Chapter 3. Holidays as Border Crossing: The Case of Russian-Speaking Immigrants in Israel

Introduction

This chapter looks into changes in festive traditions and attitudes to various holidays, Jewish, Slavic and Soviet among Russian-speaking Israelis. It is based on focus interviews with seven informants recorded in August–November of 2011 in Haifa and Netanya (7 hours of recording). Material of the interviews was supplemented by posts devoted to holidays on Russian-language Israeli web sites and our participant observation of the lifestyle of Russian-speaking Israelis. The chapter follows up on our previous studies of everyday life of Russian-speaking Israelis. They revealed a mosaic in which Russian and Soviet practices dominated but were mixed with elements of the Jewish tradition. In biographic interviews our informants reminisced about Soviet rituals and some habits of their parents and grandparents that had puzzled them. One informant told us that she could never understand why her grandmother would soak a chicken in the water before cooking. Only later she realized that it was a home method of making chicken meat kosher. Another interviewee wondered about an old kerosene lamp that was used only three times a year. As it turned out, her grandmother lit it up on the days her two sons fell in World War II and on the Day of Atonement. Still another informant shared her memories about waiting for a happy day in autumn when her grandmother would tell her to miss classes for no particular reason. Without explaining the reason to the child, the grandmother, familiar with the Jewish tradition, tried to mark in this way the Day of the Atonement when no Jew

should work. A characteristic feature of these stories was that only in Israel where immigrants could witness the Jewish tradition practiced without disguise did "strange" behavior of the relatives begin to make sense to the narrators (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2007: 68–87).

Ten years have passed since we conducted biographic interviews, which we discussed in our previous book, and all this time we continued participant observation. Like our colleagues who investigated secondary socialization of Russian-speaking Israelis in terms of their attitude to religion (Remennick & Prashizky 2010), we see that immigrants are more involved in the Jewish life. Some have picked up knowledge about the Jewish tradition in the course of day-to-day interaction with veteran Israelis; others read books or took courses on various aspects of Judaism and Jewish history. On some occasions immigrants participate in Jewish festive rituals in public settings, for example when they attend office parties, visit their children's schools or participate in community events in various NGOs; however, in most cases Israelis spend holidays in the family circle. While public festivities taking place on the streets and on the squares welcome anyone willing to participate, home celebrations presuppose invitation of guests and joint activities to prepare the event. When the attitude of the hosts and guests to religion differs, their habits are usually taken into account and respected. Thus, when the secular invite their religious friends they either order food in kosher restaurants, and serve it on disposable dishes, or serve drinks, ice-cream and cakes bought in kosher shops. In case guests are not religious but eat kosher, restrictions are less severe. The hostess might cook herself but will not mix meat and dairy foods. As a rule, people observing the Jewish tradition do not visit their secular friends on the days of Jewish holidays, rather they come to parties held on weekdays or after sunset on Saturday when Sabbath is over. Yet many religious people do not hesitate to invite their secular friends for a Sabbath dinner on Friday night. One of the considerations then is to try to bring the secular closer to a traditional way of life.

When we were choosing informants for the focus interviews we approached those who displayed curiosity about various traditions. We were interested in narratives about festive rituals but even more so in our subjects' reflections about the place of festive traditions in their life, and the changes in the role of holidays and attitudes to them that occurred as a result of resettling. At the time of immigration all our informants were secular and had but superficial knowledge of

any religious traditions or rituals. One of the first changes in their lifestyle in Israel was different division of time: weekdays starting on Sunday, and a new year starting in September. This change has various implications for newcomers. One is the loss of mobility at weekends and during holidays. In all the towns of Israel, except Haifa and Upper Nazareth, public transport comes to a standstill on Friday afternoon until Saturday evening (see section "Long Distances in a Small Country" pages 70–73). The same happens on the eve of all Jewish holidays. People who have cars and those who can afford taxis can solve the problem easily if they don't live in the areas dominated by Ultra-Orthodox Jews. It is the economically weak, including new immigrants, who are stuck at home on days off. Political aspects of the problem of transport on weekends and holidays have recently come to the fore again, when the Minister of Transport announced that night routes would be added in the localities that had suffered most severely from shelling during the military operation in Gaza in November 2012 (http://news.israelinfo.ru/tribune/43964, last accessed on 18 Jan 2013). Despite these measures, the problem remains so acute that the leader of the secularist political party "There is a future", Yair Lapid, included the pledge to introduce full-scale operation of the public transport on holidays in his election campaign of 2012–2013.

The absence of mobility alone may lead to ambivalent attitudes to the Jewish holidays. They can be perceived as intimate family events and so highly valued, or as "house arrest" imposed by the religious establishment on all the citizens, including the secular. As a result, Jewish holidays alienated many secular newcomers and triggered opposition similar to the latent protest and cynicism coloring attitudes to "the red days of the calendar" in the late Soviet period (see Dubin 2004: 242, 246–247). We could observe how the attitude of ex-Soviets to holidays gradually diverged: those who were more flexible in adapting to the new culture embraced new traditions. In this group some shed old habits, others saw no harm in preserving them despite the critical attitude of the host society. But there are also those who resisted adapting to new customs and were adamant in preserving festive traditions and rituals of the "old country".

Holidays: Time to Bind or Separate Families

Different attitudes to Jewish holidays may lead to family conflicts which were discussed in the interviews. Similar problems emerge in those families where one or several members turn to Christianity after settling in Israel. We will now quote these stories. The first one is from an interview with Veronika, who is secular but came to like Jewish festive rituals and tried to cultivate them. She found it upsetting that her efforts met with opposition on the part of her family and friends.

Veronika, 47, divorced, a Halachic Jew (her father was Russian), emigrated in 1990 from Frunze (today Bishkek), Kyrgyzstan (previously lived in Tiraspol (Moldova) and Moscow), a philologist by education, self-employed as a translator and a tourist guide. Veronika lives in Haifa.

Veronika: Everything, but everything was one big effort. That is, say, I always invite friends for *Rosh ha-Shana* (the Jewish New Year). But when you invite all the company to the table, nobody will even mention that the feast celebrates the New Year. (…) That is, when you find yourself among the people who openly demonstrate that they don't give a damn, it's very hard. So you are invited to my home on a festive occasion. A festivity is some sort of a game. That is, you come to play some merry and cheerful game, because it is an excellent event for everyone. Come on! Take part in it, it won't hurt you if you do! But it was a matter of principle, for example for Sergei (Veronica's ex-husband); that is, he always torpedoed my attempts as much as he could.

In her work as a translator Veronika often deals with texts on religious subjects. This new knowledge and natural curiosity inspired her to adopt new habits which would make the usual gatherings of friends more cheerful thanks to the elements of play. She was hurt and offended that nobody in her circle shared her enthusiasm and preferred to stick to old routines. She perceived it as active opposition to the new environment and conservatism. Yet in some cases, in particular in the first years after resettlement, immigrants are so stressed by having to learn a new language, new communication patterns, and adopt new practices in their professional life that they try to protect their leisure time from the invasion of anything that is unfamiliar and may require any additional efforts or suppression of the old habits.

The second excerpt is drawn from an interview with Rita, who immigrated to Israel as an adolescent:

Rita, 28, married to a native Hebrew-speaking Israeli, a Halachic Jew (her father, who is of partial Jewish origin, is registered as Ukrainian), emigrated in 1991 from Odessa, a biologist, employed in a communications company. Rita lives in Haifa.

Rita: Well, my mum tried, she tries to celebrate *Pesakh* (Passover). But she is not very successful.

Interviewer: Why?

Rita: Neither dad, nor Sasha (Rita's brother) can live without bread (laughs). She tries very hard. She found a bakery that makes loaves using flour for matzo. But then here are these loaves and next to them is bread (both laugh).

Interviewer: Does she make a *seder*[1]?

Rita: Well, we used to do it when grandpa was still alive.

Interviewer: Oh, I see.

Rita: And afterwards…

Interviewer: No more?

Rita: And afterwards I went to the army, then Sasha went to the army, and she was left with the coalition of "I don't want it".

Interviewer: I see.

Rita: So now it doesn't really work.

Interviewer: But grandpa was for it.

Rita: Grandpa was for it, and mum is for it. But she is alone against all those who are against it.

Like Veronika, Rita's mother is secular and was resourceful in trying to persuade her family to change their habits, but she was equally unsuccessful. The difference is that the relations in the family remained good, and the disagreements about observation of the tradition were

limited to mutual teasing. Elsewhere in the interview Rita remarks that for her grandfather the newly-opened possibility to observe the Jewish tradition had a nostalgic touch as it reminded him of his own childhood and family. Her mother's attempts to keep kosher during the Passover did not stop her from eating non-kosher the rest of the year or decorating a tree for the New Year (first some branches from a forest and today a proper plastic fir-tree). Another detail worthy of attention is that the first neighbors of Rita's family would often invite the newcomers to spend holiday evening with them. Many immigrants in the biographic interviews we had conducted for the previous projects recalled similar experience with warmth. Despite the gratitude for friendship and hospitality much needed by immigrants in the new environment, in the case of Rita's family the relation did not last:

> **Interviewer:** Have you remained friendly with these neighbors?
>
> **Rita:** No, no…my parents err… got scared because they (the neighbors) were too religious…

The third excerpt comes from an interview with a student who immigrated to Israel after graduating from high school in the framework of a program that promised studies at a technological college combined with studies of Judaism. Brought up in a secular family, Yurii knew little about the Jewish tradition. Upon arrival in Israel he found out that the emphasis in the program was on religion rather than on the studies of technology. As a result, he left the program four months later, but his stay in the *yeshiva*[2] provided him with the knowledge of the Jewish history and tradition that proved important in his further university studies and served as a source of reflections about the interaction of cultures in the life of his family and friends.

> **Yurii, 27, single, a Halachic Jew (his father is Ukrainian), emigrated from Gorlovka, Ukraine in 2001, an M.A. student of Political Science, lives in Haifa.**
>
> **Yurii**: As I've already told you, my brother's wife is Russian. And her mother who still lives in Ukraine she is very… well either she poses as a deeply religious Orthodox person paying tribute to fashion, or she is, indeed, religious. And she constantly tries to influence her daughter. And so it's very important for my sister-in-law to go to Migdal' ha-Emec to consecrate *kulichi* (Russian, Easter cakes) (…)

Interviewer: Does your brother go together with her?

Yurii: No, he doesn't. He is against any religion. Not actively though. His attitude is reduced to ironic phrases of this sort: "What else did these traders of opium for the people teach you?"[3]

Since among the FSU immigrants of the 1990s there are many mixed families, the congregation of churches has increased (Remennick & Prashizky 2010: 84–98; Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2011: 155–156). Since Russian Orthodox churches are relatively few, some of the believers have to travel to other towns, as is the case in the quoted excerpt. Yurii's brother is obviously annoyed by his wife's religious practices, yet in our ethnographic diaries there are stories told by two Christian women whose Jewish husbands willingly bring their wives to church for Easter services when there is no public transport.

Family conflicts emerging due to different attitudes to holidays may be triggered by ideological preferences or stem from the reluctance of some members of the family to change habits and sacrifice their comforts. As time passes, alienation from Jewish holidays and rituals may become more acute, or conversely, disappear under the influence of the environment. This is what happened in the family of our interviewee Iosif. Coming from a secular family he became interested in Judaism at the age of 15 and until age 23 he was studying Judaism in depth and adopted an orthodox way of life.

Iosif, 25, Jewish, married to a Russian. He emigrated in 2000 from Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, a student of philosophy, lives in Haifa.

Iosif: My becoming religious was very… of course it was very difficult for them (Iosif's parents) to accept. Mostly it was because of the way of life. But then I realized that it was difficult for them because they were afraid that my religiosity would distance me from the family. Because they saw other guys who had also become religious… And there are many cases when a person becomes religious, then his children are born and he doesn't want his parents to see them (children) because they don't keep kosher… and then they distance themselves from the family. I think this is what my parents were afraid of, and this explains their skepticism. But gradually they got used to it and even supported me in many respects. I think they did, because they wanted to reinforce their own Jewishness. There was a period when my dad wore a *kipa* (a skull cap). Afterwards he gave up on this, but still... My brother (pause)

> observes *kashrut* (Jewish dietary rules). He doesn't observe anything else, but *kashrut* is somehow important for him. There was a period when my mum lit candles on *Shabbat* but then she also gave up … And when I left [religion], first it was a great relief for them… but when I said: "I've met a girl and she isn't Jewish", they said: "We'd rather you married a religious girl, we'd rather you had gone to study at a *yeshiva,* and so on and so forth."

Iosif's story is an example of dilemmas confronting families where some members start to observe the tradition, while others remain secular. The seemingly inconsistent behavior of Iosif's parents has logic. They did not protest against their son's religiosity and enjoyed the newly learned Jewish rituals despite anxiety about their impact on the coherence of the family. But enchantment with the rituals and willingness to perform them was short-lived and came to an end when Iosif returned to a secular way of life. Their son's wish to marry a gentile was viewed as a bigger menace than Jewish orthodoxy. In the Soviet Union despite being wide-spread, mixed families were frowned on by Jews, and in Israel this attitude was reinforced by the dominant ideology of the Jewish state and various bureaucratic complications and moral dilemmas facing non-Jewish immigrants (Kenigshtein 2007; Moin, Krivosh & Kenigshtein 2007).

Although not everyone is curious to learn about the history of Jewish holidays or interested in their philosophical antecedents, most immigrants have become familiar with such festivals as *Rosh ha-Shana*, *Succoth*, *Chanukah and Pesakh* (the Jewish New Year, the Feast of Ingathering, the Festival of Lights and the Passover) and know the attributes and elements of play related to them (cf. Nosenko [no year]).

> **Veronika:** (reflects about the Passover) So all of you have some connection to it. That is, not you as private persons who came to…no, all of you have connections to it. And add to it the festive atmosphere, because you light candles. And it's not ordinary candles but special candles for the **PASSOVER.** And you read a text in Russian, or some other language, it doesn't really matter, and you tell a story. That is, after that you feel it's a real festival. You open matzo, then you close matzo. And then there is *afikoman*,[4] and the children have to run around to get it. That is, well, the children are very important for the whole script. And it's not like our usual parties: adults are in one room, and the kids are in another one. Here, everyone, the kids and the adults have to sit at the same table. In my opinion it is tremendously important.

Unlike Veronika who finds special pleasure and value in following the ritual, our interviewee Ella feels that it is pointless to follow the ritual without thoroughly understanding its meaning:

Ella, 64, married, Jewish, emigrated in 1995 from Kaliningrad (previously lived in Kiev and Latvia), an English teacher, self-employed as a cleaning lady and a tutor, lives in Yokneam.

Ella: Well, what is tradition for us? Everyone comes. Everyone comes to our house. Well, naturally we don't read any fairy tales. I don't like profaning things. If we don't know and don't even understand what we are reading, then what's the use? A holiday is when everyone comes together. The only thing though, which we did do on *Pesakh* was hiding these pieces of bread, and Aleshka… What is it called?

Interviewer: *Afikoman.*

Ella: *Afikoman.* And Aleshka, he was the youngest. He would always find it. And now Danka (Ella's granddaughter) is growing up. Certainly, my children want her to be brought up in these traditions. And I think… yesterday we were looking at her album. They celebrate everything in her kindergarten: they celebrate *Succot* (Russified Hebrew, *Succoth*) and everything, absolutely everything. So now I have to make an effort to let her look for this piece of bread. So we'll try to do our best. This is, indeed, interesting, but otherwise…

Although Ella and her family show little interest in the history of Jewish rituals, they take it for granted that the young one should be well versed in them. Note the slip in her speech: talking about *afikoman,* she forgets that it is a piece of matzo and refers to it as "bread", which, as all the other foods baked with leaven, should be banned from the Jewish house for the Passover.[5]

While Veronika and Ella describe the Passover ritual meal from the parental position, Rita recalls her childhood memories:

Interviewer: Do you read *agada*[6] for *Pesakh?*

Rita: In his family, yes, we do (refers to her husband's family).

Interviewer: And when your grandfather was alive?

Rita: When grandpa was alive, we read a shortened version.

Interviewer: But did you get *afikoman*?

Rita: Yeah, we would get *afikoman*, but usually it was not hidden very well, so it was very easy to find it.

The motifs for involving children into ritual play differ. Some parents wish to introduce their offspring to the culture of the forefathers in a natural and non-coercive way, others feel it consolidates intergenerational family ties; still others have didactic goals in mind. Our participant observation suggests that reading of the Passover tale in turns during the meal serves as an exercise in reading out loud – an unpopular activity in the Israeli school. It is also important to note the children's special role in making immigrant families more involved in the Jewish holidays. The need to buy or sew an attractive fancy dress for a *Purim* party in a kindergarten or at school, children's requests for some sort of a tabernacle for *Succoth*, and expectations of gifts for all the Jewish holidays leave parents little choice but participation. We know immigrant families where children insist on following rituals for the Jewish holidays, so that they feel they are "like everybody else" and can discuss their experiences with their peers at school. Contrary to the usual intergenerational model of transferring traditions from the old to the young, in immigrant families children act as instructors and consultants to their parents. Acquisition of knowledge about Jewish holidays and their rituals is particularly important in mixed families, in which children are not Halachic Jews[7]. In this respect it is worth mentioning that one of the chief goals of the Association for the Protection of Mixed Families' Rights (an NGO) is to facilitate integration of the children into society through participation in the Jewish culture and tradition. Together with Reform rabbis coordinators of the association organize group *bar-* and *bat-mitzvahs*[8] and festive evenings for adolescents and their parents. The association also organized a children's theater *perakh bar* (Hebrew, Desert Flower). Participants of the group write scripts, make dresses and stage props, and perform scenes based on biblical plots (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2011: 156–157).

Holidays are associated with leisure. Whether one is involved in a festivity and identifies with it is sometimes determined by a prosaic fact: does one have a day off or not? The difference in calendars deleted the "red days" of the Soviet/Russian holidays which are workdays in Israel. It hurt many Russian-speaking Israelis, in particular with regard

to such holidays as the New Year, the International Women's Day, the 8th of March, and Victory Day, the 9th of May. From Veronika' interview we see that in many families of secular Russian-speaking Israelis Jewish holidays are devoid of any ritualization. This is reminiscent of the late Soviet period when festivities in honor of the October Revolution and the Labor Day did not inspire ideological enthusiasm but were a good opportunity to party with family and friends (Baiburin & Piir 2008: 236, 244). Similarly, in Russian-speaking Israeli families Jewish holiday evenings are often devoid of rituals and lack traditional content and symbolism (cf. Veronika's story about her guests forgetting the Jewish "New Year" and Ella's refusal to read the Passover *Haggadah*).

The difference in passive and active attitudes to holidays, and in effect, readiness to defend one's lifestyle, emerges most vividly in stories about the New Year, which still remains the most popular holiday among the FSU immigrants. The newcomers' attachment to New Year celebrations alienated the Jewish sector of the host society since Israelis identified it with Christianity (St. Sylvester's Day) and were unaware that in the USSR it was the favorite holiday because unlike others, it was not tinged with the official ideology.

> **Ella:** Somehow, it doesn't work for us. *Rosh ha-Shana* (the Jewish New Year) is different – everybody will celebrate it, while the **New Year is an ordinary workday**. So what? And another thing, in the past, there was a fir-tree and gifts for children. And now? Shall we just sit in front of the box the whole night? What's the fun? So we'll sit together a bit, drink a glass of champagne and this will be all. It was so different when the kids were small: Grandfather Frost would knock at the door and bring a whole sack of gifts. Here there is no such thing. And so without… gradually, it sort of … (…) Well, I can't say that we don't buy champagne, that we don't drink, but **at half past 12 we go to bed. Is this a real holiday? But we have no strength for more.** And so we can't make it into a real holiday.

> **Yurii:** When I was in the army I moonlighted and worked as a waiter in a hotel (…) My colleagues were also Russian speakers, and so it was very difficult to get a day off on that day. **And I felt as if it were a question of life and death**. I felt I should **NOT** work on that day, and that we, all my co-workers should have a party. At that time my colleagues made my main circle of friends. And we should go and celebrate in some Russian restaurant. Now I am not at all attracted to this. I don't really know what I will do on the New Year's Eve. Most likely, my parents who live in Upper Nazareth will ask me to come over there. In fact, I

***Figure 7**. This toy Grandfather Frost made a long journey: produced in China it was on sale in an Arab-owned shop in Haifa, and finally, found its place under a plastic fir tree in a family that had emigrated from Kyiv (photograph courtesy of Lilia Dashevski).*

don't want this day to become like any other day, but at the same time I don't make it into a big celebration. And if there is a **reason and if there are friends** who would like to celebrate together with me, and the atmosphere is favourable for this, then *Rosh ha-Shana* can be no worse than the civilian New Year.

Figure 8. *With the Israeli flag in the background, Grandfather Frost can hardly be considered an alien, and hundreds of Russian-speaking children waiting for him are the best proof of his successful integration (http://izrus.co.il/print_article.php?article=20083, posted on 31 Dec 2012, last accessed on 26 Jan 2013).*

Like in the narratives of many other Russian-speaking Israelis, Ella's and Yurii's stories about New Year celebrations moving to the background do not reflect actual practices. During the interview Ella spoke at length about decorating the house, buying gifts for all members of the family and the joy she felt looking at the exhilaration of her little granddaughter dancing around the glittering New Year tree. To increase the festive atmosphere during the New Year celebration, Ella and her husband buy fancy-dress masks for all the members of the family, including the dog. According to the Internet-based survey commissioned by the state-run Russian-language TV channel "Israel Plus" and conducted by the sociological institute *Mutagim* in December 2011, 83 per cent of ex-Soviets continue to celebrate the New Year. Of those who do, 76.6 per cent were going to have feasts at home, and 15.1% chose to go out. 63 per cent of the Russian-speakers surveyed declared that they would allocate higher sums for buying food for this event than they usually do, and 60 per cent intended to buy gifts for family and friends (http://nofesh.gid.co.il/?p=6233, last accessed on 14 Jan 2013).

Unlike Veronika, who perceives holidays as an opportunity to become closer to history, be it Jewish or Slavic, and is attracted to rituals by their play elements, Yurii and Iosif emphasize the atmosphere of solemnity they create. Both were introduced to the Jewish festive tradition in a religious community. Although both left religion, they have preserved tolerant attitudes to religious people and a traditional way of life and they admit that the atmosphere of the religious rituals, which they rejected, is special and elevating.

> **Iosif**: …I remember that when I was religious we began to celebrate all the religious holidays. It wasn't easy for my parents, yet on the whole they supported me. So there was *Rosh ha-Shana,* and we had *Seder Pesakh*, and for *Succot* we would put up a *succa* (hut). And I remember that these things gave a much deeper festive feeling than the New Year. It really gave a feeling of a holiday, as we say *maamad* (an occasion) in Hebrew, and some special atmosphere. Then one could really feel the holiday. Even my parents admitted this, that **there was a real ceremony, from the beginning to the end**. There were prayers, there were special dishes. Although for the New Year (laughs), *Olivie* and *vinegret* salads are also compulsory dishes (…). Yet, on Jewish holidays… one could feel the tradition behind them. And it was beautiful. I remember there was a time when for *Pesakh* my father would put on a *tallit* (a prayer shawl) that he'd got as a gift. It was snow-white and beautiful, really very beautiful. It all looks very festive. And we would all sit around the table, and of course, there was this round Passover dish made of silver. One could feel the holiday. I don't know, but on no secular holiday did we have such a festive atmosphere.

> **Yurii:** You know, first I thought that I would forget it (time in the *yeshiva*) as you try to forget a nightmare. But even when I was in a kibbutz, that is, when I moved from one extreme to the other, I felt something was missing. I missed the Sabbath we had there, when I would put on a black suit, a white shirt and would go (pause) to the Western wall. This atmosphere, I miss it.

Irrespective of their attitude to various holidays, all our subjects underscore the importance of a definitive script for creating festive atmosphere. Repetition of the ritual's elements and anticipation of a familiar order in the ceremony help participants tune in to the anticipation of joy and contribute to the feeling of unity which is also embedded in the script (cf. Dubin 2004: 233). At the same time, rituals of the holiday that has not been accepted and remains poorly understood is perceived as annoying and burdensome (cf. Nikolaev 2003).

Holidays and Ritual Foods

An important part of festive scripts is food which is described in the narratives about Jewish and non-Jewish holidays. Among the dishes associated with Soviet holidays the *Olivie* salad, known in many countries as "Russian", is still the leader and triggers bursts of laughter. Its close competitor is *Vinegret,* a culinary composition of boiled potatoes, beets, carrots and green peas mixed with onions and pickled cucumbers. Like in Russia, food eaten on the New Year's Eve has become ritualized. Although neither *Olivie* nor *Vinegret* have any sacral background, both have acquired such connotations in the mentality of ex-Soviets (cf. Kushkova 2005). Sacrality of foods does not presuppose their positive evaluation. Some women complain that these dishes are too time consuming to make and are too rich in calories. These complaints are gender-specific. Judging from our observations, ex-Soviet men are still seldom involved in preparing festive meals, and women have to do all the cooking and baking on their own. Yet, even those who are not in favor of these dishes (e.g., Veronika), admit that they are indispensable at New Year feasts. To confirm this attitude, advertisements of New Year celebrations in a big hotel chain in Eilat and on the shore of the Dead Sea promised their guests a traditional New Year menu, including "joys of Soviet times", such as "Herring under a fur coat" and *Vinegret*, http://izrus.co.il/hotels_news/article/2011-12-09/16396.html, last accessed on 14 Jan 2013.

Among the ritual dishes of the Jewish cuisine familiar from the pre-immigration period, most often immigrants cite *gefilte fish* (known to Russian speakers as "stuffed fish") and matzo. Gefilte fish is a traditional dish of Ashkenazi Jews served for Sabbath and such holidays as Passover and the Jewish New Year. According to the contemporary recipes we found on the Internet, it presents balls or cakes of white chopped boned fish mixed with egg and matzo meal and simmered in broth. However, the traditional recipe in some regions presupposes stuffing of a whole fish. The recipe of the ritual fish dish, known to many since childhood, is considered to be authentic and much more sophisticated than what is customary in Israel, and scornfully referred to as "little fish balls". The emphasis on the "wholeness" of the fish is emphasized in the narratives quoted below, including Yurii story in which gefilte fish is replaced by fish in aspic. Note that interviewees reflect on deviations from the Jewish Ashkenazi tradition and consider

Figure 9. *A snowman made of pomegranates with a palm-tree branch instead of a broom illustrates the symbiosis of Jewish and Russian festive traditions in the life of FSU immigrants. And the Russian-Jewish ritual fish sailing to the New Year feast is distinctly different from all the other species. Drawings by Sergei Sychenko and Boris Erenburg, published in Sekret, 16 Sept 2012, p. 17.*

their own practices a tradition itself. Thus in Yurii's family ritual food for *Rosh ha-Shana* was a poppy-seed cake, instead of apples and honey required by the tradition.

Ella: I am afraid we do everything wrongly, and the way we celebrate is also wrong. In the Soviet Union we would celebrate all the revolutionary holidays and the New Year, and we would celebrate Christmas. When we came here we celebrated both the Russian Christmas, and *Rosh ha-Shana,* and everything. But with us all of it is connected to some food. And for every single holiday, except *Pesakh* I make stuffed fish (both laugh). But not some nonsense, not some *gefilten fish,* you know, those minced-fish balls, but the **REAL** thing. We stuff a really big fish. This is how we do it. And if there is fish, this is a holiday. Yes. We invite a lot of people, yeah. And now I will make a *Rosh ha-Shana* party. It may be wrong and probably one has to use some other foods, but for us it's always fish, always minced herring and herring in mustard sauce, and other stuff.

Yurii: As a rule, mum makes fish in aspic, like my grandma used to do. My grandma would always make fish in aspic for *Pesakh and Rosh ha-Shana,* and so my mum does the same.

Interviewer: So you don't stuff the fish?

Yurii: Not gefilte fish. It's fish in aspic, err, that is, it's a whole fish. Yeah, and there is always matzo. And the bread is served too. (…) Sometimes mum consults me concerning the menu for *Pesakh,* she asks what it should include. I tell her what is needed... but I keep forgetting things, like that there should be a *zroa* (a chicken bone with meet on it), and that there should be an egg, and *khazeret* (horseradish), and some other things. I also remind her that for the New Year (he refers to the Jewish New Year) there should be honey and that there should be apples.

Interviewer: Are there any dishes in your family that are served on specific holidays, or is the food the same on all of them?

Rita: (pause) No, there is no dish which is **always** served on every holiday. What sort of food do we serve? Well, *sufganiot* (doughnuts) are for Hanukkah. *Rosh ha-Shana* is primarily associated with fish. When grandpa was alive, there was a whole fish on the table with a head (laughs). The whole (head). It used to frighten me a bit (unclear, both speak in chorus). I would turn it away, so that it wouldn't gaze at me but at someone else. And *Pesakh* is associated with matzo, and not only with matzo, but also with chicken. Since one has to put on the table a chicken leg or wing, mum would cook the whole chicken for the main dish. Always two or three… and a whole chicken, and legs in some sauce. So this is what I always see for *Pesakh.* What else? What other holidays do we have with specific food? Oh, yes, for *Shavuot* (the Giving of the Torah holiday), usually, say… oh, this is really funny, in my husband's family they always do meat, for *Shavuot.* They make *al ha-esh* (roasting over live coals).

Rita finds it amusing that her husband's family ignore that feasts on the Giving of the Torah holiday should be composed of dairy dishes and roast meet – the favorite pastime of Israelis picnicking on the Independence Day. Despite Yurii's experience in a Yeshiva, he observes in a matter-of-fact manner that bread is served together with matzo for the Passover. Ella, who admits her ignorance about conventions of the Jewish ritual cuisine, is convinced that "little fish balls" are inferior to the whole fish and can hardly qualify as a ritual dish. At the same time different dishes with herring have been promoted to this status in her family.

While talking about ritual foods of the Jewish cuisine, our interviewees, including those who avoid code mixing (e.g., Veronika and Yurii), intersperse their speech with Hebraisms. The reason is in in-

separable associations between the recipes of festive dishes and their names acquired in the process of primary and secondary socialization. Another peculiarity of the discourse about Jewish holidays is the verb "celebrate" which some immigrants use not only when they describe such cheerful holidays as Passover or the Giving of the Torah, but also when they talk about the Day of the Atonement.

Our observations show that loyalty to the familiar festive dishes is not limited to inertia and unwillingness to change habits, but often reflects nostalgia for childhood and desire to preserve family traditions. Yet many immigrants are ready to experiment with new foods and recipes, demonstrating curiosity and openness to the culture new to them. An interesting example is Veronika's foray into the culinary art of ancient Jews.

> **Veronika:** Besides everything else, *Pesakh* triggers various interesting associations with culinary art. I remember that once I wanted very much to make an authentic *Pesakh* (feast). I didn't want anything else, say, wise men, in the 1st, in the 2nd century AD, they would sit at the table for the Passover and eat something. It's as clear as day that they didn't eat tomatoes or egg plants. They didn't eat potatoes or chocolate, they didn't eat beans and, naturally, they didn't eat turkey. So to make authentic *Pesakh,* you need to have a clear idea of what you can serve. And this is also **SO** interesting.
>
> **Interviewer:** Did you manage?
>
> **Veronika:** Only partially. Partially. Because it's impossible not to use tomatoes (both laugh). But you can manage without potatoes; just like you can do without peppers or egg plants.

A special case is how festive traditions are observed in mixed families in which one of the spouses is not of Soviet extraction. This topic remains almost completely unresearched. Touching upon it in passing, Lomsky-Feder and Leibovitz remark that conflicts emerge due to the failure of Russian-speaking partners to keep kosher or refusal to make a ritual meal for the Passover; on the other hand there are cases when partners demonstrate willingness to compromise (2010: 120–121). Our ethnographic diaries confirm this observation. Differences in the upbringing and habits are easier to overcome when the two have similar attitudes to the religion and traditions. The issue of holidays and observance of the tradition often emerges in the stage of courting and can either stimulate mutual understanding and closeness, or con-

versely, trigger separation. The cornerstones in such cases are again New Year celebrations and a kosher Passover. Our interviewee Rita, who has recently married a native Israeli from an Ashkenazi family, told us that her fiancée was quickly involved in family celebrations, and his tolerance was tested when his future parents-in-law gave him a red cap with the inscription: "I love Snow Maiden" as a New-Year gift. This young couple would like to work out their own style by making the best of what they can learn from others:

> **Interviewer:** You have a new family. Do you think you will continue celebrating with the parents, or would you like to invite your own friends?
>
> **Rita:** We will invite our own when we come to understand how we would like to mark each holiday. For the time being, we visit others and note something in each family. Then we will mix our own salad and say, "Now, this is our holiday".

Magic Days, Simoron and Survival Strategies

While collecting material about the known religious and secular rituals we discovered a festive ceremony or rather a happening which combined features of quasi religiosity and quasi science with various elements of play. This was celebration of a mythical day – 11.11 of 2011, which we attended in the town of Netanya.[9] In a two-hour long group interview which preceded the ceremony our informants touched on the meaning of the "mythical day" and its celebration only in passing, so our account is based primarily on participant observation. The organizer of the happening was our informant, Raisa.[10] Once an officer in the Russian police force specializing in juvenile delinquency, in Israel she failed to find a job close to her professional qualifications and earns her living by taking care of the elderly. But what she sees as her real vocation is teaching people how to be happy and optimistic and achieve their goals by doing magic. She organizes meetings in her house which she refers to as seminars. On her business card she presents herself as a psychologist and a consultant. She is cheerful, has an endless reservoir of stories and is eager to expand the number of her disciples.

When she decided to organize celebration of the "magic day" she called her numerous acquaintances inviting them to participate well

in advance. To her chagrin it was impossible to fix the time of the happening at the hour consistent with the mythology – at 11:11:11. Most of the people she tried to involve, including her, worked in the morning, so it was decided to meet at 5 p.m. Raisa allocated a small sum from her modest family budget to buy balloons, paper and pencils. Posters calling on passers-by to love and embrace each other were written in Hebrew. They were meant to attract members of the majority group, because everyone invited by the organizer of the event spoke Russian.

Raisa was deeply disappointed to see that her expectations that "half of Netanya's residents" would show up didn't materialize. Only 12 people came to the meeting point on a city square at the seaside.[11] According to one of the participants, Hebrew-speaking residents of the town had celebrated in the morning, at the "right time"; however, when later we looked for an announcement or a report about it on the Internet, we failed to find any. The posters prepared by Raisa did not help to attract Hebrew speakers. What she did not take into account fixing the time of the happening was that 5 p.m. on Friday is a "dead hour", when a lot of Israelis, including the secular, are preparing for a Sabbath meal. Only three Russian-speaking girls perching on a garden bench joined wish-making. Wishes were written on narrow paper strips and inserted into the balloons which were blown up then. Some of the balloons burst and had to be replaced by new ones, which did not disconcert the participants; on the contrary it was interpreted as a good sign. The participants, primarily women, were cheerful and had a lot of fun trying to cope with their balloons. When the balloons were ready and a lot of photographs were taken to document the event, it was already dark. A small procession started walking along the embankment towards an observation tower. The balloons were to be set free from the top floor. The sea is a sacral locus (cf. with a natural *mikve,* a ritual bath in the Jewish tradition), so the choice of the launching place was not accidental. The balloons with wishes were tied together with two bigger ones filled with helium. The whole bunch rose up, but the wind was unfavourable for the event and blew the balloons in the direction of the road, instead of the sea. But this final failure of the original plan did not upset the participants at all. The whole ceremony was conceived of as a promise to bring good fortune, so whatever deviations from the initial plan, it was interpreted as a contribution to the overall success of the Magic Day, but not as a bad omen.

All the participants of the ceremony belong to the socio-economically weak layer of Israeli society. They have to work hard, primarily doing unqualified jobs in order to make a living and survive in a new country. Apparently, the main attraction of the event for them was an opportunity for a get-together that broke the monotony of their everyday routine. Moreover, the festive atmosphere of an anticipated miracle cultivated by Raisa, who emanated vivacity and good will, created an illusion that everyone could be in control of her life and destiny.

In a religious ritual believers know that God is capable of blessing and awarding but also of punishing. Raisa and the members of her circle were addressing their requests and wishes to *simoron*, or *Simoron Stepanovich*. Like Grandfather Frost, *simoron* does not demand any sacrifice, but guarantees wish fulfilment. The notes with wishes inserted in the balloons (in other cases put into bottles, jars and other containers) transform the tradition of written requests addressed to God and saints which exists both in the Jewish and Christian traditions (Bessonov 2012). This brings the addressee, simoron, close to contemporary quasi saints (cf. Moroz 2011). Raisa and her friend Maria began what they call *simoroning* back in Russia after they read books by Dolokhov and Gurangov (also known to their followers as "Papa" and "Beard").

The Russian search engine Yandex yielded 583,000 web pages for the key word "simoron". On the first 20 sites selected by relevance we found articles explaining the principles of this new school of magic founded by Petr and Petra Burlanov. Like books one can buy in airports and train stations, the simoron school of magic promises its followers success in everything, from love to career, from financial gains to things as mundane as catching a taxi when needed. All these wonders are claimed to come to those who can learn to look at life positively. As stated in the article posted on many simoronist sites, while other schools of magic are serious and pompous simoron is the magic of humor, positive thinking and funny absurdities (Anastasia Volkova, http://www.magicwish.ru/publ/simoron_magija_povsednevnoj_zhizni/2-1-0-329, last accessed on 17 Jan 2013). After the publication of Dolokhov and Gurangov's first "Texbook on Magic" in 1988, the founders and their disciples have published a considerable number of books that are advertised on the Internet. The Burlanovs opened a school in Kiev which seems to be a successful commercial enterprise with courses, festivals, training sessions and happenings running on

a large scale (http://simoron.kiev.ua/content.html, last accessed on 17 Jan 2013). Courses teaching simoron methods and rituals function in other towns of the FSU, e.g., in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Odessa, Minsk, Ufa, as well as in big Russian-speaking enclaves such as Canada, Germany, Italy, Israel and the U.S.A.

When Raisa and Maria immigrated to Israel they immediately started searching for local *Simoronists*, which reminds one of religious people looking for the suitable congregation in a new place. It didn't take our interviewees long to find the *simoron* followers and both women became active participants of their meetings and ceremonies. On the basis of the group interview and the study of Internet sites we could conclude that besides group festivities, *simoronists* practice regular performance of rituals rationalized as quasi science and alternative psychology (cf. with observations about the quasi scientific discourse among the religious in Akhmetova 2008). Raisa's speech is permeated with the terms: seminar, lecture, training, consultant, tutorial and others. She willingly demonstrates the classics of the movement – the books "A Handbook for a Beginning Wizard. The textbook of Good Luck" and "Technology of Success: A Handbook of Good Luck" authored by Gurangov and Dolokhov.[12] Raisa had attended training courses for simoronists before emigration and proudly demonstrated to us one of the certificates she had received. She tries to conduct training courses for beginners in order to improve her socioeconomic status but with little success. The rituals which she and her friends perform are either borrowed from the books we mentioned and Internet sites, or invented by them in the process of magic-doing. These rituals are accompanied by rhymed texts, functionally similar to charms. Raisa doesn't use this term, instead she prefers a pun playing with the endearing form of her own name: *Simo-**Raiush**ki*. This pun is widely used in her circle. Many of Raisa's texts abound in obscene words, and the rituals described have various features of a carnival. For example, when one needs money badly and wants "to attract" it, one has to tie a besom to the morning gown, and walk with this "tail" while doing domestic chores, repeating all the time:

> If you need a lot of money, tie a besom to your fanny.[13]

Raisa claims that she used to practice this ritual. Curiously enough, it doesn't evoke in her associations with a witch flying a broom.[14] The rhymes disseminated by Raisa are learned by heart by her fiends, and are recited when they wish "to do magic" in order to find a suitable

apartment, a boyfriend, or money for some project. Raisa's and Maria's speech, and their Simo-Raiushki in particular, are full of paronymy and puns (e.g. *pri**man**ivat' zhenikhoiv **man**koi* (to entice fiancées with semolina), *Glazhu belie naglazhivaiu / Dorogu v Netanyu navorazhivaiu / Dorogu gladkuiu nalazhennuiu / Vokrug sadami zasazhennuiu* (I'm ironing my laundry, I'm making it smooth / I am bewitching the road to Netanya / I'm making it simple and smooth / with gardens planted along the way). In the narratives about wish-fulfilment with the help of *Simoron Stepanovich* one can easily notice genre features of a memorate and with time they are most likely to evolve into legends. As an illustration we would like to cite a story told by Raisa and her friend Maria about their requests to simoron to help Maria emigrate and then move to Netanya.

Raisa, 53, Jewish, married, emigrated from Vladivostok in 2006, before emigration served in the police (resigned in the rank of a captain), in Israel is employed as a nurse taking care of the elderly, lives in Netanya.

Maria (diminutive Masha), approximately 60, a Halachic Jew, lives with her invalid mother, emigrated from Vladivostok in 2006; before emigration worked as a choir master, in Israel is employed as a nurse taking care of the elderly, lives in Netanya.

Raisa: Masha couldn't find time to come to our meetings, because she had her work, her choir and her mother. And so she says to me: "Teach me something, something which is not difficult, something that doesn't take too much time, so that I could do it while I'm busy with something else." And the first thing that came to my mind was "fanny" – a magic word in simoron.

Fanny swings, fanny turns
Masha'll get what she wants.
And she says: "This is good for me". And this is how she started.

Maria: Well, it's really so. It's my thing. It suits my nature. I am nimble on my feet and very energetic, so it caught on **IMMEDIATELY.** This was the period when we were planning to come here (immigrate to Israel), and there were some problems with the papers, and things dragged on, and everything was a mess. And I began to live with this rhyme. I would get up and recite it; I would go to bed and recite it; I would run to work and recite it. And about a week later things started moving, they got moving, moving, everything really went swimmingly. And I still live with this rhyme. When I have some, when I am in a very bad mood I immediately say to myself (recites with feeling)

Fanny swings, fanny turns
Masha'll get what she wants.

Things began to happen. That was it. Then when we moved here (to Israel), first we lived in Bnei Brak. We rented an apartment there. Then I came here (to Netanya) to a birthday party and I liked the town so much. So I decided to move here. I came here once, and there were some apartments, but everything went wrong. And then again I said to myself…

Raisa: Come, tell them what we did!

Maria: And what did we do?

Raisa: (in a disappointed tone) You don't remember! How come? There are these four guys here, iron guys, you know. Concrete guys on the *kikar* (square). When we go to the square you'll see them. One, first, there were two.

Maria: That happened later, when I moved here.

Raisa: (ironically) Did it really?

Maria: No?

Raisa: No. (…) And so we went there. Luckily, it was a day off. Otherwise, we may have not, we may have not dared, although we might have still dared. So we danced with these iron guys. One of them had a sweet wrapper (in its hand). I took it out and put in a good and tasty sweet instead. And only a short time after this event Masha finds this apartment.

Maria: And this is what I wrote for myself then:
Simoroning-simoroning, I'm simoroned all over
When I get to Netanya my sufferings will be over
Please help me, simoron, oh, how Netanya lures me
And (…) Raiska is attrac…enticing it in unison with me.
In response I'll send you gifts, I'll open my soul
I'll give you beauties of the world and joy to make you glow.

Among the rituals described in the interview we would like to note one presenting a series of transformations. A strip of paper with a wish written on it is put into a bottle filled with water. The bottle is then placed into a freezer. When the water turns into ice, the bottle is taken out of the freezer to melt. The ritual is concluded by ceremonious emptying the bottle into a lavatory pan. These manipulations with the

bottle are reminiscent of the contemporary practices of reciting charms against anguish as described by Adonieva. In both cases it is the running water that has magic powers, be it water in a river, in radiators of central heating systems or poured into a lavatory pan (Adonieva 2011: 73). We view this as inversion of the ritual with the balloons. In both cases wishes are sent off to "another world", be it the sacral world above us or the chtonic underworld. Turning to the sacral and the profane, like the combination of the elevated and obscene words, simoronists seek to break the borders between real and symbolic spaces in order to "perform magic".

Simoron rituals similar in the goal and spirit to those described by Raisa can be found on numerous web sites. Here is one example: when one needs to pay back a bank loan, the sum of the loan has to be written on a slip of paper which is put into a jar with carbonate soda. After that water is added to the soda, the jar is closed and the fitting rhyme is recited: I am paying back this credit / I am no longer a bandit (in Russian *kredit* is rhymed with *bandit*). Judging from the number of sites describing this ritual, it is in great demand. One of the sites advertises it as "The most reliable method of paying loans. We pay back bank loans!" http://attractmoneyrituals.blogspot.co.il/2010/04/blog-post.html, last accessed on 17 Jan 2013.

Simoron is one of numerous New Age trends in Russia and in the near and far-abroad where Russian-speakers reside. Although the groups and their worldview vary, some typical features, common to many of them can be specified. One tendency is that secular and even atheist members of post-Soviet intelligentsia have found themselves in the niche of ideological emptiness and become some kind of gurus or shamans, although not in the strict terminological sense of these words (Zhukovskaia 2012: 335–347). Another feature is a combination of magical practices with elements of psychology and the aspiration to break the border between science and the occult. As distinguished from the scientific approach which requires questioning everything, pop-psychologists prefer another one: "anything goes". The third feature is the union between various New Age groups and popular culture, especially when group leaders fail to enter mainstream institutions. Numerous seminars are taught selling people all kinds of techniques, and various entertainments are offered (Falikov 2012: 380). While both science and religion are associated with the establishment and alienate laypersons these popular seminars and happenings are perceived

as trustworthy. However, "blending with the folk" shows a tendency to commercialization, the success of which clearly depends on the entrepreneurial abilities of a guru (shaman, alternative psychologist etc.). Even when it does not bring financial rewards as in the case of our interviewee, it elevates the social status of a guru among his/her followers. Whether simoron ideas and rituals are referred to as "psychotraining", "spiritual practices" or "games", the secret of its success may be in the illusion of empowerment that it lends to its fans and followers. It became popular in the FSU in the period of geopolitical changes when millions felt they had lost their bearings and control of their lives. Simoron methods gave them an illusion that by relying on the "limitless" potential of the self they could regain that control without the help of any institutions. Moreover, the mixing of everyday practices with play, participation in ritual performances, as well as recital of funny or absurd rhymes contributes to the festivalization of everyday life, particularly valued by people having limited resources.

Holidays as Arena of Ideological Strife and Consumer Bonanza

In various confrontations of majority and minority cultures the intolerance of the holidays and rituals of the *other* is a well-known phenomenon. In the early and mid-1990s native Israelis were surprised and amused when they saw Russian-speaking men rushing to buy flowers on the 8th of March, and old men marching along the streets in their best clothes decorated with orders and medals on the 9th of May. As mentioned earlier, what did not amuse the mainstream society was the habit of celebrating the New Year. In fact, emotional attachment to Victory Day and the New Year proved to be crucial for the Russian-speaking community in preserving its group identity. The indifference of Israeli society to the contribution of Jews in fighting against Nazism and the absence of a holiday marking the victory, spurred World War II veterans, immigrant media and Russian-language politicians to change the attitude of the host society and honor not only victims of the Holocaust but also fighters. Thanks to these efforts Victory Day became an official Israeli holiday in 2005, although it remains a work day. It is still celebrated primarily by members of the community, but is no longer ignored by the state. The creation of several memorials, including the monument to the Red Army soldiers in Netanya, socio-

Figure 10. *The annual World War II veterans' march along the streets of Jerusalem and Haifa on Victory Day has become a familiar sight for veteran Israelis.*

Figure 11. *Victory Day in Haifa. When speeches are over, merrymaking starts, reminding old soldiers of the joy of May 1945, and their descendents of the old Soviet movies.*

economic help to war veterans and changes in school history books, which no longer silence the role of the Soviet Union in the war – all of these are signs that the war narrative of the Russian-speaking community has been at least partially integrated into the master narrative of the society as a whole (Yelenevskaya 2009a).

The ideological battle around the New Year proved to be more lasting, sharpened the opposition between the religious and the secular, and turned into a test of the society's tolerance. In December 2012 a real scandal broke out in Haifa which has the reputation of the bulwark of tolerance in Israel. The city rabbinate warned hotel and restaurant owners that they would lose their *kashrut* certificates[15] if they held New Year parties with elements of "alien" traditions such as decorated fir trees.[16] Business owners protested, the mayor of Haifa interfered, and the threat was withdrawn. The Russian-language Internet was full of angry comments repeating the arguments that can be heard every year in December: the New Year is not a religious holiday and there should not be any sanctions against the people celebrating it. The dictate of the rabbinate backfired, irritating not only the secular but also religious Jews. A secular Hebrew-speaking student of the Technion-Israel Institute of Technology told us about his conversation with his fellow-student. Coming from a secular Russian-speaking family she became religious in Israel and stopped celebrating the New Year. The demarche of the rabbinate infuriated her and for the first time in eight years she decided to put up a fir tree in her home. When she failed to find one in her storage room she asked her mother to buy a new one for her. The mother was happy: she took it as a sign that her daughter was "returning home".

Although similar threats have been voiced earlier and scandals emerge almost every year, the tradition of New Year celebrations does not show any signs of disappearance. On the contrary, in the last two decades it has become more common among Hebrew-speaking youth to go to New Year parties. Young Russian speakers who immigrated to Israel as children and have inherited the tradition from their parents are now passing it on to their own offspring. As the journalist Lutskii writes

> The crooked unity of ex-Soviets won't be straightened even in the grave[17]. Because we have infected our children with our main holiday. Despite stubborn opposition of the furious people around us we introduced some changes into our genetic code (Lutskii 2013).

According to entertainers organizing festivities in homes and community centers, today New Year performances are as much in demand as ever. Although some of the little spectators have never seen snow, real fir-trees, skates or sledges, their parents are eager to make them familiar with the New Year tradition as an essential component of Russian culture. Moreover, some young parents try to take their little children for a vacation in Europe to enjoy snow and festive atmosphere of the winter holidays (Kogan & Gantman 2012).

Accepting or rejecting the New Year as a holiday legitimate for Jews to celebrate has become a test for Israeli politicians, in particular before elections. They send greetings to members of the Russian-speaking community, appear on the Russian channel of the Israeli TV (Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2005, Vol. 2: 78) and visit "Russian" New Year parties. One recent example is Tsipi Livni, the head of a newly formed party. As part of her election campaign she was trying to attract "Russian" votes on the eve of the New Year. This is how it was reported in the electronic press:

> They say: As you celebrate the New Year, so will you spend it. Tsipi Livni, the head of the party *ha-Tnua* decided to celebrate the New Year with the Russian-speaking citizens of the state of Israel. On the eve of the New Year she met Russian-speaking voters on several occasions: she "won" the elections (mock elections held in several Israeli schools during election campaigns) in the Zhabotinsky school, where over 70% of the students are children of immigrants from the FSU. She gave a speech at the presentation of a book by Lily Galili (see the bibliography) and met the staff of Channel 9 and radio 1 (broadcasting in Russian). Moreover, she decided to attend the New Year Party in Leonard City Tower attended by more than 600 Russian-speaking citizens of the country (http://news.israelinfo.ru/tribune/44026, posted on 1 Jan 2013, last accessed on 19 Jan 2013).

The attitude to the New Year is also used by image makers. Thus a popular blogger David Eidelman, who had served as a consultant to Israeli, Ukrainian and South African politicians, wrote an article headlined "The New-Year Mystique of Israeli politics". Giving tribute to the tradition, he opens the article by explaining the secular and non-ideological nature of the New Year clearing it of any connections to St. Sylvester's Day. But the main theme of his article is the fir tree which has "some symbolic meaning in Israeli politics. A mystic meaning! In particular, because since the beginning of the third millennium elections are held during the first months of a new year". In the rest of

Figure 12. *A ten-meter plastic fir-tree was first installed in Ben Gurion Avenue in Haifa in December 2010. A curiosity for Israel, it immediately attracted children and adults who came to look at its glittering lights in the evening. Russian speakers dubbed it "the main fir tree of the country", a cliché associated with the gigantic tree traditionally installed in the Kremlin (photograph courtesy of Janos Makowsky).*

the article Eidelman tells the reader that those politicians who were not afraid to be photographed and filmed next to the decorated fir tree subsequently won the elections; those who refused or even demanded that the "impious" tree should be taken out of the room were defeated. He concludes his story: "Do you think all these incidents were a mere coincidence? But aren't they too many? I don't know whether there is something mystic about the New Year tree, but it is clear that Israeli politicians shouldn't offend it" (Eidelman 2013). An experienced image-maker, Eidelman uses the script of Jewish Hasidic legends about punishment which awaits the persecutors of Jews and desecrators of Jewish Holy places, for example, cemeteries. These legends crossed ethnic boundaries and became part of Slavic folklore (Belova 2005: 144–146; Cała 1995: 133–134; Fialkova 2007: 95–97). Several weeks before the publication of Eidelman's article, many Russian Israelis, including us, got a forwarded viral email which contained three stories ascribed to anonymous rabbi from Netanya. The first one tells a story of an American ambassador in Great Britain who did not only refuse to give American visas to Jewish refugees during the Holocaust, but also reported them to the American authorities as illegal immigrants. As a result they were sent back to Europe and perished. The ambassador and his family were cursed by a Jewish rabbi. The name of the diplomat was Kennedy. The second story narrates about a Japanese ambassador in Lithuania helping Jews to escape. He was reported to the German authorities and lost his position, but was blessed by the Jews. In order to earn his living he opened a small garage for automobiles. His name was Mitsubishi. And the last story is about Bogdan Khmelnitsky, whose most devastating anti-Jewish pogrom took place in the town of Chernobyl. The text which we got through our network of friends is also available on the Internet where it was posted on 7 Dec 2012 http://maxpark.com/community/4391/content/1696706, last accessed on 19 Jan 2013. The wide circulation of this text may have triggered Eidelman to use a popular script as a means of political propaganda called "political technology" in contemporary Russia. This is a clear example of applied folklore (cf. Fialkova 2010a: 154–157). Ironically, the Jewish script is used to defend a holiday dear to Russian Jews, or "Russians", but which is scorned by the Israeli establishment. As a result, there is a reversal of roles, as "Russians" are placed in the position of "real Jews" while the Israeli establishment occupies a place traditionally reserved for aggressive gentiles.

The sheer abundance of articles devoted to the stubborn loyalty of Russian speakers to this holiday in the Hebrew- and Russian-language media testifies that it still remains a point of contention in the society. But while politicians are bickering, businessmen obedient to the market demand use the New Year as a great business opportunity. While in the early 1990s those who wanted to buy plastic fir trees and New Year paraphernalia had to go to Christian Arab quarters, today one can find them in Jewish quarters too. New Year bazaars are held by Russian book stores. Many non-kosher "Russian" food stores are decorated with fir-trees and sales people wear Santa caps. These caps are also worn by girls smiling at customers from posters advertising goods of many big chains in December. Aware that Russian-speaking Israelis are fans of Chinese horoscopes and are familiar with animal patrons of the Chinese calendar, owners of souvenir shops order figurines, badges and cups representing these animals. In 2012, an Israeli air-company El-Al advertised discounts for December flights to the FSU enticing customers to celebrate the New Year "among friends and family", and the state radio channel *Reka* in the programs broadcast in Russian kept playing the paraphrased song from the popular movie "I step through Moscow":

A ia idu shagaiu po Moskve
Za etu tsenu ia smogu
Siuda s El'Alem priletet'
Na prazdnik ves'v snegu.

I step through Moscow
For this price I can afford
To come here with *El-Al*
For the holiday full of snow.

Another invitation to enjoy the festive New Year atmosphere came from the cell-phone giant "Orange". It invited Russian speakers to join festivities in Nazareth, one of the centers of Christian culture in Israel. Finally, the cable TV company HOT was offering the Russian-speaking Israelis a New Year "gift" – a deal including a multitude of TV channels in Russian. To increase persuasiveness of the message, the Internet version of this advertising was supported by the paraphrase of one of the most often quoted Soviet posters "Have you signed up as a volunteer?" (the original authored by Dmitrii Moor). Interestingly, the same Soviet poster was used in contemporary Latvia urging the people shopping for Christmas, which attests for persistence of Soviet images (Pakalns 2012: 120).

Now that in every big company there are Russian-speaking employees, we can see that more and more businesses use Russian cultural codes in their advertising campaigns. Despite the growing acceptance of "Russian" holidays by members of the host society, immigrants still feel they have to explain and even defend them in private conversations and in public discourse. A case in point is the advertising of a New Year party that was posted on the website of the online Booking Office "Bravo":

> Who said that the New Year is only the holiday of our neighbors-Christians? Who said that they celebrate the birthday of some ancient pope known as Sylvester? May their hideous tongues be cut out. What nonsense people may invent…
>
> (…)
>
> The New Year has always been beyond any religious tradition – it is not Jewish or Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant, nor is it Muslim. This is a holiday when all the people can have fun irrespective of their "national identity". This is our holiday!
>
> http://kassa.bravo.co.il, last accessed on 3 Jan 2013.

Conclusions

Our analysis of the interviews combined with many years of participant observation enable us to view the attitude to holidays and festive rituals in the context of integration and ghettoization processes in the immigrant community. Inertia in accepting new festive rituals "because everyone does it" and fear of criticism for preserving one's old customs and habits often come together with simulative identities. On the other hand, when immigrants accept innovations sincerely, they internalize festive rituals, separating them from the dictate of the majority. In such cases they are motivated by curiosity, desire to better understand the culture of their ancestors, break the monotony of everyday routine by "performing" rituals and creating the atmosphere of festivity and elation. Different attitudes to the acceptance of new traditions, or their rejection is a conflict-generating issue within a family, a circle of friends and society as a whole. The attitude to traditions is also influenced by a pragmatic factor – whether the state or the employer grants days off to the minorities for their holidays. As

time goes on, alienation from the festive days of the Russian-speaking Israelis gives way to greater tolerance on the part of the host society. Israelis got used to the abundance of flowers on the 8th of March, as well as to the parades of war veterans decorated with Soviet orders and medals on the 9th of May. Even plastic fir-trees sold in abundance at the end of December no longer create panic. Immigrants on their part make festive meals on the eve of the Jewish New Year and Passover, although they are often non-kosher and may not include the dishes required by the ritual. Children and holidays is a special theme – in the same family, parents will decorate a fir tree, buy Santa Claus hats for the New Year, and two months later make carnival dresses for their children's Purim parties. The reason for this mix is the desire of the immigrants to transfer their culture to the young generation, yet not to make them outcasts in the new society.

Another important theme is the gastronomic component of the holidays, most obvious in female narratives. They speak primarily about those dishes which make an essential part of the ritual. *Olivie* and *vinegret* salads are considered to be ritual New Year dishes and cause a lot of amusement. Stories about Jewish dishes often have a trickster touch, and include narratives about sandwiches composed of *matso* with pork and bread eaten during the Passover. Interest in the history of one's people can be manifested in the desire of some immigrants to recreate authentic dishes of the forefathers. One example is making a Passover meal using only those foods that were available to ancient Hebrews in the time of exodus.

Finally, we'd like to note the divergence of the narratives in the interviews from practices. Declarations about indifference to the New Year, for example, come together with buying gifts for family members, decoration of the house with garlands and blinking lights, and cooking a festive meal. According to the Internet survey conducted in 2011, 83% of the FSU immigrants continue celebrating the New Year, whether it's a day off or a week day. The use of New Year symbols as applied folklore by businessmen and image makers is an important sign of festive traditions as identity markers.

Notes

[1] *Seder* is a ritual meal which marks the beginning of a week long Jewish holiday of the Passover.

[2] *Yeshiva* is an Orthodox Jewish school that focuses on the study of religious texts.

[3] These ironic words allude to the Soviet anti-religious propaganda.

[4] *Afikoman* is a piece of matzo set aside at the beginning of the Passover meal to be eaten for dessert. In the modern tradition, it is hidden, and the children have to find it. The elder member of the family then gives a gift to the one who finds it or to all the children who participated in the search.

[5] The tradition to eat matzo instead of bread during the Passover is motivated by the desire to preserve memory of the years spent by ancient Hebrews in the desert after exodus from Egypt. According to the Bible, the only bread they had then was unleavened.

[6] The *Haggadah* is a text narrating the story of the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt as described in the Book of Exodus. Reading *Haggadah* during the *Seder* Passover meal sets the order of the meal and is an important part of the ritual.

[7] According to Halacha, a child born to a Jewish mother or an adult who has voluntarily converted to Judaism is considered to be Jewish.

[8] Jewish boys become responsible for observing commandments at the age of 13 and girls at the age of 12. The coming of age ceremonies *bar-mitzvah* for boys and *bat mitzvah* for girls are held in synagogues and are common practice not only among the religious but also among the secular, although *bat mitzvah* are held only in Conservative and Reform Synagogues. In Orthodox families only ceremonies for boys are conducted.

[9] In December 2011 before and after the "magic day" one of us received several viral e-mail messages explaining that the whole of the year abounded in unusual combinations of digits. Besides the crowding of ones, there were also five Saturdays, five Sundays and five Mondays in October. All of this allegedly made the Chinese call such a year "a bag full of money". As is customary for this type of letters, the recipient was promised wealth but only if the message were passed on to others.

[10] She is the only interviewee whose name we have not changed because punning with it is a distinctive feature of her speech portrait.

[11] After the "magic day" another viral message received by e-mail read: "Dear friends, the SHTF planned for 11/11/11 11:11:11 has been put off until 12/12/12 12:12:12".

[12] See http://bookap.info/popular/gurangov/, http://www.koob.ru/gurangov_doloxov/wizard_course, last accessed on 17 Jan 2013. Both books are advertised on the Internet in the rubric "Popular Psychology".

[13] After the manuscript of this book had been already submitted we came across an announcement glued to a lamp post in Balfur street in Haifa. The tourist agency "The Promised Land" invited Russian-speaking residents to join a special tour entitled "The Rain of Money" to Miron Mountain in Galilee. Prospective customers were enticed by "the opening of channels of luck and financial wellbeing" and the blessing of a rabbi. The date of the tour (25/04/2013) was carefully chosen to be close to the Jewish Holiday of *Lag BaOmer*, which fell on April 28 in 2013. But although the promotion of the tour emphasized its relation to Judaism, the tourists were also promised the company of Alona, a clairvoyant. The implied help from a rabbi and a clairvoyant and a combination of a religious holiday and "The Rain of Money" were in complete symbiosis in the advertised excursion.

[14] While recording this episode we were unaware of its similarity to contemporary *denezhnaia magia* (magic for money) popular in present-day Russia (see Arkhipova & Fruchtmann 2013).

[15] A document issued by local rabbinates to certify that a business does not violate laws of Judaism. The loss of such document repels clients and may result in bankruptcy.

[16] Not all the rabbis are as conservative. The more flexible ones try to "absorb" this holiday emphasizing its meaning as a private family event (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya 2011: 154).

[17] This is an allusion to the Russian saying *"Gorbatogo mogila ispravit"* which literally means: Only the grave will straighten a hunchback.

In Search of the Self:
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