

## CHAPTER ONE

# COMING HOME? FSU IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL AND GERMANY

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According to Kim's (2001) comprehensive theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation, as well as to Alba and Nee's (2003) new assimilation theory, immigrants' social and cultural integration is affected by the political, economic, and cultural features of the host country, as well as by the characteristics of the immigrants themselves, especially the strength of their ethnic group, yielding results ranging from rapid assimilation to cultural and social segregation. As such, this chapter opens with a review of host environment conditions pertinent to the integration of immigrants from the FSU in Israel and Germany, followed by a description of the immigrants' sociodemographic and cultural characteristics, and concluding with an examination of adaptation strategies employed by these immigrant communities.

### HOST ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS

Immigrants' adaptation to a new cultural environment cannot be fully understood without taking into account the various factors of their reception context. We review the principal factors affecting both the pace and scope of FSU immigrants' adaptation and cross-cultural transformation, including Israel and Germany's immigration and absorption policies, their respective integration ideologies, and the public climate toward the Russian-speaking newcomers prevailing in both countries.

### IMMIGRATION POLICIES

Israel and Germany are among the few countries whose immigration and citizenship policies are based on the ethnoreligious *Jus Sanguinis* [right of blood] criterion. Consequently, ethnicity plays a central role in these countries'

public policy and political discourse (Levy, 1999a, 1999b; Munz & Ohliger, 1998, 2003; Shuval & Leshem, 1998). By contrast, in countries adhering to the multicultural model, such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, every immigrant is equally entitled to citizenship according to the *Jus Soli* [right of territory, i.e., place of birth] principle (Castles & Miller, 1993; Hjerm, 1998; Joppke, 1999).

Since its establishment, Israel has thus maintained a highly liberal immigration policy toward immigrants of Jewish descent, in accordance with its Declaration of Independence (1948) and by virtue of the Law of Return (1950), declaring that the Jews have the “natural right” to return to their historic homeland. As a result, all Jews and their families are entitled to immigrate to Israel and to receive Israeli citizenship immediately on arrival (Berthomiere, 2003; Shuval & Leshem, 1998). Similarly, in the second half of the twentieth century, several large groups of ethnic Germans arrived in Germany after having lived in Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union for dozens and sometimes hundreds of years. In this case as well, the immigrants are granted German citizenship forthwith according to Paragraph 116(1) of the German Constitution (1949) and its recent (1990 and 1992) amendments (Bauer & Zimmermann, 1997; Koopmans, 1999; Munz & Ulrich, 1997; Ronge, 1997).

Moreover, because of these countries’ ideological obligation toward their co-ethnics in the Diaspora, in both cases, the neutral word “immigrant” was replaced by the normative term *Oleh* (one who ascends) in Israel and *Aussiedler* (one who resettles) in Germany. These terms designate people perceived as returning to their “fatherland” and consequently characterized by cognitive and emotional affinities to the cultural traditions of the host country (Faist, 1994; Martin, 1994; Shuval & Leshem, 1998; Steinbach, 2001).<sup>1</sup>

Official declarations notwithstanding, there are essential differences between Israel and Germany in implementation of mechanisms to encourage or limit the returning Diaspora’s influx. During the 1990s, Germany began to revise its open-door policy, adding several restrictions to its immigration laws. In 1993, for example, Germany set a quota of 225,000 *Aussiedlers* per year, as contrasted with the unlimited influx allowed in previous years. That same year saw the passage of a new law that would eventually halt immigration of *Aussiedlers* altogether. According to this law, from the year 2010, persons of German descent born outside Germany after 1993 will no longer be entitled to the status of returning immigrants (Munz & Ulrich, 1997; Richter, 1999; Ronge, 1997). By contrast, the Israeli government has always declared that *Aliyah* (Jewish immigration to Israel) contributes to the country’s security and economic stability and even to international recognition of its legitimacy. As such, Israel never limited the number of returning immigrants and continues to encourage *Aliyah*, especially from the FSU (Shuval, 1998).

As a result of this liberal immigration policy, to obtain immigration visas to Israel, potential immigrants need only to provide documentation

attesting to their ethnic affiliation, without having to prove any cultural or emotional affinity for the Jewish people or acquaintance with Jewish traditions (Ben-Rafael, 2000). Similar criteria were applied previously in Germany, where the only proof necessary for obtaining a German visa was a birth certificate attesting to German nationality. Moreover, at the beginning of large-scale emigration from the FSU, German authorities considered ignorance of the German language as proof of the persecutions that Germans had suffered under the Soviet regime (Lens von Traitteur, 1991; Levy, 2003). In 1996, however, Germany did institute a language and culture proficiency test as a visa prerequisite. According to the new procedures, a FSU resident of German descent desiring to immigrate to Germany is asked to fill out a fifty-page questionnaire in German, indicating details of German lineage and demonstrating knowledge of German folklore, customs, and holidays. Due to its difficulty, half of the applicants fail this test and thus are not granted German visas (Dietz, 2000; Senders, 1999; Steinbach, 2001; Thranhardt, 2000).

In summary, although both Israel and Germany officially view FSU immigrants as people returning to their historic homelands, their basic orientations toward returning Diaspora differ markedly: Israel strives to increase *Aliyah* as much as possible, whereas Germany adopts a more ambivalent stance on this issue. At the declarative level, the German government calls for the “return of our German brothers and sisters who wish to live as Germans in a German country” (Joppke, 1997: 279), yet in practice Germany maintains a yearly quota system and has instituted rigid language requirements. Moreover, by rendering immigration contingent on the results of a language and cultural examination, Germany is making an ideological statement as well, declaring that potential immigrants must prove their cultural affinity for German culture, demonstrating a priori similarity to the host society.

#### INTEGRATION IDEOLOGY: MELTING POT VERSUS CULTURAL PLURALISM

Receiving societies vary significantly in the degree to which they exert implicit and explicit pressure on immigrants to change their original cultural values and adopt those of the host culture. Therefore, integration ideology (whether assimilative or pluralistic) is one of the most important factors influencing the nature of the immigrants’ adaptation process, as it reflects a measure of “conformity pressure” exerted by the host environment on the newcomers to adopt and practice the host cultural values and codes of behavior (Atkinson & Coupland, 1988; Kim, 1999).

In this regard, Israel’s integration ideology changed significantly during the 1990s. Like other immigration-intensive countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia (Alba & Nee, 2003; Armstrong, 1998; Castles & Miller, 1993), Israel took giant strides away from the melting pot ideology that espoused immigrant assimilation in the dominant culture (Bar-Yosef, 1968; Eisenstadt, 1954; Lissak, 1999) in favor of cultural pluralism that

recognizes cultural differences among immigrants and allows for their preservation (Horowitz & Leshem, 1998; Kop & Litan, 2002; Leshem & Lissak, 2001). FSU immigrants were then treated with greater tolerance for their cultural and organizational demands and were even granted public resources for their fulfillment. Notable among the numerous achievements in this respect are the bilingual *Gesher Theater*, matriculation exams in the Russian language, high school courses in Russian as a second language, and the Russian-language media funded by various government agencies (Ben-Rafael, Olshtain, & Geijst, 1998; Caspi & Elias, 2000; Gershenson, 2005; Horowitz, 1996; Remennick, 2007).

The transition from melting pot to cultural pluralism is also reflected in the status of the Hebrew language in immigrants' integration. For forty years, Israel implemented a monolingual policy, attempting to build a nation in which the Hebrew language was at the core of the Zionist revolution. Instructions for new immigrants were written in Hebrew and authorities urged immigrants to change their names to Hebrew ones (Katz, 1982; Stahl, 1994). Recognition of other languages was limited to fifteen-minute radio programs for each immigrant language and a limited number of foreign-language newspapers, most of which represent the ruling political party (Caspi & Limor, 1999; Leshem & Lissak, 2001; Lissak, 2001).

Significant changes began to occur during the 1970s and continued through the 1990s, reflecting a growing tendency toward at least temporary tolerance of the immigrants' language and culture. During the 1990s, government agencies and municipal authorities began publishing information pamphlets in Russian; the state radio network *Kol Israel* (Voice of Israel) established a Russian-language radio station; Israeli television channels initiated Russian-language programming and subtitles; and Russian-language magazines and newspapers began to appear, some even supported by the Israeli government (Caspi & Elias, 2000; Caspi, Adoni, Cohen, & Elias, 2002; Glinert, 1995; Lissak, 2001; Zilberg & Leshem, 1996).

Germany's integration policy toward immigrants from the FSU, unlike that of Israel, still maintains the melting pot ideology and expects Russian-speaking *Aussiedlers* to assimilate quickly into the German culture and lifestyle (Joppke, 1996; Zick, Wagner, van Dick, & Petzel, 2001). Moreover, even before the onset of massive immigration from the FSU, German policymakers assumed (incorrectly) that the integration of such immigrants would present no problem since their cultural background is similar to that of native Germans (Faist, 1994; Hermann, 1995; Hofmann, 1994; Lens von Traitteur, 1991). In accordance with this assumption, German immigration authorities expected Russian newcomers to demonstrate their cultural affinity as soon as they settled in their "fatherland" (Brubaker, 1998). Furthermore, institution of a German language and culture examination attests to an even more extreme cultural demand, mandating a cultural resemblance between the immigrants and the host country prior to immigration.

The result of this assimilation policy is that the integration of Russian *Aussiedlers* is highly structured, with considerable emphasis on the framing of German identity. The German language plays a crucial role in this process, as it is not only the instrumental tool of integration into society but also a symbol of national identity (Kurthen, 1995; Pfetsch, 1999; Richter, 1998). As such, the *Aussiedlers* must learn High German (*Hochdeutsch*) and speak it in public instead of their own local dialects.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this coercive language acquisition process, instead of mastering the language (*beherrschen*), the immigrants are mastered by it (*beherrscht werden*), rendering many of them mute in the public sphere (Senders, 1999).

Furthermore, as a nation of immigrants and their descendants,<sup>3</sup> Israeli society accepts multiethnicity and tolerates a variety of accents and intonations, as well as insufficient knowledge of Hebrew. Hence the limited (or nonexistent) cultural and linguistic connection between Russian Jews and the Jewish state is not an obstacle to the immigrants' acceptance as Israelis. Germany, on the other hand, does not perceive itself as a nation of immigrants and demands a much higher degree of cultural uniformity for national membership, as expressed, first and foremost, in an uncompromising demand for mastery of "proper" German language skills as a prerequisite to acceptance as an "authentic German" (Koopmans, 1999; Richter, 1999).

#### ABSORPTION POLICIES

FSU immigrants in Israel and in Germany enjoy full citizens' rights and extensive benefits as returning Diaspora. On arrival, both immigrant groups are entitled to financial assistance, intensive language courses and professional training, the right to vote, and the right to unemployment compensation and social security stipends (Munz & Ohliger, 1998; Shuval, 1998). Thus, in Israel, new immigrants from the FSU are granted six months of financial aid to cover living expenses and rent, six months of free Hebrew language classes and various other benefits, such as health insurance, pre-academic preparatory courses, professional training programs, and tax exemptions (Leshem, 1998b). Germany offers even greater benefits to *Aussiedlers*, who may receive financial assistance for nine months at the average unemployment payment rate, six months of German language studies, unemployment and social security assistance, health insurance, and professional training and retraining courses. In addition, *Aussiedlers* are also accorded preference over local German families regarding special public housing benefits (Faist & Hausermann, 1996; Koopmans, 1999; Munz & Ohliger, 1998).

Along with the numerous similarities between Israel and Germany in integration of FSU immigrants, there is also an essential difference in the initial integration track the immigrants follow in each country. On arriving in Germany, the immigrants are housed at transit camps on the eastern border for periods of three to twelve months as the authorities handle initial

problems of immigrants' integration and transition to permanent housing. The immigrants are then sent to towns in any of several districts, in which they are obliged to live for at least two years, under the close supervision of integration authorities. Districts are selected administratively according to population size, with virtually no consideration for the preferences of the immigrants themselves, as the only request considered by the authorities is proximity to family members who had immigrated earlier (Bauer & Zimmermann, 1997; Brauer, 1995; Faist & Hausermann, 1996; Hofmann, 1994; Koopmans, 1999).

A similar centralized absorption model prevailed in Israel until the 1980s. When Russian-speaking immigrants first started arriving en masse in the 1970s, they were placed in "absorption centers" for approximately six months, enabling them to adjust to their new society gradually (Horowitz, 1996; Lissak & Leshem, 1995). This centralized policy was amended in the early 1990s with the introduction of a new integration model called direct absorption, allowing for virtually independent and relatively unsupervised integration into society and the labor market (Doron & Kargar, 1993; Hacoheh, 1994).

According to this model, immigrants had a right to choose the town in which they wished to reside immediately on arrival, usually displaying a preference for large metropolitan areas or places in which they could establish significant communities of their own (Kimmerling, 1998). Hence, the dispersion of immigrants was not included among the absorption authorities' responsibilities, rendering it more difficult to arrange regular Hebrew language study programs and other activities that would reinforce immigrants' socialization into Israeli society and culture (Horowitz & Leshem, 1998; Leshem, 1998a).

#### THE PUBLIC CLIMATE REGARDING IMMIGRANTS FROM THE FSU

Along with official integration policies, another factor significantly affecting immigrants' social incorporation is "host receptivity," namely, the local residents' openness toward newcomers and willingness to accommodate them with opportunities to participate in local social communication processes (Kim, 2001). A lack of host receptivity (i.e., closeness, indifference, rejection, and hostility on part of local residents), in turn, limits the immigrants' access to relationship building with locals, exacerbating their social isolation (Amir & Chana, 1977; Worchel, 1986). As such, our examination of local Israelis and Germans' receptivity toward their Russian-speaking co-ethnics will include a brief review of the main trends in public and media discourses addressing FSU immigrants in both countries.

In Israel, mass immigration from the FSU was immediately perceived as a threat by numerous sectors of the local population. Descendants of immigrants from Islamic countries (so-called *Mizrachim*), who had only re-

cently stepped up their social mobility, were threatened by the newer immigrants who were more educationally and professionally skilled (Israelowitz & Abu Saad, 1992; Kimmerling, 1998; Leshem, 1995). Israeli Arabs, who were also becoming increasingly socially mobile, feared not only the impending threat to their position in the labor market but also the immigrants' potential electoral power, which would inevitably increase the political influence of the Jewish majority (Al-Haj, 1998; Kimmerling, 1998). Furthermore, since most of the immigrants were nonreligious and some even arrived with non-Jewish partners, they were perceived as a detriment to the political power of religious parties and the Jewish character of Israel (Khanin, 2000; Kimmerling, 1998).

These anxieties were clearly reflected in public opinion polls assessing positions adopted by the local population toward FSU immigrants. During the 1990s, Israeli citizens' attitudes toward Russian-speaking immigrants steadily worsened, bordering on the hostile (Horowitz, 1998; Leshem, 1998a). This tendency was further exacerbated and intensified by the Israeli media that often accused the immigrants of involvement in prostitution and organized crime and of falsifying documents attesting to their Jewish origin.

In this regard, Golden's (2003) research on portrayals of female immigrants from the FSU in the Israeli press between 1990 and 1992 revealed an ubiquitous association of the immigrant women with prostitution, depicting them as morally and socially fragmented. Released from the moral bounds of familial—and, by implication, national—ties, these women were symbolically located beyond the boundaries of the Israeli-Jewish collective. Although the study's main focus was the media representation of female immigrants, Golden also mentioned that the prevailing media image of male immigrants from the FSU was that of "Russian mafia," reflecting their alleged extensive involvement in illegal activity.

Similarly, Lemish's (2000) study of news items in the Israeli press from 1994 to 1997 showed that the most dominant image associated with coverage of female immigrants from the FSU was that of suppliers of sexual services. Another prevailing image perceived the female Russian immigrant as the "other"—one who is not Jewish or who deviates from the norms of a functioning wife and mother, both strongly embedded in Jewish tradition that treasures the family as the center of cultural life. These media images have exerted a significant influence on perception of female FSU immigrants by local Israelis, as two-thirds of participants in a public opinion poll conducted by Lemish expressed negative attitudes toward immigrant women from the FSU. The most salient among them, spontaneously expressed by a third of the participants, associated these women with the sex industry.

Israeli newspapers thus appear to have created a tripartite image of Russian-speaking immigrants as non-Jews, criminals, and prostitutes—the three stereotypes emphasized in most articles about new immigrants from the FSU during the 1990s. Several of these articles also underscored their perceived lack of loyalty and patriotism toward Israel, presenting them as cunning

opportunists who used Israeli visas and absorption grants as a stepping-stone to the United States and Canada and displayed no motivation to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (Solodkina, 1993).

Attitudes of local Germans toward Russian *Aussiedlers* worsened during the 1990s as well. A turning point in public opinion occurred after German unification that caused a decline in the country's economic situation. A continuing influx of refugees from Eastern Europe and Arab countries further exacerbated the public's negative attitudes toward immigrants of any kind. Thus, polls taken at the time showed that the German public was nearly as hostile to Russian *Aussiedlers* as to asylum seekers. Despite their German ethnicity, these immigrants were perceived as foreigners, whose financial assistance should be reduced and whose admission to Germany ought to be limited (Klusmeyer, 1993; Levy, 2003; Martin, 1994; Munz & Ohliger, 1998; Rathzel, 1995; Thranhardt, 2000).

Another interesting similarity between Israel and Germany is the prevalence of hostility toward immigrants among the socioeconomically weaker strata of the local population. Apparently, residents of the former East Germany were the fiercest opponents of the continued immigration of *Aussiedlers* and the granting of special rights to this population because the FSU immigrants appeared to be competing for resources previously allocated for improving the living conditions of former East Germans (Faist & Hausermann, 1996; Friedrichs, 1998; Hart & Wijkhuijs, 1999).

In Germany, as in Israel, hostile public opinion toward Russian-speaking newcomers was also reflected in political discourse. Yet, unlike Israel, in which the most powerful opposition to the FSU immigrants was expressed by religious parties, in Germany, it was the left-wing politicians who demanded an amendment to Paragraph 116(1) of the German Constitution, claiming that it was an anachronistic, nationality-based law that should be replaced with a universal immigration quota that regards ethnic Germans merely as one of many immigrant groups and does not entitle them to any special privileges, thereby reducing the flow of immigration from the FSU (Luchtenberg & McLelland, 1998; Martin, 1994; Munz & Ohliger, 1998).

Like their Israeli counterparts, Russian-speaking immigrants to Germany are generally represented negatively in the local media. Taraban (2004) found that German media tend to ignore the historical dimension and diachronic approaches in portrayal of the *Aussiedler* community, frequently focusing on the scandalous chronicles of contemporary Russia, where post-Soviet reality is represented largely through accounts of chaos, criminality, corruption, and alcoholism, creating the image of a society that inevitably produces all kinds of dangerous characters incongruent with the Western vision of civilized, law-abiding citizens.

*Aussiedlers*, in turn, are linked with this negative image and are commonly portrayed as "problematic" citizens who forge their birth certificates to obtain German visas, who are frequently involved in hooliganism and alco-



holism, and who continue to act and think according to the “Soviet mentality.” Such media discourse constructs Russian-speaking *Aussiedlers* as foreigners who failed to integrate because of their previous residence in the post-Soviet states, drawing public attention away from issues of discrimination and prejudice toward the FSU immigrants. Moreover, the sentiments expressed by the German media, claiming that *Aussiedlers* from the FSU are unwilling (or unable) to integrate into German society and are thus burdening Germany’s welfare system, are usually accompanied by demands to reduce the number of *Aussiedlers* admitted to Germany (*ibid.*).

Studies conducted in Israel and Germany indicate, therefore, that the returning Diaspora from the FSU, in both countries, is no less negatively represented in the media than are other immigrant groups whose arrival is not rooted in the ideology of “homecoming” (see, e.g., Butterwegge, 1996; Hussain, 2000; Santa Ana, 1999). In both cases, FSU immigrants are often described as unemployed persons who burden the welfare system or antisocial misfits such as drug addicts, alcoholics, and prostitutes. The host media thus serve as a powerful mechanism allowing construction of immigrants’ “otherness,” possibly increasing alienation between the hosts and the newcomers and slowing the pace of immigrants’ integration.

#### FSU IMMIGRANTS’ SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

The pace and scope of immigrants’ integration are affected not only by the host environment conditions but also by the sociodemographic and cultural characteristics of the immigrants themselves. Moreover, according to Kim’s (2001) theory of cross-cultural adaptation, different structural factors are applied differentially to different immigrant groups, especially because of the groups’ respective ethnic strength, referring to the relative status and power that membership in an ethnic group accords. This means that a strong ethnic group is likely to offer its members a strong ethnically based subculture, which in turn might reduce their efforts at cultural adaptation. Bearing this in mind, we proceed to examine the principal characteristics of the two immigrant communities, including their historical background in the Soviet Union, cultural characteristics, and patterns of political activity in the host country, thus providing a base for better understanding of the two communities’ cultural adaptation.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JEWS AND GERMANS IN THE FSU

In the Soviet Union, Jews and Germans were among the most conspicuous ethnic minorities that were not granted territorial recognition. As early as 1913, Lenin determined that anyone supporting Jewish national identity is an enemy of the proletariat. During the 1930s, the Soviet regime took on an

even more stringent assimilation policy, with Yiddish cultural activists among its most prominent victims. Jewish communal life and various aspects of its organizational and cultural structure were prohibited throughout the Soviet regime. Moreover, the Jewish heritage dwindled from generation to generation, even in such informal spheres as family traditions, as a result of modernization and the destruction of traditionally Jewish localities in the western area of the Soviet Union during the Holocaust (Ben-Rafael, 2000; Leshem & Lissak, 1998; Leshem & Sicron, 1998; Slezkine, 2004).

German communities under the Soviet regime suffered a fate quite similar to that of the Jews. Germans first began settling in Russia during the eighteenth century, when Empress Catherine the Great encouraged their immigration to Russia and granted them extensive rights. Most were farmers who were granted large parcels of land and established agricultural communities along the banks of the Volga River and the Black Sea. These communities were fully protected by the empress and were allowed to observe their traditions in marked isolation from the surrounding population (Bade, 1995; Hofmann, 1994; Ronge, 1997; Schmaltz, 1998).

After the Socialist Revolution, the Germans in Russia flourished only for a short time. Lenin allowed them to establish German autonomy on the banks of the Volga and to maintain German-language schools, newspapers, and theaters. With the outbreak of World War II, however, the authorities changed their attitude toward citizens of German descent, while Soviet leaders, headed by Stalin, began to regard German residents as potential collaborators with the Nazis. Hence, in 1941, the German communities were forcibly removed to work camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan, where many lives were lost. Even after the war, it was forbidden for these citizens to conduct ethnic cultural activities, German schools were closed down, and until the end of the 1950s it was against the law to speak German in public (Bade, 1995; Richter, 1998; Ronge, 1997; Schmaltz, 1998; Waters, 1995).

It appears, therefore, that Jews and Germans, like other ethnic minorities in the territories of the Soviet Union, were forced to undergo coercive assimilation and to abandon their culture of origin, yet the “nationality” category was meticulously retained on Soviet passports, enabling the government to track and discriminate against “problematic” minorities in higher education and professional advancement. As a result of these circumstances, despite forced detachment from their original cultural roots, Jews and Germans became conscious of their respective nationalities in response to discrimination on the part of the Soviet regime (Brauer, 1995; Markowitz, 2001; Ronge, 1997).

#### SOCIOCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FSU JEWS AND GERMANS

Extended persecution on the part of the Soviet regime and its unflagging attempts to force ethnic minorities to assimilate into Russian-Soviet cul-

ture weakened the affinities of Jews and Germans to their respective cultures of origin. Weber (1994) described Jews under the Soviet regime as an ethnicity without language, rituals, Jewish education, or even historical roots. This community was dubbed “imaginary Jews” or “the Jews of silence”—a Jewish community that simultaneously does and does not exist (Horowitz & Leshem, 1998).

On the other hand, it would be a mistake to claim that assimilation of Jews was achieved entirely by coercion. Research literature shows that many Soviet Jews were particularly adept at assimilating, quickly becoming the central bearers of the new Soviet culture (Kimmerling, 1998; Slezkine, 2004; Trier, 1996). Moreover, despite virulent repression of any Jewish cultural expression, the Jews in the Soviet Union were granted civil rights that they did not enjoy during the Czarist era, since under the Soviet regime, Jews were allowed to move from peripheral areas in the Pale of Settlement to large cities and were accepted at universities, in industry, and in public service. Thus, the Jewish heritage vacuum resulting from Soviet assimilation policy and the Holocaust was quickly filled by a new affinity for Russian-Soviet culture (Ben-Rafael, Olshtain, & Geijst, 2001; Remennick, 2007; Slezkine, 2004).

Moreover, during the Soviet regime, the Jews became the most educated ethnic minority. The percentage of academically educated people among Jews in the Soviet Union was four times that of the general population. Similarly, 79 percent of the Jews were employed in white-collar professions, as compared with 38 percent of the overall population, and 18 percent (versus 6%) served in administrative positions (Tolts, 1997). Similar characteristics are evident in an analysis of the sociodemographic profile of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel: 55 percent have academic education, 35 percent were employed in the Soviet Union in scientific and academic professions, and 34 percent in other white-collar occupations. On the other hand, only 4 percent were employed in services and 0.3% in agriculture. Furthermore, about 80 percent of the immigrants had lived in European areas of the USSR, including scientific and cultural centers such as Moscow and St. Petersburg (Horowitz, 1999; Lissak & Leshem, 1995; Sicron, 1998).

Because of the Jews’ extensive education and profound involvement in the cultural and academic life of Soviet society, Jewish nationality was perceived as membership in an elite group of intellectuals—people of science and letters. In Soviet Russia, being Jewish meant being an educated person, deeply rooted in the highest echelons of Russian culture, who belongs to the intelligentsia and whose professional achievements are far superior to those of others (Bekerman, 2000; Lerner, 1999; Rapoport & Lomsky-Feder, 2002). Jewish identity, emptied of its religious content, thus acquired new meaning: education, ambition, culture, intellect, cosmopolitan affiliation, and respect for art and wisdom (Markowitz, 2001; Slezkine, 2004; Voronel, 1973, 1982).

Similarly to Jews, assimilation into Russian society often caused Germans to lose their original cultural identity. As a result, many ethnic Germans born into the Soviet regime did not even speak German and had no knowledge of German culture and traditions (Bauer & Zimmermann, 1997; Brauer, 1995; Brubaker, 1998; Richter, 1998). Nevertheless, the Germans in the Soviet Union were more successful than the Jews in preserving their cultural heritage. While many Jewish localities had been destroyed during the Holocaust, the Germans continued living in cohesive agrarian settlements and succeeded in preserving intergenerational continuity. Germans living in these communities were able to maintain several authentic features of German culture and traditions; some even spoke a particular old German dialect. Even after mass deportations to Siberia and Kazakhstan, the ethnic Germans rehabilitated their communal life and continued living in closed villages, isolating themselves from the local population (Bade, 1991; Hofmann, 1994; Rathzel, 1991; Schmaltz, 1998).

Thus, despite coercive assimilation, many Germans in the Soviet Union felt a strong emotional affinity to the German language, perceiving it as an important part of their identity. A survey conducted among the German population of Kazakhstan in 1997 showed that approximately 87 percent of residents of agricultural areas and 51 percent of city dwellers defined the German language as their mother tongue (Germans of Altay, 1999). Similar findings were presented by Munz and Ohliger (1998), according to which, in the last census conducted in the Soviet Union in 1989, 49 percent of the Germans listed the German language as their mother tongue irrespective of actual language knowledge.

The research literature also shows that German communities in the Soviet Union included people belonging to various Christian denominations, such as Baptists, Mennonites, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Pentecostals, who preserved their religious customs zealously despite persecution by the Soviet regime (Dinkel & Lebok, 1997; Lanquillon, 1991; Munz & Ohliger, 1998). Similarly, a survey conducted in 1997 among German residents of Kazakhstan indicated that only 30 percent defined themselves as "atheists," while the rest aligned themselves with various denominations of Christianity (Germans of Altay, 1999).

Another significant discrepancy between the Germans and the Jews concerns their educational and professional status. Germans in the Soviet Union were less educated than the Jews, as only 25 percent had any postsecondary education (Dietz, 2000). The Germans also constituted a high percentage of agricultural and industrial workers (7 percent and 58 percent, respectively), with a mere 19 percent employed in white-collar professions (Feckler, 1991; Munz & Ohliger, 1998; Pfetsch, 1999). Moreover, most Germans in the Soviet Union lived in villages and towns in peripheral areas, such as Siberia and Central Asia, far from cultural and scientific centers (Brauer, 1995; Dietz, 2000; Munz & Ohliger, 1998).

## PATTERNS OF FSU IMMIGRANTS' POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Before analyzing patterns of the FSU immigrants' political activity, it is important to take into account their respective demographic representation. At first glance, the Russian-speaking immigrant community in Germany is twice as large as that of Israel: 2,000,000 immigrants versus 1,000,000 respectively (Dietz, 2000; Leshem, 2000). However, the Russian-speaking immigrants constitute a significantly larger percentage of the population of Israel than of Germany, as they constitute approximately 12 percent of Israel's total population. By contrast, *Aussiedlers* from the FSU compose 2 percent of the united German population, rendering them an ethnic minority of negligible demographic significance.

The FSU Jewish immigrants' demographic power, combined with their prominent educational and cultural capital, were expressed almost immediately in their extensive public activity. Thus, during the 1990s, about 400 organizations and associations were established in Israel, representing FSU immigrants in various political and public arenas (Horowitz, 2001a, 2001b; Leshem & Lissak, 2001). Moreover, the most salient political achievement of this immigrant group was its success in turning its demographic weight and organizational skills into political power by establishing an ethnic political party called *Israel Be'Aliyah* (Israel on the Rise), with seven members elected to the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in 1996 (Khanin, 2000). The FSU immigrants' political success in the national elections was reflected almost immediately at the local level; in the 1998 municipal elections, 15 percent of those elected to local councils were Russian-speaking immigrants, four of them holding positions as deputy mayors (Horowitz, 2001a).

However, the electoral preferences of FSU immigrants apparently changed substantively in the 2003 elections. A change in the electoral system—from separate votes for party and prime minister to a party vote only—compelled the immigrants to choose between their sectorial loyalty and their positions on various political issues at the heart of dominant public agenda. As a result, in contrast to its impressive victory in the previous elections, *Israel Be'Aliyah* won only two seats in the Israeli parliament, whereas the largest percentage of FSU immigrants' votes (accounting for five to seven Knesset seats) was gained by *Likud* Party, led by Ariel Sharon—a pattern that reflected these immigrants' hawkish position on issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Khanin, 2004).

Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, by contrast, are not politically active in any sphere of public life. Throughout the 1990s, there were no attempts whatsoever at establishing a political party or social movement on behalf of the *Aussiedlers* or even at attaining representation within existing German parties. The only such activity evident in the public sphere was the highly limited establishment of local immigrant associations (*Landsmannschaften*) (Hofmann, 1994; Munz & Ohliger, 1998; Pfetsch, 1999). Besides lacking

political initiative, the *Aussiedlers* take little interest in German politics. According to Dietz and Hilkes (1994), a scant 30 percent of Russian-speaking immigrants displayed any concern for political affairs, while the remaining two-thirds were indifferent to political agendas, limiting their attention to issues relating to their personal interests (quoted in Shevchuk, 1995).

One key reason for this marked difference in the two immigrant communities' political activity patterns is their differing demographic representation. As noted earlier, FSU immigrants constitute 12 percent of Israel's population; consequently, their political organization into a party was a priori highly likely to succeed, especially considering the low threshold for election to the Knesset (1.5 percent) and the traditional profusion of Israeli political parties (Friedgut, 2000; Herzog, 1987). By comparison, the Russian *Aussiedlers* constitute a mere 2 percent of the overall German population, while the Bundestag threshold comes to 5 percent (Jeffery, 1998).

Differences in demographic representation and parliamentary threshold levels, however, do not explain the *Aussiedlers'* passivity in other spheres of public activity, such as local politics, lobbying, or representation in existing political parties—areas in which FSU immigrants in Israel display impressive activism (Katz, 2000; Khanin, 2000). The answer may lie in the differential proportion of intelligentsia in each immigrant community. As indicated earlier, many Jewish immigrants have academic education and worked at in prestigious white-collar professions in the FSU. Nevertheless, after immigrating to Israel, they lost their senior public status, thus finding it necessary to establish a political leadership of their own (Kimmerling, 1998; Leshem & Lissak, 2001). By contrast, relatively few *Aussiedlers* belonged to the intelligentsia, as most were engaged in blue-collar and agricultural occupations. These findings show that the FSU immigrant community in Germany lacked potential political and cultural leadership, resulting in their public passivity.

Another factor conducive to political organization among FSU immigrants in Israel is the cultural pluralism implemented by the host society that grants legitimacy to political activity by diverse minority groups, including the Russian-speaking immigrant community (Horowitz & Leshem, 1998; Kimmerling, 1998; Leshem & Lissak, 2001). Conversely, it may be assumed that the melting pot ideology that still prevails in Germany impedes sectorial political and communal activities on the part of the Russian-speaking *Aussiedlers*.

#### FSU IMMIGRANTS' ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Having analyzed the host environment factors influencing the FSU immigrants' incorporation in Israel and Germany, as well as the sociocultural characteristics of Jewish and German immigrants returning to their respective historic homelands, we now examine the major cultural adaptation and ethnic maintenance strategies employed by these immigrant communities.

The research literature suggests that immigrants' cultural adaptation yields a broad range of possible outcomes: they may assimilate totally in the host society and forgo their unique cultural characteristics; they may become integrated into their new cultural environment in a partial, controlled manner; or they may isolate themselves from the host society to preserve the authenticity of their original cultural affiliation. Berry (1992) presents these diverse strategies as four modes of adaptation, each representing a different result of ethnic identity retention versus adoption of the receiving society's cultural values.

According to the *Assimilation* model, immigrants adopt (whether by force or by choice) the values of the host culture, while abandoning their original cultural identity. Moreover, at times, their desire for acceptance is so fervent that they exaggerate their imitation of local norms and codes of behavior, making a clean sweep of any old cultural remnants that could hint at their origin—a reaction known as *Overemphasis* or *Overshoot*. By contrast, the *Integration* model assumes that even after full incorporation into the new society, immigrants will retain their original identity (or parts thereof) because of a need for cultural continuity, intragroup solidarity, and self-esteem. Hence, instead of adopting the host culture in toto, the immigrants choose which features to internalize and which aspects of their original culture to preserve.

The *Segregation* (or *Separation*) model represents a much stronger tendency toward preservation of original cultural patterns, usually with little to no adoption of new ones. Separation is a common response when immigrants object to the new society's cultural patterns or when the host population rejects them, blocking their full integration. Finally, according to the *Marginality* model, newcomers might suffer a sense of alienation and identity loss as a result of profound cultural shock. In such cases, they lose their cultural and psychological ties to their culture of origin and the host society alike and are cast into the margins of society.

Recent studies show, however, that incorporation of immigrants into the host society is not a homogeneous process but rather comprises a combination of several strategies and cultural practices. Immigrants may emphasize different aspects of their original cultural identity in different situations or may choose specific adaptation strategies applicable in designated social and cultural spheres. For example, they might employ assimilation strategy in adopting the local cuisine and abandoning ethnic dishes, but still use both the host language and their mother tongue in everyday speech. Similarly, they might prefer participating exclusively in intracommunal cultural activities while becoming deeply involved in the host society's political agenda (Ebo, 1998; Kim & Hurh, 1993).

In this regard, more and more researchers have noticed a *hybrid* (or *hyphenated*) identity typical of immigrants that combines identification with one's new home while still longing for the old one, that is, looking "around" at the new environment but also looking "back" (Sreberny, 2000). Similarly,

according to Hall (1993), the immigration experience engenders conditions in which immigrants are likely “to inhabit at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, to negotiate and to ‘translate’ between them” (ibid.: 362). Moreover, in an era of ethnic revival, the second and third generations of immigrants also feel free to reconfirm and reinforce their ethnicities, a tendency known in research literature as “segmented assimilation” (Alba, 1990; Cordero-Guzman, Smith, & Grosfoguel, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996, 2001).

In addition, according to Alba and Nee’s (2003) new assimilation theory, assimilation of immigrants and ethnic minorities may occur not only through changes in the minority group that render it more like the mainstream population, but also through changes affecting both groups that diminish the differences between them. In this group convergence process, the impact of minority ethnic culture on the mainstream may occur through expansion of the range of perceived normative behavior within the majority culture. Elements of minority culture are thus fused with mainstream elements to create a composite culture (ibid.: 25).

It should be noted, however, that previous studies investigating immigrants’ adaptation strategies focused on the most common type of immigrant, that is, people seeking better job opportunities and a higher standard of living with no primordial link to the target country. In this respect, Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel and in Germany represent a different genre, since they are perceived by the respective target countries as “sons and daughters” returning from the Diaspora, who are thus entitled to immediate citizenship and extensive economic assistance. This special status challenges the traditional models of immigrant adaptation that assume a clearly defined balance of power between the dominant hosts and the immigrants hosted. In the case of returning Diaspora, however, their cultural and historical affinity with the host society and status as citizens with equal rights may provide the confidence that immigrants require to undermine these traditional power relations, present demands to the host culture, and even influence its formation.

On the other hand, a completely different scenario is also possible: When the FSU immigrants return to their “fatherland,” sometimes as a result of ethnically based persecution and discrimination by the Soviet regime, they might strive to assimilate quickly into the host society which they consider their historic homeland. In this case, the immigrants might apply the *Overshoot* adaptation strategy, inordinately emulating their new-old culture and avowing severance from their culture of origin.

Despite the similar status granted to FSU immigrants in both countries, however, the different integration ideologies prevailing in Israel and Germany might encourage different cultural adaptation patterns among immigrants. The melting pot ideology and centralized absorption track employed by German authorities might accelerate immigrants’ assimilation, whereas Israel’s pluralistic approach and less structured direct absorption track would facilitate new immigrants’ preservation of their original cultural patterns.



In addition, the research literature reveals that the two immigrant communities might differ in ethnic group strength, possibly leading to differences in ethnic maintenance strategy. In other words, besides manifesting differential demographic and political power, Jewish and German returnees differ significantly from one another in terms of involvement in Russian culture, attachment to their respective historical and cultural roots, and position in educational and professional hierarchies. Hence, one may assume that Jewish immigrants from the FSU, who possess prominent cultural and professional assets, would be less willing to give up their original cultural identity, even for the sake of more rapid adaptation, whereas the relatively modest educational and cultural capital and weaker affinity to the Russian language and culture typical of FSU immigrants to Germany would tend to hasten their assimilation.

Indeed, the dominant cultural characteristic of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel is their perception of Russian language and culture as a key aspect of their self-definition. Israeli culture, on the other hand, is perceived by them as peripheral and Levantine. As a result, an overwhelming majority of FSU immigrants prefers preservation of their cultural values to adoption of the local cultural patterns—a trend also supported by Israeli society's pluralistic integration ideology (Kimmerling, 1998; Niznik, 2003; Trier, 1996).

Loyalty to Russian cultural roots is particularly evident in the FSU immigrants' use of their mother tongue rather than the host language. Thus, a majority of immigrants (90 percent) continue speaking Russian with their spouses, children, and parents, whereas only 3 percent address their children in Hebrew (Ben-Rafael, Olshtein, & Geijst, 2001). Moreover, the FSU immigrants not only maintain a strong attachment to the Russian language but also acquire Hebrew proficiency relatively slowly. In this regard, Al-Haj and Leshem's (2000) findings show that 56 percent of the participants in their study reported poor to fair ability to conduct a conversation in Hebrew; 51 percent reported the same regarding oral comprehension, 67 percent did so concerning Hebrew reading skills, and 72 percent reported difficulty writing Hebrew.

As such, thanks to their demographic significance, political power, high self-esteem, and Israel's pluralistic integration ideology, the Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel are not ashamed of their cultural and ethnic background, whose presence is palpable in every aspect of Israeli social and cultural life. Notable among the FSU immigrants' many achievements are numerous performance troupes, as well as an extended network of Russian cultural clubs, libraries, and ethnic grocery stores in virtually every Israeli locality (Bernstein, 2005; Elias & Khvorostianov, forthcoming; Horowitz, 2001b).<sup>4</sup>

Despite the FSU immigrants' strong tendency toward preservation of their cultural roots, it would be wrong to claim that they isolate themselves from Israeli society. On the contrary, research literature reveals that Russian-speaking newcomers seek to conduct cultural dialogue with the host society, thus influencing its cultural mosaic. One of the most prominent signs of the

FSU immigrants' cultural influence may be found in the Israeli educational system, which now offers Russian-language matriculation exams, courses in Russian as a second language, and an independent school network called *Mofet* (Paragon) established by immigrant teachers from the FSU. Although Hebrew is the language of instruction at *Mofet* schools, this alternative educational system places particular emphasis on preserving the Russian cultural heritage, including an educational atmosphere and curriculum typical of the FSU (Leshem & Lissak, 2001; Niznik, 2003).

Another sign of the Russian immigrants' cultural influence is the transformation of Victory Day on May 9—the anniversary of the Soviet army's defeat of Nazi Germany—into an Israeli national holiday that includes a parade of World War II veterans down a major Jerusalem street. Another holiday important to the Russian-speaking immigrants—New Year's Eve—has also become a recognized holiday now celebrated by local Israelis as well (Horowitz, 2001b; Roberman, 2005).

Research on the Russian *Aussiedlers* in Germany, by comparison, shows that these immigrants currently appear to opt for rapid assimilation into the host society. Senders (1999) and Pfetsch (1999) found that they exert considerable efforts at acquiring the “right” kind of German language and prefer to remain silent in the public space rather than speak incorrectly. Russian *Aussiedlers* also appear to be ashamed to read a Russian newspaper in public (Darieva, 2000) and refrain from opening ethnic businesses, such as Russian restaurants and grocery stores, to avoid being labeled as “Russians” (Kapphan, 2000).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, according to Nauck (2001), half of the Russian immigrant couples speak German to their children, in comparison with only 3 percent among their counterparts in Israel.

On the other hand, research literature also shows that, on arriving in Germany, many *Aussiedlers* protest that modern German culture is too cosmopolitan, materialistic, and far too liberal. Consequently, they tend to isolate themselves from the local Germans and congregate in closed communities based on family, religious, and geographic affiliations (Brauer, 1995; Munz & Ohliger, 1998; Steinbach, 2001; Zick et al., 2001). Likewise, the Russian *Aussiedlers* tend to establish their own churches and do not attend local ones, which they consider anonymous and alienated (Klassen, 1994; Lanquillon, 1991; Shevchuk, 1995). As such, although the assimilation model seems to be a major adaptation strategy employed by Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany, the findings do point to some isolationist trends, especially regarding interpersonal contacts between immigrants and the host population.