

Мария Еленевская и Лариса Фиалкова. Русская улица в еврейской стране. Исследование фольклора эмигрантов 1990-х в Израиле. (Maria Elenevskaia and Larisa Fialkova. Russian Street in a Jewish Country). Investigation of the Folklore of Emigreees of the 1990s in Israel). 2 vols. Moscow: Academy of Sciences, 2005. 352 pp. (vol. 1). 242 pp. (vol. 2). ISBN 5-201-00887-9. \$26.95 (paper)

Elenevskaia and Fialkova's research is based primarily on a series of interviews with Russian-speaking immigrants to Israel on their experiences. The authors emphasize that they are attempting to broaden the scope of folklore studies in various ways both through the inclusion of non-traditional data and theoretical approaches from other disciplines. Their data are augmented by material from the internet, from mass media, and from consumer culture (advertisements, store signs) (p. 157, vol. 2). Their interdisciplinary analysis relies on not only folklore theory, but also on research on sociology, political science, geography, social psychology, linguistics, and anthropology related to immigration (p. 10, vol. 1). The end result is a fascinating study of the folklore of these immigrants and the three broad sources of this material: traditional Russian culture, traditional Jewish culture, and Soviet culture (with minor influences from Islamic culture as well).

The Introduction and Chapter One of the first volume present a description of the rationale for considering the personal narrative to be a form of folklore and the field work. The second chapter details the informant pool, not all of which were Jewish, and who immigrated from a wide geographic area of the former Soviet Union, from the Central Asian and Caucasus and the European region (primarily Moscow, Kiev and Saint Petersburg) (p. 28, vol. 1). This huge wave of immigrants (the largest in Israeli history) has caused some significant disruption within the local populace about the expectations for immigrants to Israel. Not only did nearly 900,000 Russian speakers immigrate to the country between 1989 and 1999, but they also did not join with the local population as previous immigrants had done (pp. 11-13, vol. 1). Rather, they have kept their language and cultural practices intact for the most part and have maintained frequent contact with their "homeland." As a result, this group of people provides an opportunity to examine the motivations for this decision and how/whether folk culture is used to adapt to the new society in which they find themselves.

Chapter Two examines narratives about three main topics: reasons for immigration; the attitude toward Jewishness in the former Soviet

Union; remnants of Jewish tradition practiced before immigration. The goal of this chapter is to establish issues surrounding self-identity in a folk group and its role in immigrant folklore (p. 45, vol. 1). The authors note that the two waves of immigration from the (former) USSR, in the 70s and in the 90s, were motivated by significantly different purposes. The first group often immigrated for ideological reasons, while those twenty years later for economic reasons (p. 52, vol. 1). As a result, their attitudes toward Israel and Israeli culture are strikingly different, since the second wave did not feel affection for Israel in the same way that the first group did, which is a major factor in the preservation of their “native” culture.

Chapters Three and Four, the last in the first volume, incorporate material on three broad folkloric themes: feeling like a stranger within Israeli society (as contrasted to the same feeling in the former Soviet Union) and the notions of space and time. Traditional folklore reflects all three of these constructs and also serves as a means to cope with instability after immigration (p. 121, vol. 1). Chapter Three, which focuses on the notion of *svoi/chuzhoi* illustrates the complexity of this issue in this immigrant group. They apply traditional mythology (such that Russian speakers are “people,” while others are not) (p. 122, vol. 1), but also resist the trend among native Israelis to lump them all together into a uniform group (p. 126, vol. 1). That is to say, these immigrants bring with them Soviet (Russian) attitudes about the center and periphery, so that urban dwellers are “more prestigious” than Jews from the mountain (or rural) regions (p. 127, vol. 1). While they retain some identity as “Russians,” they also respond to the concept of *svoi/chuzhoi* (one’s own / other) within the Israeli context, so that they view themselves as “better” than Jews from Africa or than Arabs (pp. 145-149, pp.186-196, vol. 1).

The concepts of space and time are also heavily influenced by the Soviet experience. Ielenevskaia and Fialkova argue that these concepts are cultural constructs that are heavily influenced by traditional belief systems. Immigrants overwhelmingly celebrate “traditional” Soviet holidays, such as Victory Day in May, Women’s Day in March and New Year’s in December. Despite the fact that their informants scorned Soviet ideology, they believe the holidays were distinct from communism and merited preservation (p. 259, vol. 1). They also typically reacted negatively to the differences in workdays and times and calendrical holidays in Israel (p. 256, vol. 1). Space also played a significant role in immigrants’ stories, since they have been strongly influenced by

traditional concepts about the danger of border crossing (pp. 261-262, vol. 1). In addition, they often described a feeling of claustrophobia after moving from the largest country on earth (a fact that figured prominently in Soviet propaganda) to one of the smallest (p. 267, vol. 1). In addition, within the Soviet Union, Jews were associated with the east, while most of the informants from the European part of Russia believe that they are westerners, i.e., representatives of more civilized societies than the cultures of the east (p. 315, p. 332, vol. 1).

Volume Two consists of three chapters plus a conclusion and includes a bibliography, a list of informants and a brief glossary. Chapter Five deals with the concept of miracles and fate in immigrants' stories. Since most of the people interviewed are not particularly religious, most of them do not attribute such events to divine intervention. However, that does not change the fact that the stories about prophetic dreams and fate do conform to the structure of these stories in traditional lore. Throughout the book the authors describe how their informants' stories contain motifs from oral literature, particularly tales and legends, making reference to Aarne and Thompson's motif index. While not all of their assertions were convincing or bolstered by a large amount of data, those in this chapter are especially interesting and do support their conclusion that individual narratives borrow from folk narrative structure (p. 33, vol. 2).

Chapter Six examines how traditional and Soviet "folk" elements are reinterpreted within the Israeli context. Informants incorporated familiar characters, including the heroes of Soviet-era jokes (Chapaev, Lenin, Pet'ka) as well as those from films, fairy tales (Baba Iaga, Sleeping Beauty), "folk" characters (Ded Moroz and Snegurochka) and children's literature (Buratino), into jokes and humorous stories about their life in Israel and back in the former Soviet Union (such as the man who told a Russian bank clerk that his home address in Israel was on Lenin Street, rather than on Weitzman (the first president of Israel) Street; she wrote it down without batting an eye) (p. 84, vol. 2). The authors also discuss how Russian proverbs, memorates and legends, *chastushki* and *sadistskie stishki* (sadistic verses) help to cope with and give voice to the social difference Russian speakers experience after they have immigrated.

The last chapter in this volume is dedicated to the study of language attitudes, an important issue for immigrants. The authors examine their informants' reactions to Russian, the regional languages of the USSR (e.g., Ukrainian, Belarusian, Uzbek, etc.) and of Jews (e.g. Yiddish,

Tatskii), and Hebrew. The role of language in identity and society is often overlooked in folk material and it is a welcome addition to this study. They provide an interesting description of language policy in Israel and examine how Russian has managed to retain its strength within this context (pp. 105-108, vol. 2). Israelis are particularly disturbed that the Russian-speaking populace, unlike other immigrants to the country, has not adopted Hebrew or evince interest in Israeli culture (p. 143, vol. 2). This chapter also examines linguistic awareness and humorous narratives created by learning a second language (p. 144, vol. 2). One particularly interesting topic is an examination of cross-linguistic strategies employed by Israelis who use Russian and Hebrew phrases in their narratives, conversations and advertisements and in cross-linguistic word play as well (pp. 150-153, vol. 2).

The breadth of the study alone makes it a worthwhile read. The authors have provided a plethora of material on the immigrant experience that is valuable in and of itself. I only wish that each interview were available for further exploration in an archive (ideally on-line). In addition, the authors have applied a wide array of theoretical material that illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of folk studies and its relevance to social sciences in the contemporary world. This book is of use not only to folklorists, but to social scientists studying the former Soviet Union or immigration. Folklorists who study material culture (particularly food and clothing), ritual, and oral literature will find data that are of interest and that raise pertinent questions and make insightful conclusions about folk material within the context of the Soviet society. An abridged English version of this book has been accepted by Wayne State University Press. Portions of the Russian version are available online at <http://www.intersol.co.il/ispr/index.php?page=802>.

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