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Narrating the Double Helix: The Immigrant-Professional Biography of a Russian Journalist in Israel

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Abstract: This research explores the professional and life experiences of a Russian-speaking immigrant journalist who relocates herself in Israel, within the new professional and cultural environment. She engages intensively in decoding and interpreting her new society for the immigrant readers. We conducted an ethnographic narrative analysis to examine the nature and significance of the "double helix" of an immigrant-professional narrative, constructed by the interplay of life and work experiences. This prism of analysis reveals the intersection between acquiring new professional knowledge and learning a new culture; between journalistic commentary and immigrant interpretation; between professional positioning *vis-à-vis* the local journalistic community and the immigrant counterparts; and between shaping the journalist's personal views and the collective political, civil, and cultural attitudes of her immigrant audience. The article contributes to the methodologies of qualitative study of migration by suggesting a multi-level interpretation of a migration narrative.

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1. Situating a Migration Story: Immigrant-Professional Narrative

> "My professional integration was very quick. I didn't undergo a so-called 'adaptation process.' You just relocate yourself within your professional field and feel like an equal among equals."

In her migration narrative, Alexandra (a pseudonym) emphasizes that she did not follow the standard course of immigrant "adaptation." Rather, she experienced her relocation after immigrating to Israel from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) as learning and refinement of the journalistic profession. She explains that other than learning to be a "Western journalist," she learned to conduct a journalistic investigation and report "from the field," practice "the Israeli way" of obtaining

journalistic information, and report on virtually all aspects of life in Israel. The inquiry into Alexandra's immigration narrative reveals the story of her professional adaptation (acquiring professional knowledge, building relationships within and in relation to the local journalistic community, and learning how the journalistic process is organized). It was not only an integral part of her immigration experience; it also shaped that experience and gave it meaning. Her immigration and professional experiences thus comprise the "double helix" of her life narrative. In this manner, Alexandra's immigration narrative constitutes an immigrant's professional identity. It is a narrative of acquiring, learning, and adapting journalistic skills while adjusting to various aspects of life in the new country. Hence, we suggest addressing her biographical story as an immigrant-professional narrative, reflecting an ongoing process of learning and interpreting the new society from the point of view of a journalist and a new immigrant. [1]

The important contribution of narrative inquiry to our understanding of the migration experience is evident in studies on classical migration (e.g., THOMAS & ZNANIECKI, 1918) as well as migration and identity at the end of the last century (e.g., BENMAYOR & SKOTNES, 1994; CHAMBERS, 1994; DE FINA, 2003; GANGULY, 1992). A recent international research project, "Biography and Ethnicity: Development and Changes in Senses of Socio-Cultural Belonging in Migrant Populations in the United States and Germany," investigates the processes behind the creation and transformation of various patterns of collective belonging, constituted and articulated in the narratives of immigrants (e.g., BALLENTHIEN & BÜCHING, 2009; CHAITIN, LINSTROTH & HILLER, 2009; ROSENTHAL & KÖTTIG, 2009; STEPICK & STEPICK, 2009). Inspired by the extensive findings accumulated in this project, the proposed study seeks to add another dimension to the complex construction of immigrants' belonging, namely belonging to a professional community. [2]

In the Israeli migration context, the narrative approach was widely applied to different immigrant groups, including the recent wave of immigration from the FSU. Some studies were conducted from the perspective of psychological and personal change (LIEBLICH, 1993), while coping with migration stress and loss (MIRSKY, 2005). Other studies addressed ethnographic and folkloristic descriptions of cross-cultural encounters (FIALKOVA & YELENEVSKAYA, 2007), or analyzed transformations of immigrants' storytelling as a narrative linguistic form (SHULOVA-PIRYATINSKY & HARKINS, 2009). Furthermore, the most significant insight attributable to the narrative inquiry and the life story approach is evident in the study of identity negotiation processes among Russian-speaking immigrants (LERNER, RAPOPORT & LOMSKY-FEDER, 2007; RAPOPORT & LOMSKY-FEDER, 2001). Conceptualizing migration is a process requiring continual and close reading of the new environment. The narrative analysis of migrant stories allows researchers to shed light on the interpretive process of the immigrant’s self-location and negotiation of identity in various institutional and cultural contexts. [3]

Every immigrant's resettling process takes place in a unique set of circumstances that affects both civic and political attitudes and personal choices (e.g., religious

affiliation, partner selection, occupation, place of residence, and the like) (EISIKOVITS, 2006; KUNTSMAN, 2008; LERNER, 2003; RAPOPORT & KAPLAN, 2009). In the context of professional resettling, however, this phenomenon may take on special depth and meaning. Immigrant professionals acquired higher education and underwent professional socialization in the country of origin, having shaped a professional identity embodying not only instrumental knowledge but also ethical codes, interpretation scripts, and lifestyle patterns (REMENNICK & SHTARKSHALL, 1997; SHUVAL & BERNSTEIN, 1997). On immigration, their professional identity also becomes the most immediate and important means of socioeconomic repositioning. At the same time, this identity undergoes many changes, as it is often denied legitimacy and at times acquires new or different meanings. This situation is particularly relevant for those occupations whose professional knowledge is directly connected to the cultural, historical, political, and economic dimensions of the society in which it was acquired (e.g., HOROWITZ, 1985; REMENNICK, 2002). [4]

Research literature on immigrant professionals focus primarily on their integration into the local professional setup and labor market (RAIJMAN & SEMYONOV, 1995, 1998; REMENNICK, 2002, 2003; SHUVAL & BERNSTEIN, 1997). Here we offer a different reading of the story of immigrants' professional integration, obtained by induction from our research case. Using the biographical-narrative approach, we view professionalism as a context that shapes the immigrant's place and identity in cultural, political, and civic terms. We argue that our focus on the immigrant journalists, who have not attracted sufficient research attention to date, offers unique qualities relevant to the process of situating immigrant-professional narratives. A journalist's professional activity is by definition a dialogic act that assumes a readership with certain interests, needs, views, and predispositions. In this regard, we seek to understand the intersection between two processes: the shaping of the immigrant journalist's personal worldviews and the formation of the collective political, civic, and cultural attitudes of her immigrant audience. [5]

2. Research Design

The compilation of empirical material for this study and the method of its interpretation were influenced by the narrative ethnographic approach or "narrative ethnography" (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 2008; HOLSTEIN & GUBRIUM, 2011). We adopted this approach as a methodological and analytical tool especially useful for our research. Narrative ethnography presents a combination of epistemological, methodological, procedural, and analytical sensibilities that must be realized to understand a narrative in social context. This approach emerges at the border of ethnography and narrative analysis, as it presumes incorporation of an ethnographic study with a collective of open-ended narrative or biographical interviews. The narratives collected during the fieldwork are interpreted with regard to the ethnographic context of the studied phenomena (e.g., generational context, context of the examined community, ideological context). A "classical" life-story approach bases the narrative interpretation mostly on theoretical presuppositions and secondary research literature (BERTAUX &

KOHLI, 1984; DENZIN, 1989). With this, the ethnographic study equips the researcher with an understanding of the immediate sociocultural reality of the narrator and the layers of social context conditioning a narrative production. In this manner, a narrative ethnographic approach enables to identify the collective and personal dimensions of the specific narrative, consider the general and the unique contents of the particular narrative, and propose generalized analytical insights. [6]

Based on the materials collected through the previous study on the Russian-speaking journalists in Israel (ELIAS & CASPI, 2007), we came to map the different professional trajectories of 20 professionals working in the Russian immigrant press. Alexandra's biography and her professional position appear as a "vital case" for understanding this field. First, she was trained and actually worked as a professional journalist in the Soviet Union prior to immigration. Second, she provided us with a trajectory of professional continuity since her immediate immigration to Israel where she became involved in the newly emerged Russian press and established herself as one of the most prominent figures in this field. She had been working as a full-time journalist rather than many part-time or freelance secondary job employees. Until today, Alexandra is keeping a position of being a significant media figure in the field of news production and broadcast for the Russian Israeli community. Based on the criteria emerging from the ethnographic exploration of the field, Alexandra was chosen as the most appropriate interviewee for the present study. She was able to reflect on major trends of the Russian-language media in Israel during the last two decades. Moreover, she was able to compare between the role of a journalist, as it was perceived in the FSU, and the role of a professional customary in Israel's journalistic field. [7]

The interpretative aspect inherent in the analysis of a biographical narrative assumes that the individual narrative does not "represent" the collective reality; but rather, it is constituted by its crucial elements (BERTAUX & KOHLI, 1984; DENZIN, 1989). That said we do not address Alexandra's biography solely as the imprint of a Russian-speaking journalist in Israel. Alexandra's biography does not intend to represent other journalists and it cannot be a record of a general empirical reality of the state of Russian-language media in Israel. Nevertheless, Alexandra's immigrant-professional narrative does resonate processes whose meaning transcends her personal experiences: her professional resocialization as a journalist following immigration to Israel, working conditions and terms of employment in the Russian immigrant press, and shaping of political views in varying political contexts, among others. As such, we can perceive how her narrative embodies the basic dynamics of Russian-language media in Israel. [8]

Any immigrant-professional narrative is a form of linguistic expression that simultaneously constructs and represents the self and the collective identity (BERTAUX & KOHLI, 1984; DENZIN, 1989; FREEMAN, 1998; LINDE, 1993; SARBIN, 1986). In line with this, we believe that the narrative related by a practicing journalist possesses the special power to expose the process of collective identity formation, as it performs the narrative's "political work"

(WHOOLEY, 2006). The political work of the narrative is articulated within the identity dilemmas and verbal self-positioning of the narrator in relation to powerful groups organizing his political surrounding. [9]

Leaving aside an engagement with the narrative's linguistic structures and the psychological characteristics of identity change reflected the life story chosen for this study. We thus focus our analysis on the overlap of the journalist's commentary and the immigrant's interpretation of new realities embodied in Alexandra's narrative. We suggest reading Alexandra's immigrant-professional narrative from a perspective that would delineate the shaping of her professional, political, and social identities. This narrative covers her first few years following immigration, the way she positioned herself *vis-à-vis* the local journalistic community and her perception of her role as an immigrant-journalist nearly two decades after her arrival in Israel. Through our inquiry, we attempt to identify and understand the interplay between immigrant and professional biographical narratives. [10]

In our data analysis, we used a threefold process: sorting, coding, and recoding the interview data; identifying and linking emerging themes; and searching initial analyses for alternative confirmation of evidence (CRABTREE & MILLER, 1999). The application of this method on our empirical data was guided by our main narrative ethnographic inquiry regarding the relations between the professional and migration identities. Accordingly, in the following parts of the article, we propose a thematic analysis of Alexandra's biographical story through its contextual reading. This reveals how the immigrant's professional biography reflects and refracts the collective structural, economic and cultural conditions of a particular personal experience, as well as identity (CORRADI, 1991; ROSENWALD & OCHBERG, 1992). [11]

First, we reconstructed a chronological narrative from the unstructured and open-ended interview. Second, we reworked differently the text structure while reconstructing the parallel migration and professional stories incorporated in the narrative. Finally, juxtaposing them, we identified the issues and themes where the two stories cross one another overlap or contradict. All transcribed data were segmented by identifying phrases and sentences that stood out as significant for potential themes. At the end of the process, data were organized around three main themes especially important for understanding Alexandra's immigrant-professional narrative: the theme of learning the journalistic profession parallel with learning the host society's culture and politics; the theme of relations with the immigrant readers; and the theme of general conditions of the Russian immigrant press in Israel. [12]

Prior to our direct interpretive engagement with Alexandra's narrative itself, we would situate it in two empirical contexts, crucial for the interpretative work. One is the professional position of immigrant journalist as interpreter of the new culture, and another is a specific migration context of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel. [13]

3. Immigrant Journalists

Considering the centrality of immigrant media as a subject of academic inquiry, it is highly surprising that no sufficient research was dedicated to the adjustment of immigrant journalists themselves, that is, their professional socialization and adoption of new cultural norms, as well as formation of their political opinions and attitudes towards the host society. Studies on media and immigrants conducted to date were based on two major bodies of data: immigrant media content (e.g., BAR-HAIM, 1992; LIN & SONG, 2006; VISWANATH & ARORA, 2000; ZILBERG & LESHEM, 1996) and immigrants' media uses (e.g., ADONI, CASPI & COHEN, 2006; ELIAS, 2008; GEORGIOU, 2006; HWANG & HE, 1999). On the contrary, the professional and immigrant experiences of newly arrived journalists, who can be considered as "cultural brokers" providing their compatriots with indirect links to the host environment, have been largely ignored. [14]

In that regard, a few studies on immigrant media production do offer some important insights into the immigrant journalist's professional experience.[1] First, the literature shows that immigrant journalists often lack professional training and many of the professionals among them are not proficient in the host language. The former shortcoming may affect quality of reporting adversely; while the latter engenders an apparent problem with host—mother tongue translation and interpretation (ZHOU & CAI, 2002). Second, personnel recruitment trends at immigrant media hinder development of higher professional standards, as newly arrived journalists are offered only minimum wages or employed as freelancers and paid according to output (ELIAS & CASPI, 2007). Finally, the position of immigrant and ethnic minority journalists within their own community may be precarious. Although they derive their strength from close contact with their own ethnic communities, their professional ethics may be compromised by flawed source dependence, poor division between professional norms of balance and objectivity, and low professional status (e.g., CASPI, ADONI, COHEN & ELIAS, 2002; COTTLE, 2000; PIETIKÄINEN, 2008). [15]

This complex and ambiguous positioning of immigrant journalists is a captivating research topic. Indeed, a journalist is by definition a professional interpreter and commentator, proficient in articulating insights and evaluations using discourse patterns, attitudes and forecasts (e.g., SCHUDSON, 1988). To fulfill this role, the journalist is expected to be closely familiar with the applicable social, cultural, political, and historical contexts—knowledge that immigrant journalists have to acquire from scratch. Hence, the relationship between immigrant journalists and their readers necessarily involves the former's own sociocultural foreignness, raising questions concerning what they are interpreting, who their interpretative communities are, and how they position themselves towards them. These questions appear to be central in the professional biography of Alexandra—a Russian-speaking immigrant journalist in Israel. [16]

1 For the study of the retraining of the East European sojourner journalists at the West and acquiring new professional standards, see more in STERNADORI (2010).

4. Russian-Speaking Immigrants in Israel

Alexandra belongs to the community of approximately one million immigrants from the ex-Soviet states; these immigrants came to Israel after 1989 with the downfall of the Iron Curtain. Today, Russian-speaking immigrants are Israel's largest ethno-linguistic group from the same country of origin, comprising twelve percent of the population. Besides their demographic significance, Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel also manifest high cultural and professional capital: More than half of the FSU immigrants have academic degrees and two thirds were employed in white-collar occupations prior to immigration (SICRON, 1998). [17]

Another consequence of the Russian-speaking immigrants' affiliation with the professional elite of the USSR is their perception of the Russian language and culture as key aspects of their self-definition that they seek to preserve after immigration. Notable among the numerous manifestations of immigrants' quest for "cultural autonomy" in Israel are the successes of the bilingual theater *Gesher* (Bridge) *that was established in* 1991. Since then, it performs in Russian and Hebrew the existence of official matriculation exams in the Russian language that are approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education, the *Mofet* (Excellence) network of Russian-language schools, and the rich variety of more than 130 periodicals in Russian (including four daily newspapers) published in Israel (CASPI & ELIAS, 2000; HOROWITZ, 2001; HOROWITZ & LESHEM, 1998). [18]

The centrality of the Russian-language press as an "interpreting" institution for the FSU immigrant community in Israel cannot be exaggerated. This is explained by the special authority attributed to the written word in the Russian-Soviet tradition that assigned ideological, publicist, and literary writing the role of an active agent in constructing the immediate sociocultural reality (DOBRENKO, 2000; FRIEDBERG, 1996). It is not surprising therefore, that the Russian-language press in Israel has attracted extensive research as a central arena of immigrant community's identity consolidation. Content analysis of this press has enabled scholars to discern trends of immigrants' integration, segregation, and affiliation with the culture of origin (ADONI et al., 2006; ELIAS, 2008; ZILBERG & LESHEM, 1996). Similarly, several studies examined the political and social attitudes of the Russian-speaking community by analyzing the discourse, taking place in the Russian-language newspapers. Thus, the identification of right-wing (TACHTAROVA, 2007), orientalist and nationalistic (SHUMSKY, 2002), or homophobic (KUNTSMAN, 2008) attitudes found in the Russian-language press was used by scholars as empirical data for discussing the views and values prevailing in the Russian-speaking immigrant community. [19]

Informed by knowledge accumulated on this topic in research literature, the present study adopts a new perspective. It diverts the attention from the macro level of the Russian-language press as a whole to the micro level of professional and life experiences of a Russian-speaking journalist. She is deeply involved in reading and making sense of the new social, political, and cultural surroundings for herself while at the same time providing commentary and meaning to the new experiences of her immigrant readers. [20]

5. The Rise and Fall of the Russian-Speaking Journalist: The Plot

At the beginning of the interview, Alexandra stated that the Russian-language press in Israel was dead, and that as one who was there from its inception and experienced its rise, she was now living through its final death throes. For her, the last ten years have been a downward spiral in both professional and economic terms. As early as our first telephone conversation, she said, "You'll be hard pressed to find journalists who would agree to be interviewed because they have nothing to be proud of; they are either barely surviving or working in PR (public relations) and selling themselves to politicians." She was right. We encountered several refusals in our attempt to find interviewees among Russian-language journalists. However, Alexandra was among those who agreed; she spent hours telling us about her life in two three-hour sessions conducted in Russian. Listening to her, we realized that her willingness to voice her experience and opinion on the state of affairs of the Russian press in Israel was driven by a critical agenda she holds towards the field. [21]

Let us start by recounting the factual plot of Alexandra's professional biography. Alexandra was born in the 1950s, in a small town in West Ukraine. Like many Jewish girls, she attended university and studied the liberal arts—philology and foreign languages. After the graduation, Alexandra moved to Georgia where she began to work as a journalist. Despite having had no prior professional education in this field, she performed investigation and reporting duties at the local evening newspaper. [22]

At the beginning of the mass wave of immigration from the USSR in 1990, Alexandra left for Israel along with her mother and her teenage son. On arrival in Israel, and as a single parent and sole provider for her small family, she immediately began to inquire about possible employment. Thanks to her English proficiency, she could communicate with her Israeli neighbors who suggested that she apply for a job at a Russian-language newspaper they knew. That is how Alexandra found her first job as a journalist, only a month after her arrival at Israel's oldest Russian-language newspaper, *Nasha Strana* (Our Country). Alexandra worked there for two months, translating stories from English-language newspapers into Russian. As she was not paid for her work, she began to look for employment at another newspaper. Again, at the suggestion of her Israeli neighbors, she found her way into *Hadashot* (News), a Hebrew-language tabloid that began publishing a version in Russian. Alexandra worked for the Russian *Hadashot* as a freelancer and she was paid appropriately this time. Her editor gave her interviewing and reporting assignments on a variety of sensationalist topics, including an interview with a sex shop salesman—her first journalistic mission in Israel. [23]

After a few months in Israel, Alexandra landed a position at *Vremija* (Time), founded by media tycoon Robert MAXWELL and still in its pilot stage at the time. Alexandra worked at this newspaper that eventually became *Vesti* (News), Israel's leading Russian-language daily for ten years. She became one of its most prominent journalists while enjoying generous terms, including tenure and a

monthly salary that matched the going rates in the Hebrew press. Most significant among the wide variety of journalistic assignments she received was her job as an investigative reporter. Alexandra describes this decade at *Vremija* as a period of "euphoria" during which she enjoyed both complete professional fulfillment and economic affluence. [24]

The editor-in-chief at the time was a colorful and well-known figure in Israel. He arrived in the country in the 1980s following a long history of subversive activities against the Soviet regime. He enjoyed such broad support and high esteem among his employees that following his dismissal in 2000, many journalists, including Alexandra, tendered their resignations. At this point, Alexandra's professional ascent ended, and a second phase of her life in Israel began a time of professional and economic deterioration. [25]

After having been unemployed for several months, Alexandra joined *Vesti*'s competitor *Novosty Nedely* (News of the Week), owned by an Israeli businessman who perceived a lucrative commercial opportunity in the emerging Russian-language press (CASPI & ELIAS, 2000). Unlike *Vesti* that offered generous employment terms, *Novosty* paid its journalists the minimum wage, without basic social benefits and proper conditions to pursue their professional inclinations. Alexandra was unable to continue working as an investigative reporter, as the owner considered that format too costly. Instead, she was relegated to a host of reporting assignments aimed at fulfilling a weekly quota of six full pages, in comparison with only two pages, which is customary in the Hebrew-language press (REICH, 2009). [26]

Six years later, as part of a general downsizing, Alexandra was fired. She currently works as a translator and language editor of a Russian-language news website. Alexandra defines herself as a "slave" of the website, as she works in 10–12-hour shifts, doing a job that is a far cry from professional journalism. Alexandra is in despair; she regards her professional career as a failure, but fears that it would be difficult to find another occupation. [27]

Alexandra's immigration-professional narrative thus reflects a conjunction of numerous cultural, social, and professional phenomena. We intend to single out and focus on three themes in the fabric of her life story: her professional socialization as a means of acquiring various aspects of *Israeliness*; her role as a "cultural broker" who shaped the political and civic attitudes of her immigrant readers; and production and employment conditions in the Russian immigrant media in Israel. [28]

6. Learning Everything from Scratch: Profession, Culture, Politics

A key feature of Alexandra's life story as an immigrant journalist is her simultaneous professional learning and making sense of Israeli culture: "Little by little, you begin to comprehend deeper stuff; [...] you learn everything empirically. Whatever you encounter, whatever you experience, that's what you learn." The actual contact, the "hands-on," unmediated experience that Alexandra finds in her

field work as a journalist, becomes a source of learning about *Israeliness* as an identity, a culture, and a political sphere. [29]

"Now I am a professional. I am a Western journalist!" says Alexandra. For her, "professional" and "Western" are synonyms in describing the journalism model that she considers her professional ideal. Alexandra willingly adopts the meaning of being a "Western journalist" from her Israeli colleagues. For her, it means a journalist who is "out there," in close contact with the field, investigating matters first hand, and obtaining information that is not readily available:

> "Here I learned how to do it like the Israeli journalists do. It means touching the facts, not hearing about them. Until you've touched it, you don't know. You have to be there, it's as simple as that. [...] In the field, lots of times unexpected things happen. You cannot program the field. In this respect, I am exactly like Israeli journalists. [...] Who taught me? That guy [an Israeli journalist she worked with at the beginning of her journalist career in Israel], who said to me: 'You're a journalist. Where they won't let you in through the door, you'll get in through the window.' [...] For me, it was a huge honor to become a Western journalist. Western! Free!" [30]

For Alexandra, "getting in through the window" meant breaking through to the unfamiliar territories of life in the new country, touching and experiencing it. The discovery of this new world begins with her first assignment at *Hadashot* when she was asked to produce an item about a sex shop. Alexandra's learning about the Israeli space progressed to other areas when she got her first job as a full-time journalist at *Vremija*. She was exposed to the practices of experienced Israeli journalists who retrained her to adjust to Israeli professional standards. Her first assignment there was to report from court:

> "We had two [Israeli] supervisors at *Vremja*. One of them said to me, 'You have to go to the courthouse in Tel-Aviv and sit there from 8:30 AM to 1:00 PM and bring your report here.' It took me a while to find the courthouse. I went there, to the detention room. I could hardly understand basic Hebrew, but this was court Hebrew [...]. I brought the transcript [that she photocopied in court] home. I was hysterical. I bought every dictionary I could get my hands on, I sat and translated and wept. It was a disaster. But a few months later, I suddenly realized that I knew legal Hebrew, legal terms, I knew them all. I knew that a 'suspect' is not 'guilty' and when you sit there, inside, you learn things like you'd never dream. I didn't know the words for a cucumber or a tomato, but I knew everything about legal procedure, legal details that only a law graduate would know. Later, when I began to carry out serious investigations, I knew how to avoid any pitfalls. It was very important at the time." [31]

Alexandra's court reporting experience reveals the proximity of professional and cultural learning, the progression in which her professional training familiarizes her with Israeli society. The contribution of Israeli journalists was central to this process:

> "At *Vesti*, I was in regular contact with S., an experienced Israeli journalist. How did I become so knowledgeable about journalistic investigation in Israel? S. taught me. He

> explained that if you investigate, you must record everything on tape. Don't ever make a phone call without a tape recorder. You're entitled to record every conversation you have with anyone. It's your legitimate right and if the other side's lawyer bothers you, you must record them and if it's threatening, you must go to the police. That's how I used to conduct my investigations. Because *Vesti* was under the auspices of *Yedioth Ahronoth* (a leading Israeli newspaper), you could learn a lot [from Israeli journalists]; you only have to want to." [32]

In her contacts with other Israeli journalists whom she met in her field work, Alexandra also occupied herself with tracing and interpreting their work practices and professional codes in a conscious attempt to adapt herself to the new journalistic style. It turns out, however, that journalistic style was inseparable from cultural style, posing both personal and professional challenges for Alexandra. Learning the working methods of Israeli journalists involved dimensions of self-transformation—a potential crossing of the borders of one's original cultural identity:

> "I remember it so well, when we arrived, I went to the supermarket because I had to buy something. I wandered around. I just did not understand all those things on the shelves. I simply could not get it [...] We were crippled. I am by nature very shy and delicate. I never push. But paradoxically, when I work in my profession, then I do have it in me, if I am in the field ... I was not like that previously [in the USSR]. Once, I was in the field and there were lots of Israeli reporters. All of a sudden, someone pushed me out. I was deeply insulted. It really hurt me. A [a prominent TV reporter] was there and I asked her, 'What is going on? What should I do?' And she said, 'What?! If you don't use your elbows you will always end up without an interview, without a recording and you will return to your desk empty-handed.' I said to her, 'But that's not nice.' And she said, 'There's no such thing as "nice." You're a pro; you're in the free world, that's how you're supposed to do your job.' And it's true; I've learned to do it." [33]

The traceable analogies in this description are the key to understanding Alexandra's story. She begins with her experience as a newly arrived immigrant in an Israeli supermarket, facing unfamiliar packages and afraid to ask what they were, feeling like a cultural "cripple." Alexandra compares that experience with her work as a rookie reporter who was pushed around and hurt by Israeli colleagues. Here she is a professional "cripple." She then describes her encounter with an Israeli journalist who served as a source of new knowledge—both professional and cultural. She has learned to "use her elbows" while acquiring a new cultural style vastly different from what she perceived as a Russian cultural norm. [34]

Discrepancies in professional style thus turned out to be cultural discrepancies. Such discrepancies are often highlighted when Russian-speaking immigrants describe the cultural gaps between them and the "local Israelis" to whom they attribute rude and unrestrained behavior, as opposed to the restraint and self-control ascribed to the Russians (e.g., ZILBERG, 1995). Interestingly, in contrast to the conventional perception of Russian-speaking immigrants' resistance to

adopting Israeli cultural codes (for the sociological and anthropological engagement with the key codes of Israeli culture see ALMOG, 2000; KATRIEL, 1991), Alexandra is willing to adopt them as part of her new professional repertoire. The interpretive insight in this story suggests that the "Israeli *chutzpah* (cheek)"—considered as an Israeli stereotypical way of behavior in a public space—is bundled as part of a "Western journalism" package. [35]

No less important in Alexandra's immigrant-professional narrative is her intensive political socialization and the shaping of her political opinions as a citizen of Israel and as a journalist. Remembering her early years in Israel, Alexandra says:

> "At first, I didn't understand anything. I didn't understand the kind of government we had here. What I did understand—and it was an ironclad rule for me—that I had no right to write about the big things, about politics [...] God forbid, it didn't even cross my mind to write about politics." [36]

One key issue addressed by scholars studying FSU immigrants in Israel concerns the factors that shape their political outlooks and possible explanations for their predominantly right-wing leanings. In this context, many scholars assume that such views are embedded in the Soviet legacy, that is, in the USSR policy regarding national minorities and in Russian-style orientalism (SHUMSKY, 2004). Others maintain that they stem from the "trauma of Jewish identity" that was an integral part of the Russian-Jewish intelligentsia's identity in the Soviet Union (TACHTAROVA, 2007), attesting to the immigrants' need to demonstrate their Jewishness and national loyalty. In the following paragraphs, we intend to supplement the existing research literature by identifying another trajectory of immigrant's political identity construction. We will illustrate now how the political self-positioning is being constituted as a result of an encounter with new political realities, as it was in the case of Alexandra. [37]

In 1992, Alexandra did not vote in Israel's national elections because she did not yet understand the local political situation. The shift in her position of "staying away from politics" took place in late 1994 when she happened to be present at the epicenter of a terrorist attack in central Tel-Aviv during a wave of mass terrorism in the wake of the Oslo Accords:

> "You have to understand, as a journalist I got into politics completely by chance, only from the field. [...] On October 19, 1994, I was in the car with my boyfriend, who had a clinic in central Tel-Aviv, and the radio was on and then they announced that a bomb just exploded at Dizengoff square.[2] We left the car and ran like crazy [to the explosion site]. [...] I was among the first reporters to arrive on the scene. And when you are walking along the pavement all covered with blood, your political views just spring into being, all by themselves [...] Since then, wherever there was a terrorist attack in Israel, I went there [...] I felt that I had to be there right now. I had to listen to what the people were saying. I had to witness it and write about it." [38]

2 Alexandra refers to a terrorist attack in the center of Tel-Aviv with 22 victims.

Here we learn that Alexandra's political views formed in a manner different from the prevailing interpretation in the research literature that mostly regards right-wing attitudes among FSU immigrants as rooted in their life experience in the USSR. Like most of Alexandra's insights about life in Israel, her political position was gradually shaped when her personal biography met with her journalistic work:

> "Nowadays, I already know what to ask [in a political interview]. I have a clear idea. But then [in my first years in Israel], I didn't. [...] Today, when I hear that a *Kassam* missile falls in Sderot,[3] and there have been 2,005 of them already, I know exactly why, according to my view, of course. And if my view is not accepted by the current government, then I am willing to defend it to the bitter end. Why? Because I am sure of it, because I already know this stuff. I've touched it, I've grasped it, I just know." [39]

Interestingly, the political socialization that Alexandra underwent during her journalistic field work ultimately drew her away from the Israeli journalistic community that she characterized as professional, free, and Western in earlier stages of her interview. Although Israeli journalists had a tremendous effect on Alexandra's professional socialization, she was not influenced by their "leftist political views," as she perceives them today. While her professional socialization brought her closer to Israeli counterparts, her political views positioned her in the opposite camp, leading her to develop a critical view of the Israeli media as a whole:

> "I have lots of stories about the total lack of objectivity of the Israeli media. It reminds me of the USSR in the 1970s, when the press was a vehicle of propaganda, not a source of information [...] Here it's just the same, exactly the same," she says. [40]

It should be emphasized that Alexandra does not align herself with Russian-speaking journalists either. On the contrary, she feels a deep alienation from them because of their reluctance to abandon Soviet journalistic standards and adopt Western ones. Hence, in search of a political ally, she clings to the views that she believes are prevalent among her readers who have learned to think according to a "dual consciousness" typical of the Russian intelligentsia, doubting the purported truths of Soviet ideology:

> "The Russians were trained to do it. They were firmly in the habit of doubting and questioning everything and trying to figure out everything on their own. They know how to think independently, how to analyze. Russians do not need others to analyze things for them. So ultimately, these views [the right-wing positions of the Russian-speaking community in Israel] are largely not derived from the [Russian-language] media; it's simply their own analysis of realities. In this sense, it's actually the Russian-language press that followed its readers' [right-wing] views." [41]

Contrary to the common perception that the Russian-language press shapes immigrants' political views, Alexandra's interpretation declares that during the 1990s, it responded to their inclinations and preference for "independent

3 Alexandra refers to the recurrent attacks by missiles (named *Kassams*) from the Gaza strip landing in the small town Sderot, south of Israel.

thinking." Conversely, in other "learning areas" about life in Israel, Alexandra attributes a tremendous influence to the Russian-language press, acknowledging its role as a "guide" for its readers. [42]

7. Learning with and Teaching Readers

Alexandra, like many other immigrants, describes her first months in Israel as a period of disorientation, confusion, and even cultural disability. "The key word here is incomprehensible," she says, "because everything was incomprehensible." Accordingly, when Alexandra started to address immigrant audience as a journalist, she realized that "everything was incomprehensible" for her readers as well:

> "I realized that my readers have no idea what the police is like here, what the court is like ... So from the beginning, wherever I managed to catch a chunk of reliable information, I passed it on to my readers ... We were the only address new arrivals could turn to for help and advice." [43]

She then began to write for them, starting with her description of the assortment of wares available at that sex shop:

> "I knew my readers, just like me, knew nothing about it [here, she points to the Soviet citizens' lack of familiarity with the sex product industry flourishing in the West], so like me, they would be rolling on the floor laughing." [44]

She went on to shed light on the legal, financial, and consumerist aspects of life in Israel that are so vital for newly arrived immigrants and eventually interpreted political processes as well. Alexandra accomplished all these as she learned about Israeli realities herself from an immigrant's perspective. She passed her insights on to her readers but resented the suggestion that her relationship with them was ever paternalistic: "We were learning together. There were no differences. We [journalists] didn't think we were better or knew more than our readers. We never felt we were above them." [45]

But her later statements do display a patronizing attitude towards readers supposedly less knowledgeable than she is and to whom she tries to impart her own worldviews and integration strategy:

> "I told my readers: 'Figure things out first.' People must have their eyes opened for them, so that they understand where they live, so they have some knowledge and love this country, yes, love it. It was important to me for my readers to love this country because I fell in love with it, madly." [46]

Alexandra discovered that the combination of "love" and "knowledge" was a good basis for "figuring things out" in Israel and tried to pass it on to her readers. In this ongoing dialogue with readers, Alexandra articulates her emotional connection to Israel that finds expression in a discussion she held with her readers. Realizing that many readers did not feel that they had "come home," Alexandra undertook

the role of educator. She tried to encourage them to bond emotionally with their new country, as she had done, perceiving that bond as a crucial foundation for their sense of belonging:

> "I used to tell them: 'We are repatriates, we are citizens, we have all the rights' and my readers would try to argue with me, saying things like: 'You say we have rights, but I work as a guard with a minimal salary, and what rights are you talking about?' Then I didn't understand them. It came to me much later ..." [47]

Based on her view of her journalistic duty as an agent of socialization for her immigrant readers, Alexandra interprets the recent decline of the Russian immigrant press as part of the inevitable process, yet successful settling in of readers. During the 1990s, when recent immigrants suffered major integration difficulties, the Russian-language press thrived, whereas today, when the vast majority of readers have found their place in Israel or at least learned "to figure things out" on their own, they tend to desert their "guide." In this regard, Alexandra concludes:

> "Nowadays, the Russian-language press is dying out because there are no more new immigrants and no more questions [...] And it's not because of Hebrew language acquisition. That's a lie! Not that many immigrants have mastered Hebrew to a level that gives them access to Hebrew information sources. So why is the Russian-language press dying? Because we taught them [immigrants] how to survive here. Our readers learned, for instance, what to do when your employer cheats you […] we were the ones who taught them all these. And when this huge immigrant community graduated our school, that was it. We've done our bit; now, we're no longer needed." [48]

One of the most commonly recognized roles of immigrant media is its function as an agent of socialization, guiding its audience into the host culture, politics, economics, etc. (e.g., KIM, 2001; RIGGINS, 1992; SUBERVI-VELEZ, 1986). Our examination enriches this literature by focusing on the role of the immigrant media through the eyes of an immigrant journalist and by shedding light on the complex relationship between the immigrant community and its media. Alexandra learned about life in Israel and in this process, she mediated, explicated, and interpreted what she would encounter on behalf of her immigrant readers. As she learned to get by, she taught them how to do so as well, providing pointers on interpreting the political situation and taking ideological and moral sides, as she initially articulated these attitudes for herself. This means that once the readers' opinions have been consolidated and everyone is getting by, the Russian-language press's demise is to be expected. But the readers' desertion is not the sole reason Alexandra mentions for her personal fall and that of the Russian-language press. As we demonstrate below, another salient theme in Alexandra's life story links her professional collapse and the general deterioration of the Russian-language newspapers to the state of economic and social marginality of the immigrant press in Israel. [49]

8. Not by Words Alone

"I am looking for a way to leave the [journalistic] profession. You cannot stay in a place that no longer exists," says Alexandra, hinting at the agony of the Russian immigrant press. During the interview, she mentions numerous reasons for the fall of this press, starting with the readers' economic difficulties:

> "Ten years ago, a pensioner like my mother could afford to pay NIS 8 [= $2] and bring home the *Vesti* weekend edition. Since then, benefit payments have not been increased or even updated. There is a total erosion of social benefit payments to all kinds of needy population. So who can afford to buy a newspaper today?" [50]

The readers' economic difficulties became more comprehensible to Alexandra only after a relatively long period of living in Israel, when she found herself working at *Novosty Nedely* for meager wages under exploitative working conditions. Her situation and that of her readers are again remarkably analogous. "Nowadays I understand my readers much better, but then, in the 1990s, I didn't understand," says Alexandra when she describes her own current professional and economic difficulties, as she experiences the predicaments of immigration first hand. [51]

This discovery occurred during a relatively late phase of her professional career in Israel. As noted earlier, Alexandra found a job at a Russian-language newspaper within a month after her arrival. Moreover, in her first year in Israel, while she was still trying to find her way around, she managed to navigate among the mushrooming new publications until she found a permanent high-paying employment at *Vremija*. She was professionally coached by senior Israeli journalists and she quickly acquired local "professional secrets." But her thorough professional socialization paid off only for as long as she worked for *Vremija* (and later for *Vesti*) where the work practices and terms of employment were closer to the professional standards and wage levels of the Hebrew press. [52]

As part of *Yedioth Tikshoret* (one of Israel's leading and richest media corporations), *Vesti* was exceptional compared to other Russian-language publications in terms of both wages and working conditions. A study by CASPI and ELIAS (2000) indicates that the majority of Russian-language newspapers in Israel were based on an extremely poor financial infrastructure that dictated terms of employment. Hence, most Russian-language periodicals were "small businesses," produced by a staff of 3-10 people. The small scale entailed low differentiation, little division of labor, and unification of diverse functions to be performed by one person. Financial considerations also made it difficult for these newspapers to establish their own information-gathering sources. In coverage of the social and political agenda, there was a clear preference for recycling existing information—from the Hebrew press and news agencies—even at the expense of timeliness (ibid.). [53]

While working at *Vesti*, Alexandra was unaware of the structural deficiencies of other Russian-language newspapers. When she resigned and came to *Novosty*

Nedely (the second largest Russian-language daily at the time), she was shocked to discover poor working conditions that made it impossible to carry out the professional journalism level she had already been accustomed. At first, she tried to introduce organizational changes and transform *Novosty* from a newspaper relying on recycled sources into one that prioritizes original material and field reporting:

> "You know what I tried to do at *Novosty* in my first year? Like a fool, I tried to persuade the editor to start working professionally. [...] I prepared a new template for the paper. I kept saying that a newspaper needs photos and that items should not be obtained by phone but in the field. [...] But when I began to show them the new format, they [veteran employees] simply laughed at me. They said: 'What? Where? You want to do it here? At our publishing house, you can't even mix colors properly. All the colors turn to black.' [...] So you understand why they laughed? They knew what kind of swamp they were working in. And the wages ... that's just terrible. [...] In economic terms, I found myself hitting bottom." [54]

Alexandra's professional experience reflects a key problem typical of working conditions among the majority of Russian-language newspapers in Israel. The literature suggests that the surplus of job demand over supply among Russian-speaking journalists allowed the owners to dictate extremely modest working conditions. Permanent jobs were very rare and only the few journalists most vital to the paper's stability were hired full time, while the majority were employed on a temporary basis or paid according to their output as freelancers (CASPI & ELIAS, 2000). Alexandra's professional story is thus the story of an immigrant journalist who successfully internalized new professional norms yet utterly failed because she remained within the boundaries of the Russian immigrant press. This enterprise was built chiefly on harsh exploitation of immigrant journalists by Israeli-born owners who considered Russian-language newspapers a quick path to financial prosperity and the newly arrived journalists a cheap labor force. [55]

9. Conclusions

The interpretation of immigrants' life stories always involves separating and recombining the components of narration: personal and professional, individual and collective, gender-based and generational. As such, even an analysis of only one immigrant biography offers narrative scholars various trajectories of analysis. This has been demonstrated in a multilateral biographical research project in which a multidisciplinary group of narrative scholars produced six different analyses of a single immigrant narrative of a Turkish female immigrant in Germany (RIEMANN, 2003). Each interpretation of the same biographical narrative possessed a distinct trope and offered a different prism of analysis: linguistic and discursive (FRANCESCHINI, 2003), psychological (MIZUNO, 2003), genderial (KAZMIERSKA, 2003), or life course approaches (SCHÜTZE, 2003; TREICHEL & SCHWELLING, 2003). [56]

As our study sought to understand migration experiences within social and cultural institutions, we focused on a particular sociopolitical context in reading the biographical story of Alexandra (e.g., GÜLTEKIN, INOWLOCKI & LUTZ,

2003). In doing so, we were able to make sense of the professional positioning of the journalist-immigrant narrator as well as the significance of the Israeli political and national setting in understanding the deep interplay between her migration and professional experiences. [57]

Our most important insight addresses the dynamic process in which an immigrant journalist is engaged in the process of cultural and professional interpretation while combining newly acquired professional knowledge and the immigration experience. In this sense, the professional "field," and the new social, political, and cultural reality merge into one composing a "double helix" of her life narrative, wherein Alexandra's journalistic skills of "touching the field" are employed to make sense of her new home. [58]

Alexandra's immigrant and professional biography in Israel extends over 18 years and embodies primary landmarks of the rise and fall of the Russian immigrant press. Her professional-immigration journey could be schematically summed up as follows: She found a job at an immigrant newspaper just a few weeks after her arrival, went on to work for two major dailies, became a well-known journalist in the Russian immigrant community, and ended up at a low-paying job with a Russian language news portal. Simultaneously, her immigrant-professional journey appears to be a constant learning of the new society and its culture, "figuring things out" about herself and her readers. Moreover, as our analysis reveals that Alexandra's narrative is primarily a story about the shaping of her professional, political, and civic views during her first few years after immigration. [59]

Some aspects of her biography are indeed related to the universal conditions of immigration. Others are grounded in the local journalistic field and the position of Russian-speaking immigrants within it and still others pertain to production and employment conditions in immigrant and minority media in general. However, the proximity of learning the new culture to Alexandra's positioning in the new professional sphere illuminates the particularly complex relations between the immigrant journalists and their readership. Focus on the course of an immigrant journalist's relocation in Israel was thus doubly significant. It enabled us to understand the intersection of professional and immigrant experiences. At the same time, it shed light on the progression through which the immigrant journalist's attitudes take shape as part of the process. This is where she interprets the new environment for herself as an immigrant and for her immigrant readers as a journalist. [60]

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