

# The Razov Family: Post-Soviet Lived Experience Through the U.S. Immigration Apparatus

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I'm not an American, but I am here...We have to be ourselves, I think it's great that we have our own background, we have our own culture and language, and that we came here. And we can embrace yet another culture, even if in our own level, from ourselves and our perspective. Life itself is history which was happening before our eyes. Of course it brought changes, like our move, it was an emigrational time after all in which we lived.

- Oxana, *participant*

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## Introduction

Ethnography as a method and a practice is well suited for addressing multifaceted issues—it has the ability to re-humanize areas of academic inquiry by dislodging assumptions and diving into the indispensable complexities and nuances of life. The practice of ethnography demands a suspension of judgment in the process of collecting observations and experiences—an immersion into another reality, followed by an attuned interpretation and contextualization. The ethnographer extends to the unknown, into a deeper comprehension, becoming a bridge between two concentric spheres. Thus, ethnography of contemporary immigrants brings much needed insight into what is deemed an “alien” life.

As a highly charged and polarized topic, immigration as a process, experience and a point of political discourse does not have a simple “bottom line,” no matter the efforts of professional politicians to procure one. The reality is, indeed, seemingly vastly complex and ungraspable. The complexity of our world is a creative challenge in visualization, rendering and practice. In this paper I attempt to illuminate connections and intricacies between the immigration apparatus and the lived-experience of a Russian Jewish family. The story of the family is also inseparable from the Soviet, and post-Soviet history, and inseparable from the history of Russian and Soviet Jews, as well as other ethnic minorities. This creates another layer of complexity since talking about Russia or the Soviet Union in the post-Soviet space is inherently difficult, as has been noted by many scholars and authors, such as Alexei Yurchak.

Contemporary immigration is occurring in a globalized economy with large, often unregulated, capital flow—in stark contrast to the highly regulated and securitized people flows between the nation-states. For those who are in the financial and social position in their country of origin to pursue this course, following capital often means pursuing a lengthy and expensive bureaucratic process. The alternative is unauthorized movement. Although the pursuit of economic prosperity and stability is implicit in migration, non-economic factors are indispensable to an understanding of migration as a multidimensional process.<sup>1</sup> The securitization of migration constructs a challenging, costly, hazardous, and at times fatal process. Rather than eliminating the “problem” the securitization of migration brings to light the non-state, non-economic factors of migration during the supposedly impending “immigration crisis.”<sup>2</sup> Connections between people play a strong, if not central role, in the decision making and moving process; transnational family networks or transnational field networks co-create migration conditions with other macro factors. The nation-state uses policies, regulations, secured points of entry, reinforced borders, quotas, fees, and employs a variety of agencies, all of which are facets of power delegated for immigration control. Accordingly, on the micro level, prospective migrants prepare for departure for years at a time, pay bribes, save and borrow money, and develop new identities and ways of socializing. Broadly, my interest in this research formed around the examination between the macro and

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Castles, Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, (New York: The Guilford Press, 2009), 33.

<sup>2</sup> Aristide Zolberg, Peter Benda, Ed., Aristide Zolberg, “Introduction: Beyond the Crisis,” *Global Migrants, Global Refugees: Problems and Solutions*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 1.

the micro processes of migration—the abstract, bureaucratic process and the subjective experience. Specifically, how do families and individuals respond to and navigate through the larger structures that they come in contact with during the different stages of the moving and settling process? What historical, political and social conditions shaped the immigration apparatus and the migrants experience of the process? How is the uniquely post-Soviet lived experience of this Russian Jewish family exposed through their navigation of the U.S. immigration apparatus? And lastly, upon leaving Russia and forging new “American” identities, how do they react to the Americanization of their prior Russification?

This study explores these questions through an ethnographic study of a Russian-Jewish family in Brooklyn, NY. As a student of Marlboro College in Vermont, I received a generous grant from Marlboro and had the support of both Professor of Sociology Gerald Levy and Professor of American and Gender Studies Katherine Ratcliff. From June to November, 2010, I conducted interviews with individual family members and in family groupings. In addition to more formal methods, participant-observation allowed for an understanding of the general family dynamics. Coincidentally, I arrived in New Orleans from Europe the same year that the Razov family moved from Russia to Brooklyn. Similarities in our adjustment and the circumstances of our departure created a mutual dialogue, rather than a more traditional one directional researcher-participant relationship. I discussed much of my thinking on the uniqueness of this historical moment in Russian migration with Raya, my main informant because of our proximity in age and in our “stage of life.” After a visit with one of her relatives, Raya and I spent late nights on the rooftop of her apartment building doing a more personal kind of contextualizing. Raya and

her mother, Klara, live in a diverse part of Brooklyn where Russian and other post-Soviet cultures and languages are heavily represented. Two train stops closer to the Russophile center of Brooklyn, Brighton Beach, lives Raya's aunt, Oxana. In Oxana's household lives the oldest member of the Razov family—the grandfather or *Dedushka*, who was the pioneer of the family's relocation. Oxana's son, Il'ia also lives with them and is studying Psychology in college. Oxana and Klara's older sister, Ludmila lives the furthest away from the family nucleus in Brooklyn; she has remarried to a man from Eastern Europe and they live in nearby New Jersey, while her daughter Irina continues to live in Brooklyn while she completes her graduate work.

### *On Representation*

In regard to methodology issues of representation heavily occupied my thinking. I was hyperaware of the reduction which the family would undergo before reappearing on the pages of the ethnography. The task of representation brought up underlying tensions and power inequalities, already imbedded in the researcher-participant relationship and in American society. Thus, I sought to go beyond the categorizations of the Razovs as “immigrants”, “refugees” or Russian Jews, though I inevitably end up referring to them as such. Three central questions posited by sociologists Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, provided me with an overall framework. First, they ask “which groups...have the freedom to construct themselves?” and “which groups, and why, find themselves caught in inescapable categories constructed by others? Second, “which groups, and why and how, are moving from one situation to another?” And third, “how do both our definitions of groups and the groups themselves change when

populations are moving to the United States—who gets combined together, who is seen as separate and distinct?”<sup>3</sup> As I progressed in my research, I recognized that it was imperative to demonstrate the ways in which the Razov family do represent a distinct group in the post-Soviet space.

Comparison is implicit to the process of immersing and gathering data in an immigrant context, to be described and re-contextualized for an academic American audience. Hence Foner articulates that, “ethnographies of migrants from different cultures are also implicitly comparative in that they entail analyzing and representing activities and relations among people from one culture for audiences in another.”<sup>4</sup> Another problematic aspect of describing the process of resettlement and adjustment is differentiation between the “immigrants” and the “Americans,” constructs which in themselves have embedded narratives and identities.

This sensitivity fits within the broader, more nuanced, conclusions reached by sociological and historical studies of immigrants in the last two decades. First, “that contrary to a conventional view of the emigrants as “pushed out” of their homelands and “pulled into” the United States in a two-step, unidirectional movement” is inaccurate since “both the “old” migrants and their “new” counterparts have been part of extensive flows well before they accomplished their move to America.” Second, “contrary to the well-established stereotype of the “huddled masses,” most U.S.-bound migrants, while certainly poor by absolute and relative standards,

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy Foner, *In A New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

did not originate from the poorest regions and were not members of the lowest economic class.”<sup>5</sup> Zolberg et.al, echo this observation in regard to refugees specifically. They assert that:

The simple notion that poverty produces refugees is inconsistent with the fact that situations of extreme economic deprivation usually have not created population outflows claiming international refugee status (e.g., the poor in India or Burkina Faso.) Even poverty in the form of structural violence—that is, extreme, systematic, and sustained economic deprivation—by itself and in the first instance typically produces powerlessness.<sup>6</sup>

In the spirit of the above observation, as well as the multiple conceptions of belonging and identity used in this paper, I approach the refugee status of the family as a matter of institutional classification. I shy away from their acquired label of “the refugees.” Although there were definite moments of powerlessness in the family’s experience, they were able to leave because of their ethnic background, as well as upper socio-economic and cultural status. Their ethnic and religious identity coupled with the incentive produced by American foreign policy are just as important, if not more, than the “refugee” label acquired upon arrival to the U.S. Thus, my hope is to utilize “the refugee” without obscuring the family’s cultural capital, to examine their identity without overemphasizing their uniquely Jewish and Russian heritage, as a separate group and as an ethnic minority overall, and to describe the historical conditions without overshadowing the agency of the family.

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<sup>5</sup> Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, Ed., Ewa Morowska, “The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration,” *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 193.

<sup>6</sup> Aristide Zolberg, Astri Suhrke, Sergio Aguayo, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and Refugee Crisis in the Developing World*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 260.

In addition, because my research involved only one family, focusing on three women, the outcome of the case study might seem to emphasize the individual reasons for migration, as earlier scholars have done. My intention is to use the historical and sociological contextualization to render the family's individual experience as exemplary of a wider phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

### *Note on Confidentiality*

Although my goal is to provide an accurate overall portrait, it is my ethical and moral responsibility to fully disguise the identities of the research participants and the specific locations where the research had occurred. Some of the people that I was able to meet shared personal information regarding their private lives, their hardships and information regarding other activities and persons. This information could be used against the participants and informants in a myriad of ways. To ensure confidentiality, the names of people and places, and time and location have been distorted or substituted.

### **Family History in a Deeper Historical Context**

On a calm evening, after a birthday dinner party I sat in a compact living room and watched Oxana, and her niece, Raya, go through two bags of photographs that the family brought with them from Russia. Oxana and Raya are two members of the lively Razov family, and the subjects of my ethnographic research. The photographs, nearly all of them black and white, were a glimpse into the past; into their life when they were still unaware of the sweeping

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<sup>7</sup> Morawska, 189.

changes that came with *perestroika*, and their search for escape. Yet, one small photograph in particular was a rare window into the visual history of the family—only three by four inches, of kiosks and small stores on Kings Highway, in Brooklyn. The picture showed produce, and newspapers outside the store, and square silhouettes lining the shelves on the inside. With passer-bys and shoppers on the street, it was the most ordinary scene in this immigrant neighborhood in late 1980's, and in that aspect it has remained stubbornly stagnant.

This photograph was sent to Oxana's father by his brother who had moved to America in the 1980's. It was a seed, which with time, trials and much effort materialized in a move to the U.S. What Yurchak calls "the Imaginary West," already had a strong hold on the Soviet social-psychology, including the Razov family.<sup>8</sup> But unlike other depictions of Western life, this photograph was not political propaganda of the Soviet Union, or an inflated depiction of consumer culture from a glossy Western magazine. The hand crafted photograph was a reminder that in actuality another kind of life existed somewhere else, including the possibility of a small, privately owned business with plenty of commodities and produce. Since shortages were a daily reality for most people living in the Soviet republics, and in other countries part of the socialist bloc, a fully stocked store was an aspiration. In "How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed," Slavenka Drakulič's candid descriptions of the limited consumer choices is encapsulated by toilet paper: she recalled her longing to buy white, soft toilet paper, but having no other choice except the very harsh, brown kind. But it is not enough to say that migration

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<sup>8</sup> Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 158.

out of the Soviet Union was driven purely by the difficulty of life, since that life was also quite stable in many ways. This stability made it hard to predict the end of the Soviet Union, and even harder to comprehend the ramifications.

Soviet citizens had a strong interest in the West, despite frequent and at times intense criticism of what was seen as imported bourgeois culture. Interest in the West and contact with Western objects was not a point of resistance, but part of Soviet life. As anthropologist Alexei Yurchak argues, “Western influences in Soviet life [were] not only perfectly compatible with the Soviet state’s vision of socialist culture” which emphasized internationalism “but also allowed them to be profoundly reinterpreted in local terms and to become a constitutive part of late Soviet culture.” The reinterpretation of the West was not a cultural mistranslation, although “the symbols of the Imaginary West did not necessarily represent the “real” West.” Indeed, the Imaginary West was a creative solution which ‘introduced into Soviet reality a new imaginary dimension that was neither “Western” nor “Soviet”’ into daily life.<sup>9</sup>

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, total disappointment and dissolution with the state, and lack of economic security or prospects seemed to confirm that the solution to life’s troubles was to resettle in the West. The Cold War had a destructive and destabilizing effect around the world, and influenced both national identities, economies and forever altered the social psychology of those living in the former Soviet Union and the Soviet-bloc. But as Gabriel Kolko so ruthlessly articulates in *After Socialism*, the wars are not over; “the crises” have not been circumvented, and replaced by international and domestic harmony. The end of the Cold

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<sup>9</sup> Yurchak, 203.

War is another component of an increasingly complex historical and economic framework facing late capitalist and post-socialist states and peoples. Kolko argues for a necessary reassessment of socialist and capitalist projects, especially in relation to each other, stating that

Social democracy's abandonment of the minimum premises inherent in its original commitment to social justice and equity, or the uncritical conversion of the oppressive Leninist regimes to capitalism's economic dogmas, cannot obscure the fact that fundamental, radical answers to a myriad of international as well as domestic political, economic, and social difficulties are needed more than ever.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Kolko acknowledges that a critical examination of capitalism and socialism is only a beginning; much more is needed. Clearly, "uncritical conversion" is the result of a fictional historical narrative of the socialist system as negative, oppressive, and immoral to be redeemed by its now assumed opposite, victorious capitalism. This narrative also reoccurs in scholarly work. Yurchak attributes the polarization and binary nature of the discourse on the Soviet Union, to the deeply seated Cold War product of "' regimes of knowledge." And to the fact that "much critical knowledge about Soviet socialism... has been produced either outside of, or in retrospect to, socialism, in the contexts dominated by antisocialist, nonsocialist, or post-socialist political, moral, and cultural agendas and truths."<sup>11</sup>

Celebrations of a "capitalist victory" and renunciation of Soviet and socialist ideals, rob the generation which lived through *perestroika* and moved to the United States of a historical context in which their lived experience is significant. It denies the implications of their resettlement on the "terrain of national culture" and political participation in the U.S. as

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<sup>10</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *After Socialism: Reconstructing Critical Social Thought*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

<sup>11</sup> Yurchak, 6

Russians, as Jews, as refugees and post-Soviet peoples.<sup>12</sup> The capitalist victory narrative fits well into a historically assimilationist conception that immigrants coming into the U.S. are able to throw off their country of origin as one would with a heavy fur coat, to reveal their “true”, formerly obscured identity, which is, of course, an American identity. But as this ethnography and all other ethnographies of Russian Jews in the America to my knowledge demonstrate, the sheer idea that at the core Russian Jews possess an American consciousness or spirit is a completely inadequate idea. However, rarely do we take seemingly simple statements about the end of the Soviet Union, or the resettlement of Russian Jews in America to their logical conclusions which starkly reveal how those statements function as reductions, stereotypes, or worse.

The personal narrative of individual and family history, offers a personal, clear voice in an increasingly complex context. Through the articulation of their experience they inevitably point to the more general deficiencies and issues in both practices. Amidst the intertwined concentric circles of history these narratives and lived experiences provide insight into a much too often abstracted phenomenon. A historical reexamination of capitalism and socialism

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<sup>12</sup> It is through the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen: a terrain introduced by the Statue of Liberty, discovered by the immigrant, dreamed in a common language, and defended in battle by the independent, self-made man...It is in passing by way of this terrain of culture that the subject is immersed in the repertoire of American memories, events, and narratives and comes to articulate itself in the domain of language, social hierarchy, law and ultimately, political representation. In being represented within the political sphere, however, the subject is “split off” from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship. Culture is the medium of the *present*—but it is simultaneously the site that mediates the *past*, through which history is grasped as difference, as fragments, shocks, and flashes of disjunction,” Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 2.

proposed by Kolko must be supplemented by voices grounded in the experience of the post-socialist peoples resettled in the West.

### ***Perestroika***

The migration of the post-Soviet peoples, or “the last Soviet generation” to the United States, produces a unique historical conjuncture.<sup>13</sup> They engage in late capitalism within the framework of late socialism, the dismantlement of the powerful Soviet government and the “bloodless civil war” of *perestroika*. They are conscious of themselves as the living embodiments of the paradoxes produced by both Soviet communism and late capitalism, Jewish heritage and the Russification of that heritage.

The cultural, political, and economic conditions between 1990 and 2010, both in Soviet Union, Russia, and the United States, produced a unique and charged experience for those who moved to the U.S. during *perestroika*. Having experienced years of deterritorialization of their life and consciousness from the state<sup>14</sup>, while being subjected to material constraints and limited purchasing power, these *perestroika* survivors witnessed the dismantlement of their government. After surviving the social and personal ramifications of this disintegration, they arrived to New York City shortly after September 11, 2001 to a tense U.S. domestic situation at large. The Razov’s faced the reality of American life and the pressure to assimilate and succeed, as well as the instability of the current systems, undermine what was also lost in some ways such as social status and access to the arts. The Razov’s were an ethnic minority in Russia and

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<sup>13</sup> See Yurchak.

<sup>14</sup> Yurchak, 114- 157.

were to some extent treated and perceived as outsiders as Russian Jews, and upon arrival to the U.S. were treated as outsiders based on their immigration status and country of origin.

During *glasnost*<sup>15</sup>—a period of injection of previously unpublished or rare information—and the parting of the Iron Curtain during *perestroika*, the West had become almost within reach and even more alluring to former Soviet citizens.<sup>16</sup> The photograph sent by the Razov's family relatives who lived in New York City, once a feeder to the imagination, could become a feasible future. In my discussions of this period with an informant and research participant, Oxana, she explained that initially, during *glasnost*' there was a lot of excitement and hope. She described herself feverishly reading new materials that were being passed around. A friend of the family also described group readings where rare foreign books were made into slides and projected onto a white sheet in someone's living room. They were participating in a revival with millions of other people, making a widespread impact through their individual and social network actions. According to Yurchak, "between 1987 and 1988, the circulation of most newspapers and literary journals jumped astronomically, as much as tenfold and more in the course of one year." The extensive impact of *glasnost*', for instance on the publishing industry, was that "often it was impossible to find many of the more popular publications at newsstands because of the speed at which they sold out."<sup>17</sup> The injection of new information generated discussions and a profound shift in people's social-psychology. This shift has been described as "a sudden

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<sup>15</sup> Meaning, "openness, public discussion," Yurchak, 2.

<sup>16</sup> But even before the socialist project, absorption in foreignness was a long standing cultural tradition, clear in the use of French as the official language of the aristocracy during the Czarist Empire. Russia itself was often deemed a backward country and the Russian language as the tongue of the peasantry.

<sup>17</sup> Yurchak, 2.

“break of consciousness” (*perelom soznania*) or “stunning shock” (*sil’neishii shok*) quickly followed by excitement and readiness to participate.”<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, during *perestroika*, Oxana remembered that the hope vanished, and many families were mired in economic and social distress. Retrospectively, guaranteed employment, minimal healthcare, and housing security became subjects of nostalgia. The inflation, unemployment, crime, social unrest, corruption, in addition to economic and governmental disintegration of *perestroika* presented new challenges to the Razov family. Generally, privatization and restructuring of the government created a massive redistribution of capital, and a widening income gap. Aside from unemployment, employment without receiving salary, sometimes for years at a time, was common. People who simply chose to go to their job were sporadically compensated in large quantities of eggs, butter, milk, honey, meat or other commodities. Thus, those who “bartered” for their work were considered lucky, a matter that will be further illuminated in the following pages.

The oppressive atmosphere of *perestroika* was omnipresent and inescapable—evident to all, even very young children. The desperation of the time resulted in many social ills, especially as the cushion of socialist services was disappearing, which translated into personal and family hardship. Many people left the country, others adopted or simply held on to what they had with all of their might, and many families suffered huge losses. This survivalist environment had spurred the Razov family and others into a flurry of activity in search of a solution—an escape

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<sup>18</sup> Yurchak, 2.

from the seemingly never-ending race for an existence worthy of the hardships they had endured.

After deciding to emigrate the question of “Where?” loomed over the family. Oxana recalled that “we began talking about moving...and at that time there was a large flow of emigration to Israel,...and we thought, ‘Yeah we could move there.’ We were even thinking about language classes, but there were many difficulties. Then we discussed going to Germany, and it became an option for immigration. Then some of our family relatives moved here [to New York] because a close relative of theirs already lived here.” Thus, the U.S. became the destination of choice.

### **The Razov Family in S., Russia**

Prior to moving to Brooklyn, the Razov family resided in S., a medium sized city of over 822,000 people as of 2010. Oxana explained that, “in the late 1970’s and then early 1980’s there was a period of shortages [*deficyt*]. We lived in a small city S., it was a [population] of a million or more, [and] we had to go to Moscow for groceries. For groceries which were actually made in our city: we had a sausage factory, we had a milk plant. All groceries were shipped out to the capital.” Oxana explained that due to the presence of the military industrial complex in S. it was closed to foreign visitors, and foodstuffs were shipped out to the capital to create more plenty, in part for foreign visitors and those in the locus of power. It is noteworthy that in my discussion with other Russian émigrés who lived in the capital, were of Slavic descend and whose relatives occupied important government positions didn’t experience *perestroika* or

*deficyt* in the same way—on the contrary, their lives hardly changed in the short term and overall improved in the long run. Thus, it is not exactly possible to define *the* experience of that period, since variables produced unique experiences. But for many more people the practices which were common in the Soviet Union to compensate for constraints in the availability of foodstuffs and housing were still crucial during *perestroika*: living communally with family members or neighbors, and growing food in small plots. Traditionally, it is common to find several generations living under the same roof and for the children to live with their parents until they are married.<sup>19</sup> In S. the Razov family lived in one large apartment, which allowed for shared responsibility of childcare and meals. Additionally, like many, the Razov family had a *dacha*, a country retreat which often also played a key practical role—supplementing the diet with fruit and vegetables grown on the surrounding land. Additionally, Oxana explained that they left S. each summer to go the *dacha* because “the children needed to be outside, run around in the fresh air.” The family consisted of three generations: the elders, Vera and Leosha, are usually referred to *Babushka* (grandmother) and *Dedushka* (grandfather) by their three grandchildren, and as Mother and Father by their three daughters: Oxana, her husband, Vlad, and their son Il’ia, Klara and her daughter Raya,<sup>20</sup> and Ludmila, the oldest daughter, her husband Oleg and their daughter Irina.

Originally the whole family applied for refugee status, on the basis of family reunification and anti-Semitic persecution. However, the interviews echoed with recollections of difficulties of

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<sup>19</sup> Even after marriage, the newlyweds might move in or remain in living arrangement with their parents.

<sup>20</sup> Because of our proximity in age, and several shared interests, Raya was my main informant and was present at all of the interviews.

everyday life, food and commodity shortages, lack of career prospects and the disintegrating economy. Although anti-Semitism was a real concern, the difficulty of life during *perestroika* was perhaps a more immediate factor, but there was fear that the economic difficulties would intensify the anti-Semitic currents already present in Russian society. The Razov family was also not sure if the beginning flares of Russian nationalism would be compatible with their religious and cultural practices in the future. Without knowing whether *perestroika*, and heightened anti-Semitism was a temporary trial to endure before the establishment of a more stable and prosperous era, the family took the risk of relocation.

The Razov family is committed to the achievement of higher education, and were increasingly alarmed by the limited educational prospects for their children. Among lack of prospects and job opportunities Klara explained that higher education had become privatized. “We knew that never in our life would we have the money to pay for the children to go to school. Here it is somewhat realistic. There was no—I don’t know what it’s like now, probably there are loans too—but then that didn’t exist. [Education] wasn’t simply expensive, but [had to be paid] with cash, the whole sum at one time. [Then] in half a year they raise the price so you never know how much it’ll be.”

Along with dwindling educational opportunities, and the violence of deprivation and anti-Semitism, evading military service was an additional motivation for leaving. Although the Russian Federation requires service with the exception of several provisions, the particularities of these provisions were also being redefined. Short of leaving, if a family wants to keep a child

out of the military the other option is to bribe a doctor for diagnosing a condition that would disqualify the male from the army or to bribe the officials in the army bureaucracy. Although bribes are also important in the application process for emigration, they pose additional financial burdens on families who are already faced with economic instability. The ability of families to evade the army also varies by the social and economic status, and most significantly, family connections to high ranking officials or administrators. Klara explained they were “without connections, and Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Chechnya and all” other military conflicts were continuing, and they were afraid for Oxana’s son, Il’ia. Emigration is one route families employ to prevent the drafting of their male children into the army.

### **U.S. Refugee Policy During and After the Cold War**

The distant relatives of the Razov’s had moved to the U.S. in previous years, during the reformation of American refugee policy. During the Cold War the refugee policy towards Russian-Jews and dissidents was intended to strike an unexpected blow to communism by creating a brain drain. The U.S. ratified the 1967 United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, agreeing to recognize as refugees those who ‘are living outside their country of origin and unable to avail themselves of its protection, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted.”’ However, in the Cold War context a policy of “calculated kindness” to the “victims of Communism” was used to grant parole and refugee statuses to Russian Jews.<sup>21</sup> As Zolberg points out, many Russian Jews chose to resettle in Israel, but due to “the chaining

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<sup>21</sup> Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 345.

effect fostered by American legislation, the onset of a new stream quickly generated additional immigration.”<sup>22</sup> The Refugee Act of 1980 contained a provision giving greater preference to groups “of special humanitarian concern to the United States,” designations which were heavily influenced by foreign policy. Additionally, the clause permitted minority groups to become advocates for migrants from their state, “notably Soviet Jews and Indochinese.”<sup>23</sup>

By the mid 1980’s the “well founded fear” clause ensured that entry for Russian Jews and certain other groups was fairly easy to secure, at least from the American side. However, Zolberg notes that during the Reagan administration fears of “asylum abuse” reinstated individual examinations for refugees in these special interest groups.

The Razov’s relatives, therefore, gained entry to the U.S. based on their classification as a special interest group during the Cold War. Raya explained that “my extended family, my second and third aunt and uncles, moved to America... [because] for a certain period of time the US was welcoming Jews living in Russia, [and] the US was giving refugee status—welcoming you and ready to give you some support financially to let you get established here. In the 80’s my extended family moved here like that and [later] my immediate family...some of us got this status.”

In 1989, another significant piece of asylum related legislature was passed changing the constricting language of asylum sought based on a “well founded fear” to a “credible basis for

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 349.

concern about the possibility” of maltreatment.<sup>24</sup> The amendment gave special preference to Russian Jews, and Evangelical Christians, and certain groups in Southeast Asia.<sup>25</sup> Additionally it “provided for the adjustment of status of certain persons paroled into the U.S. from these groups,” allowing for those who were denied refugee status but met the group requirements to be given “public interest parole.”<sup>26</sup> This provision eventually allowed the family to resettle, with some members of the family establishing refugee status and others parole status.

### **Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union**

Anti-Semitism had a strong presence in tsarist Russia, reappearing and adapting to both the Soviet and the *perestroika* society. The Cold War, as previously described, necessitated an attack on communism on several fronts, notwithstanding refugee policy in regard to Jewish peoples in the Soviet Union. The relationship between U.S. foreign policy, the Soviet Union and Soviet Jews hinged on three key factors: first, Cold War policies in both states created tensions around the state of Israel, and its position in the Middle East. The second important consideration is the special status of Soviet Jews, within and outside the Soviet Union contributing to a characterization of their emigration as actions of “traitors” and “Zionists.”<sup>27</sup> A third factor is the significance of Soviet Jewish resettlement in the U.S. as opposed to in Israel. At different periods during the Cold War and after its end these dynamics co-created a complex, and at times problematic status for the Soviet Jews.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 400

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 400 and see Footnote 17

<sup>26</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ “Eligibility for U.S. Resettlement,” *Refugee Council U.S.A.*, <http://www.rcusa.org/index.php?page=eligibility-for-u-s-resettlement>, accessed on 4/2/11.

<sup>27</sup> Maria Smith, “Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union: An Overview,” Marlboro College Plan of Concentration, 66.

In a 1996 Plan paper, “Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union: An Overview,” Marlboro College student Maria Smith described the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism as a political tool in domestic and foreign relations. For example, when the Soviet Union sought to temporarily smooth relations with the U.S., permission for Soviet Jews to emigrate was a key bargaining chip.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, U.S.S.R.’s anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian stance after the Six Days War affected how Soviet Jews were perceived internally.<sup>29</sup>

After Moscow broke diplomatic relations with Israel, large numbers of books and pamphlets attacking Judaism were published from 1970 to the early 1980’s. The anti-Israel propaganda, in addition to the pro-Palestinian stance, tarnished the Russian credibility of Soviet Jews by their implicit association with the “Jewish state” of Israel. Decades later the permission for Soviet Jews to resettle allowed Russia to prove the success of the *perestroika* and the secure further foreign aid. Historically, Soviet Jews functioned as an explanation for or a diversion from social, political and economic problems. Aspects of the marginalization and Russification of the Soviet Jews was also an experience shared by several of the ethnic minorities throughout Russian and Soviet, and post-Soviet history. Having had to be Russian before being Jewish during the Soviet Union, there were several palpable questions: How would the conditions of *perestroika* and afterward change perceptions of Russian Jews? And, how would the family negotiate the Russification of their Jewish heritage in the American context?

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, 78.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 55.

In response to the targeting of the Soviet Jews, American Jews became powerful advocates for their Soviet associates by facilitating a “special interest group” treatment and resettlement. However, the special status attained by Soviet Jews placed them in a vulnerable position domestically. A series of well publicized trials were held between 1968 and as late as 1983 attacked Soviet Jews who had attempted to emigrate. Smith argues that this is distinctly Soviet anti-Semitism since it was aimed at the “Jewish emigration movement” itself. Adding to the anti-Israeli momentum in Soviet foreign policy, the willingness and at times ability for Soviet Jews to resettle in the United States or in Israel, was a seeming proof of the Russian Jews’ betrayal. *Glasnost’* and *perestroika* allowed for a revival of Jewish culture and religion in Russia. Smith argues that it also permitted for the rise of hate literature, and organizations producing a rejuvenated, more personal version of anti-Semitism. Many Russian Jews felt they were unprepared to face these challenges and questioned their place in the new, nationalistic Russia.<sup>30</sup>

According to Fred A. Lazin certain sources reported that “some Soviet Jews had said that they would rather stay in the Soviet Union than go to Israel” putting into question the qualification of Russian Jews as refugees.<sup>31</sup> Although the U.S. allocated over \$400 million dollars to Israel for the absorption of Soviet Jews, with support from American Jewish organizations a trend of preference for resettlement in the U.S. became pervasive.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, preference of U.S. over Israel as a relocation destination might be the result of earlier campaigns of anti-Israeli

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<sup>30</sup> Smith, 70

<sup>31</sup> Fred A. Lazin, “The Role of Ethnic Politics in U.S. Immigration and Refugee Policy: The Case of Soviet Jewry,” Working Paper 175, San Diego: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, (February 2009), 23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 8.

propaganda.<sup>33</sup> Amidst doubtful loyalty to the Soviet state and disputed refugee status in the United States, many Russian Jewish families were able to navigate these complex dynamics in Soviet Union, Russia and abroad successfully.

During the application process the Razov family had to present specific instances of anti-Semitic persecution. Klara reported that her uncle had been “ambushed and badly beaten in the stairway of his apartment building [*dadu izbili v podyezde i on tam proval’alsya*]. We didn’t know the reason behind it; he held a prestigious position in S. and, you know, he was Jewish. Anti-Semitism in Russia and especially in Ukraine was common, but it existed even in a small city like S.” However, Klara explained “we didn’t [necessarily] experience Anti-Semitism by being beaten but in other ways: restricted access to education, [I] didn’t get certain jobs, even just certain childhood memories of how other children reacted to us [*kak deti otnasilis’*], what we were called [*kakieta slovechki byli skazyny*]. What can I say, the older generation had it even worse [*esheo bol’she*, even bigger, more]...And my mother also remembered a lot, and my father must have, too.” Memories of anti-Semitism, shared between generations, created a deep awareness and understanding of the interplay of their Russian and Jewish identities and histories.

### **The Ten Year Path**

The application and moving process was a decade long effort, spearheaded by the oldest sister, Ludmila. On different occasions Oxana and Raya, Ludmila’s youngest sisters, spoke to me of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 32.

Ludmila's dedication to this process: it was she who was "running around the whole city getting everything together," and it was her self-sacrifice and persistence that eventually allowed the family to move. It was a tremendous undertaking, and an achievement for Ludmila to fill out the appropriate paperwork for nearly a dozen people. Originally the three generation family applied for refugee status, and traveled to Moscow for their interview, but only Raya and her daughter Klara received refugee status. Although initially the adults in the family had agreed to emigrate, during the long interval of uncertainty Klara had remarried. Because her new spouse wanted to stay and pursue his career, the successful acceptance in to the refugee program was contradictory to Klara's desires in her personal life. For these and other personal reasons, Klara was very reluctant to make the move to the United States.

Oxana and Ludmila were eager to relocate, and were eventually able to gain parole status. But apart from difficulties gaining status to secure entry in to the United States, the Razov's faced a complex application process. First, proving relation to family in the U.S. was problematic because of name misspellings, creating issues with matching documentation within the family. Second, finding a translator and notarizing the documents was problematic in a medium-sized city, which had been previously closed to foreigners. And lastly, in conjunction with official application fees, the cost of bribes and multiple trips to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow became a significant, implicit financial burden. Navigating official and unauthorized dimensions of the process took a toll on the family's financial and emotional well-being before departure. The concept of departure in itself is temporally fluid, would we consider departure the moment when the wheels of the airplane disconnect from the ground in moments before flight? Or,

rather at the conception of the idea of departure, when we mentally begin preparing for the unparalleled experience of leaving everything accustomed—the moments when we have chosen a complete unknown, instead of the unknown which is familiar to us? In this ethnography I treat the process of departure in the wider sense, from the first moment of planning to leave and attempting to leave Russia.

During the length of the application process some of the family members passed away or divorced. Thus, from the original eleven applicants only seven members of the family actually emigrated. Because, Klara explained, “by the time the documents actually came, only I, Raya and my father remained. Everyone else had passed away—so can you image how long the process took? Until these papers came at all.” The duration of the application process, with its possibility of abandoning their life and home, had a destabilizing effect on the family. After all, how does one go about pursuing life’s goals and maintenance of a meaningful daily routine, in the context of possible relocation and general structural disintegration? In the drawn out application process the move itself becomes abstracted and generally, the actual departure come as a shock in its own right. The particular life circumstances surrounding departure has an effect on the need for transnational practices after departure, as well as the overall mental state with which the newcomers arrive into the American landscape. This is well illustrated in the differences of approaches and relations to the move that Klara and Oxana shared with me.

In my interview with Klara, we sat in her kitchen, drinking tea and snacking on sugared cranberries. Klara sat on a chair with one leg bent and the other dangling off the chair,

sometimes lazily brushing the floor while her upper body was poised and regal. Her outstretched right arm rested on top of her bent knee, with her head slightly tilted back—she looked straight ahead, at times looking straight at Raya or me while contemplating a question; Klara’s clear and confident voice moved through the dense space, as she looked out the window. Only a couple of feet away, the kitchen window led to the brick wall of the adjacent building, blocking any cooling breezes. This window, which showed nothing, opened to no real space, let in the sounds of the air conditioners, traffic and voices—the quintessence of a blistering day in Brooklyn. She spoke of very real loss, but interspersed with laughter coming from a tempered seriousness and the savoring of even the rougher textures of her experience. Oxana sat calmly by the table, alternating between the articulation of her memories and pensive silence. Raya and I sat at the kitchen table, immersed in the unfolding of the story. Oxana and Klara’s story underscores the inseparability of emotions and family dynamics from transactions with the immigration apparatus.

After relatives in the U.S. had sent documents to the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), the family awaited to hear from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Klara recalled that, “the documents came for me, Raya, and my father—because I was in the process of getting a divorce I was considered part of my father’s household—and my sisters didn’t get the papers because, at the time, they were married...and [the papers came] for my mother, and her elderly parents, so we were one big family.”

Oxana vividly recalled the difficulties of life in Russia. She explained that during *perestroika* “were reading feverishly, reading books and journals like crazy without stopping. Then things calmed down and then things started to fly around that were very uncomfortable [for us]. In the late 80’s right [when] we had children, a very difficult time began, economically and I guess morally difficult as well.” The economic difficulty began with empty stores. Oxana recalled that “everything was gone from the stores matches, laundry detergent or any soap, everything. I was running around the whole city looking for matches in all of the stores (to light the stove). I got home and thought ‘That’s it! We are leaving this devil’s country because I can’t do this anymore!’ After Oxana finished university she “worked in a publishing house, as an editor, a writer, I worked in a magazine,” she explained. Raya was surprised and jumped-in in English, “You were an editor?” Oxana replayed, “Yes, yes, for a year but they didn’t pay me. There were such times! [*Vreme takoye biilo!*]...My ex-husband worked at the Institute of Genetics and they would pay him back in sour cream, milk, and eggs. We were incredibly happy because it was impossible to get anything [from the stores] and it was a chance to really eat up [*prokarmitsya real’no*]. Thank God! Now that I reminisce about that time,” Oxana recalled gratefully, “we had milk, and sour cream, and meat and eggs.”

When I asked Oxana about the contradiction of repayment in foodstuffs and empty stores, she replayed that “everything [in the system] was rotten, but there was everything in Russia and [the scarcity] it was constructed. I am more than sure it was constructed because of how things changed later.” She argued that the reason behind this was an intergovernmental and elite power struggle:

Gorbachev and his *glasnost'* and *perestroika* rubbed a lot of [upper level] people the wrong way [*nastupil na mazol'*, stepped on their sore]. Many people *did not* want this, especially people who were in the power structure so it was some kind of an opposition [which used scarcity as a tool]. It was, all in all, a bloodless civil war, I think, so everything that was going on with us was the result of what was going on with them [up] there. [It was] their battle and we paid for it because we had to wait in line for matches, for laundry detergent—it was sickening. When were waiting in line for meat for two or three hours and then happily went home with a stinking, rotten slab [of meat.] We would soak in alcohol [*margantsovki*] to kill that smell—we still had to feed the family. Of course it was terrible, but at times I also think [that] it's good that we experienced this [because] now nothing can scare us. Honest truth, anything that could happen we will survive it. Poor Americans, I look at them and God, they are so thin-skinned [*nezshniie*]. If they don't have electricity for half an hour they start fainting... We survived everything, I'm serious.

Oxana identified the humor with which we recounted these memories as a proof of the strength which was gained through survival. She added that “when Americans look [hear] this, they don't understand. They think it's horrible, a nightmare. And you [guys] see it with humor, the whole ridiculousness [of the situation] is funny [but] they just can't imagine it [in the same way].”

The family's plan for survival was to move, but the process of relocation was a bureaucratic obstacle course to endure in its own right. Consequently, I asked Klara about the duration process:

You know, Mother had told me that they applied for us when I had entered the theater, so five years because I had already worked there for five years and you [to Raya] were ten when the papers came. Then it took a year to fill out the documents—they send you an invitation to an interview—and it takes a year because it's a big pile of papers which you must fill out in two languages, all of your documents translated into English and notarized.

Klara detailed the problematic aspects of the application process: “In S. to find an honest, knowledgeable, certified translator and notary was very difficult. We looked everywhere—in all

of the English [university] departments, in all of the universities—with God’s help [*boga radi*] so they could translate the papers for us. Well, it’s not like that now, it’s probably easier. I didn’t deal with these things because as far as being home [*natsiianal’nyi strany*] I didn’t want to go; I had my own personal business, responsibilities and problems so I wasn’t interested in leaving.”

Apart from the difficulty of translation, Oxana remembered that “there was an enormous amount of questions, and about some of our relatives about whom we had no idea, and about familial lines. My grandmother was alive then and it turned out that in her documents the name was different from her *metriki*, which come from the place of birth.” Raya confirmed that the last name had only a one letter change. “So suddenly,” Oxana went on, “it turned out we had to go to courts and find some witnesses to verify that what looked like two people on paper was actually the same person—one face.” The variations in the spelling of last names occurred because their ancestors migrated from Ukraine to Russia during World War II. Since the names were written so quickly the mistakes became real last names. The result was that some of the members of the family appeared to be unrelated, lengthening the preparations for the application process. Oxana elaborated:

So it began like this and Father moved [the U.S.] The application process was very long, even getting the passports because it turned out that at every stage bribes [*vzatki*] were necessary, even to the smallest order bureaucrat for services that were part of their responsibilities some gifts had to be given. Were trying to get around [these things] so we found a woman who was supposed to help us get expedited passports which turned out to be a scam. We lost our nerves—so much time to anxiety.

After the application was submitted, the Razov family waited for an interview appointment.

Klara recalled that:

Most of the questions [during the interview] were for him [my father] because he was the head of the family. I sat there [through the interview] and I so badly wanted to stay put that I tried to say whatever I could think of so they would reject me—and they gladly gave me the permission to enter. The boy [who did the interview] was very nice, he asked me, ‘So you are an actress? What are you going to do there [in America]?’

‘I don’t know, I probably won’t do anything there, I’m a Russian speaking actress so I just don’t know,’” she recalls saying in surly tone. The interviewer replied cheerfully “‘Come on, come on, there, in our America, everything is going very well—you will find a job, and they love actors there and everything will work out for you.’ Therefore,” Klara surmised “he had already determined that we will be allowed to go—it was all a formality.”

Originally, Oxana also had to go to an interview at the Embassy in Moscow. She explained that “we didn’t get refugee status. Why didn’t we get it? I and my older sister, we are Jewish but we were married to Russian men and because we were applying based on [Jewish] family [lineage] they were in doubt of our nationality [heritage]. So we didn’t get refugee status. The questions, I don’t remember the questions now to tell you the truth. I thought it went well at the time, they asked us questions and we answered them honestly. Then we got [a letter that stated that] the decision was a ‘No.’ [We had provided] documentation [proof], like *metriki* of my parents... but they had suspicions, they wanted to limit immigration...so we didn’t get refugee status but we got parole status [*status parol’*] so we were allowed to enter the U.S. legally.”

Oxana explained that:

*Status parol’* required that there is employment already waiting because the [U.S.] government doesn’t extend the invitation to people who might end up without means here. Father found an employer that filed documentation vouching for our family’s financial independence from the government. It was a job in the hospitality industry but upon arrival we declined the job. But it allowed us to come here. *Status parol’* is for one

year, so if you don't leave in a year [the permit] is lost. We had a year to get all of our papers and sell our apartment. We had to sell our apartment, get ready and go—so we had a year to do all of that. So we did it.

Klara explained the steps after the interview “you must go to another agency and get documents to be put through a [health] review by a committee, which also costs money. The review lasts a year and if it expires, if you didn't get everything together to move, then you have to go through it again. Klara, with Raya's help, determined that she had reappeared three times before finally departing for the U.S. to join her father. Klara explained that:

I remained to deal with my [personal] reasons and other business, but so the case wouldn't be closed I would renew the [health] review—each time paying a substantial sum, especially for Russia it was a lot...They would take blood samples and everything to make sure weren't going to bring some disease...There was always the same doctor. I saw him three times in a row when I came there; he examined millions of people. Each time I had to come with Raya, and he remembered her, so the second time he exclaimed, 'These eyes came back again!' because she was so little with precious eyes...third time he said, 'I know you now, you are getting older.'...Each time I had to go to Moscow it was financially and emotionally problematic, and caused family issues.

Moscow is sixteen hours away from S. and while Karla acknowledged that, “Raya was a joy to travel with,” going to Moscow meant enduring a long train ride, and the length of the process meant that certain tests would have to be repeated.

Raya also remembers the application process spanned, essentially, her whole childhood. She recalled that “the process of coming here took many, many years and I think the reason they applied was that they were really shaken by the economic crisis of the early 90's and the mid 90's...It was a really scary situation in Russia and that is when they applied. By the time, not that things were better economically necessarily...But I feel that what happened is that my mother

didn't want to come because she found some kind of stability in her personal life, and I found some stability in my life."

The religious freedoms which began with *glasnost* and then during *perestroika* fortified the synagogues and Jewish cultural centers provided a resource to children and youth. Raya found a niche in the revived Russian Jewish and artistic arenas. Raya identified herself as a Jewish girl "because I was part of this really well established Jewish community in S.... it was basically a place where I felt like I was different enough and rebellious enough; to be Jewish and to be open about being Jewish—in Russia which was a big deal—it was a big deal for me. And I had a really involved life: I had painting classes, drawing classes, singing, I was part of the chorus, part of this theater group."

Despite being able to create a fulfilling life in Russia, the family still pursued a relocation strategy. The multilayered application process seeks to not only capture the personal and family histories of persecution, but the impact and the condition of the body of the potential refugee. Although research data does not prove overseas screening to be economically efficient or effective in meeting public health objectives, screening acts as another filter in the application process.<sup>34</sup>

Concomitantly, academic literature and perceptions points to 'the generalization and problematization of the "refugee"' and "discursive externalization of the refugee from the

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<sup>34</sup> Jacqueline Weekers, Harald Siem, "Is Compulsory Medical Overseas Screening of Migrants Justifiable?," *Public Health Reports* 112 (September/October 1997), 401.

national (read: natural) order of things.”<sup>35</sup> Domestic, pan-continental and international migration constitutes a reality for a significant part of the population. In the increasingly globalized and mobile world refugees are problematized as an exception in a supposedly sedentary world. In fact, Weekers and Siem argue that:

In the age of rapid community and transportation, when tens of millions of people move annually from one country to another, screening refugees and other permanent re-settlers does not contribute much to controlling the spread of communicable diseases.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the refugees do not pose a substantial public health threat but rather challenge “sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place...[which] defines displacement not as a fact about sociopolitical context, but rather as an inner, pathological condition of the displaced.”<sup>37</sup> The position of the refugee as an abnormality in an otherwise “healthy” nation-state system has ethical and political implications; primarily the configuration of the status, as domestic yet external, for the individual and the state.

After the final stage, the health examination, Klara explained “we had to pack...because I got a letter which stated that if I didn’t go now they will close my case.” Despite her reluctance and years of delay Klara began preparations for departure. Explaining that:

By this time my sisters had gone through the process of getting permission, and they quickly began to get ready. I was scared of being left behind, scared that Raya will be left without her beloved family, and that she wouldn’t forgive me [for staying behind.] I had two months, I think I had the [health] committee review but I went to Moscow to make sure, which was a secret from my husband.

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<sup>35</sup> Liisa Malkki, “National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,” *Cultural Anthropology* 7 (February 1992), 33.

<sup>36</sup> Weekers, Siem, 399.

<sup>37</sup> Malkki, 33.

Exasperated, Klara recalled that:

Then we had two months to get a passport, figure out what we were taking with us, assemble all documents, health records from the hospital; I had my [own] business to finish, like dental work—so all of these things, everything that was needed. The preparations, from an emotional side were difficult because I was leaving the person I was in love with, my job which I loved—it was not easy. Moreover, I was leaving my sisters and [their] children for an undetermined amount of time because who knew how long it would take them to get ready to leave. In my mind I was leaving to go to a black hole [*cheornaya dira*, hole in the ground], for me America didn't mean anything—just a black hole. Where? It was it—death. Additionally, I was taking my daughter [Raya] there, whom I didn't get a chance to ask if she even wanted to go there or not.

Klara resented the move because of her personal life circumstances and was unsure of her decision. With Klara's sisters eager and poised for departure, Klara was torn between the short and long term consequences of moving. Raya stated that "I think my experience of coming here was traumatic because of the reason that I didn't want to be here. The reason we kept on dragging this process and telling the US agency that we did want to come here was because my mother's sister and their families who I consider to be my immediate family really wanted to come here and as soon as they got their documents." They began to prepare for departure because "they felt like they wanted a better life and they didn't want to be unemployed." Thus, with many misgivings about their future Klara and Raya finally departed after ten years of uncertainty about their path.

### **The "Double Bind" and the Immigration Apparatus**

The immigration apparatus is the main facilitating instrument of the state in the placement of incoming refugees. From the onset the applicants communicate with an Overseas Processing Entity (OPE), followed by a contractor who conducts health examinations and security checks. If

the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provisionally grant refugee status sponsorship assurance is needed. The Refugee Processing Center and the Allocations subcommittee use private organizations which contract with the State Department to facilitate the actual resettlement. During the height of the Russian Jewish immigration, for example, NYANA's (New York Association for New Americans) budget was in the millions of dollars. Since the curbing of the refugee quotas after September 11, 2001 agencies like NYANA have had to downscale or redefine their purpose.

Upon arrival, NYANA assisted Klara and Raya with obtaining a white card and other paperwork at the port of entry.<sup>38</sup> Raya recalled that "then sometime, within a week you have to check in with them, and what the organization does is kind of offers you some benefits" like English classes, job searching, and "if you don't have a job they help you apply for welfare." Klara and Raya experienced not only a completely foreign landscape but a dependence on an organization which they found helpful, but problematic in its function. Klara explained that she had to bring in a lot of paperwork and documentation, and if she forgot a document she had to repeat the process of getting an appointment and waiting. Drained by the moving process itself, coping with cultural shock, and grieving over what she had left behind made the navigation of a bureaucratic structure in the U.S. all the more challenging. Another important aspect to

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<sup>38</sup> NYANA provided a range of services which were originally geared Holocaust survivors and then for other's escaping violence. Services included: "refugee resettlement, education and English as a Second Language, legal services and citizenship, health and mental health services (including running a center for women and families, a mental-health clinic, and a substance-abuse program), workforce and economic development, community development, and bi-culturation." From "NPO Spotlight," *Philanthropy News Digest: A Service of the Foundation Center*, <http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/spotlight/spotlight.jhtml?id=93600014>, accessed on 4/3/11

consider in understanding Klara's interactions with NYANA is the overall relationship between the individual and the state in the Soviet Union. The Razov's perspectives were informed by their experiences in the Soviet Union and Russia, and were carried over to the U.S. in their interactions and perceptions of NYANA.

The late Soviet generation held a relationship to the socialist bureaucracy which Yurchak describes as deterritorialization, meaning that "one voted in favor, passed Lenin examinations, filed reports, repeated precise textual forms, and went to parades, but without necessarily or usually having to pay attention to the constative meanings of these ritualized acts and speeches."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Yurchak argues that "routine replication of authoritative discourse enabled new identities, socialities, and forms of knowledge that were enabled but not determined by the authoritative rhetoric."<sup>40</sup> Deterritorialization allowed Soviet citizens to fill the performative functions of political rituals *and* be allowed by the state to create their own meanings and functions within the performative dimension. What Yurchak calls "Lefort's Paradox," is central to his argument for the existence of this phenomenon in the Soviet Union and in other modern states. Yurchak argues that the "general paradox within the ideology of modernity," to which socialism is no exception, is a "split between *ideological enunciation* (which reflects the theoretical ideals of Enlightenment) and *ideological rule* (manifest in the practical concerns of the modern state's political authority)."<sup>41</sup> Thus, the deterritorialization of

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<sup>39</sup> Yurchak, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 10

transactions with the state facilitated the creation of a social psychology of being within and part of the state while simultaneously tuned out and outside of the state.

Therefore, unsurprisingly Russian Jews repeatedly exhibit behavior that is contrary to the assumptions made by American agencies. As Gold describes Russian Jews are reluctant to accept all of the services offered and even resent the overly enthusiastic approach to their adjustment. They often feel that their Jewish-ness is being tested, or that they have to be Jewish in ways which emulate American Jews. Drawing from their experience in the Soviet Union as Jews and Russians, many Russian Jews are apprehensive of the goodwill of official state agencies and their contractors. Their experience, especially the historical and political revelations of *glasnost*' and *perestroika*, compels them to look beyond the face value of their transactions with the immigration apparatus.

Although Russian Jews may be ambivalent towards American Jewish organizations, they are not immediately drawn into circles of more acculturated Russian migrants. While being viewed as a distinct group in Russia, upon arrival they suddenly become Russian-Jewish or Russian. Steven J. Gold notes that "...for the Soviet Jews who lack a solid grounding in the Jewish faith, the more distinguishing factors, to other Americans, are their Russian language and traditions." In his study of Soviet Jewish refugees in the "Golden State" Gold cites a comment of a San Francisco physician that "actually, we do have a joke in the community: 'You have to come to America to become Russian.'"<sup>42</sup> This is not to suggest, that agencies were not successful in

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<sup>42</sup> Steven J. Gold, *From the Workers' State to the Golden State: Jews from the Former Soviet Union in California*, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1995), 76.

facilitating the resettlement of thousands of Russian Jewish refugees. Rather, the relationship of refugee resettlement agencies and American Jewish organizations was complicated by the ramifications of the unique status of the Jewish people in the Soviet Union and their lived-experience in Russia described in the previous section.

The paradoxical status of being within and outside for the Russian Jews is amplified by their arrival to the United States and the accompanying adjustment to high mass consumption culture. As Yurchak points out the paradox is not unique to late socialism, but rather a characteristic of the modern state. The paradox manifested in the Soviet society through the demand from citizens “to submit completely to party leadership, to cultivate a collectivist ethic, and repress individualism, while at the same time becoming an enlightened and independent-minded individual who pursues knowledge and is inquisitive and creative.” These contradictory demands necessitate another dimension in which both of these can be manifested.

Late capitalism in United States manifests its own paradox. Yurchak cites Susan Bordo who argues that the “Western subject [is] in a “double bind” between, on the one hand, a workaholic ethic and repression of consumer desire, and, on the other, the capitulation to desire and achievement of immediate satisfaction.”<sup>43</sup> Based on this observation it is prudent to further explore the significance of the historical and political context of communism and *perestroika* on the adjustment of Russian Jews in the United States. During the relocation process the modes of interaction which are historically ingrained are exposed in a new way through the interactions with the U.S. immigration apparatus. Meaning that the historical

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<sup>43</sup> Yurchak, 11.

experiences and the conflicts of identity are triggered by the heavily consumer oriented, and seemingly transparent interactions with the state and resettlement organizations. Although the Razov family heavily emphasized the lack of basic food and household products in their frustration and decision to leave Russia, they were also not prepared for the level of consumption in New York City. In their life in Russia the Razovs were accustomed to consuming arts and culture at high rate, but found themselves unable to participate in the arts and cultural spheres in New York City in the same way. These and other aspects of their lives in Russia have given them at times a sense of grief in being unable to recreate the positive aspects of their former lives.

The Razovs and other ethnic and religious minority individuals who are part of the “last Soviet generation” do represent a unique perspective in history. The examination of this distinctive perspective must take into account the following factors: a) the last Soviet generation had a particular conception and relationship towards the West via the “Imaginary West” which Yurchak argues was not “Western” or “Russian,” and b) having experienced the disintegration of political and economic structures and consequently the end of a Soviet relationship with the “Imaginary West,” c) the last Soviet generation and those who were children during *perestroika* moved to the United States, having to navigate the American immigration and resettlement system. Lastly, d) Russian Jews experienced a multiplied “double bind” which resulted from both the “socialist” and “late capitalist” orientation of the state, and due to their status as being, or at times perceived as being, outside and inside in multiple ways of both Soviet Union, Russia and the U.S.

Through the application process and through work with agencies after arrival Klara and Raya found themselves peculiarly situated in New York City. Despite assistance Klara described this situation as being left one on one with America; of being inside America, and outside until her physical location attained meaning. The emotional experience of the application process illuminates the impact of the immigration apparatus on the social psychology of the individual. The history of the family, if we take it as a microcosm of post-Soviet history, is starkly illuminated in the process of navigating the U.S. resettlement process. These emotional experiences of the process are not mere “emotions” or “moods.” Indeed, they go to the core of the lived experience of what it means to be an ethnic and religious minority from Russia living in America.<sup>44</sup> Raya recalls the intensity of her mother’s experience:

So what happened with my mom, for a bunch of emotional reasons, she didn’t want to be here from the start that was the reason she couldn’t move here in four years because she had a husband in Russia who didn’t want to move here; they are both actors. If you don’t speak the language there is not much you can do as an actor, unless you completely change you career. So she didn’t want to be here and she kind of broke all the rules, she went to English classes but she kind of didn’t go with the program to the end...she didn’t go through welfare and other stuff as a good American refugee.

Klara admitted that she was so unhappy to be in the U.S. that she wasn’t interested in advice, and would view it as an intrusion. She recalled that she also found NYANA very difficult to deal with, though in retrospect she is glad that they had access to information and services. Thus, she now assessed that they were not completely “abandoned.” However, after being Jewish in Russia, and then Russia in the U.S. proved that an institution such as NYANA was a small conciliation. Removed from the larger family network, the cultural and historical context which

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<sup>44</sup> Zlatko Skribiš, “Transnational Families: Theorizing Migration, Emotions and Belonging,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29 (August 2008), 236.

made their existence relevant, and their place in the cultural landscape of their hometown, Klara and Raya felt distinctly dislodged.

**Relocation: “Flowers Aren’t Waiting Here for Anyone”**

Klara sees her experience as distinct from her sisters because “when they were coming here, my older sister had already figured things out [and separated] from her husband, and my other sister, she came with her husband so they didn’t have the same kind of dislocation [*razryv*, tear], that they were leaving something [dear] behind.”

Even though Klara had low expectations moving to America didn’t match her preconceived notions. The “imaginary West” which so prominently occupied the consciousness of the Razov family, seemed to have had nothing do with the reality which Klara encountered upon arrival:

We saw America not in pictures, but in films. You know, the skyscrapers and everything, so we had an idea about it [*my po drugomu vozprimali*] but when we came to Brooklyn, with dirt flying [everywhere]... And when I first came to Brighton—now I enjoy walking around—but can you image the first time, with the train above your head, grime: ‘What is this? Where did we come?’ I was thinking. Actually, what I’m telling you is so widespread. If you ask every first person, not even second will tell you of the same—the same feelings, the same shock but then, humans are like cockroaches—they adapt everywhere.

The context indicated that the comparison of humans to cockroaches was not cynicism, but rather an expression of agency; a belief in the resilience and adaptability of the human spirit.

The initial time after arrival was very difficult for Klara and Raya. Raya recalled that initially:

I rejected everything here, and I refused to learn English in the first year of being here. My mother brought eight volumes of Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky, Lermontov and something else that was also extremely depressing. So at the age thirteen I read my

Crime and Punishment. I was depressed as hell, and I didn't speak a word of English, and I refused to learn it.

Klara empathized with her daughter and the difficulty of the move for her stating that, “essentially, speaking from an emotional standpoint, children of this age, when they aren't little, they're not toddlers...[and] have a social group a circle of friends and attachments. [But] no one asks them, the same [as with toddlers] they are grabbed by the arm [*podhvataut pod myshki*]” and taken away. Klara recalled regretfully:

What she [Raya] left behind and her separation [*razryv*, tear] no one asked about that...when they get here they also begin to reorient [*vyzshivat'*, survive] and comprehend the where and what of the surroundings in general [*i voobshem ponimat' gde my? Chto?*] and without knowing the language. Of course [*pariadechno*, appropriately] they gain the skills, but it still takes time.

The adolescent and child experience of moving away from Russia and creating a new, uniquely Russian, Jewish, and American identity for children and adolescents who were born in the very end of the Soviet Union, or during perestroika, is an independent research subject. The experience of the family and the historical context of those experiences still deeply impacts the child or adolescent even decades after living in America, when by all measures the individual has assimilated. Of course, the depression of the parents impacts their children.

Klara recalled her thoughts during the initial shock and depression. “For example, the first year I was just thinking of how terrible it was. Why have we come here? What have we done? In the first four months I would wake up with this raw wound, and when I woke up—I remember it was every morning—I would open my eyes and I couldn't understand where I was: Where is this? Then as my consciousness came back and my second thought was: What are we doing

here? [*Zachem my zdes'?*].” During the interview Raya asked if Klara had told herself that she was moving for her, to give her a better future. Klara said no, because “I saw that it wasn’t so great here and I’m against making these types of sacrificial decisions. Never in your life should you say that you are doing something for your children for which you could be blamed later. I did what I did, and I knew we had to live through it.” Raya clarified that “up to a certain point my mother kept going back and forth. And she even considered staying in Russia, moving back to Russia and starting a business there.” But after an attempt, explained Raya, “she just realized that she can’t because I’m here. At the time when she decided to move back to Russia when she was financially and emotionally stable enough to move back there and live there I just began high school I established my own circle of friends... I was like, ‘Wow, I’m different and these people are also different and I can also be friends with them.’ And she realized I would not move back to Russia. Initially family ties, and then as I got established here for my mom that was like ‘I’m staying here because that’s my daughter and I can’t just leave her here.’ Thinking back on it I’m happy we moved here—I mean, my life is here now.”

Klara described a significant difference between those who want to come and her experience. The lack of closure in her situation not only made her reluctant to become “a good American refugee” but prompted her to return to Russia for periods of time. “Thus,” Klara clarified, “all of the technical [bureaucratic] aspects are very highly related to the emotional state...because... maybe a person who wants to come takes, consciously [*konkretno*, concretely] collects all of their possessions and documents, and this provides closure emotionally about what is being left behind and how easy or difficult it is, and what awaits them.” Ultimately though, Klara feels

that the process is difficult for all “because flowers aren’t awaiting here for anyone, whether a person wants to come here or not, they encounter the same problems. My sisters wanted to come here very badly, but they had the same shock and depression which I experienced.”

When Klara’s sisters and their families arrived six months later, they lived together, and re-lived the onset of shock and depression with them.

Oxana recalled that “the first year was horrible and I thought why was this necessary? I thought I was never going to understand these people [Americans], I’m never going to become an American, I can never understand their mentality.” Then “bit by bit—I just had to start socializing with [American] people, of course for that you need [to know] the language...I have been so lucky [that] I met so many interesting people.” Oxana went on to explain that:

We went [to work] cleaning apartments, and in practically two weeks we rented a large apartment for our whole family. We lived all together: Father, I and my ex-husband and my son, Klara and Raya, and my older sister [Mila] and her daughter [], and we lived like this in Russia too...rent was paid communally, bills were communal, food was communal, so that really helped us. Everyone went to work, and went to, first one type of [English] classes, then when we got social security we found a school for free...[because] they were paid for by grants. We went straight to school and started working.

### **Attaining Belonging**

After the turbulent first couple of years the Razov’s began to acclimate to their new location which shifted their self-identity. Raya, who was present during the interview asked how long had passed before her mother, Klara, didn’t want to move back to Russia. Klara found this question difficult, but it revealed the importance of becoming placed:

Three or four years [long silent pause]...three or four years. The next time I went there [to Russia] I didn't have any aggression towards this country. And I would get annoyed when people would try to tell me something [negative] about America, [I would ask them] do you know? Have you been there? Because I saw many positive things socially, and how elders and children are treated, social programs and welfare [*sotsial'nii pomoshi*]. Principally, very fundamental things like seeing smiles when you walk down the street—even if they are fake smiles, they are not the grimace [*kozya rozha*, goat face] which you get to see in Russia...So when people [in Russia] were telling me, 'Over there you have like, America is a country without a culture. Over there you have fake smiles,' [I said] 'Guys, and here you don't get fake smiles but real scowls that if you walk by, anyone will curse you out—God forbid you brush against them! And such a culture—it's exhausting! [*sil nekokih net!*]. I was offended when people started talking about what they did not understand. You know, [talking about America negatively] only because they were shown something on TV...The first year when I back from there [Russia], I gladly noticed that things here were already familiar, I knew the streets and which way to walk. It's really a place for me now.

Klara's visits to Russia became a way of gauging her adjustment to her evolved identity and a new life in New York City. Klara felt that she belonged physically in her neighborhood where both American Jews, Russian Jews and Russians, as well as other ethnic minorities from the former Soviet Union were heavily represented. Upon going back to Russia and attempting to fit back into the Russian society having developed a self-identity and a sense of cultural membership that incorporated Russian, Western and uniquely post-Soviet and post-*perestroika* experiences and contexts, she found that she could no longer comfortably operate in Russian society—at least not in the ways which seemed perfectly normal and were expected of her before leaving.

Klara expressed the value of her experience and background, asserting that despite no longer wanting to move back "I don't think that a person should forget their birth land, their roots. It's not right [to forget]." She described the broadening impact of having lived in three different

cultures, noting that the move “was cathartic, it gave a chance to experience [life] here and there. If I stayed there I would never have had a chance to visit the places I have been to [now], I could have never traveled [like that], Raya could never study in a college like the one she attends.”

Aside from providing and sending necessary documents for moving to the U.S Klara’s more acculturated relatives did not give financial or emotional support upon their arrival. Because Klara’s ageing father was a closer relative, the more adjusted relatives had housed and helped him in myriad of ways. Klara stated that “When we came here and we were left one on one with America—I, her [Raya] and America—and that’s it.” However, Klara did spend time with another relative who had moved three years ago who was able to relate and empathize more closely with the resulting troubles and depression. She concluded with “I think that moving is a huge psychological trauma for everyone [who experiences this] for the little and the grown up. Thus, in school they provide the immigrant children with psychological counseling.”

Despite the hardships endured and many memories of difficulties Oxana feels very happy here. Because, she explained, “I think it’s wonderful that we experienced and survived all of this, and immigration is also wonderful because, first, many found so many opportunities that we couldn’t have known about sitting there [at home].”

I asked Oxana if she felt a sense of belonging here, and she replied confidently with “Absolutely. I love New York and I like it here. I met so many interesting people here, I got a new profession here...I don’t know, I feel that here I have a full life and I know that it wouldn’t be the same

back there. Never could I have been able to get a second education there. I wouldn't have had enough money because there wasn't a system of loans. The first three or four years were very hard; we were very homesick [*skuchno*, bored, sad]." Oxana has been here for nine years and is not inclined to go back to visit Russia. When I asked her about visiting she said, "I don't know to what extent things are better there [in Russia] now...I have never been back, my sisters have gone back but I haven't even once yet...I would like go back with Father, I don't know if I want to from what I hear..." The accounts she heard from her sisters and Raya, certainly give a complex and strange landscape to navigate. Some of the challenges and cultural disconnects of going back to visit "home" will be addressed in the last section, Transnational Kinship and Family Network.

Oxana concluded with:

I'm not an American, but I am here...We have to be ourselves, I think it's great that we have our own background, we have our own culture and language, and that we came here. And we can embrace yet another culture, even if in our own level, from ourselves and our perspective. Life itself is history which was happening before our eyes. Of course it brought changes, like our move, it was an emigrational time after all in which we lived.

In conclusion, Klara explained that her belief in adjusting to the U.S. is that "before you can come to love the country...you have to be shown the best." Although Klara remembers the concrete difficulties of life in Russia, the "tearing" away from her life in S. provoked her to return multiple times. Oxana was glad to emigrate, but doesn't minimize the difficulty of the relocation. Finally achieving a sense of belonging and membership which accommodated their experiences, the family settled down.

For Raya life means attending a prestigious arts school in the city, and living with her mother. Becoming a U.S. citizen ensures security and is the final stage of the transactions with the immigration apparatus. Raya's experience of the naturalization interview, and her interpretation of surrounding events illustrate the maintenance of the within/outside dynamic described in the previous sections. Citizenship alone did not compel Raya to see herself as a full member, as "within" America, pointing to the non-legal dimensions of national membership and belonging.

Raya explained that for the citizenship interview "you come into this room and there is this officer and there is this one question she always has to ask, 'Are you going to raise arms against the US government?' And you have to say 'No,' and she is extremely bored and she is like, 'OK.'" Questions about the past and current president followed, as well as a literacy test. "Then," Raya continued, "a month or two later I had to come to the ceremony, and the ceremony was basically this huge room where everyone was sitting and waiting for people to change their names. Then we all sang 'God Bless America' and took the pledge of allegiance."

After the oath ceremony, Raya received a simple paper booklet:

They gave this booklet this little comic it was about Maria and Pedro who were fired from the cleaning lady and plumber jobs for being Hispanic, and then they went to this Americanized Mrs. Smith Something, who told them that no one can fire them from these wonderful jobs for being Hispanic, and if they call this number those people are going to give them their jobs back. And the whole point of the comic was like no one can discriminate against you based on your race because you are an American now. But the comic was so racist, the names, the jobs that these people had the person they went to, the way they were drawn: Pedro was kind of heavy and short, and Maria had huge breasts and was also short, and had tiny legs. It was extremely stereotypical. It was

really hilarious, I was laughing at that so hard, now I'm American, now finally I won't be discriminated against.

Experiencing and reinterpreting racial stereotypes and their connection to racialized labor, allowed Raya to turn the tables and imagine the booklet made to inform Russian or Slavic immigrants. Raya recalled, "I was laughing at it and I wish someone would make a Russian and Ukrainian comic like that saying, 'I'm a prostitute and they denied me my prostitute job because I'm Russian and I want it back because this is what I was meant to do based on my ethnic background.'" Or alternatively, "'My name is Ivan and I'm a pimp, and my name is Natalia and I'm a prostitute: these people deny us our jobs that we rightfully own as American citizens with Russian backgrounds, give them back, that's what we came here to do!'" Raya was repulsed by the stereotyping, and its disguise as educational material for new citizens.

Indeed, learning racial reading is indispensable for navigating the American landscape. For example, after being exiled from the Soviet Union and denationalized, the famous Soviet writer Vasylii Aksyonov, was granted asylum and resettled in the U.S. During the process he had an incident with a black officer of the INS, "who reacted angrily to his suggestion that the information on a certain form he neglected to fill out could be found in his computerized file: "Are you trying to teach me my job? . . . You have no rights in this country! You're a refugee!" Afterward, "a Polish friend who had lived here longer than he offered some tempering

observations about the complexity of interracial encounters in America, compelling Mr. Aksyonov to recognize that he was not as free of racist sentiments as he imagined.”<sup>45</sup>

Race and class become points of departure in which the immigration apparatus is seen as shared, since differently racialized groups are in effect, working within the same system.

Furthermore, the construct of race in the American context is also seen in the disassociation of immigrants from otherwise racialized immigrant or marginal groups in the U.S. as a rite of passage “in becoming white.”<sup>46</sup> For example, historian Nancy Foner provides a comparative perspective on the differences of experience of Caribbean immigrants in London and New York City. Upon entering the racial landscape and norms of New York, where the newcomers learn that they are “black,” they often consciously dissociate from African-Americans, while generating and confirming a Caribbean-American immigrant identity. Thus, Foner demonstrates that, what I call learning the correct racial reading, in the racial hierarchy of New York City, is a key part in the adjustment and acculturation. In the context of the immigration apparatus, racial and class power dynamics and hierarchies are replicated and communicated through the immigration process. In “Immigrants Navigate Race and Class,” Ong illustrates this process through an examination of Cambodian refugees and Chinese corporate transnationals on the West Coast. Although Chinese transnationals feel the impact of “race” to a lesser amount due to the insulation of their upper class status, Cambodian refugees experience a

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Lingeman, “He Likes It Here, Mostly,” NYTimes.com: Global Edition, Books, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/07/19/books/he-likes-it-here-mostly.html?sec=&spon=&scp=2&sq=Lingeman%20Aksyonov&st=cse&pagewanted=1>, accessed 4/1/11

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigration and the Alchemy of Race*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 52.

racial disadvantage in the immigration and welfare bureaucracy and are situated socially accordingly via the resettlement processes.

Learning racial reading allows migrants to recognize obstacles and advantages to living in the United States. Thus, navigating the American racial landscape entails an understanding of the racial, class and gender hierarchies and systems of power—as well as one’s place in that structure. The racial matrix in the U.S., filled with the contrasting notions of being “black” and being “white” potentially obscure the Razovs complex history as survivors of the Soviet system and *perestroika*. It is as if the long and difficult history of being a Russian Jewish family can be “washed away” in the American system where they are regarded as white immigrants. Echoing Zolberg, in the design of the demographic makeup of America the Razovs are a welcomed addition. But their Jewish and their Russian ethnicities are complex in different ways in the American context. Simply put, there is nothing to “wash away” except the whole person and all the historical events which have led up to that person’s existence. Thus, the Razovs are forced to confront the Russian Jewish, Jewish and the Russian aspects of their family’s history in the post-Soviet context in order to be able to understand their lived experience in the American context. The forging of a new self-identity and reconciliation with the Soviet legacy of their heritage in the United States is more than an invitation, or an opportunity—it is a necessity.

### **Transnational Kinship and Family Network**

Commonly, kinship and family networks are known to provide an economic buffer, grounding in self-identity, community support and sense of ownership/belonging.<sup>47</sup> For immigrant subcultures, kinship and family networks are ties to the culture and country of origin. The transnational kinship and family network generates a fluid multicultural identity which allows individuals to be have segmented yet encompassing cultural and self-identity, imperative for their “within/ outside status.” Furthermore, transnational kinship and family networks foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, in which the conditions and reality of multicultural life are understood and shared by the members.<sup>48</sup>

Kinship and family networks are also an important unit of research since prevalence of transnationalism among migrants is still under debate. For example, Castles and Miller state that the use of the term “transmigrant” is rash, and should be avoided as to not exaggerate what is yet to be proven through quantitative research. They argue that “to be a considered a transnational, transnational practices must be central to a person’s life.”<sup>49</sup> But as Glick and Levitt point out, individuals who don’t participate in transnational practices are not fully dissociated from transnationalism because they are often engaged in communities and

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<sup>47</sup> See Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*.

<sup>48</sup> “Within transnational social fields, individuals actively pursue or neglect blood ties and fictitious kinship. Based on their particular needs, individuals strategically choose which connections to emphasize and which to let slide. Second, in many cases, socialization and social reproduction occur transnationally in response to at least two social and cultural contexts.” Peggy Levitt, Nina Glick Schiller, “Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society,” *International Migration Review* 38 (Fall 2004), 19.

<sup>49</sup> Castles, Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 32.

networks where transnationalism is vibrant.<sup>50</sup> Evaluating transnationalism by the single measure of “the centrality of transnationalist practices to the individual’s life” overlooks the ways in which kinship and family networks are crucial to individuals, and the significance of transnationalism to the individual via these networks. Eventually, the adolescent children in the Razov family returned to Russia and states in the former Soviet Union reinforcing the long standing transnational practices and networks which have been in place since the earlier Razov relatives moved to New York in the early 1980’s.

Like many family and kinship networks the Razov’s network is multi-generational, amplifying generational and cultural differences. During a discussion of migrant parents and children Oxana stated that she thought “that language is the base” on which everything else rests, thus language was the greatest differentiating and communal factor.

“Because,” Oxana explained, “thoughts are also some kind of word-forms. Sometimes I catch myself sitting and formulating [some thoughts] in English, and then I think about why I did that and for whom...So some things now are more difficult for me to talk [and think] about in Russian; everything surrounding my profession...because I studied it here.” Thus, language plays an important role, in communication as each word carries a specific cultural and possibly historical context. A short case study of a birthday party during which I was a participant-observer illustrates the intergenerational and linguistic dynamics in the family:

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<sup>50</sup> Levitt, Schiller, 14.

The celebration was in traditional Russian style, and began with the family and close friends gathering around a large table that was made up with several smaller tables pulled together from different sections of the house. Chairs from all over the house were arranged for more than a dozen people for this occasion. Different types of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, salads, cut up vegetables, meats and caviar, fish and other main dishes were laid out on the table to create an atmosphere of festivity and plenty. The arrangement of the dinner party in all of the activities focused on the inclusion of all present. After the guests had settled in, all of the food and drink had been passed around at least once and every guest had made a plate for themselves, a series of toasts began, headed by *Dedushka* (grandfather.) Guests that arrived later or needed assistance were asked if they would allow the hosts or other guests that were especially close to the family, to *po uhazhivat'*. This term can be applied to courtship or in this case it means to "take care" of them, for example refilling their wine and food in a way that is understood to be very welcoming and endearing. Another aspect that created this unique and warm atmosphere was the entertainment for the evening, which included poetry, family games and singing. Ludmila, the oldest sister was a poet in Russia and was recently re-inspired by a trip to Paris. Ludmila's poem described her walking through the streets of Paris, swept off her feet and completely in love again. She felt Paris was home, that it was S.. Ludmila was moved to express this sensation in prose even though logically she knew that Paris was no home, and S. is thousands of miles away. Although this was a very serious part of the evening it was important experience to record and share because the poem resonated with the guests by grappling with

feelings of displacement, alienation and the fluidity of “home.” How can you feel at home in a place you have never been before?

Then the family and the guests enjoyed a couple of rounds of light hearted games. Due to their interactive nature, the games highlighted the linguistic dynamics. Since Ludmila’s husband didn’t speak Russian, and *Dedushka* (grandfather) doesn’t speak English, it was up to the three youngest guests (age 22 to 27) to continually translate and provide live narration of the events in both Russian and English. The first game was a task to make a birthday speech using five random words written on an index card. Again an index card in all English and a custom all-Russian index card for *Dedushka* were made. In the past, *Dedushka* had said that he is tired of hearing English all the time and would strongly prefer that only Russian would be used so he could understand the conversation and participate fully. Translation and social inclusion were maintained voluntarily, but also requested at times because at times English phrases seeped into Russian conversation for convenience and context. Certain English phrases or actions don’t have a convenient translation and are easily inserted into Russian conversation.

This also occurs in reverse, between Russian speakers conversing in English and coming back to certain Russian words to convey subtle references or give cues. The second reason for linguistic hybridism can be exemplified by Oxana. Oxana was an editor and writer in Russia but changed her profession in New York. Since her study and training for her second career was in English, she greatly prefers and feels more confident discussing her current work in English. The relationship of English and Russian in different social contexts is important since bilingualism is

more dominant and prevalent. These gatherings and celebrations function as spaces of negotiation between intergenerational, cultural and linguistic aspects of the Razovs individual and collective identity. A space is created where all of these characteristics are daily, normal activities. In these gatherings, the uniquely post-Soviet perspective, the Russian Jewish and aspects of American culture are silently celebrated.

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Inclusion of family narrative in examinations of the migration and resettlement process expands the American “immigrant” narrative.<sup>51</sup> For example, Klara’s reluctance to accept refugee status and move to the “black of hole” of America goes against certain ethnocentric and political assumptions. Although the U.S. was the Razovs destination of choice, changing political and personal circumstances, augmented by family dynamics, demanded a careful weighing of options and implications. The consideration of these factors points to multiple aspirations in people’s lives in which relocation, to the U.S. specifically, does not necessarily constitute the main goal.

As I searched for words to describe the difficulty of the Razov’s application process, and their exhausting trips to Moscow, I received a letter from the Department of Homeland Security

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<sup>51</sup> “If the law is the apparatus that binds and seals the universality of the political body of the nation, then the “immigrant,” produced by the law as margin and threat to that symbolic whole, is precisely a generative site for the critique of that universality...cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality displace the fiction of reconciliation, disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures, and intervene in the narrative of national development that would illegitimately locate the “immigrant” before history or exempt the “immigrant” from history,” Lowe, 8.

requesting my presence in Atlanta, GA. Amidst the last, crucial couple of weeks of my time at Marlboro College in the spring of 2011, I had to drop everything and oblige. After the appointment, with my biometrics successfully captured and stored, the weight of the process became apparent to me. First, and foremost the process of becoming an American citizen is a political process. Similarly, to the political connotations of emigrating from the Soviet Union, the process of gaining American citizenship cannot be divorced from its political and historical framework. As this study has sought to demonstrate, citizenship formalizes but does not encapsulate belonging, identity and attachments. The Razovs offer a lived experience that happened in a concrete and limited time span, between two countries, three political ideologies, an intertwining of cultures and historical legacies. Their narrative must be preserved for the distinctive and yet collective comprehension it provides to us about the human experience at large.

*Notes*

An additional part of my research focused on race and legal status in a Colombian family in East Boston, MA. Unfortunately, I had to discontinue that project, but even the beginning of my analysis with these two families crystallized the importance of class and race. Race at times sways the immigration experience in the direction of economic vulnerability and cultural marginalization. Class potentially produces disparate outlooks on similar issues. For example, in the Latino community I often heard the term “newcomer,” to refer to what are in normative language referred to as immigrants or migrants, and aliens in legal language. By using newcomer, instead of the other categories, a distorted power balance between those who belong and those who do not qualify to be true “Americans” is shifted to the matter of personal or generational duration on the territory which after expansion and conquest became the United States of America.

This difference in perception is exemplified by a discussion I had at a Russian gathering. Since it was known that I was a family friend but also studying immigration one of the guests asked me about the US-Mexico border and immigration control. I was asked whether the “13 million illegals who crossed the border, like cats and dogs and snakes that cross the desert, should be given amnesty?” The speaker then asserted that they cannot be allowed to stay because that would impede the creation of national healthcare system. My reply was that “Yes, right now the crossing of the desert is dehumanizing and extremely dangerous, but if there were shuttle buses going back and forth, it would be much better to sit and be able to drink some water. And

then when the day was over maybe people actually just take the bus back to their home and families.” Apart from moving the conversation away from this topic (this was not the time or the place for such a discussion) my desire was to move the dialogue past the logic of criminalization of migration. After all, it can be far too easy to forget the role of U.S. economic and foreign policy, not just on Mexico, but also on Russia during *perestroika*. My family and the Russian Jewish family which cooperated with me on this research project left in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, when the U.S. advocated aggressive privatization and the implementation of other aspects of development theory. Again, this experience solidified my understanding of the migration and naturalization as a racializing and placing processes.

Additionally, Lisa Lowe points to the contradictions of cultural citizenship and Asian immigration. By using the title of her work “Immigrant Acts” to touch on the ways that Asian Americans have been to “subject to” exclusionary acts and “subjects of” agency, she points to their place “within” and “” foreign” and “outside” the national polity.<sup>52</sup> As we can see much scholarship has already introduced and mapped the role of the state and its extensions on migrants. Since those migrants sometimes also become American citizens this points to larger trends and questions. Further examination of this process could reveal lived-experiences of Americans vis-à-vis the transactions between the U.S. nation-state and immigrants.

Specifically, it has potential to provide new insight into the relationship between assimilation and socialization in the nation-state: How do the ways that nationals are socialized relate to the processes by which foreigners are assimilated?

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<sup>52</sup> Lisa Lowe, 8.

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