

## BOOK REVIEW

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# Homemaking in the Russian-Speaking Diaspora: Material Culture, Language and Identity

By Maria Yelenevskaya and Ekaterina Protassova (eds.)  
Edinburgh University Press, E-book, 2023, 256 pages,  
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Home is a concept which has extensive and multiple reference points. It can refer to a physical space where people dwell, and it can extend to a country where people live or to which they feel they belong. It also has intangible and sentimental characteristics reflected in lifestyle, daily practices, objects, or in the language of individuals. In this sense, “home” goes beyond the physical boundaries and obtains a transnational character that enables immigrants to build “home” away from their home countries. Setting off from this viewpoint, *Homemaking in the Russian-Speaking Diaspora: Material Culture, Language and Identity* aims to present home-making practices of Russian-speaking immigrants in various countries. Comprising ten chapters, the contributors come from various disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, international relations, and migration studies. Although published in 2023, the submission of the chapters was completed in 2020. Therefore, as the editors highlighted, the studies cover the period before the Russia-Ukraine war and reflect the home perceptions of immigrants before the war.

This comprehensive study involves cases and research from various countries, namely Greece, the United Kingdom, Japan, Finland, Australia, the United States, Uruguay, Israel, and Türkiye. The studies are mainly interpretative and descriptive as most of the chapters are based on in-depth/semi-structured interviews with Russian-speaking immigrants who migrated from Russia and post-Soviet countries.

Interviews are mostly conducted in Russian and comprise of various immigrant profiles including different generations, genders, marital statuses, social classes, and migration backgrounds. Along with the interviews, the authors conducted face-to-face group discussions and archival research, collected data from social media and forums of Russian-speaking people, and accessed statistical data. Chapters also present passages from interviews, and photographs from archives and immigrants' homes. While immigrants have individual and unique narratives about their experiences, these visual collections and expressions from interviews enable readers to capture similarities between home-making practices in different countries.

The introduction of the book offers a clear framework that underpins the chapters and guides the readers throughout the book. Home is referred to as a communicative space, a symbol, and an identity. The changing meaning of home in migration is also discussed. The authors approach and investigate "home-making in Russian-speaking diaspora" within the scope of language, identity, and material cultures. The main questions revolve around how material cultures and language affect the identity and home-making practices of Russian-speaking immigrants reciprocally. How do selecting, keeping, and abandoning material objects contribute to home-making? How do the adaptation to a new culture, the host-country environment, and new daily practices change the meaning and functionality of these objects? Although the prominent research questions are shaped around material objects and home relations, the book also addresses the questions of communicating space, and the role and place of language and social relations in home-making in the diaspora.

In Chapter 1, Kira Kaurinkoski approaches home-making practices in the Russian-speaking diaspora from the perspective of social relations and sociocultural practices. The chapter covers the different stages of migration to Athens from the 1917 Russian Revolution to the post-Soviet period, and presents how home-making practices took shape in these different stages. Subsequent chapters (2-5,8) focus on the role of material objects and possessions in migration and home-making, and the interaction between immigrants and their material objects are examined. In Chapter 2, the concept of "diasporic objects" becomes prominent. Anna Pechurina identifies objects as "diasporic" since

they are not only reminders of the attachment to home but also of being away from home. These objects bring together past and present, and create a sense of home in the host country. In Chapter 3, Ksenia Golovina supports a similar argument for the case of Japan. Golovina explores how the material objects in the immigrants' homes reflect "material stories" as they store the immigrants' "experiences, memories, affects, emotions and aspirations". Immigrants do not only attribute positive meanings to objects; material objects also reflect negative connotations relating home. Golovina argues that with both positive and negative connotations, these objects affect the immigrants' relations and perceptions about home and host country. Researching the home-configuration of Russian-speaking immigrants to neighboring country Finland, in Chapter 4, Ekaterina Protassova and Kirill Reznik investigate how Russian-speaking individuals in Finland perceive home; why they keep some objects and get rid of others while configuring their homes; and how the meaning of these objects has changed. While answering these questions in the context of home-making, the authors also draw attention to generational differences. The host-country environment and integrating into host society can be considered one of the reasons of these generational differences. In the Australian context, examined in Chapter 5, Marika Kalyuga analyzes how the host-country environment affects the meaning and functionality of material possessions. Kalyuga examines how objects or possessions may lose their material/functional value but keep their sentimental value. Taken together, these analyses expose how objects do not have fixed values, meanings, or functions, but, in fact, are open to change depending on the generations, time, physical and cultural environment, and personal experiences. Maria Yelenevskaya's research on the Israeli case in Chapter 8, demonstrates the psychological and stabilizing role of material objects in immigrants' home while adopting to the new country. These objects reflect their home-country environment and bring the past to the present, or their home country to the present moment. Yelenevskaya draws attention to the generational differences in relation to both objects and language.

The Los Angeles (Chapter 6) and Uruguay cases (Chapter 7) focus on home-making based on sociocultural and language practices. In the case of Los Angeles, author Sasha Razor researches Russian restaurants and cafés in Hollywood which were established between the 1920s and

1980s. Having a Russian interior and exterior design and a Russian atmosphere, these places function as a home for the Russian-speaking community where its members could find cultural references, a sense of home, and speak the Russian language. As Razor states these establishments “fulfill the socio-communicative function.” Razor also discusses how starting in the 1960s sociopolitical developments and the identity and migration background of the owners affected the changes in the Russian restaurants in Los Angeles. In the Uruguay case, Gleb Pilipenko discusses Russian culture and language in the city of San Javier. Here, at the beginning of immigration, the Russian language was used in homes, but through generations the use of the language disappeared. The chapter explores how and why the use of the Russian language transformed and nearly disappeared in time. Yet, still, one can find Russian language references in the city keeping their symbolic meaning. In other chapters, the use of the Russian language by immigrants and its role in home-making are also underlined implicitly or explicitly. In Chapter 8, Maria Yelenevskaya, for example, refers to the bilingual and multilingual characteristics of the home and its effects on material culture. In the example of Türkiye in Chapter 9, Laisan Şahin investigates how Russian-speaking women of different ethnic origins (Russian, Azerbaijanis, and Tatars in this case) form and describe home while they reconcile and negotiate the different cultures and values of their home and host countries. The chapter emphasizes individual differences and experiences of immigrants in home-making. The author also brings attention to the role of communication technologies in home-making practices and relations with homelands. The last chapter (Chapter 10), written by Larissa Aronin, makes reference to the material culture of multilingualism (MCM) and Dominant Language Constellations (DLC) theory. On the basis of global transformation and interconnectedness, Aronin promotes the “multi-diverse” and “interconnected” characteristics of “materialities and language” in home-making, and reviews the research presented in this volume within the framework of the “multilingual materialities of home.” Based on this concept, she underlines the prominent features of Russian-speaking immigrants and their home-making practices. It should be noted that, for researchers, “multilingual materialities of home” can be a helpful tool to be applied to other research cases on immigrant communities.

The book presents home-making in the diaspora as an ongoing, living process. Within the different migration stories, home-host country environments, and social and cultural relations, home is continuously constructed and reconstructed by immigrants. This (re)construction process reflects on the language practices and material objects of immigrants as well. Language and material objects can serve as tools which secure the immigrants' identity, enhance their sense of belonging, and create a safe place where that feel "at home". Nonetheless, their meaning and function is open to transformation. The Russian-speaking diaspora contains a wide geography, different ethnicities, and different cultural/historical reference points. With this challenging but also distinctive feature, this volume presents the home-making practices of Russian-speaking immigrants in a comprehensive way. Moreover, while the study highlights common characteristics in home-making practices, the writers do not disregard the individual differences derived from individuals' narratives, experiences, and the recollection of past memories.

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