel. Like the religious sites of Jerusalem, it attracts members of the international Bahai community and contributes to Haifa's popularity among visitors to Israel. The residents of Haifa, however, have mixed feelings about it.

**Interviewer:** What's your feeling, do you know Haifa well?

**Tamara:** I know the places where I go. I don't remember the streets at all [She means street names]. I know, my legs carry me where I need. But, say, I know everything that is close to my house. Places to go? There are not many, but actually I know them too.

**Interviewer:** And when you say "places to go", what do you mean?

**Tamara:** I mean museums, or parks, but there are not many, so it's not difficult to count them. The place you can always go to is the Bahai shrine. It's really sad that the most beautiful place in Haifa is not Jewish and has nothing to do with the Jewish State, Israel. It's the most beautiful place. It's more than... it's the only place where you feel that it is a city that is just... that you can, well, I don't know, it's just like paradise. I simply adore that place.

Kotkin observes that a successful modern city should combine educational and job opportunities and entertainment. Besides, they should provide law and order and give their residents the feeling of security (Kotkin 2005: 154). The interviews show that young immigrants value all these attributes of the modern city but cannot find all of them in any town in their new homeland.

## **City Threats: Between Missiles and Delinquents**

Security of the citizens is among the primary concerns in Israel, in particular in the towns which have been targeted by missiles and terrorist attacks. Our interviewees did not dwell on these issues, but we found many conversations devoted to shelling in forums of the southern towns that have often been under fire from the Gaza strip (Askelon, Ashdod, Beer Sheva and Sderot), and from the Southern Lebanon (Kiryat-Shmona, Akko, Karmiel and Haifa). Some of these threads present retrospective reflections of what discussants went through, but most deal with the events as they unfold and serve to share information, give or ask for advice and calm down one's own and virtual interlocutors' anxieties:

### **Volener, posted on 23 Feb 2011, 23:03:**

Two missiles fell in district... in Beer Sheva, two explosions could be heard [quotes the Internet source of this news item].

### **androdo, posted on 23 Feb 2011, 23:13:**

In what district? Has anyone been injured? I also heard them; many people began to close iron shutters and then there was a boom.

### **Maria, posted on 23 Feb 2011, 23:20:**

Four people have been reported to suffer from a shock. R [gives the name of a radio journalist] has just said on radio *Darom* [Hebrew, "South"] that no one was physically injured.

### **Mechta, posted on 24 Feb 2011, 00:17:**

What really bothers me is what to do with the kids, whether to send them to school or not! It's so good that there is a *bitahon* room in the apartment [Hebrew "security", refers to built-in shelter].

**Alinar, posted on 24 Feb 2011, 00:46:**

We can hear missiles exploding, two or three per minute... I don't know myself what to do with the kids tomorrow...

Discussion thread "If tomorrow brings war"<sup>15</sup> (505 posts and 76,562 viewings), <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=41423>, last accessed on 25 Aug 2012.

Children and their psychological state is an issue of special concern to the parents and grandparents, so in some of the messages we can find links to the articles posted by psychologists who give recommendations on how to cope with stress in the family. Some admit that any noise similar to the thunder of an exploding missile alerts them to potential dangers; others complain that they find it difficult to concentrate on anything but just wait for the next "boom" to come. Not everybody is composed. Besides expression of anger against Palestinian militants, severe criticism is directed to what discussants see as weakness of the central government, its preoccupation with issues irrelevant for the population and indifference to the plight of towns under fire:

**Dubinzik, posted on 10 March 2012:**

We are worried about our grandchildren's psyche, not to mention daily threats to their life... What if Tel Aviv were constantly shelled for years and years? What would be the response of the government and the army?

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=43629&sid=cd8e03eae030d89cfae3f3b5e593050d>, last accessed on 30 Aug 2012.

Local authorities are also under scrutiny, and efforts of different municipalities to equip and maintain shelters and organize emergency services are compared. Forum participants discuss effectiveness of the new anti-missile system "The Iron Dome" and argue about the time needed to get to shelters after the alarm is sounded. The noun "shelling" often appears in the titles of these threads, e.g., "Shelling in Ashdod" (74 posts and 21,868 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=43629&sid=cd8e03eae030d89cfae3f3b5e593050d>); "Shelling" (the Ashkelon forum, 38 posts, 18,350 viewings); <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=30654&start=30>), "More on shelling in Sderot" (268 posts and 88,863 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=71&t=21807>, last accessed on 27 August 2012). In their wish

to express emotions and document attacks, forum participants post verses about shelling, upload photographs and even video clips shot from the windows of their homes or on the site of events. This can be seen as needless bravado, but it also serves as evidence that shelling has become part of everyday life in the targeted towns.

Among the participants in the conversations about missile attacks we find residents of Israeli towns unaffected by shelling. These users inquire about the situation, express sympathy and offer help, such as giving shelter to families wishing to leave the town.<sup>16</sup> Residents of the north who were targeted by Hezbollah missiles in the 1990s and in 2006 share their own experiences and encourage southerners not to despair:

**Deizy, posted on 20 May 2007:**

From the bottom of my heart, Natan, I wish you and all the residents of Sderot not to lose your cool. Just hold on! And good luck to you!

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=71&t=21807>, last accessed on 27 Aug 2012.

**Viktor, 12, posted on 22 Dec 2008:**

Residents of Ashkelon, cheer up! Everything will be fine. Khamastan [a pejorative name of Gaza strip governed by Hamas] should learn and remember for a long time that shelling Israel is dangerous even with Allah's agreement. The main thing is not to panic. I live in Naharia and our house was hit by two missiles. More than that, both ended up in the same apartment. The owner and his family were away. The apartment was repaired, and they still live in it. After the missile hit the house I climbed to the roof, blocked the water and took pictures.

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=26&t=30654&start=30>, last accessed on 27 Aug 2012.

Indeed, while anger is a frequent companion of these discussion threads, fear and panic are rare. Another observation that can be made comparing the dates of the posts is that even during the periods of the escalation of the conflict, the war theme does not prevail in the targeted towns. This may be a sign that FSU immigrants have adopted the Israeli habit of not letting war and terrorism interfere with everyday life and try to go on with their usual routines, adamantly pretending to be cool and undisturbed.



While avoiding the issues of terrorism, our young interviewees spoke about fear of crime and anti-social behavior in public places while reflecting about life in their towns. For example, Liudmila admitted that she was reluctant to go to that area in Kiryat Yam where her grandmother lived because she was afraid of hooligans. Tamara indicated the Haifa district which she avoided for the same reason. Gennadii mentioned several times that Upper Nazareth would be quiet and safe if it were not for the neighboring Arabs. Stress topography is known to restrict residents' movement and affect their spatial behavior (Pacione 1990: 19). Discussing life in Eilat, Ekaterina and Anatolii pointed out that on the one hand, they felt safe in their town thanks to a large number of policemen and guards; on the other hand, after Eilat had evolved into a tourist center, it became attractive to drug dealers. They also deliberated on why a small town is unlikely to have a high level of crime:

**Interviewer:** Is there crime triggered by xenophobia?

**Anatolii:** Nobody murders anybody here.

**Ekaterina:** It's very problematic in a small town. No, of course there is much less crime here. That is, in the Jerusalem [university] dorms hatred against Arabs and Russians is much stronger than in Eilat.

**Anatolii:** Or in the Beer-Sheva dorms.

**Ekaterina:** Or in the Beer-Sheva dorms. That is, I think this advantage primarily stems from the same difference that exists between the Jerusalem and Beer-Sheva dorms on the one hand, and Jerusalem and Eilat on the other. It is a very small and restricted community. Just one violator of other people's peace will immediately alienate a very big number of people. Because it will turn out that in the hospital he will be treated by the mother of his victim, in the police he'll deal with the victim's father, then he'll go to a birthday party of the victim's junior sister, and so on. Take the case of vandalism here. Not long ago they smashed several, well, quite a few gravestones. The kids did.

**Interviewer:** Just randomly or...

**Ekaterina:** Randomly. They are all children from very good and very cultured WHITE families. All the families are white, all the parents are educated, and the kids gave a real (pause)

**Anatolii:** Show.

**Ekaterina:** Show. Apparently they drifted into a trance. And they smashed plenty of gravestones. As a result, very few families in town remained unaffected in some way or another.

**Anatolii:** And if, indeed, the mother works in the hospital and the father is a policeman, they have no place left in Eilat.

Several motifs are of interest in this excerpt. First, our interviewees speak without any inhibitions about the intergroup hatred they observed among students in the dorms of their respective universities. They don't elaborate on this theme because they take it for granted that the interviewer is fully aware of the spread of xenophobia targeting minority groups, including "Russians". Secondly, they bring up the subject of close ties in a small community. While they present this as a crime deterrent, in other contexts of immigrants' discourse close-knit networks are viewed primarily as a sign of a closed society and fertile soil for nepotism. It is not by accident that in Ekaterina's narrative, relatives of a hypothetical victim whom a hypothetical criminal would be unwilling to confront are not street cleaners or supermarket cashiers, but members of the local elite – hospital employees and policemen. Finally, the excerpt brings up the motif of youth violence that has become a major issue of concern in Israeli towns in the last decade. Ekaterina emphasizes that all the young hooligans who desecrated gravestones came from good "white" families implying that they should be the least likely criminals. This is another example that immigrants have internalized ethnic stereotypes of Israeli society.

The increase in street crime and violence previously virtually unknown in Israel, where people used to be proud that it was unnecessary to lock apartments, is widely discussed in the Russian-language media and in city forums. Among the most serious complaints are gang fights, vandalism, alcoholism and drug addiction, and disturbance of social order. While in some discussions the blame is primarily put on young Arabs and Ethiopian Jews, in others, for example in Ariel, discussants express anxiety about the involvement of Russian-speaking adolescents:

**Boded, posted on 23 Aug 2012:**

Dear ladies and gentlemen, I am not engaged in politics, but I wish to know whether there is police in our town. I pay land tax regularly and I wish to sleep peacefully at night and go to work after a good night

sleep. The place where our *moteki* [Russified Hebrew, “sweeties”, an endearing form often used to address children] get together to have fun, curse and break bottles is known to everyone in the vicinity, including the police. Yes, they are ours, ours. Most of them are Russian speakers and may even be children or grandchildren of those present here [in this forum] Why not? This place is a “100 meter race track” along the *Rov ha-Alef* shops. The kids are convinced they won’t be punished. It is clear to me why the surrounding adult guys ignore all of it (...) They are simply afraid. (...) Ladies and gentlemen! What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for your children to be detained in such company? Are you waiting for your daughters’ bras to be hanging on the lamp posts? Or do you think you will manage to escape this lot? With such an approach I doubt this.

Discussion thread “What’s going on in the town?” 1,838 posts and 241,538 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=36589&start=1830>, last accessed on 28 Aug 2012.

The Russian-speaking parents’ anxiety about their offspring is justified. The rate of school drop-outs and delinquents among the FSU immigrant adolescents is higher than among their native peers (Fishman & Mesch 2005). As a nation-wide study showed, when FSU immigrant adolescents report increased Israeli identity and reduced Russian identity but at the same time associate mostly with Russian-born peers (which is often the case in Russian enclaves) they are likely to suffer from the feelings of discrimination and alienation which increase the odds of becoming delinquent (Turjeman et al. 2008: 122).

The city built originally for the sake of security – to protect residents inside the city walls against malevolent invaders coming from outside – in our times has come to be associated with danger rather than with safety. Contemporary fears are typically “urban fears” as exemplified by watched neighborhoods, surveilled public spaces, armed guards and electronically operated doors (Bauman 1998: 47–48). All these protection measures have become an integral part of Israel’s urban life too, although residents of the neighborhoods, where risks are highest cannot afford the most sophisticated of these.

The spread of delinquency and growing worries of the adult population called for multi-faceted measures to combat youth anti-social behavior. In 2004 the sociologist Orly Innes and the mayor of Eilat Meir Itzhak Halevi initiated a complex program “City without Violence” that relied on joint efforts of the municipality, educators, social workers, psychologists, organizers of cultural events and volunteers.

Besides more vigilant control of the streets by policemen and patrols manned by volunteers, the program included installation of numerous video cameras enabling 24-hour monitoring of public places and as a result faster reaction of the police to the violation of public order. The main emphasis, however, was put on creating better opportunities for young people to find jobs and places to study and participate in sports and cultural events for free, thus offering alternatives to “sitting on a bench”. The program’s success in Eilat led to its adoption as a nationwide project in 2006, and today it operates in 98 municipalities (<http://www.cwv.gov.il/English/About/Pages/default.aspx>, last accessed on 23 Aug 2012). The achievements and shortcomings of the program, as well as involvement of Russian-speaking professionals and volunteers in its implementation are regularly covered in the Russian-language media (see e.g., reports about the program in Ashdod [http://www.ashdod.ru/news/gorod\\_bez\\_nasiliya/2010-01-14-292](http://www.ashdod.ru/news/gorod_bez_nasiliya/2010-01-14-292), Karmiel <http://haifa.info.ru/?p=12267> and Haifa <https://sites.google.com/site/haifaiziteli/home/socialnye-proekty>, last accessed on 23 Aug 2012). Most of the municipal reports about the achievements of the program are scrutinized by the readers in talk-backs. Police are often criticized for insufficient vigilance (see the excerpt of the discussion in the Ariel city forum quoted earlier), and municipal officials for overstating the program’s success. Some authors of the comments appeal to co-ethnics to become actively involved and lead the “zero-tolerance” combat against street violence and crime (see e.g., <http://haifa.israelinfo.ru/comments/?id=8469#rules>, last accessed on 27 Aug 2012).

Since most of the efforts of the program “City without Violence” target adolescents and young people, one of its active participants is the NGO Youth in Distress (*ELEM*). Founded in 1988 by American and Israeli young professionals, it targets homeless, runaways and delinquent children and adolescents. Among *ELEM*’s successful projects is “Friendship” Vans. These are mobile night-time help stations which offer humanitarian help (food, showers, clothes, etc.), informal consultations with professionals and volunteers, some of whom are students, and referral to social services when appropriate. Notably, although the web site of the organization specifies that it provides help for Arab and Jewish children, it gives detailed information about its activities in Hebrew and English, a summary in Russian, but there are no explanations in Arabic or Amhari (<http://www.elem.org/index.php>, last accessed on 23 Aug 2012).

## Long Distances in a Small Country

In our focus interviews the theme of safety in public places was discussed in parallel with the issues of mobility. As Amin and Thrift observe, the modern city is unprecedentedly based on mobility, and, moreover, a mobility that seems to increase year by year. On a number of different levels, far becomes near, and distance is therefore re-defined (Amin & Thrift 2002: 33, 43). Immigrants, however, are limited due to a shortage of resources. As one of our adult interviewees observed, "Israel is a huge country in which distance is not measured in kilometers but in shekels". Only one respondent in the target sample had a car; the others used public transport. This means that they had to take distance and time of commuting into account when they looked for jobs or institutions to study. Moreover, they could not travel freely on holidays and late in the evening since public transport did not function after 11 p.m. Entertainment in Israel begins late: theater performances and concerts at 8:30 p.m., and disco clubs, pubs and bars fill up only after 9 p.m.

**Marina:** Here it is problematic to get anywhere even on Saturday night. From Kiryat Yam it is problematic since there is no public transport.

**Interviewer:** And how about shared taxis?

**Marina:** They come once every one and a half hours. I mean, you can spend the whole evening waiting... It's like, I got somewhere... simply horrible. I understand that Haifa is different. When I lived in Haifa, I could go out. You just go down the Carmel and find something. And there are shared taxis, and buses. And in Kiryat Yam you can't find anything, I mean the town is cut off. (...) This town, yes, I feel it's cut off in essence. It's cut off from civilization.

**Rita:** Without a car I feel cut off, in particular, on *Shabbat*. There are plenty of religious people in our neighborhood. And in the playground it's primarily them again. The kid doesn't find a common language with them. If I had a car, I'd go to another neighborhood where my girlfriends live. The atmosphere in the playgrounds is different there. But the situation with public transport is bad not only on *Shabbat*. For example, when you want to go out in the evening you have to think twice before you make up your mind. To go by bus takes an hour, and you have to wait for it quite a while. And then you have to walk from the bus stop to where you want to get to. And if you go by car, it's just 20 minutes.

In recent years the situation has improved thanks to the introduction of night buses. Following the example of London and some other European cities, Jerusalem launched a pilot project in 2007, and a year later Tel Aviv and Haifa joined in. Four bus companies are involved and currently 41 lines serve over 50 locales. The main goal of the night lines is to provide safe transportation for young people and tourists travelling to entertainment centers. Night buses run on Thursday and Saturday nights and during vacation time on other nights as well. Only Haifa operates night lines on Friday night, which confirms its reputation of the most secular-friendly town in Israel.

According to the Transportation Ministry Survey, 80 per cent of the passengers of night buses are under the age of 24. There has been a general reduction in the number of night accidents after penalties for driving following alcohol consumption became more severe. The survey emphasizes that the rate of serious accidents in the towns that operate night bus routes is 40 per cent lower than in those that don't (Lior 2012). What the report does not mention is that night lines have increased mobility of the poorer layers of population, those people who cannot afford to have private cars.

The work of public transport is among the recurrent themes in city forums. For example, in Ariel, the thread "Bus company *Afikim*" containing information about and changes and discussion of bus routes, schedules and services was started in January 2009 and is still going on, numbering 748 posts and 125,284 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=39&t=36523&start=735>. In some cases such discussions function as a communication channel between bus companies and residents. For example in Haifa, where issues related to public transport come up frequently in the city electronic paper of *Israelinfo.ru*, the paper serves as liaison between officials managing public transport and city residents. In 2008 it published the announcement that participants of the city forum could address their questions to the bus company *Egged* operating in the city (99 posts and 26,230 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=26127>, last accessed on 29 Aug 2012). The questions that followed showed residents' interest in a variety of issues ranging from future plans for changes in the routes and schedules to the interaction of buses with other transportation means (intercity trains and the subway). Besides, residents made various suggestions aimed at making public transport more efficient and convenient for the passengers (operating special school routes, putting up maps of all the routes on the bus stops, providing drivers

with hard copies of bus schedules, and so on). Making their suggestions, forum participants gave examples of what they thought to be good practices of bus companies operating in other Israeli towns and abroad. In the course of discussion many participants complained about inaccurate schedules and a lack of information about changes. They pointed to the needs of schoolchildren whose parents cannot bring them to school by car and to the difficulties of the elderly, who sometimes find it difficult to get home from the outpatients' clinics since some of the bus routes stop operating at the hour when doctors still receive patients. The bus company had many critics but also supporters, who pointed to the excellent web site of the company that provides all the necessary information.<sup>17</sup> Their opponents, however, argued that most of the passengers using buses are either too old to use computers or are too poor to afford buying them. Even using more familiar mobile phones can be a problem for these groups of population:

**Yazzon**, 1/02/2008: Grandmas equipped with telephones can phone the call center and in *ridna mova* [Ukrainian, "native language"] enquire about the schedule of the bus she needs.

**Mishka**, 1/02/2008: Sure, just like this. I can imagine such a grandma loaded with bags that she drags from the market take out her mobile phone, call *Egged* [bus company] and start listening to music while waiting for an operator to answer her question in *ridna mova*. She may even start dancing, but time is passing, and the money she'll have to pay for the conversation is clicking ☺.

Although in a farcical way, this exchange has captured the problem of many underprivileged members of contemporary society. The transfer of various services to the Internet welcomed by the young and the middle-aged has become a curse for the elderly and poor who either have no access to or are incapable of mastering new technologies and so feel helpless.

City forums also show that intercity trips still remain a problem for many residents, but like other Israelis, immigrants look for a solution in mobilizing their networks. Almost all the city forums have requests for a one-time ride or a long-term partnership in commuting. This practice is wide-spread among the affluent and among the poor, enabling cost sharing and optimizing time. In most of the towns there are places known as *trampiadadas*, where people looking for rides can wait for a friendly driver to pick them up.



In the Soviet Union people who owned cars were the minority; but public transport was cheap and functioned from early morning until late at night. In Israel youngsters without cars either become dependent on parents and turn them into taxi drivers, or have to travel in taxis, which is not affordable for many immigrant families. Furthermore, Russian-speaking parents, who are much less permissive in educational matters than veteran Israelis, do not always allow their teenage children, particularly daughters, to take taxis late at night. Although night lines have improved the situation, young immigrants may still feel confined to their homes. An overwhelming concern of the less affluent population about poor public transport and heated Internet discussions about every new bus route, every kilometer of rail-track extension, and the running of the public transport on Sabbath testify to the importance of this problem for Israel.

### **City Internet Forums: A New Form of Group Solidarity and Place Involvement**

Most of the online city forums that we have monitored started their activities in 2003, although some towns joined later, e.g., Eilat in 2004 and Sderot in 2006. As mentioned earlier, some of the city forums show few signs of activity, while others have hundreds of discussion threads and thousands of posts and viewings. This difference does not only stem from the number of Russian speakers in different towns, rather it reflects the vivacity of the local Russian-speaking communities, resourcefulness of moderators and the number of active participants posting messages instead of just lurking. As we have seen in the discussions about shelling, not all the users participating in online chats in a specific city forum are residents of that particular town. Some don't even live in Israel, which doesn't prevent them from being actively involved in discussions. In general, the attitude to newcomers in the city forums is positive, and their questions seldom remain unanswered. Practices for socializing newcomers are the same as in many other online communities: display of FAQs, no restrictions for viewing discussion threads and explicit invitations to sign up and join online conversations (Ren et al. 2007: 394).

City forums are often used as a medium providing instrumental aid and support. Several forums with low activity function primarily as electronic notice boards, with immigrant-owned businesses offering

goods and services, and individuals asking about jobs, apartments for rent, addresses of organizations and agencies, and availability of various services. In such cases a thread can contain just one post, usually an ad, although the automatic counter sometimes registers hundreds or even thousands of viewings. One such example is the city forum of the town of Hadera: out of 175 discussion threads more than one third (65) contain one post and no responses or comments, and 87 have from 1 to 10 responses.

Many topics in city forums are formulated as requests for help in matters as diverse as choosing a good school for a child, a doctor with reputation, a retraining course in a specific field or a barber for a dog. Some of these requests sound urgent if not desperate:

- Please Help! My washing machine has broken down. I need your advice!
- Help to find a *mishpahton* [Hebrew, “private kindergarten”] in the vicinity of *Dereh Iavne*!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- Save a child! Urgent!
- Please help: A mother is unable to reach her daughter on the phone!

The severity of the problems named in the titles of the threads may be incomparable, but the writers rely on the camaraderie of the participants and hope to reach large numbers of people. Campaigns to raise money for an expensive surgery or treatment often come from parents living in the FSU – in the recent years the so called “medical tourism” has grown considerably thanks to the reputation of Israel’s medical care and to the visa-free travel for Russian and Ukrainian citizens.<sup>18</sup> Requests to find a missing person also come primarily from forum participants living outside Israel. Such ads are regularly placed in Russian-language newspapers, and in recent years, search for friends or family members has become a recurrent theme in city forums too (see a narrative about a successful search for a friend through a newspaper in Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2005, Vol. 2: 43–45).

Many requests for advice in city forums come from new immigrants or those who are only planning to move to Israel. Future immigrants use city forums as a source of information before choosing a town to live. They ask about language learning courses, availability of jobs and social services. They inquire about the security situation in the chosen town, facilities for the children and the elderly and also about weather conditions – an important factor for those who move to a dif-



**Figure 3.** *Although Israelis can post their ads in the press and on the Internet, the old method of sticking a private advertisement to fences, wooden boards or any other surfaces that seem suitable to the advertisers is still popular among the Russian speakers.*

ferent climate. Some mention that institutional sites for immigrants are not informative enough and so they prefer advice of co-ethnics who have gone through the ordeals of immigration. Sharing information online increases immigrants' social capital by simplifying access to the necessary services and organizations and creating a network of acquaintances. In fact, many messages end with suggestions to continue the conversation by e-mail or by phone. In some forums, there are threads in which participants discuss having get-togethers in real life.

Online city forums are also used for organizing offline activities for members of the Russian-speaking community. Professional and amateur actors and musicians are invited to auditions, new members

are recruited to the local branches of the brain ring “What? Where? When?”, the Club of the Merry and Resourceful (*KVN*) and Bards’ clubs. There are invitations to participate in meetings for businessmen, art contests and festivals, sign up for domestic tours to popular and off-track destinations, attend lectures in scientists’ clubs, and so on. On some occasions, city forums are used to organize actions to protect institutions created by immigrants. This was the case with a Russian library affiliated with the Immigrants’ House in Ashdod. When in 2010 the municipality wanted to close it down and move the books to another library, the issue was discussed not only in the Russian-language press and on the state TV channel broadcasting in Russian, but also in the city forum of Ashdod (131 posts and 31,569 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=38813>, last accessed on 14 Sept 2012). Those members of the debate who opposed the municipal decision called on forum members to protest against it, citing a successful campaign against closing the Russian library in Jerusalem.

City forums clearly show growing involvement of the Russian-speaking residents in the life of their towns. As Wojcik aptly remarks, local electronic city forums are exceptional as they allow an unbroken opinion flow (Wojcik 2010: 7). We observe lively conversations when building or reconstruction projects are discussed. Some of the comments contain detailed description and evaluation of the projects, give links to the articles in the press about them and photographs uploaded by the commentators or copied from other sites. In each forum we can see a lot of criticism targeting local authorities in matters related to public order, ecology, operation of utilities and public transport. But these criticisms are not reduced to mere grumbling. In many threads we hear voices calling on co-ethnics to take an active stand in the approach to city problems. Thus, in the discussion thread “Residents’ proposals for the improvement of services and utilities in Beer Sheva” (67 posts, 3,166 viewings), the user who initiated the thread encouraged participants to photograph problematic places and people violating public order, and post their pictures in the forum.<sup>19</sup> He/she also wrote:

**Volerner, posted on 11 Jun 2010:**

The situation won’t change by itself. If we want a change, let us ask ourselves a question: What can I do to change the situation?

<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=38264>, last accessed on 12 Sept 2012.



**Figure 4.** Graffiti in Israeli towns are as multilingual as their residents. This message on the wall of an apartment house in Haifa reads: Those who love animals do not eat them.

In the course of the discussion this user also offered help in fixing the broken swings on a children's playground which were mentioned in the discussion among examples of bad maintenance of municipal property.

Immigrants' growing ties with their towns of residence are also manifested in the curiosity expressed about local flora and fauna and narratives about wild animals living in parks and *wadies* (beds of dried-up rivers with lush vegetation). Forum participants talk about the history of street naming and demonstrate concern about the protection of old buildings and historic sites. In several forums we find threads in which participants talk about prominent residents and achievements of the local institutions and individuals. See, e.g., the thread "Ashdod can be proud", 174 posts and 47,299 viewings (<http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=21&t=29660&sid=40655915f9cafcecaac9423179958d91>, last accessed on 14 Sept 2012). It started with information about an award received by a Russian-speaking academic living in Ashdod and greetings sent to him by forum participants.

The conversation continued with the posts about successes of Ashdod sportsmen and young musicians. High rating of Ashdod high-school graduates in the matriculation exams was also mentioned as a source of pride, proving again that good education remains an important value for members of the Russian-speaking community. A similar thread in the Haifa forum, “They are from Haifa: Gold can be easily told!!!” started with the information about the Nobel Prize awarded to two professors of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology located in Haifa (40 posts and 19,246 viewings, <http://forum.israelinfo.ru/viewtopic.php?f=16&t=5375>, last accessed on 14 Sept 2012). Like in the Ashdod forum, the conversation then moved to other prominent residents of the city contributing to its wellbeing and international image. The choice of celebrities in these threads is biased, as most of them are Russian Jews, which boosts the immigrants’ ego filling them with pride for co-ethnics and for the city. Finally, it is important to note that there is a deictic shift from “they” to “us” and a frequent use of phrases “my city”, “our town” in the immigrants’ discourse about urban life in Israel – a clear sign of cognitive positioning oneself in a place and appropriating it.

## Conclusions

- The identity of a place can be perceived as a unit of three inter-related components – physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meanings and symbols (Relph 1976: 60). Immigrants start their acquaintance with new towns from appearances. Everyday activities needed to settle and earn a living in the new environment make them learn the functions of various streets, squares and buildings. Understanding of symbolic meanings requires exposure to traditions and rituals and may take much longer to grasp, but without this knowledge the real identity of the town remains elusive to newcomers. As the biographic interviews we conducted showed, in the first years after resettlement, immigrants keep comparing their new towns with their native towns and other cities in the FSU. Nostalgia is not the only reason for this. These comparisons made it easier for our subjects to make sense of and structuralize their new experiences. In the majority of cases the first comparisons were not in favor of Israeli towns. This phenomenon was vividly described by



the Russian-Israeli writer Nina Voronel: "When I came to Israel, all the towns here looked the same to me, because none of them was Moscow. But gradually I came to like Tel Aviv: the longer I strolled along its narrow crooked lanes, the more I learned about its alleys and boutiques, the dearer it became to me. All the more so that the city has become so much more beautiful, young trees adorned streets turning them boulevards, while Moscow gradually faded and became distant" (Voronel 2011: 31). Indeed, many urban localities have become more comfortable for living and more attractive to look at. FSU immigrants have played their role by creating "Russian" islands with food and book stores, boutiques and beauty salons, kindergartens and afternoon schools, libraries and hobby groups run in community centers or in private apartments. While shops and services are increasingly used by Hebrew- and Arabic-speaking Israelis, cultural institutions created by Russian-speaking Israelis cater to members of the in-group where hybrid Russian-Israeli identities find expression and evolve new symbolic meanings.

- In the Soviet Union mobility was limited by registered domicile, vigilantly controlled by the state. In Israel immigrants are free to choose where to live and nobody blocks moving from an inconvenient or rundown neighborhood or town to a better organized and more prosperous area. Yet many FSU immigrants are still located in areas that they can afford, and as a result, in many cases their social environment does not correspond to their former, and sometimes current, social status. A high percentage of Russian-speaking Israelis live among members of other ethnic groups, in particular Moroccan and Ethiopian Jews, and Arabs, while the target of many families is to live among middle-class European Jews. To achieve this goal some families buy apartments in poorer neighborhoods, lease them, and rent in more expensive areas. An important motive behind these complex operations is to immerse the children in a desirable environment as regards school and potential friends. These tendencies show that Russian-speaking immigrants have internalized the sociospatial ideals of Israeli society and have joined the race to attain them.
- The perception of core and periphery found in both interview samples and in discussion forums is in line with the Russian cultural tradition: the core is associated with the opportunity, prosperity,



culture, and entertainment, while the periphery is disliked and despised. The words “province”, “village”, “small town”, and “suburbia” are invariably used pejoratively to characterize the towns the interviewees and forum participants dislike.

- Perception of distance among ex-Soviets has changed, particularly in the case of those who used to live in metropolitan areas. While daily commuting for over one hour is taken for granted in such cities as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, etc., trips of the same length in Israel are seen as long and unacceptable as part of the daily routine, particularly for those who do not own cars. Despite some improvements in public transportation, immigrants without cars often suffer from limitations in mobility, making them feel they are second-rate citizens.
- Discourse on urban life in Israel shows many signs that Russian-speaking immigrants of the 1990s-2000s have developed an insider position as regards urban life in Israel. Whether discussing changes occurring in their towns of residence, proposing improvements of city services, advertising cultural events or documenting local life in photo and video albums posted in discussion forums and blogs, Russian-speaking Israelis demonstrate a growing feeling of place belonging. This comes strongest in city forums when off-line actions to improve liveability in towns are negotiated, and when “veterans” serve as guides and councilors for the new and potential immigrants.
- Words from the semantic field “space” are frequently used in immigrants’ discourse to describe one’s degree of integration. The master-metaphor here is “to find or not to find one’s place” in the new country.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Associations of fellow-countrymen were created to facilitate maintenance of cultural traditions of Jews coming from different areas of the FSU and consolidate ties with the countries and towns of origin. Besides organizations catering to immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Kyrgyzstan, mountain Jews, etc., there are smaller units formed by residents of towns, e.g., Tomsk, Donetsk, Cheliabinsk, Samara, and so on. Besides organizing conferences, informal meetings and cultural events, they function as solidarity networks helping newcomers to integrate in the new country.

- <sup>2</sup> Here and further the date following the address of the web site indicates the date when it was last accessed.
- <sup>3</sup> The following are self-reported data about the level of education of the respondents: unfinished secondary – 0.5%; secondary – 15.6%; unfinished higher – 13%; higher – 56.9%; Academic degree (Ph.D. or Big Doctorate) – 13.9%, <http://polls.zahav.ru/?date=07-09-2012>, last accessed on 18 Sept 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> According to the surveys conducted in 1992, 82.3% of FSU immigrants came from big industrial cities in the European part of the USSR (Hasson 1996: 169).
- <sup>5</sup> Note that there are some similarities between housing problems and methods of solving them in Israel and in the USSR. In the 1920s it was common practice in the Soviet Russia to distribute rooms in the apartments and houses abandoned by émigrés among the needy. Those owners who stayed on were forced to make do with a single room giving up the rest to ex-servants or strangers. This gave birth to the ill-famed communal apartments. Like in Israel, the standards of new housing projects were low, in particular in the 1930s, when the best building materials were kept for big industrial projects, building technologies were primitive, and the workers, many of them former peasants, unskilled (Lahusen 2006: 744).
- <sup>6</sup> We change the names of our interviewees but provide genuine demographic information about them for the time the interviews were conducted.
- <sup>7</sup> The Green Line is the term commonly used to refer to the demarcation of the 1949 Armistice Agreement.
- <sup>8</sup> Excerpts from the interviews and Internet posts were not edited and reflect contaminations and individual style of narrators and Internet users. Omissions are marked with (...), Hebrew insertions are italicized, and fragments emphasized by intonation are printed in bold font.
- <sup>9</sup> News items were classified using the following categories: local business activities, new building and infrastructure development projects, ecological situation, housing, municipality reports, international contacts, education, local NGO activities, culture and entertainment, holidays, sports, law and crime, interethnic relations, social protest and strikes, press portraits. Some of the articles could be included in two or more categories. In such cases the prevailing theme was determined by the title of the article, key words and the links to other articles covering similar topics which are given below each article.

- <sup>10</sup> The monitored papers are not equally active, and so the three equally big samples cover different periods of time: Haifa, from the 13<sup>th</sup> of June to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July; Ashdod, from the 27<sup>th</sup> of April to the 25<sup>th</sup> of July; Ariel, from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2011 to the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2012.
- <sup>11</sup> In the original the second part of the title “*Arabam v Karmiele zhit’, prepon ne chinit’*” seeks to create a humorous effect, because it is rhymed and alludes to the edicts of the Russian czar Peter I.
- <sup>12</sup> Brighton Beach, an outpost of Brooklyn, came to be known as Little Odessa because several waves of Jewish immigration from the USSR turned into a Russian-Jewish ghetto. The name became proverbial after the 1994 movie of the same title by James Gray.
- <sup>13</sup> According to a recent survey devoted to school education, which was conducted by the portal *Kursor*, the majority of respondents believe the Soviet system of school education was more effective than the Israeli system (<http://cursorinfo.co.il/news/novosti/2012/09/02/shkola/>, last accessed on 17 Oct 2012).
- <sup>14</sup> Russian-speaking Israelis are active participants in online discussions about the role of Moscow and St. Petersburg in the past and today (Yelenevskaya 2011: 104, 108).
- <sup>15</sup> This is the first line of a popular Soviet song inspiring the nation to be ready to retaliate if an enemy wages a war. The music was composed by Dmitrii and Daniel Pokras and the lyrics by Vladimir Lebedev-Kumach.
- <sup>16</sup> In July 2006, when approximately 4,000 shells and missiles were shot at the northern towns of Israel from Lebanon, numerous families in the South offered to host families who had fled their homes. There were FSU immigrants among the hosts and the refugees.
- <sup>17</sup> One of the authors uses public transport regularly and can testify that inaccurate schedules make passengers waste a lot of time. The high-tech solution of downloading the program updating passengers about minute changes in schedules does not yet cover routes away from the center of the country.
- <sup>18</sup> Visa requirements for Russian citizens travelling to Israel were eliminated in 2008 and for Ukrainian citizens in 2011.
- <sup>19</sup> This is reminiscent of the notice boards with photographs of drunkards and hooligans under the title “They disgrace our town” which one could see in the streets of some Soviet towns.

# In Search of the Self: Reconciling the Past and the Present in Immigrants' Experience

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