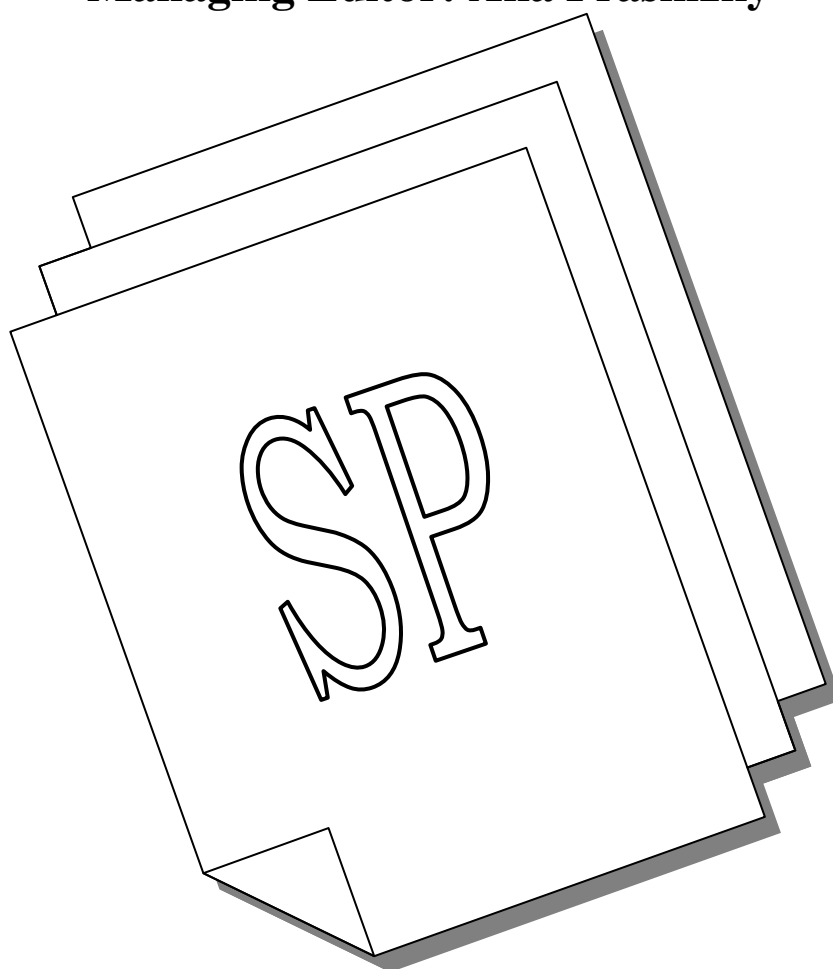


*Sociological Papers*

**Immigrant Scholars  
Write about Identity and Integration**

**Series Editor: Larissa Remennick  
Managing Editor: Ana Prashizky**



**Volume 12, 2007**

**Sponsored by the Leon Tamman Foundation for Research into Jewish  
Communities**



**SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY STUDIES  
BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

# **An Introduction: Russian Immigrant Scholars Write about Identity and Integration**

**Larissa Remennick**

The demise of the Soviet System in the late 1980s and 1990s coincided with a mass exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel and a few Western countries, depleting the ranks of Soviet Jewry but significantly fortifying Jewish communities in the host countries. Emigration and taking a fresh start in the new homelands became one of the key traits of collective experience and identity of former Soviet Jewry and a subject of multiple research projects. This special issue of “Sociological Papers” brings together seven articles about immigrant matters authored by the social scientists who are themselves immigrants of Russian-Jewish origin.

Up until recently, most social research on Russian Jewish immigration in Israel and in the West was conducted and published by the scholars who did not belong to this community, often did not have a fluent command of Russian or a first-hand experience of migration and resettlement. Over time, we see more and more Russian names among the authors of these books and papers, signifying gradual entry of immigrant scholars into the ranks of academic institutions in the host countries and their improving professional status. I believe that immigrant scholars, who are native Russian-speakers and insiders to the migration saga of the 1990s and early 2000s, bring a special insight to the study of immigrant problematics due to their cultural competence and natural access to fellow immigrants for in-depth and ethnographic research. Another advantage of immigrant scholars’ work is redressing power relations between researchers and their respondents or informants, whereby smaller social distance and cultural gap (vis-à-vis native researcher-immigrant informant situation) can lead to greater trust, sincerity and wealth of personal information gleaned. Yet, at the same time the researcher studying members of his/her own ethno-cultural group may need to make a special effort to distance him/herself from the informants and their narratives in order to preserve a neutral and unbiased stance in the course of data collection and analysis.

The articles in this volume belong to different research streams and styles: some are written as reflexive essays (Remennick, Kliger and Darieva), others are based on in-depth ethnographic study (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, Elias and Khvorostianova), and yet others report on traditional structured quantitative studies (Dahan and Donitsa-Schmidt, Kushnirovich). The authors of five articles are Israeli scholars - sociologists, folklorists, ethnographers and communication researchers; one contributor is American and one is German, representing the breadth of post-soviet immigrant experience in different host countries. The authors also belong to different generations, both in terms of age and period of emigration. The volume opens with my own essay, giving an overview of the pathways to and expressions of diasporic and transnational tendencies in the lives of former Soviet Jews in their new homelands. I show that social and cultural ties with co-ethnics within host countries and across the emerging Russian Jewish diaspora typify immigrant lifestyles everywhere, but they are most prevalent and intense in Israel and in Germany. This introductory article is followed by two essays by Russian-trained scholars living in the West: sociologist Sam Kliger from New York and social anthropologist Tsypylma

Darieva from Berlin. These authors reflect (in a very different manner) on the issues of identity, religious affiliation, and relations with the hegemonic mainstream societies among former Soviets who moved to the USA and Germany.

The remaining four articles represent specific research projects exploring different aspects of Russian-Jewish immigrant identity, economic adjustments, social and cultural integration. The article by Elias and Khvorostianova introduces the reader to the cultural life on the “Russian Street” in one specific Israeli city – Beer-Sheba, exploring the patterns of creation and “consumption” of cultural products within the Russian-speaking community. The article by Fialkova and Yelenevskaya offers a close-up on the perceptions of justice and experiences with the Israeli legal system among Russian immigrants by examining several case studies based on narrative analysis. Dahan’s and Donitsa-Schmidt’s paper reports on the structured study of identity and acculturation among students and their parents who originate from Soviet Central Asia (Bukharian Jews), showing a decisive power of Israelization versus cultural continuity among younger Bukharian Jews. The final article by Kushnirovich about immigrant entrepreneurs tests the hypothesis that women who run small businesses suffer of a double disadvantage, as immigrants and as women.

Altogether, the articles collected under this cover offer a range of insights on the immigrant experiences of Russian Jews in different national contexts of the host countries. Apart from their academic merit and potential policy implications, they signify the emerging intellectual force growing from the ranks of recent immigrants. In the years to come, this force will contribute to the overall understanding of global migration landscape and specifically its former Soviet and Jewish component. I hope that this issue, comprising one of the first attempts to bring together immigration studies conducted by immigrant social scientists, will be of interest to a broad range of readers – anthropologists, sociologists, historians, socio-linguists, and others.