
During the past decade, many scholars have concentrated their attention on problems of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel.¹ This is only to be expected, since this wave of immigration of about 850,000 newcomers significantly changed the demographic, economic, social, and cultural situation in Israel. This great exodus has its specifics and in many aspects differs from other waves of Jewish immigration. Nevertheless, some aspects of this unique phenomenon as well as its consequences for Israeli society still have remained poorly researched and require further investigation. In particular, our knowledge of some social and cultural features of this immigration “portrait” is far from complete.

The Russian version of the book by Larisa Fialkova and Maria Yelenevskaya (2005) was an attempt to fill this gap in ethnocultural inquiry and analysis.² The book became something of an event in social research in Russia on what can be termed “Russian Israel.” Unfortunately, like most publications in Russian, this book was inaccessible to a non-Russian readership, and an English translation was published in 2007 by Wayne State University Press.


² Maria Yelenevskaya and Larisa Fialkova, *Russkaya Ulitsa v Evreiskoi Strane. Issledovanie folklora emigrantov 1990 godov v Israile* (‘Russian Street in the Jewish State: The Study of the 1990s Immigrants’ Folklore’) (Moscow: The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2005) [Russian].
The authors adopt a largely qualitative approach, common in research in anthropology and cultural studies. They have used it to great benefit in their other works and carefully describe here their methodology and sources. The main source for this book is their own field material, principally texts of oral narratives and “life histories” of the immigrants from the FSU. From 1999 to 2002, Maria Yeleneskaya and Larisa Fialkova conducted 123 face-to-face in-depth interviews with newcomers. Their other important sources are the Israeli Russian-language press and Internet—forums, blogs, web-discussions, etc.—as they play a growing role both in immigrant life and in folklore transmission. The authors also used their own field ethnographic diary. These commentaries, notes and observations are of great interest, the more so because the authors are both researchers and ‘insider’ participants in the immigration wave of the 1990s. Thus, this book presents not only academic research on a problem complex, but also provides insider perception of this problem through the prism of personal experience. Numerous photographs are not just impressive illustrations but constitute additional sources for anthropological analysis.

Chapter 2 centers on the impact of the emigration on the collective identity of ex-Soviet Jews as well as the transformation of the newcomers’ identity in the society of the country of immigration. Although the Jewish mass exodus of 1990s has been investigated by many scholars, L. Fialkova and M. Yeleneskaya suggest their own classification of the reasons behind the Jewish mass emigration from the post-Soviet states. The authors single out its nine main factors behind this mass emigration. This classification, based on the careful analysis of an array of texts, largely correlates with results of scholars who have conducted earlier sociological and anthropological research. At the same time, some driving factors included in this classification are quite new, such as what they term the avalanche—“everyone else has done it” (p. 46). However, as a result of the upsurge in disappointment among many newcomers in Israel, the avalanche gradually came to a halt and has not been adequately studied by scholars.

The authors stress that in the USSR, Jews were viewed as an ethnic group (p. 51). I would add that most Soviet and post-Soviet Jews consider their “Jewish blood,” i.e. their genetic origin, as the main feature of their Jewishness. According to some scholars, ethnic origin was and remains for them more important than Judaism,