

‘Is Israel part of Russia?’ Immigrants on Russian and Israeli screens

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The mass immigration from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) changed both the Israeli and Russian cultures. Since the 1990s, Russian immigrants and their homeland began appearing in Israeli films. Meanwhile, Jewish themes, including emigration, became more common in Russian cinema: Israel now appears in Russian films. Whether Russian or Israeli, these movies circulate through the internet, transnational TV channels, and Jewish film festivals, and are seen in Russia and elsewhere in the Russian diaspora. This shows that cultural processes in today’s globalized mediated world are interrelated: as Russian-Jewish immigrants transform themselves through migration, they also transform cultures around them.

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Several years ago, when I had to get my US passport, I took the naturalization paperwork to the post office. My paperwork stated: ‘Place of birth – Russia. Place of residence – Israel’. Confused, the clerk asked, ‘Is Israel part of Russia?’ ‘No’, I told her, ‘but you do have a point.’ Twenty years earlier, the clerk’s mistake would not have made sense. But once Russian Jews¹ became the largest wave of Jewish migration into Israel, to the point where today one out of every six Israelis speaks Russian, the country has in a way become part of Russia. And Russia has in some ways become a part of Israel.

In a world that is increasingly globalized, decentralized, and diasporic, it is becoming difficult to talk about clear national boundaries. Post-Soviet immigrants, known in Israeli parlance as simply ‘Russians’ are a case in hand. These immigrants, who often maintain multiple passports, homes, and languages, make us re-think the meaning of homeland and exile: they are part of a traditional Jewish diaspora and of a new Russian diaspora. Upon immigration they transform themselves through new employment patterns, language, and other signs of cultural integration. In the process, they also transform their home and host countries.

Through an examination of recent films all dealing in some way with Russian-Jewish immigration to Israel, made in both Israel and Russia, I want to explore the changes in the cultural landscapes in both countries. Regarding Israel, one sign of these changes is that since the 1990s, ‘Russians’ have become characters in many

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Israeli films and TV series. Some of these characters have been created by immigrant filmmakers and actors themselves.

As Russian immigrants began to appear in Israeli movies, Jewish topics, including emigration, became more common in Russian cinema. Immigrants to Israel became characters in several Russian-Jewish films, and Israel even became a setting for some movies unrelated to Jewish topics. Today, not only does Russia appear in Israeli film, but Israel also appears on Russian screens.

Although these films (whether Russian or Israeli) have different production values and cultural significance, all of them have wide circulation in Russia and destination countries of the Russian diaspora worldwide. Here, I approach these films as 'cultural documents', without engaging with aesthetic questions.

'Russians' on Israeli screens

The first 'Russians' appeared on Israeli screens in the films of the so-called heroic-nationalist genre,² such as *They Were Ten* (1960, dir. Baruch Dienar). The characters of the film are heroic Zionist pioneers, presented as generic 'new Jews'. Although historically pioneers were Russian Jews, whose Zionist-socialist ideology was deeply influenced by their contemporary Russian culture and revolutionary movement, the film downplays its characters' Russianness.

Even as the Israeli cinema moved away from the heroic-nationalist genre, its cinematic Russians remained in the cultural centre. In *The House on Chelouche Street* (1973, dir. Moshe Mizrahi), Russian Sonia (Michal Bat-Adam) is positioned as a local both culturally and socially, in contrast to Mizrahi characters. In this and other films, the characters' Russian origin, however understated, constitutes an integral part of the Israeli-Zionist cultural capital.

This changed in the late 1970s. After a ban on emigration from the USSR was eased, and the first wave of Soviet Jews landed in Israel, the Russian characters became cultural 'others'. They were now represented as typical immigrants, struggling with a new culture and language, not belonging to Israeli society, and certainly not constituting model Israelis. The first such film was the now forgotten drama *Lena* (1980, dir. Eytan Green) portraying Russian characters as foreign newcomers and moving them from the Israeli cultural centre to the margins. In many ways, *Lena* typifies the representation of Russian immigrants on Israeli screens that was to persist for years to come.

The film's heroine Lena (Fira Cantor) is a young and beautiful woman, torn between her loyalty to her Zionist husband, still in a Soviet jail, and a newly found love for an Israeli man (incidentally a Hebrew teacher); or metaphorically between maintaining her Russian identity and assimilating to Israel. Consistent with Zionist tenets, she chooses to leave her Russian husband. Lena herself, with her poor knowledge of Hebrew, her non-Israeli looks, and her struggle to negotiate a new society, is represented as a classic immigrant.

As is common in Israeli films, interethnic tension is expressed through mixed coupling: Lena is inducted and assimilated into Israeli society via the narrative

strategy of romantic-sexual relations with a local male.³ In contrast, Russian male characters are confined largely to their self-contained, homosocial world that evades assimilation into Israel. In *Lena*, as in many other films, Russian male immigrants appear aggressive, irrational, and violent. None of them have any potential for developing relationships with Israeli women. Even more outrageous are Russian immigrant male characters used for comic relief, such as in *Kuni-Leml in Cairo* (1983, dir. Joel Silberg).

The casting and use of language in *Lena* are also typical: Russian immigrant actors play immigrant characters. Their accent and occasional Russian dialogue are authentic, but also foreign-sounding within the 'Hebrew only' text of the films.

In the 1990s, Russian characters began to appear more often on Israeli screens. They are featured in many films, including *Saint Clara* (1996, dir. Ari Folman and Ori Sivan), *Circus Palestina* (1998, dir. Eyal Halfon), *The Holy Land* (2001, dir. Eytan Gorlin), *Made in Israel* (2001, dir. Ari Folman), *What a Wonderful Place* (2005, dir. Eyal Halfon), *The Schwartz Dynasty* (2005, dir. Amir Hasfari and Shmuel Hasfari), *Love & Dance* (2006, dir. Eytan Anner), as well as in TV series *A Touch Away* (2006, dir. Ron Ninio) and *To Love Anna* (2008, dir. Tzion Rubin).⁴ Now the presence of Russian immigrants on Israeli screens is nearly ubiquitous. Subplots involving minor immigrant characters appear in such mainstream hits as *Broken Wings* (2002, dir. Nir Bergman) and *Nina's Tragedies* (2003, dir. Savi Gabizon), and such popular TV serials as *Florentine* (1997, dir. Eytan Fox) and *The Mediator* (2007, dir. Shay Kanot).

Following in the footsteps of *Lena*, these films represent immigrants as dangerous and abusive men, and beautiful, helpless, sexualized women. The women often have distinctly Russian looks (blond hair, blue eyes, round face) and are frequently shown in frontal close-ups, disconnected from their Israeli environments. Their inassimilable foreignness can be overcome only in romantic involvement with an Israeli man.

The Schwartz Dynasty is a good example of such a stereotype. The plot hinges on the presence of a beautiful and seductive Russian woman, Ana (Anya Bukstein), who comes to Israel, not to immigrate, but to fulfil her late father's last will and bury his ashes in the land of Israel. As the daughter of a non-Jewish mother, Ana is not considered Jewish according to Jewish law. Consequently, she runs into endless bureaucratic obstacles trying to bury her father's ashes in a Jewish cemetery without proof of his Jewishness. While trying to resolve this problem, she falls prey to various exploiters and crooks. An older woman, Miriam, an Israeli of Russian origin, tries to help Ana. Miriam's grandson, Avishai, also helps Ana. Predictably, Ana and Avishai fall in love and get married. *The Schwartz Dynasty* portrays immigrants sympathetically, but constantly emphasizes their cultural and religious difference from Israelis.

Love & Dance further explores Russian-Israeli intermarriage. At the centre of this lyrical drama is Khen (Vladimir Volov), a young boy battling a cultural conflict between his Russian-born mother and Israeli father. Like other Russian women in Israeli films, Khen's mother is beautiful and charming, but also helpless and

frivolous. Khen's own identity is caught between his frustrated parents. This is emphasized linguistically as his mother speaks to him in Russian and his father in Hebrew. Although Khen uneasily negotiates his Russianness and his Israeliness, his parents fail to reconcile their cultural differences and must part. And yet *Love & Dance* ends on a positive note: as the characters are swirling on the floor in the final dance, it becomes clear that Khen is leaving behind his obsession with the beautiful but dysfunctional Russian girl, and is falling in love with the down-to-earth and reliable Israeli girl. In the narrative logic of the film, even the inassimilable hybrid Khen makes the right choice between his Russianness and his Israeliness.

In contrast to bi-cultural Khen, immigrant men almost never become protagonists in Israeli films. In those rare cases where a romance between immigrant men and local Israeli women is featured, it is a failed or an illegitimate connection. For instance, *A Touch Away* presents an aborted romance between the secular immigrant, Zorik (Henry David), and the ultra-orthodox Rohale (Gaya Traub). Despite her love for Zorik, Rohale ultimately chooses to marry an ultra-orthodox man. An earlier TV series, *Florentine*, featured a subplot about an illicit affair between a married immigrant (played by a Russian-Israeli star, Israel Demidov) and a young Israeli woman (Karin Ofir). In the logic of these films, a successful union between a Russian male immigrant and a local woman is unlikely. For the most part, the Russian male characters are depicted as unreliable husbands and fathers, or worse, as swindlers and mafia thugs; either way they are inassimilable strangers. Most importantly, whether male or female, stereotypical or nuanced, Russian immigrants are represented in these films from the Israeli perspective, which is deeply grounded in the local culture and sensibility.

Israeli films with a Russian accent

Gradually, immigrant filmmakers started breaking into the Israeli film industry. They introduced the immigrant's point of view and added their own accented voices to the Israeli cinema. They formed a body of work that I call Russian-Israeli 'accented cinema',⁵ which emerges in the contact zone between Russian-Jewish and Hebrew-Israeli cultures. Russian-Israeli films exist in a particular constellation of Zionist ideology (where immigrant absorption is a national value), cultural policy (a combination of public and private local funding), and Russian-Jewish cultural identity (secularized, invested in Russian language and art). Russian-Israeli films affirm and challenge, often simultaneously, the dominant national identity: the filmmakers walk a thin line between asserting the immigrants' place in Israel and insisting on their cultural distinctiveness. Sociologists call this position, 'integration without acculturation'.⁶

Unlike the Israeli films which are preoccupied with assimilation via inter-ethnic romance, Russian-Israeli films rarely feature successful Russian-Israeli romance. *Yana's Friends* (1999, dir. Arik Kaplun) and *Five Hours to Paris* (2009, dir. Leonid Prudovsky) are rare exceptions. Most couples are intra-ethnic, and the protagonists are often male immigrants.

The very first Russian-Israeli film, *Coffee with Lemon* (1994, dir. Leonid Horowitz), is already illustrative of these trends. At the centre of the plot is a famous Moscow actor (played by an actual Russian film star, Aleksandr Abdulov) who immigrates to Israel with his family, only to discover that he cannot bridge the cultural gap and is doomed to failure. In part, he comes to realize this due to his affair with his Hebrew teacher (reversing the consequences of romance in *Lena*). He returns to Moscow and is killed there in a street shooting. At the end, the immigrant protagonist fits neither here nor there. Not only does his inter-ethnic affair fail; his immigration to Israel and his return to Russia result in tragedy. This is not a typical immigration narrative for an Israeli film. Later films present immigrant life in more positive terms. Even if characters' lives are full of challenges and hardships, Israel gradually becomes a home for them.

A more recent *The Children of USSR* (2005, dir Felix Gerchikov) also features a male protagonist, Slava (Daniel Brook), once a soccer star in his native town, and now an immigrant, suffocated in the remote town of Netivot, and struggling to support his young family. Slava and his friends populate the margins of Israeli society – the locals that they encounter are marginalized minorities themselves – among them the corrupt Mizrahi cops, an Ethiopian immigrant soccer player, and an oddball Hassidic soccer fan. The 'model Israeli' is nowhere to be seen, which explains why the film does not insist on assimilation. In fact, even the film's title is hybrid – partly in Russian and partly in Hebrew, indicating the inassimilability of its characters. The title is *CCCP ילדי* (pronounced *yaldey sssr*), where the first word is Hebrew for 'children' and the second word is Russian for USSR. Idiosyncratic bilingual spelling not only introduces a Russian word into Hebrew, but also uses a Cyrillic acronym as a nostalgic icon.

The main romantic relationship of the film is Slava's failing marriage to Sveta, a fellow Russian, who wants him to leave behind his dreams of soccer and to be like her father (a proud manager of a garbage business). But Slava is unwilling to give up the male camaraderie – he lives in a world of other young Russians, whose dreams have also been crushed. With the help of his ex-coach (famous Russian-Israeli actor Vladimir Friedman), Slava succeeds in putting together a soccer team. At the end of the film, Slava is reconciled both with his Russian wife and his Israeli surroundings. Other characters also find peace.

Another intra-ethnic romance is at the centre of *Paper Snow* (2003, dir. Lena and Slava Chaplin). It is a historical drama about a love affair between Hanna Rovina (Evgeniya Dodina), a star of the Habima national theatre that originated in Moscow, and Alexander Penn (Zak Berkman), a communist poet from Siberia. Other literary giants, Avraham Shlonsky, Avraham Hafi, and Hayyim Nahman Bialik, all of them hailing from Russia, surround Rovina and Penn. Unlike mainstream Israeli movies, *Paper Snow* pays tribute to their culture of origin – to their Russian literary and theatrical background. In this way, the film focuses on the Russian roots of Israeli culture, emphasizing the importance of Russian Jews (past and present) to Israel.⁷

In a more subtle form, this use of the past also appears in *Yana's Friends*. Its subplot involves an ostensibly Israeli woman and an immigrant male war veteran, who recognize each other as lovers separated by World War II (in which they both fought on the Soviet side). Their son died defending Israel in the Six Day War. This subplot both pays tribute to the heroic Israeli history and claims this history as their own.⁸ A similar motif appears in the short film, *Dark Night* (2005, dir. Leonid Prudovsky), which opens with a scene of an Israeli patrol in the occupied territories. One of the soldiers, who comes from a Russian family, is singing a famous Soviet song of the World War II era – 'Dark Night'. Driving the army jeep through the night, he explains to his fellow soldiers the significance of the song, which inspired Soviet troops, including his Jewish grandfather, as they went to defeat the Nazis. In another film, *A Trumpet in the Wadi* (2002, dir. Lena and Slava Chaplin), an accented variation of a Jewish-Palestinian cinematic romance, a Russian immigrant protagonist is killed while on army duty, presumably by Palestinian militants. All these representations emphasize the identification of Russian immigrants with the Israeli-Jewish nation, while simultaneously affirming their Russianness.

Unlike mainstream Israeli films, made to appeal to the Hebrew-speaking audience, Russian-Israeli films also target Russian speakers, with dialogue moving freely between Russian and Hebrew. This is particularly significant in *Paper Snow*, where Israeli historical figures are portrayed speaking to each other in Russian. This is all but unimaginable in Israeli films representing the 'Hebrew only' national past.

The recent TV series *Between the Lines* (2009, dir. Evgeniy Ruman) pushes the envelope even further. In this series, produced for the recently instituted Israeli Russian-language cable channel Raduga (Russian for 'rainbow'), the action takes place entirely in Russian (Hebrew subtitles are optional). The series is set in Israel, but the story deals with the work of a Russian-language newspaper, and the plot involves a staff of writers and reporters, all of whom are immigrants speaking to each other in Russian. The fact that the plot deals with the Russian-language media in Israel makes this series self-referential, reflective of the position of the Russian-language culture within the larger Israeli cultural context.

Not only Russian immigrants but also their homeland began to appear on Israeli screens. As a rule, diasporic homelands are not often depicted in Israeli films, and in the rare cases when they are, it is only to portray these places negatively and justify characters' coming (or returning) to Israel. Recently, this representational trend has changed, and some movies and TV series now depict Russia in neutral or even nostalgic ways. Thus the plot of *A Touch Away* introduces the life of a Russian-Jewish family in Moscow, prior to its immigration to Israel. Their immigration is motivated mainly by family reunification, rather than persecution or other hardship. In *Paper Snow*, the heroine has a nostalgic flashback to Russian winter depicted as a beautiful snow-covered landscape. These 'Russian' scenes are usually filmed on location. As a result, not only Russian immigrants, but also their homeland, appear on Israeli screens.

Israel on Russian screens

During Soviet times, any mention of Israel was all but impossible in Russian cinema. A scene in the 1977 film, *Mimino*, by a Soviet Georgian director Georgiy Danelia, was for many years the only cinematic acknowledgement of both Israel and Jewish emigration from the USSR. When the main character makes a call to a Georgian village, Telavi, a phone operator puts him through to Tel Aviv by mistake. It so happen that a Soviet-Georgian emigrant answers, and the two men not only talk, but also sing a nostalgic Georgian song on the phone. The film was not banned only because of the cultural remoteness of Georgia from the Soviet centre. Another important film, *Theme* (1979, dir. Gleb Panfilov), was less fortunate. A minor character, a boyfriend of the main heroine, whose Jewishness is not indicated in any way, acknowledges to his lover his intention to emigrate. Although this tragic scene was marginal to the plot, based on it alone the film was shelved and not released until 1986, when ideological prohibitions were relaxed.⁹

In the liberal era of *perestroika*, Jewish topics began to appear on Soviet screens. Later they became so common that the films featuring them may be loosely grouped into Russian-Jewish cinema.¹⁰ A number of such films dealt with the topic of emigration to Israel both directly and indirectly. In contrast to Israeli cinema, in these films emigration is often presented as a tragedy – a consequence of local violence or injustice. Inter-ethnic romance is between an ethnic Jew and an ethnic Russian. Such a tragedy is at the core of *Love* (1991, dir. Valery Todorovsky), a love story between a Russian man (Yevgeniy Mironov) and a Jewish girl (Natalya Petrova). Although their love is at first awkward, it blossoms by the end of the film. But the heroine is traumatized by persistent anti-Semitism – gang raped and refused justice as a ‘dirty Jew’ – and therefore she is squeezed out of Russia, left with no choice but to go to Israel.¹¹ Todorovsky (who is Jewish) acknowledged that in making the film he was influenced by the mass emigration of Soviet Jews.¹²

Ladies’ Tailor (1990), a film made by Leonid Horowitz shortly before his own emigration to Israel, is similarly concerned with leaving the USSR. The film on the surface has nothing to do with emigration; it is set during the Holocaust. Isaac (great Russian actor Innokentiy Smoktunovsky) is with his family on the last night before the ‘deportation’ to Babi Yar, a place of mass execution of Jews in Kiev. At the end of the film, the family marches together with others under the German guns, as the camera faces rows of people slowly coming closer and closer. In the last moment, the camera cuts to a contemporary street, with a jumble of cars behind a hill, over which the same procession of Jews gradually appears – or perhaps rises from the dead. This is a polysemic image, but some interpret it as a reference to an exodus of Soviet Jews in 1990.¹³ Although the faces of the characters seem too sombre for the march to be a new beginning, the director himself confirms this interpretation, and says the entire scene was inspired by both his own impending emigration and mass Jewish exodus from the USSR.¹⁴

A later film, *Arye* (2004, dir. Roman Kachanov), also connects the Holocaust and emigration to Israel. The film’s main character is a famous Moscow surgeon,

Israel Arye (Polish actor Jerzy Stuhr), who decades before survived the Holocaust in hiding, together with his then girlfriend, Sonia. After the war, Sonia emigrated to Israel and Arye went to Moscow. Years later, when Arye learns about his terminal cancer, he decides to travel to Israel to find Sonia (played by Israeli actor Sandra Sade). Their reunion leads to rekindled romance, but ultimately, Arye comes to Israel to die, not to live. Yet after Arye's death, his young ethnically Russian widow marries Sonia's Jewish-Israeli grandson, resulting in a happy end and a successful Jewish–gentile and Russian–Israeli union.

Starting in 1990, Russian films present not only emigration from Russia but also immigrant life in Israel, something that was totally unthinkable only a few years earlier. In contrast to Israeli films, Russian movies often present immigration and immigrant life as a mistake, whether comic or tragic. For instance, a non-Jewish character in a screwball comedy, *Passport* (1990, dir. Georgiy Danelia), ends up in Israel, placed in the position of a new immigrant due to a series of mix-ups and misrecognitions. He desperately tries to return to his native Georgia, meeting in the process motley Russian immigrant and Israeli characters. In the thematic logic of this movie, emigration is a mistake to be fixed.

In later films, characters include visitors from Israel or return immigrants.¹⁵ At the beginning of *Daddy* (2004, dir. Vladimir Mashkov), set in 1929, a minor character, Meyer Wolf (Sergei Dontzov-Dreyden), returns from Palestine. His return introduces the topic of a national home. In an extraordinary monologue, Meyer explains that his return is a homecoming:

When I was young and travelled with my father, in every place there was a wise man who said, 'go to the Wailing Wall' ... But the Wailing Wall proved to be just some old lousy wall, and when I came to Jerusalem, it's turned out that I came not home, but to a foreign country, where one can only weep and die, and where people are strangers to me.

According to *Daddy*, the true motherland is Russia, and Russian Jews (as represented by Meyer and other Jewish characters) choose it over Israel.¹⁶

A different kind of return immigrant appears in *Roots* (2005, dir. Pavel Loungine), a satire of western heritage tourism. One of the subplots introduces Baruch (a Russian-Israeli actor Leonid Kanevsky), a black-clad Russian-Israeli Mafiosi who wants to rebury his dear mother 'at home'. Even in this over-the-top black comedy, it is implied that the true homeland – the true 'promised land' – is back in the old country and not in Israel, where one cannot even rest in peace. Such a turn of the plot is impossible in Israeli film; in fact, the plot of *The Schwartz Dynasty* hinges on exactly the opposite premise.

More recently, Israel and Russian immigrants to Israel started to appear even in Russian movies and TV series thematically unrelated to Jewish topics. *Padishah*, an episode of a hit detective series, *National Security Agent-3* (2001, dir. Andrey Kravchuk and Dmitriy Svetozarov), takes Russian detectives to Israel. The Israeli scenes are filmed on location, so not only does Russia appear in Israeli film, but Israel also appears on Russian screens. As in *Arye* and *Passport*, the main characters are travelling to the most alluring tourist destinations in

Israel – beaches, historical sites, hotels, and restaurants. But they also come in contact with a wide range of Israelis – religious and secular, new immigrants and native-born. Characters (and audiences) learn about everyday Israeli life: Russian detectives in the *National Security Agent* series collaborate with Israeli police, creating friendships and even romances along the way. The Russian detective (played by a Russian film star Mikhail Porechenkov) falls for an Israeli colleague, a young, confident Israeli woman. The romance is not expected to last, but it does indicate open and warm relations between the two cultures.

An episode in a more recent Russian detective series, *Zhurov* (2009, dir. Ilya Makarov) also takes place in Israel. Colourfully titled *Shabbes-Goy*, the episode takes place not just in Israel but among a Hassidic sect in Jerusalem. The filming is on location, in a religious neighbourhood of Mea Shearim. The Russian detective (Andrey Panin) is working on a case together with an Israeli-Russian colleague (Russian-Israeli actor Vladimir Friedman, already mentioned here) who serves as both his interpreter and cultural mediator. The series gives the audience a glimpse into the life of an insular religious community, but without exoticizing it. In fact, *Shabbes-Goy* portrays Israel with remarkable linguistic and cultural veracity.

All these Russian films and TV series serve as an advertisement of the Israeli tourist industry, but also as an introduction to Israeli society and mores. In many ways, it is important that these shows are no longer ‘on Jewish topics’. Israel appears in these series just like any other foreign locale, as any interesting place. This is of course a significant departure from the Soviet-era taboo or high-strung emigration tragedies of the 1990s.

Russian immigrants to Israel are also represented in co-productions and collaborations, which have a potential to blur national and cultural boundaries. A TV series, *Under the Sky of Verona* (2005, dir. Vladimir Krasnopolsky and Valeriy Uskov), is a co-production between an Israeli Russian-language cable channel, Israel-Plus, and a Russian company, Telefilm. The fact that this is a co-production not with mainstream Israel but with Russian Israel, and that the directors are both Russian, makes the series much more Russian than Israeli. Most of the dialogue on screen takes place in Russian, even when according to the plot it ought to be in Hebrew. Moreover, like Russian-Jewish cinema, the main romantic relationship is between a Jewish religious woman Lea (a Russian-Israeli actor Lucy Dubinchik) and gentile Andrey (Russian actor Aleksandr Arsentev) whom she met when touring Verona, Italy (an obvious reference to *Romeo and Juliet*). Lea is torn between her duty to her religious husband Yosef (the above-mentioned Israel Demidov) and her love for Andrey. Despite love, Lea refuses to leave her husband after he becomes quadriplegic. Conveniently, the husband commits suicide, leaving Lea free. The resolution that the plot craftily offers does not compromise Lea’s integrity or her love: her reunion with Andrey takes place only after Lea is given enough time to mourn. The prognosis for inter-ethnic and inter-religious romance is uncharacteristically positive – perhaps a result of this being a Russian-Israeli co-production.

National and cultural boundaries are challenged in the film by the great Russian-Israeli director Mikhail Kalik, who was one of the figureheads of the Soviet poetic cinema of the 1960s, along with directors like Andrey Tarkovsky and Sergey Paradjanov. Following an onset of anti-Semitism when several of his films were banned or shelved, he emigrated to Israel in 1971. His first Israeli film (*Three and One*, 1974) was a critical flop, after which Kalik has not made a single feature film there. In 1990, he was invited by the Russian film authorities to make a film. The result was *And the Wind Returneth* (1991), Kalik's autobiography, blending together fictional narrative and archival footage. The film also deals with his emigration to Israel and return to Russia. In fact, it opens with the scene at the airport as Kalik leaves Israel for Russia to work on his film. Once he arrives, he is embraced by his Russian friends and colleagues who celebrate his return. Then the narrative veers to Kalik's childhood in the 1930s following the main stages in his life story – the war and evacuation, his arrest and imprisonment in Stalinist camps, his study of filmmaking after his release and eventual reconnection with his Jewish roots, joining the Zionist movement, and emigration. Although the film is mostly set in Soviet Russia, it both opens and ends in Israel. The film was not a co-production: it was financed by Soviet state funding, and shot mostly in Russia. But with a director who is a self-identified Russian-Jewish Israeli, the film's Israeli character is unavoidable.

Kalik's film is not the only example of Russian and Russian-Israeli filmmakers working together. Russian-Jewish and Russian-Israeli films share both on- and off-screen talent: filmmakers and cast who cross national and cultural borders. Leonid Horowitz directed both a Russian film, *Ladies' Tailor*, and just a couple of years later an Israeli film, *Coffee with Lemon*. The latter could easily be mistaken for a Russian film, not only due to its plot focusing on Russian characters and its Russian dialogue, but also because it stars Aleksandr Abdulov, a Russian (not Israeli or immigrant) actor who appeared in scores of Soviet movies. Leonid Kanevsky, an actor beloved in Russia for his Soviet-era roles, immigrated to Israel, continued his professional career there on the stage of the Gesher theatre, and then started to appear again in Russian films. Increased mobility, open borders, and online communication make possible such collaborations and cross-overs.

A more detailed example demonstrates how this takes place on the ground. Two years ago, when Mikhail Bartenev, a scriptwriter of *Zhurov*, started working on the series, he emailed a number of his fellow writers asking to pitch ideas for different episodes. Bartenev is Jewish, and so are a lot of his friends and colleagues (as in the US, there are many Jews among Russian cultural producers). One of them suggested working with his old friend, once a Russian filmmaker who now lives in Israel. This filmmaker, who is referred to in *Zhurov* credits as 'Ramat Ganeev', was excited about developing a plot for a detective story, but felt disconnected from life in Russia. Therefore, he pitched a plot set in Israel. Bartenev liked the plot, and under his supervision and extensive consultation with 'Ganeev', another Russian writer wrote the dialogue. This entire collaboration was carried out by email. In addition to plot development, 'Ganeev' also recommended an Israeli art director

for filming on location.¹⁷ An Israeli production company (staffed with Russian Israelis) helped with the local casting. Their involvement explains the veracity of Israel's representation. But the very appearance of Israel in the Russian TV series is explained by the old social ties between Russian-Jewish cultural producers, some of them living in Russia and some in Israel, and their easy access to electronic communication.

This behind-the-scenes account gives us insight into how mass migration changes the culture of not only a host country, but also a country of origin. These changes are made possible by the emerging migrant networks which are 'sets of interpersonal ties that link together migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through the bonds of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin'.¹⁸ Because such a large number of cultural producers immigrated to Israel, the social ties which they maintain with their Russian friends and colleagues create the migrant networks, which once set in place then operate as their own force, leading to new cultural production and to the blurring of national and cultural boundaries.

Blurring of boundaries is also evident in film distribution. Whether Russian-Jewish or Russian-Israeli, these movies and TV series can be seen on the Israeli Russian-language channels Israel-Plus and Raduga, and on transnational Russian-language channels (such as RTVi) produced in Russia, Israel, and the US, as well as the ever expanding number of Russian cable channels accessible in Russia, Israel, and destination countries of the Russian diaspora worldwide. In addition, these movies and TV series circulate through the internet, and can be downloaded or streamed online on a great number of Russian-language portals and sites (legal aspects of this is a subject for a very different paper). Israeli films about Russian immigrants, as well as Russian-Israeli and Russian-Jewish films also circulate through the growing network of Jewish film festivals worldwide, where screenings of these films inevitably attract Russian speakers and become sites for the formation of the Russian-speaking diaspora.

All these cultural crossings and exchanges make it possible to see the Russian-Israeli cinema as an extension of both post-Soviet or, in broader terms, Russian diasporic cinema. This phenomenon is not limited to cinema. Clear boundaries are blurred through collaboration and distribution networks in literature, art, business, and scholarship. And yet most research on Russian immigration foregrounds the process of integration and cultural changes in Israel, without engaging with cultural developments of the home country. Here I consider the migrants as both immigrants and emigrants, agents of change in both new and old countries.

The analysis of Russian immigrant representation in both Russia and Israel shows that cultural processes in today's globalized mediated world are interrelated. Immigration impacts cultural production in home and host countries and in the diaspora elsewhere. As Russian immigrants to Israel transform themselves through migration, they also transform cultures around them. This is why Israel today is a part of Russia, and Russia is a part of Israel.

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Notes

1. Here I use 'Russian Jews' as a shortcut for referring to Soviet and post-Soviet Jews and their families. Similarly, I use 'Russians' to refer to Soviet and post-Soviet immigrants in Israel.
2. Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 57–114.
3. On interethnic romances in Israeli films, see *ibid.*, 134–73; Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 90–169.
4. Elsewhere I call these films *pierogi* parallel to the Israeli ethnic genre of *bourekas* films. For the initial definition of the term *pierogi*, see Olga Gershenson and Dale Hudson, "New Immigrant, Old story: Framing Russians on the Israeli Screen," *Journal of Film and Video* 60, no. 3–4 (2008), p. 29. For a nuanced discussion of *bourekas* genre see Dorit Naaman, "Orientalism as Alterity in Israeli Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 40, no. 4 (2001): 36–54.
5. I am using here Hamid Naficy's term, 'accented film', which is defined not only by the actual languages and accents on the screen, but also by the diasporic or displaced identities of the filmmakers. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.
6. For articulations of this position by Israeli sociologists, see Tamar Horowitz, "Integration without Acculturation: The Absorption of Soviet Immigrants," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1982), 19–33 as well as Larissa Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transactions, 2006), 109–17.
7. For analysis of *Paper Snow*, see Olga Gershenson, "Accented Memory: Russian Immigrants Reimagine the Israeli Past," *Journal of Israeli History* 28, no. 1 (2009): 21–36.
8. For analysis of *Yana's Friends*, see Olga Gershenson and Dale Hudson, "Absorbed by Love: Russian Immigrant Woman in Israeli Film," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 6, no. 3 (2007): 301–15.
9. Author's interview with Aleksandr Chervinsky (scriptwriter of *Theme*), March 5, 2009.
10. Here I discuss only films dealing with Israel. For a useful overview of other Jewish topics in Russian cinema, see Miron Chernenko, *Krasnaya zvezda, zheltaya zvezda: Kinematograficheskaya istoriya evrejstva v Rossii, 1919–1999* (Moscow: Tekst, 2006).
11. Olga Gershenson, "Ambivalence and Identity in Russian Jewish Cinema," in *Jewish Cultural Studies*, Vol. I. *Jewishness: Expression, Identity, and Representation*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 175–95.
12. Elena Salnikova, "V yubilei 'Lyubvi' snimaetsya Lyubovnik," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, December 8, 2001.

13. Judith Deutsch Kornblatt, “*Ladies’ Tailor* and the End of Soviet Jewry,” *Jewish Social Studies* 5, no. 3 (1999): 180–95.
14. Author’s interview with Leonid Horowitz, May 7, 2009.
15. Russian films also feature return emigrants from other places as well, mainly the US, e.g. *Russian Ragtime* (1993, dir. Sergey Ursuliak).
16. For analysis of *Daddy*, see Gershenson, “Ambivalence and Identity,” 183–9.
17. Author’s interviews with Mikhail Bartenev, July 2, 2010 and with ‘Ramat Ganeev’, June 25, 2010. ‘Ramat Ganeev’ asked me to preserve his anonymity. His penname is a private joke. He lives in an Israeli town of Ramat Gan, and by forming a Russian possessive from its name, he arrived at his penname that can be translated to English as ‘of Ramat Gan’. Yet, to a Russian ear, the name simply sounds Kazakh or Tatar, and is entirely unmarked.
18. Douglas S. Massey, “The Social and Economic Origins of Immigration,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 510 (July 1990): 69.