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Social immigration of FSU citizens from Israel to the United States

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

According to recent data, approximately 110,000 immigrants from the FSU who lived in Israel chose to transfer their lives from Israel to other countries, including the United States. This phenomenon has become increasingly common in the last two decades and has reached its peak in recent years.

Understanding the subject and conducting research on it has great importance. The immigrant population from the FSU is about 17% of the total population (Smootha 2008). Their departure from Israel for reasons that are primarily social raises questions about their absorption into Israeli society and can affect the absorption of other immigrant groups. Additionally, it will help to understand the phenomenon of migration in our days, which is changing and expanding due to globalization.

To date, many studies have been conducted on immigration, but very few studies on the immigration of immigrants from the FSU to Israel and their migration patterns after immigrating to Israel, with an emphasis on migration for social reasons. This study integrates previous literature on the subject, referring to the types of immigration that have been common so far and intertwining them with the concept of social migration concerning immigrants from the FSU.

In order to examine the concept of social migration among this population, the study examined several questions. First, this study examines questions related to the different aspects of life among immigrants who immigrated to the United States and

how these aspects influenced their decision to emigrate. The emphasis was on social, cultural, religious, and economic issues.

After conducting 33 in-depth interviews with immigrants who moved to the United States and analyzing the interviews together with analyzing questionnaires that the subjects answered, it can be understood that social reasons and a desire for social acceptance have a dominant influence on the desire to emigrate. Reasons such as economic, religious, cultural, and other factors that emerged during the interviews were a catalyst for the decision to make the immigration, but it seems that by weighing all the factors, the dominant factor is the social factor, while the other factors reinforce it.

The ever-changing world and globalization are increasing immigration and allowing citizens to move from country to country for various reasons, not just those familiar to us from the past, such as voluntary migration to improve lifestyle or from economic reasons, or forced migration in case of refugees, but with the growth of globalization, a new type of migration develops (Kislev 2017). Social migration is a phenomenon in which individuals choose to move in order to mobilize themselves socially and increase their social acceptance. This phenomenon increases as globalization grows. New migration distensions open, and knowledge grows (Kislev 2017)

Understanding the concept of social migration has a dual contribution. On the one hand, recognition and understanding of the concept contribute to the depth of research on immigration these days. At the same time, decision-makers and policymakers will be able to understand better the circumstances of immigration and what causes people to emigrate.

Chapter 1: Introduction and literature review

About 1.5 million Russian Jews immigrated between the years 1990-2004 from the FSU (Former Soviet Union) after the disintegration of the Soviet Union to different countries. About 60% of them immigrated to Israel by the law of return that grants Israeli citizenship to Jews and their family members (Raijman and Pinsky 2011). Today, the Olim (immigrants to Israel) are about 17% of the total Israel population. These immigrants came from the former Soviet Union. The US closed its gates, and therefore they had no option other than the State of Israel. The political situation in the Soviet Union, which had disintegrated, became more and more difficult to remain. The Jewish population's security falters as the economic condition worsens, and destabilizing political situations continue to occur. The State of Israel welcomed the immigrants from the FSU with open arms (Smootha 2008).

Israel has become the most significant Russian Jewish Diaspora in the world - about 60% of the Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union came to Israel, 30% immigrated to the United States, and 10-15% to Europe. The Jewish Diaspora in Israel is not only the largest but also the most important one in terms of the share it has in the general population and hence, the political, cultural, and economic influence this situation entails. The Russian immigrants in Israel affected the structure of the nation and the political and cultural Boundaries in Israel (Remennick 2011). For example, new political parties were founded to target these immigrants, and

special educational programs have initiated to cater to the needs of this population. One can analyze the FSU immigrants in Israel by examining several factors that can explain the level of integration of these immigrants in Israeli society: social status, economic status, legal aspect, identity, and cultural aspect (Remennick 2003).

1.1 The FSU immigrants in Israel- life aspects

Legal aspect

In the **legal aspect**, the main focus is on religion. Not all FSU immigrants are Jewish. A sub-group in the FSU immigrant group are Christian or half-Jewish Russian immigrants that came to Israel. The reason for this migration was a massive phenomenon of assimilation, which led to mixed- marriage and having kids outside of wedlock. As a result, those who did not recognize themselves as Jewish by the Israeli law would suffer. These immigrants suffered from difficulties regarding their civil status in aspects such as marriage and divorce. These aspects are solely regulated and controlled by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel (Remennick 2003). This group numbers around 320,000 immigrants, and among them, 30,000 define themselves as Christians (Cohen and Susser 2009). This situation leads to obstacles in civil procedures and entails a feeling of discrimination.

Another critical element concerns the fact that most of the Russian community is very secular. In contrast, a big part of the Israeli Jewish population defines themselves as traditional. Researchers show that religious identity is a critical element in the process of immigration (Kislev, 2012 #526). When the immigrants have the same religion as the natives, it can help them integrate into the new country better. In the case of the FSU immigrants in Israel, most of them are Jewish, but the fact that they are very secular changes the attitude toward these immigrants and increases their social

alienation (Neiterman and Rapoport 2009). It is important to note that not all FSU immigrants tackle such problems. There is tremendous diversity among the FSU immigrant groups in all that is connected to Judaism. For example, in the Former Soviet Union, Judaism was not an active component in one's self-identity and also not in the Jewish population's collective identity (Lerner 2011). However, some held their Jewish beliefs and thus integrated into more religious communities after arriving in Israel. The latter group is usually more connected and less socially excluded (Remennick 2012).

All kinds of religions were banned in the Soviet Union, and the separation between church and state was absolute. Judaism was hurt the most by this ban. Synagogues were closed, and with time marriage between Jewish and non-Jewish people became common. For a big part of the FSU Jewish citizens, their religion was only technical (Remennick 2012).

The FSU immigrants made *Aliya* to Israel by virtue of the Law of return. The Law of Return allows all Jews or their relatives to reside in Israel (Cohen, Haberfeld et al. 2011). Approximately 300,000 FSU immigrants who are classified as "other" (meaning non-Jewish by the Halacha) in their religion came to Israel from 1900 until 2009 (Cohen and Susser 2009). This migration has made the religious split between the FSU immigrants in Israel and the veteran Israelis even larger.

Economic aspect

The economic aspect contains many spheres of life. FSU immigrants are high skilled immigrants, and their educational level is high. More than 60% of these immigrants are highly educated, and most of them used to work in the FSU in white-collar jobs such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, and more. When they immigrated to Israel, many

had to find inferior employment, even though they held a higher level of education than the local population. The reason these immigrants struggled with finding work was the meager variety of jobs offered to them and inequality in opportunities (Remennick 2003).

Similar to other immigrants, when the FSU immigrants came to Israel, they experienced a decline in their occupational prestige due to skills transferability and difficulties in finding a job that matched their education and experience. However, over time, their social and employment mobility increased, and they manage to advance in terms of employment. Data show that out of 400,000 immigrants that arrived in the 1990s, about 40% found work in their profession. In 2009 the average salary of an FSU immigrant family was about 35% less than that of other Jewish families, which affected integration (Remennick 2012). When immigrants reach the point where they master the language and acquire social skills and social connections, it is much easier for them to find a better job, which they compete with veteran Israelis. The FSU immigrants in Israel belong to the majority group (Jews), and therefore were expected to integrate as time passed, and indeed, it was (Gorodzeisky and Semyonov 2011).

Also, as mentioned above, the FSU immigrants have a high level of education, and many times they are not satisfied with the educational standard in Israel and wish for a better one (Remennick and Celnik 2011). For instance, the establishing of the "Mofet" after-school program that focuses on excellence and the Russian language is one of the outcomes of this discontent (Remennick 2003). Immigrants from the former USSR place their children's education as a significant value and invest their income accordingly because they understand that this will affect their employment

horizons in their new country. In Israel, education is free and public, but the best schools are in better cities, whereas immigrants mostly could not afford to live in these cities (Remennick 2012). Besides the after-school program, immigrant parents considered great importance in imparting the correct values in their children and serve as a personal and intellectual example for them towards proper hobbies, books, and activities. Parents also encouraged their children to learn Hebrew better through various means (friendships with Israeli children, Israeli television, and more). In this way, parents contribute to the integration of the children into Israeli society (Remennick 2012).

Economically, the 1990s Alya from the FSU contributes significantly to the human capital in Israel. Economic Integration happens when the immigrants receive the same salary as the local people who have the same characteristics as them. As mentioned above, a large part of the immigrants were highly skilled and highly educated. Affords were made by Israel to help the immigrants to integrate into the Israeli market at workplaces that fit their education and skills, but as a result, the integration was not satisfying (Remennick 2003). Only about one-third of the immigrants were working in jobs that match their skills (Remennick 2004). In the mid-1990s started a phenomenon called "The Russian street" - many FSU immigrants worked in Russian grocery stores, Russian book shops, Russian clothing shops, and so forth. Additionally, many of the Russian immigrants worked at "Israeli" workplaces but at roles that include working with the Russian audience. In this way, Russian niche workplaces were created (Remennick 2003).

As mentioned, the FSU immigrants are mostly highly skilled and educated individuals. Starting from their first years in Israel, the FSU immigrants participated in the labor market in senior ranks, in a variety of fields, sometimes in blue-collar

professions that are less prestigious than the ones they had in the FSU (Goldner-Cohen, Eckstein et al. 2010). Although they earned less than their Israeli colleagues, many believed that as time passes, this group of immigrants will integrate into the Israeli labor market (Amit, Bridg and more, 2012). Researches show that FSU immigrants in the US had a considerable increase in their salary, more than other groups of immigrants. Another finding is that the reward for high education for this group in the US was big (Chiswick 1993).

Social aspect

In the **social aspect**, one of the most dominant things about the FSU is the community. The FSU immigrant society formulated a robust community that separates from the general Israeli population. Researches defined the Russian community as a 'new sector' in society. The members of the community, i.e., the FSU immigrants, share the same norms and values about different aspects of life. These values include things like education, parenting, and religion. The Russian community established schools, kindergartens, and independent communications media. The community was able to create things like newspapers, radio channels, TV channels, and programs all in the Russian language. They continue to maintain the soviet holy days that they used to celebrate in their old life in FSU, for example, "novey god" (the New Year's celebration) (Leshem, 2005).

FSU immigrants became successful at integrating into Israeli society while preserving their community norms and values (Leshem 2008). The immigrant families are characterized by the fact that they are mostly secular, and they have small families (Okun and Kagya 2012). Most of them live with their older parents (Remennick and

Celnik 2011). Many families are single-parent families, usually, a mother who lives with her children and older parents (Stier and Levanon 2003). These are typically low-income families with high human capital. A tenth of the immigrants from the FSU came from the three largest metropolitan cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg and Kiev, where the Russian intelligentsia is concentrated (Smootha 2008). Russian immigrants must preserve the Russian side of their life alongside their Jewish tradition (Leshem, 2005). One survey shows that the FSU immigrants prefer to buy in Russian owned shops than in mainstream Israeli ones. Also, they prefer to watch Russian TV channels, read Russian newspapers, and consume Russian culture. The same survey was handed out to Israeli locals about consuming Russian culture and Russian products. Most of the subjects that responded to the survey answered that they usually don't commence business with Russian owned services. One definition of the Russian community in Israel described as "integrated but separated" (Remennick 2003).

FSU immigrants in Israel are a group that has slowly integrated into Israeli society in many ways. Since the beginning of the *Aliya*, 27 years ago, this group has had a significant influence on Israeli society. Since the FSU immigrants are a highly educated group, it affected the Israeli market and the IDF, developed many systems such as the health care system and the hi-tech and military industries (Khanin 2011). Although only one-third of the first generation of FSU immigrants worked in their profession at the beginning (1990), by late 1990, their economic situation improved (Remennick 2011). The massive and fast *Aliya* and especially the *Aliya* from the FSU had also raised some difficulties in Israeli society, changing the cultural and political characteristics (Khanin 2011). The Israeli institutions welcomed the FSU *Aliya* and

helped them integrate into society in various ways- economically, socially and politically. The institutions helped the FSU immigrants integrate faster into society. Their political integration started as a result of the establishing of the "Russian street" in the 90's- the many stores, media channels, grocery shops, schools and more. The Russian Israelis started developing social and political awareness in their new homeland. The political integration and influence on the political Israeli scene can teach us about the integration of the FSU group into the receiving society (Khanin 2011)

The social attitude of the Israeli society ever since the end of the 20th century and until today toward the FSU immigrants is mixed. Nowadays, the Russian street and the Israeli society become on in some ways the Russian impacts are seen everywhere in the Israeli society. A large portion of the FSU immigrants integrated into the labor market, especially the 1.5 and 2nd generations of immigrants¹ that are now an integral part of the Israeli society (Remennick 2011). Despite that fact, the FSU immigrants in Israel still have a feeling of "otherness" from mainstream society, especially in their schooldays in Israel. Simultaneously, the Israeli *sabras* students felt that the Russian students are arrogant or insecure. In the military, some of these feelings disappear because of the blending between many groups in society, but this friendship with other groups rarely takes place after the military. Two-thirds of the Russian Israelis marry other Russian Israelis (Remennick 2011). Also, almost one-third of the sabra citizens of Israel expressed negative attitudes towards FSU immigrants (Niznik 2011).

Self-identity

¹ This groups are more relevant to this discussion because they are the ones who mostly emigrate from Israel.

Perceptions of self Identity is an essential aspect of integration regarding the immigrants in a new society (Remennick 2004). The Jewish FSU immigrants in Israel cultivate the Russian part in their identity, staying in touch with family relatives around the world, updated in the news and the Russian media via Russian channels, and very interested in what's happening in Russia culturally and politically. Also, there is a phenomenon of holding Russian citizenship and living in two states simultaneously (Lerner 2011). Studies show that the "1.5 generation", the generation of immigrants that came to Israel as children or adolescents, have an extreme 'otherness' feeling about the mentality and culture in Israel. Many even believe that the Russian culture is in some ways better than the Israeli culture, which was described by some as "primitive" or "violent" (Remennick 2003).

Moreover, a survey has shown that many FSU immigrants feel that the Russian part of their identity is stronger than the Israeli part (Remennick 2004). Language is another aspect that can define self-identity. Most of the first generation immigrants use the Russian language at home and between friends, while at work, they speak mostly Hebrew. Another option of communication is "Hebrush," a combination of Russian and Hebrew, which is very common in first and 1.5 generation of immigrants of the FSU. Another interesting thing is that in family's with school-age children speaking Hebrew at home is more common (Remennick 2004).

Conclusion

Today, almost 27 years after the beginning of the significant influx from the FSU, Russian immigrants can be found in all aspects of life –From Knesset members, doctors, and scientists –to security guards, nurses, and cleaning offices. They live in kibbutzim, developed cities, the suburbs, and in the center of Israel in good

neighborhoods (Remennick 2012). There is no doubt that they are part of Israeli society, but their situation is complicated. A survey that was made by "Shatil" in 2010, which examined the impact of immigration from the former Soviet Union on Israeli society, presents a composite picture. 45% of Israeli society noted the positive effect of immigrants from the former Soviet Union on the population, but 22% said immigration had an adverse impact, and about 25% felt that immigration did not affect Israeli society at all. There was a direct correlation between socioeconomic status and a negative view of migration from the Soviet Union, where the lower the socioeconomic status, the more negative the view. At the same time, the hostility toward immigrants from the Soviet Union is not only found among the lower socioeconomic class but is often related to the degree of religiosity (Galili and Bronfman 2013).

1.2 FSU immigrants migration from Israel to the US

From 1970 to 1989, Jewish FSU citizens could choose where to immigrate: to the US, Israel, or other countries like Germany. The US welcomed those immigrants and accepted them as refugees (during the cold war). Those who had higher education usually chose to move to the US and not to Israel, knowing that they will get a better opportunity of return for their skills and education (Cohen and Haberfeld 2007). In 1989, the US closed its doors for immigration, and the FSU immigrants immigrated mostly to Israel. However, some still immigrated to the US², even though it was harder than moving to Israel because of the need for a visa. Unlike the US, Israel offered help to new FSU immigrants, but they preferred what the US had to provide

² Mostly by family reunion laws

them with: higher wage level, flexible labor market, and a high return on skills rate (Cohen, Haberfeld et al. 2011).

Nowadays, the Jewish emigration rates from Israel to other countries are not high relative to other developed countries. Nevertheless, Data shows that from 1989 to 2005, nearly 10% of the 1.2 million FSU immigrants that came to Israel left to other countries. Contrarily to the FSU immigrants, Israeli-born emigration is low (Cohen and Susser 2009). The FSU immigrants, both first and 1.5 generations, are both well assimilated into Israeli society and into the labor market. They have political representation, and they participate in centers of power. Still, they fail to reach the earnings of veteran Israelis (European origin) (Cohen and Haberfeld 2007). Aside from the possibility of earning more in other countries, there are still more factors that are driving the FSU immigrants to move from Israel to the US, and these factors are social. They derive from the various aspects of life that they live in Israel.

1.3 Social migration

Until today, most of the migration theories focused on economic factors for immigration, like the neo-classical economic theory, the world system theory, the dual labor market theory, the relative deprivation theory, and the new economics of labor migration theory. (Parkins 2010) (Kislev 2017). It was common to think that people immigrate for one of two reasons: voluntary migration to improve lifestyle, economic reasons, or forced migration in the case of refugees, but with the growth of globalization, a new type of migration develops (Kislev 2017). Social migration is a phenomenon in which individuals choose to move in order to mobilize themselves socially and increase their social acceptance. This phenomenon increases as globalization grows. New migration dimensions open, and knowledge grows (Kislev

2017). FSU Israeli citizens who are leaving Israel to the US, looking for a more socially comfortable environment for them and their children are moving for these reasons.

Pull factors usually include better jobs and employment conditions, better wages, and more opportunities. Furthermore, push factors generally include an unstable economy and factors that affect an individual's social and economic opportunities. Another push factor that causes migration is when one's occupation doesn't match his education, and he immigrates to another country to find a job that will suit his education. This happens to people with high education (Parkins 2010). When talking about push and pull factors, the discussion is mostly economic, but in the FSU immigrants case, the factors that are driving migration are also social.

1.4 Prior Research Findings

Many studies have been made in the past several years about immigration from different types, but very few focused on social emigration. However, some researchers did examine aspects of the social immigration process. Borjas (1987) focused on his study on Cuban male immigrants that emigrated from Cuba to the United States and compared them to men from other immigrant groups. Borjas shows that Cuban immigrants have higher economic mobility than other male immigrants. The reason for this is the high return costs to Cuba. Therefore, Cuban immigrants invested more in education and human capital than other immigrants. They have a more significant incentive to integrate faster in their new country. Cohen (1996) showed similar results in his research. Cohen focused on Palestinians (non-Israeli citizens) from the West Bank and Gaza, who immigrated to the United States. Like

the Cuban man, the Palestinian immigrants tried to assimilate in the United States faster than other Israeli immigrant groups. As a result, the difference between the Palestinians salary and Israeli Jewish immigrant's salaries was much smaller than in Israel. The reason for this is that the Palestinians assimilated in the United States. Kislev (2014) showed similar mechanisms on Israeli Arabs that assimilated successfully in the United States.

1.5 Research Questions and Working Hypotheses

RQ1:How do social attitudes toward FSU immigrants in Israel affect their choice to immigrate?

H1: Many of the 1.5 generation members are highly educated and hold key positions in the Israeli market. A large part of them leave the Peripheries they grow up in and move to big cities like Tel Aviv. The reason for this moving is mostly to improve their employment conditions and their professional career, and also their cultural and personal lives. They become an integral part of the social life in the center cities of Israel. Despite that, there are still gaps between the 1.5 generation group and the Israeli mainstream (Rosovsky and Almog 2011). Although the Israeli Russian group is fully integrated into Israeli society, we can see that they still ask to maintain their cultural and personal lives inside the Israeli Russian society. Therefore, FSU immigrants are hypothesized to be incentivized by social reasons, but not as much as other groups, because of their closeness to the Jewish majority.

RQ2: How does the economic condition of FSU immigrants in Israel affect their immigration?

H2: FSU immigrants have become an essential part of the Israeli labor market over the years. The first generation is better placed than in their early years in Israel, but they still struggle with language problems and cultural barriers in the labor market (Remennick 2011). Economic integration happens when immigrants in the country they immigrated to, are financially rewarded the same as the natives with the same skills set (Amit 2010). Therefore, the FSU immigrants are expected to show some economic incentives but also to show the motivation to immigrate to the US because of the more significant opportunities and characters of the American labor market.

RQ3: How do Israeli and US policies affect the migration of FSU immigrants?

H3: In Israel, Russian immigrants are in the center of the melting pot of Israeli society. They are a part of society and have intergraded in a good way. However, the FSU immigrants still feel they are a subculture, and not entirely a part of the mainstream society (Remennick 2011). In the US, the attitude toward immigration is a "salad bowl" approach. The FSU immigrants are expected to feel more comfortable practicing their religion and culture (Bhattacharya and Groznik 2008).

Therefore, it is expected that the FSU immigrants will be affected by the US policies toward immigrants and will feel the confidence to move to the US. At the same time, the Israeli policy toward immigrants will not make them stay in Israel.

RQ4: How do human capital factors affect FSU immigrant's migration from Israel?

H4: Russian immigrants have high human capital, even higher than the majority level of human capital in Israel (Goldner-Cohen, Eckstein et al. 2010). Their human capital comes to fruition mostly in terms of profession and education, although not always transferable in Israel (Amit 2010). The different labor market structures and job system affects the choices of immigrants who are dependent on their degree of human capital. The FSU immigrants, as mentioned, have high human capital, and thus it is expected that they will be affected by human capital factors in their decision to emigrate from Israel to a more open market where they can bring both their human capital and get a higher reward for it.

RQ5: How the degrees of religiosity in Israel affect FSU immigrants migration?

H5: The FSU immigrants are a very heterogeneous group. This group is mostly secular, challenging the Israeli Jewish society and its boundaries (Lerner 2011). The FSU immigrants in Israel are the leading consumers of non- kosher food in Israel. On the other side, this group is the majority in Jewish conversion plans (Lerner 2011). Religious-secular discord in Israeli society is the biggest of all conflicts in Israeli society. The FSU immigrants made it even more severe because of the fact they are mostly secular (Leshem 2008).

Therefore, it is expected that the FSU immigrants will be affected by the high degree of religiosity in Israel that does not match their way of living. It is also likely that it will affect their motivation to immigrate to a more secular state.

Chapter 2: Data and Methods

2.1 Design of the study

This study is a qualitative and quantitative study that examines the motives behind the decision of immigrants from the FSU to emigrate from Israel to the United States in light of the term "social migration." The study focuses on examining and analyzing the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of immigrants from the FSU who emigrated or plan to migrate from Israel to the United States concerning various aspects of their lives: the religious aspect, the social aspect, and the economic aspect. The research method chosen for collecting and analyzing the data in this study is a combination of semi-structured interviews and a survey that the respondents answered after the interview. The interviews and surveys took place during the first half of 2018.

2.2 Method

The study includes 33 semi-structured interviews with *Olim* from the FSU. Thirty of the interviews are interviews with immigrants from the FSU who emigrated from Israel to the United States and now live in the United States, and three are interviews with immigrants from the FSU who are in the process of migration to the US. All respondents live or will live in the United States and have lived in Israel in the past, and all the respondents are immigrants from the FSU. After the interview, the interviewees were asked to answer a survey. I chose semi-structured interviews to give interviewees a clear framework for the questions, on the one hand, but also an opportunity to express their opinions openly.

All the interviews were conducted between January 2017 to August 2017 by phone calls or Skype calls at times that were convenient for the interviewees. Most of the interviews took place at night because of the difference in hours between Israel and the US. In addition, most of the interviewees are working people with families, and therefore the interviews were done at times that were convenient for them and lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed by me.

After the interview, no more than two days after the interview, a questionnaire was sent to the 33 participants (attached in appendix A). The survey is structured and closed. In the beginning, there are a number of questions that examine the participants' personal information, and then 17 questions that ask the participants to rank on a scale between one and five the extent of the influence of different statements that present various reasons for the decision to immigrate to the United States. In these statements, it was possible to expand if this is an important reason.

2.3 Study population

The participants were found using social networks and the "snowball" sample, in which the researcher uses his social networks and those of the study participants. Using this sampling method, it is possible to reach populations that are not necessarily accessible to the researcher.

The study population consists of immigrants from the FSU who immigrated to Israel in their childhood and are now approximately 25-50 years old, with most of the participants in their late 30s. The countries of origin of participants in the study in the

former USSR are varied, and so are the cities in which they lived in Israel. Another common point between all the participants is the fact that the vast majority of them have an academic degree - at least a bachelor's degree and a large part have a master's degree or even a third degree. About 35% have a bachelor's degree, about 35% have a master's degree³. In addition, most of the participants are married with children. Their current residence is in the US, or they aspire to move to the US. The sample was varied. The participants differed in a number of characteristics: age, religion (Jews, half-Jews, and Christians), motivation to move to the United States, place of residence in the United States, profession, and more.

In the beginning stages of data collection, I posted messages on the social network Facebook and asked my friends to share my posts on their personal pages. In addition, I used various groups that have a high concentration of immigrants from the FSU, and I posted that I was looking for immigrants from the FSU who had moved to or planned to move to the US. Also, many of the interviewees referred me to their friends and acquaintances. The biggest challenge was coordinating the interview time due to differences in hours between the US and Israel. About 50 potential interviewees responded to the ads I published. I contacted everyone, but eventually, I interviewed 31 of them. The remaining were not interested in participating in the study or were unable to make time for this purpose.

³based on the questionnaire

Chapter 3: Results

3.1 The social aspect

Soffie: "here, I don't feel I belong, and will never be. I think that this is a problem for many Russians because they do not feel that they belong anywhere. In Israel, society does not accept them, and then they feel freer to leave the country because they did not establish roots here, they are freer, but every country they will live in will be even less connected, so you are always left detached. Here, too, I am neither Russian nor Israeli. So with my Russian friends, it's OK, they did not live in Israel, and my Israeli friends here, I'm like Russian girl for them, and I have to find the Israeli Russians, this strange Minority".

Alienation, foreignness, and social detachment are concepts that were seen consistently during the interviews conducted in this study. Immigrants from the FSU are one of the "formal" immigrant groups that became integrated in Israel: Many of them are in the 9th and 10th deciles in Israel. 47% of the respondents rated their average income as 4 out of 5⁴. When they lived in Israel, many of them had senior positions in the market and especially in the high-tech industries. Their education is higher than the average, and they are children of educated parents. About 70% of the interviewees have an academic education, and 80% of them report that they are children of parents with academic qualifications⁵. According to the research of Kosovski and Almog (2001) many of the immigrants, despite their professional and economic integration into Israeli society, continue to feel that there is a social gap between them and the general population and the Israeli mainstream.

⁴based on the questionnaire

⁵based on the questionnaire

The main argument that emerges from an analysis of this issue regarding the social assimilation of immigrants from the FSU in Israel is that despite the formal and professional integration into the Israeli society and economy, immigrants feel that they are socially different from the Israeli mainstream. They think and perceive themselves as "strangers," which makes it difficult for them to assimilate culturally into Israeli society and find their place in it.

Emma: *"I remember mainly a sense of strangeness as if I really understood that I was different from everyone else."* Emma clearly describes her feeling during her adolescence as a new immigrant in Israel. Like Emma, many of the interviewees immigrated to Israel as children during the elementary and high school years, after having experienced a significant period of their lives in the former Soviet Union. They are describing adolescence in Israel as painful and traumatic, and point that it also affected them as adults. Many describe painful experiences of racism and discrimination on the part of the *Sabar* group, which included harsh calls such as "Russian prostitute" or "stinking Russian" and other stereotypes. Many of them, in order to avoid this, used to connect only with other immigrants like them and not with the *Sabar* group.

Connecting and clinging to this peer group is a way of coping among immigrants, especially young ones (Tannenbaum 2008). Alex: "Most of the time, I was among Russians. My best friends were Russians, my parents, their friends were Russians, I had no problem integrating, but it was not... how to put it... but it was not the language issue because the language was not a problem; it was a bit more of a mentality issue, in my opinion." Alex describes how as a young immigrant he chose a conscious choice to stay mainly among immigrants from the Soviet Union like him. So did his parents who connected only with immigrants from the Soviet Union as well. Their

surrounding environment was homogeneous. All of the interviewees came to Israel at an early age, in the elementary or middle school years. In out-of-home settings, young immigrants chose to maintain most of the reciprocal relations with their original culture - the peer group. The immigrants develop their environment in which they can retain their authentic, shared culture within the engaging Israeli environment (Luque, del Carmen García Fernández et al. 2006).

Adhering to the peer group, along with the fact that it is a coping practice during the immigration process, leads to further differentiation from the absorbing society. In a certain sense, it is a "double-edged sword" for the immigrant population from the Soviet Union. On the one hand, they enjoy a sense of belonging. On the other hand, this is temporary and unrealistic because they avoid contact with entire populations in Israeli society, and this distinguishes them even more from the general society. Because they differ from the Israeli population and stick to other new immigrants, they strengthen the differentiation and distance between them and the general population.

Alex B: "I literally couldn't connect with the people called *Sabar*, who were born in Israel ... It makes you wanting to search for belonging to a society that accepts you; that is why there are many Russians at the beginning who are wandering around in a group of Russians. It is not necessarily a choice; it's because it is challenging to integrate.

Therefore, the *Olim* choose to immigrate to the United States and live in places where many immigrants live. This choice stems from the difficulty and alienation they felt as a distinct group in Israel and the desire to live in a country where the feeling will diminish or disappear.

Arkadi: *"I love it that we live together, and all are equal, and I love that there are so many Indians because one of the things that bothered me a lot in this country is nationalism, this fixation on the ethnic issue, on the national issue. The fact that you are not getting foreign immigrants except Jewish people, which is under the Law of Return, this thing has really begun to grow and grow into a big problem for me."*

A large percentage of the interviewees live in cities like New York, Boston, and areas such as Silicon Valley, where there are almost no "white Americans," but most of the population consists of high-skilled immigrants from different countries around the world, including Israel. There, immigrants from the FSU feel less alien.

3.2 The economic aspect

Immigrants from the FSU in Israel have become an integral part of Israel's economy and labor market over the years. Economic assimilation occurs according to Amit, Bridges, and others (2012) when immigrants receive financial rewards, similar to the general society. According to this definition, a big part of this group, especially those employed in high-tech and academia, has been economically assimilated into Israeli society. But economic assimilation is only one parameter of the general assimilation of immigrants into the society to which they come. In the case of immigrants from the FSU, in this sense, assimilation was proper and improved over the years, especially in the second and third generations. In other aspects, and especially in the social sense, assimilation was lacking. In the 90's, when the FSU immigrants came to Israel, there was a significant population that were employed in the former Soviet Union, who had advanced degrees in various fields and extensive experience, but were forced to work in Israel in professions such as cleaning and caring for the elderly in order to make a

decent living. This problem was usually resolved in the second and third generations of immigration when those immigrants who arrived in Israel as children were integrated into the academic and business sectors in Israel with the encouragement of their parents.

An analysis of the interviews shows that immigration of these immigrants to the United States, second and third-generation immigrants to Israel, relies on many reasons when the economic field appears to be a way of coping with immigration itself.

Alexandra: "In terms of my husband and, we are both product managers in high-tech companies. If we move to Israel, our opportunities will be reduced by at least ten times, and it does not make sense because we both grew up in families that had no money."

Alexandra describes the need for "**professional belonging**" in the country where a person lives. She notes that both she and her husband grew up in immigrant families without financial means. Alexandra goes on to describe how this affected their desire to live in economic well-being, which is more convenient for them in the United States. Like Alexandra, many of the interviewees and the immigrant population from FSU who immigrate to the United States do so through relocation from their jobs (usually in high-tech) or for doctoral or post-doctorate studies. Many immigrants use a professional field as a means of moving to the United States to realize their desire to integrate socially and improve their quality of life in this sense.

The combination of the need for social and professional belonging is further reinforced by the phenomenon of "connections," which are very common in the Israeli employment market. Immigrants naturally have fewer "connections" than

Sabarpeople that were born in Israel, and their families are economically and professionally based. Alexandra, who works in the high-tech industry, describes this as follows: *"The Israelis who studied with me Business Administration- they are all returned to Israel, and they all have good jobs, but the reason is that none of them comes from a family of immigrants. Everyone has an entrepreneur, CEO, father and so on. Everyone has a network. We do not have. When we get back, we will not have opportunities that they have, and that's something that really makes me sad. When people ask me if I want to go back, I do not feel like I can because I will not have the same opportunities in Israel because I'm not someone's daughter."* Alexandra refers to the discourse on the possibilities and opportunities of immigrants compared to Sabras in Israel. She stresses that in the US, there is no need for connections to advance like in Israel. As an immigrant, it is simpler for her and her partner to develop in the United States. The free market in the United States and the multitude of opportunities allow immigrants to fully realize their potential, as opposed to the "almost" feeling they feel in the professional aspect in Israel because they do not have the right connections in the industry. Networking is a vital tool in the employment market, and the lack of these capabilities for immigrants in Israel is an obstacle for them.

Many of the interviewees mentioned their purchasing power in Israel versus the US, and the possibility of buying a home or apartment in the US, compared with the impossibility in Israel. Buying a home is considered a "milestone" in the lives of many people, especially in the lives of immigrants who often feel "temporary," and buying a home makes their lives more stable and secure (Chiang and Leung 2011). The subject was repeated in many interviews when the matter of economics came up. Purchasing a house or apartment is an essential element for the interviewees, in the sense of "planting roots" in the country in which they live. Immigrants often feel that

they have no tangible roots or foundations in the country they live in because they have no property, land, or house. Buying an apartment or house is an integral part of the sense of stability that they seek. In Israel, this is not possible for them, but in the US, it is easier to buy a home or an apartment.

3.3 The religion aspect

Immigrants from the FSU are heterogeneous in their religion. They consist of groups of ultra-Orthodox, religious, and traditional, but an important aspect to note is that most of them are entirely secular, and some are even atheists. This fact, besides the point that most of the citizens of Israel define themselves as "traditional," is a significant factor in the feelings of racism and discrimination among the immigrants from the *Sabras* during the first years of immigration and throughout their lives in the country. In addition, the Israeli rabbinical establishment makes it very difficult for immigrants to practice their Judaism, which is often not recognized by the rabbinate. It seems that this problem is solved in the United States, in which various forms of Judaism exist without the intervention of the state or federal government.

One of the procedures that repeatedly arises during the interviews is the process of clarifying Judaism, which many immigrants are forced to cross when they wish to marry, divorce, or bury their loved ones. These practices have a direct link to the institution of the rabbinate in Israel. Ilana: "I am Jewish on both sides, and I had to prove my Judaism. The moment I want to marry in Israel, I have to prove to the rabbinate, and I have to go and prove it," she says. ... I come with my husband to the rabbinate, and a man with a *Kippa* sits in front of me... and he tells me that it does not

matter, and he rejects the documents with disgust and tells me there were fakes, so my papers are irrelevant".

Another point concerns the process of "incitement" ("*Hadata*") that takes place in many cities and communities in Israel. A number of respondents noted that they felt that their environment places too much emphasis on religion and its influences on their way of life - shops closed on the Sabbath, only kosher products, and religious coercion. Felix describes it: *"The religious part, I do not like it. I'm very upset about it. I'll give you an example, I lived in Ofakim, Ofakim is a city that is becoming ultra-Orthodox, and on Friday at 4 pm there is a siren in the city. Everything is closed. The city is dead. There is not even a gas station open. It bothered me, if for that matter, I am a business owner, it's the law of supermarkets now. It hurts people's business, and it hurts their livelihood. It's not fair, live and let live, you're religious; you're ultra- I do not have a problem with this, do not get into my plate and do not get into my life and what I believe. Here is a great advantage in the US."* Felix notes that he lives in Ofakim, a peripheral city that he describes as "ultra-Orthodox." He describes a great difficulty in everything related to shutting down businesses on the Sabbath and intervention by the religious establishment in the life of the individual, in contrast to his new life in the United States - a country in which religion and state are separated, and there is almost total freedom of religion.

The experience of immigration in its religious aspect brought many immigrants to a feeling of disappointment with their immigration process to Israel, and especially to the second generation. Arkady describes it as follows: *"One of the most difficult experiences in the early years was that I lost the feeling that I was a Jew because I am not a Jew according to the Law of Return ... My mother was not Jewish, but our family was much more Jewish when we lived in Russia, and I always thought of myself*

as a Jew, And when we came to Israel so suddenly, I am sure you have heard many such stories already, it turned out that I was not". Many of the immigrants and their children grew up in the former Soviet Union with the full understanding that they were Jews, and so did the general society in the FSU treat them. When they came to Israel, they found out that they were not Jews according to the definition of Judaism as accepted in Israel. These Immigrants had their identity of Judaism abolished throughout their lives in Israel, and it led to an identity crisis. When they immigrate to the United States, they experience their Jewish identity anew.

As a result of this, there is severe anger among a large number of the respondents towards the religious establishment in Israel and the ultra-Orthodox stream, which is expressed in Arkadi's words. Some describe the desire to distance themselves from this as one of the reasons for moving to the US. Lia describes it this way: *"I'm very not religious; I'm the opposite of religious. Secular? An atheist? Or Whatever. It bothered me that there is no transportation on the Sabbath; it really bothered me. Over many years I did not have a car, and if I wanted to do something, it demanded taxis or coordinate it with friends and stuff. It bothered me that I cannot always order in restaurants what I want... from all kinds of considerations of kashrut and such".* As part of the anger at the religious establishment, there is a significant restraint to the Israeli education system that is influenced by spiritual elements. Evgenia describes the influence of religion in educational frameworks as one of the reasons that changed her migration: *"Religion itself does not bother me, but rather the religious framework, especially the part it takes in the educational frameworks."*

These difficulties disappear when they rebuild their lives in the US. Yana describes her religious life in the US as much freer and more enabling than in Israel: *"Some freedom ... of everything, even absolute expression, freedom from religion, even*

though we are traditional, tradition is important to us, and we do kiddush on Sabbath. Freedom from religion, even in Israel, it is not related to everyone being Jewish, but freedom in the way of how you are a Jew is much judged. There are so many religions here, and immigrants practice their own religion the way they want to. There are one thousand ways on how to practice Christianity and the same thing for Judaism... There is only one way to practice Judaism in Israel, and here you have several types of synagogues". American society allows the existence of different streams in Judaism, which, according to Yana's feeling, does not exist in Israel.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and discussion

This study examined the reasons for the immigration of *Olim* from the FSU to Israel and to the United States. The population examined composed of young adults aged 20-50, who immigrated to Israel in childhood, youth, and young adulthood. They lived in Israel for a considerable part of their lives and chose to move their lives to the US. Some of them did so for professional reasons, some from a lack of belonging to Israeli society and some for a combination of several reasons.

One of the main motivations cited by the subjects of immigration is the social element. Concepts such as lack of belonging, alienation, foreignness, and racism were repeated in many interviews as experiences they had gone through as children in Israel in the years following immigration. Many of the interviewees continued to feel these feelings throughout their lives in Israel from various walks of life, with the age at which they immigrated to Israel as the main factor influencing the level of their sense of belonging and foreignness. Participants, who immigrated at a later age, and especially in their teenage years, reported feeling a more considerable lack of

belonging. Their experience in high school greatly influenced their feelings. Dealing with disparaging words, ostracism by the Sabra population, and the sense of difference permeated their lives as adults in the country.

Another motivation focuses on the element of religion and its impact on everyday life in Israel. As noted throughout this study, many of the immigrants are not Jewish, according to the definition of the institution of the Israeli rabbinate. This fact directly affects the daily lives of the FSU *Olim* in Israel. Many immigrants first encounter the experience when they want to get married, and they cannot do so in Israel unless they undergo a formal conversion. The fact that most of the immigrants live a completely secular life makes it even more difficult for them to do so. The discrimination against immigrants in basic activities such as marriage, divorce, and burial as a result of their separation from the general Jewish population (Remennick 2003) reinforces the sense of alienation and separation they feel. These experiences take place amid a sense of confusion of identities; the immigrants feel that since they immigrated to Israel as children. Also, the sense of dissonance created by the fact that in the Soviet Union, they knew that they were Jews and even experienced hostile treatment from the local population. In Israel, they were told that they were no longer considered Jews.

The economic element as consideration for immigration from Israel to the US has risen in almost every interview, but in most of them not as a primary consideration but as a way of dealing with other difficulties that they experienced. The industry and the labor market in Israel often rely on familiarity with people and "connections," which makes it difficult for second-generation immigrants because these connections do not exist for them. These relationships do not exist; when an immigrant competes with a *Sabar* whose family has been based in Israel for many years, the competition is unequal. The respondents noted that it is easier for them in the United States to enter

senior positions without the existence of this element, but only based on their qualifications. This fact, coupled with the desire to move forward and to be financially established, especially in light of the negative economic and professional experience that their parents underwent when they immigrated to Israel, strengthens their desire to immigrate to the United States.

As noted, most of the subjects in this research have established themselves in a financial sense in Israel. Except for a few, most of them involve themselves in the high-tech industry or the senior academy. In the United States, however, their income has grown and also their ability to "plant roots" in the form of buying a land and a home, something that could not happen so quickly for some of them in Israel. For immigrants, especially those who have migrated three times in their lives, it seems that the stability experience created by land acquisition is particularly significant.

When immigrants immigrate to the United States, some of these difficulties do not affect them. They feel more belonging and less discriminated against by American society. Contributing to this is the fact that the vast majority live in immigrant areas in the US, where there are almost no "Americans" but mainly different groups of immigrants. They experience fewer difficulties in terms of religious life as a result of the fact that there is no political intervention in the manner in which they maintain their religiosity. They can live a secular lifestyle without discrimination and racism. Economically, they feel more comfortable because of the sense of stability and belonging created by the fact that they earn higher wages and can reach more senior positions.

The phenomenon of immigrants from the FSU who emigrate from Israel to the United States and the findings in this study reinforce the existence of the concept of social

migration. Social migration is a phenomenon in which individuals choose to move in order to mobilize themselves socially and increase their social acceptance (Kislev 2017). This phenomenon increases as globalization grows. New migration distensions open, and knowledge grows (Kislev 2017).

According to the results of this study and the analysis of the interviews and the questionnaires, it can be understood that social reasons and a desire for social acceptance have a dominant influence on the desire to emigrate. Reasons such as economic, religious, cultural, and other factors that emerged during the interviews were a catalyst for the decision to make the immigration, but it seems that by weighing all the factors, the dominant factor is the social factor, while the other factors reinforce it.

These findings are consistent with existing literature in the field. Leshem (2005) noted that former USSR immigrants live in closed communities within Israeli society. They often differentiate themselves from the general population and prefer to live as part of a closed community made up of other immigrants who resemble them, despite their excellent integration into Israeli society over other immigrant groups in Israel (Khanin 2011). This integration and assimilation into Israeli society have resulted in a dual attitude from Israeli society (Remennick and Celnik 2011). On the one hand, large sections of Israeli society accept immigrants from the USSR and treat them as equals. On the other hand, even today, there is racism and discrimination against immigrants in various fields (Remennick 2011). As a result, many immigrants experience a sense of "otherness" in their lives in Israel. They feel separated from the different groups that make up Israeli society and many times it even makes them feel that they do not belong. This feeling sometimes leads to the belief that Russian culture, which they have known from home, is better and more correct than Israeli culture. This reinforces

the sense of distinctness and otherness from the Israeli society (Remennick 2003). As a result, many immigrants, especially the 1.5 generation who came to Israel at an early age and grew up there, feel that the "Russian" part of their identity is stronger and more substantial than the Israeli one. They identify as Russians before identifying as Israelis (Remennick 2004). The participants in this study often described the feeling of being separated from Israeli society. This was an important element of the decision to immigrate to the United States for them.

4.2 Research limitations

This study has several limitations that I would like to point out. First, in terms of the method of research, the initial goal was to interview not only immigrants from the FSU who now live in the United States but also some who are in the process of immigration and still live in Israel. As the study progressed, my attempts to locate subjects who met this definition failed. This failure may be due to the discretion required in an immigration process. The subjects I interviewed in the process noted numerous times before and during the interview to remain anonymous and stressed the importance of this to them. Also, my research is mainly qualitative. A more quantitative and broader analysis of the issue could bring interesting results. In addition, to the best of my knowledge, there is no collection of data by the state, which made it challenging to collect data for research.

Another limitation of the study was the discourse with the interviewees and their openness to talk about painful issues. Many of the interviewees chose to focus on the first parts of the interview on things that may be easier for them to talk about, such as the desire to improve their economic situation and quality of life. It took many of

them a lot of time to open up and talk about more sensitive issues such as the racism they felt and the social and cultural aspect that influenced them on the choice to immigrate to the United States.

Finally, the study focuses on the subject of social migration, as well as the perspective of the author of the study. There may be other significant aspects that have not been treated in research and should be treated in further studies.

In addition, I would like to point out that the author of this study is herself an immigrant from the former Soviet Union.

4.3 Advantages of the Research and its Applicability

This research focused on a particular group of immigrants with unique features: most of them are highly educated, have required professions and they are mostly immigrants with high human capital, moving from Israel to the United States to improve their life status in various aspects, with the possibility to feel more integrated than they feel in Israel. They see themselves progressing very quickly in the United States, faster than in Israel. If these researches' assumptions are correct, it can apply to other groups of immigrants in the world that are moving to other countries for social reasons. This case also teaches us about the integration and assimilation of social immigrant groups in their new country. Another aspect that can be viewed as the applicability of this research is the source country that the immigrants are leaving- in our case, Israel. The FSU immigrants in Israel are a high human capital group that is an integral part of the Israeli economy and society. Their leaving impacts Israeli society in many aspects. Other countries can relate to this when highly qualified

groups are emigrating from it. I encourage other people to keep exploring and addressing the social aspects of migration and the concept of social migration on different groups of immigrants.

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