ABSTRACT

Between January 1, 1950 and December 31, 1960, 1671 Israeli soldiers and other defense personnel lost their lives; of these, 51 were women. Of the 51 female military casualties, 30 were born in Eretz-Israel and 21 were born abroad. The article examines the lives and deaths of these female military casualties. Special focus is given to those who were immigrants and went through the dialectic process of assimilation versus alienation. In addition to examining the entire body of female military casualties and their collective profile, the article charts the differences between the native and immigrant female military casualties of the 1950s in a number of sectors: ethnicity, education, youth movement membership, army service branch, age at the time of death, date of death, cause of death, and methods of commemoration.

INTRODUCTION

Nineteen-fifty was a momentous year for the State of Israel. The War of Independence was over, mass immigration was at its height, and the country appeared to be entering a period of normalcy. The winter of 1949–1950 was unusually harsh. Snow fell in Tel-Aviv for the first time in its history, and the government established the first ma’abarot (transit camps) in order to house the 100,000 immigrants living in damp squalor in dozens of makeshift tent settlements. As the new Ministry of Health struggled with a growing polio epidemic, the government put an economic austerity policy into effect to deal with the massive influx of immigrants.
Although the country stood behind the mass immigration, the economic policies it entailed were not always to its citizens’ liking. In October Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion resigned in response to coalition opposition to his economic policies, but immediately formed a new government to further their implementation. Wishing to show that nothing would stop the new State, during this same period the government sponsored two physical expressions of the Zionist entity—the Third Maccabiah in September³ and the first major IDF maneuvers in November, involving over 75,000 soldiers. These included large numbers of new immigrants, including some of the 170,000 who had come to Israel since January of that year.⁴

Nineteen-fifty was a year of life and renewal for most of the Israeli population, but not for Zehava Harari, Rina Lemberger, Simcha Joyce Nissim, Dina Kalmanovitch, Michal Grossberg, and Leah Melech, six female IDF soldiers who lost their lives during that year. Aside from Grossberg, who was born in Tel-Aviv, all the others had immigrated to pre-State Israel between the ages of 6 to 16. Harari and her comrades were the first group of women soldiers to lose their lives while on active duty during the new State’s first full year of peace. Along with 117 young male soldiers who died or were killed during that year, they heralded a total of 1671 Israeli soldiers and other defense personnel who lost their lives between January 1, 1950 and December 31, 1960.⁵ Fifty-one of this group were women, thirty of whom had been born in mandatory Palestine and twenty-one abroad. Close to 70% of the immigrant female military casualties (IFMC) had arrived after the outbreak of the Second World War and at the time of their death, a third had been in the country for fewer than eight years, and a fifth were in Israel for six years or less.

What can we learn from the lives and deaths of the IFMC during the 1950s (all further references are to this decade) about the form and content of life in Israel during its first decade? Using this group as a springboard to discuss the young immigrants who comprised a large portion of Israelis at that time, I will also target one of the core issues of contemporary Zionist ideology: automatic assimilation.

During the Yishuv and the early years of the State, the Zionist establishment almost axiomatically assumed that immigrants, particularly young ones, would adopt a Zionist set of values and lifestyle, relinquishing their Diaspora-based behavior for what was considered a healthier and more natural existence.⁶ Approximately 50% of these young women immigrated to Eretz-Israel before age 11; how “Israeli” were they at the time of their death? How long do young immigrants retain characteristics that separate them from the native population?
In order to answer these questions, I researched the personal and military histories of young immigrant women who lost their lives while serving in the IDF or related defense organizations, from the beginning of 1950 until the end of 1960. The choice of dates was mandated by the debates taking place over women’s induction into the IDF and the length of their army service.

With the imminent demobilization in late 1949 and early 1950 of women who had enlisted during the War of Independence, military leaders and defense functionaries feared that few women would volunteer to serve in the IDF. Their pessimism was based on the fact that only a handful of women had voluntarily enlisted to serve in the permanent army. This situation heralded a larger problem as the proposed National Service Law mandated one year’s agricultural service for conscripts, leaving women with their shorter military service little time for military training and duties. The head of the IDF Women’s Army Corps suggested conscripting women in peacetime, beginning with those born in 1931 and 1932, which was later adopted. In late 1949 military bodies discussed the possibility of lengthening women’s army service and in 1950 the Knesset approved extension of women’s military service to two years.

Thus, 1950 was the year when women’s induction status into the IDF underwent debate and change. The Liberal Party, later joined by the Herut, suggested reducing the length of women’s army service to 18, 15, or even 12 months. However, in 1960 government and military circles stressed that by serving longer in the IDF, women became more mature and knowledgeable of the country’s security and settlement needs. In 1961 the head of the IDF manpower division stated that a reduction in the length of women’s army service would be possible after 1963–4, when women conscripted in 1960 would be demobilized. Thus, late 1960, when the nature and form of these discussions shortened women’s IDF service to 21 months, marks the end of this study.

RESEARCH ISSUES

Any qualitative study drawing on such a small sample raises broader research issues. In this case, several questions come to mind. How representative are the FMC who lost their lives during these years of all Israeli young women of their age group at that time and, of all Israeli young women who then served in the IDF? How representative are the IFMC of all immigrant Jewish young women of their age group during the same years? Finally, how
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representative are they of all immigrant Jewish young women who served in the IDF during the years in question?

Bearing in mind that Arabs, Haredim, some orthodox girls, many Mizrachi (particularly immigrants), married women, uneducated or handicapped girls, and most girls of military age who had just arrived in the country were not drafted, no female IDF soldiers, whether dead or alive, were representative of all or even most young Israeli women of their age. However, the total group of FMC who lost their lives during this period does appear to be a broad, albeit random, sampling of women serving in the IDF. Almost all army corps are represented, as are a broad gamut of younger age groups, military professions, educational groups, and ethnic groups.

The questions referring to immigrant young women are more difficult to answer and the answers take their cue from my definition of “immigrant”, which I use to delineate all those not born in Eretz-Israel regardless of age at immigration and length of time in the country prior to their death. When noting those arriving during the mass immigration of the 1950s I will usually use the term “new immigrants”, to differentiate from the more veteran ones.

Age at the time of immigration is an important factor, as the situation and experiences of a girl who arrived aged six were obviously different from those arriving at sixteen. This variation in immigration age is pivotal to one of my broader research goals: examining the differences, if any, between groups of native and foreign-born FMC in order to ask how long one remains an “immigrant”, not only at heart but also in praxis.

The mass immigration rapidly doubled, and within a little more than a decade tripled the country’s population.11 During these years large groups of new immigrant women, particularly those of Mizrachi origin, were not drafted. Appearing before the Knesset Security and Foreign Affairs Committee in 1953, Shimon Peres, director of the Ministry of Defense, explained that one reason so many potential female conscripts did not serve in the IDF in these years was the reluctance of Oriental families to allow their daughters to serve in the military. Girls were encouraged to marry at a young age or request a religious deferment.12 Thus, the IFMC is not representative of all new immigrant Jewish young women of their age group by virtue of the very fact that they served in the army. As for the more veteran immigrants the situation differed. A large number of secular, veteran, and immigrant young women of European origin, comprising the largest group of veteran immigrant girls in the State, served in the IDF, as did girls from certain groups among the veteran Oriental immigrants. Fulfilling most of the criteria mentioned vis-à-vis native-born FMC, it appears that the
IFMC were a broad random sampling of the female immigrants serving in the IDF. 13

These questions lead to a salient issue that lies at the basis of the entire study. Only 35% of each year’s potential female recruits were drafted. If the IFMC composed slightly over 40% of the total FMC of the decade, they represent less than 15% of the young women. Although they do not necessarily represent all the young female immigrants of the mass immigration, they adopted enough of a Zionist ethos to be drafted and thus, pertinent for examining the extent to which young immigrants were actually absorbed into the Zionist culture, adopting native trappings.

ABSORPTION PROCESSES AMONG YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

In their study of immigrants and society, Kovacs and Cropley 14 explore the absorption process of adults compared to young immigrants. While adult immigrants experience the conflict between well-established patterns of behavior and the way of life in the receiving society, immigrant children appear to have other adjustment problems, in some cases leading to rebelliousness or even to “personal disorganization”. Conflicts with parental authority are often exacerbated due to clashes between the expected traditional patterns brought from countries of origin and those of the new country. Although children seem to perform the necessary socio-cultural adjustments to the receiving society at a much faster rate than adults, they often have a long-standing undercurrent of alienation from that society. The estrangement is evident in schooling or in an incongruity from their parents. The exposure to two socializing agencies, parents and peers, can create a pull–push dynamic between alienation and assimilation, resulting in subtle but long-lasting differences between even those children who immigrated at a relatively young age and their native peers. 15

An added factor in the difficult equation of alienation versus assimilation expression among young female immigrants in the Yishuv and early State was the expectation that immigrants, particularly young ones, would seamlessly assimilate into the cultural fabric of Zionist society by relinquishing their Diaspora-rooted behavior and adopting a Zionist ethos and etiquette. Gender here is an additional factor. Were girls and young women, traditionally kept closer to home than their brothers, more influenced by home life and parental expectations of obedience to traditional values than their male counterparts? The lives of the IFMC are compared to their native counterparts in order to discern the extent to which they had become
“Israeli” by the time of their death. An indication of the extent of the assimilation–alienation dialectic among certain young females depended on their age at immigration and the length of time in the country until their death.

WOMEN SOLDIERS IN THE IDF

We need to understand the nature of the military framework in which the group served and ultimately met their deaths. During the War of Independence, following the mutilation by Arabs of a woman soldier’s body near Kibbutz Gevulot, women were immediately removed from combat units and sent to rear units, serving primarily as clerical personnel, providing medical assistance, and other auxiliary functions.

Although a few women continued unofficially as combatants during the war, this was not the norm and after an amendment to the National Service Law in 1952, women were forbidden to fulfill combat roles or tasks that required physical strength. Service was limited to twelve professions, which rose to 210 (of a total of 709) army trades and professions. Although all army corps were officially open to women, they along with men were drafted for various non-defense positions. Women served as teachers to illiterate new immigrants, sent to frontier settlements, allocated to agricultural work, and served in Ma’abarot, border villages, and new kibbutzim.

No exact records and numbers of women recruited or serving in the army were kept during the first five years of the Women’s Army Corps. However, it appears that in the 1950s between 4,000 and 7,000 served in the IDF at any one time, with women comprising 10% to 20% of all soldiers. During the decade approximately 40,000 women served in the IDF, while fewer than 35% of the potential female inductees of each year were eligible to serve in the army. Thirty percent of women of induction age received a marital deferment, 20% a religious deferment, and over 15% a medical deferment or were rejected due to lack of education.

Among new immigrants, there was a discrepancy in the induction of a large number of males opposed to the much smaller number of females, which manifested in several spheres including place of birth and sex breakdown between native and immigrant military casualties. While 70% of the male military casualties were born outside Eretz-Israel, only 41% of female military casualties were. Furthermore, 2% of immigrant military casualties were female while they comprised 6% of the native military casualties. Similar to all periods of the IDF’s existence, women comprised approximately 3% of the total number of military casualties.
The IFMC came from eleven countries, the greatest contingent from Germany, followed by Rumania, and Iraq. The large number of German-born IFMC derived from the large German immigration to Palestine during the Fifth Aliya (1929–1939), and particularly the “Youth Aliya” movement that brought unaccompanied children and teenagers from Germany to Palestine throughout the 1930s. Of the five IFMC who lost their lives in 1950, two, Lemberger and Kalmanovitch, were born in Germany and came to Palestine as part of the movement. Melech also came through Youth Aliya, albeit from Rumania after the war.

Close to 75% of the IFMC were born in Europe while less than 50% of the native-born FMC were from Europe. Over 25% of the IFMC as opposed to over 50% of their native-born counterparts were of Mizrahi origin, another indication of the low induction rate of immigrant Mizrahi women. Nevertheless, these numbers are much higher than the general percentage of all women soldiers of Mizrahi origin serving in the IDF, which stood at approximately 5%.

The fact that a proportionally large number of IFMC were born in Iraq was the result of immigration of Iraqi Jews from the 1920s onward. The youngsters of this group, arriving as children and teenagers, were educated during the Yishuv. Many were less tradition-bound than their counterparts during the 1950s. This can be seen when examining the stories of three of the IFMC of Iraqi origin.

Simcha Joyce Nissim (b. 1920, Iraq), the oldest of the IFMC of the group who fell in 1950, came to Eretz-Israel aged 14. Despite her traditional background, when conscripted into IDF intelligence during the War of Independence she was already an unmarried adult of 28, a rarity in traditional families. It was easier for her to make personal choices regarding army service without a family struggle. Adina Barashi (b. 1934, Iraq), was brought to Eretz-Israel as a young child. Although they were traditional, her family provided her with a Zionist education and allowed her to join a secular youth movement, which paved the way for her army induction in 1953. Barashi served in the Military Police and lost her life on active duty in 1954 two days short of her 20th birthday. In contrast, Nadia Mantzur (b. 1940, Iraq), came to Israel with her family in the early 1950s as part of the mass immigration. Her observant parents opposed her decision to join the IDF, in which she enlisted against their wishes and consent. Mantzur fell on active duty in the Air Force within a few weeks after enlisting.
Three chronological issues are significant when examining the various categories of IFMC: the year they immigrated, age at immigration, and the length of time that they had spent in the country at the time of their death.

One-third came to Eretz-Israel before WWII, 25% arrived during the War, and close to 30% immigrated after the establishment of the State. Each group was a product of a different Zionist era, regardless of country of origin or even their age at the time of immigration. Those arriving before 1939 became part of the Yishuv, numbering somewhat over 400,000, and experienced part of the Arab uprising between 1936 and 1939. Wartime arrivals were aware of a possible German conquest of the country and the concern for the safety of those under Nazi rule. Those arriving between the end of WWII and establishment of the State often had bitter wartime experiences under occupation or collaborative rule and experienced the conflicts between the various underground movements in Eretz-Israel and the struggle for statehood. Those arriving after 1948 entered an Israel facing the challenges of a massive influx of immigrants swelling its population, and experienced first-hand the government attempts to impose a doctrine of “statism” upon its inhabitants.

The average IFMC age of immigration was nine, although ages ranged from one year to twenty years. Slightly more than 33% were six or younger, having only scanty memories of their country of birth. Ostensibly, these girls should have been the most likely to seamlessly blend with their new surroundings, making them “almost sabras”. Almost 25% were fourteen and above at the time of their arrival—the most difficult ages for teenagers attempting to assimilate into a new society. For this group, successful educational, linguistic, and cultural absorption was imperative for them to “overwrite” their existing cultural background while making active attempts to identify with the local ethos and etiquette.25

Although the average IFMC had been in Israel for 11 years at the time of her death, in practice, the numbers ranged between three and twenty-two years. While close to 60% had been in Israel more than ten years before they died, 20% of the young women had been in Israel six years or less.

A large number of the IFMC were not “new immigrants” at the time of their death, but were considered veteran immigrants. Thus one questions whether their non-native birth status or their potentially different cultural upbringing was expressed in any form in the story of their lives, army service, death, and commemoration.
PERSONAL STATISTICS

One of the first outward expressions of a person is their name, and the IFMC usually had either biblical names (close to 25% were called either “Leah” or “Ruth”), or double names (Mazal-Fortuna, Zehava-Golda), where the Hebrew one was a translation of the original Diaspora name. None of the IFMC had Sabra names such as “Aviva”, “Michal”, or “Pnina”, common among the native FMC. Despite the establishment’s encouragement, none of the IFMC Hebraicized their last name, a common practice among various Diaspora-born Israelis at that time.26 It is difficult to determine whether this was a result of their young age or a cultural attachment to their families and upbringing.

Close to 15% of the IFMC had lost both their parents by the time they were drafted compared to none of their native counterparts.27 In all cases, the parents had been killed during the Holocaust. Some of these girls had immigrated prior to the war as unaccompanied minors while their parents were still alive. Rina Lemberger had immigrated to Palestine before the outbreak of WWII, leaving her parents in Germany. Only after the war’s end did she learn of their deaths and the fact that she was now alone. In other cases the orphans were themselves Holocaust survivors, arriving either during or after the war, and were among the youngest and oldest IFMC.

Geula Yitzhaki (b. 1939) was the youngest orphan IFMC, having been brought to Eretz-Israel from Athens in 1943, shortly after the Nazis killed her parents. She attended school in Ra’anana and then spent time in Kibbutz Nachsholim. In 1957 she was drafted into the Ordnance Corps and fell in the line of duty later that year. Hava Goldman (b. 1928) was the oldest orphan IFMC. She lost her family when they were transported from the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz, surviving as she was already incarcerated in a women’s camp in Innsbrück. After the war she was transferred to Sweden by the Red Cross and spent several months with relatives in France. In 1948 she moved to Israel. She joined the IDF in November 1951 aged 23 and served in the artillery. She fell in the line of duty in early 1952.28

Almost 50% of the IFMC were Holocaust survivors, making 20% of all FMC Holocaust survivors, similar to their proportion in the Israeli population of the 1950s.29 Hanna Yablonka’s study of Holocaust survivors in the IDF during the War of Independence, states that in most cases the newcomers’ painful past was largely ignored during the struggle for national survival.30 A similar state of affairs existed during the following years regarding the IFMC who were Holocaust survivors. This may have resulted from the tendency of people who have been traumatized to become
introverted, preferring to deal with the minutiae of daily life rather than broader issues. Yet the past, and in particular the trauma of having lost some or even all close family members, were in some cases contributory factors to their death.

Both native and foreign-born married women fought and fell in the War of Independence. Nine percent of all women soldiers were married, fourteen were killed in battle, including two married women with children. Although married women were exempt from IDF conscription, 10% of the IFMC were married upon enlisting during the War of Independence when married women without children went to war.

One of these was Zehava Harari (Golda Frodson) who had immigrated from Kovno, Lithuania, with her parents at the age of six. She was conscripted into the IDF in July 1948, serving first in the military police and later in the infantry. She died in March 1950 of tuberculosis contracted during her army service. Another was Ruth Rothenberg (Weinberg) (b. 1930 in Piastare, Rumania). She immigrated with her parents at age five and was drafted in May 1948. Having contracted kidney disease in the army she was transferred to the Ministry of Defense where she married and continued working sporadically throughout her illness. She died of medical complications in 1957. No native-born married women were among the FMC.

The IFMC differed from their native counterparts in religious observance. Although there are statistics regarding the number of religious Jews (by various definitions) in Israel from the 1980s onward, there are no precise statistics during the first years of the State. Based on election results of the time, one may deduce that approximately 20% of Israeli Jews were religious Jews.

During the War of Independence religious girls served in the IDF. From 1950 onward growing numbers of both immigrant and native-born girls took advantage of the clause granting exemption of service to religious young women. Ultimately, 30% of potential female draftees were not conscripted, citing that they were orthodox. Nevertheless, there were traditional and religious Jewish immigrant young women who served in the IDF, many from the religious kibbutz movement.

Only 10% of the IFMC were observant, as opposed to close to 20% of their native-born counterparts, mirroring the percentage of religious Jews in the general population. The scant number of religious IFMC in comparison with their native-born counterparts appears to be indicative of the large number of observant Mizrahi new immigrants and/or observant veteran non-native Mizrahi families opposing the idea of their daughters serving in the IDF.
Some religious or traditional young women among the Mizrachi immigrants served in the army. Nadia Mantzur came from a religious home but only considered herself “traditional” and thus desired to serve in the IDF. Rina Lemberger reached the religious Kibbutz Ein Hanatziv in the Bet Shean Valley from where she joined the IDF in 1948 and lived until her death in 1950.37

In one sphere related to religious observance there were similarities between certain IFMC, particularly those who had been in Israel since early childhood, and their native-born counterparts: some girls were no longer observant even though they had come from an observant home. Yosef Tirosh (Weinberg), Ruth Rothenberg’s husband, remembers that after their marriage her orthodox father would force him to accompany him weekly to synagogue although both Tirosh and his wife had become secular as teenagers.38 The same held true for Shulamit (Celine) Ben-Kiki (b. 1938) who immigrated with her observant family from Alexandria in 1949, joined the ordnance corps in 1956, and was killed in a car accident while on active duty in 1957.

There were also geographical differences between the immigrant and native FMC. Almost twice as many IFMC lived on a moshav or a kibbutz prior to their induction, as did their Israel-born counterparts. This may be an indication of the fact that unaccompanied child and teenage immigrants were often sent to agricultural settlements as part of Youth Aliya or if arriving with families, were at times sent to kibbutzim as a requisite part of their education. Nevertheless, immigrant children, such as Nadia Mantzur, frequently left the kibbutz framework to return to their families and assist them financially. Similarly, immigrant families who had moved to kibbutzim often found it difficult to adjust to kibbutz life and left soon after.

The situation regarding immigrant children on moshavim, cooperative agricultural communities, differed somewhat. After the Holocaust there was bitter competition between the kibbutzim and the moshavim over allocations of immigrant children.39 Although the kibbutzim absorbed more young people from Youth Aliya than did the moshavim, young immigrants on moshavim often integrated better socially and culturally than did their kibbutz counterparts. During the mass immigration moshavim were more attractive to Mizrachi immigrants than kibbutzim, as they retained the family as the center of social life.40
FORMAL AND INFORMAL EDUCATION

During the first decade dramatic changes took place in Israeli education. The mass immigration brought about a five-fold increase in the number of children eligible for compulsory education while the State Education Act, passed by the Knesset in August 1953, transformed education from a loose federation of four political “streams” into a systematic state system under the supervision of a cabinet minister. Pupils enrolled in one of three educational systems: State, State-Religious, and Independent.  

It appears that the IFMC were far more educated than the general Israeli population of the 1950s, although less educated than their native-born counterparts. Close to 60% of the IFMC had completed at least one year of post-elementary school education, similar to the average among all women soldiers in the IDF during the early 1950s. In comparison, nearly 80% of the Israeli-born FMC had studied for at least a year after elementary school before leaving the school system. A similar gap between the two groups exists when examining high school education. Over 40% of the IFMC completed high school as opposed to 60% of their native-born counterparts. As only 12% of each elementary school graduating class during those years continued on to high school, these numbers reflected the IDF decision of the early 1950s to draft only those who had a full elementary and preferably also a partial or full high school education. Almost 50% of females in the IDF in 1952 had completed high school.

Regarding post-high school education, the gap between immigrant and native-born FMC narrowed. Fourteen percent of IFMC and 17% of their native counterparts had studied in a post-high school framework. This was considerably higher than the average among female soldiers in the early 1950s, which stood at less than 2%. All the IFMC who continued on for post-high school training had emigrated from Europe as teenagers and trained for professions (teaching, nursing) that they continued during their army service. For example, Leah Moshkowitz (b. 1924 in Munkac, Czechoslovakia) immigrated through Youth Aliya in 1940. After completing high school she studied nursing at Belinson Hospital. She was drafted in July 1948 and after the War she signed on for the permanent army as an operating room nurse until her death in early 1951.

The gap between immigrant and native-born FMC narrowed further when it came to professional training, much of which was given during high school. Approximately 25% of both immigrant and native-born FMC received professional training in sewing, clerical work, teaching, and nursing. This reflects both the socio-economic and educational tendencies of
young women—immigrants and native-born—being inducted into the IDF.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, there were active young movements in Israel along the entire ideological, political, and educational spectrum. Belonging to a youth movement was not only a political statement; for immigrant youth it was also an active statement of intent regarding absorption into Israeli society. During the 1950s and 1960s, about 40% of teenagers belonged to some organized youth movement.43

When comparing youth movement participation, there are few aspects in which the chasm between the immigrant and native-born FMC is as blatant. Fewer than 15% of the IFMC had been members of youth movements, as opposed to almost 66% of their native-born counterparts. Furthermore, 66% of the IFMC who were members of youth movements had immigrated as small children, and thus their chance of socialization into Zionist society was greater than for those who had immigrated at a later age.

One example was Ruth Lorch who had emigrated from Germany with her family at age three. She completed her schooling in Jerusalem where she had been an active member of the Scouts, and also served in the paramilitary Gadna organization prior to her army service. In 1950 she joined the infantry where she served until she fell in the line of duty in 1951. An exception to this rule was the Hungarian-born Esther Palner (b. 1941) who came to Israel as a teenager, and during her high school years belong to the “Hamaccabi Hatzair” youth organization. She was drafted in 1950 and served in the Air Force until her death in a military car accident in 1960.

MILITARY STATISTICS

During the 1950s almost all branches of the military were open to women, albeit in non-combat positions, and FMC could be found in ten branches of the army and in the Ministry of Defense.44 Most FMC lost their lives at the rank of private or private first class, the most common ranks held by conscripted soldiers of those years during their compulsory army service. Fifteen percent of the IFMC were officers or worked in the MOD compared to 7% of their native-born counterparts, testimony to their serving in the permanent army or having been trained for professional duties such as in the medical corps.

One military sphere in which there is a marked difference between native-born and IFMC is the branch in which they served. Almost 25% of the IFMC served in infantry and less than 5% in Nahal. In comparison,
almost 33% of native-born FMC served in the Nahal, which aimed at settling or reinforcing kibbutzim or moshavim. Between 1952 and 1961 more than 20,000 soldiers passed through Nahal in 684 groups of soldiers, and each Nahal soldier spent between twenty and twenty-four months working on kibbutzim. Nahal graduates established eight of the ten kibbutzim founded between 1954 and 1961. These groups were often formed from young men and women who had been members of pioneering youth movements, or youth groups of native and immigrant youngsters from Youth Aliya who were being educated on kibbutzim, graduates of agricultural schools, volunteers, and new immigrants the IDF decided not to train for military combat or professions.

The dearth of IFMC in Nahal came from their relatively low rate of participation in pioneering youth movements, the fact that even when brought to kibbutzim through Youth Aliya they often left the kibbutz, and joining Nahal was primarily a “native” undertaking, requiring not only ideological commitment but also practical participation in precursor organizations. Rivka Haimoff (b. 1934) is an example of an IFMC who served in Nahal. Following her immigration from Bulgaria to Israel at 14, she lived on Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. Having joined the kibbutz youth, she joined their Nahal group and was drafted two months short of her 17th birthday. Haimoff served in Nahal until her death in 1951, at age seventeen.

A noticeable dichotomy between immigrant and native-born FMCs was their year of death, age at the time of death, and cause of death. Half of the IFMC lost their lives by the end of 1952, compared with only 25% of their native-born counterparts. The largest number of female military casualties died at age nineteen (24% immigrants, 63% natives); however, at the time of their death almost 50% of the IFMC were 24 years of age or older compared to none of the native FMC. This may reflect the older age at which some of the immigrant women were drafted, depending on their age at immigration or the fact of their being trained professionals in the permanent army, often in the medical corps.

Without knowing the individual stories of the FMC it is difficult to determine their cause of death. During this period there were several phrases the army used that either described or referred to the soldier’s cause of death. The term “died of illness” was used for those who had died of natural causes; (“died”) alluded to suicide; “fell” or “fell in the line of duty” was used in many situations such as car accidents, training accidents, and even in the case of one native-born female military casualty who was bitten by a poisonous snake. “Fell in battle” was used for combat situations, and in such cases the memorial Yizkor book often included a more detailed
explanation. An example was of a native-born FMC, killed by a sniper’s bullet near Masada, for whom it states, “fell being shot by an ambush”. However not all cases were clear-cut. Rivka Haimoff, the Nahal soldier from Yad Mordechai, had been depressed and committed suicide; however her cause of death states “fell in the line of duty”. The IDF preferred to record as few suicides as possible and took into account that she had been living in a border settlement where she had to carry a gun at all times. Using what the army considered “benefit of doubt”, it presented her death as a result of an accidental shot that she may had set off in the wrong direction.

Similar to their native-born counterparts, the largest number of IFMC “died in the line of duty”; however 10% of the group committed suicide, compared with only 3% of their native counterparts. In the case of the immigrant young women, the decision to take their own life seems to have been exacerbated by their immigrant status: the fact that they were orphans with no social network or someone to turn to in time of crisis, their lack of supportive peer group due to their immigration as a late teenager, or their inability to find social cohesion due to the geographical and personal upheavals that they had undergone in their later youth. After the war, Rina Lemberger learned of her parents’ deaths in Germany and later became involved with a young man who informed her during her army service that he wished to end the relationship. Having no family to turn to and almost no friends, due to a difficult and relatively unsuccessful absorption process, she fell into a deep depression. She took her own life in the nearby town of Beit Shean while holding a picture of her former boyfriend. As she was not in uniform the local authorities were not aware that she served in the IDF and began searching for her family among the local kibbutzim. However, in view of the fact that she had committed suicide it did not occur to them to check with Kibbutz Ein Hanatziv. Only a few days later did the authorities contact the kibbutz secretary who traveled to Beit Shean and identified her body.

Another difference between immigrant and native-born FMCs is in commemoration. From the War of Independence onward, all soldiers were commemorated in various forms. These included official commemoration, such as the IDF *Yizkor* book, or semi-official commemoration such as *Gvilei Eish* (Scrolls of Fire). Similarly, there were private commemorations such as *Yizkor* books published by their families, friends, youth movements, schools, or kibbutz movements; memorial plaques, trophies, scholarships, and libraries; dedications of buildings, community centers, synagogues, torah scrolls, and naming children after the dead. Emmanuel Sivan’s study of the 1948 generation has shown that native-born soldiers or those
who immigrated as young children had a much greater chance of being commemorated both officially and unofficially than those who immigrated at a later age. New immigrants, therefore, stood little chance of receiving any type of memorialization. The same appears to hold true regarding the IFMC.

Other than being included in the official IDF *Yizkor* book, fewer than 15% of the IFMC were commemorated in any other form, as opposed to over 33% of their native counterparts. This lacuna may stem from the fact that some of the IMFC had no family or few friends who could commemorate them. Surviving parents of those who did have family were often unaware of the possibility of contributing to the quasi-official commemorative books other than the official IDF *Yizkor* book. It could also be that the friends of those who died did not consider their fallen immigrant female comrade’s cultural contributions significant enough to include them in these cultural memorial books. Of the IFMC who were commemorated, 66% had been in the country prior to age six. This may be a result of a different form of socialization that the IFMC had undergone in Israel compared to their native counterparts, and connected to the difference between the groups in education, youth movement participation, and army corps service.

**HOW “ISRAELI” WERE THE IFMC?**

Having examined the lives and deaths of the IFMC, I return to the questions: How “Israeli” were these young women by the time of their death? In what spheres do the differences between them and their native-born counterparts become significant markers of assimilation into Israeli society, or lack thereof? The lives and deaths of the IFMC appear to diverge from their native-born counterparts in eight of the issues examined.

*Ethnicity*—Fewer *Mizrachi* young women could be counted among the IFMC than among those FMC casualties born in Eretz-Israel. Bearing in mind the low percentage of *Mizrachi* women in general and new immigrant *Mizrachi* women in particular who served in the IDF, their army service appears to be an indicator of their ostensible assimilation into Israeli society and willingness to accept the Zionist military ethos.

*Education*—One-third of the IFMC had only partial or full elementary school education with no professional training, as opposed to only 7% of the native-born FMC. This difference points to various aspects in the IFMC’s foreign background. One was the fact that the young Holocaust survivors among them often had their education truncated. Another was
the economic hardship characterizing large numbers of immigrant families during their first years in Israel, who limited their daughters’ years of education so that they could rapidly join the workforce. A third was a strong connection to traditional gendered upbringing, more common among immigrants than among families in Eretz-Israel for many years. In view of the belief that girls should be trained primarily for a domestic role, in traditional Mizrachi families girls were often discouraged from continuing to study past the age of compulsory education. The educational factor was indicative of the IFMC’s immigrant status, their pre-immigration experiences, or the strongly traditional home they grew up in that had not yet absorbed a more liberal attitude towards the education of girls and young women.

A third issue is youth movement membership. Fewer than 15% of the IFMC were members of youth movements compared to over 60% native-born FMC; of the 15%, 60% had immigrated before their sixth birthday. Interviews with immigrant young women who had served in the IDF indicate that in some cases, particularly where young girls immigrated soon before completing their education, the question of joining a youth movement never arose. Some stated that even had they thought to join a youth movement, their traditional parents opposed that step, claiming that the time spent in movement activities should be used caring for siblings, home, etc. In many immigrant families finances were tight and young teenagers were expected to work after school to support the family, leaving little time for movement activity. There were young women who stated that for the first years after immigration they felt little connection to the Israeli youth movements, viewing their ideological fervor as childish. In comparison, they, who had already experienced so much in their young lives, were adults.52 Youth movement membership was an indicator of assimilation and the lack thereof among the IFMC is indicative of a distance between their social and ideological framework and that of normative Israeli society.

The army branch they served—The largest percentage of native-born FMC served in Nahal (30%) compared to less than 5% of the IFMC. As Nahal groups were often an outgrowth of youth movements, this factor can be seen as a continuation of the previous one. Although an ostensibly purely military matter, the army branch in which they served indicates constant cultural differences between the groups.

Age and year of death—Over 25% of the IFMC lost their lives at age twenty-four and over, as opposed to none of the native-born female military casualties, all of whom lost their lives by age 21. Over 50% of the IFMC died during the first three years of the decade as opposed to only 20% of their
native-born counterparts. While the year of death appears to be a random issue, the fact that many of the IFMC were considerably older than their native-born counterparts is in part connected to their age at the time of conscription. Unlike native-born young women who were conscripted at approximately age eighteen (although certain women, studying for professions needed by the army, were accepted to the military reserves and conscripted later), unmarried immigrant women arriving in their early 20s were still subject to conscription.

_Cause of death_—Over 10% of the IFMC committed suicide, contrasted to fewer than 3% of their native counterparts. Contributory factors were the lack of family, social circle, and support groups due to their immigrant background, loss of both parents in the Holocaust, and inability to adapt to local social norms.

_Commemoration_—While 33% of the FMC born in Eretz-Israel were commemorated in some form or other, less than 15% of the IFMC were commemorated, and of those commemorated, 66% had immigrated before their sixth birthday. As commemoration was usually carried out by family, but even more so by schools, youth movement comrades, or fellow soldiers from cohesive army units who often had a shared prior history, the IFMC was disadvantaged by foreign background, lack of participation in youth movements, or cohesive units settled on kibbutzim. Even in cases where parents of IFMC could have promoted their military commemoration, this response to the loss of their daughters in the army was obviously still not part of their family’s new cultural baggage.

Thus, even those young women who had spent more than half of their lives in Eretz-Israel differed significantly from native-born young women of the same ages. Some differences were the result of cultural upbringing at home, which at times contrasted sharply with local ethos and custom, often causing friction between parents and children but ultimately leaving its mark. Others stemmed from economic factors such as the financial pressures to which immigrant families were more vulnerable.

An additional set of differences came from a different type of vulnerability—social exclusion, which may have been more common among immigrant girls arriving in their teens, or lacking extended family, peer support groups, etc. Individual factors that are almost impossible to fathom as a whole, played a role in formulating each girl’s personality, choices, and in certain cases, ultimate fate.
LONG-TERM REPERCUSSIONS OF THE
CHILD IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

How long does a newcomer to a country remain an “immigrant”? How many years do young immigrants retain characteristics that separate them from the native population? Even when immigration legalities are long over, there is not always a direct correlation between an immigrant’s legal status and their cultural and psychological assimilation into the fabric of a new society.\(^5\)

Kovacs and Cropley show how the removal of the legal status of immigrant is a distinct process from the socio-cultural incorporation into the receiving society.

They find a strange currency of outlandish names and the very seasons curiously rearranged or even reversed . . . they will meet a whole host of social customs which differ markedly from what has always been right in the past . . . they may find that gestures which they have always thought friendly and civil have become impolite, that the order in which foods are eaten is changed, or that paying for a ride on a bus involves a mysterious ritual which they cannot manage without undue embarrassment. They are truly strangers.\(^5\)

For many years following immigration, immigrant children face a unique set of difficulties. Younger ones can often grasp the nuances of a different culture more rapidly than adults. However, in cases where they continue to live with their family, they often find themselves living with parental pressure to continue a former way of life inside the house while trying to assimilate into the new culture of their peers.\(^5\) This appears to have been a problem among certain IFMC who ultimately enlisted in the IDF against their parents’ wishes. Problems of adjustment, particularly when there is a clash of cultures, often lead to issues of rebelliousness. In Israel, scholars have noted long-term problems among immigrant children of challenges to authority, truancy, difficulty in adolescent social adjustment. Other long-term problems arise when parents object to the adoption of a local way of life among children, particularly freedom of movement and choice of friends permitted. These two issues appear to be most difficult when dealing with adolescent girls.\(^5\) In the case of the IFMC, they appear to have received expression in the low numbers of girls who had been members of youth movements.

Other long-term repercussions among immigrant children are those dealing with mental health and social maladjustment. Particularly in cases
where the immigrant children’s home environment is best suited to helping them adjust to a distant society, the children find themselves falling somewhere between the two cultures, fitting well into neither and being alienated from both.\textsuperscript{57} This seems to have occurred among some of the IFMC arriving in their early teens, making their way from parental home to kibbutz and back.

In cases where immigrant children arriving at any age are unaccompanied by parents or family and face a receiving society on their own or in the framework of a children’s group, a different set of problems arise. These children lack the cushion of a family nest throughout their immigration process that could mitigate the immediate need for a peer support group. The urgency, due to lack of any family support, that some of them express in their desire to socially integrate with their contemporaries, is at times perceived by local children as vulnerability and weakness, thus hampering their assimilation into a new social group.\textsuperscript{58} This was the case with several of the IFMC whose suicides were deeply rooted in the combination of their lack of any family or peer group support at a time of personal crisis.

Another problem characterizing unaccompanied immigrant minors is the children’s own subliminal desire to preserve something of their previous culture and thus maintain something from their previous home. In certain cases, this may cause a cultural clash with the dominant society in which they live.\textsuperscript{59}

A final problem plaguing immigrant children for many years is that of a geographical-cultural time gap. While immigrant parents may be out of step with current practices of the receiving society, they are also separated from their old society, lacking continuous interaction with its changing culture. They therefore may not only sponsor folklore appropriate to a distant society but also cling to an idealized memory of the manner in which it functioned years before.\textsuperscript{60} This can remain a problem for immigrant children for years after their immigration, long into their teens until adulthood or becoming independent of their parental home, such as after induction into the army.

\section*{CONCLUSIONS}

Pressures of being an immigrant can continue for many years after immigration, even for children who are ostensibly more flexible than adults and are supposed to assimilate more rapidly into a receiving society. The IFMC were no exception. Even young girls who had immigrated before age ten
could carry difficult cultural baggage and few were exempt from its repercussions to some degree. The question of how deeply these repercussions influenced their lives, and at times, even their deaths, is one to which there can never be a precise answer.

Notes


5. All statistics dealing with fallen soldiers are taken from the *Yizkor* Book of the Israeli Ministry of Defense unless specified otherwise. The most accessible form is the computerized *Yizkor* Book of the Israeli Ministry of Defense (www.izkor.mod.gov.il)


7. Yadin and Maklef’s arguments, Maklef to Chief of Staff, Manpower Division and head of the Women’s Army Corps, 28 August 1949, 64, 1551/51, IDF Archives [hereafter, IDFA]; Meeting of the Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, 7562/13a, 24 July 1950, Israel State Archives [hereafter ISA].

8. Head of the Women’s Army Corps to the Chief of Staff, 9 December 1949, 48, 183/62, IDFA.

9. Report of the Manpower Division, women’s army service in the IDF as per the order of the Chief of Staff from 26 January, May 1960, 30 63/65, IDFA.
10. Survey of women’s army service, head of army manpower division to the Chief of Staff, 11 January 1961, 44, 1/64, IDFA.
12. Knesset Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, 24 February 1953, 7563/9a, 7–21, ISA. In 1950, 25.4% of potential female inductees received a religious deferment from the IDF.
13. Personal files of IDF soldiers during the 1950s are closed by statute; it is impossible to determine the percentage of soldiers born in Israel and abroad.
18. Ze’ev Drori, Utopia in Uniform (Sede-Boker, 2000) [Hebrew].
19. During the early 1950s the proportions of foreign-born among male and female military casualties was higher than the average, and the numbers of native-born casualties, particularly among women, grew as the decade progressed. In 1950, of the 117 male IDF soldiers who lost their lives while on active duty, 94 (80%) were born abroad. Among the female military casualties, the number was 5 out of 6 (83%).
20. Other countries of origin were Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Morocco, Hungary, Egypt, Lithuania, and Greece.
22. Nearly 5% of those serving in the IDF in the 1950s were of Mizrahi origin.
27. In 1950, 21% of the immigrants and 10% of the general population were orphaned from both parents. Moshe Sikron and B. Gil, *The Jewish Population According to Sex, Age and Country of Birth* (Jerusalem, 1956) [Hebrew].

28. Erez Ya’akovovitch (ed), *And We Shall Remember Our Children—The Fallen of the Shfifon Battalion Who Fell in Battle and in the Line of Duty* (Carmiel, 1988) [Hebrew].


38. Interview with Yosef Tirosh Weinberg, 3 August 2002.


42. Native-born FMC who proceeded to higher education were all also of European descent.

44. Military branches included the infantry, Medical Corps, Air Force, Intelligence Corps, Communications, Ordnance, Military Police, Nahal, Artillery, and the General Corps.
47. Interview with Dr. Eli Tzur, Kibbutz Zikim, who taught for many years on Kibbutz Yad Mordechai.
48. Interview with Dr. Ya’akov Tzur, then secretary of Kibbutz Ein Hanatziv, Ramat Gan, 5 June 2000.
50. Sivan, 76–78; Ilana Shamir, Commemoration and Remembrance: Israel’s Way of Molding its Collective Memory Patterns (Tel-Aviv, 1996 [Hebrew].
52. Interviews with Judith Berkowitz, Haifa, 5 August 2005; Yocheved Goldstein, Ramat-Gan, 7 May; Margaret Deutsch, Ramat-Gan, 7 May; Dina Abirbul, Tel-Aviv, 14 May 2007.
57. Steven Vertovec (ed), Migration and Social Cohesion (Cheltenham, 1999) 22.
60. Kovacs and Cropley, Immigrants and Society, 54.