"WE LEFT FOREVER AND INTO THE UNKNOWN":

SOVIET JEWISH IMMIGRANTS' EXPERIENCES OF TRANSIT MIGRATION

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"We Left Forever and Into the Unknown":

Soviet Jewish Immigrants' Experiences of Transit Migration

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As a result of the geopolitical divisions of the Cold War, approximately 185,000 Soviet Jews traveled from the Soviet Union through Austria and Italy between 1971 and 1990 in order to immigrate to countries other than Israel. This dissertation examines U.S. immigrants' experiences of this period of transit migration as well as their extant connections to it through semi-structured interviews, archival research, immigrant-published literature, and the consideration of the experiences of the ethnographer (as a member of the 1.5 generation) and her family.

This interview-based, intimate ethnography demonstrates that for Soviet Jewish Americans, the places of transit migration are the start and finish lines of reclaiming dignity as immigrants from the Second World. In Austria and Italy, they experienced shock, shame, chaotic travel, imposed waiting, and the realization of their loss of social status. But there were opportunities for hope, too: enchantment, enjoyment, and creativity, which pointed to

the subject-positions they one day expected to embody. Therefore transit migration was marked not only by loss and a reckoning with one's past but a stretching forward toward a future that would elaborate on and redeem its hardships. Immigrants' present-day interactions with transit migration—through narrative, reflection, and return trips—illustrate that the embodied experiences of passage continue to form part of their lived experience, as markers of self-worth.

As the first study to examine Soviet Jews' transit migration, it contributes valuable ethnographic and historical knowledge about this group. By attending to migration as both social process and experience, it reveals transit migration to be a distinct category of experience with features parallel to other migrations marked by unfixed immigrant legal statuses. This thesis also identifies a relation to the past that is not cast as either traumatic or nostalgic. Instead, it points to a range of embodied relations to the past: neither determinative, inaccessible, nor only present-focused, but emergent and dynamic, allowing for both re-experiencing and connections to earlier, anticipatory desires. This dissertation therefore portrays migration to be a complex and shifting experience that gets continually written and re-written as it is incorporated into the broader trajectory of one's life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION: "WE LEFT FOREVER AND INTO THE UNKNOWN"

On May 19, 1989, nine of my family members and I departed the Black Sea port city

of Odessa of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. We left by boat from the nearby port

of Izmail and traveled along the Danube River until Vienna. It was an unusual route, made

newly available by the blooming co-operative businesses allowed under the unraveling policy

of *perestroika*. The majority of the hundreds of thousand who emigrated from the Soviet

Union before us, and the hundreds of thousands who would leave after, primarily left by

train; those privileged with good connections and a substantial amount of money left by

plane from Moscow or Leningrad (Saint Petersburg); still others left by the similarly new

option of bus travel through Poland.

It was my parents, my 11-year-old older brother, me, my three grandparents, my

father's 30-year-old brother, my mother's 25-year-old cousin, and their six-year-old daughter.

Of this group of ten, my parents, then 34-year-old professionals (my father an elevator

mechanic and my mother a computer programmer), considered themselves to be the

principal drivers of the emigration and thus responsible for the whole group. The lives of

eight other people weighed heavily on their shoulders, magnifying the impact of every

hardship and setback of the ensuing journey. My mother insists that the family chose this

route of emigration to avoid making her mother pass through the notoriously nefarious

customs facility at Chop, Ukraine. (Each of the most popular customs points had equally

bad reputations: the train station at Brest, Belarus; Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport;

Leningrad's Pulkova airport.)

My mother has always said that it was when she saw her beloved Black Sea

discolored by pollution that she made up her mind to emigrate. The decision had been on

the table for a long time, though. She first learned of the possibility of emigration when her third-cousin and parents left in 1973. Back then, she was ardently patriotic, dismayed by the act of leaving, but not so much as to call emigrants "traitors to the Motherland," as others might have.

Even in the late 1970s, when several very close friends and relatives (including her grandmother and father's sister's family) emigrated in 1978 and 1979 amid a record mass of 80,287 Jews in those two years (Lazin 2005b:310), and my father told her to consider it, she would not. Her parents, who would follow her no matter what, were not opposed to it, but left the decision up to them. It was a frightening one. Not only was it seemingly irreversible and offered an unknown and uncertain future, but applying to leave posed considerable personal and familial risks.

Until its demise in 1991, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) did not allow free emigration. My family belonged to one of the few groups allowed to pass through the restricted, onerous, and permanent emigration process under the assumption of "family reunification": since the 1960s, only limited numbers of Soviet Jews, Germans, Armenians, and evangelical Christians were permitted to emigrate. Because of the limits to travel as well as to emigration; the oppressive nature of Soviet society and the restrictions on educational and career advancement, especially for minority groups; and the gradual and increasingly obvious nature of the political-economic degradation of the Soviet Union, the desire to emigrate from the Soviet Union was strong among members of these groups and, in the 1980s, reached well beyond them.

In the 1970s, an application for an exit visa alone jeopardized a family's employment, housing, and social statuses (in a society where work was legally, ideologically, and morally mandated). Emigration was tantamount to treason. Those denied exit visas became *otkazniki*

("*refuseniks*"), condemned as social pariahs. The risk of refusal and thus social marginalization diminished but did not disappear by the time my family emigrated in the late 1980s. The application and emigration process still remained confusing, elaborate, and purposefully frustrating, with a bevy of changing restrictions and exorbitant fees. Despite that, by the time we left in May 1989, over 300,000 Jews had emigrated before us since 1965[1]—most, like us, on a permanent basis after rescinding Soviet citizenship, allowed to leave with a maximum of $90 per person. That so many embraced these risks speaks of the great desire to leave.

From that day of departure, as we cleared our apartment for good, I only remember being concerned not to forget a doll and her little bed. I was four. A black-and-white picture from that day shows tens of people milling about outside our apartment building on Belinskaya Street (in a relatively privileged area in the center of Odessa). Smiles abound in that picture as well as in the last two photos taken inside our apartment. A picture at customs depicts some concerned faces staring over stacks of suitcases while others reflect the boredom of waiting.

The pictures, of course, capture little of the whole story. Besides having to part with our beloved city, home, and most of our possessions (among them family heirlooms and a car, a *Zhiguli*, an even rarer piece of property), we were leaving behind dear relatives and friends. My aunt Ira (my mother's cousin) and uncle Sasha (my father's brother) married the year before, and many anxious conversations preceded my aunt's decision to emigrate with us. My aunt Ira was leaving behind her parents and younger brother in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Despite the distance between Odessa and Tashkent, we had remained close, spending every summer together in Odessa. Ira's parents and younger brother accompanied us to customs, and they appear in the photo, with unsmiling faces. Ira's mother blamed my

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[1] Based on figures drawn from Lazin 2005b:309-310.

mom for taking away her sister, daughter, and granddaughter. The concerned and blank faces in the photograph were dealing with this imminent, heartbreaking parting. The story is easy to tell now, because, luckily for us as Soviet Jews, we would all be reunited in Brooklyn several years later.

I haven't asked everyone to describe this moment of parting. It is an emotionally charged conversation. Instead, I can infer the emotions involved based on all that I know: the love and attachments of all the family members; the seriousness of family bonds and obligations—especially between parents and children, among the most sacred of social relationships among Soviet Jews; the certainty of permanent parting (although, at that time, the Soviet Union was already allowing citizens to travel abroad to the United States, as my grandparents had); that those who remained behind in the Soviet Union treated the departure of their friends and relatives with the graveness and finality of funerals; the great longing and anticipation with which we greeted them and other relatives in the years to come.

We boarded the hired boat at the port of Izmail with about 20 passengers, including a young Odessan couple with a son a year younger than me, with whom we passed through all of transit migration and immigration. We sailed for two weeks along the Danube to Vienna, Austria. By all accounts, it was a fine journey. Even my grandmother, my father's mother who emigrated only out of familial obligation (feeling herself to have no other choice, since both her sons were leaving), remembers it to have been a pleasant trip.

It was in Vienna where we joined the approximately 1,175 Soviet emigrants who had also arrived that week[2] and some 14,000 Soviet Jews[3] who were already in Vienna and Italy,

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[2] This is a rough number based off a chart showing monthly Soviet exit totals in HIAS's Annual Report of 1989 (Elliot 1990:6). The approximate monthly total of Jews and non-Jews exiting the Soviet Union in May 1989 is 4,700. I therefore estimate that about 1,175 arrived each week of May.

the next stop on this route. That was the moment we entered into the collective experience

that is the topic of this dissertation: the period of transit migration.

TRANSIT MIGRATION

"Transit migration" is a relatively recent term but not a recent phenomenon.[4] It

describes the period during which migrants, maintaining unfixed immigration statuses,

sojourn in a place other than the one from which they emigrated and in which they will settle

as immigrants. Such "places" of transit may entail both overland and maritime journeys.

Indeed, when conceptualized in such terms, it is clear that transit migration has been a

feature of most migrations in history before the advent of high-speed transportation (see

Bredeloup 2012 for a historical perspective of transit following the Second World War). A

focus on the period between emigration (the process of leaving one's place of residence) and

immigration (the process of settling in a new locale), maintains that the *how* of arrival is

important.

In migration studies, this in-between period tends to be overlooked in favor of

research about the conditions in the countries of emigration and the social, economic, and

political lives of people after arrival (see, for example, Massey 1999; Massey et al. 1993).

Recent literature on migrant transnationalism focuses on the sustained social, political, and

economic linkages between the two places (e.g. Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc

1994; Vertovec 1999; Levitt 2001). However, there is little work that considers the

experience of the actual migration journey and the meaning that the journey collectively

acquires for the migrant group over time. Indeed, because transit migration is temporary and

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[3] Exact figures for the month of May 1989 could not be obtained. The figure is an estimate based on
the fact that there were 16,000 Soviet Jews in the pipeline in July 1989 (Lazin 2005b:268).
[4] I thank Ulla Berg for pointing me toward this term.

not determinable until it ends (i.e. it may be unclear that a migrant is in transit until after

s/he has moved again), it is often difficult to study people in transit. The exception is people

in definable periods and places of transit: those in refugee camps (though camps, too, may

become permanent) and those following established routes of mass migration.

"Transit migration" entered political and academic discussions in the mid-1990s

following the recognition of new patterns of migration in Europe after the fall of communist

regimes (Collyer et al. 2012:407). Recent critical scholarship points to its embeddedness in

the politics of migration, that is, its use as "a political code for unwanted and often irregular

immigration to the European Union" (Düvell et al. 2008:1; Düvell 2012). Scholars also draw

attention to the geopolitics implicit in any instance of transit migration (Collyer et al. 2012):

passing through regions of political conflict and cooperation; the variance in countries'

degree of accommodation or acquiescence to particular groups within their borders; the fact

that certain countries are or are not desirable as places of residence; varying regimes of

mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013).[5]

One of the few monographs on the topic, Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula's

Transit Migration: The Missing Link Between Emigration and Settlement (2008), is a policy-oriented

study detailing routes, debates, and various real-life circumstances in the European Union,

the Maghreb, and former Soviet (CIS) countries. Though Papadopoulou-Kourkoula writes

little from migrants' point of view, she points out that "the transit condition was not

identified in terms of time, but in terms of the characteristics that define the transit

experiences" (10). Those are not necessarily just psychological or emotional conditions; there

are tangible, political-economic aspects to transit migration that entail certain kinds of living

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[5] The authors define "regimes of mobility" as "the relationships between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatized and forbidden movement, migration and interconnection of the poor, powerless and exploited" (188).

conditions and the (lack of) political protections. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula argues that transit migration is "a process and a contingency" (5) rather than a status (87). During transit migration, "'I am nothing'," a Kurdish woman in Athens says in 2002 (46-7); another Kurdish woman says in 2001 that life in transit in Penteli, Greece for her is waiting for "a normal life" (87). The fact that these statements resonate with others' living with unfixed legal statuses, as documented in chapter 3, points to the existence of a particular experience of transit migration.

Ethnographies that attend to the journey of migration and its lasting meaning for immigrants (e.g. BenEzer 2002; Markowitz 1993; Mahler 1995) have not connected it to the scholarship on transit migration, thereby missing the opportunity to generalize on the circumstances and experiences of migrants with unfixed immigrant statuses. Gadi BenEzer (2002) stands alone in making the experience and lasting significance of the migration journey central to his ethnography. About 20,000 Ethiopian Jews immigrated to Israel via Sudan (by foot, where they remained for one or two years) between 1977 and 1985. The shared experiences of the journey as well as the shared modes of narrating it, BenEzer argues, lay the foundations for their group identity in Israel. Similarly, Fran Markowitz (1993) in her exemplary ethnography of Soviet Jewish immigrants in New York City, asserts that their common journey through Austria and Italy, along with their lives in the USSR, enabled the creation of the immigrant community. These experiences "provide[d] initial symbolic material by which immigrants unify and then differentiate themselves…from other Americans. And it lays the groundwork for intensification of intragroup interactions, embellishment of symbolic content, sharing of new experiences, and further conversations," which form the basis of their "postmodern community" (1993:6).

Extending this insight to other migratory contexts, such as those in refugee camps, E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (1995) assert that "transit camps and locations of resettlement are contexts wherein the need to create meaning and recover the cultural process becomes acute for [the] refugee" (5). Therefore the transitory period is important in general for the individual to construct a "normative picture of one's past within which 'who one was' can be securely established to the satisfaction of the refugee" (5), and other categories of transit migrants.

Overarching Argument

This dissertation consolidates and contributes to this still nascent literature by exploring self-experience through and since a temporary period of unfixed immigrant legal status. I demonstrate that for Soviet Jewish Americans, the places of transit migration are the start and finish lines of reclaiming dignity as immigrants (from the Second World). The Soviet regime robbed them of a dignified emigration, and the recuperation of self-worth was scarcely available to them as refugees-in-transit. Instead, they experienced shock, shame, chaotic travel, imposed waiting, and the realization of their loss of social status. But in transit there were opportunities for hope, too: enchantment, enjoyment, and creativity, which indicated the subject-positions they one day expected to embody. Therefore transit migration was marked not only by loss and a reckoning with one's past but a stretching forward toward a future that would elaborate on and redeem its hardships and slights. Soviet Jewish immigrants' present-day interactions with transit migration—through memory and in person—illustrate that the embodied experiences of passage continue to form part of their lived experience, as markers of self-worth.

SOVIET JEWS' TRANSIT MIGRATION: THE VIENNA-ROME PIPELINE

Approximately 185,000 Soviet Jews traveled from the Soviet Union through Austria and Italy between 1971 and 1990 in order to immigrate to countries other than Israel: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, West Germany, South Africa, and the countries of South America, in order of popularity. Because the Soviet Union had severed diplomatic relations with Israel following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War,[6] there were no direct flights to Israel. Those who chose to immigrate to Israel traveled to Vienna, where they were greeted by emissaries (*slichim*) of the Jewish Agency for Israel[7] (JAFI; known to American immigrants as "*Sochnut*"), spent a day or two in Vienna, and were then flown to Israel.

There were no direct flights to the United States either (and visas for direct immigration to the United States were difficult to obtain), so emigrants seeking to settle in the West first needed to refuse the exhortations of JAFI representatives to continue onto Israel, and then were transferred into the care of non-governmental organizations. It is unclear how Soviet Jews first learned that they could use Israeli exit visas to continue to other destinations; we have to assume it was through word-of-mouth, probably from relatives already in the U.S.

Both Austria and Italy (among other European countries, such as Greece and France) had been facilitating Jewish transit migration within their borders since the end of the Second World War (Hein 2010:35).[8] Several immigrant-aid organizations coordinated and funded the passage of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the

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[6] The Dutch Embassy represented Israeli interests in the USSR from 1967 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, when Russia and Israel again established consular relations (see Buwalda 1997 for a detailed account of the role of the Dutch Embassy in facilitating Soviet Jewish emigration).
[7] JAFI is "a quasi-governmental organization funded by Jews overseas that handles the newcomers in Israel" (Chicago Sun-Times 1990).
[8] Hein (2010:35) asserts that the agreement to allow Jews to pass through Austria and Italy had been negotiated by Israel; I have not found evidence to either corroborate or negate this contention.

Middle East through Europe to resettle in the West as refugees. The main organizations, without which Soviet Jewish transit migration would not have been possible, were the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (otherwise known as JDC or the Joint) and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), both funded primarily by U.S. Jews and partially reimbursed by the U.S. Government Office of Refugee Resettlement. JDC provided funding (spending money, grant relief), housing, social activities, medical care, and social services while HIAS took care of transportation, paperwork, and its related documentation.[9]

How Soviet Jews' transit route came to follow the Vienna-Rome pipeline is a matter of historical coincidence. Vienna, with its presence of the JAFI, had been the primary city from which European Jewish migrants immigrated to Israel since WWII. It was also the geographically closest non-communist capital for Eastern Europeans. In 1968, after HIAS and JDC's Vienna offices were overwhelmed by hundreds of fleeing Czechoslovakian Jews (following the Soviet invasion), the two agencies began to direct émigrés to Rome, where Western Europe's largest American Embassy with an Immigration and Naturalization Services[10] (INS) department could accommodate a larger applicant pool. Moreover, care and maintenance of migrants in transit cost 50 percent less in Italy than in Austria ("Soviet Transmigrant Program," HIAS Memo by Michael Schneider to JDC staff, March 27, 1989, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives in New York [hereafter "JDC-NY Archives"]). HIAS and JDC each consolidated its European offices over the end of the 1960s, centralizing their "transmigration program" (as it was called then) to Vienna and

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[9] A cooperating agency, World ORT, provided English classes and vocational training, but could never accommodate more than a few hundred of students at a time in Italy.

[10] "The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), referred to by some as former INS and by others as legacy INS, ceased to exist under that name on March 1, 2003, when most of its functions were transferred from the Department of Justice to three new entities – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_and_Naturalization_Service).

Rome. Émigrés arrived in Vienna with visas issued by the Austrian Embassy or as tourists who would then file for refugee status. HIAS arranged for a group visa issued directly by the Italian government to cover all HIAS clients traveling to Italy.[11] In the early 1970s, due to the low volume of clients, the two organizations considered further downsizing their Austrian and Italian staffs, even considering a merger between the two organizations, before—with no warning—Soviet Jews began to emigrate in ever-growing numbers. Tens of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union had been immigrating to Israel throughout the late 1960s. In April 1971, the first families asked in Vienna to continue onto the United States.

The entire "transmigrant" operation required an incredible amount of coordination, energy, and funding on the part of JDC and HIAS, especially when the two organizations were handling thousands of clients at a time. They had to expand, contract, and generally adapt to an unpredictable and constantly changing caseload. In September 1989, the Vienna-Rome pipeline held some 20,000 Soviet Jews in various stages of processing (Buwalda 1997:193); at the close of 1989, the European caseload of the two organizations was 28,000 (Elliot 1990:9). Soviet families, officially stateless, sojourned in Europe anywhere from five weeks to two years, depending on their destination and the backlog at the time of arrival, before obtaining permission to immigrate as refugees. (The U.S. typically had the shortest wait time).

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[11] Up until December 20, 1980, entry visas issued in Vienna were for Italy in general. Since December 22, 1980, the visa is issued for a Rome and province (Memo, Feburary 3, 1981 with attached translation of *Il Mattimo* article by Michele de Simone [January 13, 1981], JDC-NY Archives). On November 15, 1974, Akiva Kohane wrote in a Memo to Sam Haber: "today the transports of transmigrants from Vienna to Rome are going on the same basis as the DP transports have gone a quarter century ago. [HIAS] prepares a list of the transport, types it on the stationary of the Israeli Embassy, which confirms that those people are going to Italy in transit to Israel. As long as this arrangement is working and is not being challenged, it is better not to ask questions" (JDC-NY Archives). That is why transit migrants lived in Italian towns and not in special camps; so as not to disturb the arrangement with the existing Italian government.

HART

Arrival Vienna
Transfer HIAS/AJDC

FOR YOUR INFORMATION
FROM GAYNOR I. JACOBS

Housing
JDC Pension
(3 days)

Processing
HIAS/JDC Office
(3 days)

Transfer Rome
(1 day)

Housing
JDC Pension
(7 days)

Processing USA
HIAS/JDC Office
(2½ months)

Housing
Apts - OSTIA
(2-3 months)

Departure USA
· 4-6 group transports
per month depending
on needs
(1-2 weeks)

Processing Vienna (3 days)

1. JA Interview/clearance
2. JDC Interview
3. HIAS registration
   a. Briefing
   b. Registration
   c. Baggage
   d. Cashier
   e. Organization transfer
      to Rome
      (2-4 transports per week)

Note:

Processing steps do not include
appointments with Case Counsellors
(various matters — Resettlement commu-
nity assignments, personal problems,
relatives or friends in USSR who seek
to immigrate, etc.); Vocational
Counsellor (incl.Work History Section);
Baggage Dept.; Cashiers office (various
payments). These appointments do not
add to total processing period.

Time Interval from date Arr. Rome	**Processing Rome (3 months)** HIAS
2 days	1. Briefing
	2. Distribution of INS forms and Work Histories to be completed by migrant in Russian. Briefing by staff as to how to complete.
3	3. Preliminary Meeting with Caseworker. Counselling.Referral to ORT(Language Training). X Ray appointment for whole family.
4.	4. INS and Work History forms brought in checked by staff and turned over to translators.
10	5. Medical examination.
12	6. Interview & registration.
	7. Photos and fingerprints.
14	8. Typing of INS and other official form
15	9. Checking of INS forms.
17	10. Submission of Registration & other material to HIAS New York.
	11. Signature of USRP Registration Record & INS Application. (Compared with Russian INS form and read back to client).
	12. All documents assembled. Photocopies for files.
18	13. Submission to INS.
19	14. USPH Medical Visit.
34	15. INS Interview .
74	16. INS Approval.
75	17. HIAS N.Y. alerted abt.approval & ·'clearance requested for movement to designated resettlement community.
77	18. Prel.Interview Transport & Baggage Sections in connection movement formalities.
78	19. Arrangmt.booking via ICEM for next available flight(group)-abt 10 days
88	20. Interview Transport & Baggage Sections Final arrangements.
89	21. Pick-up excess hand bagg.(beyond 20kg)
90	22. Departure.

FOR PREVIOUS CORR SEE: M.H.S
ORG. HIAS.
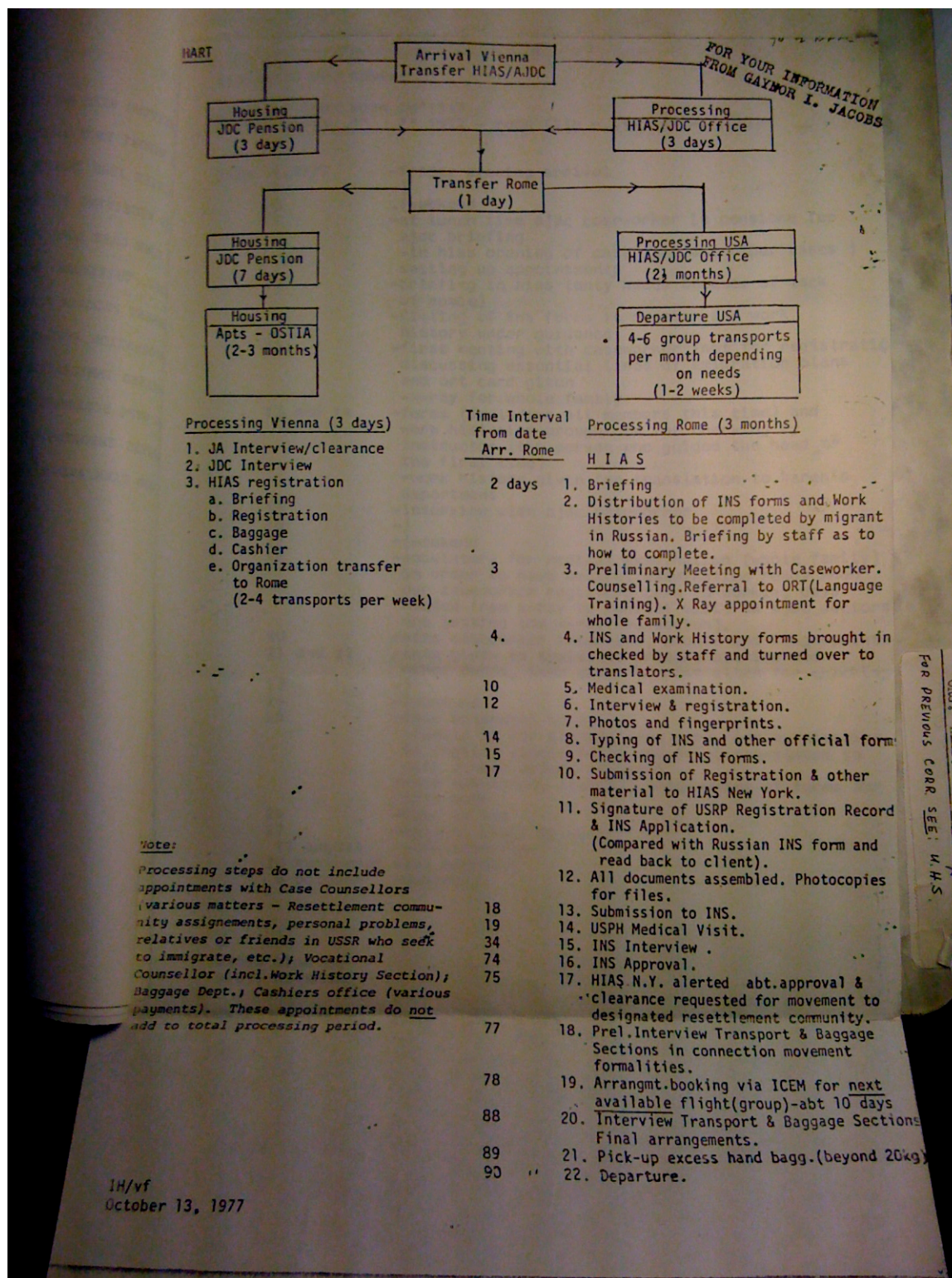
IH/vf
October 13, 1977

Figure 1 Flow Chart of Transit Migration Process. October 13, 1977 HIAS Memo, JDC–NY Archives.

Between arrival in Vienna and departure from Rome, a number of steps needed to be completed. After JAFI transferred emigrants into HIAS's and JDC's care, JDC first determined whether they were indeed Jewish. Those confirmed as clients were put up in Viennese hostels while initial interviews with JDC (later eliminated) and HIAS took place. They were then transferred to Rome, where, while they stayed in hostels for a maximum of one week, HIAS began their applications for refugee status. Along with an interview at the chosen embassy, migrants underwent a medical examination and fulfilled other requirements (fingerprints, photographs, etc.). Jewish Federations around the world, which bore the economic and social responsibility for immigrants, accepted immigrants based on their own criteria—particular professions, education levels, ages, health requirements, funding available, and so on. Finally, the International Committee for European Migration (ICEM) arranged for their air travel (the cost of which they were asked to repay at a later date). Figure 1, above, shows a 1977 HIAS schema of the process, outlining the steps of an average three-month processing. Nearly all Soviet Jewish families, including my own, passed through these steps at different rates.

OUR JOURNEY OF TRANSIT MIGRATION

Our emigration (as we immigrants say, instead of "transit migration") lasted six months, until November 1989. This was a very long time to live in a temporary state, with the future uncertain.

When we arrived in Vienna in May 1989 and entered into JDC's and HIAS's care, there were several close family friends already in Italy. We spent two weeks in Vienna, which my mom calls her "Viennese Holiday," after the 1953 film *Roman Holiday*. We explored the city, museums, the zoo, which we would remember often in later years. My parents had a

chance encounter on a city tram with Yuri Melnick, an acquaintance from high school. He had also just left the Soviet Union, from Moscow, where he had been living and working for the previous decade. My mom told me that she at first wasn't sure whether he'd recognize them. He did, and they began a lasting friendship. My mom told me about a touching encounter between my grandma (her mom) and an Austrian meat vendor: as a Yiddish speaker with some German-language training in her youth, my grandma was best able to communicate with locals. While buying chicken on one occasion, she told our story of emigration to the curious vendor. The vendor, visibly touched (probably, we assume, remembering her own difficulties during and after the Second World War), gave us a good share of meat without allowing us to pay. Stories like these, of which there are many from both Austria and especially Italy, remain meaningful to my family.

Vienna was the city of "firsts," the place where emigrants first encountered the bounty of capitalism, the high quality of life in Western Europe, and the beautiful world landmarks they had never thought they would get to see in person (see also Levkov 1984). It was a deeply disorienting and wondrous experience, with ample doses of shock and enchantment, shame and dignity.

I don't remember our 14-hour, overnight train ride to Italy. This penultimate leg of the journey (the final leg was the plane ride to New York City) was, by everyone's account, the most stressful stage of transit migration. The train arrived at Orte train station, a rather rural town some 50 miles north of Rome. Emigrants were given a limited amount of time to unload all of their belongings and then were rushed onto buses waiting to distribute them to hostels rented by JDC in and near Rome. More alarming than the rush was the presence of armed guards, hired by HIAS, to protect them as a group of Jewish persons in transit. Emigrants knew little about past incidents of terrorism against emigrants and the supporting

organizations and, accordingly, were confused and disoriented by the armed presence. Thus, besides feeling themselves to be Soviet subjects, emigrants also experienced themselves as Jews, entering a transnational, transhistorical political arena.

From Orte, my family was taken to an urban camp in Ostia called Castelfusano that JDC recently rented to accommodate the high volume of Soviet Jews (see Levine 2005 for an account of a conversation between the owner and a fellow emigrant, 15 years later). My family was relieved not to have been taken to Sporting, a hostel full of emigrants that was notorious for being atop a hill, to the top of which emigrants had to lug their many heavy suitcases. From people's descriptions, Sporting was also quite crowded and dirty, with an unpleasant air, depressing furnishings, and a cockroach infestation. Castelfusano, on the other hand, was a rather pleasant camp with wooden bungalows, a shared dining hall, and many recreational facilities. Emigrants were allowed to stay in these initial accommodations for only a week to ten days before having to find their own housing.
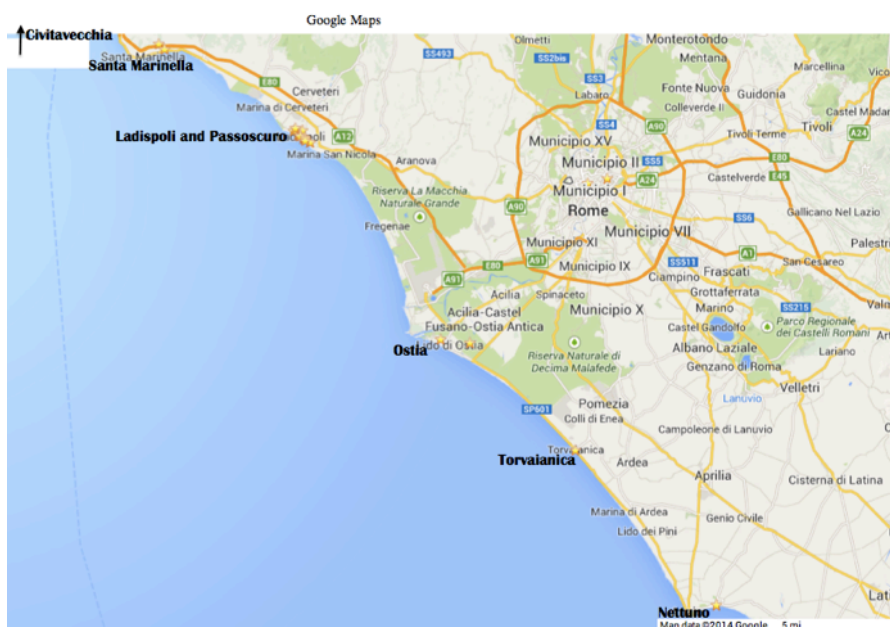

Figure 2 Map of the Lazio region of Rome. Google Maps 2014.

In the early seventies, Soviet Jews mostly found housing in Rome. As the years

passed and the number of families-in-transit rose, emigrants moved to the towns on the

Tyrrhenian Sea where working- and middle-class Romans vacationed during the summers.

The most popular were Ostia, Ladispoli, nearby Passoscuro, Santa Marinella to the north,

and Nettuno and Torvaianica to the south. In the late 1970s, most Soviet Jews lived in Ostia,

where locals came to call the post office the "Red Square" because it became émigrés main

gathering place. Then and in the late 1980s, with Ostia "full," it was Ladispoli that became

most popular, spreading into other towns once it became too difficult to find housing there.

There was no "Jewish community" in the Soviet Union (see Markowitz 1993). Jews

in the Soviet Union tended to be part of close-knit networks of Jewish friends and family,

but no formal institutions or organizations for Jews existed. Such organizations would have

been illegal. In transit migration, emigrants for the first time learned of the diversity of Jews

that existed in the Soviet Union (differences spanned regions, appearances, levels of

religiosity, education, wealth, social status, manners, and so on). Though new friendships

were born because of the shared routes and recognizability of fellow Soviets, emigrants

mostly relied on their already established dense, trusted networks while in transit. In the

1975 Annual Report of the AJDC[12] in Rome, Italian office head Loni Eibenschütz Mayer

writes about Soviet "transmigrant" life: "We are now dealing with a very large group which

has developed its own life pattern, almost its own tradition in Italy" (JDC-NY Archives).

"Old-timers" helped out newcomers with tips on how and where to find housing, where to

buy the cheapest and best foods, where and how to sell the wares they brought along. As my

family's story indicates, a vibrant, though temporary and ever-changing, community formed,

with its own social dynamics, including reunions of friends and family, regular meeting

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[12] The acronym changed over the twentieth century from AJJDC to AJDC to JDC, its present form.

places, robust networks of information and gossip exchange, self-organized schools for children and English classes for adults, and even self-organized group tours in Italy. This community was not an altogether benevolent one; some emigrants, for example, profited off of newcomers as housing brokers. (See David Bezmozgis's novel *The Free World* [2011] for a creative account of the darker side—scamming, smuggling, dealings with Italian mafia—of life in transit). Documents in the JDC archives also bemoaned occasional heavy drug use and struggles with the general Soviet population. The emigrants, being "deeply conditioned by the USSR life system," were "difficult" to deal with in the eyes of the organization (a common complaint across humanitarian organizations); they were "stubborn," "demanding," and had an "antagonistic relationship with authority" ("Annual Report for 1974," by Loni Eibenschütz Mayer, April 30, 1975, JDC-NY Archives).

Not long after my family arrived in Castelfusano, my parents set out to find the whereabouts of their close friends, the Bekkers. On June 12, they traveled to the hostel Sporting, where they scanned a bulletin board in the lobby. They're not sure, now, how they knew of its existence. My mom and the Bekkers say they can still picture it: that bulletin board, the note with the Bekkers' address in familiar handwriting on the right-hand side. My mom got goose bumps when the three of them told me the story—that feeling of intimate familiarity in a foreign place was incredible and remains vivid. The next day, my parents traveled to the town of Passoscuro to find the Bekkers, who were residing in a dilapidated, one-room abode that can only be called a shack. It turned out that the Bekkers were scheduled to leave Italy the following day.

That was how we wound up in Passoscuro, where we spent the next five months, waiting to leave. At that time in 1989, a new anxiety was gripping the in-transit community. Since September 1988, Soviet Jews were no longer proceeding to the U.S. with automatic

refugee status. A budgetary shortfall resulting from the sudden and unanticipated rise in the number of Soviet Jewish emigrants led to a year of chaotic, reactionary policies concerning Soviet refugee adjudication on the part of the INS. A route to the U.S. that was once guaranteed now became unreliable. Rejection rates rose to 37.5 percent in March of 1989 (Elliot 1990:11), with thousands of emigrants with *otkázami* (rejections) accumulating in Italy, "stuck," during 1989 (nearly 5,000 by September; Buwalda 1997:193). In North American media and politics this came to be known as the "Ladispoli Crisis," as the majority of emigrants-in-transit resided there, in numbers equal to more than half of Ladispoli's permanent resident population.

Our refusal came in July, right before my parents set out for a tour to the north of Italy—Florence, Venice, Rimini, and the country of San Marino. They had consulted another friend, Grigoriy Kushnir, living in Ladispoli, as to whether to they should spend the money for the trip. The cost for these popular, several-day tours was relatively little, but stood for much to migrants who were saving as much as possible for a future they could not yet fathom. Grigoriy advised them to go: if they received permission to leave soon, when next would they be in Italy? If they were to be refused refugee status, then the enjoyment of the trip would help them withstand the blow. On the bus to Florence on July 11, my mother covered her tears with her dark, oversized sunglasses. We applied as a family of ten, so my parents felt responsible for the fates of all of us. She says she barely saw anything of Florence through her despair, until, standing in front of Botticelli's *Primavera* (*Spring*; ca. 1482) in a Florentine museum, her anguish dissipated. The painting is an expression of beauty, renewal, and hope, and it convinced my mom that they would find a way to persevere.

My father told me that it was a nerve-wracking time. In the ensuing weeks, as HIAS filed an appeal on our behalf, they discussed the possibilities of immigrating to other destinations, among them Argentina and South Africa. My parents and aunt found work picking tomatoes, then cleaning apartments. My mom says they always maintained their dignity, never shying to tell Italians their Soviet professions, and attending to the benefits of such work: they were learning, for example, about Italian homes, about Western cleaning products.

As for me, life in Passoscuro was wonderful. Six months is a long time in the life of a four-and-a-half-year-old. I, of course, did not know what was at stake. I don't remember feeling the anxiety and occasional despair of the adults. Days were spent at the beach, in the courtyard of our *villa* and around town with my six-year-old cousin under the supervision of my grandparents or my 11-year-old brother. My cousin and I sometimes accompanied my brother to a local café with an arcade. With our skinny arms, we would fish out lost coins from under the machines for him. My fifth birthday in September was one of my most special and memorable, with surprise gifts from my aunt and uncle and brother. I still have my brother's gift to me: a small *Transformers* digital clock.

My brother was the first of the family to begin earning money by washing windshields at a popular intersection. Other teenage boys did the same in other locations and towns, like Michael Drob, whose family was also "stuck" in Italy during this time in nearby Santa Marinella. Our Italian neighbors once gave my brother way too much money for the cleaning. When my brother refused to accept it, the neighbor told him that it was to take their daughter out. It was his first date.

As kids, we were largely unaware of our predicament. We experienced our limited means in mundane, everyday ways (Kidron 2009): our complaints over the interminable

meals of pea soup, which became a long-lasting family joke; sharing beds with the adults (my unlucky grandparents had to put up with my tossing and flailing limbs); our intense desire for the rare treat of the Kinder egg (*Kinder Sorpresa*), egg-shaped chocolate candy with a toy in its center, which we still so strongly associate with desire, gratification, and our time in Italy. There is so much to tell. So many things happened in "emigration" that it's hard to describe everything. For me, my cousin, and my brother, transit migration was a time of discovery and family togetherness that we hoped to replicate in the future. For the adults in our group, it represented a host of other experiences that are the subject of this dissertation.

The Vienna-Rome pipeline closed in 1990. The last trainload of Soviet Jews arrived in Rome from Vienna on February 15, 1990 (Elliot 1991:4). All Soviet Jews bound for the U.S. left Rome by June 1, 1990 (Elliot 1991:5), with the remaining caseload of émigrés immigrating to Canada and Australia following suit by the end of 1990. With it ended a historical era, the Cold War, and the end of the necessity for Eastern European Jewish emigrants to be transit migrants in Europe in order to go to Israel and elsewhere.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: INTERVIEW-BASED, EXPERIENTIAL, AND INTIMATE ETHNOGRAPHY

Intimate Ethnography

Unlike most ethnographic studies, the primary method utilized in this research is not participant-observation, at least not in the classic sense of the term. By virtue of my having taken part in the experience at the heart of the study, by having my own personal memories and shared stories of the event, and by employing general strategies of observation in light of my research interests throughout the research period, there is an aspect of participant-observation at the heart of this research. I did not, however, choose a physical fieldsite.

Doing so would have been extremely difficult, since, as the best ethnographer of Russian-American immigrants, Fran Markowitz, noted, it is a "community without organizations" held together by informal networks and collectives rather than formal immigrant institutions (Markowitz 1992, 1993; Gold 1995). Although Brighton Beach is still cited as the stereotypical Russian immigrant neighborhood, and still hosts a significant number of Russian businesses and (mostly aging) residents, it is no longer dominated by Jewish immigrants who left the Soviet Union, much less by those who made it "Little Odessa" in the 1980s and 1990s. There are several towns and neighborhoods throughout the U.S. that are known as "Russian," like Fair Lawn and Marlboro in New Jersey; Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn; Brighton, Massachusetts; and West Hollywood, California. But at this point in time, like Brighton Beach, the "Russian community" entails a mix of both Jewish and non-Jewish Russian-speaking immigrants from a diversity of arrival years. Therefore, there are no longer neighborhoods or locations in which a significant number of Jewish immigrants who emigrated through Austria and Italy gather.

Moreover, such a location would not even necessarily yield relevant data, since my interest is in people's recollections of their transit migration experiences, which may only rarely come up in undirected conversation. This is expected, since the event in question is, at the time of writing, anywhere between 24 to 43 years in the past. As I explain below, my "field site" is thus the space of memory among a select portion of the Russian-Jewish American immigrant community, best accessed though directed conversation.

It follows that the backbone of this project is interview-based (or "interview-driven") fieldwork wherein "interviews took the form of loose life histories" in places of participants' choosing (Ortner 2003:14-15). This method is appropriate to ethnographies concerned with longer stretches of time and bigger stretches of space than classic place-based ethnographies

(Ortner 2003:15). Sherry Ortner (2003) undertook a similar project in which she sought out members of her high school class to find out the nature of their socioeconomic mobility 40 years after graduation. Like Ortner, I am part of the social network of the research group, and may thus use my own experiences to compliment interview data. Like Ortner, I can compensate for the limitations of the interview method (1) by "paying close attention to the details and textures of the sites in which the interviews were conducted" (2003:15) and (2) with long-term and intimate knowledge of the people and event I am studying.

Furthermore, this project is also an elaboration of what Alisse Waterston (2013) and Barbara Rylko-Bauer (2014) have termed "intimate ethnography." Waterston made her father's life the focus of her study, using interviews with him, family documents, and historical research to tell the story of his unusual and stormy life. Rylko-Bauer did the same for her mother. Both ethnographies choose a parent's life that is evocative on its own and representative of larger historical events and social processes. Because participant recruitment centered on my personal family network and fanned out through snowball sampling (a nonprobability, judgment sampling; Bernard 2006:190), this project also belongs to that category of work. I benefit from their trailblazing work and broaden the scope of the intimate ethnography by including a community of research participants. This serves to contextualize my family's experiences not just historically but socially, among a network of relatives and peers (both intimates and strangers).

Unlike Waterston and Rylko-Bauer, I lived through the events in question, though as a young child. As I have tried to illustrate, transit migration for me was a time of exploration and family togetherness. I did not have to worry about finding work, making ends meet, taking care of daily chores, or what the future may hold. However, growing up with a well-fostered sense of empathy, I came to know what transit migration and the early years of

immigration entailed for my parents, their friends, and our relatives as well as what meaning they make of it considering their life trajectories. The experiences I describe in this dissertation are for the most part about their generation, those between the ages of 25 and 50 at the time of emigration, independent adults traveling with and responsible for their children and elderly parents; this is the generation for whom emigration is the defining element of their lives (as opposed to, say, the Second World War for the generation older than they). I understand research participants' experiences through my parents, not though my own lived experience. Therefore, this work is one based in empathy for those Soviet Jewish immigrants older than me; it is based on the pain, delight, and range of experiences that I have heard, felt, and otherwise perceived from the generation that raised me and therefore have come to be a part of me. This conveys the embodied dimensions of intergenerational memory, what Marianne Hirsch called "postmemory" (1997); and this is why embodiment forms an important part of my interpretive framework, explained below. It is also why this ethnography can itself be read as an artifact of the 1.5 generation, since the interviewer is part of the story as much as the narrator (Portelli 1991; Yow 2005).

My own role as a member of the 1.5 generation[13] further distinguishes this work from Waterston's and Rylko-Bauer's. Like them, I have intimate knowledge of many of my research participants and lived the consequences of their experiences in a way that is difficult to access or learn about with short-term (year-long) research. My probing, my questions, and my analysis were all driven and made more nuanced by my knowledge, learned both through personal stories (and their morals), cultural and family practices, and the unarticulated

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[13] According to sociologist Rubén Rumbaut (1997), I would technically be considered a member of the 1.75 generation, because I was between the ages of zero and five at the time of my arrival in the U.S. According to his model, those who arrived between the ages of six and 12 are the classic 1.5 generation, and those who immigrated in their teenage years, 13-17, are the 1.75ers. These numbers indicate the proximity of the child's cultural and personal experiences to either that of the first or second generation.

rhythm of daily life, wherein silence itself can impart knowledge (Kidron 2009). My subject

position enriches the data collected, the understanding of participants' experiences and the

profundity of the impact of transit migration on them and their self-conceptions—or the

ways the experiences of transit reflect other aspects of Soviet Jewish American lives and

perspectives: all of which are not at all obvious on the surface, observing their day-to-day

lives.

Intimate ethnography, autoethnography, and native anthropology all reinforce the

lasting impact of the discipline's reflexive turn, which highlighted the influence of the

anthropologist's subject-position on the collected data and the writing of ethnography. The

viability of these subgenres attests to the importance of acknowledging the researcher's

relation to his or her research participants and subject matter, regardless of the nature of that

relationship. Both Waterston and Rylko-Bauer acknowledge the tribulations of family

members as key informants: there is considerable conflict of interest and sometimes of

perspective as both daughter and anthropologist. Waterston, for example, explains that her

father's stories to her were frequently delivered with a moral, which usually sat at odds with

her own beliefs, and this may have shaped what he was willing to reveal to her (2013:151;

Rylko-Bauer 2014:14-15). There are always limits to what the researcher can learn and the

kinds of things participants will reveal, given the identity of the researcher, or, in general. As

my mother said to me during one of our talks about transit migration: "There are some

things I will never tell anyone, not even you."

I consider my mother to have been my key informant, though I never directly

interviewed her. During the research period, I would often discuss my thoughts and findings

with her. Her and my father's reflections and reactions helped me to refine my

interpretations and understanding of people and events. This is an extension of my

relationship with my parents, both in terms of their openness in sharing their personal stories with me and in terms of my learning from them. As historian Annelise Orleck noted, stories of the past "are not just the province of the elderly. They color the intimate and loving relations between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren here in the United States, where deep closeness and unshakeable loyalty are marks of the Soviet immigrant family" (Orleck 1999:12). This didactic relationship between my parents and me extends to the majority of my interviewees, many of whom treated me as they would a friend of their children's or their friend's child.

My mother's presence during a few interviews with family and close friends (and in one case both my parents' presence) provided me another lens through which to interpret the experiences and outlooks I was hearing. During those interviews, my mother provided both social lubricant and an "ethnographic prism"[14] though which I could understand others' stories and perspectives because of how well I know my mother and the nature and history of her relationships. I could keenly pick up on reactions of interest, boredom, surprise, empathy, recognition, teasing, dismissal, and so on, between peers who, at different times, went through the same process of transit migration and to a certain extent already knew each other's experiences. Her occasional presence in interviews also offered feedback, via others' reactions, on her opinions and experiences as my key informant.

Research Participants

My parents, many of their closest friends, some relatives, and I all appear in the pages of the dissertation. In making my relationships with my interlocutors explicit, I help the reader contextualize their words and outlooks. Of my sample size of 48 individuals

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[14] Personal communication with Jeffrey Shandler, September 12, 2014.

whom I formally interviewed for this research, six are relatives, 22 of them family friends, and 20 individuals I met through networking. (There were of course dozens of others from all three categories to whom I spoke informally on the topic). I was cognizant of how I was interpreted and treated by interviewees—frequently as a member of my generation, as "someone's daughter," rarely as purely an interviewer—as well as the limits of our topic(s) of conversation because of my and their personalities as well as cultural norms around gender and age. There is also the politics of hearing to acknowledge: that the listener attaches a "moral quality" to a voice based on the social role of the speaker (Gardner 2002:33, citing Cohen 1998:175). Furthermore, my selection of people to interview as well the basis for others' recommendation of interview subjects (and participants' self-selection) often hinged on the individual's narrative skill and mnemonic authority. Though I sought to interview individuals with a variety of personality types, outlooks, and experiences, people inevitably recommended to me those they consider to be interesting people and skilled story-tellers.

The social setting of the interview fell in line with the communal nature of storytelling that is a distinguishing feature of Soviet Jewish culture: communal in the sense of being done by a community and in the sense that stories are for common use. Throughout their lives, Soviet Jews heard, carried, told, and retold their own, their family's, and others' lived experiences from a shared and an emergent pool of stories. It is not just stories of the past that pass intergenerationally within families (Orleck 1999:12), nor just talk (discussion, reflection, jokes, gossip) that consolidates Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants into a community (Markowitz 1993); a prominent, core feature of this group is precisely the cultural practice of self-narration. These stories of lived experiences are marked by self-drama that accentuates one's endurance of hardship: one has lived to tell, and now is telling

others about that.[15] This cultural practice defines them, and it is a sign of its power that these stories endure without institutional help.

As a group, Russian-speaking Jews in the U.S. are highly educated, professionalized, and upwardly mobile immigrants, reflecting their general high levels of education and social capital within the Soviet Union (Hoffman 2001; Orleck 1999; Handelman 1998; Markowitz 1993; Chiswick 1993; Sarchar 1992; Simon 1985). Across the USSR, Jews were largely urbanized and culturally assimilated, participating on par with the general population both in Soviet state-building youth and young adult projects and in valuing "high" Russian culture (performing arts, literature, knowledge of history). Levels of socioeconomic status varied significantly but generally corresponded to high-status professions and activity on the black market. Due to their social capital, and not strictly by any definitions of "class," Soviet Jewish emigration was of the middle and high social strata. They arrived in the U.S. as "secularized Russian-speakers intensely concerned with finding well-paying jobs in their professions, nice housing, and good schooling for their children (Markowitz 1993:228).

Here, excluding the elderly living on social programs and benefits, first generation Soviet American Jews by and large vote Republican, and hold both socially and fiscally conservative viewpoints (Berger 2012; Zaitchik 2011). Drawing on their lives in the Soviet system, they vehemently reject any political project that resembles socialism, even if their aging parents benefit from social welfare programs (see Axelrod 2012 for a characteristic point of view). They hold mostly white-collar jobs—administrators, specialized technicians, computer programmers (the most popular profession among Russian-speaking Jews)—and in their first years of immigration were grateful to find jobs that allowed for socioeconomic mobility and the fulfillment of important goals: the acquisition of comfortable housing, high

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[15] Personal communication with Jeffrey Shandler, September 12, 2014.

standards of living, education and career success for children, and their own future financial security. They worked hard and a great deal in their early years of immigration, and still do, regardless of personal interest or fulfillment. Their focus on career practicality, saving practices, and the steady accumulation of money was not an end in itself but followed from the recognition of its use-value in U.S. society (in contrast to the Soviet system). Now, facing a changing economy after over two decades of work experience, many voice complaints about the nature of their chosen industry, the job market, and the changing job culture in the U.S. (e.g. the decline of company loyalty and benefits to employees). They nevertheless persevere, following the deeply held ethic of personal responsibility—that is one's own responsibility to know enough, work hard enough, save enough, and to react to society in ways that benefit you and your family. Likewise, as I assert in this dissertation, it is one's responsibility to move oneself from shame to dignity, to turn negative memories in positive ones, and to make oneself successful. Armed with social capital that translated well in the U.S. job market and supported materially, socially, emotionally by a dense network of friends and family, this is what they set out to and did accomplish in the U.S. They remain deeply invested in their friendships, family life, and generally sustain the life-long relationships they have nurtured throughout the years.

As to location, half of all Soviet Jewish immigrants to the U.S. settled in New York City (Orleck 1999; Handelman 1998); at the time of the interview, my sample consisted of 29 persons living in the boroughs of New Yorks City (18 in Brooklyn, two in Queens, six in Staten Island, three in Manhattan); 11 from the Boston metropolitan area; and the rest from the New York Metropolitan area (New Jersey, Long Island, Orange County). Besides those currently living in Boston, all of the other interviewees initially settled in Russian-speaking enclaves in Brooklyn. Those who now live elsewhere moved after a number of years in

steady, professional jobs, usually to suburbs or neighborhoods with strong public education systems. Most, though not all, own their homes or apartments and many have remodeled them in a modern, European style that is idiosyncratically recognizable as that of Russian-speaking immigrants.

Owing to the characteristics outlined above, my research participants are indeed representative of the mainstream, educated, professionalized Soviet Jewish immigrant population (though not statistically speaking), at least in the New York and Boston metropolitan areas. While I surmise that those immigrants on the West coast, like those living in the relatively affluent San Diego, San Francisco, and Los Angeles areas, would recount experiences similar to those of my research participants, it is plausible that Soviet Jews living in, say, Kentucky, would reflect differently on their immigrant trajectories, especially with regards to notions of "immigrant success."[16]

Research Methodology

Most interviews took place between February 2011 and August 2013 at the location of the interviewee's choosing.[17] These included their homes, work spaces, public areas, and restaurants. In interviews, I solicited immigrants' recollections of transit migration in the form of an event-history. It was evident that some recollections were emergent as part of the interview context, while others part of a practiced repertoire of stories (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007:7; Labov 1972). I supplemented spontaneous and prepared recollections with a set of reflective questions, for example, about their experience of statelessness and

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[16] Personal communication with Rebecca Kobrin, October, 4, 2011.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, interviews were conducted in Russian. I collaborated with Michael Drob on the making of his documentary *Stateless* (2014), about Soviet transit migration in the year 1989. As part of this project, I conducted an additional six interviews with eight individuals in 2013. Some of the interview data is included herein; the context of the interview is always noted.

refugee status (as statuses), about the historical significance of their emigration (which generally did not resonate with people), about the difference between their "emigration" and that of those who immigrated straight to the U.S. When narratives were halting, I took interviewees through the steps of the transit migration process chronologically with plenty of follow-up questions (e.g. how the decision to emigrate was reached; what preparations were undertaken; what happened at Soviet customs; their impressions of Vienna; their activities in Italy; whether they took any trips in Italy; the nature of their interactions with Italians; whether they've made any return trips). When appropriate, I would also ask immigrants to share and discuss with me photographs, documents, and objects that remain from that period of their lives. This, too, helped me to understand the lingering significance of transit migration in their lives today.

To further broaden the scope of my research, I read published memoirs and personal essays (e.g. Boym 2014; Shteyngart 2014; Nelin 2011; Shrayer 2007; Tetelbaum 2007; Zigman 2006; Dranov 1981), fiction (Draitser 2012; Bezmozgis 2011; Shrayer-Petrov 1994, 2003) as well as personal accounts published on the internet (e.g. on mystory.hias.org) and available in archives (such as New York Public Library's Dorot Division) related to Soviet Jews' transit migration. I analyzed these in terms of unique and generalizable elements of the transit migration experience and outlook, taking into account the medium and the self-consciousness (techniques of self-presentation) of the published writer.

Finally, I spent many hours searching through the archives of the JDC, HIAS, and the Center for Jewish History (all located in New York City) for documents related to the operation and the historical context of the "transmigrant" program. These archives offered more information through which to imagine and contextualize transit migrants' everyday lives throughout the two decades under discussion (Bretell 1998), even though archived

documents may contain errors and themselves reflect historical and personal biases (Stoler 2009; Bernard 2006:448; Merry 2003; Davis 1987).

Though these other sources and my subject position complement and strengthen the validity of interview-driven data collection, there remains an acknowledged shortcoming of the interview method: its truth value. Do the things people say really reflect what actually happened? To what extent? How can you know? These questions are not as pertinent to a project, like this one, that focuses primarily on understanding people's relationship to an experience in their past rather than establishing historical accuracy. Still, it merits attention, as it has been thoroughly discussed in fields that use memories as evidence to reconstruct a historical event (Grele 1996:63).

Both historians (Thomson 1999a) and social scientists (Bretell 1998) have criticized the oral history method for issues of reliability, validity, and representativeness. Oral history is historically contingent; the information obtained depends both on the researcher soliciting it (what kinds of questions are asked, what biases are brought in), the narrator's current understanding of his or her past, and the relationship between the researcher and informant (Portelli 1991). Nevertheless, oral histories allow participants to reveal their view of the events in which they were involved (Yans McLaughlin 1990; Maynes 1992). The interviewee has the time, space, freedom, and creativity to construct his or her life as he or she sees it, emphasizing the personally salient features. By making memory the object of analysis, the oral history method stresses "how people make sense of their past, how they connect individual experience and its social context, how the past becomes part of the present, and how people use it to interpret their lives and the world around them" (Frisch 1990:188; Ochs and Capps 1996). Personal accounts of migration, for example, reveal not only events in the past but also how migrants' felt and continue to feel about migration (Thomas-Hope

1980:35). In this sense, interviews reveal how migrants make their lives through stories (Thomson 1999b), as we all do (Ochs and Capps 1996; Erickson 2003).

Anthrohistorians have agreed with historians' conclusion that every statement is valuable; even wrong statements are psychologically (Portelli 1991:51), culturally (Merry 2003:57), and personally (Ochs and Capps 1996) true. Rather than try to sort through different recorded versions of an event to find "historical truth," Ann Stoler (2009), for example, concludes that these multiple versions point to the "confused space in which people lived, to the fragmented knowledge on which they relied, and to the ill-informed and inept responses that knowledge engendered" (185). Anthropologists dealing with events in the past do not try to ascertain historical truth so much as the making of meaning through historical time and the making of accounts that come to be understood as history.

Though every story/narrative/account is influenced and framed by culturally salient discourses (Wertch 2008; Zerubavel 2003), and though remembering does in fact re-constitute the past (Climo and Cattell 2002; Dureau 2001; Lambek and Antse 1996; Halbwachs 1992), the content of people's words should not be overlooked or discounted, nor the fact that they refer to something that actually happened. Whereas narrative is often interpreted as merely discourse and so used to undermine the power of experiences, narrative is a critical way to express what is lived, perceived, and felt. Instead of dwelling on the erasures and failures of memory, the creative nature of remembering and retelling, the impacts of social contexts on remembering, and the irrecoverability of the true past, I embrace the idea that people feel and tell what is true to them, and they know because they experience it.

The questioning of the interview's truth value thus captures the complex relationship and slippery distinctions between an experience, the memory of that experience, and its

recounting. How can we identify and grapple with "experience" when "the pure present is an ungraspable advance of the past devouring the future. [And,] in truth, all sensation is already memory"? (Bergson 1991). The past does not cease to matter. But how can we account for the ephemeral nature of an experience? How do we capture both the texture of an experience, like Soviets' transit migration, and conceptualize its significance if the event has ceased to be?

To interpret how research participants carry the experience (of transit migration) with them, I turn to the concepts of experience and embodiment, and what they imply about an event and its remembering. This approach reconciles (but does not erase) the problematic of temporal distance by establishing that people embody traces of the experience and its memories, because neither the materiality nor the significance of the past cease to be.

EMBODIMENT AS A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS THE EXPERIENCED PAST AND CONTEXTUALIZED REMEMBERING

Memory, broadly conceived, is the mental representation of the past in the present. Contemporary humanists and social scientists researching memory trace their theoretical roots to Maurice Halbwachs. A dedicated follower of Durkheim, Halbwachs saw memory as the means by which societies maintain their social solidarity (Coser 1992:25). Halbwachs (1980) argues that memory is necessarily collective because all experience is social. The impressions we have of the world do not come into existence through us alone, but as a product of interaction with others and our constant belonging to social groups. Memory is not a product of isolated beings; it is "in society that people acquire, recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 1992:38). Thus not only cultural life, and particular experiences, are shared and social in nature; recollections are as well.

Anthropological work on memory contributes to this tradition, focusing on "re-membering"—social constitution through the act of recollecting. Ethnographies that focus on memory tend to explore collective memory in terms of its institutionalization—that is, in terms of memorialization and memory-work, especially the politicization of collective memory (i.e., the use of collective memory or countermemory for political organizing or as material for political ends, e.g., Coutin 2011; Uehling 2004; Climo and Cattell 2002; Mageo 2001; Kenny 1999). This does not facilitate the understanding of an experience like Soviet Jews' transit migration, which is collective but has not been politically or socially mobilized and rarely shows up in public discourse. This is why I turn to an understanding of memory that is situated within lived experience. From the outset, this research has been motivated by a desire to in some way capture the experiences of migration. In order to understand what that means, it must first be established what I mean by "experience" and then what I hope to show about migration by focusing on participants' experiences.

In the 1980s and part of the 1990s, several prominent anthropologists undertook an anthropology of experience, led by Victor Turner, Barbara Myerhoff, and Edward Bruner. The volume edited by Turner and Bruner (1986) established several useful definitions for the term. Turner, drawing on the work of Wilhelm Dilthey and John Dewey, differentiates between "mere experience," which is "simply the passive endurance and acceptance of events" and "an experience," which stands out from the usual flow of time by a definitive beginning—marked by "shocks of pain or pleasure"—and a definitive end (1986:35). Its distinction from the flow of "normal," otherwise indistinguishable time, Turner writes, engenders "an anxious need to find meaning in what has disconcerted us, whether by pleasure or pain, and converted mere experience into *an* experience" (36). Another contributor to the volume elaborates on Turner's point: "as a concept, experience

underscore the ongoingness of life and the open character of ongoing actions, yet it also encourages us to see actions as units of behavior that can be separated from the rest of the action and talked about later" (Abrahams 1986:49). Both Turner and Abrahams here assert that the meaning-making and narrative processes that follow "an experience" reinforce its status as such; it is the distinct nature of the experience itself, however, that engenders the search for meaning.

Despite its useful definition, the volume, reflecting Turner's influence, primarily couched the analysis of experience in terms of performance and social drama. In the 1990s another edited volume by Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Hervik (1994) also addressed "experience," but in a different light. Hastrup and Hervik's volume considers the relationship between the production of anthropological knowledge and embodied social experience—the ways in which anthropologists come to understand social life through participants' and their own bodies, senses, emotions, the atmosphere of a place (ambience), as well as through informants' verbalizations of their experiences and observations of their practices. This holistic, humanistic approach to the way people understand their lives and themselves in the world approaches my conceptualization of experience more closely than attention to social rules and social cohesion (as performance and social drama studies do).

"Finding that anthropology had come to focus unduly on questions of meaning, discourse, structural relations, and political economy to the neglect of the everyday experiences, contingencies, and dilemmas that weigh so heavily on people's lives" (Desjarlais and Throop 2011:92), anthropologists in the 1990s began to draw on phenomenology in order to address the same concerns as Hastrup and Hervik (1994). Much like the embodiment and sense anthropology literature (e.g. Chau 2008; Howes 2005; Desjarlais 2005, 1992; Csordas 2002, 1994; Sutton 2001; Stoller 1995, 1989; Feld and Basso 1996;

Seremetakis 1994) developing in parallel, Hastrup and Hervik's volume is concerned with

countering the empiricist strand in anthropology that relies on Cartesian dualism of knowing

mind versus body (1994:228), which has left present-day Western scholars without "a precise

vocabulary with which to deal with mind-body-society interactions…[leaving us] suspended

in hyphens, testifying to the disconnectedness of our thoughts" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock

1987:10). But even anthropological studies attuned to this discord maintain boundaries

between what in reality are integrated modes of experiencing and knowing: We have, for

example, the anthropology of emotions, affect, senses, body, memory, place, material

culture, and cognitive anthropology. I therefore follow Hastrup and Hervik in using the

concept of "experience" as an integrated mind-body-self perspective in its broadest sense

(see also Wilson 2004), strengthening the concept of experience as an *event* of lasting import

with the methodological and interpretive rigor of the anthropology of the senses and

embodiment, wherein experience (i.e. "all human functions") is operationalized as

synthesized bodily experience (Csordas 1993; Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Embodiment, drawing strongly on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962),

emphasizes the body as a source of knowledge in order to understand the situated,

intersubjective engagement of human subjects with the world that precedes objectified

representation (Csordas 1994:10; 1999:184; Weiss 1999; Stoller 1997). That is, because the

body acquires knowledge through habitual doing (Connerton 1989; Bourdieu 1990; Mauss

2007[1935]), knowledge itself resides in the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962). We know through

our presence, through our body in place, even when we don't know what, how, and that we

are knowing (Taussig 2007).

Studies that take seriously the continued embodiment of knowledge have shown that

memories remain alive and contribute to how their bearers experience the present.

Knowledge of the past is revealed and kept relevant not just through muscle memory and the five senses (when we see, hear, smell, touch, or taste something familiar; Pink 2009; Sutton 2001; Marks 2000; Serematakis 1994). It also in our interaction with places (Casey 1996; Basso 1996; Okely 1994), in the way individuals interact with objects in the world (Kidron 2009; Boym 1998; Hirsch 1997; Stewart 1985), in cultural practices and bodily techniques like music (Riaño-Alcalá 2006; Quireshi 2000), and the ways we narrate our lives (Boym 2001; Hirsch 1997; Myerhoff 1981; Halbwachs 1980).

This dissertation is not directly about the body or the senses. Rather, it relies on embodiment as a conceptual framework to unite all the aspects of *experience* that I wish to address as modes of perceiving, retaining, and transmitting knowledge about the world through time: storytelling; meaningful relation to place; tone, feeling, emotion, self-reflection (dealing with self across time); affective/visceral reactions (moods, goose bumps, tears); the interaction with and continued possession of meaningful objects; the surprising expression of knowledge and abilities (phrases in Italian, topographical memory of Rome). As a conceptual framework, embodiment establishes the possibility for immigrants' embodied memories of transit migration, and therefore allows me to account for and reconcile the various temporalities and intersubjective encounters that are at play in this ethnography: the original experiences of transit migration; the passage of time since transit migration; the content of the interview (the stories told); the interview setting and the interactions thereof; the fact that that interview "setting" is itself now in the past; my own relation to the ethnographic data.

By acknowledging that all experiences are embodied; that we move through the world within a body that is attuned to and permeated by the world; and that not only the senses, but that emotions, affect, moral values, the imagination, memory, and the ambience

of place are all integrated in our experience of the world, we can see that both the visceral and the temporally variable—the past, the future, memory, imagination—matter in an ethnography of experience. Therefore how migrants imagine the future (chapter 1); how they and others interpret legal statuses (chapter 2); how they experience and produce the sensations of transit migration, like chaos, anxiety, uncertainty (chapter 3); how they experience their sense of self and self-worth as they leave a closed society and move through the international nation-state system (chapter 4); and how they interact with the past through return visits (chapter 5) all imply a holistic, integrated, embodied approach to experience.

A Relation to the Past that is Not Trauma

Embodiment is not the only theoretical framework that allows for a methodological exploration of the lasting relationship between experience, memory, and recollection. The psychoanalytic concept of trauma does, too. What is useful in its formulation of event through time is *trauma*'s attention to the lasting, embodied imprint of a profound event: "It at once has some pastness, is a sort of a 'memory-knowledge'…and is not past, not 'memory'…at all…. [It is] 'deep memory', the persistence of the past in its own perpetual present" (Culbertson 1995:170). In analyzing Soviet Jews' lived experiences of their emigration and transit migration, however, I have purposefully steered away from the lens of trauma, because the ways in which trauma delineates the relationship between an event and its impact on self-experience through time does not articulate the back-and-forth dynamic relationship between past and present that this dissertation seeks to describe.

In the most widespread understandings of trauma, a traumatic event ruptures one's experience of self and time that cannot be reconciled or re-integrated into the self (Caruth 1996; Culbertson 1995). This renders trauma unnarrateable, because the self that should be

the narrator is destroyed or divided (Culbertson 1995:191). In place of narration, trauma is repressed and silenced (Ballinger 1998), "disabl[ing] constructive memory work" (Ghassem-Fachandi 2009:20). Trauma is manifested in the present as elements of the traumatic event "revisit"—its symptoms, the origins of which may elude especially the traumatized individual, putting him or her in crisis (Caruth 1996; Culbertson 1995:175). Therefore, in psychoanalytic understandings of trauma, "there is a profound disconnect between what is experienced and what is apprehended or assimilated" (Pellegrini 2007:415); the chasm "between memory and event is attenuated to point of fracture" (413).

Ann Pellegrini (2007), in contrast, argues that the effects of trauma are not pre-determined: "injury does not have to be the whole of the story, the hole in her self" (416). Pellegrini demonstrates that traumas, in her piece exemplified by pedophilic sexual relations, vary in experience: repulsion may be mixed with desire; rape may have been bad, but not the worst things in one's life ("*nontraumatizing* experience of rape"; 421); a refusal to heal oneself by "letting go" of the trauma "may not be destructive of the self but constitutive of its ongoing life" (428).[18] These possibilities do not in any way take away from a victim's wounds. Rather, Pellegrini shows the possibilities for the integration of the traumatic experiences into the self and one's life course. Although this critique offers a different interpretation to the effects of a traumatic event on one's experience of self, past, and time, the concept derives its force from the definition outlined above. I therefore do not attempt to re-define or expand the concept of trauma by using Soviet Jews' transit migration as a case study of it.

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[18] Carol Kidron (2009) additionally demonstrates that, even though silence is interpreted as repression and a lack of healing in psychoanalysis, healing and commemoration may take place in silent practices of everyday life (e.g. in "survivor-descendant face work…, in person-object interaction…, and in mundane practices of survivors and descendants"; 6).

STRUCTURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

This work begins by countering two interrelated stereotypes of Soviet Jewish Americans that underlie how American scholars generally interpret their emigration: that those who immigrated to the West (as opposed to Israel) were economically motivated, and, for this reason and in comparison to other groups, they were not "real" refugees. I counter these (outsider) assumptions by presenting the points of view and the lived experiences of the immigrants themselves, as well as by pointing out the instability and biases of the very categories used to define them.

Social science has generated an abundance of valuable knowledge about migrants and migration but, as anthropologists like to point out, academically useful epistemological categories often obscure other truths and perspectives. In chapter 1 I first explore the historical narratives that dominate American scholarship of Soviet Jewish emigration, indicating the many players and stakes that skew these histories in various directions, but consistently away from the ordinary but primary agents of the mass movement: the Soviet Jewish emigrants. In trying to understand and categorize what was actually a unique sociocultural group exiting a unique historical experiment (to which only Cuba and North Korea may be compared), scholars relied on familiar labels of identity and motivation that still fit awkwardly on Soviet Jewish immigrants. Thus, Soviet Jews were interpreted as having either a strong or a weak Jewish identity, which somehow correlated with either a religious or ideological (Zionist) motivation to immigrate to Israel or an economic motivation to live in the West. (The desire to reunite with family abroad was taken as uninteresting or self-explanatory and left unpolemicized). In chapter 1, I point to the political and scholarly biases that led to the labeling of West-bound emigrants as economically motivated as well as to the methodological difficulties in determining a person's motivations for emigrating to begin

with. Instead, I suggest the relevance of emigration as part of Soviet Jews' social imaginary, a known response to discrimination and violence through generations of lived memory (and, more broadly, a time-honored survival strategy for all despised minorities, including Jews, throughout European history).

The pitfalls of accepted epistemological categories of identity come through most clearly in chapter 2's discussion of Soviet Jews' relation to the refugee legal status and social label. Though (or, rather, because) it is an international legal construct, the content of refugee status has always been dependent on the national and historical context within which it is applied. Because, in actuality, there is no definitive definition of "the refugee," statements regarding genuine refugeeness point to moral judgments that underline the sociolegal problems with a legal label that has suffering as its principal criterion. In this light, Soviet Jewish immigrants' utilitarian attitude toward their refugee status points to their realizations of the disparity between what is expected of "refugeeness" as a social and client subject-position (e.g., helpless, sad, abject) and who they expected themselves to be as people of worth in society.

Accordingly, in this work, I slip consciously between the terms *emigrant*, *émigré*, *refugee*, *transit migrant*, and *immigrant* when referring to Soviet Jewish Americans.[19] Although each of

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[19] The term *emigrant* refers to a person who has left his or her country of citizenship and/or residence in order to settle elsewhere. It highlights the process of leaving. Correspondingly, the term *immigrant* focuses on the person in the context of arrival and settlement and happens to be the most popular denomination for persons who create a home across international boundaries (because that is how the person comes to matter politically and socioeconomically to the receiving country). The term *migrant* has been espoused and favored in academic literature in the last two decades as a way to recognize the variety of migration practices—internal migration (that is, within a country's boundaries), international migration, seasonal migration, circular migration, permanent migration, and the maintenance of transnational ties and livelihoods (which acknowledge the importance of the "sending" societies as well as various "receiving" contexts and the possibility that settlement may not be permanent). The most recent trend in migration scholarship is to recognize migration as another instance of mobility (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Salazar 2013; Cresswell 2006), further situating the phenomenon of migration as one of many contemporary practices of moving from one place to another.

these terms has a particular sociological meaning and accompanying connotations, it is possible to occupy several nodes on this continuum, especially over a period of time. An emigrant may be an émigré, may be in transit, applying for refugee status, become a refugee, and then an immigrant over the span of five to ten years, as Soviet Jewish emigrants did. I wish to avoid any orthodoxy with regard to labeling, especially because labels can obscure experiential connections across established political-legal statuses (e.g. identifying shared embodied experiences—shame, demoralization, insecurity, an inability to construct one's social becoming and therefore focus on "normal" life, but also a possibility for pleasure, enchantment, self-evaluation, and plans to recuperate dignity/construct a life that feels normal—among people living with unfixed immigrant legal statuses). It is more important to keep in mind that Soviet Jews left a closed society, forever, and entered into the unknown. This is the experience that was shared, has been remembered, and that is relayed in the subsequent three chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 delves into transit migration as an instance of mobility, constituted by both moving and waiting. By following a particular route, transit migration for Soviet Jews was defined by distinct spacio-temporal and politico-legal parameters. The chaos of moving and the imposition of waiting resulted in their realization of their new subject-position (as stateless refugees-in-transit) in a theretofore-unimagined world. These sensations are expressed most vividly as feeling "like no one, going nowhere." The uncertainty that infused

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The *refugee* is a legal category, the history and application of which is discussed in chapter 2. The majority of Soviet Jews arrived in the U.S. with refugee status; they were thus refugees. They were also transit migrants, although none of them have ever heard of this academic term. They, instead, refer to themselves during that time as "emigrants," "immigrants," or both. Other terms, such as *émigré* and *exile*, have particular political and literary connotations. The émigré typically leaves his or her country for political or ideological reasons; *exile* is a literary term denoting a particular emotional aesthetic: solitude, loneliness, estrangement, a profound sense of loss, and an "essential sadness" (Said 2000). Both, then, are a matter of perspective, self-representation, and inflection.

this passage of time heightened the range of responses to moving and waiting, resulting in transit migration being a distinct category of experience and phase in immigrants' lives.

The second prominent aspect of realizing their new subject-positions was their self-consciousness in Europe and shame over the extent of their ignorance and deprivation as Soviet subjects. This deeply felt and thoroughly embodied encounter with the West entailed both shock and enchantment, the experiential contours of which I detail in chapter 4. I argue that the shame and the pleasures that they encountered and experienced, compounded by the uncertainty of the future and the inability to literally work toward that recuperation of dignity, resulted in a deeply held determination to recuperate dignity in the future. This desire, formulated and embodied while in transit, is what underpins the common practice of return visits to the places of transit migration.

Return trips, as illustrated in chapter 5, therefore exemplify a dynamic interaction between past and future. The aim of a return visit to the places of transit migration, heretofore unexplored in migration studies or anthropology, is a recuperation of dignity longed for while in transit, a point that also indicates immigrants' investment in understanding and making meaningful their self-experience as immigrants through time. Return trips are experiences in and of themselves, but ones that hinge on the re-experiencing of place in a different way, from an anticipated subject position. This re-experiencing breaks open the distinctions between an experience, a memory of that experience, and its subsequent remembering—a set of distinctions that results in privileging either the discursive, re-constituting nature of remembering or the irreconcilable impact and intensity of the original experience. This tendency is borne out in scholarship of immigration, which examines the experience of immigration as either isolated, sensory moments of

displacement, determinative of a particular kind of permanent identity politics[20] or as narratives about self in which the past is permanently out of reach. In this last formulation, nostalgia becomes the primary means through which immigrants may interact with their pasts.

By focusing both on the experiences of transit migration and Soviet Jewish Americans' returns to it through narrative, visits, and reflection, this dissertation points to the potential for a more dynamic, experiential, mutually reinforcing relationship to a significant experience in the past—neither determinative nor remote. In these ways, my interlocutors show that migration is a complex and shifting experience that gets continually written and re-written in ordinary strategies of resilience and self-worth as it is incorporated into the broader trajectory of one's life.

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[20] Thank you to Nell Quest for help with these insights.

CHAPTER 1. EMIGRATION OF/AS SOVIET JEWS

"A person who longs to leave the place where he lives is an unhappy person."
                                        -Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

EVERY MIGRATION IS A STORY

Responding to an interview question following the publication of his 2013 memoir about growing up Jewish in the Soviet Union, Maxim Shrayer describes how two sets of readers might receive his book: "I think North American Jews who are not of Soviet origin view [the book] as a kind of extended explanation of why Jews left Russia and why they still loved this land. Jews of Soviet origin, and especially their children, read the book as a kind of manifesto of their generation" (Zeltserman 2013).[1]

Shrayer's statement touches on issues relevant to this chapter. It is quite clear that the audiences he identifies might differ in their interpretation of Soviet life and Soviet recollections: curiosity versus recognition. Observers, when considering Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, would focus on understanding why it is that they left in the first place. Indeed, the English-language scholarship supports his idea. Until the 2000s, it has been primarily American and Israeli (Jewish) scholars writing the history of Soviet Jewish emigration. The various historical narratives that have emerged focuses on several sets of actors to explain the causes of emigration—Israel, participants of the American Soviet Jewry Movement, Soviet Jewish activists, the Soviet Union and the United States—to the exception of the mass of Soviet Jewish emigrants themselves. It also bifurcates Soviet Jewish

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[1] He responded to the following question: "Can you comment on how the book has been received thus far, and if you've found that your audience responses differ between Russian Jews and North American Jewry?" The question was posed to him by Lea Zeltersman, a blogger and writer in her early thirties, immigrated to Canada at the age of three. Divorced from her cultural background for much of her life, she began to research her family's background and write about what it means to have immigrated from the Soviet Union. She has organized a network of like-minded immigrant children across North America. She sends out monthly emails to her listserv entitled "The Soviet Samovar - Your [monthly] round-up of Russian-Jewish news."

emigrants into two types based on their destinations: those who settled in Israel as religiously motivated Jews and those who immigrated to points West (United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany) as economically motivated.

In this chapter, I review the extant scholarship on Soviet Jewish emigration in order to examine the assorted historical narratives competing for dominance in the politicized milieu of Soviet Jewish emigration. In particular, I suggest that Israel's historical role in making possible the emigration of Soviet Jewry heavily influenced this discursive framing of West-bound emigrants as economically motivated, consumption-hungry immigrants who were barely Jewish at all (and not Jewish in the right ways). As this and the subsequent chapters show, determining the motivations for emigration is not as clear-cut a task as migration studies portray, especially when one listens to migrants' retrospective narratives of those decisions. Here I steer the discussion away from definitive motivations and, instead, toward social imaginaries of migration (Pessar and Mahler 2003) as a way to describe ways of being and points of view that Soviet Jewish American immigrants would recognize as their own. Attention to social imaginaries emphasizes that it was the personal family history of emigration as a response to anti-Jewish sentiment and violence that allowed Soviet Jews to imagine their futures lives elsewhere.

THE GENERAL HISTORICAL FEATURES OF SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION

For contemporaneous observers, emigration from the USSR was, as two sociologists put it, "surely one of the most unlikely events in post-revolutionary Soviet history, for the USSR [was] often viewed as a 'closed society', a nation situated enigmatically behind an 'iron curtain'" (Zaslavsky and Brym 1983:1). As such, much of the academic literature, especially

from the 1970s and 1980s, searches for its causes and its fluctuating scale.[2] American and Israeli (and usually Jewish) scholars typically tell the story of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union in this way:

After years of closed doors, the Soviet Union had begun to let Jews trickle out in 1965, ostensibly on the basis of family reunification. Israel's victorious end to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War led to a reawakening of Jewish consciousness and pride among Soviet Jews, who began to demand the right to live as Jews in the Soviet Union or else make *aliyah*, that is, "ascend" by immigrating to Israel. Such efforts were amplified by a foiled hijacking of a Leningrad airplane in 1970 (intended destination: Sweden) by 12 dissident-refuseniks[3], of whom nine were Jews. The trials and resulting nine prison and two execution sentences drew Western attention and sharp criticisms of human rights violations. The Soviet government sought to resolve the pestering protests and garner Western favor by allowing limited emigration, a kind of "bleeding off" of its internal problems (Gitelman 1999:89).

Meanwhile, the Leningrad hijacking trials intensified nascent efforts among North American and European Jews to "save" the "Jews of Silence,"[4] a project begun in secret by Israel shortly after its founding.[5] Israeli operatives continuously fueled what became the Soviet Jewry Movement, considered second to Zionism among the 20th century's most

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[2] Most research concerning Soviet Jews published since the 1990s focuses on their acculturation as immigrants, particularly in Israel, where they constitute one-fifth of the Israeli population.

[3] Refusenik: a Soviet citizen denied permission to emigrate; this category came into existence in 1969 after the institution of an exit visa quota (Morozov 1999:16). The Russian term is *otkaznik*.

[4] *The Jews of Silence* is the title of Elie Wiesel's book on the imperative of rescuing Soviet Jewry, published in French in 1966 and in English in November 1967.

[5] The effort was headed by Israel's Liaison Bureau (*Lishkat HaKesher*), whose ultimate goal was to ensure the immigration of Eastern European Jews to Israel. So secretive were these efforts that, as one of its early leaders Nehemiah Levanon writes, only in the mid-1990s was he allowed to disclose its code name, *Nativ*, in print (Levanon 1999:71).

successful Jewish political mobilizations (Gitelman 1999:84); in the U.S., it was a collective

effort of Jewish establishment and grassroots organizations, widely regarded as U.S. Jews'

"coming of age" in U.S. national politics (Friedman 1999:7; Lazin 2005b:4; Beckerman 2010;

Altshuler 2005). Following the trials, Brussels hosted the first World Conference on Soviet

Jewry in February 1971, shortly succeeded by the founding of various national as well as

regional organizations across the U.S. Reacting to the Soviet implementation of an education

tax on emigrants,[6] this powerful movement ensured the 1974 enactment of the Jackson-

Vanik Amendment, which, as the first major piece of U.S. international human rights

legislation (Friedman 1999:5), refuses Most Favored Nation tariff status, trade credits, and

credit and investment guarantees to countries that deny or obstruct their citizens' right to

emigrate. The 1975 Helsinki Accords, which emphasized national sovereignty as well as

human rights such as free emigration, followed on the heels of Jackson-Vanik.

Emigration from the Soviet Union continued to increase through the 1970s, reaching

its apex in 1979 at just over 50,000 emigrants. By this time, most scholars emphasize, over

half of emigrants were choosing to immigrate not to Israel, but mainly to the United States,

as well as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, among others. Already by 1975, perhaps

propelled by the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, this "new phase" of "economically-

motivated" emigration had replaced the earlier "Zionist" one (Salitan 1992:7; Orleck

1999:58-62), with 36.9 percent of Soviet Jews choosing to go to places other than Israel

(Lazin 2005b:310). Israel dubbed these Soviet Jews *noshrim*, "dropouts" from the destination

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[6] This "diploma tax" required exiting emigrants to pay the Soviet government for each year of higher
education schooling, which was free for all citizens. In some cases, this fee amounted to more than a
decade of annual salaries and made it impossible for many professionals to leave (Krasikov 2007). A
recently declassified KGB study determined that, contrary to Americans' and Soviets' assumptions
only 13 percent of those who left during the first rush of emigration had a college education
(Krasikov 2007). In reality, the fee was in force only from August 3, 1972 to the end of the year;
Brezhnev called it "a bureaucratic bungle" (Buwalda 1997:91).

intended for them.

Israel, as most historical accounts describe, battled the American Jewish establishment, which generally but not unanimously endorsed Soviet Jews' "freedom to choose" their country of immigration. The controversy quieted only during the Soviet closed-door years of 1982 though 1986,[7] when mere hundreds of Soviet citizens were allowed to emigrate per year. It ignited anew once Mikhail Gorbachev's relaxed emigration policy propelled an unprecedented number of applicants and emigrants, climbing to over 70,000 in 1989, of whom nearly 90 percent sought immigration to the West. After a year of incoherent U.S. immigration policy concerning Soviet emigrants, in 1989 the newly elected Bush administration conclusively ended the "dropout debate" by instating a yearly quota for Soviet immigrants under the Lautenberg Amendment. From then on, the majority of the exploding number of Jewish emigrants from the USSR and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, the territory comprising the Former Soviet Union) settled in Israel. This narrative concludes with Israel receiving its long-desired massive influx of new Jewish citizens, but just as American Jews had in the 1970s and 1980s, Israel struggled with the unanticipated, overwhelming number of immigrants and the reality of their "Soviet-ness"— that is, their being far from ideal co-ethnics.

Between the years 1965 and 1991, approximately 775,000 Soviet Jews emigrated from the Soviet Union. Within the first six years following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December of 1991, another million left, leaving just a fraction of the Soviet Jewish population, estimated at 2.1 million in 1970. In total, the emigration of Jews from the USSR

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[7] This period coincides with the death of Leonid Brezhnev in November 1982, the 15-month leadership of Yuri Andropov, and the 13-month leadership of Konstantin Chernenko; Mikhail Gorbachev came into power as the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985.

and CIS counts as one of the greatest Jewish migrations in history.[8]

This historical narrative, which I have cobbled from the most recognized sources on the topic of Soviet Jewish emigration, adumbrates the key features of this mass migration. While factually accurate, it naturally skims over much of the nuanced history and background of Soviet Jewish emigration while highlighting particular actors and aspects of the movement. Sarah Fainberg has pointed out that the literature on Soviet Jewish emigration in the past 30 years has been dominated by "an idealized and triumphalist narrative" that celebrates the collaboration and achievements of Israel (fighting for the "ingathering of exiles"), Western (and particularly American Jewish) mobilization, and Soviet Jewish activists (2012:393-4). In doing so, Fainberg points out that the widespread historical narrative has particular biases (see also Wertsch 2008). Not only does the literature overstate the degree of collaboration between these three nodes (Fainberg 2012), but it glosses over the power dynamics at play in the creation of this narrative. Here I expand Fainberg's observations by pointing to Israel's influence on the contents of the narrative and the obscured role of non-activist Soviet Jewish emigrants heading West in the unfolding of this history.

The Role of Israel

From its very inception, Israel looked to Soviet Jewry as a source of the population surge that would allow it to become a viable state, as future Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (then Golda Meyerson) insisted during her Moscow visit in 1948 (Ro'i 1997:46). Israel's

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[8] Historical differences aside, Zvi Gitelman (1997) points out that Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union was relatively more intense than that from the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century, with a greater proportion of Jews leaving the territory in a shorter time period.

underground Liaison Bureau, charged with maximizing immigration to Israel under a secret

program codenamed *Nativ* (a route, a way), kept in touch with Jews inside the Soviet Union

since the 1950s by distributing religious and Hebrew-language material and sustaining social

networks. When the Soviet Union severed diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967

Arab-Israeli War, the Dutch embassy represented Israeli interests in the Soviet Union until

diplomatic relations were officially restored at the close of 1990.[9] Israel issued hundreds of

thousands of *vyzov*—literally "call up letters," referring to the invitation to join family abroad

required by the Soviet government to apply for an exit permit. Time and again, Israel opted

for the liberal and creative usage of these invitations in order to maximize emigration from

the Soviet Union, even when doing so countered their interests (e.g. when Israeli visas and

other services, like document transfers out of the country, were used by non-Jews or by

emigrants not headed to Israel). Israel also enacted legal measures to facilitate Soviet Jewish

emigration to Israel: in 1971, the Knesset passed a law allowing for Jews to obtain Israeli

citizenship automatically, even if outside its borders. Though few, if any, Soviet Jews took

advantage of this route, it was hoped that the measure would bypass the emigration

restrictions on Soviet citizens (Buwalda 1977:77). By creating automatic Jewish citizenship,

Israel established the legal argument that all Jews in transit and without nationality belong

there.

Furthermore, Israel was always involved in the organization and administration of

the Vienna-Rome emigration route of Eastern European Jewry. The Jewish Agency for

Israel, Israel's quasi-governmental immigration department (partially funded by overseas

Jews), ran an immigrant processing facility in Vienna since the end of the Second World

War. Until 1973, emigrants arriving to Vienna with Israeli visas were taken to Schoenau

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[9] See Buwalda 1997 for detailed analysis of the role of the Dutch Embassy in Soviet emigration.

Castle, under Israeli jurisdiction. After a pro-Palestinian hostage-taking incident in

September 1973, Austria accommodated the terrorists' demands to shut down the facility,

but housed migrants-in-transit nevertheless at a Red Cross facility under Austrian authority.

To the frustration of Israel and ardent Zionist, Austrian Prime Minister Bruno Kreisky

insisted on emigrants' freedom to choose their destinations once within Austria's borders.

Throughout the years of Soviet emigration, emigrants newly arrived in Vienna first

met with Jewish Agency officials, who would "release" them to HIAS and JDC if the

emigrants refused to proceed to Israel.[10] Israeli, HIAS, and JDC representatives were in

constant communication for as long as the emigration route persisted. On several occasions

throughout the 1970s and 1980s, in response to the high percentage of emigrants seeking to

go West, Israel agitated HIAS and JDC to adopt several strategies to curtail emigration to the

West: cut aid to Soviet Jews who had left Israel to immigrate elsewhere (c. 1973; "Annual

Report 1973," by Loni Eibenschütz Mayer, JDC-NY Archives); create a holding station in a

single hotel in Naples run by the Jewish Agency to strongly encourage—through education

and insistence—immigration to Israel (c. 1980; see "Refugees in Naples 1980" file, JDC-NY

Archives); and alter the emigration processing point from Vienna to Bucharest, which would

have restricted further travel to Israel alone (c. 1988; see "Change in Content of Israeli

Letters of Invitation; Resulting Changes in Flow of Soviet Jews," Memo to Cooperating

Agencies by Karl Zuckerman, April 28, 1988, JDC-NY Archives; Buwalda 1997).[11] Israel

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[10] In the post-War years, the Jewish Agency would not "release" emigrants to HIAS until after three to four days of insistent convincing. By 1973, the Jewish agency abandoned its "hardline sell" of Israel, now preferring to let people go to other places rather than suffer the cost and embarrassment of them wanting to leave Israel later ("Kohane visit to Rome 6-7 April 1973," Confidential Memo by Akiva Kohane, May 1, 1973, JDC-NY archives). By the late seventies, a Jewish Agency official greeted arriving emigrants in Vienna with the question, "Israel or elsewhere?"

[11] As of March 1988, during a year when 88.5 percent of Soviet Jewish emigrants were choosing to go West, Israel issued a new letter of invitation, stating that emigrants may pick up their Israeli visas at the Israeli Embassy in Bucharest, Romania (rather than the Dutch Embassy in Moscow). Romania

thus remained in charge, except administratively, of all decisions and guidelines related to emigration.[12]

In the 1960s and 1970s Israel's Liaison Bureau also fanned the flames of what was to become worldwide attention to the cause of Soviet Jewish emigration (this program was code-named *Bar* [grain]; Lazin 2006:390). It is certain that the Liaison Bureau envisioned politicized American Jewry as an essential channel to pressuring the U.S. government to exercise its "leverage on the Soviets" for the cause of Soviet Jewry (Lazin 2005b:26; Altshuler 2005:35).[13] After all, in the context of the Cold War, the Soviets took heed of U.S. action and threats, and it was in U.S. foreign policy interests to win minor ideological victories in the form of citizens leaving the Soviet system, an action dubbed "voting with their feet" (Salitan 1992:38; Lazin 2005b:83; Zucker and Zucker 1989:365; Zucker and Zucker 1987; Saloman 1991).[14]

Israel drove not only the course of events but the very understanding and narrative of the emigration movement (as the powerful are wont to do; Foucault 1980), with lasting effects. The very framing of Soviet Jewish immigration to the West as a "dropout" phenomenon (*neshira*) is a case in point. This perspective persists not only in scholarship, but in more widespread portrayals of the past: a recent, relatively well-known American documentary called *Refusenik* (2007) highlights the struggle of famous refuseniks against the

was the only state in Eastern Europe that maintained diplomatic relations with Israel. Unlike Austria, Romania would not endorse emigrants' freedom to choose their destinations. Once in Bucharest, emigrants' only choice would be to proceed onto Israel.

[12] There is no known evidence to suggest that Israel was part of the U.S. decision to end unlimited refugee status in 1988-9, even though this is believed to be true by many Soviet Jewish Americans. However, it can be surmised that Israeli representatives had a say, through the U.S. Jewish establishment, in the setting the annual quota stipulated in the Lautenberg Amendment.

[13] Not to mention the financial power of American Jews, whose funding was indispensable to migration processing and resettlement (both in the U.S. and Israel), not to mention the very founding of the state of Israel.

[14] The U.S. valued defection so highly that until 1980, the U.S. defined a refugee as any person fleeing a Communist regime. Until 1989, nearly 100 percent of all Soviet emigrants entered the U.S. as political refugees.

backdrop of Soviet Jewish emigration. In it, there is not a single mention of non-Israel-bound immigration, despite the fact that one of its featured refuseniks settled in the U.S. Partially because it is linked with a social movement and political struggle, Israel-bound emigration (aliyah) retains a noble and prestigious historical quality. Even though American Jews (especially those aligned with grassroots organizations) overwhelmingly vied for emigrants' "freedom of choice," they, too, were drawn to this Israel-centered (and Jewish-themed) explanation of the mass migration by framing it as a Zionist movement. Scholars Zaslavsky and Brym make the point:

> Many [Soviet] activists refer in their articles, memoirs and other testimonies to the euphoria and shock of the Six Day War as the decisive precipitant of heightened Zionist motivations. Supposedly, the loose mass of assimilated heartland [Ukrainian and Russian] Jewry suddenly formed cohesive groups armed with Zionist ideology, their single aim being departure for Israel. The Western mass media certainly helped build up this romantic vision of the "exodus," a new episode in the struggle of the Jewish David against the Goliath of the totalitarian state. [1983:36]

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War inspired pride among American Jews as much as certain Soviet Jewish dissidents, so the discursive emphasis on Israeli history, especially the 1967 victory as the mainspring for emigration, found lasting traction. Moreover, the war of 1967 was part of the Cold War in the sense that the victory of Israel was also the victory of the U.S. against the USSR, which had agitated for the war (Ro'i and Morozov 2008). Besides rhetorically positing Israel as the proper, logical destination for émigrés, the historical narrative presumptively assigns Soviet Jews a particular Jewish, Zionist consciousness that turned out to be far from representative.

Soviet Jewish Dissidents

The tendency to presume Zionist motivations is strongest among scholars who argue that the beginnings of emigration were the beginnings of a Jewish national movement in the

Soviet Union (e.g. Ro'i 1991:288), which rode on the back of dissidents agitating for democracy, parallel to the protest movements coursing through the world in the 1960s. Heading this camp is historian Yaacov Ro'i, who, for example, interprets the act of emigration or even receiving a vyzov from Israel (as well as receiving a rejection of a Soviet exit visa) as an act of (albeit passive) Zionism (1991:327). In this sense, emigrant action/non-action is pre-conceived as Zionistic. This bias also persists to this day. For example, in a footnote to a chapter about "The Zionist Family" in a volume dedicated to exploring the Soviet Emigration Movement as a social movement (edited by Ro'i), Edith Friedgut reveals the chapter's underlying assumption: she sees no "typical" families among Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel; rather, she sees "infinite variations on the theme of birth and rebirth of Zionism" (2012:263, fn21). This is a bold statement given that the majority of Soviet immigrants to Israel arrived after the U.S. set an annual quota, thereby arguably "steering" emigrants to choose Israel as their destination. Moreover, in this literature there is a parallel tendency to lean towards the religious understanding of Jewish identity, therefore belittling the Jewishness of those not bound for Israel. Consider Ro'i's statement: "These [West-bound] men and women did not for the most part identify with the Jewish nation and its state or partake of the desire to feel that their 'uniqueness as Jews [was] voluntary rather than compulsive'" (Ro'i 2012:8, quoting Ettinger 1982:16). The statement asserts that West-bound emigrants were untouched by a sense of Jewishness. It implicitly links the degree of emigrants' Jewish identification with immigrating to Israel and posits both that the only Jewish nation is the Israeli one[15] and that the only type of Jewishness is a religious or Zionist one.

Though a Soviet social movement focused on Jewish consciousness and emigration

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[15] As opposed to, say, places of the Diaspora.

did exist, its actual size and scope cannot be determined (Ro'i 2012:6-7). Its influence,

nevertheless, has been glorified by non-Soviet scholars and journalists, who were rightfully

impressed by the courage and tenaciousness of the refuseniks and the difficulty of their

struggle. Historian Benjamin Pinkus produces a corrective quantitative measure to

celebrations of a widespread Jewish national movement in the late 1960s and 1970s: besides

the 163,000 Soviets who emigrated to Israel between 1968 and 1982 (whom Ro'i categorizes

as "passively" Zionist), Pinkus cites 5,454 as the number of unique signatures on petitions

for emigration signed by Soviet Jews between 1969 and 1978; in the period 1965-1983, he

identifies 237 Soviet Jews as "leaders," those arrested or put on trial for their activities

(1988:315-16). These more modest numbers, of the Soviet Union's two million Jews, more

reasonably portray the extent of a Jewish social movement. Unlike in the West, there was no

wide-spread, unified social movement among Soviet Jews outside of small groups of

activists.

The American Soviet Jewry Movement (ASJM)

However, there is no doubt that there were important, courageous, effective Soviet

Jewish activists, whose tribulations became rallying points for the world-wide Soviet Jewry

Movement. The American Soviet Jewry Movement, a campaign that spanned 1964-1991 and

engaged a broad range of American Jewry, understandably narrated the movement through

Jewish religious—not just Zionist—motifs.[16] Much of the grassroots organizing took place

through synagogues, where consciousness-raising events included "Bar Mitzvah twinning" of

American and Soviet youths (only the former of whom could actually undergo the

ceremony). One of the Movement's most famous slogans, "Let My People Go!," aligns

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[16] Consider the intertwinement of religious Jewishness and Zionism in America, especially pre-1990s.

protestors with Israelites and the Soviet Union with biblical Egypt. Such familiar associations and recognizable framings granted American Jews a sense of intimacy with their far-flung subjects of rescue, but it misrepresented the Soviet Jewish population, who, as immigrants, deeply disappointed American Jews by lacking the ideological nobility and religious and cultural Ashkenazic Jewishness (*yiddishkeit*) of the Soviet dissidents (and of American Jews' own Eastern European-born grandparents).

A convergence of conditions made Soviet Jewish emigration a viable and successful cause, especially in the United States: the growing influence of non-state actors in the international political arena; the political culture of the Civil Rights era; the consensual nature of the issue, attracting both conservatives eager to battle the Evil Empire and liberals eager to champion human rights; Diaspora Jews' guilt over their inability to save Holocaust Jews; American Jews' ancestral ties to Russia; Jews' traditions of cross-boundary solidarity; their high levels of education, which is often linked with political involvement; and the work of mass media and technology that abetted social mobilization (Gitelman 1999:26).

As any social movement, the U.S. Soviet Jewry Movement was made up of disparate organizations, actors, motivations, and perspectives, all shifting over time as they responded to external contexts. The rifts that developed, especially between grassroots and elite, established Jewish organizations ran primarily along one fault line—who should decide the fate of Soviet Jews? Israel, Diaspora Jewry, or Soviet Jews themselves?[17] Correspondingly, the antagonism between Israel and the American Jewish political establishment that developed over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, beginning with an 18.7 percent rate of

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[17] Generally speaking, Jewish grassroots organizations, responding to the Soviet Jewry cause, supported emigrants' right to decide; American Jewish organizations that preceded the cause prioritized Israel's well-being and demands (Altshuler 2005).] The grassroots/activist Union of Councils for Soviet Jews was formed after the hijacking in 1970; following the trials, Brussels hosted the first World Conference on Soviet Jewry in February 1971, shortly followed by the founding of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry as well as regional organizations across the U.S.

Soviet Jewish emigration to the West in 1974, was palpable and significant; several authors

argue convincingly that it helped reveal to U.S. Jews that their interests and Israel's were not

necessarily one and the same[18] (e.g. Friedman and Chernin 1999; Harrison 2001; Lazin

2005a; Altshuler 2005:15; Fiengold 2007; Spiegel 2008; Beckerman 2010). The representation

and control of Soviet Jewry became an ideological battleground between American Jewry

and the Israeli state; at the heart of the debate was the question of who defines Jewishness,

and where Diaspora Jews belong. The political will and capital of the American Soviet Jewry

Movement, once aroused by Israel, most forcefully proved to American Jewry its own

power, especially as a consolidated political front both for and against Israel.

The grassroots-driven American Jewish organizations did succeed in preventing

Israel from forcing all Soviet emigrants to make aliyah, at least until 1989, when economic

and domestic political pressures led to a change in U.S. policy. Regardless, immigration was

not exactly a matter of emigrants' "freedom of choice." Through their political will and

enormous outlays of effort and money, it was nevertheless the powerful, "free world" Jewish

elite (as well as the nation-states involved in the migration) creating the contexts and

possibilities for emigrants' decision-making.

The Role of the Soviet Union and the Extent of the Influence of the United States

Political sociologists Victor Zaslavsky and Robert Brym (1983) identified two

separate but not mutually exclusive analytic strains that explain Soviet emigration policy

towards its Jewish citizens: as shaped by factors either extrinsic or intrinsic to the Soviet

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[18] Referring to a 1976 General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds meeting in which American Jewish leaders voted against the Israeli proposal to cut aid to emigrants choosing to immigrate to Western countries, journalist Gal Beckerman writes, "the *Jewish Post* and *Opinion* dubbed this moment of vocal opposition to the Jewish State 'the Magna Carta of the American Jewish community'" (2010:363).

Union. The *extrinsic* factors include Western, especially U.S., and Middle Eastern foreign policy, public opinion pressure, trade regulations and other events outside the USSR as motivators (e.g. the 1967 Arab-Israeli War) or hindrances (e.g. the 1973 Arab-Israeli War) of Soviet Jewish emigration. Alternately, the *intrinsic* view emphasizes Jewish emigration as a reaction to Soviet national political, social, and economic problems (e.g. emigration as a "bleeding" to clear out "trouble-makers"), Jews' desire to emigrate as deep-seated, and their destination decisions as springing from personal experiences.

This dual explanatory model has left its mark on analyses of Soviet Jewish emigration, becoming a topic of fierce debate especially among American scholars. Zvi Gitelman's continued assertion of U.S.-Soviet relations as the driving force for Soviet emigration allowances remains the strongest and most popular, since the trajectories of positive-negative Cold War relations and high-low emigration rates seem to run parallel for the 1970s (especially in anticipation of SALT I and II negotiations) and 1980s. To be fair, however, this analysis pivots on evaluating the nature of international relations on an annual (or monthly) basis, which can be a point of contention (see, for example, Gitelman's refutation of Salitan's demarcations of years of international conflict, Gitelman 1999:27).[19] Undoubtedly, after Soviet Jewish applicants applied the pressure of escalating emigration requests (Chlenov 1999) and the Soviet Union experienced economic strain that led them to seek American economic support (Buwalda 1997), the Liaison Bureau's program (Nativ) and American Soviet Jewry Movement activists created the political stakes through which Jewish and free Soviet emigration could become a bargaining chip at the foreign policy level. Yaacov Ro'i's more attenuated position asserts that though the USSR seemed to strategize to gain Western technology, trade credits, and détente (1999:60), Western agitation and public

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[19] Moreover, Laurie Salitan points out that in the late 1970s "German emigration decreased despite a distinct improvement in Soviet-FRG relations" (Salitan 1992:104).

opinion at best led to certain Soviet *concessions* (1991:245-6).[20]

It is important to note that, on the ground, Soviet emigration numbers were generally unpredictable. Although yearly predictions were made and immigrant aid organizations' budgets created based on American and Israeli diplomatic intelligence, weekly emigrant numbers were known and assessed only after emigrants actually exited the USSR. In the last two years of the 1970s and 1980s, those years of quickly escalating emigration, migrant-receiving organizations constantly scrambled to physically, administratively, and financially accommodate the unprecedented numbers. This unpredictability alone should counteract the temptation to read emigration (and events in the Soviet Union in general) solely through the lens of USA-USSR relations (Salitan 1992:3; Zaslavsky and Brym 1983), which would have hypothetically made the outflow foreseeable. Moreover, the Soviet Union had been letting Jews trickle out since the end of World War II.[21]

The broader version of this extrinsic position holds that the Soviet Union manipulated its emigration allowances to achieve positive public relations. The most dramatic evidence for this stance is the sudden, significant increase in emigration numbers of Jews at the end of 1968 (considered the beginning of the "Third Wave" of emigration from the Russian Empire territories)—supposedly as a countermove to the internationally denounced Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia following the suppression of the Prague Spring. However, following the equally unpopular and heavily condemned Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December of 1979, the Soviet Union took the opposite approach: it severely retracted all emigration. The number of emigrants in Vienna, freshly out of the Soviet Union

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[20] In a 2012 volume, Ro'i argues that emigration policies were driven by domestic considerations, with the exception of 1978-9, as Soviets anticipated the U.S. ratification of SALT II.
[21] Truly *trickle*: less than 1,000 total in the 1950s, less than 9,000 total in the 1960s. The highest annual number up until then was in 1966 (just over 2,000), which was before Soviet emigration became an international human rights issue and before the U.S. negotiated arms and trade treaties with the USSR (Salitan 1992:104).

and headed to destinations other than Israel, was 550 in January 1980; in December of 1980, it was 73 ("1980 Annual Statistics on Russian Transmigrants," January 12, 1981, JDC-NY Archives). The drop in exit visas had actually begun before the invasion of Afghanistan and continued throughout 1980, through the summer of the Moscow Olympics, and leveled off at the end of the year. That was when, in common parlance, дверь закрылась (the door closed) on emigration until 1987.

Unsurprisingly, diplomats and activists of the Soviet Jewry Movement accentuate their own roles in achieving Soviet emigration as well (see, for example, the contributions to Friedman and Chernin 1999[22] and Cummins 1987). Though such advocacy undoubtedly won a select number of refuseniks their exit visas, the impact on Soviet state decision-making remains uncertain, even in retrospect. It is generally recognized, for example, that the implementation of the landmark Jackson-Vanik amendment, a domestic politics victory for American Jews that linked American trade relations with partners' favorable emigration policies, was followed with several years of decreased Soviet Jewish emigration; most scholars deem the effectiveness of the legislation to have been limited or counterproductive (e.g. Goldman 1999:115; Buwalda 1997).

The opposite explanatory model—that emigration decisions were motivated by issues primarily or exclusively intrinsic to the Soviet Union—does not prevail either. Zaslavsky and Brym (1983) develop this point of view most extensively. They situate Jewish emigration within the scope of Soviet nationality policy, which, in attempting to privilege territorial nationalities in each republic (e.g. ethnic Georgians should constitute the majority of political officials in the Georgian S.S.R.), discriminated against many minor nationalities

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[22] Altshuler 2005 criticizes many of the contributions to the Friedman and Chernin volume for being self-congratulatory; Stuart Altshuler himself was part of the movement he favorably assesses in his 2005 book.

with no Soviet territory. According to this line of thinking, the Jews' disproportionately high levels of education, achievement, and urban (highly-desirable) residence perpetually posed a problem; emigration provided a convenient solution: "the state now manipulates emigration opportunities for its own convenience, often just to rid itself of dissidents, the old and the useless, the not too bright, and the unemployed...sometimes avoiding an oversupply of labor in particular professions" (Medvedev 1978:152, as quoted in Zaslavsky and Brym 1983:70; Shipler 1981); or freeing up the always-limited housing supply, sometimes encouraging emigration through deliberate petty harassment (Zaslavsky and Brym 1983:70-1).

The Soviet Union permitted certain other groups the privilege of family reunification beyond Soviet borders, too. In the late 1950s, these one-time group-wide policies led to the emigration of Spanish citizens, in the USSR since the Spanish Civil War; Greeks who took refuge from the Greek Civil War and WWII; Korean soldiers sent to Sakhalin by Japan during WWII; Polish Jews who had evacuated to the Soviet Union during WWII; German POWs and certain Germans from Lithuania; and diasporic Armenians who had "returned" to the Armenian SSR after WWII but found it unlivable (Low 1990:167-8; Ro'i 1991:260; Heitman 1989:131). After the 1960s, this allowance of emigration on the grounds of family reunion was made to only three groups besides Soviet Jews: Soviet Germans, Armenians, and Evangelical Christians.[23] Evangelicals received the right to emigrate only in 1988, under the intensification of *glasnost*. The emigration of Soviet Germans, settled in the Russian empire since the time of Empress Catherine II (in the last third of the 18th century), resembled that of Soviet Jews. Like the Soviet Union's Jews, Soviet Germans were a diligent, accomplished minority group (though, unlike Jews, primarily agriculturalists) without an

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[23]Although "Pontian Greeks also enjoyed the theoretical right to emigrate on the basis of family reunification" (Khanin 2003:315, fn3), they do not appear in any articles or charts that summarize Soviet emigration numbers.

autonomous Soviet territory, but allowed greater cultural and linguistic freedom than the

Jews. Their emigration also happened in waves, though not ones identical to Jews', and both

the Germans (Low 1990:168) and the Jews (Brym and Ryvkina 1994:16) were seen as pawns

in Cold War diplomacy. By all accounts the outlier, Armenian emigration was driven by the

dissatisfied and disillusioned post-War "returnees," who were born outside the Soviet Union,

rather than native Soviet Armenians, who eased intergroup tension by facilitating

applications to emigrate (i.e., native Armenian officials helped approve returnees'

applications; Heitman 1989). Unlike Jews and Germans, Armenians had no Western

support; American Armenians, for example, disapproved their leaving the ethnonational

"homeland."

Such aberrations suggest that a politically- or administratively-unified Soviet

emigration policy did not exist at any one time or throughout the years—only in the sense

that free emigration remained forbidden and that authorities continuously implemented

measures to quell citizens' desires to emigrate (see documents of Morozov 1999, Khanin

2003). Before archival access was possible, scholars interpreted the arbitrariness of

emigration allowances as purposeful, intended to produce uncertainty for would-be

emigrants (Ro'i 1997:61; Zaslavsky and Brym 1983:125). With subsequent, albeit limited,

access to those records,[24] certain insights emerge. For one, there was no monolithic position

within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) with regard to emigration policy,

political trials, or Zionism (Frankel 2012:172). There is evidence of a lack of consensus

among members of the Politboro, the principal decision-makers of the Communist Party,

especially during Leonid Brezhnev's leadership (1964-1982). Whereas the Politboro under

Brezhnev was divided between the use of emigration as barter with the West and allowing

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[24] Soviet archives have been sorely underfunded; access therefore has been intermittent and partial since 1991 (Morozov 1999:1-2).

no emigration (Morozov 1999:19-20), Soviet documents reveal that decisions were made ad hoc, in response to the greatest pressure, often choosing between diametrically opposed interests (e.g. Soviet emigration pleased the West but angered Arab states; Morozov 1999:18-19; Friedgut 1991). Furthermore, these top personnel responded to information and recommendations made by regional and local organizations and leaders (Morozov 1999:20). Two, while the Politburo gave overall directions—e.g. to "be lenient"—, decisions were made by local bureaucrats in regional Offices of Visas and Registration, or OVIRs. Therefore, there was often initiative from below concerning emigration, with impulsive, unplanned decision-making (Morozov 1999:20). Memos by various city and state officials to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine in 1980, for example, complain of the lack of uniformity in the evaluation of exit visa applications across their regional OVIRs (Khanin 2003:292, 294, 297), to the point of wide abuse of vague stipulations (e.g. the interpretation of "direct kinship") by local party officials and OVIR officers (Khanin 2003:297, fn2).

Though it seems that the pitting of external factors versus internal ones (i.e. foreign vs. domestic policy) is a bit overstated when it comes to a centralized, authoritarian state such as the USSR, most accounts flatten the bureaucratic complexities described above under an ideologically uniform Soviet state. Indeed, any Soviet policy can be interpreted through either model. For example, were the WWII family reunification policies after Stalin's death in the "Geneva Spirit" of improving Soviet-Western relations (Ro'i 1991:101; Heitman 1989:132) or a purging of people resistant to Sovietization (Zaslavsky and Brym 1983:103)? True motivations and policy decisions remain hazy to this day; the Soviet Union undeniably *gave the impression* that U.S. diplomacy and Western opinion was a major factor in Soviet policy decisions such as emigration.

The extrinsic-intrinsic debate adheres to American scholars' emphasis on state and non-state political organizations, steering the lens away from the principal subjects and actors of emigration, the Soviet Jews themselves. In the last decade, for example, they are missing from most of the monographs published on the topic of Soviet Jewish *emigration* (distinct from the topic of their acclimation as immigrants), a collection that celebrates the American Soviet Jewry Movement as an emblem of American Jewish social activism and political organizing. Actual Soviet Jews show up in two ways: as discussed above, in the form of notable (usually heroic) refuseniks (e.g. Ro'i 2012), of whom a few tens are spotlighted out of thousands; and in the context of understanding the motivations for their departure, on the scale of millions.

THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND EMIGRATION

Whereas Israel and Zionists focused on the reasons for "dropping out," American Jewry asked, why do/did they leave? This ubiquitous question of migration research is primarily answered through the push/pull model: they were driven by negative conditions in their home country to leave; at the same time, they were attracted by something in their country of immigration that influenced where they decided to go. This structural, macro-level model views migrants as a mass and their migration as a unified phenomenon. In the case of Soviet Jews, the following reasons, extracted from surveys, are generally cited for their mass emigration: in the late 1960s and early 1970s, emigrants were pulled by the desire to live as Jews in Israel or to live in better economic conditions elsewhere; in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the desire to join family was the most frequently cited motivation, followed by anti-Semitism, and political alienation; after 1990, there was a panicked rush to emigrate, pushed by the collapse of the Soviet Union (Gitelman 1997:30-2).

Much as the Iron Curtain hid the motivations of Soviet political decision-makers from outsiders, so, too, it hid knowledge of the vast majority of Soviet Jews for Western scholars and activists. For this reason, uncovering Soviet Jews' motivations for emigration became paramount (even the "most important" to understand, as Lewin-Epstein asserts [1999:1]). It was part of the way outsiders, in this case scholars, tried to understand Soviet Jewry, dividing them into observable types based on "motivation"; their year of departure (as discussed above, the 1970s, 1980s, and after 1989, dubbed the "panic emigration"); residence (Republic and city of origin, "heartland" vs. "periphery"); customs; and, especially, their destinations. Soviet Jewish Americans maintain some of these divisions among themselves, as well, especially pointing to differences between Soviet Jews from different regions (but usually not having to do with the places of settlement) and more seriously between the trailblazing first emigrant "wave" of the 1970s, those who came in the late 1980s, and those who emigrated without having to renounce citizenship or travel through Austria and Italy. But for scholars, the principal dividing marker was and continues to be the émigré's choice of his or her country of settlement, the assumption being that a certain "type" of person chooses to settle in certain locations.

While of course driven by social scientific research seeking to understand the nature of Soviet Jewry and of Soviet Jewish emigration, the inquiry into motivations blossomed in the shadow of two concomitant circumstances—the "dropout" phenomenon, which Israelis and Zionist Diaspora Jews hoped to reverse, and the sudden, great influx of Soviet Jews to the United States in the late eighties, forcing American Jews to face immigrants who came off as antagonistic, ungrateful, scheming (Gold 1995), and far from that refusenik or Old World ideal of their grandparents' generation. Judgments (scholarly or otherwise) on whether groups were driven primarily by spiritual, religious, or political reasons, by fears or

discrimination, or in search of better economic conditions (pejoratively signaled by the metonym "better refrigerators," as the chairman of the National Conference for Soviet Jewry charged in 1988, Altshuler 2005:11, 25 fn24), are part and parcel of negative approaches to and views of these *neshira* (dropout) immigrants.[25] The stereotype of consumption-hungry Soviet Jews stamped itself on many a Soviet Jewish immigrant; more than a few of my interviewees spontaneously denied being part of a "*kalbasnaya emigratsiya*" (emigration driven by the desire for "sausage"; see also Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007). These biases begin to indicate why determining the motivations for emigration is a difficult, elusive, and misleading task.

Broadly speaking, emigrating for Soviet Jews was generally tied to the condition of being Jewish in the Soviet Union for the basic reason that it allowed (some of) them to leave. Attempts at identifying more precise explanations are largely unconvincing for several reasons, especially when separated from the larger context of people's lives. For one, answers reported in research reports came from structured surveys, often administered in transit or upon émigrés' arrival, when they were still likely to be suspicious of strangers who, no matter their backgrounds or qualifications, were seeking invasive personal information. Second of all, the motivations for such a dramatic life decision is never single-stranded nor easily disentangled from the rest of one's life. That is not to say that a simplified explanation will not be easily accessible at the time of making the decision to emigrate (e.g. "it was for our children's future") or as one progresses through the emigration and then immigration processes. A concrete explanation may be discursively available when reasons for leaving are frequently discussed among family, friends, and groups of émigrés and, especially, when they are presented as a set of options in a structured survey. Thirdly, the motivations for a choice

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[25] It is also part of the point of view that leads people to wonder whether they were "really" refugees, as explored in chapter 2.

may only become or seem clear to an individual in retrospect, or may never become clear at all. Most likely, the articulation of one's motivations will change over time, through life stages, through the changing understanding of oneself, and the context in which one experiences and processes such changes. Zvi Gitelman provides a relevant observation. He interviewed the same Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel (*olim*), upon their arrival to Israel in 1972, and then again in 1975. He found that after three years, the frequency of Zionist explanations for their emigration decreased. Why? Gitelman speculates that perhaps in 1972 Zionist rhetoric was more common, or, maybe, after living in Israel for several years, they no longer thought in abstract and ideological terms (1999:31). One could add several other conjectures to explain the tendency to revise one's past: the original explanation was false; the rejection, regret, or better understanding of one's original motives; living through a traumatic Arab-Israeli War. Motivations are changeable and always part of the changing ways that people narrate themselves and their circumstances.

Moreover, they may not be fully knowable. One woman, hired as a translator by HIAS for its informational interviews preceding emigrants' INS interview, told a researcher about fellow emigrants, "'Most people didn't know what to say. They were not clear on why they were leaving'" (Hoffman 2001:147; dates of this woman's transit migration is unspecified, but probably sometime in the seventies). Mikhail Dubinsky, who also worked for HIAS as a translator in the summer of 1978, told me the same thing. He was (and still is) flabbergasted that some emigrants, asked to detail their experiences with Soviet anti-Semitism in order to file their application for refugee status, had nothing to say ("even some from [the notoriously anti-Semitic] Ukraine didn't know what to say!" [February 22, 2011]). Dubinsky would counsel them. Speaking to me, Mr. Dubinsky expressed dismay both that, contrary to his own background, there were some Jews who lived free of Soviet

discrimination and that some emigrants seemed to have made such a drastic life decision without much thought. I would challenge this conclusion that people left without knowing why, suggesting instead that some may not have yet been able to articulate the confluence of factors that led them to leave, especially when one's reasons are not part of social discourse (or when one is unused to being honest to bureaucrats). Furthermore, behavior that is taken-for-granted as normal in a society that does not publicly acknowledge discrimination may only later be classified or understood as anti-Semitic.

The following conversation captures particularly well the difficulty in pinpointing a single motivating factor for one's pre-emigration experiences. It shows that many factors over the course of many years may influence one's decision to leave. It also points to the ways immigrants have subsumed dominant and negative ideas about their emigration.

My parents and I had arrived at the northern New Jersey middle-class, suburban house of two of their close (married) friends, Klara and Dmitriy Gatovsky, on a pleasant Saturday in July 2012. The interior looked much the same as it had the last time I had been there, in the mid-nineties. Klara and my mother have known each other since college, where they specialized in computer programming. They and Dmitriy now all work as computer program analysts. After some photo browsing of grandchildren, we sat in the living room, I facing Klara and Dmitriy on adjacent couches, and my parents nearby but spatially separating themselves as onlookers.

I asked them, not long after we began the interview, "When you were leaving [the Soviet Union], did you think about 'freedom'? I read a few memoirs [by Soviet Jews] that mentioned that." My mother answered immediately from across the room, "I don't know. My most vivid impression was the barbed wire fence between the Soviet Union and Romania. My tears dried up immediately." My mother remembers a chain-link fence jutting

out of the water on our journey along the Danube River from the port city of Izmail. A character in Professor Emil Draitser's 2012 novel describes a similar border fence between Ukraine and (probably) Hungary. The character, Boris, had long imagined an imposing, fortified fence to separate the sacred lands of the Soviet Union and its enemies. But Boris's shock at his encounter with the fence stemmed from the realization that the barbed wire faced inwards; that is, to prevent escape rather than attack. This burst his "illusion, that he was living in freedom," and Boris resolved to break out of that cage by emigrating (23).

"When we left Izmail. In that <u>first</u> hour. We had to <u>stop</u> before going into neutral water or otherwise our departure would be held up. And when we were sailing away—I was all cried out [from our goodbyes]—and we stopped, and from the water protruded that barbed wire." My mom's voice had risen to passionate adamancy.

"Yes, yes, everywhere," papa gently confirmed.

"Along the whole Soviet border there was a barbed wire fence. <u>That's it</u>: as soon as I saw it, my tears dried up."

Papa tried to paint the image for us: "It was barbed wire, barbed wire, barbed wire; and then Austria: suddenly there was green grass, people lounging on the grass—"

"And sunshine," mama added.

"People swimming in the Danube," papa continued, smiling, to complete the contrastive imagery. "But you know, Inga, about 'freedom'—it wasn't that there was a separate idea about 'the economic' and a separate 'freedom'. It was all mixed together."

"Yes, that's what I wanted to say" Klara agreed.

"You can't say we left only for *kalbasa* (sausage)," papa asserted, "It was all, it was all mixed up." No one had mentioned this yet in our conversation; the defensive assertion about not being solely economically motivated was spontaneous, much like others I had

heard in my interviews. In an interview for a documentary (*Stateless* 2014), for example, the

filmmaker Michael Drob asks his wife's parents, on camera, to explain their motivations for

emigrating. Yelena Korenfeld launched into a five-minute explanation that began with the

uniqueness of their generation, as Soviet people. She described the unfurling of truth about

the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's *glasnost* that led her to realize the hopelessness of the

regime. She cited neither anti-Semitism nor a lack of material goods as the force behind her

family's emigration. Instead, she defended herself and her emigration wave from accusations

of "economic" emigration:

> Many call our emigration a sausage emigration; this is completely incorrect, I think. It
> wasn't a sausage emigration of any sort. In Russia [i.e. the Soviet Union], of course,
> there were deficits, including of sausage. But, by the paradoxes of socialism, although
> there was nothing anywhere, every refrigerator had everything. That's how that life
> was built; every person survived how he could. But people did not leave for sausage.
> People left to taste this sweet word "freedom"; to be able to live without having to
> look behind oneself, expecting something frightening to be there; to not know what
> repression is, which rolled its frightening wheel across every family in Russia,
> practically across every single one. [interview for *Stateless* by Victoria and Mike Drob,
> May 18, 2013]

Yelena did, like other Soviet Jewish memoirists, emphasize freedom as a motivating factor.

My parents and the Gatovskys framed similar emotions, outlooks, and experiences in

different terms.

"Yes," Klara emphasized, responding to my dad about motivations being "all mixed

up." "We were fed up with everything. There was this feeling—I <u>cannot</u> take it anymore. We

left to get away from all of it." Klara and Dmitriy's shared past includes bureaucratic torment

on account of Klara's Jewishness in the realms of state-controlled university admission,

marriage certificates, and residential allowances. Klara's parents and Dmitriy's grandfather

suffered the physical and psychic traumatic effects of Soviet imprisonment.

A year after this conversation with Klara and Dmitriy, I asked my dad whether

"sausage emigration" is an ironic phrase. No, he said, it just refers to emigrating for

economic reasons, as opposed to political emigration (like that of the 1920s preceding and following the Russian Revolution) and religious emigration (of the late sixties and early seventies) from the Soviet Union. He explained that they didn't know anything about religion when we left; even though they might have been admitted to college or hired for the job they wanted for being Jewish, it was more of a personal insult; it wasn't *the* reason to leave. Our emigration was probably economic above all, my dad reflected; we were all fed up with all of the lines we had to stand in to buy any little thing. But then again, he continued, it's hard to say that it's just one reason above everything else. As with anything else, the range of reasons and motivations fell along a bell curve. Freedom, fear, ideology, Jewish identity and personal experience, historical and social imagination, food, material conditions, economic prospects: how can they be torn apart?

"We left—maybe—maybe because here [in the U.S.] you don't have to hide that you're a Jew," Klara continued during my interview with them.

"For now," Dmitriy, an ethnic Russian, cautioned jokingly, relaying an unremitting Russian Jewish pessimism with which he was well familiar. After generations of lived, embodied anti-Jewish experiences in Jews' background, what could possibly be different in the future?

"For now," Papa and Dmitriy laughed.

"For now," Klara echoed and the conversation briefly turned to her sadistic experience of gaining university admittance before Dmitriy reiterated the difficulty of separating the economic from the political, the social, the personal in one's decision to leave. "It accumulated, it accumulated," Klara concluded. "Inside of you it accumulated. All the vileness just accumulated" (July 8, 2012).

SOCIAL IMAGINARIES OF EMIGRATION

Instead of enumerating individuals' reasons for leaving, and thereby typecasting migrants according to motivations, I suggest understanding the context of Soviet Jews' emigration in terms of social imaginaries of migration (Pessar and Mahler 2003).[26] This perspective focuses on the factors that placed emigration on the horizon of desirability and possibility in the lives of so many Soviet Jews, the majority of whom were demonstrably determined not to waste their chance to leave.

Besides the structural conditions that created the legal, political, social, psychological, emotional possibilities for migration (according to the push-pull model), besides social networks that facilitated one relative or friend to follow another in the form of "chain migration" (as the concept of transnationalism emphasizes), there is also the particular Soviet Jewish social imaginary at work with relation to migration. With all notions of Jews as a migratory people aside, emigration, linked with Jewish identity, was a real element in the lives of Soviet Jews. It was passed through lived memory; it existed as a reality of the past and, increasingly throughout the 1970s, of the present. That fact that each living Soviet generation carried forth the collective memory of violence against Jews (Pinkus 1988:307) and resulting emigration impacts the way Soviet Jews of the 1970s and 1980s understood (and continue to understand) both their own potential fates and that of the Jewish people.[27]

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[26] Pessar and Mahler (2003) discuss "gendered social imaginaries" to explain how men and women make decisions about migration based on how they differently imagine their futures; they take actions, like dropping out of school early, because of what they understand to be true, that, say, they see themselves as future migrants. In general, a "social imaginary" refers to the way large groups of "ordinary" people imagine their social surroundings and engage with it and with others. The expression of these imaginings often takes place in images, stories, and legends (Taylor 2004:23).

[27] It is important to note the ways in which I am generalizing "Soviet Jewry," which hardly existed as an emic category in the USSR. Soviet Jews saw differences from other Jews in different cities, not to mention regional differences. The cultural distance between Leningrad Jews, for example, and the Mountain Jews was enormous (many saw the other as a different cultural group, Gitelman 2001:251). The suggestion of social imaginaries of emigration does not hold for the Jews of the Caucuses, where

As my father and Dmitriy joked about American Jewish identity and livelihood: we are safe from the turmoil of the past "for now."

The history of the Jews in the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire is a long and complicated one (explored beautifully and insightfully by many skillful scholars such as Mordechai Altschuler, Zvi Gitleman, Benjamin Pinkus, Yaacov Ro'i, and Anna Shternshis). The "Jewishness" of Soviet Jews is a complicated issue, which perhaps can be summarized thusly: in the early Soviet years, Soviet national policy pushed for the Sovietization of minority cultures through the extant ethnic languages and customs. For Jews, this entailed a flourishing of state-sponsored, propaganda-infused Yiddish education and arts programs, publications, and community life (Shternshis 2006). In the 1930s, the policy was reversed, and all Yiddish-related life died out in favor of the Russian language, urban dwellings, and Soviet values. Jewish life became, especially after Joseph Stalin's rule, something to hide. People might conceal a celebration of a Jewish holiday from inquiring neighbors, for example, by calling it a birthday party (as my family occasionally did). Officially, Jewish life was reduced to a nationality indicated on the infamous fifth line of one's internal passport, acquired by every citizen at the age of 16. But one's Jewishness was identified, announced, and known well before that age. Whether by physical appearance, name, or a public "outing," a kindergarten class was typically the first place for a child to learn of his or her distinction as a Jew.[28] Seemingly eternal Russian anti-Semitism mingled with official state policies that produced both casual, face-to-face and institutional discrimination: normalized anti-Semitic speech and relations in public space (*zhid* [kike] as a common refrain; stranger-

there is evidence of Jewish presence since Hellenic times. It should be noted that my suggestions apply on a general basis primarily for European, Ashkenazi Jewry.

[28] Memoirs written by Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel, for example, recount their youth in the 1950s with "stories of hackles, insults, and beatings, leaving youngsters confused and with no choice but to confront the question of their nationality and its standing within the Soviet community" (Fürst 2012:141-2). Also see Gitelman 2001:154 and Soviet Jewish émigré memoirs in general.

to-stranger comments such as, on a city bus ride, "what's a nice Russian girl like you doing with friends like *her* [a Jewish-looking girl]?!"); state-wide anti-Zionist campaigns infused with authors' anti-Semitism[29]; higher education and job quotas that screened applicants by nationality.

It goes without saying that each of the Soviet Union's approximately two million Jews did not have the same experience. Jews—as well as non-Jews—living in the Baltics, Moldova, western Ukraine[30] and western Belarus, integrated into the USSR during or after World War II, were less deeply affected by efforts to produce "a Soviet people"—the notorious *Homo Sovieticus* (Zinoviev 1985)—and therefore these areas contained more practicing religious adherents than Russia or Ukraine (Pinkus 1988:297). Jews in the Caucus republics, especially Georgian, Azeri, and "Mountain" (Tati) Jews, and the Bukharan Jews of central Asia—though living in republics that were part of the USSR since its inception—also lived a more religiously rich and ethnically distinct life because of the cultural climate of the these regions, so different from the Russian "heartland" (Gitelman 1991a).[31] That is, in general, Jews of the Caucuses and the Bukharan Jews of Central Asia enjoyed feelings of camaraderie and community among the Muslim-majority population (Pinkus 1988:1-2)[32]; Soviet Jews from Russia's Far East and Siberia also report a lesser degree of anti-Semitism.[33]

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[29] Misinformation was easily spread by scientists who mixed mainstream anti-Semitism with their jobs to produce anti-Zionist propaganda, as admitted even in Soviet state documents, for example in L. Kravchuk memorandum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, 9/14/84 (Khanin 2003:308) and especially in L. Onikov's memorandum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 9/30/74 (Morozov 1999:208).

[30] These western regions had the highest rates of emigration in the earliest years of Jewish emigration; for example, in the Chernovtsy Oblast (region) of Ukraine, formed in 1940 (discussed in a memorandum, among others, by V. Malanchuk and A. Mialovyts'kyi to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, 8/15/73, in Khanin 2003:261-264).

[31] This article's conclusions are extracted from a survey of immigrants already living in Israel.

[32] Not to mention Jews' two thousand-year tenure in the Caucuses.

[33] Surveys, the data of which was always limited, estimated the Soviet Jewish population at 2.1 million in 1970. Of those, 2.5-3 percent (50,000-60,000) of Soviet Jews were estimated to be observant: 3-6 percent of the Jews in the Ukrainian and Russian Republics; 5-9 percent in the Baltic Republics of

Unfortunately, however, the experience of being set apart as Jews, most often

negatively, is a common feature of Soviet Jewish lifeworlds. Besides one's own quotidian

encounters with anti-Jewish expressions, the known experiences of parents, grandparents,

and great-grandparents, along with even limited knowledge of recent and ancient Jewish

world history, combined to paint a canvas of hatred and violence against Jews, whether the

perpetrators be neighbors, strangers, or the state. When in 1988 Soviet Jews began to be

palpably alarmed by growing grassroots anti-Semitism, including calls for pogroms, which

lasted at least until the fall of the Soviet Union, many American scholars scoffed at the

resulting "panic" emigration; scholar Zvi Gitelman (1991b) was one of the few who

understood these threats to be *very real possibilities* for Soviet Jews, given their own family and

national histories. In many families, anti-Semitism was a reality and a feared expectation; in

many families, emigration had been a realistic response. A reflective excerpt from the

emigration memoir of Sol Tetelbaum (b. 1936, raised in Odessa) succinctly relays this

worldview:

> With great bitterness I think about my former home country, the former USSR.
> Millions of people left the country.... What drove them? When we stayed in Ladispoli
> [Italy], I spoke with many people and got to know many of them. A few did it
> because of money or career, but the vast majority wanted freedom and a future for
> their children and, most importantly, they wanted to escape from the wild
> government sponsored anti-Semitism and discrimination. They feared unexpected
> persecution which, like it was in the past, could begin at any time. They feared for
> the fates of their children. [2007:Kindle Locations 2178-2184]

The vast majority of Soviet Jews took no part in and had no knowledge of a Jewish

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Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; 7-8 percent in Moldova; and 7-12 percent of the Jewish population in
the Caucuses and inner Asia (Pinkus 1988:297). The levels of religious observance—in an
authoritarian atheist state, no less—do not define or indicate the nature of the experience of being
Jewish. Though the more favorable areas for Jews to live as Jews seemed to have been outside the
Russian and Ukrainian Republics (where over half of all Soviet Jews nonetheless resided), it should
be noted that not all the Jews of the Ukrainian and Russian S.S.R.s lived in an environment of
negative reinforcement of their Jewishness, either.

national movement sprouting up in major cities of the Soviet Union.[34] In fact, all of the national and international politics discussed here were realities far away and unknown to the vast majority of emigrants, even to this day. They knew what they heard on the illicit radio broadcasts of BBC, Voice of America, Radio Liberty, or *Kol Yisrael* (Voice of Israel); they knew that Israel or the U.S. or Canada were receiving them as refugees; what they knew best were the experience of those who came before them.[35]

As such, another salient feature of their social imaginaries of emigration is having a relative abroad. In memoirs and fiction published by Soviet Jewish émigrés of the 1970s and 1980s, for example, characters facing the decision to emigrate usually already have kin either in Israel or the United States. Maxim Shrayer admits in his memoir that although "an 'uncle from Israel' was a legendary cliché" among Soviet Jews applying for exit visas (because a fictionalized relative would allow for "family reunification" abroad), he actually had a great-uncle who left for Israel in the 1920s (Shrayer 2007:187). This feature finds itself into fiction as well. Maxim Shrayer's own short stories frequently explore the descendants of this generation, which brought over a million Jews from the Russian empire at the turn of the 19th century. As Professor Emil Draitser says of America in his novel about Soviet Jewish emigration of the late 1970s, "For those of us from Odessa [Ukraine], America has long been present" (2012:244), precisely through generations of emigration and the enduring ties

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[34] Although it is conceivable that it helped to raise Jewish consciousness at an unconscious level (creating the psychological and moral atmosphere for Jewish life in the Soviet Union and for emigration to flourish, as Ro'i suggests [2012:114]). However, this line of thinking is inconsistent with statements about West-bound emigrants having little Jewish identity (e.g. Ro'i 2012:8, cited above).

[35] The first time I recognized this was through a blog entry by Canadian journalist Lea Zeltserman, who focuses on issues relevant to Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants. Lea hosted a showing of the documentary *Refusenik* for a group of her parents' friends. While some knew about some of the refusenik activism and punishments, many heard it for the first time. Evidence from my interviews reinforces her observation that emigrants learned of Soviet and American Jewish activism only after arrival to the West, if at all.

thereof. Certainly by the late 1980s, most Soviet Jews already had relatives and friends somewhere in Israel or the West. Emigration is part of the narrative of Soviet Jewish peoplehood, part of their self-understanding and self-construction; "waves" of Russian emigration is part of the story of Russian Jewry.[36]

Another illustrative scenario of the way emigration was present as an idea in Jews' lives: a grandfather of the pre-Soviet generation may have acquiesced in the early 1970s to put up the bribe money needed for his grandchild's university entrance exam; but, the grandfather added, "it'd be a better idea to use that money for the family to emigrate." My mother retold this story to me and my cousin to illustrate her grandfather's judiciousness and wisdom during a family meal in 2010. It is not otherwise part of her narrative of our family's emigration. Even though the advice may not have been taken in the 1970s, when my mom claims she didn't even know of widespread emigration, the idea lingered. It sat at the back of her mind into the 1980s, may have jumped to the forefront once reasons in her own life pushed her "over the edge" to apply to leave.

Some of my interviewees narrated a precipitating moment as part of their emigration decisions; but for others, little incidents that metaphorically "pushed" them out become reanimated only upon further reflection. While my mother and I visited them in the Boston suburbs, a family friend described her own last-straw incident in 1978 (involving riding a bus and being called a "zhid"), compelling my mother to remember one such incident of her own. As my mother recounted to her friends the next day:

> Yes, when she told me that, it hit me in the head: I concretely remembered standing on line for meat at that stinkin' store, which wasn't there yet when you lived there [in the 1970s]. I was in a black coat, red scarf, red bag, which mama had brought me

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[36] Though there is a difference—when Soviet Jews speak of 'waves' they refer to those who came either in the seventies, eighties, or after 1990. Scholars and other outsiders mark the Russian emigrants of 1880-1920 as the 'first wave' and post-WWII emigrants as the 'second wave' (to American shores).

when she visited you here [in the U.S. in 1988]. And I was on this line, and everything was fine. And when I heard that "Go to your Israel!" (Ежайте в ваш Израель!).... I was in a good mood, in boots, a whole nice outfit, and when I heard that, yet another slap on the cheek.... I asked for a little less fat, and I heard that in response. [July 10, 2011]

Others, in separate interviews, echo the sentiment, remembering strangers snapping, "why don't you go to Israel and leave that for us?!" (See also Smith 1976:646, cited in Frankel 2012:191).

Soviet Jews were thus further set apart by the distinction of being allowed to emigrate. Leaving was onerous, fraught with difficulties (bureaucratic mazes, taxes levied, restrictions on valuables at customs), leaving one and one's family subject to citizens' wrath and distaste (in the 1970s that involved unemployment, public shaming in places of work, social pariah status); but leaving was also a privilege, a cause for envy among those of other nationalities who wanted to leave. This, of course, created serious concerns for Soviet authorities, who worried that the "departure of some of the Jews to Israel has a negative effect on the attitudes of other nationalities–Germans, the Baltic peoples, the Crimean Tatars, etc., who posed the question, 'Why are Jews permitted to leave for other countries while we are not?'" (L. Onikov's memorandum to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, dated September 30, 1974 in Morozov 1999:206).

This negative sentiment did, in fact, take hold (Low 1990:167; Salitan 1992:54, citing Gitelman 1980).[37] Comments and jokes laced with envy and anti-Semitism coursed through public discourse. One official Soviet memo recognizes a popular anti-Jewish sentiment underpinning Jewish emigration: "'Let them go wherever they want. The more that leave the

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[37] In the Baltic Republics, where anti-Soviet sentiment loomed throughout the years of Soviet annexation, there was a softer, normalized jealousy. One interviewee, Valentina Kmelintzky, who emigrated from Vilnius in 1988 explained to me that, unlike in other parts of Soviet Union, when you told people you were leaving Lithuania, they would shake your hand and ask why you hadn't left earlier. "If I were a Jew, I would've left long ago," they would say (August 16, 2012).

better"' (L. Onikov's memo to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, dated September 30, 1974 in Morozov 1999:209). A variation of a popular Russian emigration joke goes, "What's the best means of international transport? – A Jewish wife." Another anecdote exchanged among Russian Jews acknowledges this desire and reality: Rabinovitch[38] is visited by a KGB agent after he submits paperwork for emigration. Why do you want to leave? the agent asks. I don't really want to go, Rabinovitch replies, but my wife does. So divorce her! the agent retorts. Well, the thing is that her mom wants to go, too. If you divorce your wife, that will solve the problem, the agent reasons. Yeah, but you see, her dad wants to go also. Divorce is the answer! the KGB agent presses. But her brother, sister, grandparents, and aunt want to go as well. The agent gets fed up: Just cut ties with all of them! But, Rabinovitch replies, I'm the only Jew in the family![39] These jokes highlight the growing self-consciousness and identification of Jews in society as outwardly linked with the possibility of emigration.

In his memoir, Noam Zigman (2006) describes a real-life example of lives marred by such envy of Jews' right to emigration. Zigman's emigration entailed a disastrous fake-marriage arrangement forged from friendship and sympathy. In order to help their non-Jewish, Ukrainian friends emigrate, he and his girlfriend each married one of them. In Vienna in 1988, after completing an interview that would begin their paperwork for refugee status, these closest friends turned out to be heartless, hateful, and conniving: they had been manipulating Zigman and his wife-to-be, Zhenya, all along in order to emigrate. Their entire friendship was a sham. The Ukrainian "friend," still officially married to Zhenya, rebuffed, cursed, and thereafter refused to speak with either of them. Worse yet, he and Zhenya left

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[38] The name "Rabinovitch" is a standard stand-in for "Jew" in Russian Jewish jokes.
[39] As documented by Emil Draitser and recited on January 28, 2013 in the lecture "Laughing All the Way to Freedom" at the Center for Jewish History, New York City.

Italy quickly for the U.S., while Zigman and his sham wife were denied refugee status and forced to remain in Italy, uncertain of their futures, for another six months. Zigman describes this episode as the worst of his life, a true testament to human callousness. In this way, the right to emigration made Soviet Jews further targets of others' hate and selfish deceit.

For Soviet Jews, state-sponsored and socially acceptable anti-Jewish sentiment sustained over generations set them apart as Jews. But it is the personal family history of emigration as a response to this sentiment that allowed Soviet Jews to imagine their future lives elsewhere. Such social imaginaries and realities of emigration demonstrate that the distinct reasons for emigration are not easy to parse; motivations may lay suggestively along one's horizon of possibility for one's entire life. Or it may become part of a group's widespread practice, as it did in the late 1970s and late 1980s. Certainly the perspective of social imaginaries counter easy categorization of "types" of Soviet Jews based on one's admitted reasons for leaving or one's country of destination, especially since studies have shown that little sociodemographic difference exists between emigrants to Israel and to the West (Ro'i 2012:8, fn13).

THE JEWISHNESS OF SOVIET JEWS ABROAD

Besides questions of motivation, another related, core concern among American scholars, activists, and Jewish communal services (which exerted tremendous effort to assist and fund the incoming immigrants) was the content and nature of their Jewishness. The ideological clash over who Soviet Jews are and where they belong lingered for a long time. Their way of being Jewish—unique, complex, unfamiliar to non-Soviets—became and in some ways remains "problematic" to "the gatekeepers of the Jewish club, whoever they may

be—this, of course, is one of the most contentious issues in world Jewry today" (Gitelman 2009:260).

Many scholars have pointed out that, by insisting on officially recording and recognizing their Jewish nationality, the Soviet Union ironically ensured the survival of Jewish identity (albeit through negative reinforcement) among an otherwise assimilated people.[40] The juridico-historical but also historico-cultural category of Soviet Jews (Markowitz 1993:9) was on the whole emptied of religious practice and knowledge, but Jewishness remained "deeply embodied" (Gershenson and Shneer 2011:130) in terms of physical features, family names, and sometimes style of speech ("speaking Jewishly" in terms of accents, humor, etc.; Verschik 2007; Gershenson and Shneer 2011:137).

Whereas in the Soviet Union the concepts "Russian" and "Jew" were mutually exclusive categories, as immigrants Soviet Jews became "Russians" and had to reconcile intersubjective differences while remaining steadfast in their being Jews. The difficult encounter—sometimes strained, sometimes antagonistic—between American and newly-arrived Soviet Jews (Gold 1995, 1997), stemmed from this unrecognizability of Soviet Jews to Americans, for whom they were an "enigma"; at least through the 1990s, "American Jews [did] not know quite what to do with Soviet Jews" (Ritterband 1997:339).

And so, unless Soviet Jewish immigrants join established religious communities or adapt religious practices, "today's post-Soviet Jews are generally seen as not Jewish enough" (Gershenson and Shneer 2011:143) by American Jews, for whom such participation is the most significant marker of Jewishness (Markowitz 1988:82-3). From the point of view of emigrants, from the 1970s as well as from the point of view of today, their Jewishness is immovable and in some cases fierce. It is defined by blood, by birth (Markowitz 1988:81,

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[40] This, of course, happens throughout the history of Jewish Diaspora.

1993:139). A comment made by the mother of a Soviet family in Cleveland in April 1977—quoted in a paper written by the Coordinator of Resettlement Service for the Jewish Family Service Association of Cleveland, Ohio—resonates with immigrants to this day: "'We are Jewish and have felt Jewish all our lives. It makes no difference if we are in Cleveland or Odessa. The only difference is that now [in the U.S.] we have a sense of pride and the freedom to be Jewish'" (Feldman 1977:65).

In general, in my interviews, "Jewishness" was not a topic of focus for two reasons: (1) it was not central to interviewees' experience of transit migration,[41] and (2) from my point of view as researcher and Soviet Jewish American, it is neither mystery nor point of contention. Jewishness rarely came up for discussion in interviews, even though many of my interviewees have a strong sense of Jewish peoplehood that encompasses their unwavering support for the state of Israel. Soviet Jewishness remains a distinct identity, not to be interpreted as weak or minimal (Rapoport et al. 2002:193; Ritterband 1997).

Alla Gorodetskaya was one of the few interviewees who touched on the topic—unsurprising to me because her daughter was at that time pursuing a research project about the American Jewish community's first encounter with and treatment of Soviet Jewish immigrants. In my interview with Alla, she mentioned to me that she had been thinking about the topic a lot because of her daughter's interests, which undoubtedly were influenced by their mutual experiences as immigrants. We met for the first time at a diner near her hometown and thereafter in her very large home in a wealthy suburb north of New York City. The family, like many Soviet Jewish immigrants', had first settled in cheap housing in southern Brooklyn before relocating to suburbs with highly-regarded public school systems

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[41] Although it was, thanks to the oversight of JDC, a part of it. In Italy, Soviet Jews had their often first taste of celebrating Jewish holidays according to religious practices. Many stepped into their first synagogue in Vienna or Rome. It was there that many also began to familiarize themselves with the Jewish culture and history heretofore denied to them (e.g. reading Leon Uris's *Exodus* [1958]).

after numerous years of hard work and sacrificial saving. After talking about her decision to leave, Alla said, "Here was an interesting moment. If you look at it historically, by years: first the majority of people left for Israel, and less to America. Because when that 'Let Our People Go!' movement[42] started here, that movement was to allow people to go to the homeland, to give the opportunity to express your religion. But—a Soviet person is a Soviet person." Alla was pointing to the difficulty in making a Soviet person religious. "Very many left–well, no," she was about to assert, I think, that many left for economic reasons. She went on, "First there was a wave in '48 at the foundation of Israel, then in the late sixties early seventies the majority went to Israel; people really left for religious reasons. But in the late seventies, that wave was—more for economic reasons." Alla's historical explanation was following the typical narrative. She continued:

> On this topic I always used to argue with my mom. She was against the emigration to America. She said, if you leave, it's only to Israel, only for political and religious reasons, only to your historical homeland. Going to America, she thought, was to assimilate, and then there's no point: because you're leaving as a Jew, because you're a Jew, because you're being oppressed. That was indeed the way it was. I agree with this. Now I can say: it doesn't matter whether you go here or there; to keep your identity, it takes additional work.

Alla's mother initially settled in Israel. Growing up, Alla's daughters would spend summers there. Several years ago, her mother moved to the U.S, where she now lives in subsidized housing for the elderly. Both feel extremely grateful to the U.S. for this opportunity and social support.

> Those in Israel may decide, "I'm in my historical homeland, I'm done." You don't have to do anything. Here, you become "Russians." I have lived here for 22 years, and still, when people ask, "Where are you from?" [I say] from Russia. "Are you Russian?" [they ask]. "No." I always specify. But it's extra work, it's extra work to know who you are and so your children know who you are. Because, really, there they made us a new nation, a Soviet people, a Soviet people–who we are it is hard to understand, hard to explain. But this identity [of being Soviet/Russian Jewish]- we didn't have it. Here, in this country—everybody [is] from somewhere. And that

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[42] Referring to the American Soviet Jewry Movement.

somewhere gives you some—difference, some identity. So, we left for—probably, yes, probably it was already for economic reasons. Because when we left [in September 1989] it was no longer [as oppressive]—at work, for example, when you left you were seen off with a cake and warm wishes, you weren't chased away, fired for being a traitor to the homeland [as occurred in the 1970s]. [January 19, 2012]

Alla's thoughtful reflections on being a Soviet Jewish American immigrant, regardless of one's country of residence, emphasize Soviet Jewry's *sui generis* model of Jewishness as well as the effort required to maintain one's past sense of self and cultivate one's Jewishness in ways appropriate to a new context. She also asserts the distinctiveness of being a Soviet Jew in the U.S. as opposed to other countries of the post-Soviet Jewish transnational community (Gershenson and Shneer 2011; Remennick 2004). She articulates a performative approach to group belonging that abounds in the U.S., one at odds with the deeply embodied and thus irrefutable nature of their Jewishness within the Soviet Union.

Alla's reasoning also touches on the intersections of "reasons for leaving" and "Jewishness today," pointing to the ingrained split in American discourse: because there was a emigrant type based on motivation, true Jews went to Israel, and all others left for economic reasons. Faced with this discursive dichotomy, Alla chooses the latter to explain her own motivations, since there didn't seem to be the same level of oppression when she left in the eighties. She arrives at that conclusion through reflection, comparison, and hesitation, not through a gut feeling based on her own experience.

Many who left the USSR did so out of a mix of political, economic, social, and personal reasons. They left mainly because of the difficult living conditions in the Soviet Union, because of social and institutionalized anti-Semitism, but mainly because they were allowed to, as citizens carrying a Jewish "nationality." Once out, many felt relieved to be free from the oppressive and dilapidated system that included casual and often searing dislike of Jews.

It follows that Soviet Jews' stories of emigration and transit migration are, among other things, also about being Jewish. The stings of emigration and transit migration—the nature and lasting sensations of which are explored in the chapters that follow—are inextricable from their lives as Jews. This conclusion falls in line with their genetic conception and inalienable identity as Jews and with the religious but also cultural discursive tradition of transmitting stories of Jewish suffering (Boustan 2011), an accepted practice even among secular U.S. Jews.

Regardless of the nature of Soviets' Jewishness, emigration from the Soviet Union as much as immigration to various destinations had everything to do with being Jewish: entry into Israel requires it; and Soviet Jews' controversial entry as refugees into Western countries rested on their persecution as Jews. But how could they become refugees in the West when there is a country, Israel, that grants them automatic citizenship upon entry? Besides migrants, whether as emigrants or immigrants, always being subject to mistrust (Daniel and Knudson 1995), Soviet Jews' motivations came under additional moral scrutiny precisely for their insistence on choosing their destination (in an era when the State of Israel created the legal and moral imperative for migrating, fleeing, and stateless Jews to settle in Israel). These moral judgments on the actions and authenticity of refugees will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2. "IT'S LIKE WE WERE REFUGEES":

THE SOCIOLEGAL AND EXPERIENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF REFUGEE STATUS

I asked Zhana Lanman, a 50-year-old I interviewed in the southern Brooklyn jewelry shop she owns with her husband, the same question I posed in almost all of my interviews: "How do you think emigration differed for those who immigrated straight [to the U.S., without going through Austria and Italy]?" In recent years I had become friends with her daughter, who warmly and generously suggested I interview her parents.

"It was probably easier for them," Zhana replied, becoming more comfortable answering my questions. Still, for the next little while, she would speak to me in a whisper, as if we were discussing inappropriate topics. A few customers sauntered in and out of the shop, mainly addressing themselves to her husband, the jeweler. It was only after I'd been at the shop with them for over an hour that they both relaxed enough to loudly discuss their transit migration and laugh over their most memorable (and shocking) encounters there. For now, Zhana whispered to me as we leaned toward each other over the jewelry cases: "Having to board one train after another, with all that luggage; you feel like refugees, you know? Then once we put luggage there [onto the train], there was nowhere to sit. Suitcases would fall; one broke my nose. That was in Vienna…" (August 17, 2011). She went on to articulate the harried state of travel during their journey, but I remained focused on her phrase "feeling like a refugee." It surprised me, given that she, like nearly all Soviet Jewish emigrants who passed through transit migration, *did* in fact become refugees.

Soviet Jewish immigrants' hold varying attitudes toward the legal immigrant category under which they entered and through which they gained citizenship in this country—from casual statements implying identification (e.g. "for we were true refugees" [Alexander

Korenfeld, interview by Victoria and Mike Drob for *Stateless*, May 18, 2013]); utilitarian approaches to it, as merely a status with material benefits that did not reflect their sense of self; and to the dissociative and dismissive, including Zhana Lanman's intimation. Soviet Jews, in fact, in many ways complicate the "refugee" category. During their emigration, and to this day, emigrants themselves as much as American Jewish leaders, NGO workers, academics, and politicians question whether they were "real" refugees. But if Soviet Jews weren't "true" refugees, then who is? What constitutes the "refugee" as a category of persons?

This last question is the starting point of this chapter, which interrogates the historical, political, social, and experiential multivalence of the "refugee" label, in the face of its assumed singularity as a legal definition. In exploring this issue, this chapter makes three interrelated moves. First, it evaluates the political history of the legal status, a discussion that indicates that the conferral of the status has always been subject to the national, historical, and political contexts. The fractioning of the status into "types" of refugees has recently led to establishing hierarchies of authenticity and worthiness (Zetter 2007), a current state strategy for restricting the entry of refugees, criminalizing them for the undocumented status that they are seeking to amend by deeming them economically motivated. By acknowledging the political history of the West, it becomes apparent that designating motivations as "economic" is tantamount to discrediting refugee authenticity. Second, the problems with a legal category that establishes suffering as its criterion means that, socially, refugeeness entails a moral judgment of deservingness (Hayden 2006), which in turn influences how and whom a country's legal system accepts as refugees. People are often labeled refugees based on their circumstances, especially if displaced due to violence (e.g. the work of Agier 2008), regardless of whether individuals have or will attain the legal status within a national context.

Third, "feeling like a refugee" is not the same as having refugee status. Socially, "feeling like a refugee"—and all that the label implies, like helplessness, haggardness, powerlessness—is what people, including refugees themselves, expect and associate with the label. This association is part of why it is not always the case that refugees do accept the label as a self-descriptor. Although Soviet Jewish immigrants do think of themselves as victims of the Soviet regime (as explored in chapter 4), they may also reject the political and social status that refugeeism entails (as other groups have; Kumsa 2006; Zetter 1999a; Shahrani 1995; Peteet 1995). Some Soviet Jews further refused the material benefits it accorded them in the U.S., preferring to work instead of accepting social welfare. After establishing the nature of "refugeeness" in the first part of the chapter, I argue that immigrants' widespread dismissive and utilitarian outlooks on their refugee status reflect their rejection of victimhood as a political status. This indicates their investment in reclaiming the diminishment of self-worth and loss experienced during transit, which the subsequent chapters of this dissertation demonstrate.

DISMISSIVE ATTITUDES

"It was me, Maria, and [our daughter], who was nine. Mama's cousin, with her mom, who was 78 years old. And another woman, a distant relative. [Six] people. And my parents. Eight people. It was very difficult." In the stately, affluent Staten Island home of family friends in the winter of 2012, I sat on a couch facing Grigoriy Kushnir, my digital recorder on the coffee table beside me. Trained as a photographer, in the U.S. he became a successful entrepreneur who owns several businesses (his first several were film processing and printing stores, when they were profitable in the 1990s). Without my prompting him with a question, he had begun his narrative once I turned on my recorder.

As he took me through their 1989 journey through Austria and Italy, for the first half hour, Grigoriy's voice and face were strained. His hands fiddled with a remote control. The fidgeting was out of character, much like his mood. It was morose, quite unlike the usual, relaxed, humorous mood in which I often encounter him.

> These people are old; they don't know what's happening to them, where they're going. No one can—not just lug luggage—but even walk, even speak with anyone. They were very nervous. In the airport in Vienna, we saw men with rifles; it was the first time that we saw anything of that kind. It was the first time we saw religious Jews. It was the first time we saw everything.
> They put [emigrants] in different places, us in a one-bedroom apartment in Vienna. There were eight of us in there. With 40 deadly heavy suitcases. On the third floor. No elevator. I alone had to carry practically everything. Thank God there turned out to be friends there [in Vienna] who were waiting to go to West Germany. I hung out with them because it was impossible to be with the family. We explored Vienna for the one month that we were there.

He felt far from me, seated on a couch to my left in the spacious seating area beside the kitchen, our voices echoing off the high ceilings. His wife Maria, who has owned and run a gymnastics school for over two decades now, was in the kitchen, visible to us, making tea and putting out snacks. I had known them my whole life, but I had never visited them without my parents. Maria called out to me, asking what kind of tea I wanted. Black with lemon, of course.

"Everything was so different," he said. "On the one hand, it was so difficult. On the other hand, there was something new to wonder at all the time. For example, I was looking at a shop and my face hit the glass: It was so clean that I didn't know it was there! In Vienna, they were putting down cables for TV. I watched how every night they cleaned everything up. I was amazed by the cleanliness."

Grigoriy continued to skip between various connected recollections: "The stores amazed us. I kept pinching myself—is this for real?! We found out which stores were the

cheapest. The amount of different types of cans that existed! There was one store called Hoffen. My father wanted to go home: 'Give me my Soviet homeland!' he would cry."

"Because it was very hard," Maria said. She had by now handed me my tea, put out an assortment of dried fruit, and sat down to Grigoriy's left. "Very hard. All in one apartment—"

"We were used to living alone, the three of us," Grigoriy added, referring to his wife, daughter and him, a rare privilege for a nuclear family in the Soviet Union. He reminded me that in Odessa they had lived well without working all that hard. Once they emigrated (exiting the Soviet Union by plane via Moscow), Grigoriy had put himself in charge of figuring out logistics and caring for the family materially, which first of all meant selling off all of those suitcases full of goods in Austria and Italy. Maria, in her own words, suffered from "terrible depression" while in transit, all the worse for her husband's interminable task of street peddling. Meanwhile, in his words, Grigoriy "was ready for anything: for war. It didn't matter. Dig, clean, anything. I was in that mindset," because leaving meant no road back. His tough, resilient, and determined nature allowed him to leave Italy with money for one-month's rent for his family's and his parents' apartments plus the cost of new furniture.

"There was a lot [that happened in transit]: we lost luggage, found it," he continued, beginning to describe the hassle and hustle of transit migration. "When we lost it, they [JDC] gave us money; then when we found it," Grigoriy laughed, "[again] money [by selling the goods therein]." He continued:

> People say "go here," we run here; "go there," we run there. But because we had friends in Vienna, for a few [weeks], we got to know the city; we had a good time with them. They had a son of the same age as [our daughter]. We went to the zoo, an [amusement park]. I would happily go back to Vienna again. That Vienna—I don't remember it very well. At that time, we counted every penny, couldn't allow ourselves anything.
> After a month, we had to go to Rome, by train. After Vienna, it felt like we arrived in a gypsy town. [The central train station] Termini, the Italy of that time,

> Rome: so many people, the filthiness; we didn't understand it at first. We were put in [a hotel called] Sporting, far from the center. It was 100 percent [Soviet Jewish] immigrant. We were there for one week. It was like a bazaar, that hotel: selling, buying, reselling, cheating. All thoughts were consumed with all of this. I held [onto all the suitcases for] a long time, until someone finally convinced me, and I sold him two suitcases.

He let out a light laugh, finding humor in hindsight.

"What was in it?" I asked, although I had a pretty good idea of the typical wares that traveled through Austria and Italy.

"Listen, what was there?! Optics, perfume, and so on. I didn't have the strength to carry it all. Unfortunately it was all on me. I wanted to—but 40 suitcases! Forty. There were few personal items. It was all stuff to sell. Because we couldn't sell our apt, we couldn't—"

"Convert money," Maria said.

"Converting money could only be done illegally [in the Soviet Union]. And they could easily trick you. Whatever money anyone had—some had more, some less—was put into things to sell. Of those 40 suitcases, 35 were wares. On the one hand, it's one's future money; on the other, it's heavy, and you have to always look after it. With every move, someone had to guard it," he laughed and paused. His voice quieted, "It was very, very hard, of course."

"Tell about how it was on the train, with the luggage," Maria said in a mournful tone.

Grigoriy's narrative had already pointed to "luggage" as representing and indexing the embodied experiences (strain, alertness) of emigration for many Soviet Jewish immigrants. But Grigoriy here shifted to explaining the experience of being in transit in a general sense, in terms of legal status:

It was a unique time then: people lose their citizenship, they don't have documents.[1] You had a thin piece of paper that said "exit visa" and had a picture on it: so-and-so left this country. You didn't have a passport or anything. You were no one. Yes, you were on the lists of [the helping organizations] HIAS and Joint. But otherwise you were absolutely no one, no one. If something happened to you in Vienna or Italy, no one but your family knew or cared. No one could say a word; you're not a citizen. [You're] no one.

"A refugee, you were a refugee," Maria responded in a mocking voice (October 25, 2011). Grigoriy repeated the phrase with equal exaggeration and smiled wearily. I took note of the exchange because it encapsulated their dismissive attitude toward the legal status that allowed them to immigrate. Outwardly I laughed, because it also made perfect sense to me that they would reject the label, pointing to its incongruity with their past (pre-emigration) and present selves as wealthy, savvy, and accomplished business owners.

The Kushnirs' joint narrative touches on a host of features of Soviet transit migration (as the process of obtaining refugee status) that this dissertation explores: the experience of shock and enchantment, difficulty and pleasure during the journey; its hurry, hassle, and the hustle (in the sense of rush and in the slang connotation of street-smarts and cunning); the experienced insecurity and uncertainty, as well as discomfort and demoralization; the sense of being "no one" in terms of legal, political, social, and personal status; a sense of responsibility to persevere, voiced in terms of grit; a desire to return to see the places of transit; the burden and significance of their luggage for migrants in transit; and, finally, the incongruence of the refugee label as a self-descriptor for many Soviet Jewish immigrants.

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[1] I frequently asked interviewees to explain to me the differences between those who immigrated through a process of transit migration and those who flew straight to the U.S. Here, he chose this way of explaining their emigration experiences to me without my asking.

Soviet Jews' refugee status had little to do with their attributes as refugees and everything to do with the political climate of the U.S. at that time. Soviet Jews benefited from belonging to a category of people that carried both domestic and foreign policy boons. They were since the late 1960s the subjects of American Jewish political organizing in the campaigns to Free Soviet Jewry, making them the beneficiaries of a successful U.S. social movement. At the same time, leaving the Soviet Union was "voting with their feet" in favor of the U.S. in the geopolitical scheme of the Cold War (Zucker and Zucker 1989:365; Zucker and Zucker 1987; Saloman 1991). The approval rate for refugee status for Soviet emigrants was 99 percent until September 1988 (Rosenberg 2003:427).

Around that time, the ever-larger numbers of Soviet Jews allowed to emigrate, including the Kushnirs in April 1989, combined with budgetary pressures on the United States, caused the automatic granting of refugee status to Soviet emigrants to be publicly debated. In August 1988, U.S. Attorney General Edward Meese wrote to the Reagan Administration that "current practices in processing Soviet émigrés appear not to conform with the requirements established by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980" (quoted in Lazin 2005a:10; Zucker and Zucker 1989:365). The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) at this time was making adjustments due to the unexpected increase in Soviet emigration and concomitant budgetary strains. From August 1988 through September 1989, the INS "began adjudicating refugee status for all Soviet applicants strictly according to the refugee definition in the Immigration and Nationality Act" to weed out the non-"bona fide" refugees (Beyer 1991:34). Accordingly, rejection of refugee status to Soviet Jews in Rome began in September 1988 (all those not granted refugee status in Rome were offered parole

by the Attorney General[2]); rejections rose to 37.5 percent by March 1989, and critics from

HIAS, the organization Action for Soviet Jewry, and rejected Soviet Jews in Rome

complained about the erratic nature of refusals—as if the INS sought to support its own

"premise that not everyone is eligible to be a refugee" ("Notes on Trip to Rome-Ladispoli,

April 2-8, 1989," Memo by Judy Patkin, April 10, 1989, Action for Soviet Jewry Archives).

Advocates for Soviet Jews also noted the shortcomings of the interview format, the biases of

undertrained and overworked INS interviewers, and the inability of Soviet Jews to frame

their experiences into INS "evidence": all typical shortcomings of bureaucratic procedures

and application processes (Maryns 2006; Blommaert 2009; Sandvik 2011; Thomson 2012).

Soviet Jewish emigrants "piled up" in Central Italy, an event known in the media as the

"Ladispoli Crisis" of 1988-89.

Former Senior Policy Analyst of the Office of Refugees, Asylum and Parole of the

INS, Gregg Beyer, who was involved in the transformation of the policy, provides the

clearest assessment of the sudden about-face (1991). American Armenians ideologically and

politically disapproved of the immigration of Soviet Armenians, especially as refugees, on the

grounds of their leaving the ethnonational homeland (Lazin 2005a:9; Lazin 2005b:266). In

1988, the Soviet Union eased restrictions on emigration, and applications skyrocketed,

especially among Armenians. Beyer explains that as early as April 1988, INS memoranda

aimed at responding to this dramatic increase focused solely on Soviet Armenians. In May

1988, "for reasons of equity and because of the increasingly unmanageable numbers of other

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[2] "Section 212(d)(5)(a) of the [Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980] authorizes the Attorney General to 'parole' into the United States, for reasons deemed to be in the public interest, persons who do not fall within any of the categories of admissibility (Beyer 1991:34 fn14). Parole "required sponsorship by friends [or] relatives (or federations) that had to guarantee in an affidavit that the parolee would not become a public charge…. Parolees were ineligible for medical benefits, government transportation to the United States, and resettlement funding [or reimbursement to sponsors]…. Moreover they were ineligible for permanent resident status which made it more difficult to eventually obtain citizenship" (Lazin 2005b:267, drawing on Rosenberg 2003).

Soviets opting for U.S. resettlement," these considerations against automatically granting of refugee status to Soviet Armenians were extended to all Soviet applicants (Beyer 1991:31). The process was more chaotic than a simple policy shift, however. In April 1988, the Reagan administration had increased the ceiling of Soviet refugees without allocating an increased budget. Responding to a budgetary crisis, and citing these former INS concerns as legal justification, the Department of State suspended part of the program for admitting Soviet Armenians in July 1988. A month later, without a formal policy shift, the INS began to implement a stricter "worldwide standard" interpretation of refugee eligibility (Beyer 1991:42-4).

The irony in this timing is that it was exactly in 1988 when observers noted the palpable uptick of grassroots anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, including isolated calls for pogroms, which lasted at least until the fall of the USSR (Althuser 2005:167-179 quoting Gitelman 1991b; Gitelman 2001:244). This reality, of course, mattered little; the examination of the policy fluctuations of 1988-89 indicates that political and logistical rather than legal determinations of U.S. refugee status prevailed. The haphazard adjudications were eventually solved by the creation of a new immigrant legal category for members of historically persecuted groups (Soviet Jews, evangelical Christians, certain Ukrainians, and Vietnamese) under the Lautenberg Amendment of November 1989. This result, too, attests to the political strength of the American Jewish establishment (within the scope of the American Soviet Jewry Movement) as well as the logistical and political uses of refugee status as an immigrant category.

Of course it was also true that some of those who emigrated could not say exactly why, because that was what people were doing, as occurs in mass migrations (Peterson 1968:290); some, the minority to be sure, left without having ever experienced any personally

significant popular or institutionalized anti-Semitism. In such cases, these individuals were

not even being *persecuted* or facing *fear* of persecution, as refugee status requires. Neither were

Soviet Jews *fleeing* war, ethnic cleansing, or natural disaster. They *applied* for an exit visa;

therefore, they *chose* to leave. And the fact that they were *choosing* not to go to Israel—didn't

this mean, as American scholars and Jewish establishment leaders speculated, that they were

economically rather than politically motivated? Moreover, how could they be refugees when

there was a country, Israel, willing to take them? (Rosenberg 2003:425).

Just as the desire to emigrate dealt an ideological blow to the USSR, so too the

rejection of immigration affected Israel. As early as 1980, the Chairman of the Jewish

Agency for Israel said about Soviet Jewish "dropouts" to *New York Times Magazine*, "They

are not refugees. A refugee is someone who is compelled to leave and has nowhere to go.

There are no Jewish refugees today. Jews seeking a haven and a new life have somewhere to

go" (Kass and Seymour 1980:112; Rosenberg 2003:425).[3]

Such opinions persisted through the years and were held by U.S. Jewish leaders as

well, though they were generally kept off the record so as not to undermine the concerted

American Jewish political effort to increase Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union and the

associated U.S. government funding. Historian Fred Lazin documented such points of view:

> Privately, several prominent American Jewish leaders shared the view that Soviet
> Jews were not political refugees as defined in American law. In March 1989, Morris
> Abram [of the highly regarded organization American Jewish Committee]
> commented, "they are not refugees, in my judgment. If you come out of a country
> and have access and automatic citizenship to a free country [Israel], you're not a
> refugee. They came here [to the U.S.] because they are 'refugees' and get the benefits

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[3] Aryeh Leon Dulzin, chairman of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization from
1978-1987, had a particularly stringent and harsh outlook on the issue of Soviet emigrants going
West. Whereas the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin valued continued Soviet Jewish emigration
over the imperative that they go to Israel, Dulzin argued that Israel's "first duty is not to save Jews[;]
we must save only those who will go to Israel" (Lazin 2006:394, drawing on Hand notes of Carl
Glick [HIAS files]).

of being refugees, payments of cash, money, and medical services and other things."
[2005a:11; see also Lazin 2005b:269; 2006:404][4]

Abram asserted (at a time when Congress was heatedly debating their automatic refugee

status) that Soviet Jews did not qualify as refugees because of Israel's Law of Return; they

were attracted to the U.S., moreover, by the very material benefits the United States offered.

They become refugees in the U.S., Abrams argues, because they could and it was beneficial,

not because they are legitimate refugees (or had other reasons to want to immigrate to the

U.S.).

Even at the highest echelons of JDC's leadership, figures such as Ralph Goldman, its

Executive Vice-President from 1976-87, and Ted Feder and Dr. Akiva Kohane, long-time

employees and heads of its European Headquarters in Geneva, were wont to agree. While

working tirelessly to maintain the difficult and overtaxed Vienna-Rome operation, they

nevertheless held onto Zionist hopes for Soviet Jews, including a 1980 plan designed in

concert with Israel to reroute Soviet Jewish emigrants in Vienna and house them in Naples

in such a way as to increase immigration to Israel (see "Refugees in Naples 1980" file, JDC-

NY Archives; Lazin 2006). Occasional critical remarks can be gleaned in JDC documents, as

in a July 19, 1978 private memo in which Ted Feder describes his phone conversation with a

New Zealand rabbi complaining about the treatment of Soviet Jews in Italy: "I told the

Rabbi that I didn't understand this point at all, because these were people who were using

Israeli visas and dropping out in order to go westward. Most of them had little Jewish

identity and were more in the category of economic refugees" ("Memo for file re: Mr. Shiff,"

JDC-NY Archives). This representative of the highest echelon of the Jewish establishment

did not perceive the Soviet Jews exiting en masse in the late 1970s—at a time when merely

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[4] Source: Abram, Morris. Testimony. New York: William E. Wiener Oral History Library of the
American Jewish Committee, March 6, 1989. More documentation in Lazin 2005b:269-70.

applying for an exit visa posed great social, political, and material risks—to be Jewish enough, or Jewish in the right way, to warrant the refugee label. Though a fair assessment from his point of view, it will be made clear below that designating motivations as "economic" is tantamount to discrediting refugee authenticity.

In one sense, the Kushnirs' dismissal of the refugee label echoes that of non-migrant observers who insisted on the distance between their experiences in the Soviet Union and the strict legal definition of refugee status: they did not "flee" violence or fear immanent personal harm. But there is a larger, more personal context to consider. Transit migration was very difficult and painful for them, a blow to their self-conceptions and previous life experiences as secure, well-off citizens. Later in my interview with them, Grigoriy and Maria argued over the length of the time period they considered to be "emigration"; that is, the amount of time it took them to reestablish themselves in the U.S., to return to a "normal," secure kind of life. Maria insisted it was a decade of their lives that emigration "stole"; Grigoriy vehemently disagreed, arguing the period was much shorter, ending when he opened his first film-developing store (after two years straight of working the night shift at a photo processing lab without days off, in addition to some short-lived janitorial jobs). This disagreement accentuates the importance they assigned to becoming re-established, to continuing the kind of life—the kind of social and moral status—they had held before emigrating.

Grigoriy used the phrase "being no one" to describe the feelings of social exclusion and lack of formal state protection they lived through while in transit. These feelings are a general feature of asylum seekers' life (Stewart 2005), and especially pronounced among a group departing a state-controlled society. (Consider Soviet Jewish immigrant Sol Tetelbaum's description in his memoir of transit migration: "My entire Soviet life experience

taught me that I wouldn't survive without my papers. In the reality of the Soviet life, you were nobody and nothing without papers" [2007:Kindle Location 1704]). This is the experiential aspect overlooked by observers: Soviet Jews' personal and physical suffering through the emigration and transit migration processes that in many ways aligns them with other refugee experiences. It is in this sense that a disavowal of the refugee label allows them to construct their life stories on their own terms, not as perpetual refugees-in-need-of-assistance, but as hard-working and upwardly mobile people in a new country.

Some analysts do maintain that "the process and effects of applying to leave were, in themselves, so egregious as to turn almost all Soviet applicants into genuine refugees" (Beyer 1991:35). This statement is both true in that Soviet Jews' underwent an emigration process that left them stateless and unable to return to the USSR and further highlights observers' and scholars' need to justify whether they were deserving of the label. It serves to categorize Soviet Jews as a certain *type* of refugee, "de facto" refugees, since the exit and application process that granted the status imposed their own conditions of hardships, thereby bringing emigrants more in line with what is meant and imagined by "being a refugee." In the section that follows, I consider the dismissive set of attitudes not so much for their truth-value (whether or not Soviet Jews were "real" refugees) but for what the claims doubting refugee authenticity mean socially and politically, especially when situated within a critical history of the international refugee regime.

THE POLITICAL HISTORY AND ADMINISTRATIVE NATURE OF REFUGEE STATUS

The term *refugee* evokes a powerful image of a suffering victim fleeing a specific terrible event, needing shelter that his or her own country cannot provide. Although 17th century Huguenots were the first named "refugees," it was not until the 20th century that the

label acquired legal and institutional significance. The contemporary international refugee system emerged in the aftermath of the First World War, whose refugee-generating consequences proved the rights of man were not inalienable but dependent on national conferral (Arendt 1951). This system solidified following the Second World War with the creation of the United Nations and its High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as an international system dedicated to making up for the failures of states to protect their citizens. So, too, was born a type of person and an epistemological category known as the refugee (Malkki 1995).

The "refugee" ideal type arises from the iconic legislation of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of the Refugee: a refugee is a "person, who owing to a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of that country" (UNHCR 2010). This enduring definition establishes five essential elements of the "refugee character": having left their country of nationality (or, for stateless people, their country of former residence); having objective evidence of being genuinely at risk; possessing fear of serious harm as the motivation for leaving the country of residence; facing danger owing to membership in a particular social (including political) group; and having a genuine need for the claim to protection of another state (Hathaway 1991:vi-vii). While enduring as a legal definition, and despite its widespread recognition and usage, there are many ways in which the term is neither neutral nor singular. The term *refugee* is, in fact, multivalent. The recognition of its political history, contextual application, including in the case of Soviet Jewry, and recent definitional "fractioning" of the label indicates that the legal term as it is

"on the books" differs wildly from the label "in action" (Boyle and Busse 2006; Mnookin and Korhauser 1979; Macaulay 1962; Fuller 1934; Pound 1910).

First of all, it should be recognized that the institutionalization of the "refugee" as an international legal category of person always had a particular Euro-American bent (Chimni 2009). The original United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted in 1951,[5] was subject to a crucial amendment in the form of a 1967 Protocol that eliminated its geographical and historical limitations. Prior to 1967, the United Nations' definition applied only to those persons who had become refugees "[as] a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951" (UNHCR 2010:14). Signatories at the time of ratification each decided whether "events before 1951" refer only to Europe or to "Europe and elsewhere" (Hathaway 2000:14). Besides its original restrictiveness, Cold War international politics contributed even more subtly to the very making of the definition: Western nations had a dominant position in dictating the principles of the policy, and by focusing on the persecution of civil and political rather than socioeconomic rights, the "fear of persecution" aspect of the definition was perceived by contemporary actors to be open-ended enough to serve the ideological benefit of the West over the Soviet Union[6] (Hathaway 2000:13; Hathaway 1991).[7]

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[5] It entered into force on April 22, 1954.

[6] Ironically, because of the failure of Soviet communism, many Soviet Jewish emigrants were in fact seeking the alleviation of socioeconomic concerns such as food availability, healthcare, and education, the last of which was made difficult to fairly access for reasons of restricted quotas for minority nationalities.

[7] Moreover, the 1951 Convention was designed to get refugees out of Europe in a way that ensured that they received traditional Western rights when resettling abroad. As legal scholar B.S. Chimni— by bringing a perspective from the global South to bear on refugee studies—has argued, the goal was to "distribute the European refugee burden without any binding obligation to reciprocate by way of the establishment of rights for, or the provision of assistance to, non-European refugees" (Hathaway 2000:14). The roots of the international refugee system lie in aiding European refugees while ridding Europe of them.

Furthermore, Western recognition of groups leaving the Soviet bloc as refugees throughout the Cold War "highlighted and in a sense created differences between the two alliances' systems of government and their citizens' way of conducting themselves" (Lippert 1999:9). Because Eastern European refugees "[symbolized] the bankruptcy of Communism" (Salomon 1991:258), emigrants from Soviet-bloc countries experienced an ease in obtaining refugee status in the United States and allied countries (e.g. Canada, Australia) as soon as the late 1940s. In this context, each émigré was a "propaganda triumph for the West" (Westin 1999:33; Young 1991).

This political stance was written into U.S. federal legislation: until 1980, the United States defined refugees as "victims of racial, religious, or political persecution fleeing Communist or Communist-occupied or -dominated countries, or a country in the Middle East" (Zucker and Zucker 1987:32). Even during the five years after the adoption of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1980, which eliminated the geographical and ideological limitations to align with the internationally accepted definition of the 1967 Convention, 51 percent of the United States' refugee and political asylum recipients were from Soviet Union (Gibney and Stahl 1988:161).

Contextual Application

As the case of the United States' ideological use of refugee status demonstrates, the definition, interpretation, and actual application of the legal label has always been subject to the discretion of receiving states; in other words, "[r]efugee character has a different meaning in different contexts" according to various national laws and regional Conventions (Grahl-Madsen 1983:17). Furthermore, despite the UNHCR being the principal international organization on the regulation and oversight of refugees, its jurisdiction is limited by state

sovereignty to the refugee camp, and the existence of the camp itself is further subject to state authority (Thomson 2013; Turner 2005). Even though the status can be affixed by international organizations like the UNHCR, the juridical status remains without the force-of-law unless backed by particular nation-states.

The contextual nature of the legal status is further evidenced by its bureaucratic administration. The definitional criteria for refugee status must be established by an evaluation of both the applicant, his personality, official statement, and the sociopolitical conditions of the place of origin (see paragraphs 37, 38, 40-42 of the *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status* UNHCR 1979), a process that results in the bureaucratization of the label through government and non-governmental organizations (Zetter 1991, 1999b) and through instruments such as the passport, camp, and refugee studies (Lippert 1999). As sociologist Roger Zetter effectively argued, "who is a refugee?—it is one who conforms to institutional requirements" (1991:51) because "bureaucratic interests and procedures are themselves crucial determinants in the definition of labels like refugee" (41; Thomson 2012).

Besides different definitions according to various regional Conventions, there have also existed legislative categories such as "B-refugees" (which keep refugees suspended in a transient state of temporary protection while they await status decisions), "de facto refugees" (those becoming refugees in the process of leaving, as Soviet Jews arguably did), and "refugees in orbit" (Grahl-Madsen 1983:17). And although refugee status should be determined on an individual-applicant basis, according to international protocol and most legislation, there are numerous instances of group labeling. For example, the Hungarian Revolt of 1956 resulted in Austria issuing a special registration card to the large number of

emigrating Hungarians; allowing more-or-less automatic refugee to the entire group (Holborn 1975:254). Soviet Jews, of course, were another such example.

Fractioning of the Label

Across the global North, "once the Cold War ended, and the refugee no longer possessed ideological or geopolitical value, Western states implemented a series of restrictive measures which, together with those introduced earlier, constitute today what has been called the non-entrée regime" (Chimni 1998:351). B.S. Chimni argues that the basis of this restrictionist approach in international refugee policy and law stemmed from the ossification in the 1980s of a "myth of difference" between Third World refugee flows and those of twentieth-century Europe's; the image of a "normal" (white, male, anti-communist) refugee figured prominently in this construction (1998).

The content of academic research parallels this historical development. Whereas in the 1980s and early 1990s the primary research question might concern describing the refugee condition and its (unintended negative) impact on people, in the 21st century, scholars focus on the "global machinery of deterrence, restrictionism, and containment" (Zetter 1999a:76) built to keep out Third World refugees (Zetter 2007). The method has been the fractioning of the refugee label, especially between legitimate versus illegitimate asylum-seekers (which in turn criminalizes the act of seeking asylum): "it was argued [by EU Member States] that 'genuine refugees', [implicitly different from refugees without this prefix] were poorly served by a Convention label which was exploited, in the political and popular mind, by large numbers of other types of migrants" (Zetter 2007:181-2).

Economically motivated migrants figure prominently among these "other types of migrants." Paragraphs 62-64 of the *Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee*

Status outline the definition of an economic migrant as someone "who, for reasons other than those contained in the definition [of a refugee], voluntarily leaves his country in order to take up residence elsewhere…moved by the desire for change or adventure, or by family or other reasons of a personal nature" (UNHCR 1979). Although the document acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between economic and political conditions and the possibility of political measures undermining the economic existence of a particular group, it maintains that if an individual "is moved exclusively by economic considerations, he is an economic migrant and not a refugee." Thus the UNHCR's institutionalization of the "refugee" dichotomizes human experience that is fluid, nuanced, complicated, and not understood in these parameters either to those experiencing or witnessing the event in question. It involves determining the motivations for leaving, even when those and the choices one has made afterwards are not particularly clear to the agents of those decisions (including decisions to non-action), as chapter 1 demonstrates. This is particularly significant considering that the terms "economic migrants" or "economic refugees" (as JDC's Ted Feder referred to Soviet Jews had in his private memorandum) casts doubt on the genuine character of a group's or individual's refugee claim, and is a political misnomer used to keep certain (ethnic) groups out of national territories (Grahl-Madsen 1983; Geddes 2003; Schuster 2005). At the heart of this distinction lies the deeply ingrained Western schema of "voluntary:involuntary :: economic:political :: peace:war" (Hayden 2006:474; Black 2001; Hein 1993). The primary means of delegitimizing refugees and asylum-seekers has precisely been to label them economically motivated, reflecting this general Western distinction between the economic and the political that has its roots in the Cold War and that potentially naturalizes and effaces the effects of structural violence (Hayden 2006).

In a similar fashion, the cultural logic of France's asylum regime allows for the coexistence of humanitarianism and migrant restrictionism in the political arena precisely by a general delegitimizing and discrediting of all asylum seekers as "false refugees" (Fassin 2005). Here we clearly see the effects of the multivalence of the term: states use it to restrict its effectiveness. In a general global regime of securitization (Goldstein 2012, 2010), especially of immigrants (Lahav et al. 2013), there is "a redefinition of the moral economy of our times: a unique combination of policies of order and a politics of suffering, in which the protection of security for the few within the polis is maintained while a compassionate treatment for those within the camps is assured" (Fassin 2005:382). Therefore, "the refugee" is not only a historically and culturally specific legal category of migrant, but the very question of who is, in fact, a "real, legitimate, and genuine" refugee is a politico-moral question (Malkki 1992, 1995; Lippert 1999).

So, on the one hand, those who become refugees should be ideal victims of the state or within a state that cannot protect them. On the other hand, despite the liberal tendencies of liberal democracies, mobile peoples have been pegged as threatening in contrast to the normal, sedentary, rooted native populations of the nation-state (Malkki 1992, 1995; Cresswell 2006; Feldman 2005; Lahav 2004; Haddad 2008). This stance is continuous with the post-War European stereotype of refugees as dangerous to national security and as amoral, irresponsible menaces (Malkki 1992). Even then, rootlessness was seen to lead to "*a loss of moral bearings*" (Malkki 1992:32); the refugees *become* the problem and exhibit the "inner, pathological condition of the displaced" (33).

Despite Malkki's (1995) criticism of studies of refugees that treat them as a cultural group with shared characteristics (e.g. Marx 1990; other examples include sociological studies that break down the "refugee experience" into discreet, systematic phases, as does Ager

1999), the expectations for the refugee as a particular kind of person persists. Scholar Dorsh

Marie de Voe noted in 1981: "[t]he lasting impression engendered by refugees is that of a

victim, a kind of immigrant and, perhaps most importantly, a client in need of assistance"

(88). The harsher version of this stereotype emerged in the U.S. quite clearly in the aftermath

of Hurricane Katrina, when a national controversy broke over whether calling Katrina

victims (of whom the hardest hit were poor and black) "refugees" was racist. Geographer

Tim Cresswell (2006) argues that this instance underlines the "social baggage that

accompanies those on the move" wherein "the history of the term has loaded it with

connotations of subversive and threatening mobility" and foreignness in the West (264). In

other words, "the 'refugee' becomes a label of exclusion…used to distance people further

away from the nation and point them to another place of [belonging]" (Kumsa 2006:241).

Thus, a critical examination of the label reveals that "refugee" is a moral designation,

and, accordingly, one of the primary factors in its application—and the determination of

"genuine" refugeeness—is the degree of responsibility and empathy we feel as the

designators (Hayden 2006:478).

Because mobile people are in general threatening, those who fall on the wrong side

of the schema "voluntary:involuntary :: economic:political :: peace:war" warrant less empathy

from Western observers (Hayden 2006:474). This strict sociolegal interpretation of the status

does not allow for refugees to be influenced by "pull factors," such as the search for

freedom or power (Malkki 1995:514), nor to exhibit agency (Hayden 2006:474; Holtzman

2000), as in the act of choosing to apply to settle in a particular country.

Along with political and social exigencies (sometimes driven by xenophobia or

racism), moral deservingness, rather than the acknowledgement of the legal and bureaucratic

circumstances necessary to attain the status, often underlies the mainstream label of the

"genuine refugee." While criticisms of Soviet Jewish emigrants of the 1970s and 1980s should not be discounted altogether, we can acknowledge that claims of their economic motivation and lack of legitimacy as refugees might point to disapproval of who they were as people, as *Soviet Jews.*

THE EMBODIMENT OF LEGAL STATUS, THE INCONGRUITY OF THE LEGAL LABEL

Immigrants' outlook on their own refugee status should first be understood through a sociolegal lens. The body of scholarship on the intersections of law and experience, especially in terms of immigrants' legal statuses, has not been consolidated into a recognized subfield of anthropology but, considered in tandem, has demonstrated the fruitfulness of attending to the interior, embodied effects of migrants' juridical statuses (e.g. Jackson 2008; Willen 2007; Yngvesson and Coutin 2006; Coutin 2003; De Genova 2002). This literature allows us to point not only to the law as a source of discourse on migration but also to the dynamic between the law and the bodies it legalizes. Nicholas De Genova (2002), in particular, delves into the topic more deeply. He acknowledges, following Susan Coutin (1993), the "discursive power of immigration law" (De Genova 2002:423) in creating the epistemological category (and thus the ethnographic object) of the illegal immigrant. "Being illegal" is meant to impart something profound and permanent about the illegal person; in common usage, "illegal immigrant" indexes social undesirability, usually racially or ethnically motivated. The law, even as text, actively constructs categories through which we understand and label the actors involved in the processes of migration. The fickleness and fluidity of legal categories, caused by ambiguities in the legal code and its implementation, make it easy to shift through different legal statuses and personhoods (De Genova 2002; Coutin 2007; Calavita 1998); the psychological, emotional, and moral effects on immigrants living through

these legal shifts are profound. This is because laws fix themselves onto the bodies of persons, even retroactively, to redefine a person's status; conversely, people embody laws and give meaning to the categories the law inscribes (Coutin 2007:121).

The law produces different kinds of (immigrant) subjects, with different legal statuses, different experiences with and understandings of the law, and different possibilities for social and physical movement. It relies on an exterior world to which it can refer (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006:178), and at certain moments, law is truth. But more often than not, it does not remain so.

Yngvesson and Coutin (2006), for example, emphasize the power of law as a knowledge system and the power of the legal paper to signify, even when reality differs. Though the law can reach into migrants' "inward parts" (Willen 2007:11), over time, the law may fall out of synch with people's realities and who they understand themselves to be at social and intimate levels.

Throughout my research, I sought to learn what it was like to inhabit the legal statuses of statelessness and refugee-in-waiting from today's point of view. While still unarticulated in the first of my interviews, I eventually realized that what I wanted to hear was their state of being, what in Russian one would refer to as моральное состояние—in English loosely translated to "moral state" or "morale," neither of which capture the convergence of one's psychological, emotional, and spiritual states that the Russian implies. In anthropological terms, I mean their embodiment, their "mode of being-in-the-world"— the sum total of how they experienced themselves experiencing the world while they were in transit migration.

Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I pushed participants to voice their attitudes towards having been, after leaving the Soviet Union, stateless and becoming

refugees. This was, after all, the reason for being in Austria and Italy. But I found that the question "were the statuses of refugee and statelessness felt?" did not always resonate or make sense to research participants, unless the participants were already thinking about those states as ones of abjectness—circumstances that themselves limit the possibilities for high morale and self-worth. For example, when I asked Boris Neyman, a 53-year-old wealthy entrepreneur who is a friend of a family friend, the question midway through our interview, he answered as if the answer were self-evident. Boris was generous with his time, reminding me that I should take my time and ask him whatever questions I wished. He treated me both as a young woman—paying for our tea and coffee, for example—and as a person deserving care and attention, as a member of his friend's social network.

"How did you feel about refugee status?" I asked.

"It came automatically. We had to provide examples of anti-Semitism in order to get it. And everyone had some of that in Ukraine," where he is from. That was not the reason Boris left Kiev. As a 30-year-old bachelor, he drove to Poland through Brest, Belarus with a few friends in a car overpacked with luggage in September 1989; he boarded a train in Poland, and his friends turned back. He went alone as a "scout," to learn about and establish a life in New York before sending for his parents. His answer implies that some anti-Jewish sentiment was a part of his Soviet life, enough so that he did not question this as a requirement for refugee status. It also makes sense especially because by the time he arrived in the Vienna-Rome pipeline, Soviet Jews were again being granted automatic refugee status on their way to the U.S. He therefore did not need to question at that time whether the refugee status he—and Soviet Jews' as a group—received was justified.

"How do you look at the fact that you were refugees today?" I asked, wondering if that question occurs to him in retrospect.

"What do you mean?" Boris asked. "That the U.S. gave me this opportunity to come here? I appreciate it. The fact that there was anti-Semitism in Russia, Ukraine: that everyone knows" (July 12, 2012).

Likewise, I asked a husband and wife—good friends of my aunt and uncle since we first moved to Brooklyn, now in-laws of my cousin, and a school bus driver and a wig-maker, respectively—in their south Brooklyn home, "how did you feel towards refugee status?"

"We wanted it," Lara Klopnik answered plainly. "That way we got monetary relief; otherwise we received nothing."

"From today's point of view," I asked later in our conversation, "Is it strange that you were 'refugees'?"

"We were refugees," her husband Viktor emphasized. "[In the Soviet Union] we were denigrated. We weren't hired to work. We were refugees. I always felt sorry for my daughter, because she was smart, able. There was no future for her there" (July 10, 2012). Such a forceful statement was rare among my research participants, but not unheard of. Viewed along a continuum between rejection, utilitarianism, and embracement, it is a stronger version of Boris's expression of the self-evidence of the status, rather than a completely different attitude. Experiences of social and institutionalized anti-Semitism, which granted them grounds for refugee status, were and continue to create the legal and moral conditions for the "deservingness" of the status. The more Soviet Jews suffered for being Jews, the more their refugee status was generally found acceptable among emigrants and observers alike (except, of course, when it is thought that they should have gone to Israel). Although this aspect to being political refugees is widely acknowledged, it is more common to encounter a utilitarian explanation of the label.

In the first of my interviewees in the winter of 2010, Mikhail Dubinsky, a philologist-turned-N.J. lawyer, was straightforward in his self-conception vis-à-vis refugee status.

"What was it like to be a refugee?" I asked him about his emigration from Moscow in 1979, as we sat for the third time in the office of his private practice in a wealthy suburb in northern New Jersey.

"I don't think I can answer that—'what is it like to be a refugee?'"

"What _was_ it like?" I repeated, only changing the tense in his statement because I was not yet sure how to phrase the question.

"You see, I did not see myself as a refugee, per se. We never called ourselves refugees. We referred to ourselves as immigrants. And we still do. So. I don't know how to answer that."

"Even in that time in Italy—you thought of yourselves as immigrants?"

"Yes. 'Refugee' was just a status, which allowed us to come here. It was a legal technicality, a term. I definitely, like everyone else, thought of myself as an immigrant. Our goal was to emigrate. So when you say 'refugee', I don't see myself in those terms" (interview conducted in English and Russian, March 2, 2011).

This articulation of Dubinsky's crisply points to an important insight of sociolegal studies regarding the distinction between state law and the interiority it points to: The law can recategorize people (via status, belonging) and provide (or refuse to provide) a reference point for belonging. Yngvesson and Coutin (2006) show that non-mainstream state subjects like deportees and adoptees both experience disorientation when the law misleads (signifies the wrong thing, so that one ends up where does not feel one should be) or fails to signify (fails to give meaning when one expects it, e.g. points to a place of belonging that turns out to be meaningless to the person; see also Kim 2010). Acquired refugee status, for example,

requires administrative procedures that match a person to his or her constructed story of victimhood and then to specific national legal criteria. The status retroactively defines a person's past in a particular way, making the "refugee condition" internal to the person. When belonging is legally defined, as for stateless people, it may be disorienting.

The complicated relationship that Soviet Jewish American immigrants have with their refugee status was made clear to me during and after an interview for which my parents were present. Picking up on the gap in understanding that my question about refugee status indicated, my parents were careful to explain to me a nuanced, utilitarian point of view that they shared.

"How did you react to the refugee status?" I asked Klara and Dmitriy Gatovsky, the family friends and computer programmers, at their house in July 2012, at the tail end of my interview with them in their northern New Jersey home.

"We were happy about it," Dmitriy answered right away, a bit surprised by my question. "We were stateless; why not have something? We knew this route, knew what would happen. It didn't embarrass us. Such words might embarrass people who are established. We knew we might suffer a bit, and should." His answer speaks of the accepted, ordinariness of these statuses and the accompanying suffering; it happened to all the emigrants who came before them. He legitimizes the hardships and the unpleasant circumstances of their emigration as part of the process.

"I remember at work," Klara continued, implicitly agreeing with her husband. "There was a conversation. My coworkers asked me what citizenship I had. I said, 'None.'" Klara let out a laugh at the recollection. "'There, [the Soviet Union] took it away; here [in the U.S.], we haven't gotten it yet. They said, 'how horrible!' I said, 'Why?!'" she laughed again. "To me it was all the same."

"Exactly," my mom joined in. "That's the same reaction we had."

"Even [dire circumstances] people get used to," Dmitriy said. "In one's circumstances, you know what to expect, what the stages are, and you go through it." In the same way as Grigoriy Kushnir, Dmitriy indicated a sense of ownership and responsibility over the hardships they would have to endure in making the decision to emigrate.

"You mean," Klara turned to me, "did it degrade people?"

I nodded, and Dmitriy responded immediately. "It didn't degrade us."

"Maybe to some people it did," my mother reflected, thinking about various friends' experiences. "But we were so ready for it."

"And it was important to people," added my father, referring to refugee status.

"Of course," Dmitriy and my mom said in unison.

"Because otherwise it was parole [status]."

"Or to Israel."

Both options were considered risky for establishing stable livelihoods: parole status did not automatically lead to citizenship nor offer material aid or access to social services and public assistance. (Refugee status, on the other hand, offered 30 days of "basic needs" [e.g. shelter, food, clothing, referrals to services]; language, vocational, and employment services; cash and medical assistance [e.g. SSI, food stamps, Medicaid, etc.]). Israel did not offer regional stability or as diverse a job market, nor a support system of friends and relatives. Moreover, people were terrified of obligatory military service for their children. For couples with one non-Jewish partner, such as the Gatovskys, Israel posed further challenges. For others, Israel was out of the question as a too-ideological state (the influences of Soviet anti-Israel propaganda on emigrants' rejection of Israel as a place to settle should not be entirely discounted).

In the car on the way home, my dad continued, trying to clarify their changing understanding of refugeeism after they emigrated, "We interpreted the status of refugee as a given."

"As deserved," my mom added.

"It was only when we got to Italy when those people who were able to analyze [the situation critically] realized just how hard it was to get refugee status in America—how privileged of a status it was, and how far we were from meeting its requirements," he told me. Having been initially denied refugee status in the U.S., my parents and many of their peers contemplated, debated, and analyzed the topic.

"What I want to say," my mom emphasized, "is that we treated the status with respect."

"—Once we realized what it's all about. At first we didn't know what it was all about," my dad continued, generalizing to the emigrant population. "At first we thought we deserve it, we deserve everything, and everyone owes us. I remember people yelling at those volunteers at HIAS: 'What are you doing?! Do this, do that for me.' Not because people are bad or mean, but because--"

"We totally didn't understand how it all worked," mama finished for him. During our last few months in Italy, HIAS had hired them to begin to organize its archive. In this way, my parents learned about the organization's inner workings and witnessed its interactions with migrants.

Papa continued, "We totally didn't understand how it all worked, first of all. Second of all, we were used to the government being responsible for everything, and took HIAS for a government agency—"

"—And the volunteers for government bureaucrats," my mom said.

I got the point. They were clueless about this "international refugee regime" they were entering and the role of its volunteer agencies. They learned what it all meant, for themselves and according to those agencies and observers, as and after they went through the process.

"I also wanted to know about the feeling of being degraded in relation to refugee status, to becoming stateless," I stated.

"That you were someone and became no one," mama restated, echoing Grigoriy Kushnir. "We came to this realization gradually, consciously."

"That we didn't have citizenship–we–we didn't know we should have it. We didn't know that a government couldn't just take citizenship away [like the Soviet Union did]."

"No, no, not true," mama countered. "Because we knew that we had to leave our passports [in the Soviet Union]; we knew that we would become stateless."

"That we knew. We didn't know—didn't realize—to what extent it is something degrading and offensive. That we didn't understand."

Soviet Jewish emigrants did not necessarily leave the Soviet Union conceiving of themselves as "refugees." Their primary focus was to *get out* of the Soviet Union. Klara, Dmitriy, and my parents clarified that it wasn't the status or the label that carried negative connotations for them; the status in fact encapsulated material and political benefits, which, overall, Soviet Jews at the time of emigration felt they deserved and needed. The route was well trodden and the accompanying legal statuses well known. What emigrants-who-came-before would not have told them, though, was what it felt like, morally, to one's self-regard, to go through this process: what it felt like to see yourself in juxtaposition to well-dressed Austrians in well manicured Vienna, or to feel yourself cheated or disregarded by Italians (though many Italians actually empathized), or not understood, assisted, or accepted by

American Jews (among the first Americans they encountered). These experiences are remembered, along with countless others, but not necessarily pinned down or attributed to their juridical status at the time of emigration. Even the sensations of being stateless—of being "no one in the middle of Europe," as Grigoriy stated—tended to be expressed rather metaphorically rather than literally. On the one hand, there is the refusal to have had one's interiority, one's sense of being-in-the-world, defined by the prevailing politics (as they were used to doing under the Soviet regime) and geopolitical conditions.[8] On the other hand, it marks a refusal to accept a label—the helpless refugee—that is at odds with the widespread self-conception of successful, self-made immigrants. Indeed, the legal label does not necessarily point to one's interiority (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006), especially under sudden shifts across socio-spatial legal boundaries (De Genova 2002).[9]

The Enactment of a Label and the Ethics of Responsibility

Indeed, the legal label itself can be life-threatening—as when immigrants need to demonstrate a level of sickness in order to maintain legal belonging. In France, the refugee system localizes the proof of needed protection in the diseased body (Ticktin 2006, 2011) or the psyche (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). This means that persons seeking refugee status need to continually embody either ailment or violence as proof of the legitimacy of their claims. Alternatively, as Shahram Khosravi, an "illegal traveler" turned refugee (turned anthropologist), points out, the refugee as a legal status and social label requires an embodied performance and the continued institutional circumstances that expect its enactment: a

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[8] Though many expressed a lived recognition of their profound difference as Soviet people in Europe, as chapter 4 illustrates.
[9] In this case, the idea and spacio-legal effects are similar regardless of whether individuals cross into territory with different laws or whether the law changes in such a way as to alter their status in the same place.

refugee is one who embodies suffering and therefore should endlessly perform "refugeeness" as sad, serious, poor, ragged, traumatized, and so on (Khosravi 2010:73; Sandvik 2008).

These implicit expectations are reinforced in and through the disciplining interactions between state agencies, refugee-assistance organizations, society, and refugees, wherein through repeated interactions and structural limitations, the label adheres to people and bodies (Ong 2003; Ong 1996:742-745). Roger Zetter instructively puts forward a theory of labeling—the way the "refugee" label produces a certain kind of relationship between state, refugee-aid bureaucracies, and refugees. By applying the status, agencies and governments turn "stories" into standardized "cases" subject to particular "programs"—that is, subject to control, which in turn requires refugee loyalty, acquiescence, and particular "client" performances (Ong 2003; Zetter 1999b; Ong 1996:742-745; Zetter 1991). Refugees, in turn, may foster certain kinds of identities in response to and because of the real material and social consequences of the label (Zetter 1991:53). Accepting the terms of these resources engenders new circumstances, some of which seriously rearrange social worlds and in turn identities (e.g. by accepting new housing in Cyprus, Greek-Cypriots accept the permanent break-up of their pre-1973 villages). In other words, certain bureaucratic interventions impart certain social identities to those who accept the label and accompanying interventions (55). These new identities can become political tools (58), or, because labels such as refugee "appear benevolent, neutral and obvious" (59), they can obscure more pressing and unattainable political demands (for example, by providing food and housing when what is desired is repatriation).

For Soviet Jews' future life in the U.S., refugee status meant entitlement to government assistance that the helping organizations and emigrants who preceded them

insisted was crucial to their survival as immigrants. That is what scared everyone so much about the refusal of refugee status: not that they would be unable to settle in the U.S., because most Soviet applicants were allowed in through parole, but that they would have no resources to begin their lives here. For a people moving from a government-controlled society with state-provided social services (free education, medical care, guaranteed employment) to a free-market society with nothing but social capital, such assistance must have seemed key. But upon arrival in the U.S. and certainly nowadays, many rejected and look down on government assistance. I suggest that this is because they experienced themselves (on their bodies, on their sense of self worth) what social scientists have shown about refugee status: that the relationship between government and non-governmental agencies, society, and refugees as clients turns those with refugee status into the low-level, marginalized society members expected of "refugeeness" (Ong 2003; Zetter 1999a; Ong 1996:742-745). In other words, the assistance provided through refugee status turns immigrants into the undesirable social category of refugees.[10]

In transit migration they already learned a vital lesson: that it takes real individual effort, shared social knowledge, social capital (e.g. education, work skills), and personal initiative to provide for themselves, their families, and acquire socioeconomic mobility. (Evidence for this is dotted throughout this dissertation in the form of money-saving and moneymaking practices. See Grigoriy's Kushnir's, Sergei Liebermann's, and Ella Bobrovsky's stories). According to them, personal responsibility and initiative fill the gap between where

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[10] Consider the following utterance of a Soviet Jewish woman, in reference to American Jews' resentment at their quick success in the U.S.: "'See our Russian community, we are successful and nobody helps us. They think 'you should work hard but not be successful. To work in McDonald's, this is your place'" (Gold 1995:115). This woman overlooked the fact that we were helped enormously by American Jews, both to allow us to emigrate and to immigrate to the U.S. as refugees.

refugee status will get you in society and where you want to be to lead a life of dignity and socioeconomic success.

Consider the following conversation among five friends (including my mother) in July 2011 at a group interview I set up in one of their homes in Brookline, MA. All five friends have known each other since high school. One couple had emigrated in 1979, the other in 1988, and my family followed in 1989.

"Remember how well-said it was in [the early years of] immigration," began Victoria, capturing everyone' attention. "All immigrants are divided into two groups: the programmers and the shit-eaters." It should be known that many Soviet immigrants became computer programmers upon coming to the U.S. based on the demand and benefits of the profession in the 1990s. "Shit-eating" can refer to having to withstand a lot of blows to one's dignity. "The shit-eaters are those who came and later told everyone all the shit they had to eat before they became 'real' people [вышли в люди]. Programmers are those who came here and right away got on the Program."

Everyone burst into laughter, and I did, too, appreciating the word play, after my mom clarified to me that "the Program" referred to Welfare.

To the group my mom said, "Each person ate his own [share of shit]! Each person ate his own! Each one!"

The conversation continued along these lines, with stories exchanged of the early years of immigration and the difference in experience from those who immigrated to the U.S. later, without a period of transit migration. Then the conversation veered back to refugee benefits and Welfare.

"Were you programmers or shit-eaters?!" Nadezhda asked my mom, laughing. "I know which one: never programmers."

"Never, never," my mom responded. "I never took one Welfare check."

"A shame," said Victoria.

"I went there to the office, I stood on line, stood, and stood," my mom said. "Then I turned around and never came back."

I had never heard this story. "Wow," I said, imagining her discomfort and sense of pride.

"We kept getting checks, even though I went to work after three months [in the U.S]," Victoria said. "I called them, told them that I was working. They said, 'No, you will be on program for six months'."

"You refused that money?" I asked my mom.

"Mama did," my mom answered, referring to my grandma.

"We didn't," Nadezhda stated. "It was different for her, it was a different time."

My mom agreed by explaining that a family member had put my dad and uncle to work right away upon our arrival to the U.S.

"You see, you had people to give you work," said Nadezhda.

"When we got here," Nadezhda's husband said, "we didn't understand anything: What Welfare is, what you can, what you can't do. And all the help ended after I went to work" (July 22, 2011). His first few jobs were as an attendant at a gas station. When the Minkins arrived in 1979, they had no relatives in Boston; any friends or acquaintances were starting from scratch the same as they. Now, the dilapidated house they bought and fixed up over the years stands on a beautiful tree-lined street. It is where Nadezhda gives violin lessons to local children. Her husband has an innovative job that he loves in the nearby (Route 128) technology industry. Their daughter, now a primary care physician, lives nearby. Their son works in the entertainment industry in Los Angeles. Victoria Shostak is no longer

works and frequently looks after her two grandchildren. Pyeter runs a successful multi-national company (with a factory in Russia) that he started with his father. They travel frequently all around the world and now live in a newly built condominium in central Boston.

Their conversation reveals quite a few things. It reveals their individual, shared, and community-wide views about social programs. Although my family seems to have been the only of the three families to turn down public assistance upon arrival to the U.S. (although my grandparents did and my grandma still does make use of other social services), all those around the table disapproved of those immigrants who remained on public assistance without pursuing employment, without putting in the necessary effort, enduring the shit-eating required, to become "real people." All of them have and feel pride about their socioeconomic mobility and how their children have fared in the U.S. All felt and continue to feel enormous responsibility for their and their families' welfare. Despite emigrating with substantial social capital, they worked hard and a great deal to bridge material, social, and personal (i.e. in terms of self-worth) divides between arriving to the U.S. as refugees and the people they have become today (just as the Italians warned them they would: "*In America, molto lavoro!*" [a lot of work!]).

Anthropologists have demonstrated that the adoption or rejection of the refugee label is linked with proclaiming a group identity in a way that forecasts one's orientations for future social and political belonging. Among those with political motivations, Afghani refugees in Pakistan, for example, called themselves "Muslim refugee-warriors," thereby framing their movement as a (religion-based/historical) political act of resistance in order to allow for future repatriation (Shahrani 1995). Similarly, Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon did not refer to themselves as refugees but as "returners," which allowed them to

"[construct] a lexicon of both refusal and resistance" (Peteet 1995:177). They rejected the label that implies a search for settlement elsewhere, therein refusing to accept deterritorialization (177).[11]

In another context, for Hutu of Burundi living in a Tanzanian refugee camp, refugeeness had a central place in narratives of self as a member of a group and nation (Malkki 1992). For them, the in-between legal status of refugeeness was a sign of purity: they were no longer being governed by others ("imposters") in Burundi, and they were not yet citizens elsewhere; this made them more powerful as Hutu. Those Hutu refugees living in towns outside of the camp, on the other hand, focused on making a new life for themselves as people, not as "Hutu refugees" or a "people" (i.e. a predetermined group).

Eastern European refugees—non-Jewish Poles and Czechoslovakians—living in Newfoundland, Canada in the late 1980s didn't call themselves refugees either (Gilad 1990). Like Mikhail Dubinsky, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, they too asserted that they were "immigrants." In Europe, though, they said that they had indeed been refugees, because there they lived in a camp and were thus designated.[12]

There is thus also the sense in which refugee identities are "situational identities embedded in pragmatic concerns" (Malkki 1995:169). It is therefore reasonable to expect a range of attitudes towards one's refugee label, as is the case among Soviet Jewish immigrants, who (like Hutu living outside the camp) sought to establish new lives and livelihoods, not to

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[11] Of course, each of these groups also was responding to and acting within regional and national contexts that also had political stakes in their designation as refugees.

[12] Gilad further struggles to categorize these Eastern European "de facto refugees" in the same category as those, like Salvadorans, Vietnamese, and Iranians, who fled from violence. In response, she fractures the label into "refugee ideologues" (those from communist countries who make the decision to leave based on prolonged difficulties and as an act of defiance against the state) and those of "active persecution" in order to account for the differences in experiences. She doesn't acknowledge the issues of race, class, and global stratification of citizens (between First, Second, and Third Worlds) that lead to distinctions between Eastern Europeans and the others (Chimni 1998).

use their identities for political ends. Because the refugee label carries moral implications of a victim (from elsewhere) who has suffered legitimately, and because it demands migrants' self-conscious adoption, the diverse studies cited demonstrate that migrants treat the refugee label self-consciously, sensitive to its implications within the group and in larger national and institutional contexts. When taking into account the blow to one's dignity and morale that applying for refugee status entails, the rejection of the refugee label and its understanding in terms of utilitarian needs counter the appeals to victimhood that "refugeeism" demands. Moreover, as Khosravi's statement implies, refugees may be sensitive not only to the performance expected of them to acquire and maintain the label in society, but of the vast gap between who they are and what a "refugee" is supposed to be.

Soviet Jews' legal status as asylum-seekers in Austria and Italy and as political refugees in the U.S. conditioned their relationship to each society: as onlookers not allowed to stay (which they didn't) or work in Europe (which they did); and as state clients subject to welfare benefits (through which political subordination is reproduced; Auyero 2012:2), which some rejected anyway. But whereas the law can define one's relationship and therefore experience in society, it can impact but be odds with one's self-experience (the way one understands and imagines oneself). The law's inability to define one's interiority in this way leads to alternate interpretations of the status. For Soviet Jewish immigrants, that interpretation is primarily a utilitarian one, as a status that allowed them to immigrate and then to remain in the United States. The gap between what refugee status accorded them and the dignity and worth they hoped to attain was filled by hard, often menial work, which itself entailed putting aside one's dignity, at least for a time. It is clear that while in transit, emigrants did not fully understand what those legal statuses meant; perhaps, too, they may

not be able to fully assimilate or make sense of some of the most extremely distressing and disorienting (traumatic) aspects of transit migration.

By disassociating oneself from one's former refugee status, or by accepting it as an effect of anti-Semitism, Soviet Jewish Americans can externalize negative aspects of their pre-emigration life to the Soviet regime. From another point of view, a rationalizing of the label as simply necessary and beneficial legitimizes the acceptance of a lower status and further allows them to disassociate their personal lives from the negative connotations of "the refugee."

Both of these point to a strategy of minimizing victimhood in order to focus on resilience and resourcefulness, abundant in persons who are as adept at manipulating their fates as refugees (Holtzman 2000:116). Because no one is a "pure" or "true" refugee—even those who perfectly match the legal definition have to act to mobilize the label (e.g. move, apply, etc.)—, everyone accorded that legal status has to adopt and perform, reject, or utilize the label. In this case, the critical question for refugees should not be why some cast off the label, but why individuals and groups might embrace it. This line of inquiry does not reveal anything essential about the category of the refugee (besides it being a situational and pragmatic identity [Malkki 1995:169]); rather, migrants' attitudes toward their past (or present) legal statuses reveal how they understand themselves and imagine their trajectories as migrants, as people changing their lives and re-imagining their futures. The patterns of mobility and emigration of Soviet Jews are intricately tied to aspirational projects of mobility, and this is also what frames people's views on the refugee experience.

As the next chapter shows, while applying for refugee status, Soviet Jews very much experienced what it meant to be refugees—moving through emergency-like conditions, feeling helpless and powerless, feeling like "no one" going "no where," unable to turn back,

at the whim of the state to decide their fates, unable to work in a way that restored the their lost sense of dignity and agency. Because immigrants do not fold or directly equate these experiences of distress and uncertainty and those of shock and enchantment, as discussed in the next two chapters, with their unfixed legal status at the time of transit migration, we need to investigate the nature of their experiences and how they continue to be felt.

CHAPTER 3. MOVING AND WAITING:

UNCERTAINTY AND THE RHYTHMS OF LIFE IN TRANSIT

"HURRY UP AND WAIT"

Transit migration is an experience of mobility, and therefore entails both moving and waiting and their attendant endurance of the passage of time. Stock video footage of Soviet transit migration from 1989 (filmed by an independent company to sell to news agencies on demand) depicts a train full of Soviet emigrants arriving into Orte train station in Italy after 14 to 18 hours en route from Vienna's Südbahnhof station, the passengers busily unloading their luggage with plenty of shouting, and then standing quietly beside those mounds of suitcases in small groups on the platform, some with cigarettes in hand, some with stern faces, others smiling coyly at the camera. Aside from the amount of luggage, the scene does not strike the viewer as particularly trying. From watching the video, one might not surmise that Soviet immigrants overwhelmingly identify this moment—arriving by train into Italy, alone among a sea of similarly hassled people, pressed with time, having to quickly unload the burden of one's luggage, with no possibility of going back from where they came—as one of the worst moments of their emigration and time spent in transit.

The extreme rush and hustle subjectively experienced upon emigrants' detraining contrasts sharply with their waiting (for a decision, to leave, to begin one's life) and its attendant feelings of uncertainty. Jerry Spitzer, an American Jewish businessman who served as JDC's Director of Operations from 1979 to 1986, described the process of the transit migration, and its "human toll," as "hurry up and wait." During his tenure at JDC, he streamlined the transit migration process, which for emigrants entailed multiple appointments with intake officers, doctors, and immigration officials in Vienna and Italy, by

simplifying the procedure to accommodate hundreds to thousands of new clients per month

on their journeys across four countries.[1] This allowed emigrants to reach Italy more quickly

and efficiently, where the bulk of the refugee application process took place, in Western

Europe's largest U.S. Embassy.

"The big hang-up," Jerry Spitzer said about the process,

was after you were settled, then there was nothing to do. So that's why I call it hurry up and wait. That expression comes from the [U.S.] Army…. You wake up at 5:30 in the morning, so you can rush to do this and get out for morning call, so you can get to the dining hall by 6:15, where you wait on line, because breakfast is at 7:00. So the whole rush was, hurry up! and now you wait. And that's what happened here [in Austria and Italy]. But the wait was 70 days, 80 days, in some cases 120 or 130 days…. And there people changed. [interview conducted in English, October 11, 2011]

He emphasized the emotional and psychological breakdowns, familial strife, and other

extreme reactions to the strains of emigration and transit among Soviet émigrés during the

wait.

The weight and dealings with the luggage, the shock of armed guards, the shared

tensions among masses of emigrants are among the explicit descriptors of the hassle,

uncertainty, and physical and personal discomforts of the journey. It was during these

intense and straining moves from one leg of the journey to the next when Soviet Jews began

to feel and understand themselves as migrants.[2] That is, in response to the sociopolitical,

legal, and affective features of their transit route, they developed "new ways of inhabiting

and moving about in one's body" that accompany marginal migrants' uncomfortable

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[1] For example, he instituted the use of one central identification number per family until arrival in the West, a deceptively obvious change that simplified the bureaucratic maze for transit migrants and JDC and HIAS workers alike.

[2] Though they are not the only ones of course. Equally of consequence are the interactions with members of the host societies and the helping organizations, the latter of which entailed, appropriate to this discussion, waiting on various lines, filling out forms, and undergoing interviews.

presence in a new society (Willen 2007:17; Csordas 1993:138). This is one of the principal effects of *moving* on the basis of permanent emigration.

Waiting, too, is a particular "kind of relation-to-the-world," an "embodied corporeal experience" in and of itself (Bissell 2007:278).[3] While waiting, one becomes aware of one's mortality as well as one's existence, resulting in a heightened awareness both of one's body and one's needs (Schweizer 2008)—for "one cannot be both indifferent to something and wait for it" (Rotter 2010:160). This heightened awareness, combined with the powerlessness to bring about the end of waiting, open up a range of experiential possibilities: dread and debilitation; discovery, reflection, and creativity; and the continuation of everyday life. Time spent in Austria and Italy melded uncomfortable but potentially eye-opening anticipation with the mundanity of the everyday—yet a distinct "everyday" precisely for being the life of transit migration, or in immigrant's words, "life in emigration."

Both in enforced moving and waiting, then, understanding the experience of time, of the "hurry up and wait" aspect of transit migration, reveals the embodied uncertainty of being a migrant in a period of transition. It is the "not-yet-determined" nature of transit migration that gives rise to anxiety and/or excitement, intensifying one's experiences of both time and self. This uncertainty and the variety of experiences it engenders mean that transit migration is a period rife with possibilities, both pleasant and hurtful, that, because of their intensity, have the potential to leave lasting impressions. This chapter therefore establishes that, due to its unique temporal dimensions, transit migration is experienced and potentially remembered as a distinct, singular, intense, phase in people's lives (Stewart 2005); hence, revisiting transit migration both in person and through remembering may also allow for pleasant, hurtful, mundane, and self-reflective experiences, as chapter 5 shows.

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[3] Even though it is often overlooked in favor of the object of waiting (Schweizer 2008) or conceived in terms of a lack, a cessation of movement (Bissell 2007).

Here I pursue this argument by first examining the "movement" stage of transit migration and then discussing the "waiting" stage.

MOVING THROUGH TRANSIT: "THAT PERIOD OF SUITCASES, MOVES, ARMED GUARDS"

This is a given: Moving oneself, one's belongings, one's family from any place to another is strenuous and taxing. For Soviet emigrants, the stress and rush associated with "moving" began well before arriving in Vienna. After receiving one's Soviet permission to emigrate (not to mention everything that went into getting that permission), one had weeks to buy what one needed, obtain or sew the proper luggage, sell off or give away all of one's belongings, fill out the assortment of necessary paperwork, pack carefully, visit the Dutch and Austrian embassies in Moscow, buy the travel tickets, say one's goodbyes, and then embark on one's journey. Each of these steps took a lot of time and entailed many difficult and stressful decisions. After arriving in Vienna the two organizations JDC and HIAS were responsible for filing everyone's applications for refugee status, getting the emigrants to Rome, where they would undergo interviews with the now replaced U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), or another country's immigration agency, and then await permission to emigrate. The final step was for the International Committee for European Migration (ICEM) to coordinate migrants' plane travel out of Italy, a wait that could be short but was numerous weeks long at the end of the 1970 and 1980s.

By organizing travel, legal assistance, and housing in Vienna and for the first seven to ten days in Italy, JDC and HIAS enormously simplified the process of transit for emigrants. Immigrants continue to express gratitude for this effort and organization to this day. The strain and stress remained, though, for each of the tasks that emigrants had to take on

themselves: lugging luggage; selling wares to earn extra pocket change; finding housing in Italy; figuring out how to live, how to pass their time, in Italy.

In spite of various restrictions, Soviet emigrants were lucky enough to be able to leave with (at least some of) their possessions. The Soviet bureaucratic mazes which they navigated required them to take and keep careful account of all of these belongings. Weight and size restrictions imposed at different times required the careful selection of objects that then needed to be attentively packed, guarded, and moved from place to place at each stage, usually in custom-made and carefully purchased suitcases. The physical exertion of lugging luggage on and off different modes of transportation and the anxiety over their safety and care was one of the hardest aspects of the journey.

A keen and sympathetic observer by nature and now one of the foremost leaders of the American Jewish institutional structure, David Harris, then in his mid-twenties, volunteered in Rome and Vienna between 1975 and 1978. He described himself as the first American many met upon their arrival to Vienna. He spoke on camera to Michael Drob for Drob's documentary *Stateless* (2014), eloquently capturing the scenes of Soviet transit migration. In the Austrian and Italian train stations and airports, Harris explains, "it was fairly easy to identify who the refugees were by their manner, by their behavior, by their anxiety, by their—uh—by their fear, by their uncertainty. By their luggage. One could write a whole story, a very interesting story just about the *chemodanih* (suitcases). Just about the suitcases and the role they played in this whole journey of the Soviet Jews through transit to their final destination."

Harris would frequently accompany emigrants on their train rides to Italy and then on the planes to the U.S. to aid in translation. At Vienna's Südbahnhof train station,[4] as

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[4] This train station was torn down in 2010 and replaced with a new one, Hauptbahnhof.

emigrants embarked on the 14- to 18-hour overnight trip to Rome, "once again, it was the same kind of anxiety [that] played out," he said. "'Where are my children? Where are the elderly? Are we on the right train? Where are our suitcases? <u>WHERE ARE</u> our suitcases? Count them again! Do we have them all?' And the uncertainty of 'where we are going next? Where exactly is this train taking us? What's going to happen once we cross the border between Austria and Italy?'" (interview conducted in English, January 13, 2013).

As Tanya Vainer said to distinguish her emigration from her co-worker's, who came to the U.S. after 2000, "We didn't know what was waiting for us, where we were going. It was just our luggage, us, and that's it" (June 1, 2011). The suitcases were important objects with which emigrants interacted and that impacted their experiences of the journey. They both housed emigrants' valuables and themselves became objects of value, and thus of anxiety. They were emigrants' fortification against the unknown, offering (false) feelings of preparedness. To Harris, they synechdocically represent the hardships of the emigrants' journey. For immigrants, the luggage, sturdy and reliable but filled with items packed from misinformation (e.g. plenty of bedding, dishware, china, toilet paper, laundry soap), has become a symbol of entering the unknown completely unprepared.

Figure 3 Soviet Jewish Emigrant Departing from Südbanhof Platform to Rome in 1989, JDC Archives.

The Connection From Eastern to Western Europe

Raisa Lachman is a petite, youthful-looking woman in her late 1960s who speaks quickly, her every word imbued with emotion that conveys her attitude toward what she is saying. A social service worker in a Russian Jewish immigrant-aid organization referred me to her, explaining that Raisa is a strong, exemplary, successful woman whom it would be worthwhile for me to interview. For years she struggled in low-wage jobs as a seamstress before establishing herself in a reliable one. Besides these qualities, which are very highly regarded among Russian Jewish immigrants, Raisa is also kind and generous. The first demonstration of this was her willingness to invite me, a stranger, into her Staten Island townhouse (recently remodeled in a modern European style widespread among Russian Jewish immigrants) during a busy time when she was spending her free nights caring for grandchildren; to treat me to tea, sweets, and warmth; to speak with me at length about her memories; and to share with me family photographs. Raisa, having lost two husbands in a span of 15 years, with three adult children who themselves have busy, somewhat difficult family lives, carries an air of deep sorrow that she responds to with a resigned realism: "You cannot escape life," she said to me ("От жизни никуда не денешься").

She described her transit migration as "dramatic," traveling with her 80-year-old mother, husband (in his fifties), 19-year-old daughter and 11-year-old son. Her eldest son had emigrated at the age of 17, at the cusp of army recruitment, in 1978. The rest of the family had been denied exit and lived the shadowed, marginalized lives of refuseniks for 11 years in Kiev, Ukraine. After four months of waiting for their exit visas daily outside of the Offices of Visas and Registration (OVIR[5]) building, in October 1989, at which time the impending close of the Vienna-Rome pipeline propelled a massive rush of emigrants, Raisa's

[5] OVIR is the Soviet governmental branch responsible for issuing exit visas, a notorious point of aspiring emigrants' stress in the face of callous bureaucracy.

family spent several days in the backwoods, border town of Chop, Ukraine waiting for seats on an outbound train. In the closing months of the Vienna-Rome pipeline after October 1989, a staggering 27,000 Soviet Jews joined the route (Elliot 1991:4). Chop was overfilled at that time with emigrants. Families there scrambled, bribed, and overpaid to snag luggage carts and paltry and inadequate accommodations (Chop had no hotels). After four days, their train took them to Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, where emigrants had to disembark for a different train headed to Vienna.

"There," Raisa said about Bratislava, "there were even <u>more</u> people than in Chop. Because there were people there from all over the Soviet Union…. It was such a nightmare, like I've never seen and will never forget.

"The first train arrived, and <u>people</u> would pass <u>people</u> and luggage alike through the windows. It was <u>so</u> awful! It was the beginning of October, there was already a little snow falling, it was melting, and this route was awful. We had one adult male [my husband] among five people." This mattered because males were expected to take care of all the heavy lifting and carrying of luggage.

> There were all these carts, pushing against each other, and our cart got stuck between the train and the platform. And my young son tried to pull it out, but ended up pulling a muscle in the inguinal region. He was in pain and couldn't walk; my husband wanted to take him to a bathroom, but said to me, "you should look, I won't know what to even look for." My <u>son</u>, though, doesn't want to go into any women's restroom: "I won't <u>go</u> to any women's restroom."
> And so we didn't even get on that train! It was impossible with my elderly mother. People were passing the elderly and children alike though the windows. There were such cries!

Raisa continued without pause: "It was worse than during the War [WWII]. During the War, there wasn't such a thing, or maybe there was, but, either way, it reminded me of the War, the Evacuation, the fear." Raisa could have only been a small child during the Evacuation, when Soviets living in the European regions of the USSR were moved en masse, if fortunate

enough to obtain passage, to Central Asia to escape German forces. The comparison must have been based on second-hand accounts. Still, the analogy speaks to the fear, anxiety, and chaos Raisa experienced during transit, heightened by the collective affective experiences of those around her (Chau 2008; Bissell 2007:291).

"The next day, all the men who remained [in Bratislava] decided to direct the loading of all the luggage. They said, 'First we, all the men, will load all the luggage. Then the women, elderly, and children will get on and sit, so they wouldn't even need to be on the platform'. And so it was: Some smart people organized it this way. And, indeed," Raisa's voice suddenly broke and she began to tear up, "by the time we sat down in the freight car we were all crying." She briefly allowed herself to cry. "Because to survive that train boarding, that organization—That picture is again in front of my eyes," she said through tears. "And so." She caught her breath and calmed her voice. "When that was all finished and there were still a few minutes left until the departure, we are all sitting calmly," her voice still wavered, "with all the luggage in a special luggage compartment; [this way,] you could walk around. On the train between Chop and Bratislava [on the other hand]—it wasn't that long of a ride, maybe eight hours or maybe fewer, five—but you couldn't sit at all, with all of that [luggage, and all that] was transpiring."

Raisa concluded the description of this leg of the journey with an observer's confirmation of the hectic, unseemly scene: "There was a regular Czechoslovakian train across the platform, and I remember one Czechoslovakian woman saying, 'where could this elderly woman possibly be going that she has to be passed through the window like this?!'" (March 9, 2011).

One can imagine Raisa's bewilderment at suddenly finding herself in emergency-like conditions, with little regard paid to others' piece of mind, health, or dignity. Twenty years

later, the scene remains intense, compelling, and chaotic to her, perhaps inexplicably so, overwhelming her unexpectedly. It is unclear what particular memory or feeling stirred her so—was it the remarkable cooperation among strangers? Was it the accumulation of the stress of emigration and transit? Was it the disorientating sense of entering new conditions unprepared? The relief over the end of a tumultuous several days? Was there something else, unmentioned, that was going on? We may surmise that the intensity is attributable to the entirety of the scene, to Raisa's experience of moving on the basis of permanent emigration. This intense hustle and generalized panic calls to mind the experience of fleeing; this is one of the ways in which transit migration put emigrants "more in line" with what is thought as a "refugee"—desperate, hassled, suffering, with few means.

Another woman with whom I spoke also emigrated during this most crowded period of late 1989. The duress of the transit period between Chop and Vienna caused her to miscarry, and she continuously emphasized in our conversations the havoc around her as a result of the overcrowding.

 Stories from other periods and from emigrants of different ages naturally carried other timbres. An aunt of mine, 24 at the time of her emigration in 1979, left the train station to explore Bratislava for a few hours, much to her mother's consternation. Another woman, Diana Kagan, 12 in 1980, recalled that during the layover in Bratislava her grandfather brought her a Fanta, whose orange color left her awestruck.

Diana spoke to me in English about her experiences and recollections, beginning with her family's exit through Brest, Belarus:

"So you go through this chaos [of customs, during which officers go through your things willy-nilly, making decisions as to what you can take with no rhyme or reason; it was just to torture people], and everything was just tossed aside and tossed aside, the train comes,

and now you have to somehow pack all of this up, shovel that into the train in a sea of people." She paused. "I have to tell you that this is probably the one time in my life that, even as a kid, I was <u>so</u> impressed. Because once you were on the platform, and the train was there, and there were all these Jews running like chickens without a head—because, you can't even—you can't even fathom the chaos going on. And what they did was," she slowed her speech for emphasis, "the men formed a conveyor belt." She continued:

> And everybody helped everybody. Instead of, like, bumping into each other. They systematically shoved shit onto the train without knowing who it belong to. With the thought that, once it's on the train, then we'll deal with it. And it wasn't even just suitcases. There were these *baulih*, these humongous fabric bags that weighed tons. They could have furniture in them, books.
>
> It was chaotic on the train, but the first thing I remember from when the train started to move: No one touched their stuff. Everybody just stood there because they couldn't believe they were leaving. It was such—it's almost like—you couldn't even breathe a sigh of relief, because you couldn't believe your happiness. The problem was, until you hit the border with Czechoslovakia, you were still fair game, for anyone. So I remember after that initial elation, people began to claim their stuff, going to their train compartments. It was an overnight train. My brother and I were in my grandparents' sleeper. I remember being in my favorite top bunk, and I remember, I woke up in the middle of the night because my grandfather—now you have to understand, my grandfather never raised his voice, like, ever. He was <u>yelling</u> at one of the train porters, because they just barged into the [compartment]. It's like we were <u>this</u> close, and it was like he couldn't wait, he found his voice, so close to the border. Frankly, it was dangerous to do that; because until you crossed that border, it was scary shit, because they could pull you off the train at any time.

This never happened, but the fear was palpable, as was the relief of being past the reach of the Soviet government.

"The next thing I remember was that in the middle of the night, we crossed the border, and the whole train applauded. Like nobody had slept. The whole train just got up. Because, yes Czechoslovakia was communist, but you were still outside the Soviet Union. And so. That was—that was tremendous" (interview conducted in English, August 1, 2012).

As a sharp, mature child, Diana felt the strains of the journey without being responsible for managing them: the frequent malicious delays of Soviet customs officials; the

timetables of trains; the colossal burdens of all of one's belongings; the anxiety of actually

being able to exit the Soviet Union. Even leaving at a time when emigration was being

severely restricted by the USSR, in August of 1980, with only about 190 Soviet Jews arriving

in Vienna per week (Telex, September 22, 1980, JDC-NY Archives[6]), as opposed to more

than 2,000 per week at the end of 1989), Diana experienced the transition as a "sea of

people," as "chaos." Even while already on the train, the mounting anticipation of a

successful exit and the possibility of malicious obstruction put people on edge. Relief, as

Diana pointed out, was palpable. Once one passed the Soviet border, a significant hurdle of

uncertainty had been overcome: applause.

Into and Out of Vienna

Raisa Lachman continued her journey's narration:

"Anyway, the next day everything was good, organized. Some snow was falling, but it

was OK. They had checked our documents and everything during the night at the [Austrian]

border for a few hours. All that was done, we arrive in Vienna, and out on the platform," she

slowed her speech "are standing Israeli guards protecting us, with firearms. We didn't know

that yet. At that time, we saw these armed guards, and we were frightened: 'Why are they

standing there, protecting us in Europe?' It turns out that that we were being protected as

Jews; we found that out later." They were not Israeli guards like Raisa and many others

thought; in Austria and Italy they were both local police.

The same disquiet played out on their departure from Vienna, after their week-long

or several weeks' stay: "The platform of the Süd-Bahnhof where we boarded the Italy-bound

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[6] The document states that the total number of arrivals from the Soviet Union to Vienna in August of 1980 was 770 (of whom 512 chose not to continue on to Israel). I arrived at 190 per week by dividing the total by four.

train [in June 1988] was guarded by blond lads my age who held tommy guns like village bread loaves," writes Maxim Shrayer in his memoir. "All of us refugees had been warned to be careful and vigilant, although the [HIAS] officials weren't telling us exactly what to fear.

"The refugees stood on the platform, vaguely anxious, the word *terrorist* dancing in our minds. The refugees discussed a possible terrorist attack at the Vienna train station," recalling the attacks on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the October 1981 bomb explosion near a Soviet Jewish emigrant gathering place in Ostia, outside of Rome (Shrayer 2007:36).

After a hostage-taking of three Soviet migrants-in-transit by the groups Black September and the Eagles of Palestine on a train en route to Vienna in 1973 (Boym 2014:3), HIAS ensured that armed soldiers would protect migrants in transit. The Austrian and Italian offices of HIAS and JDC were similarly guarded, and not without reason: the offices received numerous bomb threats and a few explosions over the 20 years that they accommodated Soviet emigrants. Emigrants in transit knew little to nothing about this history of threat and violence, yet (or maybe because of their lack of concrete knowledge), they felt extreme discomfort and anxiety. It was a realization of entering a situation, a process, larger than themselves, possibly full of peril, in a world unknown to them. Interviewees frequently described this as one of their first shocks along their emigration journey. The shock entailed a reciprocal vulnerable identity, a feeling of embodied risk and vestiges of violence as a group of Jews in transit.

Maya Kliger described one of her husband's most vibrant memories from Vienna in October 1989, which began similarly, but makes a different point: the realization of becoming an (im)migrant.

> First, I remember my memories of when we exited the train. People were standing there with machine guns—these were either soldiers or policemen. It was the first

time that I ever saw people with firearms. I was shocked. At first it was a little scary. But I understood that these are probably people who are protecting us, with so many Jews in one place.

> We were led into some room, and a man appeared. I don't remember his name—David, yes, it was David. I remember he was wearing a wide-brimmed hat, and he would announce which families go where, onto which bus. He was assigning the housing [in Vienna]. So naturally everyone tried to somehow get close to him, make a deal with him to get the best possible kind of place, the fattest piece of meat. But those people who were standing farthest from him, in the rear, were being loud, and he, in his not-very-good Russian uttered a phrase that has stuck with [my husband] his whole life. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen inside the rear!" ("Господа взади!" instead of "Господа сзади!")

Maya concluded, laughing, "And so we immediately understood where we stood" (interview by author for *Stateless*, February 13, 2013).

This story of miscommunication, a favorite of the couple's, also captures the feeling of acquiring a new positionality in transit migration: With strangers with limited communication skills now in charge, in an uncomfortable setting with an aura of danger, emigrants matter little and belong in the least respectable of places.

Figure 4 Emigrants waiting to be seen by HIAS and JDC in Vienna. JDC Archives.

From Vienna onto Rome (but not quite to it)

Irina Peller, in conversation with her co-workers Tanya Vainer and Ella Bobrovsky, told us that on their train ride between Vienna and Rome, their train was attacked by terrorists. Although it is unconfirmed (due to archival limitations) whether there was an actual attack or the guards began shooting preemptively, all of a sudden, the train stopped and was gunfire. Irina's 18-year-old son was curious and tried to peer out; Irina threw a pillow and herself atop him and lay there until all quieted and the train again began to move. She laughed as she recalled her son's motionless body when she had arisen: he had fallen asleep. Ella, Tanya, and I couldn't believe that this had happened to her.

"Oh that's why they would rush us!" Ella exclaimed after we took the story in, referring to the short amount of time emigrants had to detrain. Over 20 years later, the motivations behind the rush was not apparent to all emigrants.

"'On the bus, on the bus, on the bus, quick, quick, quick!'" Tanya remembered of the process from the Orte train station, where all transit migrants detrained and traveled the remaining 50 miles to Rome by bus.

Even those immigrants who described their transit migration as quick and easy identified the transition off the train and onto buses at Orte train station as the worst, most stressful part of the entire journey. Emigrants were told ahead of time by HIAS workers that they would have just a few minutes to unload their belongings. In reality, it was closer to 20. In interviews, each person cited a different amount of time at the station; the actual amount of time does not matter so much as the subjective experience of it, reflecting the experienced hustle and tension.

"Oh, this is what was horrible," Klara Gotovsky said as she remembered this point in her family's transit migration in March of 1989. "It was so embarrassing…. We were told that when the train stops in Rome—"

"Before Rome," her husband Dmitriy interjected, referring to the Orte station.

"Yes, everyone cautioned and scared us about this," my father said, anticipating the scene she was about to depict.

"There, you are given very little time. You'd have to unload your luggage very quickly. Like Evacuation," Klara said, calling to mind war-time displacement, this traumatic part of Soviet history, as Raisa had.

"Where did these rumors come from?" Dmitriy wondered.

"But that's how it was; it wasn't long [that the train stood at the station]," my father said.

"For us it was fine," Dmitriy responded. "Well, not really, Klara made a scene—"

"There was very little time, like ten minutes," my mother added.

Figure 5 Arrival of Soviet Jews to Orte Station Outside of Rome, 1990. JDC Archives.

"But everyone had a chance to unload. Anyway, I was hysterical," Klara continued. "Those suitcases were too heavy to lift; they were the size of me. We had to push them through the windows—"

"Yes, through the windows," my mom repeated, nodding.

"Anyway, I was fighting with someone. I was in hysterics. It was so embarrassing. And the children—a nightmare. It's better not to listen to anybody in these circumstances," she said, and amended her consideration: "It's better to forget all of that," she laughed and moved onto their next point of discomfort, their assigned housing in Rome in an eerie, stark, old pension house that left them with a haunted, horrible feeling (July 8, 2012). Klara did not elaborate what exactly transpired at the Orte station; whatever it was, she still feels ashamed about it. She merely left it as a "nightmare": an extremely unpleasant, shocking, altered state from which one cannot readily escape.

In contrast, the spontaneous acts of cooperation among transit migrants appear as minor saving graces in descriptions of the multiple moves of transit. I heard at least six separate stories of luggage cooperation at various legs of the journey. But this shared distribution of the burdens of moving did not always pan out.

According to Maria and Grigoriy Kushnir, the transfer at Orte was also one of the worst points of their difficult transit migration.

"When we were going from—" Maria began.

"From Vienna to Rome, during the night. Everyone has lots of baggage, lots of suitcases. So all the men agreed: we will all help each other. Because there wouldn't be much time; the train would come and go through the station quickly. So we agreed that we would open the windows—it was summer [May 1989]—throw the luggage through the windows. I

was helping," Grigoriy recounted in a light tone. "Anyway by the time it got to me, everyone had left."

"Everyone had left," Maria repeated stonily.

"There was no one to help me. I was alone. I threw those suitcases through the window, however I could, all the while afraid the train would leave," he laughed lightly. "They were practically unmovable."

"Unmovable. It was horrible," Maria said with contrasting acridity.

"I don't know how I managed it physically," Grigoriy said reflectively.

"Yes, where did the strength come from?" Maria asked.

"I'm talking physically, not even in terms of morale (морально)," Grigoriy continued. "Later, many people who came here [to the U.S.] came from high status professions; they didn't want this or that job. But we—I—was ready for anything. My mindset was that of going to war. I never magnified my education, ability; it didn't matter. I'd dig, clean, anything. I was in the mindset that when you leave, you sever all of your roots, any and all ends—"

"There's no road back," Maria added, seamlessly elaborating on Grigoriy's statement.

"There's no road back, and there won't be any. Only forward. And in going forward, you can't choose, because you're no one there. That was our mindset, war-like" (October 25, 2011).

The hustled moments of moving concretized the overwhelming stress, the burdens of uncertainty, and the weight of one's materialized past (in the form of luggage). Grigoriy persevered through the distinctly unnerving and trying circumstances of transit migration—particularly the despair and suffering one feels in moving—wherein he was the only able-

bodied adult male in a group of eight, responsible for moving 40 pieces of luggage, without help, not knowing when the train would begin to pull away.

In our conversation, Grigoriy made it clear to me that in the process of emigration, transit migration, and immigration, he expected a tough journey and met it with equal grit. (Maria, on the other hand, admitted to becoming terribly depressed and angry). This conveys the making and feeling of a different kind of person in transit, one defending him or herself from the consequences of permanently leaving one's country. Eugene and Klara Drob echoed this notion, but conveyed it through a slightly different feeling, that of having arrived in unique, disquieting circumstances. Their anxiety, too, was piqued by the presence of armed guards and the rush demanded of them.

"It was like in a movie," Eugene said.

"Yes, like in a movie," Klara echoed, her tone intimating disbelief. "When we arrived, we weren't taken right to Rome or Ladispoli. The stop was practically nowhere."

"In a field," Eugene said. Orte is a small town amid low hills—a pretty open area, a rather rural setting, not literally an open field.

"In a field. And we were told that basically within ten minutes we should throw all our baggage through the windows and detrain. And then—Well there was this feeling, you know, it was—and—that you are in emigration." Klara struggled to articulate the surreal and uneasy feeling of entering and experiencing a fundamentally new mode-of-being of an emigrant-in-transit. "We were all gathered in some kind of field and then put on buses. And it was this sort of, you know—"

"We were afraid of terrorists," Eugene said. "We didn't know—"

"We were people without anything, yes," Klara said.

We didn't know. Here was a moment when you understood that you have arrived nowhere. It was a bit of this unpleasant feeling from, you know, suddenly

remembering those awful, frightening stories about things that happened to the Jews. And so this was, of course, distressing. This was the only moment during which they gathered everyone: "quickly, quickly, quickly!" [interview by author for *Stateless*, April 28, 2013]

This was not even emigrants' final move: after a week to ten days in their assigned housing in Italy, they would need to find their own lodging in Italy, usually shared with other families. So emigrants would journey to the towns they learned about from others—Ostia, Ladispoli, nearby Passoscuro, Santa Marinella to the north, Nettuno and Torvainica to the south, among others—searching for the signs stating "*Affitasi*" (renting); making inquiries with the aid of the Italian-Russian dictionaries distributed to them by JDC; asserting to Italian landlords that they were *not* from Odessa, because everyone knew that Italians refused to rent to Odessites according to their routine reply, "*Adesso, no*" (not now). Being coastal resort towns, rents were significantly higher in the summers, and apartments needed to be shared. In the winter months, though rents were lower, the apartments were cold; they were not outfitted for winter living. Many times, especially during longer stays, emigrants ended up moving again to another, or several other, apartments.

Together, these circumstances and narratives about them convey emigrants' bewilderment within a process that was nonetheless extremely well organized. They remember well the anxieties associated with the rush of moving through the transit route. Emigrants found themselves in the middle of Europe as a group Soviet Jews, with all of their future in their hands—no possibility of return—under the supervision of unfamiliar organizations. It felt like being "no one," as Grigoriy said, and being "nowhere," as Klara did. These are expressions of their new subject-positions as transit migrants with unfixed immigration statuses, positioned outside of society. They perfectly illustrate what Sarah Willen articulates in terms of illegal migrants: "[the juridical statuses of] illegality affect not only the external structure of migrants' worlds, but can also extend their reach quite literally

into illegal migrants' 'inward parts' by profoundly shaping their subjective experiences of time, space, embodiment, sociality, and self" (2007:11).

Emigrants' apprehensions were magnified by their knowledge of Soviet and Jewish histories and the general, shared affective atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and vulnerability among emigrants. As these narratives reveal, many of the emigrants in their thirties and forties imagined this experience akin to war-time Evacuation.[7] The transit route that Soviet Jewish émigrés followed was shared by many Jewish refugees since World War II, and perhaps they sensed this precarious Jewish history intuitively, experientially, without fully knowing it. In a sense, the route itself generated a shared affective experience of being a Jewish migrant-in-transit, moving through chaos and uncertainty.

"WE WERE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH": WAITING AND UNCERTAINTY

Vienna "had been our entrance to the West, a perfect place to experience a culture shock, especially if you were twenty, as I was a the time, and had spent an entire life behind what they used to call the 'Iron Curtain'," writes Maxim Shrayer. "Although I had been in Vienna for about ten days, the time has been lengthened in my memory, every day's finite time multiplied by innumerable 'firsts': first cappuccino, first porno film, first taste of Nazism, first ride in a Jaguar, first…" (2007:36). Whereas Vienna was the place of emigration's initial and most acute shocks and enchantments (explored in chapter 4), Soviet Jews spent the bulk of transit migration in the working-class resort towns outside of Rome, settling into routines of waiting. In Italy, emigrants began to "live in emigration," as they put it, although it wasn't always easy to explain just how they passed the time. The impacts of

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[7] When I asked my grandmother, who was seven at the time of her Evacuation from Odessa to Kazakhstan and remembers it with great clarity, about its similarity with transit migration, she scoffed. She then retold her story of the long, frightening, uncertain journey by boat and then train, with German bomber planes intermittently overhead, and many days of suspended movement.

living in a phase of transition are of course compounded by the stresses of one's material

circumstances, family relations, social adjustments, and self-worth.

It is startling how much the descriptions I heard in my interviews resemble research

from the 2000s about the experiences of people from all regions of the world seeking asylum

in Sweden and the United Kingdom (e.g. Sutton, et al. 2011; Rotter 2010; Lennarston 2007;

Bissell 2007; Brekke 2004; Stewart 2005; Besier 1987).[8] These interview-based studies

establish that the uncertainty of the outcome of one's application as well as the uncertainty

of the length of wait for that decision lead to "ontological insecurity" (Brekke 2004:59),

"extreme personal [rather than negative societal] effects" (Stewart 2005:509), and "strain on

the body and mind" (Lennartston 2007:24). Given these structural and experiential

similarities, and without claiming that there is a singular refugee experience, this analysis

nevertheless identifies shared aspects, not of *being* a refugee, but of applying for nationally

recognized refugee status. I do not, however, mean to imply that all Soviet emigrants

experienced the same thing, because each person's circumstances are unique and, moreover,

people react to and remember similar conditions differently. Rather, the anxiety of the

unknown, the potential for a thwarted journey (i.e. inability to leave Italy for one's

destination), the pressures of responsibility all take on different hues when experienced

under conditions of waiting, over a prolonged amount of time. These effects are noted both

by Soviet immigrants and observers of their transit migration.

In the first Annual Report of the JDC in Rome since the arrival of Soviet Jews, that

of 1970-71, Director Loni Eibenschütz Mayer writes about Soviet "transmigrants" (as they

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[8] Asylum is the legal term for protection sought in the country in which one is already present. In contrast, refugee status is applied for from a third country. It is unclear why the experience of waiting has not been explored in depth among refugees (in camps or in third countries), but it seems to be most stark among asylum-seekers, who are already present in the country in which they hope to settle but remain outside of society, subject to deportation if asylum is not granted.

were called by the organization), "During the adjustment period they show anxiety and insecurity, which is often expressed in difficulty in managing every-day life and in projecting themselves into the future. These feelings tend to decrease and often disappear as time passes, but frequently reappear before departure time" (JDC-NY Archives). A few years later in the Annual Report of 1975, Mayer writes, "Many emotional problems develop in connection with the emigration processing," especially because the "first impact with the transmigrant's condition in a totally strange environment can be traumatic" (JDC-NY Archives).

Observations about "the tremendous anxiety that [Soviet transmigrants] have concerning their future in the West" ("For the Record," Memo by Zev Hymowitz, August 30, 1978, JDC-NY Archives) remain prominent in reports by JDC employees throughout the 1970s. In April 1979, when Soviets number between 4,000 and 5,000 in Ladispoli, a town of 11,000, an ex-Soviet doctor working for JDC criticizes the organization for not being concerned enough with "the anxiety [transmigrants] face after having taken the decision to leave their country, the physical and mental stress of the trip, first to Vienna and then to Rome, [and] the insecurity of their future" ("Jews from Russia in Transit in Italy," Memo by Alexander Gopnik, April 17, 1979, JDC-NY Archives).

Immigrants echo these observations about the despair, experiences of trauma, and the undue stress of facing the uncertain present and future. Almost unanimously Soviet immigrants talk about the feelings of uncertainty that weighed on them during their transit migration ("неопределённость давила всё время"). The twin descriptors *nyeopredelyonast'* and *nyeizvestnost'* denote the English-language conditions of incertitude, unpredictability, indeterminacy, and being in limbo. Even without the added strain of refugee status refusals, the condition of living in transit migration, of waiting for permission to leave while

unfamiliar organizations controlled the conditions of one's present and future, weighed heavily on emigrants' minds and equanimity.

The amount of time Soviet emigrants spent in transit varied. In the first half of the 1970s, it might have lasted just four or five weeks. During the late 1970s and 1980s, when the majority of Soviet Jews exited, the high volume of emigrants meant longer waits for the approval of their refugee status. The longest and worst period was in 1989, when a temporary cessation of the United States' acceptance of Soviet Jews as refugees and the unprecedented number of emigrants exiting the USSR exacerbated the build-up in the Vienna-Rome pipeline. At that time, because of actual denials of refugee status, emigrants-in-transit worried whether they would get to the U.S. (or their chosen destinations) at all. Misha Galperin, a long-time leader in major U.S. Jewish federations and now in an executive position at the Jewish Agency for Israel, passed through transit migration as a teenager in 1976 and returned to Italy in the summer of 1989 as a volunteer in his capacity as a psychologist. "There was a very oppressive and a very depressing sense that you got," he recalled about emigrant life in Italy in 1989 during an interview for *Stateless* (2014), "because you [had] people there who were already stranded for months and didn't know what to do, and sort of [had] gone from being angry at one point to being more…in a sense of despair" (interview conducted in English by author, May 1, 2013). That is why today's sharpest and most impassioned expressions of the anxieties of transit migration come from immigrants who emigrated in 1989.

Consider Ella Bobrovsky's description of her time in transit in from the end of July to September of 1989:

> It was a very unpleasant time, in terms of morale (морально). Very unpleasant: the uncertainty. Always thinking, will we get refused refugee status; will we get refused, will we not? Nothing is certain. And everyday those so-called roll-calls, where

decisions [about status] were announced. The worst part was that we couldn't buy the kids ice cream or anything. We were there for a short time, didn't have time to work anywhere, and [the supporting organizations] didn't give a lot. We had no rights, were without citizenship. We were saving everything because you don't know what lies ahead. And overall, there was complete unknowability (nyeizvestnost'). In the middle of Europe, with no citizenship, just—stateless, with sickly elderly parents and small children. So we didn't give them anything. The first time we bought them ice cream, was when we got our approval, and it was clear that we were going. That was the first time they had ice cream. Before then, nothing was spent, everything was being saved.

Her co-worker Irina Peller turned to me and offered the following analogy: "You are standing at the shore of a lake. You have to jump—you must! Everyone tells you that it's good in the water. But they think that. They don't actually know. And you realize this. But you must jump. Theoretically it's good there, in the lake. This is what happened with us."

The "lake" is the entire process of transit migration and immigration—the whole of the unknown that follows emigration. It is not just fearfulness over the unknown future that Peller conveys in this analogy. It is also the feeling of anticipation, of being suspended in the unknowable and being forced to move through it. Those who immigrated straight to the U.S. must have faced the more ubiquitous uncertainty of what the future would be like as an immigrant; transit migration, though, heightened this nervous anticipation through a protracted period of waiting during which, as Ella said, one felt the exclusion of statelessness and the material restrictions of preparing for an uncertain future.

"And with us," Ella continued,

we were traveling with elderly parents. My husband's parents didn't want to go, but they refused to be left alone [in Odessa] without their only son. His dad was sick, very sick. There [in the Soviet Union] he was an important, respected person, who made all the decisions. Here he has no say, knows nothing. He's used to being the master; now he's no one. We have to support them somehow when they're so pressured, yet not explode ourselves while we're under extreme strain. From one angle the kids [needed help], from another we did, from a third our parents. And we ourselves didn't know anything—

Irina and Tanya echoed Ella's language of exploding from pressure and shouldering the responsibility of absorbing and ameliorating the troubles of loved ones.

"I would explode frequently on my son, because I had no one else," Irina said about the accumulated stress. "Sometimes with my fists."

"You went with your son all alone—a nightmare, nightmare," Ella empathized.

"Who can you explode on?" Tanya Vainer, added reflectively. "No one, only on yourself."

"Here [in the U.S.] it's hard too." Ella emphasized the uncertainty generated by an unfixed legal status: "But here you're here, settled. You get a white [permanent resident] card. You already have social security, and you are some kind of person. There who are you?! You're just going around selling junk." Like Yelena Korenfeld, Maria Kushnir, and others, Ella was deeply shamed and felt degraded for having to peddle wares. The newly encountered and obligatory practice of self-denial and denying her kids made Ella distraught during transit. "Horrible," she said (July 8, 2011).

Some scholars accentuate the obvious parallels to the liminoid state, the "betwixt and between" transition phase between statuses, based on Victor Turner's reworking of Arthur Van Gennep's articulation of the liminal state in rites of passage (e.g. Sutton, et al. 2011; Stewart 2005, drawing on Graham and Khosravi 1997; BenEzer 2002). This, however, underplays the ways in which waiting for permanent immigrant status is a distinct experience. As Rotter (2010) observes about asylum seekers, in a language that applies equally well to my conversation with Ella, Irina, and Tanya, "the waiting…involves an intertwining of aspects of the condition of waiting as such and policy-induced circumstances in which the individual must relinquish his/her 'dignity for handouts and leftovers'" (175). The experience of applying for immigrant status, especially in a context of regular denials,

heightens applicants' attention to the tenuous and arbitrary nature of state protection and juridical belonging, which are far from natural or self-sustaining (De Genova 2002). The lack of opportunity to develop as an individual in society and build a temporally reliable identity (Lennartston 2007:23) heightens their awareness and desire for a life that seems "normal" (Rotter 2010; Lennartston 2007; Stewart 2005; Brekke 2004:21; Wong 1991).

Waiting for "Normal" Life to Resume: Debilitating Delay

Vincent Crapanzano famously invoked "waiting" as a thematic unification for the general mood, the general outlook, and explanatory rhetoric of the lives of white South Africans in 1980's Apartheid: "*Waiting for something, anything, to happen*" (1985:42). Afrikaners and English South Africans do not literally wait everyday, every moment. They, according to Crapanzano, live in a state of perpetual expectation, suspension, uncomfortable waiting for something to change, something that they fear will end their privileged position in society: This is the experience of an oppressive minority. They do not fully live out their lives with vitality, but, like the characters of *Waiting for Godot* (Beckett 1956), are instead caught up in their anxiety of a contingent future (Crapanzano 1985:44). Crapanzano explains poetically:

> Waiting means to be oriented in time in a special way. It is directed toward the future—not an expansive future, however, but a constricted one that closes in on the present. In waiting, the present is always secondary to the future. It is held in expectation. It is filled with suspense. It is a sort of holding action—a lingering. (In its extreme forms waiting can lead to paralysis.) In waiting, the present loses its focus in the now. The world in its immediacy slips away; it is derealized. It is without élan, vitality, creative force. It is numb, muted, dead. Its only meaning lies in the future—in the arrival or the non-arrival of the object of waiting. [1985:44]

The nature of this dreaded anticipation among a group of privileged South Africans resembles the "anxious, powerless waiting" of the disenfranchised (Auyero 2011:6), including those waiting for the resolution of health problems, those dependent on state services (Auyero 2012), and those waiting for asylum decisions. Unlike Crapanzano's

subjects, marginal populations endure temporal processes in and through which political subordination is reproduced (Auyero 2012:2). The experiences of waiting for permanent immigrant legal status (and thus inclusion in society), for example, invoke feelings/states/moods of being not only "between heaven and earth" (a liminoid state), but also of "'empty time', a period of boredom, difficult memories, and feelings of vulnerability, of anxiety, confusion, and nervousness" (Lennartston 2007:22), of "being no one," of being anxious over the "waste of time, waste of everything" before one can really start one's life (Rotter 2010; Lennartston 2007; Stewart 2005; Brekke 2004:21; Wong 1991).

These discomforts do not stem primarily from a lack of material benefits or entitlements, however, but are particularly based on "daily restrictions, or ruptures from daily life" (Stewart 2005:507), such as the routines of schooling, work, and the community and family life to which one is accustomed. Neither are the descriptions of asylum seekers' lives as "abnormal" primarily a consequence of social stigma; these perceptions are largely self-imposed, based on their experiences and expectation of daily life prior to seeking asylum (Stewart 2005:507). This means that life in a temporary state (e.g., temporary immigration status) has profound personal (moral, emotional, psychological) effects,[9] indicating the importance of analyzing migrants' self-experience.

Both physicians of obvious talent, social grace, and intelligence, Yelena and Alexander Korenfeld characterize their recollections of their time in Italy as that of "wearying waiting." They spent their early years in the U.S. first locked in a room, their adolescent kids passing them notes about mealtimes as they studied for a series of exams included in the Education Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG)—a

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[9] It may also be accompanied by a strong desire to "shed the [refugee/asylum-seeker] label" (Stewart 2005:509), referencing chapter 2's discussion of Soviet Jewish immigrants' rejection of the refugee label in the present day.

grueling task to tackle in a new language and in a completely different medical system—and then working through daunting and draining years of residency and board examinations. They are now both primary care physicians at the same practice in a wealthy northern New Jersey suburb. Their time in Italy in 1989-90, though only three and a half months, felt frustratingly long and wasteful.

"When you're just sitting on the crumbled ruins of your life," Yelena Korenfeld said, "not knowing what lies ahead, having left everything behind you, without any English settling into your head—it was just a very strange life. The kids didn't go to school; we weren't occupied with anything. It was very difficult. Many fell into depression." Others severed familial and friendship ties, ended marriages, committed suicide.

Yelena narrated their New Year's Eve celebration into 1990. Usually one of the most delightful and beloved of Soviet holidays, this one came on the heels of an unpleasant exchange with their Italian landlady, who evicted them. Gathered at a friend's apartment, with the table set beautifully and the Soviet champagne uncorked, "the crying started, and we cried and cried. No one could smile. The women wept, and the men couldn't smile; they were calming the women down…. That was our New Year's!"

Her daughter asked her to elaborate. "Why exactly were they crying?" Yelena repeated. "We left the past behind, the future is uncertain, [lying] somewhere ahead of us; we're stranded in Italy, between the past and future, which is unknown, unknown. It was a period of indeterminacy. There is nothing worse than uncertainty. There is nothing worse than indeterminacy. When you already know something, you understand what you are dealing with and how to fight. When you don't know what lies ahead, it's the scariest. That is why we had this feeling, why we 'cried in' the New Year" (interview by Victoria and Mike Drob for *Stateless*, May 18, 2013).

The Korenfelds were not alone in experiencing transit migration as a debilitating delay. Klara Drob, Sergei Liebermann, and Yuri Melnick expressed the same frustrations of "losing a year" while in transit (though Klara was endeared to life in Italy and didn't want to leave, and Sergei reinterpreted his experience during our interview as beneficial for learning the grit necessary for life as a U.S. immigrant). This experience points to these individuals' thinking of "the bodily experience of…mobility in relation to linear clock time," which we assimilate through "the technologies of control such as watches, clocks, timetables and ticket details" with regards to the experiences of modern travel (Bissell 2007:284; Thompson 1967) and through the institutional structures of formal education and work in terms of the experiential movement of one's life course. Moreover, it points to the ways in which waiting "produces in us feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, and vulnerability…and all the rage that these feelings evoke" (Crapanzano 1985:44), because we cannot actively seek the object of waiting. We have no control over its arrival.

For white South Africans under Apartheid, the object of waiting, the loss of their way of life, of political power and social privilege, was indeterminate and threatening. The precise object of waiting for Soviet emigrants in Italy was the permission to leave and end transit migration; but the actual object of the Korenfelds' waiting, hope, and desire was the reclamation of steady ground, the opportunity to start life anew, and re-establish themselves as individuals of worth. In a sense, expanding Crapanzano's (1985) insight, it doesn't matter what exactly they were waiting for, since the event of waiting, as Bissell argues, is "a state of unfinishedness"—not so much about an endpoint anticipated in the present ("the arrival or the non-arrival of the object of waiting")—but about "the excessive immanence of the 'not yet'" (Bissell 2007:292). In other words, the experience of waiting is not as much about the object of waiting, but with the (often troubling) experience of the not-yet-determined.

"And So We Began To Live In Emigration": Meaningful Life in a Transitory Community

Even in the most dire of circumstances, say among Europe's displaced persons (DPs) following World War II, people make a life for themselves while their future is being legally and logistically determined. Historical studies of the lives of Jewish Holocaust survivors in DP camps richly depicts the ongoing-ness, the everyday mundanity and social effervescence of this temporary community, even in the aftermath of the cruelest form of devastation (see Patt and Berkowitz 2010; Grossmann 2007).[10] Time must be passed, endured, made use of. As this section shows, life can and has to be made in transit: People go about their daily lives with activities of procuring and cooking food within a tight budget, looking after children, figuring out how to earn money, engaging in arguments (some of which ended or fractured relationships), strengthening bonds, and finding ways to enjoy themselves.

The Zelmans lived a rich life in transit and continue to make it an important part of their lives. Although he didn't know what lay ahead, Leonid Zelman says that when he, his wife Lyuba, their daughter, and his mother-in-law left Leningrad in September 1989, it wasn't scary: there was safety in numbers.[11] Only one moment stood out for him as scary: when a miscommunication with HIAS led them to miss their transport to the Viennese train station (to travel to Italy) from their lodging in the Viennese countryside. Leonid is a jovial, good-hearted, sociable man, aged 60 at the time of our conversation in the summer of 2012, his memory sharp for the details of long ago. He told me about his family's experiences over

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[10] Thank you to Jeffrey Shandler for pointing out this insightful parallel.

[11] This is the opposite affective experience of Elena Golub, for example, who felt infected by others' anxiety: "everyone would stand in stony silence, squeezing their hands, wondering whether their names would be called [for acceptance of refugee status]. And when you watch this for a while [day after day], it starts to affect you, too. You start to feel the same thing—it invades your mind."

several hours at his recently remodeled middle-class Queens apartment (remodeled in the style resembling Raisa's apartment and many of my own relatives). When Lyuba joined our conversation a few hours later, she disagreed with him about their level of fear. Although her impressions of transit migration remain similarly positive, she insisted that the unknowability of the future scared both of them. Leonid seems not to remember other negative aspects of transit migration, like the cockroach infestation of their hostel placement in Rome ("You were scared to get in bed!" Lyuba exclaimed) but did tell me about the tension with his mother-in-law throughout the emigration process. (She was a difficult person to begin with and became depressed in Italy, he said, which led to many arguments with her.)

The third time Leonid and Lyuba debated whether they felt scared during emigration and transit, Leonid insisted that they weren't, because when you keep busy, you're not scared. ("He says we weren't scared, but we were," Lyuba countered.) How did they fill their time?

His easygoing and curious nature allows Leonid to make friends easily, and connect with people on shared interests such as music. In transit, like other emigrants, Leonid met many new kinds of people—he had never known, for example, about Bukharan Jews from Central Asia. They lived in the small coastal town of Nettuno, Italy for four months with a large group of friends and relatives. This vibrant group of 23, including many children, frequently met and socialized in each other's apartments and, on special occasions, at Italian cafés. Like many emigrants, the Zelmans ran into old and random acquaintances. Like many emigrants, they met and befriended Italians, but they created an especially close, lasting relationship with one family.

While their daughter went to school (as some but far from all Soviet children managed to do), Leonid found work at a store where he earned £2,000 per hour, roughly

$15 for nine hours of work. (This job inspired jealousy from other emigrants, he told me). Before that, he and Lyuba would occupy themselves by selling their Soviet wares at the local flea markets. He found it fun to interact with strangers, but called it "monkey business," a mere distraction to pass the time, as it earned them little. Lyuba began to earn money by cleaning apartments, which was precisely the kind of work she had feared she would have to do when they were still in Leningrad. However it was through this work that she met the family that would take care of and protect them (from predatory housing brokers, for example) throughout their sojourn. Lyuba, who in Leningrad took special courses in cosmetology to prepare for life abroad, began to do manicures for the family's matriarch and her friends. Friendships blossomed. Lyuba's mother and this Italian woman, of the same age, would chat intimately without sharing a common language. The Italian woman told them that she was helped by strangers during the Second World War and wanted to do the same for others. She would often give them food; as a farewell gift, she knit three sweaters of increasing sizes for the Zelmans' daughter.

Lyuba and Leonid shared with me many of their stories of song, dance, food, charming encounters with locals, and good-hearted and cooperative moments with other emigrants. These are stories that they still frequently recall and retell among that large group of friends with whom they spent time in Italy as well as with new acquaintances. Oftentimes, they say, when they get together with a group of Soviet immigrants, the group will divide itself into those who emigrated through Austria and Italy and those who did not. The transit migration group remembers the past, the stories serving as a means of social exchange. It unites them, Leonid said. "Because they were the best, the best months!" Lyuba said— especially because they were young (in their mid-thirties), with a big group of friends. It

turned out to be a unique time, which they didn't realize then. "Roman Holiday!" they said

together, capturing its enchantment and singularity.

Like other emigrants, they developed an attachment to Italy, one based on genuine

affection. The Zelmans have gone back to Italy five times since emigration. Every time they

go, Leonid says, his Italian is reborn. On most of these visits, the two of them visited the

Italian family with whom they have kept in touch for all of these 20-plus years. Each re-

connection with them—especially the first time they saw them again and the trip before that,

when the Zelmans happened to meet neighbors of the family on an Italian cruise—Lyuba

and Leonid were overcome with emotion, remembering the Italian family's care, generosity,

and heartfelt, unsolicited kindness during a time when money was tight, the setting

unfamiliar, and all was temporary and uncertain. Most importantly, the kindness from and

the friendship with the Italian family granted them a sense of recognition, of dignity, a

chance to "*be someone*" while in transit—this is of upmost importance to refugees and asylum-

seekers feeling like "no one" while waiting for permanent status (Lennarston 2007:33; Oka

2014).

"Yes, it was an interesting time," Leonid reflected after describing a typical scene in

Nettuno, over which the couple laughed heartily. "But people tried, it seems to me, not to

think too much, because there was no road back. There was no road back. Sitting, being

nervous, eating themselves up—I think that all emigrants lived the same way in Italy, trying

not to think too much; [the logic was] 'When we get accepted to America, then we'll begin to

think'. I think that's the way it was."

Leonid Zelman's easy-going and optimistic disposition lends itself well to this

strategy—whether actual or just remembered as such—to deal with the wait and the

permanence of their departure. As we have seen, he was being overly optimistic in imagining others' experiences of living in a state of the "not-yet-determined."

Creativity and Effervescence

Literary scholar Harold Schweizer (2008) identifies another possibility in the experience of waiting: discovery, reflection, and creativity. Being in a state of suspended anticipation and living this realization is uncomfortable, but also opens up opportunities for reflection, for insight, even for enchantment (Schweizer 2008). Unlike Crapanzano's (1985) focus, the experience of waiting is not only that of suspended uncertainty; it may also, with proper disposition or training, give birth to meaningfulness, self-discovery, and art (Schweizer 2008). In waiting, one might discover oneself.

Maxim Shrayer's father, the accomplished Soviet medical doctor-turned writer and refusenik David Shrayer-Petrov, could not shut himself off from contemplating his unhappy circumstances and feelings of despair. He nevertheless channeled this malaise into creative activity. His poem "Villa Borghese," begun in Italy in 1987 and completed in 1990 in his new home in Providence, Rhode Island, describes his painful longing for his homeland once he has finally left. The poem depicts one of the momentous and most painful scenes from Maxim Shrayer's memoir: finding his father passed out drunk in Villa Borghese after a particularly acrid fight with his mom and a generally difficult time during his first days in Rome. The incident is equally painful from his father's point of view, which contrasts the beautiful, historically rich setting of the Villa Borghese with the stray dogs at his eye level, the grass in his hair, the anguish of his thoughts that transforms architectural beauty into a barbarous scene, especially in comparison with the majesty of his hometown, Leningrad. The pain of being a Jew, a refusenik, and a writer-non-grata in the Soviet Union is magnified for

him in this in-between time of transit. Shrayer-Petrov expresses his bitterness at having been

expelled from his (nevertheless) beloved homeland, his anger at having to be in transit

migration, missing the beauty and comforts of his former home:

> "…And yet, despite all, we still loved that land
>
> That cast us away like inferior stuff,
> Aborted like something conceived out of error,
> All that wasn't all, it was never enough,
> Until they were rid of us cursed ones forever,
>
> Until I came here to this barbarous Villa
> Where statuesque maidens and dogs crowd my sight,
> Out walking the dear little paths, like my darling.
> Remember, back home, how we walked those white nights?"
> [1994; Translated from the Russian by Maxim D. Shrayer and Dolores
> Stewart]

A short story also written by Shrayer-Petrov in Ladispoli in 1987 during his transit

migration, "David and Goliath" (2003), portrays a child amidst the changing settings, people,

and codes of conduct of emigrant Vienna and Italy. This young boy, David, discovers his

single mother romantically involved with a boorish, repulsive fellow emigrant, who

represents the seemingly indomitable Goliath. The story, like his poem "Villa Borghese,"

brings to life the feelings of impotence and disorienting change against which emigrants, of

all ages, tried to defend themselves. Reflecting on these experiences is how David Shrayer-

Petrov spent his days in Italy; his son lived it a different way.

In his memoir of transit migration, Maxim Shrayer beautifully captured the rhythms,

moods, concerns, and delights of life in Vienna and Italy in the summer of 1987. About the

Italian town in which he spent most of transit he wrote: "Ladispoli's seedy Tyrrhenian beach

with its fine black sand was our refugee parlor, library, and newsroom. Like the lives of

hundreds of other refugees stuck there, our lives, mine and my parents', were centered on

waiting for America. That summer was one of the few times, perhaps the only time in my life, when I completely surrendered to greater forces of being" (2007:78).

Shrayer, as an intelligent, sweet, curious, socially vibrant 20-year-old, was not consumed by waiting. Because "[t]here was nothing [he] could do to speed up the workings of the American consulate," and because he "had but the faintest idea of where [they] were going in America" (78), he allowed himself to be present, to experience the kind of lingering that Schweizer argues is key to appreciating art, beauty, and the nature of being (2008). Shrayer did not, like Alexander Melnick, a 34-year-old adult and husband, feel suddenly stripped of agency, self-sufficiency, and dignity. Shrayer instead explored, learned about himself, others, and the world around him. He embraced the unrepeatable circumstances of being in transit. He felt at ease enough to develop unlikely friendships and romances with local Italian teenagers, rekindle flames with old girlfriends, converse with other migrating Jews from Central Asia, the Caucuses, Iran. All was not rosy; it was raw, honest, and open to possibilities, which his memoir vividly brings to life.

Outlooks and Attitudes

I end this chapter with a final story of the variations in experiencing the uncertainties of transit and of being aware of the experiences of others during this time. My conversation with my great-aunt Rita, and her daughter, my aunt Mila points out the importance of personality, attitude, outlook, personal history, and life trajectory in the experience and recollection of a period of transition. For Rita, their transit migration in 1979 was rather unremarkable and easy, a true relief after her tumultuous life and exit from the Soviet Union. Mila, at 24, spent the entire time in transit exploring, reading, and learning. Both are incredibly resilient, talented, astute, no-nonsense women. It was my second time listening to

Mila's stories about transit in her home in a middle-class suburb outside of Boston. This was

her fifth home in the U.S.; her first two apartments were small and modest; her next two

houses were located in a wealthy suburb to allow for her daughter to attend a reputable

public school system; she and her husband moved into their current, more modest, house

after their daughter left for college.

"Were the statuses of refugee and statelessness felt?" I asked them.

"It didn't matter," said Mila. "None of that matters once you broke free from the

Soviet Union. There's a panic-laden fear that you won't be able to get where you want to go.

There's a panic-laden fear that you won't pass the medical exam [that the INS required] in

Italy. You don't know for two weeks and have to wait. You can feel condemned while you're

in Italy; you don't know <u>when</u>, you don't know <u>where</u>—"

"They told you right away," Rita countered, "that you wouldn't be here long."

"<u>If</u> everything is OK." Mila referenced my grandfather's mother, who because of a

stroke spent ten months in Vienna before being cleared for travel to the U.S. "I have to tell

you, Inga. You chase that fear away because—"

"Everything you see is new," said Rita.

"You relish the fact that every morning you wake up," Mila said, "and—"

"You're not there [in the Soviet Union] anymore," Rita offered.

"The whole world is in your hand," continued Mila. "If you don't wind up there [in

the U.S.], you'll wind up somewhere else in the civilized world." (Notice the language of

civilization and savagery, implying a rejected Soviet subjecthood, which the next chapter

addresses.) "So it happens that on the one hand your soul is buoyant because it doesn't

matter what will happen: Whatever happens, happens. But <u>for now</u>, you have the world in

your palm. And for that we left. I don't know if that's why [my parents] left. That's why I left."

"What was holding me there?" asked Rita rhetorically. "The KGB? Or papa's imprisonment?"

"You," Mila said to her mother, "were driven by the idea of a normal life. I wanted to leave to see the world."

"I had the police, the KGB, OVIR sitting on me, over here," Rita pointed to her head, indicating the pressure of years of harassment.

"Because you don't know what will happen to you," Mila continued about life in transit.

Her mom conceded that that was the case.

"There are different approaches to this kind of thing. There are some people, who when they don't know what will happen to them—"

"Panic."

"They recede into their shells," Mila said. "They don't even look around. There are others who have no idea what is going on; they just go on as though everything were fine. Others make crazy plans. Some people sat in Italy devising crazy plans. My outlook was: everyday is a gift." She added quickly, "But I have no idea what is going on."

"No one had any idea," said Rita.

"At first one has lots of nightmares," Mila shifted the topic from uncertainty to fear. "Sometimes you wake up thinking you're still there [in the Soviet Union]. The last time I had that dream was eight years ago. When that happens, I start to panic, I can't breathe. I wake up with relief" (November 12, 2011).

Their conversation continued, veering through the many personal and familiar repercussions of state terror, harassment, and slights. Twelve years of life, taken away from everyone, Rita concluded about her father's imprisonment. Then there were their shared elevated hurdles for being Jewish. Rita recounted each battle with fierceness, Mila with matter-of-factness. Both ended hard-won, successful professional careers as music teachers in Odessa to take on more practical, dependable work in the U.S.: my great-aunt Rita as an administrative assistant and then bookkeeper and Mila as a computer programmer and now an instructor at the college-level. Despite Mila's insistence on emigration as a chance for her to see the world, she was plagued by nightmares all the same. In transit, Mila had many adventures, but in this conversation she framed them in terms of her attitude, her intention of treating every day as a gift. For my great-aunt Rita, after her accumulated traumas from Soviet life, facing the unknown challenges of building a life in the U.S. at the age of 50, Austria and Italy passed by unnoticed: "To say we did anything during those two months [in Ostia in 1979]: I can't," she said. "We just waited for permission to leave" (November 12, 2011).

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF TRANSIT MIGRATION

When I asked Valentina Kmelintzky how her emigration differed for those Soviets who left after 1990, with no period of transit migration, she answered, casually, rather matter-of-factly:

> They didn't have such an emigration. They got on a plane, and came straight to New York. They didn't have that period of suitcases, moves, armed guards. This–this inability to know whether you'll get entrance to America. They knew clearly that they were coming. They had a different mood. Before we got our visa, we were between heaven and earth. The stress that we lived through—those who came after didn't have that. [August 16, 2012]

Valentina glosses the burdens, stresses, tensions of uncertainty, feelings of in-betweenness as a distinct mood. She did not spend all of her time in Austria and Italy worrying, however. During my interview with her in the working-class Coney Island apartment that she now owns, she emphasized many pleasant family episodes, positive encounters with Italian landlords, feelings of mirth, and dreams of an idyllic future. But she and many other immigrants understand that their total migration experiences were qualitatively different from others' because of the period spent in transit migration.

In framing immigrants' descriptions of the quality of life in Italy as an experience of waiting and their descriptions of getting to Italy as its twin experience—the chaos of moving and the emergent feelings of becoming a different kind of person, an emigrant-in-transit—, this chapter allows us to see transit migration as a distinct category of experience. It expands ethnographic studies that examine the experience of waiting while applying for asylum/refugee status by attending to both these aspects of mobility. The different ways to embody transit migration endure as distinct phases of immigrants' lives particularly because, as an instance of mobility, it entails a particular experience of temporality (Bissell 2007:289) framed at once by moving and waiting as experiences-in-and-of-themselves and by the contingencies of having unfixed migrant statuses. Moreover, it is the experience of waiting— and the uncertainty it entails—that offers pause to reflect on one's approach to that waiting and to formulate one's responses to its end. The anticipation of the future that waiting allows for, even as it suspends the arrival of that future and at once intensifies the meaning of it, is further explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. SHOCK AND ENCHANTMENT: THE BITTERNESS OF SOVIET

SUBJECTHOOD AND THE WONDERS OF AUSTRIA AND ITALY

"In all, those 19 days that we lived in Vienna were just a Viennese Waltz," Yelena

Korenfeld said. The Viennese Waltz is an interesting and apt metaphor, uniquely used by

Yelena: It is an elegant, fast-paced, partnered dance associated with wealth and splendor. If

not perfectly coordinated, the gliding and swirling easily results in a clumsy cessation of

movement.[1] "For the first time, for the first time we saw with our own eyes the things that

we had only read about. And it seemed to us that it was only on Mars, on the Moon that

such things existed, such life. We had lived behind the Iron Curtain, and all of this was a big,

big secret—how that 'decaying, tainted capitalism' exists. And suddenly we see it with our

own eyes. It was a shock."

Emigrants' experience of shock in transit migration captures the embodiment of a

historical moment: from within to outside the Soviet bloc during the last two decades of the

Cold War, wherein before emigration, emigrants were thoroughly Soviet people who left on

the premise of permanent settlement in the West. Moreover, transit migration captures this

embodied experience for a large, relatively homogenous group.[2] The stark contrast between

the two placeworlds means that the experiential transition between socialism and capitalism

was most severe to emigrants, rather than visitors or those Soviet citizens that lived through

the demise of the USSR. This also means that, as Svetlana Boym and others have observed,

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[1] In an uncomfortable and uncanny testament to historical distance and continuity, consider the same metaphor used by Austrian Jews remembering their encounter with Nazism, as in George Clare's 1982 memoir *Last Waltz in Vienna.*

[2] By virtue of the USSR's totalitarian nature, there are many ways in which Soviet Jews, especially European Soviet Jews, could be considered a homogenous group. However, one need only to refer to the first chapter of this dissertation to glean the extent of variety within the group, not to mention individual differences, etc.

Soviet emigrants better remember Soviet life than citizens who lived through the transition to oligarchic capitalism (2001:331-2). This does not mean, however, that their recollections are unbiased or representative. In fact, besides the slights suffered while living in the Soviet Union, the conditions of emigrating left many even more embittered by Soviet life.

Yelena's descriptions followed at a fast clip, beginning to describe the material evidence of a different society:

> We were just in shock, of course: From the fact that people, who gathered the garbage, wore snow-white, leather gloves; from the fact that at Viennese intersections everyone stood still on red lights—no one, not one person moves; from the fact that in the hardware stores, the nails gleam like diamonds from cleanliness as opposed to being covered in solid oil. The jolts (потрясения) happened at every single step. From kind people, from their smiles, from how open and free they were; from the fact that kids—our kids—may eat bananas, however many bananas they want. From—. [interview by Victoria and Mike Drob for *Stateless*, May 18, 2013]

Here her husband cut her off to tell and laugh over a story about how the family divided up a single, hard-to-obtain banana in Latvia. What was a rare luxury in the Soviet Union became an accessible source of enjoyment in transit migration, if one's means allowed it.

The shocks, of course, were not all from the awe-inspiring. The housing assigned to Jewish emigrants in Austria ranged from stunning to dismaying. Ina Rubenstein recalled her impressions as a 20-year-old: "We were sent to some hotel where prostitutes brought clients. I remember a man behind a glass window, a couch nearby with springs sticking out…. That was my next shock: I thought, 'Oh my god, where have we ended up?' We left such a pretty home [in Ukraine]…. Will it really be this way now; is this really our life now?!" (August 14, 2012).

My aggregated list of "shocking" objects and scenes in Vienna from Soviet Jewish immigrants runs long, from the trivial to the profound: pretty glass bottles; orange-colored soda; the diversity of glass and plastic containers; large stock and public availability of plastic

bags and toilet paper; feminine hygiene and baby care products; food made just for pets; the existence of pay phones on every street; the soft, yellow color of street lights (as opposed to harsh white light); bigger, more modern cars; advertisements (which did not exist in the USSR); the cleanliness and orderliness of public space; the courteous manner of public interaction; the respectful relationship between sellers and costumers; efficient and advanced medical care; the variety of meats, cheeses, products, toys; abundance.

As these items attest, the experience of arrival in Vienna, especially for those who had never been on the other side of the Iron Curtain, was one of both jarring surprise and revelation, of both dismay and wonder. As I argue in this chapter, shock and enchantment are in fact intertwined experiences, and both convey a fundamental re-orientation of self in the world that take place through an embodied encounter with material difference. Without asserting that every emigrant experienced either or both, I maintain that these two sensations appropriately articulate Soviet emigrants' deeply felt responses to the places of transit migration. The "jolts" that Yelena refers to could easily be written off as mere surprise. I, however, insist that they were deeply felt, synthesized bodily experiences (Csordas 1993; Merleau-Ponty 1962) that shook emigrants at every level of their being: emotional, affective, psychological, cognitive, bodily, and so on. They affected their sense of self, their outlooks on their Soviet past, and their aspirations for their future lives and values as immigrants.

I demonstrate this first by pointing to emigrants' self-consciousness as Soviet subjects in Austria, a negative casting of themselves as bearing the imprint of a decrepit and degrading system. Though this realization and the circumstances of Soviet emigration procedures and their resulting transit migration caused them real shame, emigrants did not internalize it as a need to shed their cultural practices. Rather, they externalized the shame into an expressed anger, bitterness, and disdain for Soviet governance that allowed them to

cope with the fact of their permanent emigration. These feelings are still palpable among Soviet American Jews. The present-day framing of themselves as Soviet "savages" encountering civilization while in transit migration points both to this lasting resentment and to their self-consciousness vis-à-vis Austrians. The extent of this embodied shock to European capitalism and democracy is best exemplified by the ubiquitous stories of adults becoming physically ill or crying when confronted with Western abundance.[3] These are well remembered and have become personal and family stories iconic of the intensity of the transition and the differences between Soviet and Western life.[4]

Whereas shock may betray a self-experience of loss, lack, and shame, enchantment of the new discloses a desire to embody and enjoy that which enchants. Rather than fetishism, the pleasure and corresponding attentive mode of engagement with the aesthetically pleasing has the potential to lead to an engaged and humane politics (Bennett 2001; Mascia-Lees 2011). This is not exactly what happens with Soviet Jewish émigrés, because, I assert, the twin experience of shock and enchantment has been geared toward their own families' futures. Nevertheless, both shock and enchantment imply the formation of aspirational, yet still tenuous, visions for themselves in the future, providing the motivation to achieve parity with natives, become people different in status from those they had to be in transit, or retain those good feelings of fulfillment from that first encounter. These explain immigrants' lasting attachments to the places of transit by demonstrating the importance of the anticipated future in difficult migrations, thus foreshadowing future practices such as return trips (the subject of chapter 5).

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[3] I am referring to material abundance, and not just to the selection but also the high quality of the goods (food, technology, objects of pleasure like toys).

[4] The intensity of this encounter may also help to illuminate how post-Soviet peoples are different, even if they didn't experience and therefore don't remember this transition so starkly.

SHOCK: "FROM THE IRON CURTAIN, STRAIGHT TO CAPITALISM—WE WERE RUNNING AROUND WITH BIG EYES, LIKE WE WERE CRAZY"

For Soviet emigrants, as Yelena Korenfeld stated and others echoed, Vienna was like "another planet," with another value system that made comparison with Soviet life difficult. In a sense, it was merely intense culture shock—"the massive psychic reaction which takes place within the individual plunged into a culture vastly different from his own" (Anderson 1971)—heightened by the knowledge of there being no way back to their former way of life. But "culture shock" is an extremely diluted concept, usually reserved for understanding temporary sojourns like study abroad programs and ethnographic fieldwork. It would be a disservice to reduce Soviet people's drastic, life-changing act of emigration to four simple stages (as does Oberg 1960 in discussing culture shock): the honeymoon phase, when everything is new and exciting; negotiation, which is marked by overwhelming anxiety; adjustment; and finally the comfort of mastery.

The shock—the fundamental re-orientation in perception—that Soviet emigrants felt more closely resembles what German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1987) called "anthropological shock," a rupture in one's basic understanding of the world and guiding cultural principles caused by a massive, unprecedented event. Beck's argument stems from his observations of West Germans' reactions to the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe of 1986 (an event even more acutely lodged in the consciousness of many a Soviet citizen). Beck argues that as the radioactive cloud moved across Europe, West Germans were suddenly confronted with the unreliability both of their senses (as radioactivity is imperceptible) and of society's governing institutions (by the failure of political leaders, scientific experts, and technological infrastructure to predict and contain the catastrophe). Citizens were "suddenly thrown into conflicts of belief that simply [could not] be smoothed out with the means available in life"

(159). While the Chernobyl explosion and cover-up did in fact intensify Soviets' mistrust of their government, emigrants' encounter with capitalist Europe was a parallel experience of "anthropological shock," further proof of malign Soviet governance, and a permanent re-orientation of the self in the world. This fundamental re-orientation does not sever one from one's past but recasts it, altering the way one perceives and understands the world and one's future in it. It is an embodied (a synthesized psychological, emotional, cognitive, corporeal) response to an unexpected, profound change in the world.

Soviet Effects: Self-consciousness, Savagery, and Bitterness

Outside of its borders in the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet citizens and recent emigrants stood out. "Do you remember," Maya Kliger said to her husband about being in Austria in October 1989, "the main thing was that we all went everywhere all together, the whole family, all together? We were nine people. They [the Austrians] absolutely, precisely knew who we were."

"It was written on our faces, on our clothes, on everything," her husband responded. "My god! The stamp of socialism was imprinted on each of us" (interview by author for *Stateless*, February 13, 2013).

Ina Rubinstein, through the eye of herself as a fashionable 20-year-old, described to me the scene of a bus of Austrians pulling up after they had just arrived at the train station in Vienna in 1979: "They came out [of the bus] in white pants, skirts, beautiful hairstyles, nice bags. And we are bent over and scared, wearing the same sweaty, synthetic dresses for two days straight. I looked at them and thought, 'Oh my god, will we ever look as nice as they do?!'" (August 14, 2012).

The expressed self-consciousness as Soviet subjects—in appearance, in mannerisms, in outlook, knowledge, expectations, familiarity with everyday objects—in contrast to well-to-do Austrians is apparent as part of the experience of emigration. Sarah Willen (2007) aptly analyzes such self-consciousness as the embodiment of precariousness among undocumented immigrants:

> Within public spaces, migrants' bodies are constantly being read, or sensed, by members of the host society, and these patterns of host society attention contribute to the production of spatially specific forms of embodied consciousness. Migrants must constantly negotiate the tension…between their own embodied experiences of self in social context, on one hand, and their familiarity with the symbolic code—replete with racial, ethnic, and national signals and associated with particular kinds of positive and negative moral value—through which they, in their bodies, are being read. [23]

This interaction of society with those perceived as unwanted outsiders leads to experiences of discomfort and anxiety, which could be mutual. Consider the phrase of one interviewee, recalling the face of an Austrian country doctor upon seeing the way Soviet babies were tightly swaddled in layers upon layers of cotton cloth: "He hadn't seen this in like 20 years, probably…. Believe me he was looking at me like *he* was in shock" (Anna Dashevsky, April 3, 2011, emphasis added). In transit migration, Austrian (and later Italian) life appeared before Soviet Jews as desirable and unattainable. The fact that it persists in people's recollections attests to the profound disparity they perceived and felt.

The metaphor of the Soviet "stamp" to describe their sense of difference is quite clever, but the more widespread labeling of themselves in the past, as individuals and as a group conditioned by socialism is that of *dikari* (дикари): wild, uncouth, ignorant, uncivilized people; savages. The realities of life in Austria cast a different light on Soviet life and their pasts. The language of "savagery" and "civilization" speaks volumes both of this self-consciousness and their accumulated hate at the Soviet regime once citizens became

emigrants. It is a comment on how the Soviet regime failed to "prepare" them for the "real,"

Western, First World. It also speaks of desire, especially for an alternate disciplining of the

body (Elias 2000; McClintock 1996; Foucault 1980) and a different subject-position with

regards to the dominant classes: not to be helpless, ignorant emigrants-in-transit but the kind

of decent, busy, established people they now see on the streets; the kind of people they used

to be, only now freed from the vulgarities, hypocrisies, and failings of the Soviet regime.

My parents' lifelong friends narrated their emigration journey to me and my mother

in their Brookline, MA home on the night of July 21, 2011. From the flow and organized

manner of her telling, it was clear that Sofa Bekker, as the principal narrator, had thought

through and prepared her stories. The theme of their Soviet ignorance in the face of Western

modernity peppered her recollections. Their first meeting of Austrian-ness was on their

flight out of Moscow, where friendly personnel contrasted with the "*dikast'* (savagery), the

rudeness of the Soviet Union."

About Austria, she said, "The most interesting part when we got [to Vienna in April

1989] was when we went out for the first time. We had to eat, of course. We would look into

the store windows like savages. We were like savages; it was our first time out of the country.

Like savages, OK?!" she emphasized. Sofa was 32 and her husband was 37 years old then.

"And we were afraid to go into those stores and afraid to ask. And with no [knowledge of

the German] language either—"

"You're afraid to go in," her husband added. "You had the feeling—the feeling, that

someone is standing at your back, watching you, about to tell you 'Don't touch it, you don't

have the right!'"

"Mhmm," Sofa responded. "At first we were looking in those stores, not knowing

what everything was. First of all, we'd never seen anything in all of that kind of packaging

before, like *dikarugi* (big ol' savages), like we were from another planet. And there was this feeling inside, like were aggrieved people (ущемлённые люди)."

"Exactly, exactly," my mom added emphatically.

Sofa went on, "Like we weren't born in the right place, at the right time, that we've been deprived in life (обделёнными по жизни)."

"One hundred percent," mama said.

"How is it that people live here [in Austria], like this, and all of these things exist here?! While for us, it's been some sort of savagery."

This feeling of having been deceived by the Soviet Union and deprived of the quality of life, the beauty, the knowledge customary to Westerners, was taken hard and personally. Analysis of immigrants' stories of shock in transit migration points to their realization of self as a product of the Soviet system and underscores the resultant bitterness and hurt at the accumulated past grievances. No condemnation was more powerfully searing than one woman's, for whom the havoc and stress of the customs procedures and train journey caused her to miscarry: "If before I didn't like Soviet regime, after [the customs exit point at] Chop I hated it." This woman also used the language of savagery and civilization: "When we got to Vienna," she said, "I understood that we finally arrived in a civilized world. Before that, one couldn't even pick up the scent of civilization."

Of the most striking reactions of Soviets' to the realities of capitalism is physical illness at the sight of abundance. These experiences testify to the intensity and holistic nature of the shock, simultaneously reverberating through the mind, body, and spirit as they realized what it meant to have been a Soviet citizen. For this reason, this type of experience best exemplifies the ways in which the encounter with the West was deeply and thoroughly felt (i.e. embodied).

The story of Alexander Korenfeld's first trip to the supermarket is known well by his

kids. His daughter asked him to tell it for the documentary. Yelena began to narrate, with

marked humor:

> Though we were given a small amount of money [by JDC], we were still able to afford to buy something for us, for our kids—the most modest things, which to us were delicacies anyway because we'd never seen anything like it. And half of it—no 90 percent of it—we didn't even understand at all: what it was, how you eat it, what it's all about.
> We walked into a supermarket. First of all, we simply got lost in it. Simply got lost. We didn't know where we were going, where the entrance was, where the exit was. We ended up in some hall dedicated to cheeses. In the middle of it lay and smelled an enormous block of cheese. It smelled—just like in Jerome Jerome's books—as if it had stunk up the entire country, all of Vienna. Finally I look up and realize that I lost my husband. And when I found him, he was this strange green color.

Yelena laughed heartily and continued in a bright, strong voice:

> He had kind of crawled away, crawled away, searching for the exit. He had become physically ill from that abundance, from those smells, from that insult: "Why had we lived our whole lives, toiling for that country?!" Never could we buy our kids a single thing that lay here in such abundance, which seemed completely unearthly, unthinkable.
> He had crawled away outside to catch his breath on some bench, where we found him. And until the end of the day he was unable to recover (прийти в себя). I think we didn't go into another supermarket while we were there.

"I couldn't think straight," Alexander began, in a more sober tone.

"He could barely think!" echoed Yelena, laughing.

"I couldn't understand what was happening to me," Alexander said.

> I understood only that I had become physically unwell. I had to find an exit, which was difficult; I had become somehow disoriented, but I understood that if I fell in the middle of this store, it would be indecent. And I somehow found the exit, and there stood a bench—I still remember—I laid down on it, and for half an hour I tried to recover my bearings, to be able to function again. This was my first encounter with, my first jolt from the abundance that existed at that time. [interview by Victoria and Mike Drob, May 18, 2013]

This type of experience most clearly and visibly captures the embodied nature of

these "jolts," these devastating realizations of what it meant to have been a Soviet person.

The next two stories entail an emotional reaction—crying—but similarly convey a deeply felt and fundamental change in self-experience, a bitterness that fueled desire not to dwell in the loss of the past and to focus on a different kind of future.

Sergei Liebermann left Kiev with his nuclear family in 1989, at the age of 29. When I asked him about his impressions of Vienna, he answered immediately:

"My only impressions are of fear. I'll tell you a story–but it was emotional." He sighed. "I'm not an emotional person, but. The morning after our arrival, we went to a market in Vienna, very, very early in the morning. It was a big, beautiful outdoor market. Farmers arrived, and a few blocks were closed off for a few hours. It was open 5-8:00 a.m."

A phone call interrupted him, and when he returned to our conversation, he cut straight to the point: "Listen, I have two strong impressions of Vienna. Do you want them?" I nodded.

> We got up in the morning and went to the market. We got there, and I stand like a statue, and tears began to flow down my face. I couldn't move. The tears were flowing. My wife asks, "what's wrong??"
> "Explain to me: For <u>what</u>?!" I said. "For <u>what</u> did that god, who doesn't exist [according to communism], condemn <u>us</u>, our ancestors, our grandparents to be born in that god-forsaken country?!" Where you had to get tickets to buy sugar, where you had to stand on line for milk. [And here:] Abundance!... Any fruit, any vegetable; just go and buy them. This shook me. I'd never been across the border, you know? And for me it was—I just stood there and cried. I was remembering, remembering my grandma, standing on line for three, four hours to bring home food–It was—it was just savagery (dikast'). That was my first strong impression. [January 25, 2012]

My family has its own version of this experience: my father, at 34, cried when he first walked into an Austrian toy store. "For what?!" my mom says were his words, "For what did they deprive me of this?!" She says it was a terribly painful sight.

Tears, dizziness, loss of balance, disorientation upon encountering the abundances of capitalism—every Soviet emigrant knows some similar story. This experience of shock speaks not only of capitalism's material excesses; Soviet emigrants interpreted the

bountifulness of goods in the West as an overwhelming anger at the Soviet Union and a sadness for oneself and one's intimates for being so deprived, deceived, and even condemned (as Sergei Liebermann articulated). It made them feel, as Viktor Klopnik said about exiting the USSR in 1989, "inferior, of having lived life without knowing anything, like a half-person" (July 10, 2012). This is why a description of "culture shock" does not do the experience justice; "anthropological shock" comes closer to describing the profound, embodied re-orientation of the world—and oneself in that world—that hit emigrants at cognitive, emotional, and, most visibly, at a physical level (which are all anyhow synthesized in one's bodily experience [Csordas 1993]). In this self-consciousness there is an identifiable, though not all-pervasive, strain of shame.

Shame: "This Is The Last Blow, And You Have To Survive It"

Describing his exit through Soviet customs at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport in 1978, Mr. Mikhail Dubinsky explained to me that others had prepared his family for the procedure. He and his family knew that officials would thoroughly search through their possessions, probably confiscate a few things with little explanation, make nasty comments, embarrass them in petty and brutish ways (break things on purpose, perform strip/cavity searches), "and you have to be emotionally ready for this," he said. "You should know that this is your final blow. You should survive it, and that's it." Like many emigrants, the preparation of grit was not enough: Dubinsky suffered an unexpected, "extra" blow when his assigned customs agent turned out to be a former classmate. A former equal now in a position of considerable power over him: the power to shame him (for being an emigrant-traitor), bully and insult him, destroy objects of sentimental and material value, purposefully

delay his departure—all with impunity. Dubinsky said he kept his eyes down the whole time. His classmate did not harass him.

The unexpected happened at every turn, the dismissive farewell from their homeland beginning with the application for the exit visa. Whereas many interactions with Soviet officials during emigration procedures purposefully sought to degrade and annoy them, in transit émigrés discovered more reasons to despise the Soviet regime. Passing through customs was far from the "last blow"; those blows to one's morale and dignity lasted well into the early years of immigration.

The experience of shame has been touched on only tangentially in migration scholarship and anthropology. In recounting his own story of absconding from Iran to seek asylum in Sweden, anthropologist Shahram Khosravi (2010) notes the need for further exploring this aspect of different types of transit migrations. Khosravi notes that "[b]order crossing can be experienced in terms of honour and shame" (2010:66); he interprets shame, both self-imposed and imposed by others, as "part of the punishment for transgressing nation-state sovereignty" (67). There may also be "shame of arrival" (of being from somewhere else) because of the instilled sense of inferiority inherited from historical processes and global relations such as postcolonialism, as literary scholar Amitava Kumar (2000) experienced as an immigrant to the U.S. from India. Expanding this discussion with a phenomenological perspective on a migrant's experience in a new society, Michael Jackson (2008) hones in on the "shock of the new." The migrant, in this article a young man from Sierra Leone, completely unprepared for life in the United Kingdom, "readily falls prey to fears that forces, named or unknown, are conspiring against one when, in reality, it is simply one's powerlessness and estrangement that produces this erosion of self-confidence, and the pervasive sense of shame, degradation, exclusion or smallness" (71).

The unexpectedness of the experienced changes of transit migration, even in such a highly regularized route, points to the need to navigate the imposed limits to mobility not just literally—legally, physically—but also personally: emotionally, psychologically, morally. People who travel through the hierarchical international nation-state system have to adjust their self-worth and ideas about how they belong socially in a rapidly changing social milieu. It seems that Kumar's and Khosravi's attribution of their shame to geopolitical and macrohistorical processes as well as Soviet emigrants' blaming of the Soviet Union are all strategies of externalizing shame in order to counter the feelings of powerlessness and estrangement that Jackson describes as part of difficult experiences of migration—to consolidate personal dignity and morale, and envision a future free from that stigma. It is a strategy of resilience.

As highly educated, cultured, self-sufficient adults, many Soviet Jews (and among them my research participants) crossed into the West and felt the shame of inadequacy on several fronts: (1) the shame of being an ignorant outsider; (2) the shame of suddenly being dependent and poor; and (3) the embarrassment of having to undertake activities that cause shame because of their poverty and dependence. The Soviet Union not only made them into "savages" relative to the West, but, perhaps worst of all, deceived them into thinking that life under socialism was superior. There is of course a class element to this shock, in that people lost their attained social status. But as a group proud of their intelligence and *kulturnost'* (culturedness), the sudden consciousness of their lack of knowledge was especially humiliating for Soviet Jews. In fact, the very concept of "kulturnost'" is instructive, as it was part of a Stalinist civilizing mission of the "backward masses" (Volkov 2000), gaining powerful significance in the formation of Soviet identities (Markowitz 1993). In this light,

feeling themselves to be uncivilized "savages" in the capital of European Enlightenment struck particularly deep.

This at least partially explains immigrants' lasting anger toward the Soviet regime: it turned confident, modern, highly educated, and savvy people inadequate, fearful, and disillusioned once outside its borders. As Yelena Korenfeld said, "We always loved Russia, our country, but we never loved that government that forced us to live under that monstrous lie," wherein the lie is the Soviet system itself (interview by Victoria and Mike Drob, May 18, 2013). Emigrants, by virtue of choosing to leave the system, suspected or were convinced otherwise; yet, even if prepared by others for what the West was like, the realization of the enormity of that difference was severe and painful.

When I met with Ella Bobrovsy and two of her coworkers at their New York City government office, where all three work in data systems management, for the second time in July 2011, Ella spoke about her experiences more than anyone else. It was apparent that Ella and her husband had not been prepared for the changes the emigration journey entailed. I wanted to hear from her and two of her co-workers, Tanya Vainer and Irina Peller, about their feelings of uncertainty associated with statelessness, which Ella used rather metaphorically earlier to denote being without place and possession and applying for refugee status. Were these statuses felt? I asked.

"We felt this very much, at every step. It was the first time we were outside the borders—well I had been once before, as a student—but basically, it was the first time. We don't know the laws—"

"Everything is new. Everything," Tanya Vainer, her co-worker, added. Later Tanya would tell me: "When we left, we had no information. Nothing. We got to Vienna, and couldn't figure out how the toilets worked! We went to the market in Vienna, looking for

bread. We couldn't find it. It was in a bag! It never occurred to me that bread might be in a

bag. For that I was also grateful to that regime," she said with biting sarcasm. "Why couldn't

they teach us how people lived beyond the borders?! Why? We knew nothing. We were like

Russian polar bears: uncivilized [*dikiye*]."

"We didn't get any truthful information in the Soviet Union," Ella continued. "All

the information we had was from news from friends, but that was all about the United

States. And there's nothing like personal experience, anyway." Irina Peller, sighed. "We're in

the middle of Europe, with no rights, with the only goal of defending your kids, parents;

[worrying] about yourself—there's no time for that," Ella said vehemently. "There was

pressure, horrible pressure (давило, ужасно давило). No language skills, just a bit of

English in countries that speak German and Italian."

"I didn't know any English," Tanya added.

"It's very difficult. The most difficult thing," Ella elaborated,

was that we lived fine [in Odessa] materially. We didn't leave because of that. I didn't
pay attention to loose change: if I wanted to buy kids ice cream, clothes, food, I
bought it. Well, [in Italy] we didn't need clothes; we brought them with us. Food: we
ate the same thing all the time; we brought nonperishables with us, and from it we
cooked first, second, third courses. We would go to markets at the end of the day—
you don't know?

I nodded that I did. "They would throw out the leftover produce," I said. My parents

had described to me the common activity of weeding through these discards in Rome's great

outdoor wholesale produce markets, which emigrants did with shame or a sense of

adventure, depending on one's attitude.

"Not throw out," Ella clarified. "They would put it out; it was free…. For us it was

very uncomfortable and shameful and embarrassing. We weren't used to such things. And

that we went to sell things, and would have to run when the police came?" She went on to

talk about one of her scariest incident along the transit route: after buying eggs at a market in Vienna, the police mistook her and a friend for unlicensed peddlers and brought them in for questioning. (In truth they had been meaning to sell some trinkets, but hadn't yet).

In their conversation the difficulties of an uncertain outcome, being with a restricted migrant status, without familiarity or understanding of life there, feeling the hurt of being unable to provide adequately for themselves and their families, undertaking unpleasant tasks to balance their material precariousness all intertwined and contributed to their degraded sense of worth and morale. Others echoed these feelings, sometimes blaming them on their home country.

"Another shock that we lived through, that I will also never forget," Yelena Korenfeld said on camera, "is when we wound up at the flea market in Italy. All our people [other Soviet Jews]—there were a great many people there—came out to those bazaars with the wares they brought in their suitcases. Because we were not allowed to emigrate with money, people bought junk, like *Raisa Gorbachova* and *Red Moscow* perfumes to sell in Italy.

"And so hundreds of people stood by and tried to sell those boxes, bottles, jars of iodine, nail files, scarves—and, what <u>type</u> of people?" The pace of her speech picked up. "Professors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, musicians: intelligent, cultured people. Intelligentsia. It was mortifying!" she laughed. "We were very ashamed the first days, very uncomfortable. We never in our lives were in such a situation. Later, of course, it all passed, and it became a game."

"But for three days we stood at attention, didn't lift our eyes," Yelena and Alexander said with each other, laughing. "We didn't earn a cent. Not one *mila* [*Lira*]."

"It was our son who began to earn money! By selling nail files," Alexander said. A child, with no prior sense of work and worth, is likely to see it as a game to begin with. (And

Italians tended to have soft spots and sympathy for children.) The fact that their son was achieving what they felt was their responsibility must have further humiliated them. "It's funny to remember it now, but it's also a period of our lives."

"We went through this," Yelena continued. "This humiliation, this yet another spit in our face, this slap from our mother country, one of the many that we got, even after our exit. You cannot look at it as anything other than a slap in the face—to not allow people to leave with dignity. People did have some money [in the Soviet Union]; but, no!" Yelena's tone was fierce. "Only [$90] per [person], and with that they permit you to leave: 'And, please, help yourself to everything'," she added sarcastically. "Fantastic" (interview by Victoria and Mike Drob, May 18, 2013).

For the Korenfelds, the culprit of their disenfranchisement is not their desire to leave the Soviet Union, but the system itself. Their laughter indicates that the class-based indignity of being turned from distinguished doctors to street peddlers no longer stings; the insult of being turned into disenfranchised emigrants by their homeland does. The notable point is not so much the loathing of the Soviet regime as the feeling of being purposefully stripped of dignity that remains palpable. While the indignities suffered during exit customs checks were clearly in Soviet officials' hands, the hardships of the subsequent train journey to Vienna is not obviously so.

My great-aunt Rita told me heatedly, "We left [in 1979] through Chop [the Ukrainian exit point]. Your father saw us off. We weren't allowed to take any food. But someone had brought chocolate candy to the train station and," she paused, trying to remember. "And sprats [a canned fish, like sardines]." I laughed. "You want to laugh?!" Rita teased. "That's all I had when I got on the train at Chop. When we sat down, my [24-year-old] daughter says to me, 'Mama, I'm hungry.' I said, we can open this can of sprats, and you can eat it with

chocolate candy. And we traveled that way <u>until</u> Vienna. And only in Vienna it became easier to breathe."

She articulated the relief of her discomfort in physical terms; this relief was full-bodied and the disquiet and anger that preceded it were long-lived: As told in chapter 3, my great-aunt Rita has many devastating stories related to her father's imprisonment under Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

"How long was the train ride?" I asked.

She couldn't remember, and asked her daughter, my aunt Mila, as she walked by us. "Two days—48 hours," my aunt said decisively.

"You see?!" Rita turned to me. "You understand what we ate?! And there were people with small children. They weren't allowed to take anything." She lowered her voice to an intense whisper. "That is what you call 'emigration'?! When it doesn't matter who you're traveling with, they let you out naked?!" She let out a deep breath to ease her sudden heart pain, and told me about the limits to the possessions they were allowed to bring with them. "They restricted you so much when I was leaving; as if they were chasing you out, so that a person has to be purposefully naked," wherein nakedness stands for being stripped of dignity. "This was our emigration. Anyway. When we got to Vienna, there we could take in air and breathe."

When my aunt told me the same story a few hours later from her point of view—of only having chocolate and sprats to eat on the entire train journey—, my great-aunt Rita reiterated her feelings: "And with a family with young kids right near us! It's such mockery! You just can't convey it! A normal person wouldn't understand it." She let out a sigh.

The shock of capitalism's abundance did not only have to do with material difference but, for many emigrants, entailed a loss of personal dignity, especially when confronted with

settled, comfortable, even "refined" Europeans. Perhaps that is why another common theme

of emigration stories is that of the kind Austrian or Italian, offering understanding, empathy,

and, usually, material support. Besides being touching stories about the kindness of

strangers, their poignancy must have been mixed with the relief and importance of social

recognition by the esteemed, "civilized" others. Care and attention restored their dignity

after the shame of border crossing (Khosravi 2010), made purposefully humiliating by Soviet

officials (see also Boym 2001:330). The experienced indignity and the full realization of what

it meant to be a Soviet person in the world—metaphorically naked in the West by Soviet

design—intensified people's already negative feelings towards the Soviet regime.

Yet whether or not the Soviet regime deserves the blame, not everyone assigns it. I

asked Maria Kushnir what her impressions of Vienna were, long after her husband Grigoriy

had told me his.

"Well, it was all new," she replied unenthusiastically. "Unusual. I hadn't seen

anything like it. But I was terribly depressed." Her voice became fiery:

> I didn't see [Vienna], nothing made me happy. Nothing was interesting. I hated
> everything. I worried that we didn't know the language; I thought, here people can
> speak; they know everything; they can buy whatever they'd like. We felt primitive,
> like needy people. In terms of morale (морально), it was very hard because we were
> educated people. We felt like unwanted dregs, beggars, wretched people. That's why
> I hated everyone around me.

Grigoriy added that at least he had had his peddling tasks, which made it easier for

him to pass the time, but which further disgraced and depressed Maria.

"Morale-wise (морально) it was very hard," Maria said. "I just gritted my teeth, and

that's it. I hated this whole emigration; I didn't want to go. But, listen, there was no other

way [to leave]" (October 25, 2011).

Maria did not blame the Soviet regime, but she does have a lasting, impassioned resentment towards the entire experience, which she claims she has tried to forget. Unsurprisingly, she never has had the desire to return to the Italian town where they spent the bulk of transit migration, Ladispoli. At the end of the interview, she finally conceded one positive aspect of emigration: "At least we are here," she said, where "here" could denote either or both the United States and their grand Staten Island home. Immigrants today speak from a position of dignity, having passed through and externalized the powerlessness and estrangement that Jackson identified as germane to difficult migration experiences (2008).

Who emigrants understood themselves to be changed at the border, before they ever settled as immigrants. While interactions with natives certainly had impacts, their encounter with the surroundings alone, with the reality of Western European places, engendered a deeply embodied re-orientation of one's being in the past, present, and future.

ENCHANTMENT: "FROM THE IRON CURTAIN, STRAIGHT TO CAPITALISM—WE WERE RUNNING AROUND WITH BIG EYES, LIKE WE WERE CRAZY"

After describing to me his tearful and angry reaction to his first view of a Viennese farmers' market, Sergei Liebermann continued with the second of his most powerful revelations during transit migration: "It was that same day," he said. "I went to some supermarket and bought Pampers." He paused, and I waited for the rest of the story. But that was it. "I saw them for the first time in my life. You don't even know what it means to have to hand-wash all those nappies and swaddling clothes. You'll never know, and thank god. When I first saw Pampers it was just—eye opening. I never knew such a thing could exist. It was pleasant. That's a pleasant impression I have—a very strong one" (January 25, 2012).

As much as being "objects of shock," the material and social novelties encountered in transit migration also were experiences of pleasure, delight, enchantment. As asserted earlier, shock and enchantment are in fact intertwined experiences. This is why Beck's concept of anthropological shock (1987) also falls short of capturing migrants' experiential encounter with the new; it does not account for the wondrous. As Grigoriy Kushnir said to me about arriving in Vienna, "Everything was so different. On the one hand, it was so difficult. On the other hand, there was something new to wonder at all the time" (October 25, 2011).

In coming to Western Europe, Soviet emigrants sensed their lack (of knowledge, modernity) and acquired a desire to be part of this new world. They experienced real pleasure in participating in it whenever possible. While American Jewish observers and scholars mistook this fascination and magnetism for materialism or personal greed, using it as evidence of Soviet Jews' economically driven "sausage emigration," I consider the experience of enchantment as a recuperation of dignity.[5] This is the less popular path to take since eminent scholars such as Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Max Weber, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno decried the excesses of capitalism for its effects of alienation and disenchantment. However, there is also the commodity's arresting and dignifying nature to consider.

Enchantment, as used by Jane Bennett (2001), is a mood that results from seeing (the regular) anew, with a sense of awe, wonder and increased sensory interaction and attention. It is "(1) a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) a more *unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's

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[5] Though I by no means deny the reality of the materialistic greed that capitalism allows. However, as students of socialist societies recognize, whereas advanced capitalism comes with self-critique and evidence of the downfalls of material overabundance, communist economies dominated by shortfalls and desire for goods do not allow for the development of this perspective/conviction.

default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" (5). According to Bennett's definition, wonder and shock are intertwined. To be awed, one's senses and understandings should be unsettled, but in a pleasurable way. The impression is immediately unassimilable, but may become so with time or regular encounters. That is why the mode of enchantment, according to Bennett, needs to be fostered and disciplined, in order to see the regular anew (as well as to learn to channel this appreciation into empathy). As we certainly know from our present-day interactions with new technologies, Bennett posits that "in addition to the beauty and sublimity of nature, there also exist hi-tech, artifactual sites of enchantment" (14).

Furthermore, as anthropologist Rahul Oka (2014) has pointed out, sudden money-saving practices and changes in lifestyle in restricted settings like refugee camps leave people yearning for the goods and practices of their "normal" lives. In this sense, Oka argues, refugees' seemingly unreasonable consumption practices (e.g. exchanging camp-issued meals for market-bought food) reflect their desire to at least temporarily attain normalcy and dignity. This "agentive consumption," argues Oka, "diminish[es] the enforced passivity of receiving aid and relief. During the long wait in static transition, normalcy and dignity become necessary conditions for resilience, adaptability, and survival" (33). Building on Oka's insights, I consider not just consumption but also transit migrants' desire to enjoy sensual pleasures and to appreciate beauty as strategies of resilience in the face of permanent emigration. Soviet transit migrants were amazed not only at the new commodities they encountered at the stores and markets, but at their very presence there, in Europe. Therefore, I expand this discussion to encompass travel, since tourism (like the kind they did on emigrant-led tour groups) may also be conceptualized as the consumption of place.

While disorientation, disillusionment, and abjection have been amply explored in the experiences of the modern migrant (and refugee), the experiences of enchantment with the

novelties of one's new surroundings show up less frequently in the migration literature. This is especially clear when considering the widespread anthropological framing of migration, especially as a refugee, in terms of the negative quality of "displacement." Elizabeth Colson (2003), for example, by way of a review of the anthropological literature, calls attention to displacement as a phenomenon, a condition "that affects those uprooted" (1). Despite the creativity and innovation by refugee-immigrants, leading to better lives for them, she concludes, "people resent uprooting, find it traumatic, and in the long run look back in grief and with an anger that lasts longer than the wars or the dams that forced them out" (15). E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen (1995) identify the "collapse of culturally constituted trust," which begins even before one leaves his or her society and continues until feelings of settlement emerge, as the fundamental, defining aspect of refugee experiences (1-2).

Though it importantly calls attention to loss, disorientation, and movement, "displacement" as much as mistrust emphasizes only those aspects of the experience, similar to treating all refugees as one category of person (Malkki 1995). "Displacement" carries the connotation of "being forced to flee" (an involuntary reaction) as well as being where one does not belong and where one ought not to be. Furthermore, and germane to this discussion, it misses the deep engagement with place even while in transit.

The encounter with the places of Western Europe held deep significance for Soviet emigrants. Not only was it their first time seeing sites they never though they'd see, given restrictions on Soviets' travel abroad, but the restriction was even more acute for Jewish citizens. An elderly woman, Mrs. Fridman told me in her southern Brooklyn apartment, "I remember that at the end of college [in the 1960s], a friend and I applied to travel to Yugoslavia. Those who <u>didn't even apply</u> got to go. We [as Jews] weren't allowed go

anywhere. And here we're going," she laughed, "to Vienna, Austria, Italy! Along with the worries about how it will turn out, there was the joy of seeing something in this world. That you would see something!" (November 23, 2011). Mrs. Fridman here describes transit migration as escaping the confines of a restricted society and, even with little money, joyously immersing oneself in everyday life amidst beautiful, historic places.

One trope that captures this experience is that of the "Roman Holiday." Ask any Soviet person who migrated through Austria and Italy, and he or she will associate it with that phrase. Whether or not the phrase describes one's own experience, whether or not one will beg to differ and assert that it was not that at all, or that it was instead a "Viennese Holiday," everyone will know the phrase. Referring to the 1953 film starring Audrey Hepburn, which enjoyed great popularity in the Soviet Union, the phrase flourished among migrants during transit migration and remains affixed to the experience. Despite the stark inapplicability of the movie's plot—about a princess who steals away from her official duties to discover plebian Rome on her own—the phrase is not employed ironically. Soviet immigrants use it literally, though with self-conscious humor that acknowledges the distance from Hepburn's character, to refer to transit migration as "the best! The best months!"— when they enjoyed Austrian elegance and the Italian sun, sights, smells, sand, beaches, beauty. Or they might, as my parents' friend Yuri Melnick did, seriously disagree: "For me— I don't know about all that talk of a Roman Holiday—for me the time in Italy was the worst in my life" (June 27, 2012). (Melnick bemoaned his sudden loss of agency, means of self-subsistence, and dignity as a 34-year-old adult and husband.) The phrase can be read as a hopeful discourse to render meaningful and cope with the insecurity and uncertainty of that period of their lives (Goldstein 2012:192). Here I consider such tropes not only in terms of

cognitive strategies but also the implications of the sensual delight and the awe-inspiring to which they refer and its implications for their future attachments to the places of transit.

Maxim Shrayer elegantly deployed a similar trope for his transit migration with his parents in 1987. He described the mix of bliss and despair, the stress of making ends meet and the magic of the everyday as a "Refuge in Paradise." He concludes his memoir on a note of warm recollection, describing his emigrant-group trip to southern Italy:

> After almost twenty years in America, when I sometimes feel low, I recall the end of that day on Capri, how mother and I walked back to the ferry down a serpentine road. All of a sudden it started to rain. We passed an old woman with a pink donkey, then a couple of men holding hands, then a boy with a fishing rod. Mother and I only exchanged glances. No words could describe our paradisal poverty. [2007:225]

"Paradise of poverty" is Shrayer's unique and beautifully apt metaphor for his two months in transit as a 19-year-old. Another then-19-year-old I spoke to referred to her time as being "poor but happy." For both, a lot of beautiful and frightening things happened, with an intensity typical of teenage summers: the blossoming of new and old friendships, discovery, a sense of freedom and personal growth, beaches, abandoned castles, love found and lost, terrible arguments, embarrassments, an accidental pregnancy. Shrayer's "paradisal poverty" captures the astonishment and full-bodied pleasure of seeing true beauty—for which one has to be receptive (recall Maria Kushnir's inability to experience it)—while feeling comfortable with one's desire for the unattainable. An ideal poverty, where one may not belong, but in a way that allows one to appreciate the beauty and singularity of an experience; beauty may lend hope and strength.

The magic of objects and places long imagined has lingered, especially of those cities visited on cheap Soviet-emigrant tour groups to cities in northern and southern Italy. Alla Gorodetskaya, for example, characterized her arrival to Venice as a fairytale. It was one of her strongest, most treasured memories from transit migration; I heard her tell it three times

on three separate occasions. She was 28 years old then, and had joined the tour group alone while her husband stayed with their daughters in the little town of Torvaianica (some 20 miles south of Rome). Venice itself was startling. But as evening fell, sitting in Piazza San Marco, eating the sorry sandwich she had packed for herself, she was suddenly surrounded by brilliantly masked and costumed men, women, even dogs. It was Carnevale. She had seen a film about it not long before she had left the Soviet Union in 1989. "When I got there, I remembered that film," she said to me and her daughter, sitting around their kitchen table. "It was an interesting feeling: When you read or watch something and think that you'll never get to see this, and then, you're there. Wow! This is all real; I was there, with my own hands I touched it!" (February 6, 2012). Alla expresses her reaction to this unexpected, spectacular, and unforgettable place synaesthetically: touching the magnificent whirl of color and commotion she witnessed, possessing it. She was able to witness, appreciate, and be enchanted, momentarily being drawn into a life from which she was otherwise an outsider, as part of that group of money-saving emigrants with their sorry sandwiches.

Wondrous interactions with new places, objects, and sensations were heightened by the restrictions they had theretofore doubly faced as Soviet citizens and as Jews. Furthermore, they were facilitated by emigrants' immersion in society (e.g. "Refuge in Paradise"), rather than facing isolation in a camp.

The Unrepeatability of First Sensations

Elena Golub and I conversed about her transit migration at her barbershop in Brooklyn on a sweltering summer day in 2011 during a long gap between customers. Her time in transit migration parallels my family's; she and her husband, both under 30, their five-year-old son, and her husband's friend's mother left Odessa in May of 1989 and arrived

in New York City in November of that year. Like my family, Elena's was initially refused

refugee status during the summer of 1989. Elena felt frustrated and humiliated by the

refugee status requirement of framing her life story in terms of persecution. She also

expressed palpable anger for having had to renounce Soviet citizenship and become

stateless, a condition that made her feel "naked," uncomfortable, and saddened. During our

conversation Elena's recollections vacillated between the wonderful and the morose, the

effort to stay positive and enjoy their time in Austria and Italy in the face of hardships and

feelings of helplessness, and the need to remember only the positive aspects in retrospect.

"I have fuzzy recollections of [my two weeks in] Vienna," Elena said after I asked

her to describe her impressions of the city. "I remember they had great dairy produce,

amazing cheeses. There were those two museums across from each other; you could use one

ticket for both, so we went to see both. Then when our friends lost their luggage, we went

on the tram without paying." Elena began to laugh, "We snaked on and off the tram to

avoid the ticket-checker." Her voice lost its mirth as she continued to explain, "We were

splitting everything with them, because they lost everything, even toothpaste. They were in

hysterics. But the apartment they were settled in was right across from this amazing,

beautiful park," probably Augarten. "It looked like the Elysian Fields. The most beautiful

I've ever seen–a huge area, perfectly manicured, with statues, trees. I stood there, my god! I

wanted to run around saying 'this is all mine'!" she laughed. "Like 'wow!' I remember this

perfectly."

Akin to Alla's descriptions of Venice, Elena framed her encounter with the

magnificence of Vienna's refined beauty and tastes as wanting to possess them. But she does

not idealize the city, nor any part of transit migration. Elena's other few memories from

Vienna were from the stores where they shopped and their witnessing anti-Semitic graffiti as

well as a brutal beating of a young Turkish man. She expressed both dismaying shock and sweet enchantment, gloominess and pleasure. When describing Italy, the breathtaking appears alongside the stressful:

> Italian is such simple cuisine, but it's sooooo good! It's rich food, but healthy. They know how to do it. So there are good recollections. If only we didn't have to lug those enormous suitcases around. Half of it was filled with nonperishables–which came in handy, by the way. Very handy. Because it was very depressing [тоскливо] there, very gloomy. With a little kid, who wants *gelato*, and you can't give him any….

The awful sentiments do not erase or undo the exquisite sensual delights of being there.

Elena's husband eventually convinced her to join one of the emigrant-led tour groups to the north of Italy, even though Elena felt uncomfortable spending money that should be saved for the future. About that trip, Elena said:

> It was <u>so</u> great. They are memories for the rest of my life. We were in Florence, Venice; we traveled to Rimini and to San Marino. It was so wonderful! You saw so much! You saw so much that it has all gotten mixed up in my head. It was just too much for one person to remember! All in four or five days.
> In Venice we took a gondola…. All the poor immigrants were skimping; we all piled into one gondola. We were told about Casanova, where he lived. It was so cool. It was great. You know, I felt like Cinderella at the ball. In Rimini, we saw for the first time a type of museum with miniature models of world-famous buildings. You want to play with everything, as if you're a small child. You're like "oh my god!" I'll never forget this feeling, you're like a little girl playing. As if you're suddenly in the land of Lilliputians. It was so cool, I'll never forget this trip. Now it's different, you've been to other countries. But this, it's like a stamp.

She clapped her hands, "A wonderful time" (July 12, 2011).

What is noteworthy about Elena's impressions from this trip is its singularity; that feeling of enchantment has not been repeated in subsequent travels (though she has not been back to Italy). In transit migration, there was a unique, unrepeatable delight of discovery: a new kind of stamp, no longer that of a socialist regime but that of nascent travelers in their new, still forming subject-positions. I heard the elation of discovery again among a few other individuals I interviewed.

"For me it was a Roman Holiday," Victoria Shostak laughed. She is one of my parents' close friends from Odessa. She and her husband have achieved enormous socioeconomic success in the United States from his multinational business based in Russia. In Odessa, they lived in squalor, of the most meager material means among their group of friends. They had come to participate in the group discussion I had organized, along with the Minkins and my mother in the Minkins' kitchen. I began the discussion with a leading question: do they consider Soviet immigration a successful one? Victoria was the first of them to speak: for me, she said, immigration to the U.S. has been a fairytale. She continued with her description of her "Roman Holiday": "When we got our 'transport' notice [granting refugee status], I said, 'What? So soon?! We haven't traveled enough yet!" She laughed heartily, referring to her participation in the emigrant-organized tour groups.

"For me it was always Viennese Holiday," my mom countered.

"We were in Vienna for three weeks, or less," Victoria said. We saw everything—museums and everything. [My husband's] cousin came to Rome from Israel. Her friend was an ambassador in the Vatican, so he took us around, introduced us to American films…. I remember the first seafood I tasted…."

"Oh! Roman Holiday," Victoria continued after others had jumped in. "Oh! The first of our dreams started to come true in Vienna. The Schönbrunn Palace. The art gallery. I always loved art. I never thought I would see it like that, up close. Now it's all under glass. But back then it was all displayed openly. Now all of Europe is under glass, so it feels like looking at reproductions. It leaves no impression." Her digression from describing those first vivid, sensual impressions aptly calls to mind Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1969). In Victoria's commentary not reproductions but a physical separation—glass—lessens the experience of the valuable object's authenticity.

But as Benjamin suggests, it is not just physical differences that undermine the value of the reproduction; it is its lack of ascribed value, its aura, as *the* original. I would suggest that for Victoria it is not just the glass that nowadays diminishes the impact of European art, but also the temporal and experiential distance from that first enchanting encounter, which simultaneously encapsulated the unexpected fruition of desire.

"The first dreams came true then," Victoria repeated. "When we were leaving Rome, we went to a meat bazaar, and we were walking past all these different kinds of meats. I said to [my husband], 'You know, I'm not hungry anymore'" (July 22, 2011). She laughed at this recollection of having had her first fill of what had long been impossible. This fill, I submit, is that of attained dignity, the dignity of being freed from the overwhelming material lack and desire they lived in Odessa. The unrepeatability of these first encounters speaks to the uniqueness of transit migration as *an* experience (Turner 1986) in their lives.

ANTICIPATION OF DIGNITY

Emigrants' shock and enchantment of encountering the radically novel, though, is not exactly equal to Bennett's description of enchantment as a mode of seeing one's *regular* world anew. If it were, perhaps there could have been the potential to construct a political ethics of empathy out of Soviet Jews' encounter. But what is "regular" when you are a refugee in transit? Their enchantment was instead turned inward, toward their own futures:

"Complete stupefaction," Yelena Korenfeld concluded about the experience of transit migration in her documentary interview. "We were stupefied even by the abundance, by the beauty, from the tastes, the beauty, from how everything was displayed and arranged on the shelves; we had never seen anything like it. And we somehow understood that we have arrived in a new life. This was a completely new life, and this gave us strength," similar

to Shrayer's description of his "paradisal poverty" while in transit. "We understood that we brought our kids to a brighter future" (interview for *Stateless* by Victoria and Mike Drob, May 18, 2013).

Yelena Korenfeld and others convey that their awe at the realities and opportunities of capitalism did not end with and at the object itself. The object(s)—the new glass jars, the abundant plastic bags, the diapers, fragrant salamis, cheeses, pastries, produce—did not become the fetish of migrants' desires, obscuring the commodities' origins, their means of production, their underlying power relations. The objects and places encountered in travel enchanted, and even inspired, but did not divert migrants from their embodied experiences of anger, shame, and lack as Second World (as opposed to First and Third World) subjects. The wondrous and magical was not forgotten, but as Victoria Shostak pointed out, the original feelings of awe—the aura of the new—cannot be easily replicated or recovered. That requires, as Bennett (2001) suggests, an intentional practice.

I'd like to suggest, though, that this is not the only possible way in which these places and objects may again enchant. This chapter shows the beginnings of desire and the anticipation of the future even while in transit, in the form of a desired recovery from the class and national self-consciousness and shame they experienced. This forms a key part of the relationship between embodiment and temporality, which illuminates the meaning transit migration holds for them today. Their temporary stay was for the most part not enough time to recover the dignity lost in feeling oneself a Soviet subject in Western Europe. Those who remained in transit for a longer period in time, as my family had, did in fact have the chance—through work and social interactions with locals—to potentially feel themselves as "normal" people. For everyone, though, return visits to the sites of transit migration offer the opportunity to do so. The meaning endowed for their future selves while in transit shape

and give additional meaning to those visits. Return trips are thus also an attempt to foresee

again their life in America; it is a return to their once anticipated futures.

CHAPTER 5. REMEMBERING THE FELT AND THE ANTICIPATED:

RETURN VISITS AS REAL PEOPLE

My mom cried hard when we left Italy. Harder, she says, than when she left Odessa. Over the six months that we were there, my parents had grown to love Rome and Passoscuro, INS refusal of our refugee status and the ensuing months of uncertainty and all. "Rome is mine," she once told her friends in my presence. "Rome is my city. We worked there. We lived there. We were part of it" (July 22, 2011).

My parents first went back to Italy in 1999. I have heard my mom tell the story several times to her friends: making a special trip from Vienna, before joining an English-language international tour group in Rome, my parents, aunt and uncle, and the other couple with whom we emigrated, hired a car to take them to Passoscuro, the coastal town where we had lived 10 years earlier. The trip was made purposefully on the tenth anniversary of our transit migration, as was the selection of an *English*-language, *international* tour company: they were coming back as Americans. In Passoscuro, they spent their day at the beach, taking along a medley of ripe berries, grapes, and fresh juices just bought from a local market. They were in awe both of the place itself and of being able to return to it. The group of six wasn't sure what to expect upon reencountering the enchanted, quaint town they once loved: would they find it much changed? Would it seem as charming, would the sea be as pleasant, would the food taste as good?

It is a story that I've heard many times, and I love to hear it. I recorded it on one occasion, during that group interview that I had assembled in Brookline, MA in 2011 with four of my parents' long-time friends. As my mom began to tell the story of her first return

trip, her friend Nadezhda teased in an affected tone, "[returning] already not as emigrants, but as Americans!" and laughed.

My mom recounted the trip with great enthusiasm and a marked emphasis on the sensuous and the improved, as she usually does:

> Ten years of life had passed, but the six of us went crazy over these fruits. First of all, as a real person, I decided that I would go to the cafe and have coffee there. We got ice cream, of course. With those bags [of food], Odessa-style, we went to the beach. After all our previous vacations, we thought we'd just get there, just to check it off our list. But how that car had to wait for us! It turns out that it's our beloved sea after all! It's not that we liked it only because we were in emigration, no! It was, in fact, beloved. [July 22, 2011]

The hired Mercedes, the ability to afford the desired snacks and beach accommodations, the enjoyment of the settings all form part of the sensation of becoming "real people." The fact that it was still beautiful and enchanting not only tells a story of pleasure; for my family it also strengthens our connections to a place we have continued to value. In doing so, it reaffirms the perceptual merits and good judgment of our former selves. The way the group of six had first seen, experienced, and evaluated Italy still stands; it is counterevidence to one's former "dikast'" (savagery) and ignorance as a Soviet emigrant fresh from behind the Iron Curtain.

Soviet Jewish American immigrants' widespread practice of return visits to the sites of transit, particularly to Italy, should be examined in light of their experiences in transit migration—the stresses and uncertainty of moving and waiting and the shame, self-consciousness, and pleasures of shock and enchantment. In this context, return visits can redeem the hardships of transit migration, allowing immigrants a sense of control over their experience in places that, whether enjoyed or not, were highly valued after coming out of the Soviet Union. It allows immigrants to re-experience these highly esteemed places with dignity, as "real" people.

Embodiment infers that experiences remain embodied as traces and therefore potentially alive for each person. I contend that it is this that allows return trips to be meaningful. There is no magic in the places of transit themselves: What allows for meaningful return are vivid and visceral traces of one's first time there. In return trips, one revisits places one knows only as a different, earlier person, a person different in age, sensibility, understanding, status, and culture, but a person who is nevertheless oneself and who once hoped for a different kind of experience in the same place. As I demonstrated in the last two chapters, this anticipation of the future and the powerlessness to bring it about while in transit entailed a heightened self-awareness and self-consciousness of one's subject-position as a helpless, dependent, poor refugee-in-transit. The back-and-forth dynamic between the anticipation of the future during transit and the re-experiencing of place as a different kind of person (the one once hoped for) during return demonstrates a more complex temporality than a classic straight-line relationship between the past and present would suggest. Rather, like a spiral, "things repeat but with a twist," with each iteration occurring in a unique spatio-temporal context, thereby creating a new form (the spiral itself), a new experience that is connected to what came before (Bennett 2001:39-40). It is this dynamic, based on the continued embodiment of past experiences, that allows one to continue to shape one's ongoing story of immigration. This is re-experiencing.

RETURN AS A PRACTICE AND AN IDEA

Anthropological studies have not explored the significance of migrants' return visits to intermediary places of their emigration journeys, as this dissertation does. Tourism studies, though, have recognized this type of practice as "personal memory tourism" (Marschall 2012) and as a category of travel identified as "Visiting Home and Familiar

Places" (Pearce 2012). Although tourism studies are more interested in "the roles the past can play in shaping people's travel motivation and identity quests" (Pearce 2012:1027), they generate insights in line with my argument about the significance of Soviet Jews' return visits to Italy and Austria.

Unlike heritage tourism, which refers to travel to sites linked with one's historical or political identity as opposed to one's lived experience (see Bruner 1996; Kelner 2010; Shandler 2014), travel on the basis of personal memory does not hinge on notable sites so much as on familiarity and recognizability. That is, "while heritage tourism revolves around the personal visit to tangible sites and preserved artifacts, memory tourism can be developed without the presence of such precious cultural objects and authentic remnants. *Its resource is embodied memories*…; memory tourism does not need 'sights worth seeing', as long as it provides 'something worth feeling...'" (Marschall 2010:327, emphasis added).

For example, travelers revisiting familiar places may be motivated both by curiosity as well as a "psychological desire for emotional healing" (Marschall 2012:330). In this formulation, the "act of travel fulfills a deep psychological need to revisit one's own past, to relive important moments, and to confront an element of one's consciousness. The encounter of the sight/site may intensify the emotions attached to these memories, but also demystify them and defuse tensions associated with them," thereby leading to emotional healing (or the fulfillment of some other emotional need or duty; Marschall 2012:330).[1] In this sense, a return visit to a familiar place is "a sensory experience which triggers basic emotional responses" (Pearce 2012:1029; Hui 2011) as well as "a cognitive process [because] [e]nvironmental cues trigger mindfulness and confront tourists and visitors with images of

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[1] This conceptualization of Marschall's relies on an interpretation of the past as an open "emotional wound," an interpretation of the past that I am not willing to make precisely because it, like the concept trauma, presumes to pinpoint and standardizes the impact of particular events in people's lives.

time and change" (Pearce 2012:1030). Tourism studies thus helpfully point to return as a practice that may both elaborate on one's experiences in those places and defuse their poignancy, an effect that hinges on embodied memories that make the visits meaningful to begin with.

Though anthropology and related migration studies have not explored return visits to places of transit migration, they have generated ample insights on return as a practice and an idea in the context of migration. In migration, the possibility of return to one's home country has always been implicit (Gmelch 1980), and continues to be today, in our contemporary era of accessible and reliable air travel. Early (e.g. Brettell 1979; Weist 1979; Rubenstein 1979) and recent (e.g. Xiang et al. 2013) approaches to return migration therefore begin with the *idea* of return, implicitly in accordance with Pessar and Mahler's emphasis on social imaginaries that inform future migratory action (2003).

The idea of return and its underlying desire is just as powerful and revealing as actual return. Returning to the places where one has been is evocative because it implies a deep emotional connection to one's past. Once people have migrated, the mere idea of return to their home countries is enough to sustain ties both with co-migrants and with those in the country one has left (Moran-Taylor and Menjívar 2005; Moran-Taylor 2001; Rubenstein 1979). In fact some mass migrations were premised on the idea of return, such as the Portuguese ideology of "*emigrar para voltar*" (emigrate to return) of the 1970s (Brettell 1979); Pakistani immigration to Great Britain, also of the 1970s (Anwar 1979); Guatemalan and Salvadoran migration to the U.S. in the 1990s and 2000s (Moran-Taylor and Menjívar 2005; Moran-Taylor 2001); and Ecuadorian migration to Spain in the 2000s (Boccagni 2011), among others (like Zionism).

Such cases, in which the intention to return, however implausible, becomes central to how an emigrant community understands and defines itself, are known as perpetuating a "myth of return" (Safran 1991), wherein what is mythologized is not return but home (Zetter 1999b). That is, because what one knew as "home" is now in the past, imagining a return to this past is a strategy to deal with the rupture with the past: "Return constitutes the process," Zetter (1999b:10) writes, "whilst the myth constitutes the reference point, 'home', which the refugees use to locate themselves after continuity with the past is fractured." The "myth of return" is pertinent to this discussion because it is an idea that helps people cope with the insecurity and anxieties of the present moment of migration (Brettell 1979; Safran 1991) by attempting to restore the continuity with the past, which has been broken by the act of resettlement. The idea of and desire to return—regardless of the destination— therefore captures migrants' deeply experienced relation and adjustment to their present circumstances, and their outlooks on the past and their future trajectories.

Anthropological and migration studies have also amply explored the implications of temporary return visits to one's place of origin, which can be a routine and integrated part of transnational livelihoods (wherein the places of origin and settlement constitute the migrant's meaningful social field; Duval 2004; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001; Levitt 2001; Guarnizo 1997a). Whereas the desire to return resolves some rupture between one's past, present, and future, actual return trips are a way to demonstrate something about oneself to others. Migration scholars usually examine the function and effects of such return trips as the sustaining of social ties as well as the validation of migrants' accomplishments abroad, reinforcing the migrant's upward mobility in the community of origin (Glick Schiller and

Fouron 2001; Guarnizo 1998; Goldring 1998; Berg 2007).[2] That is, because the categories against which the self has to be enacted are shared by compatriots and co-migrants, and because socioeconomic advancement is most stark in the community of origin, migrants invest significant money, time, and value into return visits (Berg 2007).

This literature explores migrants' relationship to their places of origin (i.e. "home"). So what of return to intermediary places—not those of origin or of settlement, but ones marked by a fleeting and temporary quality? What of refugees who like Soviet Jews left on a permanent basis and accepted and dealt with it by "not looking back" to their "home"? It is interesting that for them, the countries of asylum (Austria and Italy) should become the points to which immigrants plant their desire for and actual return. These return trips to the places of transit migration do validate immigrants' achieved status vis-à-vis other Russian-speaking immigrants. After all, travel to Europe is itself a valued practice among Russian-Americans, without the added significance of returning to the sites of transit migration. However, my emphasis in this chapter is that despite this possibility of social validation, immigrants' return visits to Italy and Austria hinge on a curiosity about one's former self, who one was fresh out of the Soviet Union, waiting to continue to the United States; in other words, it rests on curiosity about the ways in which they originally felt and perceived in place. In this way, I contribute to the literature on return as a practice and an idea in migration by demonstrating that return visits to the sites of transit migration can serve to personally and privately validate a sense of self and one's trajectory as an immigrant through time. In other words, it's about experiencing one's life journey, about feeling oneself *through* time.

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[2] Although as Luis Guarnizo elsewhere points out, migrants who return to their society of origin either temporarily or permanently may suffer a decrease in social capital because of the effects of being a migrant, such as the loosening of "family-bound solidarity" (1997a:54).

OUR RETURN TRIP

My parents next traveled to Italy in 2010. Their trip entailed a boat tour in the Venetian Lagoon with two other couples, friends since high school who now live in San Diego and Israel. As part of my field research I went along, so that my parents might show me the places that had become the focus of my research. I always remembered being in Italy fondly, spending my days with my older brother, cousin, and other kids my age, our group of ten family members affectionately living together. I now know that there was a fair share of depression, arguments, anxieties and pain among the adults in plain sight and behind closed doors. Nevertheless, each May for over 15 years, 13 of us (including the family friends with whom we spent transit migration) would gather to celebrate our departure from Odessa, and the night would be filled with the laughter and amusement of recollection. Even unpleasant incidents, like being pickpocketed, acquired jovial tones.

My return visit was equally warm. During the few days before we headed to the Venetian region, my parents showed me Rome. They still love the city. They know it, remember it well. Our hotel stood near the American consulate, in front of which, my parents pointed out, the adults of our emigration group joined hundreds of other émigrés protesting U.S. refugee refusals in September 1989. In the center of Rome, they took me from one historical landmark to another on foot without consulting a map. Like other interviewees have told me, they have a map of the city in their heads. They can close their eyes and walk themselves through the historic center.

The most astounding sight for me was the Fontana di Trevi. I was surprised by the crowds in this relatively small space, but the fountain with its blue water and white baroque sculptures backlit in the warm July night were breathtaking. The anticipation of seeing a

place I had heard about my entire American life heightened my encounter with it. It always

carried a magical ring to it, its name always uttered with rapture. Whenever she wore a pair

of beautiful maroon-colored, leather open-toed shoes, my mom always mentioned that she

had bought them at a shoe store at Fontana di Trevi. We hoped to continue the tradition

and buy a wearable souvenir, but, alas, the store had already closed for the evening.

On the next day, at my request and also guided by memory, my parents took me to

Viale Regina Margherita, 83, the headquarters of the Joint and HIAS offices in Italy. The

beautiful, pastel-colored building in a commercial part of Rome stood tall and elegant,

guarded by a locked, black wrought-iron gate. We followed someone inside. We stood in the

rock-strewn courtyard. Here at the gate, my parents told me, for a few weeks papa and

another man also refused refugee status worked as guards. HIAS would benevolently hire

those stuck in Italy, waiting for the approval of their refugee status appeals. I tried to imagine

my father as a guard at the gate, probably joking with the fellow emigrant; imagining my

father—a mechanic who's always worked with his hands, a troubleshooter, a creative

problem-solver—as a security guard was strange. We peeked through the main door, at the

elegant interior with red carpet and a black iron staircase, at the small elevator that I had read

about in JDC documents. In the late 1970s and 1980s, with the constant stream of clients,

emigrants were not allowed to use it to get to the offices on the fourth floor, in order that it

might be of use to other building tenants. I so wished I could go up to see the offices. Here

it all happened—the anxious crowds gathering during their appointed hours, the exchange of

information, the center of the entire transit migrant operation.

Here was the door we used to go to the basement, where we began organizing the

archives, my parents told me. HIAS hired them in September to begin organizing their mass

of accumulated files. They were the first to do so, a point in which they both still take much

pride, working together for the first and only time in their lives. It was one of the happiest periods, one with a romantic, carefree aura about it. They traveled to Rome from Passoscuro every warm autumn morning, their future in the U.S. at this point ensured, savoring an espresso in a nearby café before rather enjoyable work: like real people. Standing in that courtyard, my mom repeated a familiar story. Every week, when the mailman would arrive with the list of those who had received permission to immigrate, they would see it first, before the HIAS staff. My father and she devised a way to read through all the listed names without actually opening the envelopes. We had already received our permission to immigrate to the U.S. as refugees; everyone they we had, except friends of theirs who suffered in Italy for 11 months, becoming increasingly despondent with each passing month. My mom didn't feel right leaving Italy without their future settled. So when one happy morning she spotted their names on the list, she called her friend right away. "Guess what I am holding in my hand!" she yelled over and over into the phone, overjoyed to bear the good news, and thereafter at peace with leaving Italy, with leaving that job, because everyone would be OK.

My mom insisted that we then go eat lunch at a nearby café, where HIAS staff would gather but where she and my father couldn't afford to lunch. I was curious; papa found the excursion silly and unnecessary. It was an unremarkable cafeteria serving local, working clientele. We sat and ate an unremarkable lunch until the midday crowd cleared out. My mom exuded satisfaction, purposefully ignoring papa's annoyed expression, though the experience did not bring her the satisfaction—the elation—that our next day in Passoscuro did.

The trip to Passoscuro was filled with great anticipation. I wondered what I might recognize from those days of being a five-year-old, from the beloved family photographs I

knew well, from the stories I had long assimilated. I wondered whether I might encounter a (Proustian) madeleine cookie. I hoped Passoscuro would not disappoint; I hoped it might still be as charming as we all remembered it to be. On the bus ride over, I felt my parents' anticipation, too. I listened to their ongoing commentary about what used to be: this was the bus route that people would take; here was the supermarket at which everyone shopped; these are the familiar towns we are passing; and so on.

The premise of my research was that the places of transit migration held great personal meaning for those who passed through. As I spoke to more people during my research I learned of the variety of experiences in Italy and the various relationships with that past, including nonchalance. My family's was always very clear: affection. Here we were, and here was all that meaning of the past, palpable. It was too much to absorb.

Figure 6 Photographs Taken by a Soviet Jewish Immigrant on a Return Visit to Passoscuro. Clockwise from top left: the bus to Passoscuro from Rome, the photo's caption reads "right by the old Sporting!" (the infamous hostel for transit migrants); a typical apartment building, the photo's caption reads "the produce store used to be here, the owner of which drove a red Ford and would dissuade us from America (*molto lavoro!*)" (lots of work!); one of the places where Soviet Jews would sell their wares (*raskladka*); the place where Soviet Jews would gather for announcements regarding refugee decisions (*skhodka*). Photos taken on December 15, 2007 and uploaded to Flickr. © Mike Yamnitsky. https://www.flickr.com/photos/yamnitsky/sets/72157603463537218.

Off the bus, steps away from the beach on a sunny July early afternoon, we were filled with a shared, buoyant excitement. Here is the main street, Via di Villacidro; and here is the toy store; and here is the café at which drinking an espresso was the height of desire; and there stands our first tiny apartment that 12 of us shared, two recently met emigrants from Odessa sleeping on the floor of the kitchen under the open sky; here stands the shack of an apartment in which my parents' friends, the Bekkers, lived, leaving the day after our arrival to Passoscuro. Unbeknownst to my dad, my mom had packed a gift for our former landlords, who besides shelter and warm relations also gifted us with toys and used warm clothing as the autumn months set in. She was unable to express her gratitude to them; they were not home. The pastel-colored, two- and three-story houses felt deeply familiar to me in a way that surpassed any knowledge of photographs. I couldn't take my eyes of the small toy store with a plethora of displayed beach toys. It tugged at me; those toys, aren't they the same as those I yearned for and admired as a five-year-old? We marveled, my parents narrated, I imagined.

The first thing we did, again at the insistence of my mother, was to enjoy a few espressos and an ice cream at that local, rather ordinary café that nevertheless held the charm of a working-class resort town. This time my dad didn't object. He enjoyed. My mom chatted with the bar owner in her sparse but confident Italian. We used to live here, she said. Twenty years ago, I added. We weren't just any old tourists, was the message. We loved this place. The barman seemed pleased. We were at ease, happy, enjoying the quality of our refreshments. This was Italy after all: it was all delicious.

We paid about €16 for a few lounge chairs on the clean, peach-colored sand and languored in the sun, swam in the calm, warm, sheltering waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. At mid-day I ran over to a nearby pizzeria and brought back a box of various pizza squares and

a few beers. Even though it was my parents' second visit back, our joy of being there is inexpressible. It was our little place.

We tore ourselves from the beach as the evening approached so that my parents would show me our second apartment, the one in our pictures, the one in which we lived contentedly as a family of ten for four months. I was disappointed that the house was unfamiliar to me, that the front lawn was unkempt: This was the place that meant most to me in terms of the meaning the period in Italy carried. The villa's failure to signify momentarily disconnected me from the aura of the past meant to be in this place. My parents were disappointed to learn that the landlady of that house had passed away.

A friend of my parents' happened to video-record my mom telling the story of our visit a few days later on the train up to Venetia. The couple from San Diego, who had also been in Italy in 1989, listened on but couldn't understand our enthusiasm. Alone, with no help from parents for their two kids, they suffered in Italy. Neither cared to ever revisit those places and experiences that they had known then. Undeterred by their difference of opinion, her face excited and animated, her voice full of passion and enchantment, mama stood among her seated friends and told them: "We had ice cream, which Inya [diminutive of 'Inga'] loved. Everything was done properly, as people should do." My mom here used the phrase "по-челевечески," which carries a connotation of something that is morally correct, proper. She went on, "The pizza, piiiiiizza!—which before we couldn't allow ourselves. Well, I had several must-dos on the plan for the day. First, to sit at the café near which we lived; drink coffee; definitely eat ice cream in Passoscuro; visit the beach, that's holy; definitely eat pizza in that pizzeria. All those stores—like the toy stores, which are probably 21 years old, because we remember all those toys—even Inya remembers—are hanging there, all the same. And then!" The recording ends there, with my mom's voice full of mystery and

pleasure; I'm sure she was about to describe the dinner we had as the sun set, in a pleasant restaurant overlooking a private section of the beach.

While we ate there, my parents reminisced, recounting the shared pleasures and pains of Italy in 1989, and we existentially delighted in eating at the simple, delicious restaurant. On this trip my parents dined at restaurants in Italy for the first time. Even on their last trip in 1999, they ate mostly in tourist locales, economizing. Twenty-one years earlier in 1989, this restaurant was beyond the realm of possibility for them. We had not set out to prove anything to ourselves or others by coming to Passoscuro. We nonetheless felt a sense of difference, of achievement because of the embodied traces of the past. I felt this through and for and with my parents, as children do (Kidron 2009; Hirsch 1997); if I had come alone, I would not have known that in 1989, my parents had been on the other side of the fence then, looking on and hoping for such a future. That even then, the future was palpable, as was the hope for a different kind of return. This knowledge infused the moment and made the meal, and every moment of the visit, enduringly meaningful.

Figure 7 The Restaurant's Business Card, which has remained in my laptop bag since that meal. Photograph by author.

THE FUTURE IN THE PAST – PROMISES

During one of my first interviews half a year after my trip to Italy in 2010, Mikhail Dubinsky described his emigration to me at his New Jersey law office. He and I registered

only mild surprise when we realized that he had returned to Italy the summer after my parents first had. This is a common practice, after all (see photos from Figure 6, above, as an indication).

One of the few who chose to speak to me in English, he extemporaneously narrated his emigration as if reading a well-composed account. Perhaps some of his stories did in fact emanate from a stable repertoire (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 2007:7), but Mr. Dubinsky asserted that he rarely, nowadays, speaks or has reason to think about his emigration. It was clear, and he himself acknowledged, that many of the described memories occurred to him as he was telling them. More likely it is his natural and nurtured skill of literary composition, for until 1978 he had been a philologist and professional translator in Moscow. He stretched his decision to emigrate over a couple of years, until a chance meeting with an American Jewish scholar manning a Jewish book exhibit at the inaugural Moscow International Book Fair in 1977. This encounter pushed him into considering a life of political and social freedom in the U.S. (including a freedom from anti-Jewish discrimination). The two published their accounts of their meeting in a 1981 volume about Soviet Jewish emigration. This American professor, who visited him in Italy a year later, described Mr. Dubinsky's three months in transit migration thus: "his wife expressed deep anxiety about his allocation of time and apparent lack of focus. He showed up at home erratically, frequently lost his books, or other valuable documents, and often had to be two places at once" (Drew 1981:129).

Besides his harried psychological and emotional state, there was a clear perception of an undesirable status. Mr. Dubinksy said to me of Italy,

> We did feel second-[rate]. We didn't have enough money to enjoy this. We had limited amounts of money. We had to eat, travel cheaply. Everything was on the cheap, and we all knew that. And all of us, and we were surrounded by all this beauty, sort of made a pledge: someday we will come here on a different level.

Everyone I know made that kind of pledge to himself—to come back to Italy from the United States on a different level, in a different capacity. Not as an immigrant being supported by charity organizations. And almost everybody did. Including myself in 2000. Which was 22 years later. That's it. [February 22, 2011]

It was an elegant and powerful way to conclude his self-constructed, uninterrupted, two-hour narrative that began with the series of events that allowed him to muster the courage to emigrate in 1978. This desire to return as a different kind of person, to have a different kind of experience in this historically, culturally, and aesthetically rich country conveys an experience of lack and a self-conception as a more deserving individual at the time of transit migration. With the present bewildering and temporary, the near future uncertain (that is why every penny needed to be saved), a promise to return under different circumstances signals that some kind of distant, hoped-for future was part of their experience of transit migration.

As Mr. Dubinsky said at our next meeting, "You see, I did not see myself as a refugee, per se. We never called ourselves refugees. We referred to ourselves as immigrants. And we still do…. So when you say 'refugee', I don't see myself in those terms" (March 2, 2011). They do not leave themselves there, as stateless and in-transit refugees, in a finished experience. During transit migration, they already conceived of themselves in their next step as immigrants, and the conclusion of the emigration narrative—and, as I argue, of the experience—is a sense of achievement in returning "on a different level." A return visit resolves the rupture with one's past self as a "normal," dignified person that occurred during transit. It completes the arc of one's story of immigration.

Like Mikhail Dubinsky, Maxim Shrayer concludes his honest and self-reflexive memoir of transit migration with a similar promise for future return. At the Italian island of Capri with his mom on an émigré-led tour group, the two sit at a café watching an American

tourist couple, who is everything they are not: comfortable, unconcerned, self-satisfied, fat,

blissfully consuming cokes, large sandwiches, dessert. Shrayer recounts his words:

> "Mama, let's make a promise, a [pact]. Let's come back here one day—you, papa,
> who knows? Maybe I'll fall in love and get married. And the four of us will sit in this
> cafe and look at Sorrento across the bay, and order club sandwiches, many club
> sandwiches, and of course champagne. And we'll talk about our new life in America
> and remember our old days in Russia. What do you think?"
> "I think it would be wonderful," she answers. [2007:225]

Maxim Shrayer has been back to Italy, but not to Rome or Ladispoli, where he lived

for three months in 1987. He writes: "Many times I've thought of…visiting Ladispoli, but

something has kept me away from it, some force that dislikes closures and completed life

journeys" (2007:78). He continues elsewhere in the book:

> Although I've twice been back to Italy, I haven't gone back to Rome. At times I
> wonder if this has anything to do with the bitterness that taints those otherwise
> thrilling memories of Rome—the bitterness I feel when I think of the tension
> between my parents. Or, perhaps I haven't revisited Rome and Ladispoli out of a
> fear of having to check and revise my memories. I know I'll visit Rome one day, but
> going back also means…stocking up for another week of waiting for America. [98]

Shrayer's reflections make a number of relevant points. For one, Shrayer indicates

that even though he has spent years delving into his memories, recuperating thorough and

extensive detail for his book, remembering and retelling are not the same as revisiting those

places. This indicates that the connections between past experience and revisiting are linked

not only externally—discursively—in narrative. The two events are linked through each

individual's ongoing experiences, through traces of the experienced past in the present.

Secondly, one never knows what one will find there, what one will remember, recognize, or

actually experience when one revisits. Shrayer is nervous to take the risk of re-experiencing

because he is afraid of both re-experiencing what he does remember and learning that what

he experienced was not as he remembers. Third, like Dubinsky, he ends his story of

emigration and transit migration with a promise to return, signaling that it is the proper

conclusion to that journey. The reader, knowing that Shrayer is now an established academic (Professor of Russian and English in Boston College's Department of Slavic and Eastern Languages and Literatures), surmises that Shrayer can indeed make this trip and inhabit the sense of ease and entitlement of the American tourists he observes. But unlike Mikhail Dubinsky, Shrayer has not made the return that would bookend his story, that would, in Shrayer's words, bring him closure and make a completed life journey. This can only be done through one's body in that place, fully re-experiencing it in one's present-day capacities and sense of self. But this step requires a certain amount of courage. The experience will not be the same; if the return act is to be felicitous, it will be different in the way imagined long ago while in transit.

Sergei Liebermann also described a promise made in the past, only for him it was a promise *not* to return to Italy. Transit migration had been extremely taxing on him and his family. As ten-year refuseniks in Kiev, enduring social marginalization and a host of difficulties, the Liebermanns expected to quickly be granted refugee status. Their qualifications as persecuted Jews seemed self-evident. But in Italy his family of four unimaginably and inexplicably became double refuseniks, remaining in Italy for six months without having brought goods to sell or clothes for winter. Feeding and clothing their seven-year-old and four-month-old sons proved particularly straining.

"It was tight," Sergei told me, referring to his family's material circumstances in transit migration. "It was hard. There was a lot of hunger. It was tight. But it's OK. We survived it. The worst part was that we didn't know where we were. In the middle of Europe, stuck without documents, not there legally, in that damned Italy." Soviet Jews were in fact in Italy legally, though their individual travel papers did not bare the country's entry stamp. The misperception reflects the feeling of belonging to an unwanted underclass. "I

hated it. I promised myself I would never return. Because of the hunger. The baby food cost so much–formula was $3, a pacifier $10! Clothes for kids are so expensive, always, to this day. Very, very expensive. It was a sizable problem. But, we made do." He made do by diving for mussels at the Ladispoli beach and washing dishes in a local restaurant (for $10 pay per night), pinching fruits and vegetables from farms on his bicycle ride home at night.

Though time has not softened the harshness of his experiences, they have allowed him to "forgive" Italy for housing them. I surmise that this is at least partially because of the Soviet Jewish American immigrant ethic of personal responsibility—it is one's responsibility to move oneself from shame to dignity, to turn negative memories into positive ones, and to make oneself successful. Despite his initial avowal never to return, I later asked him whether he had gone back to Italy. "I decided at one time that I would never return to Italy," he said. "Now I would go. I will sometime." It has turned out, though, that other, unexplored destinations took priority for his limited vacation time. "To be honest, I think in Italy it will end up being just a trip to walk around and see where we once lived. Then to walk around Rome again. I could walk around Rome endlessly. I really liked it, and still do. I would walk around endlessly. As if time did not exist." Even as he suffered, Rome enchanted and offered reprieve.

"But would you go to Ladispoli?" I ask.

"Definitely. Definitely. Definitely," he said.

> People who have been say it's a different town now, that it's changed a lot. I would definitely go. I'm very interested where I walked with my son in the stroller, where we sat on the beach, where I worked, where I caught *cozze* (mussels). It would definitely be interesting. Although when we left I cursed Italy for the rest of my life. And at the same time, there are many positive things that came from Italy. [My friend Alla Gorodetskaya] is completely right, completely. In Italy we learned many things necessary for life here. I learned that to feed my family, I would do anything. I didn't have to get to that conclusion here [in the U.S.]. If the kids need to eat, then you have to do what you need to do. [January 25, 2012]

In his first years in the U.S., he worked at several pizzerias and cafés, cleaning, working two full-time jobs without days off. While his wife stayed home to care of their youngest son, he would leave home at 6:00 a.m. and return at midnight. They refused to accept welfare assistance. She eventually went to school and became an optician. He fell into work in real estate management by first working as a mechanic (a unionized position) and than as a superintendent's helper in the building where he lived. He continues to work for the same company going on two decades.

Transit migration taught him hard lessons of survival, similar to Grigoriy Kushnir, who came out of Italy with a "war-like mentality," ready to do any kind of work to ensure his family's well being. Sergei Liebermann's anguish led him to reject a return to Italy in his future, ridding his future of this place and time. His wish to return springs from a desire to revisit what was always pleasant (Rome) and a newfound curiosity over the distant past. Not driven by an expressed redemption of his hardships, he nevertheless wants to have a pleasant experience of those same places.

Even if Liebermann, Shrayer, or Dubinsky didn't actually make these promises while in transit, even if they are rhetorical flourishes to convey a feeling to his audience, each of them still inserts the expected, hoped for future into the remembered past. In this way actual and desired return visits become part of one's narrative of emigration, and may in fact have always been a part of it. For Dubinsky, the return trip to the site of his first steps as an immigrant offers narrative closure to the promises made on his migration journey, discursively redeeming a difficult and unsettling experience and subject-position. But the changes described to me are more profound than mere words, rhetorical tools to create a narrative of accomplishment. They are embodied in a way to create one's ongoing life story,

so that one's life story will be different in the future based on meaningful activities in the present.

THE EXPERIENCE OF RETURN VISITS: THE DESIRE TO EXPERIENCE PLACE DIFFERENTLY

To Return as a Tourist

To explain Jewish Cubans' desire to emigrate, Ruth Behar (2007) tells a popular Cuban joke of the 1990s: ask a child what she wants to be when she grows up, and she'll answer, "a tourist" (237). Being in place in the "carefree role of a tourist" means that one may partake in the aesthetic and social pleasures of a place without having to endure the difficulties of living there (Behar 2007:237). One may enjoy with adequate means and leave.

Many Soviet Jewish Americans I've spoken to voiced the desire to and pleasure in returning as a tourist. In these anecdotes, my interlocutors seek in return visits a different experience of the same place. The imagined and actual return visits entail a different state of being, a different material experience, an ownership (a right to be there, feeling at ease, not dependent on charity organizations), and control over one's activities and length of stay: a tourist's experience of place.

Take my exchange with Nona Fridman, a co-worker of Ella Bobrovsy's, in the courtyard of the city agency where they work. Ella introduced us at our pre-arranged meeting by announcing that we had both spent our time in Italy in 1989 in Passoscuro. We both excitedly began to discuss the town we adored, which I had visited the year before and she longed to see again. After we had spoken for a while, after she had told me her emigration trajectory, she re-emphasized her desire to visit.

"I dream of returning there," she said.

This time in a good, calm state, without all of that nerve-wracking stress. We had a meeting everyday, the *skhodka* [roll-calls where decisions were announced]. Every night, we worried. Because everyone worried about being denied refugee status. But we ended up leaving Italy first, and my parents had to stay. We were afraid that because my dad had been a member of the Communist Party, they would keep them there [in Italy]; my parents left one month later, in August. I would really like to go, with everything calm. This year I wanted to go; but I was busy with work, the tour group was full, and I went to Spain instead. It was nice.

She questioned me on how I had gotten to Passoscuro, how I had found out how to get there, how long the bus ride was, whether I had gone to nearby Ladispoli. I echoed my mom in telling her about the most relatable and tangible aspects of our delight in being there: beach, the pizza, the ice cream.

"Oy, how interesting!" Nona cooed, while I gushed. "Woowwww, how great." She asked me more about the beach. She told me that they had lived above that very toy store that looked so familiar to me; I excitedly told her it was still there (November 11, 2011). Our conversation was buoyant and enthusiastic, though with evident regret on her part for not having been able to make the return visit yet.

I recorded several other similar outlooks. Klara Gatovsky said about her husband Dmitriy on their trip to Venice during transit migration, "He ruined Venice for me. It wasn't enjoyable because he went around trying to sell cigars." She laughed, "But still it was interesting, to see it. It was a dream, but we have to return, because we haven't seen that part of Italy in a normal state, as real tourists" (July 8, 2012).

Asking Alla Gorodetskaya about the Italian town of Torvaianica where she lived in 1989-90, I asked her about the beach. "The beach was very nice. I still want to go back there in the summer, to that beach, and say 'Hello, Mr. Cilori!'" Alla's recollections of her landlord, Signor Cilori, remain fond, and she remains grateful to him for his kindness. "I want to go there as a tourist. Back in the Soviet Union, I had relatives in Baku [Azerbaijan]. I was there a few times. I told them, I want to come here as an Intourist [an official Soviet

tourist], to see the city differently. To live in a hotel where there's always hot water, not just

for two hours a day," she laughed. "So in that way I want to go to Italy as a tourist. Because

I don't consider that I really <u>was</u> in Italy" (January 9, 2012).

It follows that a central desire of return is to do things that one wanted and never

got to do—an elaboration. This indicates how important those early desires in transit were,

and how immigrants are able to access and reconnect to that earlier time.

Diana Kagan emigrated from the Russian SSR in 1980, at the age of 12. She is a

discerning, confident, energetic, and woman with a wide range of tastes and interests. She

told me:

> I remember Vienna vividly. I took my kids there in 2007. I could still walk those streets, find different places. I still remember a store that just sold yogurt—stupid things like that. But it was mesmerizing. We would have family outings to the supermarket, to see what things were like... When I was there as a kid, I used to walk by all these people eating at cafés. I wasn't jealous–I mean, I was a little. But I was so happy to be there. I didn't look at those people with jealousy, but I was fixated on that: people sitting, eating at café. That's the first thing we did when we got there. I dragged my kids to a café—"We're gonna eat these pastries, and you're gonna like it!" [interview conducted in English, August 1, 2012]

Diana not only wanted to self-consciously enjoy the treats she admired but could not partake

of in adolescence, but insisted that her two sons, similar in age to Diana in 1980, do so, too.

The accomplished violinist Mark Peskanov, who beautifully reflected on what his

transit migration at the age of 16 meant to him during our interview, was not able to

compare his return trip to his first time there. Nevertheless, he framed his recent visit to

Italy not in in terms of being older, but in terms of being a different kind of person. In

English, he told me, "I spent some time in Rome. It was a totally different experience this

time. I didn't even go to very many places last time [during our transit migration], I didn't

even know where I was frankly."

"Was anything familiar?" I asked.

"Maybe," he reflected, "almost nothing."

"What was different this time?" I asked.

"I was an American," he answered decisively. "When I was there I was American," he smiled and then laughed heartily, "I love being American. I was an American being in Italy. I was looking for a few really nice restaurants—really, really good ones. I went to one big church, and just played [my violin] there. It was empty" (interview conducted in English, August 3, 2012). This wasn't so hard to imagine; Mark is rarely separated from his violin.

The meaning of return visits is deeply personal and invested in the confirmation of one's present identity as the fruition of one's expected life journey. That is not the rule. (I think of my placid, matter-of-fact, unsentimental aunt Mila. She reveled in recounting her adventures as a 24-year-old in transit migration in 1979. When I asked her about her numerous return visits decades later, she answered, "The country looked completely different. But I don't know, am I supposed to have some lingering feelings towards Italy from back then? I like Italy" [November 12, 2011]). But the widespread anecdotes of re-experiencing in a different state—that of a "real person," a "tourist," a "secure adult," able to make up for the perceived lack of the past—deserves attention. There were no dire privations among Soviet Jewish emigrants. No one starved, thanks to the care and support of voluntary organizations funded by American Jews and the U.S. government. But the hardships of anxiety, extremely limited means (and real hunger for some, like Liebermann and Elena Golub's husband), and the self-denial of enjoyment created a distinct category of experience against which return visits are judged and experienced.

The value of return trips is backed by no directive, no overarching ideology, no political incentive. Nona loses none of my estimation for not having returned; Klara, Dmitriy, Nona, and Alla express no shame in not having fulfilled their desire. Yet there is

something additional at play besides a validation of status in relation to others or a bonding over shared practices. In returning, one may validate one's past desires and impressions as well as one's present means to experience them. There is a deep self-validation that is not, of course, unconnected to belonging in the Russian-American community[3] and its valuation of socioeconomic success.

Return as an Experience of Success

Success is an important self-conception among Soviet Jewish Americans (Orleck 1999:150; Gold 1995:115; Markowitz 1993:237). It is a common way that they distinguish their immigration group from other U.S. immigrant ethnic groups (for example, asserting that a high percentage [overwhelming majority] of their emigration became successful, unlike other groups); it is a common way that they evaluate their own group (for example, asserting that their particular emigration "wave" [from the seventies, eighties, or nineties] is the most successful); and it is a common way they evaluate each other, as individuals. One of the brightest illustrations of this for me was when, in the summer of 2010, in response to a query from one of my parents' friends regarding the central argument of my dissertation, I asked her what she thought it should be. She immediately answered that I should find a way to measure levels of success of our emigration cohort by first defining "success" and then measuring it across several variables and four immigrant groups: those who immigrated to Israel, those who went with us through Austria and Italy, those who immigrated directly to the U.S., and those who remained in Italy (of whom there are actually very, very few). This is what she said *she* would want to know. With a smile, I told her that I had a feeling this was what she was going to propose; she expressed surprised, indicating that she was not aware of

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[3] Consider the excited nature of my conversation with Nona Friedman; we connected on both having lived in Passoscuro and on her interest in my return visit.

what I had long perceived as an important value for Soviet Jewish Americans of her generation.

In her proposed study, as well as in many references I heard to immigrant "success" (among Soviet Jews and other immigrant groups, e.g. Ortner 2003), *success* refers to financial and material accumulation. Fran Markowitz (1993) wrote about Soviet Jewish immigrants in New York City in the late eighties and early nineties that, for them, "in America there is only one indicator of status, prestige, and success: money" (71); this "material success has deep meaning" because "for them, the mastery of their new lives is the ultimate expression of their intellect" (239).[4] Markowitz perceptively notes that it is not the money itself but the values it represents, like the intellect necessary to accrue it, which gives it prestige. Similarly, the following reflections relay the experience of return trips as expressions of socioeconomic success, but one that emphasizes becoming a respectable person in society—in contrast to how they were perceived and how they felt during transit.

Ina Rubinstein, an intelligent and self-assured 52-year-old, emigrated from Leningrad in 1979 at the age of 20. I visited her in August 2012 at her workplace, the U.S. office of her brother's highly profitable, transnational Moscow-based business. Endowed with the gift of storytelling, she told me what she called "immigrant stories" for hours. When she first mentioned one of her return trips, she remarked, "Every time I end up there, in Italy, especially in Italy, I have the feeling of achievement." The word she pronounced was "*achievementa*," the English noun accorded Russian grammar. For her, it seems that *achievement*—in its English definition and its connotation of success obtained after the considerable input of effort, skill, and dogged persistence—captured the sentiment she wished to express. She continued, "You achieved something. That's why when—people who

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[4] It can also be focused or projected onto the educational and career success of their children (Gold 1995:40; Markowitz 1994; Castex 1992).

came after us," she stumbled over how to express her thought. "I think we are achievers. This immigration of '79 is an immigration of achievers. All my friends are friends who met each other here, then [in Brooklyn in 1979]; we are like family. We went through so much together. And everyone is settled and adjusted. Everyone became someone," explicitly framing this sense of achievement not strictly in terms of socioeconomic success but rather as an attainment of dignity and worth in society.

When I asked her to elaborate about her return trips at the end of our conversation she told me:

> It wasn't as if it took my breath away (*zameraiyushaya sertsa*) though. It was more like—I don't know if this makes sense—it was more like pride, that I can come back here in my present condition (*sostayaniye*), status (*polozheniye*), with my present feelings/sensations (*oshchushcheniye*), where I don't have to worry how much a cup of coffee costs, where I know I can afford any dinner, where I can walk by a store window and say, "at some point I liked this, and now I don't."...So in different stages one has different sensations—I haven't been back to Vienna, I should go, it would be interesting—but in Italy, I felt, "how good it is that I'm here again, but in a different way." [August 14, 2012]

Ina appreciates that she could return as a person who is not only a tourist but who has also matured, a person with particular tastes, and preferences, and background, not trapped in time as a refugee, not confined to only experience that place as she did then, as a Soviet Jewish emigrant-in-transit.

A proud person, she is not alone in drawing from her life an arc of success, self-driven over many hurdles. Neither is she alone among my interlocutors in situating herself in a group-wide network of successful people (however such a group is defined).[5] This sense of accomplishment, of success, does not refer to socioeconomic mobility alone. As I have indicated, it consists of an embodied sense of a transformed state of being, one that is based

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[5] As noted in chapter 1, Russian-American immigrants tend to situate themselves in different "waves"—that of the earliest Soviet immigrants of the late seventies, then those from the late eighties, and then those who came directly to the U.S. after 1990.

on a sense of dignity and moral worth, vividly and sometimes poignantly encountered in the places of transit migration, in the places of their first experience of becoming immigrants.

Unpleasant Return

Though I have shown that the primary desire for return trips is to have and to feel the things one wasn't able to in transit, one may not always be able to avoid the negative experiences of the past.

Ella Bobrovsky recounted her return trip in 2003, 14 years after her emigration. Smiling, in a sing-songy, happy voice, she told me, Irina Peller, and Tanya Vainer in a common space at their downtown Manhattan office: "[my husband and I] returned [to see the house we lived in] when we went to Italy.... We purposefully hired a taxi to take us to Santa Marinella. We took pictures by the house where we lived.... We found it, and it was pleasant, we were happy to find it. It was so nice to be able to go there, calmly, freely, on our own money."

"Not beholden to anyone," Irena added, echoing Dubinsky's assertion. Ella agreed. Then Irena, who has not been back, asked, "Did the recollections surge over you?"

Ella's voice took on a serious tone as she referred to her visceral re-experiencing. "Well, listen, of course, they surged over me," she said. "It was a very unpleasant time, morally. Very unpleasant" (July 8, 2011).

Klara and Dmitriy Gatovsky told me about their trip to Naples in 2009. On their way back to the airport in Rome, they, like Ella, stopped by Santa Marinella.

"I cried," Klara said with a laugh, though a year ago she had told me that in confidence, in a serious tone. "I stood beneath the windows of where we lived and cried."

"Inga says it's still very pretty," my mom offered.

"We were there in November," Klara said about her visit. "Maybe they don't keep it up as well over the winter; the windows looked dirty. [My daughter] used to stare out of that window. I had a very sad feeling. I'm not sure why" (July 8, 2012).

To stand in front of one's old, if temporary, home and cry—what does that mean? What deep feeling, what experiences welled up within her? Was she sad that what once was is no longer, or that the experience of transit was what it was?

Yuri Melnick, a serious, brilliant, and accomplished man, is clear on these questions. He was curious to visit Passoscuro, even though for him, "the time in Italy was the worst in my life." Our conversation took place in the summer of 2012 in southern Brooklyn, at an insurance office branch of which he is the head. He told me: "I went to Passoscuro a few years ago. It left me with a horrible impression. First, the smallness of this town that seemed the height of beauty. And second the memories surged over me again: My father in that telephone booth [where in front of my eyes he became an old man], and those degrading, humiliating roll-calls [where decisions about leaving were announced], and that complete, total poverty. Maybe it should be that way; we were refugees, after all, but it didn't make things any easier."

I asked him how he ended up there. "Well, everyone is probably curious to see those places where you didn't have money to even buy a hotdog, and to return as future, secure (*obespecheniye*) adults." Exactly, I said. I told him how we had gone to the beach in Passoscuro and bought ourselves pizza. My excitement contrasted sharply against his plaintive tone. "I didn't go to the beach," he went on, "I wasn't there long. Thirty minutes. In order to close the page—close the lid on the drawer, knowing that I will never come here again" (June 27, 2012).

Yuri Melnick admits to having been driven to Italy by a longing to experience the places of transit in a different way, as a successful, independent adult. But in visiting Passoscuro he, unlike my parents and me, did not find it charming. He discovered his past self, which thought the town to be "the height of beauty" in 1989, to have been deceived or naïve. This, along with his other painful recollections, deeply disappointed him. Without staying long enough to appreciate the food, the soft sand, or the shimmering sea, Melnick found no redemptive aspect of his return visit to Passoscuro. His past self was not validated by return.

This fear of encountering one's past self and being unable to redeem that person may explain why some people refuse to return. Svetlana Boym (2014) writes about her recent attempts to locate the refugee camp in which she stayed while in Vienna in 1981:

> I looked up a few of my fellow dropouts, whom I didn't know at the time but who subsequently became my friends. None of them was particularly interested in finding the location of the camp. The idea of the "camp reunion" left them cold. They approached the conversation with a healthy dose of skepticism.
>
> Why revisit the camp now? *We were very tough then because we knew how to forget; if we start remembering now we could risk our immigrant resilience. Obsession with the past might shortchange our future.* "Is there is a change in your life now that makes you look back at that first big break?" one friend asked. [3, emphasis added]

As indicated throughout this dissertation, refusing to dwell in the losses of the past was one of principal strategies through which emigrants dealt with the fact of their permanent exit from the Soviet Union. Boym does not expand on what aspects of their pasts they wish to forget. But this point of view reveals the courage and self-confidence one must have to face the risks of backward-glances. What these immigrants do not consider, but what Boym does indeed discover upon return, is that in re-experiencing one does not lose oneself in the past. Even negative episodes of return, like Melnick's, contribute to one's self-experience by confronting the painfully degrading experiences and resolving to leave them in the past, decidedly separate but not disconnected from who one has since become.

The staging of acts that demonstrate success (in this case, return visits) and the translation of such acts into discursive tools in memory-narratives serve to frame the past in a particular way: the past as a stepping-stone into the present. The present affords the resolution of a desired way-of-being, a desire crystallized during the period of uncertainty of transit migration. In return visits, one experiences their former *places* of living in a new way, in one's changed circumstances. But the re-experiencing of one's former *self* in those places, means that return has the potential to upend the chronological, almost teleological sequence of their success, letting into one's secure world the overwhelming loss, unexpected change, and persistent anxiety about the future that is endemic, no matter how hidden, to their lives as immigrants, even today.

Whether expected or not, pleasant or not, in choosing to confront the past through return—or by refusing to return, as many do—, one creates the experiences of one's ongoing life-story of immigration. The commitment to revisiting indicates the level of embodied intensity of transit migration for my interviewees, their extant connections to their past selves as young emigrants, and the personal and social investment in validating one's transformations in status and sense of being. This analysis accentuates that the significance of return visits is its potential to elaborate the original experience in a way that is connected to the past through the self-experience of dignity over time. It can redeem both the past and what has been lost in the present course of life. It is a return to the same place but with a difference, because a distant future as a secure, successful adult was always present, always hoped for before emigration and while in transit.

A RELATION TO THE PAST THAT IS NOT JUST NOSTALGIA

Because of this dynamic temporal interaction, return trips cannot be read or written off as simply nostalgia. In this final section, I'd like to briefly counter a general bias in academic literature of attributing positive feelings or curiosity about one's past to nostalgia. I will show that, though occasional attitudes that can be described as nostalgic do exist towards the period of transit migration, return trips point to a different type of relationship between embodiment and temporality.

The force of nostalgia as a descriptive concept is the way that it captures a particular relationship to the past: both memory and an emotional arc. Svetlana Boym (2001) notably refines the concept of nostalgia into two types, reflective and restorative, expanding the traditional idea of nostalgia as pointless longing. She defines the traditional, destructive longing for an irrecoverable past as "restorative nostalgia." Reflective nostalgia, which she finds among Soviet immigrants like herself, on the other hand, is realistic and can coexist with the practical. It "does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is 'enamored of distance, not of the referent itself'" (50). Reflective nostalgics accept that home, or the past, is in ruins or has changed to the point of unrecognizability. It is "[t]his defamiliarization and sense of distance [that] drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future" (50). In this light, Boym argues, nostalgia can exist as a form of memory, as a re-experiencing of emotional pasts that is not necessarily detrimental. But, unlike return visits, this re-experiencing does not connect one to the envisioned future in the past in a way that becomes part of one's "life story."

There are indisputable moments of wistful nostalgia towards transit migration—consider the words of another then-teenager in-transit, Misha Galperin:

> As I think many people in that wave [of the late 1970s], we didn't feel nostalgia for Russia so much; we felt nostalgia for Italy. Because…you know, it is really an interesting experience for all of us. It was pretty dreamy to come out of the Soviet Union, which at that point was still behind the Iron Curtain, into the sunny Italy,

with all its culture and life and food and color and capitalism and art, all those things. So…I describe my being in Italy on the first trip as the…hundred happiest days of my life. [interview conducted in English by author for *Stateless*, May 1, 2013]

Misha's description of the experience as "dreamy" and Italy as "sunny," full of "culture and life and food and color and capitalism and art" rings of enchantment. Upon Galperin's next return to Italy in 1989 as a volunteer to help those stranded by refugee status refusals, he found the mood among émigrés to be that of despair; his overall impression of transit migration has now been tempered by that second visit.

Mrs. Fridman, who had marveled at being in Italy after being refused permission to travel outside the USSR in her youth, reflected on transit migration with a more marked mix of wonder and realism. "It was decent in Italy, [after the frightening housing in Vienna]," she said. "We found an apartment in a small town called Passoscuro. We lived there, but it was very expensive; it was difficult. So we would take two buses to Ladispoli, where we could buy things cheaper…for the entire week. And it was so crowded you couldn't even get onto one of those buses! We tried to survive all that…. You remember it all now like a dream. Like a dream!" (November 23, 2011).

Eugene Drob said something similar in his interview for his son's documentary: "Now I – you know, it's like a movie in slow motion [before my eyes] – you begin to remember and think, did we really go through all of that?!" (interview by author for *Stateless*, April 28, 2013). I heard this sense of disbelief in other phrases: "It was crazy, crazy!"; "From today's point of view, it all seems strange, even to me"; "Now I can't imagine how we did all this. How did we do it all?! How did we go through it all?"

Such a sense of wonder and disbelief seems quite an appropriate relation towards a past experience of liminality, as a unique and most irregular time of one's life. These phrases point to immigrants' temporal distance from the circumstances and sense of self in transit

migration, with the exception of when events are so sharp, meaningful, and poignant that they are remembered "as if they happened yesterday." Regardless of the perceived proximity of memories, there is a clear retrospective evaluative stance, as in the remark that transit migration "turned out to be [a] unique" time in their lives, and in the declaration that the experience is better in retrospect; there is no confusion of how transit was experienced and how it seems from today's point of view.

Viktor and Lara Klopnik emphasized this point, calling to mind the themes of waiting and uncertainty explored in chapter 3.

"We thought at that time that it was veryyyy hard," Lara said. "Now! Now it seems like, like a 'Roman Holiday'. But then, you know, when everything is new, [it is very hard]." She returned to the theme again later on in our conversation.

> It was very, very—you know the feeling when you're waiting for something…. Back then it was "Oh, when will it end?!" Because you don't know what will happen in the future; this unpredictability weighed on us very heavily. But now as I think about it, it was the best time of our lives.
> We came in 1990. It was hard to find work. I didn't know, but now I understand that I'll never again have time [off] like we had in Italy.

And the theme emerged a third time in our conversation in their townhouse in northern Sheepshead Bay—and it should be noted that at the time of the interview, Lara faced great strain and precariousness at her job as a wig maker.

"If not for the uncertainty–they told us, you will remember Italy as a resort, as a vacation. As the easiest—"

"Who would tell you?" I asked.

"Everyone," Lara answered. "My sister [who was already in the United States]. 'Relax', she would say, 'don't think of anything. Relax and don't think about anything'. But how can you not?!"

"'You'll never have such a time again in your life'," Viktor remembered. "That's how it happened. If not for that stress of waiting, waiting, waiting—"

"The uncertainty," Lara said.

"The uncertainty," Viktor repeated. "When – or rather <u>will</u> you get to America, or not?" (July 10, 2012).

The Klopniks' reflections indicate that, as chapter 3 illustrated, the experiential nature of transit migration reveals the multivalent nature of uncertainty—endless possibilities, both wonderful and terrible. They make a concerted effort to situate and relativize the experiences of emigration and transit migration, but are ultimately unable to reconcile the opportunity to do nothing and enjoy with the reality of their experiences in transit. Immigrants' self-conscious evaluations of experiences and memories emerge from their general outlook on life, that is, their optimism, realism, or pessimism in the face of hardship and the fact that "there's no road back." They are realistic about the past, not deceived by it or yearning to re-live it.

"From Italy, memories have remained two-sided, the good and the bad," said Sergei Liebermann. He continued:

> Which stands out more? I don't know. There are both kinds. All memories from emigration are in general bad, because life was hard. All memories from emigration are in general good, because–remember I told you about me and my brother going drinking after getting notice of our refugee status denial? You know why we went drinking? Because to hell with that! At least we're not there. The one thing that made me happy and calmed me during emigration was that we're not there anymore, in the Soviet Union, and thank god. How will it be in the future? It will be better, because it could not possibly be worse. [January 25, 2012]

The period of transit is a period of both high and lows—their first unpleasant and exhilarating steps in their new lives as immigrants. Liebermann's double-sided outlook and the relativizing of the hardships of transit migration stem from the hard lessons and realism learned in the USSR. The enforced permanence of their emigration, its incivility, the

difficulties of transit that reinforced their hatred of the regime (for putting them in these circumstances), prevents him from idealizing any part of his past.

These aggregated narratives and reflections do indeed suggest the analytic relevance of Boym's reflective form of nostalgia. Indeed, her concept of reflective nostalgia hinges on the outlooks of post-Soviet subjects. Boym is herself a Soviet Jew who emigrated alone (through Austria and Italy) at the age of 19 in 1981. There is no doubt that her more tempered understanding of nostalgia stems from her and her family's own experiences: "In my family we are used to leaving longing behind together with personal belongings and to treating nostalgic tales with a grain of salt," she writes (2014:1).

More than just realism toward past, the narratives about return trips demonstrate a complex temporal interaction that *reflective nostalgia* does not capture. Because immigrants' desire to return was born during transit, it was always future-oriented in a way that nostalgia (which begins with the present and stretches toward the past, and sometimes the future [Biehl and Locke 2010; Boym 2001]) is not. Transit migration for Sergei Liebermann was itself influenced by his past life in the Soviet Union: the unpleasant and difficult aspects of transit were tempered by the far worse years as a refusenik in Kiev. From today's point of view, the dreadful and demeaning aspects of life in Italy have been softened by his good life in the U.S. Even though he is now curious about this time and experience that did indeed turn out to be unique, if he returns, it will be in the capacity that he once envisioned for himself.

To revisit is to encounter those places—and its traces that one may re-experience—on one's own terms. It is to willfully confront and, in doing so, potentially elaborate—in the sense of explain to oneself and to broaden the scope of—the original experience of transit.

Of course, once return is experienced, it can be re-embedded into the story of immigration

one is constantly living and writing.

CONCLUSION: THE CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF THE PAST

In transit migration—this period in-between leaving and arriving, of reckoning one's losses, realizing one's changing circumstances, and hoping for a redemptive future, a true liminoid phase (Turner 1978)—a person undergoes experiences that alter who one is becoming, not in a determinative fashion, but as part of the ongoing trajectory of immigration that one will continue to experience and to fashion. This dissertation shows transit migration to have been *an* experience (Turner 1986) for Soviet Jewish Americans, one that left embodied traces and remains as both discursive and experiential material to understand and feel oneself as an immigrant through time. It is not sedimented into the past, severed from what came before or after, nor funneled into a particular political goal or discourse. It remains multivalent, of both moving and waiting, of shock and enchantment, of dread and hope. It lives on as experience, imbuing one's perceptions of the world by simultaneously informing oneself of who he or she once was and who he or she has become. Particularly for Soviet Jews, the places of transit migration allow for the confirmation of a dignity that they began to sense but could not fully embody during transit.

This dissertation therefore delineates the dynamic back-and-forth, mutually affecting relationship between lived experience and remembering, which together contribute to the continual making of one's ongoing life story of immigration. It contributes to an anthropology of experience by embracing several modes of knowing and so broadly conceiving what it means to experience. This attention to Soviet emigrants' experiences also shows transit migration to be resonant with a broader set of migrant categories: that of living with an unfixed immigrant legal status, including those migrants seeking asylum (and

therefore already in their intended country of settlement), those living in refugee camps, and those living as undocumented workers.

This dissertation additionally demonstrates that attention to experience in a study of migration can help us to understand how migrants feel *as* migrants. In this closing chapter, I want to emphasize the (albeit changing) and *un*anticipated relevance of this past experience in immigrants' lives. Here I wish to emphasize the obvious: that they can connect to this earlier, long past experience of transit precisely because the experience of being an immigrant is ongoing. Experience lives on in and through the body, its social practices and its modes of knowing, remaining potentially resonant even if not pertinent to everyday life. This is relevant to point out because, though we constantly embody (perceive, feel, interact with, respond to, understand) the world around us, we and our lifeworlds are ever-changing (Desjarlais and Throop 2011), and so the way we embody the world changes through time, making the past potentially ungraspable.

THE PAST AS IT LINGERS

My family, as a group of eight to 13 people, depending on the year, used to get together every May to remember and celebrate the anniversary of our leaving Odessa.[1] It was a celebration of togetherness, of change, of remembering the past. Ever year my mother even brought a saved package of Italian pea soup to set at the center of the table as a tangible reminder of the endless meals of pea soup we endured in Italy (and then refused to eat for years in the U.S.). The night would inevitably end with laughter over familiar, favorite stories, occasionally some new ones, about the mistakes, trials, and thrills of being in Austria

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[1] A board member of JDC pointed out to me in 2011 that there is a Jewish tradition of doing this called a "Personal Purim." None of my interviewees mentioned this, but it would be fascinating to explore the origins of the Personal Purim and its connections to this type of practice among Soviet Jews.

and Italy in 1989. We delighted in re-imagining what now seemed incredibly implausible and unrepeatable, because there is ultimately a happy ending: it ended; we are here. This alleviates the sting of the past. As the Drobs reflected during their interview with me and their son for his documentary, the "tragicomedies" of the past turn into today's "comedies" (April 28, 2013). Maxim Shrayer similarly writes, "My parents and I sometimes laugh about [the events of Austria and Italy] the way one laughs about surviving a shipwreck in trepid, alien waters" (2007:52)—in other words, with relief that we came out intact.

I spoke with other families who also used to commemorate their departure from the USSR or arrival in the U.S. annually. Some never wished to commemorate a time that broke apart marriages and people. For some, that celebration has faded, simply, as life moves on and all things change. A series of incidental circumstances and an untimely death erased that practice for my family. Twenty to 40 years after the fact, it is the rare case when the experiences of transit migration continue to matter prominently. More often, it matters in passing, or passively, as a trace. Some experiences, as touched on in chapter 4, may be unrepeatable. Here I briefly give examples of each of these relations to the past as conveyed in stories told, objects still in possession, social practices and interactions, and sensory modes of attention.

Noticeably

I introduced Leonid and Lyuba Zelman in chapter 3 as a couple for whom the significance of transit migration endures conspicuously. They have returned to Italy five times since 1990, including several visits with the Italian family with whom they have, impressively, kept in touch through all of these years, exchanging gifts, photos, and news of each other's families. They told me that in social interactions, especially when meeting other

immigrants, they continually bring up and discuss the period of transit migration. They have kept that experience alive and relevant through their repertoire of stories as well as the many things they still have from 1989-90 and their subsequent visits: a bottle of liquor saved from their trip to San Marino in 1990; various documents; an address book begun while still in Leningrad and used during emigration and transit (including information of where to send parcels to receive them in Italy, where to buy toys in Vienna, the addresses of the important organizations, the schedule of Jewish holidays); and maps and photographs of the town of Nettuno from their return visits, to name a few. Theses vectors of past moments have been folded into their lives, not occupying a special, prominent place in the home or in their thoughts (Boym 1998), but vibrant and real all the same. "As you know," Leonid Zelman wrote to me in a recent email, "that was a big part of our life - and still is" (April 29, 2014).

Temporarily

For some, transit migration may loom large at a certain period in their lives, as when individuals seek to create a lasting record of it—works of fiction, memoirs, poetry, non-fiction (the present work included), photography, music (e.g. violinist's Yevgeny Kutik's album *Music from the Suitcase* [2014], based on music brought in that Soviet luggage)—, in each return visit, and in spontaneous or solicited stories.

One story, about the unexpected return of the past, remembered at the tale end of one interview, warrants retelling. As I turned off the recording and readied myself to leave their Central New Jersey home, the Dashevskys suddenly remembered: the dentist! One of Anna Dashevsky's worst moments from transit migration was when she returned from their apartment's kitchen in Torvaianica, Italy to the room where she left her youngest son, then five-months-old. She was younger than 30. In the room, she did not immediately see her

infant on the bed where she left him. She found him on the floor where he had fallen off of the bed, face-first, with blood pouring from his nose and mouth. The nature and shock of the injury had prevented the infant from screaming. They had just returned from the hospital with him after another bout of illness. Italian neighbors took them straight back to the emergency room.

The boy turned out OK. His lips were swollen, making eating difficult, but he was otherwise safe. The episode remained in the past until the boy's second set of front teeth came in, each with a conical indent. When they asked the dentist about it, they couldn't believe when he asked whether, by chance, the boy had ever fallen on his face as a small child. "It was like a haunting," Anna said. "It came back to haunt us." It is a striking example of the insistence of the past, a literal imprint reappearing in unexpected ways. It was quite appropriate, too, since their younger son is in many ways a symbol of their immigration in their eyes. Anna's daily life on the journey was structured by having to take care of him, and the family's encounter with the West was in many mediated through him, including through doctor visits, hospitals, medicines, and well-wishers. And if they ever want to remember how long they've been in the U.S., Anna told me, they just have to remember his age.

This story concretely captures the visceral reminders that may catch immigrants by surprise: a sudden reminder in the form of an object, a story, a sight, a smell, and so forth, that makes one's stomach sink, one's skin prickly, or one's eyes water.

Remnants

As the Zelmans' story reveals, various objects from the past remain as well, receding into the background but present all the same. That documents remain—like Soviet exit visas and initial American visas ("white" and "green" resident alien cards)—is a commonplace

among immigrant families (see Behar 2007). That china, silverware, books, souvenirs and the like remain from the USSR and Italy is also fairly typical of immigrant homes (see Boym 1998, 2001). That some immigrants' homes still house a Soviet suitcase or two with which they moved to this country decades ago, though, is quite unusual and notable. As explained in chapter 3, the luggage, by virtue of holding all of one's belongings and so turning into onerous objects of security and anxiety, has come to synecdochically represent the strains of transit migration for many immigrants. In separate conversations between my mom, the Bekkers, and the Gatovskys, I learned that each of their homes still has at least one. These big, roomy suitcases were used in the U.S. to store things such as linens; some helped the family move from one house to another (or could potentially do so in the future). Sofa Bekker admitted to keeping one for sentimental reasons, unable to throw it away. Kept for so long as potentially useful objects, now they become difficult to shed. And, what if, just in case, they might be useful or important in the future?

Figure 8 Plastic Bag Saved from 1990 from Torvaianica, Italy. From the home of Alla Gorodetskaya. Photo by author.

Many such Soviet-made items remain, at once outdated, easily replaceable, and potentially useful: medical supplies, like cotton, gauze, pipettes, and medicines; kitchen utensils; all sorts of bedding and towels; clothing; photo cameras and binoculars; tools; and so on. Photographer Anna Loshkin captured some of these items in her recent photography exhibit, *Nash Chemodan* (Our Suitcase; 2014). Some of these objects remain in my parents' home as well, folded into the texture of the house. I did not recognize them as such "useless" objects until I learned of Anna's project, precisely because they are so a part of our house of 22 years. Perhaps, then, they are still objects of anxiety, holdovers from a past in which they loomed large, suspended in a present that does not quite believe that the future is reliably calm. Recall the joke passed between Dmitriy Gatovsky and my father in chapter 1: after Klara Gatovsky says that here in the U.S. you don't have to hide that you're a Jew, Dmitriy quips, "For now." Every joke points to a recognizable truth.

Not just objects remain, but sensory impressions, forever after integrated into one's perceptive faculties. Upon return to the Vienna refugee camp where she spent a significant portion of her transit migration, Svetlana Boym (2014) realizes that, unbeknownst to her,

> everything I photographed all over the world was there: the stains on the concrete walls, sickly poppy flowers and dandelions, half-readable signs, the pinecones in a disowned shopping cart, and a dove, the color of urban ruins, finishing her comfort food, in haste. Wandering through the invisible ruins of the camp I discovered the landscape of my own photographs that traveled with me from one continent to another. [5]

Only during her return visit to a site of her transit migration does Boym realize that she has been attending to and exploring elements of her own past in her photography. Beautifully capturing the significance of transit migration that I have been trying to demonstrate, she writes, "Somehow, the walls of the camp stood both for liberation and for confinement, for memory and for forgetting; they became a canvas for our improbable hopes" (5). Echoing my emphases on the intertwined temporal dynamics and the range of experiences as part of

the lasting impressions of transit migration, Boym continues: "After many turns and returns I recognized my point of departure. It was not my house in Leningrad but this forgotten refugee camp that I carried with me as I traveled light. Unmemorable and unmonumental, the camp became a ruin in reverse, a palimpsest of my future transits, a hidden backdrop of my second home" (5). In this recent critical project of cultural production of hers (rare among those of the first generation), Boym realizes that what they encountered and felt in their first impressions as ex-Soviets left a mark on their modes of sensing and knowing, even if unacknowledged. In the place itself, the unremarkable gains meaning, the traces that have always been embodied become apparent.

The Unrepeatable

Phrases recounted at the end of the previous chapter also indicate immigrants' growing distance from the experiences of that period of their lives—both the events and themselves of that time: "It was like a dream"; "Did we really go through all of that?!"; "It was crazy, crazy!"; "From today's point of view, it all seems strange, even to me"; "Now I can't imagine how we did all this. How did we do it all?! How did we go through it all?" However, despite the feeling that the past is bizarrely out of synch with one's present self, the experiences of transit migration have not yet become unrecognizable; it is "'the memory of things that seem retrospectively to be out of place or unfathomable'" (Cohen 1994:123).

I already told the stories of Elena Golub's and Victoria Shostak's unrepeatable enchantments in chapter 4. For Victoria, it was her close encounter with European art in museums that no longer exists (due to, as Cohen's [1994] analysis would conclude, the changes in museum display practices). Elena claimed that her travels have never equaled her first encounters with Vienna and the north of Italy. She has never recaptured the sense of

mirth or childlike wonder she felt then. Here I add another such evocative unrecoverable sensation, told to me by Mikhail Dubinsky.

After emphasizing people's fears about passing through customs at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport in 1978 and the emotional intensity of the huge crowds of family members and brave friends saying goodbye forever, Mikhail said,

> And then we…proceeded to that glass wall [that separated those who were emigrating from those who were not], the significance of which I cannot describe. It was really – we knew, we step beyond the wall and you're in another world. Except until the plane was in the air, you couldn't be sure. There were stories of people being taken off the plane. So even beyond the glass wall you didn't feel safe.
> But still, you knew. You stepped beyond, and you know: The air was different. The smell was different. Now I go through the airports and I can't recapture that smell, the air. But I distinctly remember how diff-diff-different it seemed. [February, 22 2011]

He tripped over the word "different," as if for emphasis.

Circumstances have certainly changed for Elena, Victoria, and Mikhail. Those sensations, though remembered, cannot again be encountered in place or objects. They are distinctly tied up with the transformational magnitude of transit migration, unrepeatable. Moreover, the three of them have changed, the world has changed, and so has the way that it renders itself comprehensible to them. Still, the first sensations endure as markers of one's difference, how one has changed through time.

Though there are aspects of transit migration that are difficult to recollect, seem unbelievable, or impossible to recuperate, little has become actually unrecognizable to them. This is because transit migration was their first steps as immigrants, and they remain immigrants.

The Ongoing Experience of Migration

This study forcefully reiterates that there is something particular to the fact of mobility as a migrant—that the experience of migration is a distinct category of experience for people, especially in instances of difficult migrations, and continues to be so throughout people's lives. Immigration is a social process that accentuates and condenses the rudimentary social transitions that naturally occur over the course of time. Emigration as an event puts into stark relief the differences between present and past, between here and elsewhere, between us and others. It highlights what culture is, why we value it, and how quickly it shifts, especially between generations.

In the last decade, there has been a flowering of reflections on the experiences of transit migration among émigrés. There is a difference between the personal essays and memoirs (Boym 2014; Shteyngart 2014; Shrayer 2007; Tetelbaum 2007; Zigman 2006; Shrayer-Petrov 1994; Dranov 1981)—serious in tone, demonstrating personal trials and growth—and fiction (Draitser 2012; Bezmozgis 2011; Shrayer-Petrov 2003), which tends toward more critical and unkindly portrayals of fellow emigrants—the brute, the bumbling, the criminal. There is a generational difference, too: recent work across various media by other 1.5ers like Michael Drob (2014), Anna Loshkin (2014) Nikita Nelin (2011), and Lea Zeltserman (ongoing), like mine, seeks to commemorate and observe our parents' journeys.

David Bezmozgis's recent novel, *The Free World* (2011), however, is notable for its especially dark and critical portrayal of Soviet Jewish emigrants during transit migration. The novel begins with the Krasnansky family's dislocation and disorientation amid the whirlwind of moving and arriving, the foreignness of Italy, and the stress of finding an apartment. But once the family does, things fall into place. A rhythm emerges. People regain their pre-emigration ways: a husband hunts for women; a wife finds a regular, boring job; mother and grandmother worry over young children's well-being; a grandfather finds everyone irritating.

The new circumstances in Rome—the "free world"—also bring about lasting changes. The Krasnansky grandfather lives entirely in the past, finding in it meaning he had ignored his whole life. One of his sons finally and dramatically learns his lesson about adultery and shady dealings. His other son finds his niche in such shady wheeling and dealing. It is overall an unsentimental portrayal, except for one feature: the early Soviet years as depicted through the grandfather's recollections. By the book's end, though, emigration buries the grandfather, along with this beloved past.

Bezmozgis was six at the time of his emigration from Latvia to Toronto in 1980, only a year older than I was. His novel, while born of a lifetime of marinating in immigrant life, is not based on and not meant to reflect his own memories or his family's experiences. The story Bezmozgis tells culls together the worst possible aspects of emigration: exploitation, family strife, criminality, death. The émigrés are scavengers and schemers, confused, making do. No one is admirable. The characters live a misery largely of their own making. Though each of these elements can undoubtedly be confirmed historically and experientially, to attribute them to one fictional family's experience points to a desire to paint emigration negatively, as something bringing out the worst in people. In one interview with the U.K.'s Metro magazine in 2011, David Bezmozgis expresses just such a negative attitude toward the fact of emigration: "'I have a tremendous sense of regret that because of the horrors of the 20th century I ended up living my life elsewhere.... It's unnatural. I should be living in Riga today, speaking Latvian, Russian and Yiddish. And I'm not'" ("David Bezmozgis"). His critical portrayal of the experience of transit served to romanticize the Soviet past, when being Jewish entailed struggle, risk, and therefore meaning.

Those Soviet-era emigrants who lived longer in the USSR do no such thing. Whereas Noam Zigman (2006), Maxim Shrayer (2007), and David Shrayer-Petrov (1994) situate

transit migration in the context of their lives of becoming and being immigrants, Bezmozgis's outlook grows from the experience of a six-year-old, who did not decide to emigrate, but to whom it happened. As members of the 1.5 generation, we do not have the power to create an ego-centered action narrative—we were taken along; emigration happened to us. But our generation is defined by the difficulties of assimilation and acculturation as immigrants; we did not live through and observe our own transformation as we moved through countries and contexts. Neither did we, the youngest of the 1.5ers, fully experience Soviet life. Unlike the older writers, Bezmozgis does not have the same stake in creating a hardship-to-success narrative; neither does he hold the same accept-and-move-on attitude that helps immigrants' cope with experienced loss.

In contrast to Bezmozgis's work, my stance, my mode of attention, has been one of empathy and tenderness—a desire to understand people in the way they self-narrate and wish others to understand them. This focus opens up the potential for a different kind of critique: not of the irreversible fact of emigration but of that manner of self-representation, which contributes to a politics of exceptionalism. While Soviet Jewish Americans take great pride in their group's shared successes through hard work and sacrifice—especially in comparison with other immigrant groups—they often in their self-narratives omit the unique help they received, in the form of wealthy and politically organized American Jewry, certain politico-historical and geopolitical contexts, and the social capital nurtured under the Soviet system. Although they do not claim a political identity of victimhood, the self-drama of their personal stories reaffirms a sense of self-importance and exceptionalism that prevents them from developing a politics of empathy based, for example, on the refugee label. Instead, their politics of care remains Soviet in nature: encompassing their families, close-knit networks of friends, and other Jews, especially in Israel. Unburdened from the task of establishing

livelihoods in a foreign country, it is the succeeding generations that are shifting their attention to thinking about Soviet Jewish American immigrants as one immigrant group among many.

At the conclusion of chapter 3, I retold a joke remembered by Victoria Shostak during the group interview in 2011. The punch line: every immigrant who did not remain on Welfare ate his and her share of shit before becoming a "real person."

As we all laughed, my mom agreed, "<u>Each person</u> ate his own [share of shit]! <u>Each person</u> ate his own! <u>Each one</u>!"

"And we continue to eat it," Pyoter Shostak insisted. "Our children and entire families. This is immigration. We are the first generation. So until the end we are immigrants."

"And we continue," mama echoed emphatically. "As the first generation."

"We continue to [speak] in Russian here," said Pyoter. "Even though we've been here [in the U.S.] for how long already?!"

"It doesn't matter," Nadezhda Minkin answered matter-of-factly.

The group was in agreement. Just as they remain recognizable as immigrants to Americans, so they continue to feel themselves as such. Their relationship to their early years as migrants-in-transit and as early immigrants is not cast primarily through nostalgia or trauma. Soviet immigrants maintain a balanced, reflective, practical relationship with their past, continuing to return, experience, and reflect on it, and so continuously integrate its meaning into their lives. Just as with "social imaginaries," things may lay suggestively on one's horizon one's entire life to shape action, so with embodied memory, things may lay

suggestively in one's tracks one's entire life—not determinative and not necessarily obvious,

but there, embedded in one's present, especially if one looks for them: a palimpsest.

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