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**FROM AGING SOVIETS TO U.S. CITIZENS: IMMIGRATION, AGING,
AND THE CULTURAL CONTRUCTION OF OLD AGE IN NEW YORK CITY**

by

Kitty Clarke

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York**

2003

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

From Aging Soviets to U.S. Citizens: Immigration, Aging, and the Cultural Construction of Old age In New York City

by

Kitty Clarke

Adviser: Professor Shirley Lindenbaum

This is a study of relationships between aging and immigration in the cultural construction of identity among elderly Russian Jewish émigrés (a cohort of 34 men and women who lived most of their lives through the times spanning the birth and death of the Soviet Union) who entered New York City in the 1980's and 1990's. The setting is two densely populated neighborhoods—Brighton Beach and Washington Heights. Life histories and participant observation are used to explore the significance of past lives and the ways in which the past, shaped by the more immediate experience of immigration, contributes to the present in the construction of aging immigrant identity. Ethnographic data demonstrate the ways in which memories of World War II, anti-Semitism, illness, and everyday Soviet life are used imaginatively to shape the present: an account of a veterans' association describes how émigrés draw from a powerful past experience to create public ritual, achieve recognition, and reach out to younger generations; an account of émigré language classes explores the influence of past educational experiences on the appeal of language study; an encounter with police exposes persisting sensitivity and conflicts about anti-Semitism and Jewish identity; their encounter with U.S. healthcare becomes an indictment of Soviet healthcare and communism. Common themes and intra-cohort

variations are identified based on the social composition of the two neighborhoods and differences in age at which key historical events occurred.

The usefulness of life course and cohort analysis confirms previous work on the role of the state in creating inequality, the significance of shifting inequalities, and the influence of historical events in shaping experiences. Findings also demonstrate the value of theoretical concepts used in the study of immigration, particularly transnationalism, and the ways in which time, place and space work to shape individual identity. Finally, the usefulness of narratives in understanding the creative processes involved in transforming identity under the dual influences of aging and immigration is demonstrated.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

The elderly are unlikely immigrants. Although they have always been a part of immigrant movements, their numbers have been small. The presence, therefore, of significant numbers of the elderly among the ranks of Russian Jewish immigrants entering the United States over the past twenty-five years has been an unusual occurrence. It raises anthropological questions about the cultural construction of aging and ethnicity as it is mediated by immigration. It provides the opportunity to gain a broader understanding of aging as a distinct part of the social order through the perspective of a unique cohort of elderly people who have lived most of their lives in a time and place of tumultuous social, political and economic upheaval radically different from the United States.

I have placed the elderly at the center of my research situated in two New York City neighborhoods where aging Russian Jewish émigrés have settled in recent years: Washington Heights, in northern Manhattan and Brighton Beach, in south Brooklyn. In most ethnographic accounts of other societies, the elderly are usually consigned to traditional, supportive positions as child caretakers, rounding out the family unit, sometimes the wise purveyors of tradition, at other times, dependent, sometimes demanding elders. In my work, I have expanded this limited view to one which recognizes the significance and uniqueness of life events for individuals and for cohorts in shaping old age. I have further expanded this view to examine aging and immigration against a backdrop of local, national and, at times, international events.

Elderly Russian Jewish émigrés represent a cohort which has lived for the longest period of time in a powerful communist state, experiencing contradictions in their daily

lives of an all encompassing providential and punishing state, one in which state responsibility for their welfare was a given in exchange for harsh deprivation, duplicity and discrimination. Those in their eighties now, were infants at the time of the Revolution, raised under new as well as old vestiges of Russian and Jewish culture. They, along with those now in their seventies, were old enough to have felt the impact of collectivization, imprisonment, and the Second World War. They are perhaps the extreme case history, in that the powerful and disruptive political and social forces operating throughout their lives almost demand close examination for their human and historical interest alone. But beyond that, their lives become grist for the creation of ideologies and social organization in a new place and time. As the subjects of this study, as immigrants immersed in a city of immigrants, as elderly members of a society in which their voices stand a chance of being heard, their ideas and actions become part of the complex mix that shapes social organization.

1.2 THE SUBJECTS

The subjects of this study are a small contingent of 34 elderly Russian Jews, 21 women and 13 men, who settled in New York City during the 1980's and 1990's after emigrating from the former Soviet Union. They occupy their own apartments but are surrounded by children and grandchildren in the Washington Heights and Brighton Beach neighborhoods where they live. Most are in their seventies and eighties—the youngest 69 years, the oldest 92. Despite their relatively recent arrival, most are citizens or are well on their way. They are active, relatively healthy, and, as participants in this study, they were

eager to tell their stories. They are part of a much larger wave of Russian Jewish immigrants.

The history of recent Russian Jewish emigration and the arrival of over 500,000 Russian Jews in the United States since the late 1960's (Vinokurov 2000:539), is part of a much larger political and economic upheaval in the former Soviet Union. There have been two distinct immigrant flows which coincide with historical periods leading up to and finally the collapse of the Soviet Union. Olneck refers to these flows as the third and fourth waves connecting them historically with the earlier first and second waves of East European immigrants occurring at the turn of the twentieth century and later, following the Second World War. (Olneck 1999:1-2). From a significant but mere trickle in the 1960's, a wave of emigration swelled in the 1970's coinciding with détente with the West and intense petitioning and public protests by Jews in the United States. For this third wave of emigrants, exit from the country was fraught with bureaucratic barriers and threats to family and friends. Their initial destination was Israel but by the mid-1970's, due to pressure from American Jews on behalf of émigrés who wished to settle in the United States, the majority of Russian Jews leaving the Soviet Union chose to migrate to the United States (Olneck 1999:116). Those who chose the United States were from the larger cities of Russia and Ukraine. They were successful, well educated professionals with little attachment to Israel or Jewish religion. In emigrating they were seeking escape from anti-Semitism, limitations on their careers, and educational opportunities for their children (Olneck 199:115-6). This wave ended suddenly in 1982 with the number of exit visas decreasing from a high of 51,320 in 1979 to just 522 in 1984 (Olneck 1999:116). A period of renewed official discriminatory measures against Jews and Jewish culture

ensued, leaving stranded nearly 400,000 Soviet Jews who had planned emigration. The door to further emigration remained shut until 1987 when, under Gorbachev's liberal policies, Jews, in large numbers, were again permitted to leave. This constituted the fourth wave. The émigrés' reasons for emigrating were more pressing than those who had departed during the third wave. Resurgent anti-Semitism that had emerged in the 1980's, led hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews to apply for exit visas. By 1996, a quarter-million Russian Jews had emigrated to the United States during this fourth wave (Olneck 1999:115-117).

Russian Jews shared common resettlement problems with other immigrants. They entered the United States at a time of peak migration which reached levels not attained since post World War I. They were both a part and not a part of this new wave of late twentieth century immigrants. They entered the United States in the relatively privileged status as refugees and, as such, their settlement was cushioned by services including direct financial aid under the Refugee Cash Assistance program, language instruction, job training, assistance in locating housing, public assistance and Food Stamps, all of which were administered by well established community agencies expert in providing refugee services. In sum, they were eligible for services that were not remotely available to most immigrants. This assistance, in conjunction with their strong educational preparation and their white European status, in a sense, make them the elite of immigrant groups of the late twentieth century.

Soviet Jewish émigrés, as Russians, as Jews, and as Europeans in the United States, found themselves in surprising and rather contradictory circumstances. They left a society in which, despite centuries of residence and participation in the creation of a Russian

culture, they were not accepted or recognized as Russian because they were officially designated Jews. But, upon entry to the United States, their distinctive Jewish identity was thrown into question in their encounter with American Jews, and their “Russianness” became their primary ethnic identity. Secondly, they left a society in which they were an officially recognized ethnic minority subject to persecution and discrimination as Jews only to enter a country in which they, as the largest immigrant group within a dwindling minority of European immigrants, have been welcomed into a comfortable white European American majority. Thirdly, they left a society in which they had learned to distrust, unequivocally, the state and its elaborate bureaucracy, only to find themselves, as refugees, beholden to the new state and state-sponsored agencies. They spurned formal networks, almost axiomatic in immigrant communities. And lastly, after decades of immersion in the oldest and most highly developed communist country, they found it difficult, in the United States, to unlearn expectations that basic necessities are not the automatic responsibility of government (Gold 1995, and Markowitz 1993).

As urbanites, former residents of Moscow, St. Petersburg, Odessa, Kiev, they quickly established enclaves in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and other major cities. The elderly stand out in these communities. They are more numerous than in most immigrant communities. For instance, data from the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service for the years 1982 - 1989 for New York City for all immigrants indicate a Soviet immigrant dependency ratio of 51 percent (the ratio represents the number of persons in dependent ages—under 18 years of age and 65 years and over—per 100 persons in working ages—18 to 64 years of age). Although this percentage is significantly higher than the overall New York city immigrant ratio of 44 percent, what is

most striking is the degree to which those 65 years of age and older contribute to this ratio among Soviet refugees: While all other immigrant groups have single digit percentages for the 65 and over dependency ratios (immigrants from the Philippines are the exception at 11 percent) the dependency ratio for immigrants from the Soviet Union is 27 percent, higher than that for all persons in New York City (City of New York, Dept. of Planning 1992:185).

In planning to study elderly émigrés, I anticipated that I would be dealing with a population faced with an additional set of unanticipated circumstances that goes beyond those encountered by younger immigrants: Many, especially those in their late 70's and 80's, were survivors of a lifetime of harsh conditions accompanying collectivization, the Second World War, and imprisonment. I expected to find them physiologically older than Americans of the same age, debilitated by chronic illness, too sick or worn out to keep up, and thwarted in their ability to contribute to the family by providing child care, by their own dependence, or because of a rapid loss of touch with grandchildren due to generational and cultural gaps as the young quickly absorbed American ways. I saw them as ethnic Jews, most without the experience or knowledge of the religious content of Jewishness, living in a Western secular society, and, as Barbara Myerhoff describes in her work with the elderly, "...facing the existential uncertainty of their own deaths," where there is little attention to ritual for passage into old age (Myerhoff 1984:308,310). I also imagined them living in new and uncertain territory with few markers, in an American culture that defines old age as a period of decline in linear, chronological terms. Little of this turned out to be true. The diverse and imaginative ways that they found to deal with

the challenges and complexities of their immigrant lives, drawing from the past and combining the past with the endless novelty of the present, are the focus of my research.

1.3 THE SETTING

The geographical location of this study extends much beyond the present setting of New York City to the remembered places of the former Soviet Union, encompassing vast spaces extending across continents. In narratives describing their lives as children and young adults the significance of space and place was crucial. Their experiences during World War II which, as the stories dramatically revealed, had a profound effect on their lives, were told through their memories of evacuation routes out across the steppes and the plains of Siberia. Life stories were often told around tables covered with maps where they traced their routes, pointing to railroad lines and rivers and destination points thousands of miles from their origin. The migration routes that many of the cohort members followed from small villages and towns in Ukraine to the major cities of Russia—Moscow and St. Petersburg—were also key to understanding their strong identification with urban living and the relative comfort they found in the densely settled neighborhoods of New York. The setting for the study was thus remembered and real, past and present, vastly spacious and dense.

The setting in New York City is divided between two old traditional immigrant neighborhoods—Washington Heights and Brighton Beach—one, Washington Heights, at the northernmost reaches of Manhattan, the other, Brighton Beach, sitting seaside on the south shore of Brooklyn. For the elderly, both neighborhoods are graced with appealing physical features—the Atlantic Ocean, the beach and boardwalk in one place and a grand

park overlooking the Hudson River in the other. On a more practical level long-standing networks of social agencies supportive of the Jewish elderly are a part of both neighborhoods. I was aware of obvious differences as well: Brighton Beach is the pre-eminent Russian-speaking community—large, ethnically distinctive, known and celebrated for its food and flamboyance. Washington Heights' Russian-speaking population, by comparison, is small but growing. The ethnicity of the neighborhood is predominantly Latino and, at least in the small enclave in which the Russian Jews have settled, with its surrounding parks, its ambiance is quieter, almost pastoral by comparison.

My original plan was to work with a small number of elderly in the Washington Heights neighborhood alone. I had lived for years in Washington Heights close to a park where, in the late 1980's and early 1990's, I began to notice groups of elderly Russian Jews out strolling along the promenade in the park. They usually walked three and four abreast while talking animatedly in Russian, oblivious to the late hours of the night. In a neighborhood where elderly German Jewish émigrés continue to maintain a prominent position and where young Dominican immigrants are the dominant population, the appearance of new Russian-speaking neighbors was a curiosity. My interest led to the discovery of a settlement of recent Russian Jewish émigrés clustered within a small enclave of the greater Washington Heights neighborhood. After several preliminary interviews with elderly émigrés and discussions with staff at social agencies involved in assisting the new settlers, the idea for the present study of aging and immigration began to take shape. It was only later, as my findings began to raise questions about the representativeness of the sample, that I was led to expand the study to Brighton Beach. In my early conversations with potential participants and others in Washington Heights, I

became curious about how the elderly émigrés were faring in Brighton Beach, especially because the people I spoke to were so biased against Brighton Beach. The harshest criticism came from a young Russian-speaking woman who was helping me with translations. She described Brighton Beach as, “...nothing but a ghetto, it’s garbage. Those who want no change, who want to continue to live in Russia live there.” Others, when asked about Brighton Beach, expressed no desire to be involved there: a former army colonel wanted no part of the well-known, well publicized veterans’ group headquartered in Brighton Beach. Orleck attributes Russian Jewish émigrés’ leeriness and avoidance of Brighton Beach to the Russian Mafiya’s presence in Brighton, especially during the 1980’s, and the media’s sensational coverage of their criminal activities (Olneck 1999:117). Yet the subject of the Mafiya did not come up in the Washington Heights conversations. Their dislike seemed more based on a fundamental disagreement with what Brighton Beach represented to them about immigration and assimilation—a clinging to past Soviet ways. I wondered too about the high level of education and professional accomplishments of elderly émigrés living in Washington Heights and whether I was dealing with an elite, self-selected, perhaps unique group who had found its way to Washington Heights who were perhaps not representative of elderly Russian Jewish immigrants. I considered the possibility that the elderly who had settled in Brighton Beach might have brought with them a different set of life experiences from perhaps a different part of the Soviet Union; or that their decision to live in a well-established Russian-speaking neighborhood made them distinctly different, or, for that matter, their lives in New York City, were significantly different because of where they settled. What therefore began as a study focused on one place moved to a revealing comparison between members

of one cohort who settled in two different neighborhoods and that dispelled easy explanations based on concepts of assimilation and acculturation. Indeed, the comparison led to a careful consideration of the interplay between the past, the play of choice, and the influence of place.

1.4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Concerns related to the elderly, although not a dominant theme in anthropological study, have occupied major dramatic territory in ethnographic writings, appearing, Lear-like, in descriptions of the distresses of old age and the dilemmas attendant on passing on wealth and power while, at the same time, maintaining enough control to assure care and comfort in old age (Bourdieu 1977; Goody 1976; Arensberg and Kimball 1968;). Jack Goody's descriptions of bridewealth contracts during the European Middle Ages document the careful and intricate marriage contract manipulations of powerful landowning elders caught up in the need to protect their land as well as themselves (Goody 1976). Arensberg and Kimball describe the old Irish peasant of the 1930's moving reluctantly from a position of power and control as household head and producer into the "west room," a place in the household where he is accorded respect and given care in exchange for the power he has yielded (Arensberg and Kimball 1968). Studies of age sets, mostly in East African colonial and post colonial societies, where they predominated, have also paid attention to the elderly, becoming increasingly focused on the origin and maintenance of gerontocracies (Fowler 1982; Parkin 1972; Colson 1981). Anthropologists have examined the ways in which land holdings, possession of wives, and

control over ritual were used by the elderly to achieve and hold onto social and political power.

Although it is clear that issues critical to a deeper understanding of aging—inequality, dependence, loss of power, and cross-cultural differences—have been addressed in the classic ethnographies and have been the focus of lively debate within the anthropological field, there are limitations. These approaches examine the elderly from a life cycle perspective reducing them to chronological and biological age sets. The elderly are functionally positioned within the family and community life cycle, often fulfilling western imposed norms of aging, gradually, often with great reluctance and fuss, but eventually relinquishing authority and accepting diminished but productive responsibilities as child caretakers, historians, the holders of ritual and ritual knowledge, and the key source of information to anthropologists attempting to salvage the past.

Anthropological attention paid to immigrants who are old, has also appeared at the margins. And, although their numbers are admittedly much smaller than those of the young, old people have always been part of migrant flows and provide the opportunity to gain a much deeper understanding of the ways in which history and global realities converge in the construction of culture. Flights from famine, flood, wars, and persecution in search of refuge are age blind. Moses in the desert outside Egypt, was not a youngster. Gwembe elders and their families, in early twentieth century Africa, fled the rich Zambeze flood plain, threatened by floods at the site of a new dam (Colson and Scudder 1981). Freud, in his 70's, and other elderly Jews left Europe in the late 1930's. In an India on the brink of independence in 1948, millions, regardless of age, were on the move.

The elderly have been key players as well in transnational migrations; they are also those immigrants who, although young when they leave their native country, settle in and grow old in an alien land. For them, aging is woven into the immigration experience. They grow old in an alien land, having assumed or having imposed upon them an assortment of ethnic identities in their encounters with the new society. There is a rich literature on these elders. Most of it, however, centers on ethnic and urban studies and tends to focus on the young as they forge places for themselves amid contending forces in a new, complex and competitive society. Unfortunately there is a stagnant quality about this literature's perspective on aging. Elderly immigrants are usually fixed in time and in cultural setting, wrapped in the beliefs and customs of the country of origin, allowing for little change over time lived in the new society. They are almost set up as representatives of the old order as a convenient backdrop against which the complex social, economic and political conflicts and changes experienced by the younger generation can be examined. Where the emphasis is predominantly on the young and change, the unchanging position of the elderly is seldom questioned. For instance, Fran Markowitz' and Steven Gold's ethnographies of late twentieth century Russian immigrant communities in which the elderly are substantially represented, although insightful, present the elderly in traditional positions within families and communities and always through the perspective of and in relation to the young (Markowitz 1993; Gold 1995). Coleen Leahy Johnson's analysis of Italian-American families in Syracuse, New York, teases out certain features of the Italian-American family that, most likely, are ethnically determined and that contribute to the high status occupied by the elderly in Italian-American families (Leahy Johnson 1983). Although Leahy Johnson provides a finely drawn distinction between enduring values of

respect and forgiveness underpinning family solidarity which persist beyond acculturation and assimilation, the perspective is still one seen through the eyes of middle-aged children.

Recent research by anthropologists working with immigrant groups in New York City departs from this approach, providing interesting insights into ways in which the elderly experience transition from homeland to life in New York City. This expanded focus on the elderly members of immigrant groups reveals considerable variability within the elderly immigrant population. Both Pyong Gap Min and Madhulika Khandelwal describe segmentation within the elderly Korean and Indian immigrant population of New York City (Min 1998; Khandelwal 2002) based on length of time in the United States—those who arrived as young adults and have grown old in the United States and those who are recent arrivals brought to the United States by their children. Attention to these differences allows a more nuanced analysis and understanding of the meaning of social and cultural change. Min's study of Korean immigrants reveals surprising decisions made by recent elderly Korean immigrants to remain in the United States while their children contemplate return to Korea; Zibin Guo's study of health care beliefs and practices among elderly Chinese immigrants in Queens reveals complex variation and mixing of Western and Chinese style medicine influenced not only by cultural practices brought from the homeland but economic factors and availability of practitioners in the United States (Guo 2000); and among elderly Indian immigrants, Khandelwal identifies gender differences influencing decisions to return in ones old age to India—women reluctant to return to the strictures of a patriarchal system and men, with unrealistic expectations of an unchanged homeland, eager to return. These studies demarcate old and young not so much in terms of their positions in the family structure but more in terms of changes resulting from their

positions as elderly in different societies with different material supports for the old (Min 1998).

Nancy Foner's much earlier research with Jamaican immigrant families in London provides the foundation for this more recent anthropological focus on the elderly (Foner 1978). Foner makes distinctions between the lives of elderly Jamaicans who remained in Jamaica and those who emigrated—differences in power, prestige and economic security based on decisions to migrate. Her insightful comment on study of the migration process provides the impetus for my research: "The study of the migration process, because we can actually see people changing, enables us ... to stand back and to contemplate some of the more general theoretical formulations about the nature of social change." (Foner 1978:238).

Barabra Myerhoff's account of a community of elderly East European immigrants is perhaps the most intensely focused ethnographic study of aging (Myerhoff 1980). Here, the voices and activities of the old are always at center. Myerhoff describes a community of elders teeming with creativity, engaged in transforming experiences drawn from their past lives lived in East European shtetles and their long years as United States immigrants. More recently, Judith Friedenberg's ethnography of the elderly of East Harlem, Growing Old in El Barrio (2000), studies the process of aging unique to a Latino population living in a low income urban enclave. Friedenberg examines the historical and social construction of aging, drawing parallels with the ways in which social policy is formed.

On a broader plane, that of transnational migration, the elderly can be seen as vital participants, if not principals, in the migration process, facilitating migration for the young,

helping to finance it, caring for the children left behind, and anchoring the home country securely as a haven for the ill, aged, and failed. From this perspective, the elderly and their immigrant children are locked in a migratory process in which three and four generations exist in an interdependence affected by social, political and economic conditions in both countries—job markets, inflationary processes, political upheavals (Colen 1989; Glick Schiller et al 1992; Sider 1992). Although the emphasis in this work is almost entirely on the immediate situations of young migrants, the analyses provide the opportunity to expand the field to the elderly family members to whom the young are linked. Gerald Sider speaks eloquently of the plight of those who elect to stay behind or have no choice but to stay behind but who remain a vital part of the immigration process. Although remittances do make a crucial difference, Sider cautions those who see this as an economic equalizer and questions how the social, economic and emotional costs of child rearing and education of the young for inevitable export as cheap labor to industrialized societies and the care of those injured, depleted returning migrants, can begin to compensate a society (Sider 1992).

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The particularity of the Russian Jewish cohort of this study, their refugee status, their newness to America, and their advanced age is captured by Robert Olen Butler in a collection of short stories (Butler 1992) about another group of refugees, the Vietnamese of New Orleans. In one story, an old man, close to death, living with his children and grandchildren, drifts between ghostly encounters with his old friend, Ho Chi Minh, as he searches for meaning in his life, and the harsh realities faced by his children from which

they attempt to insulate him. Butler, in this work, captures the profound liminal state of the older immigrant in his struggle to make sense of the past, as the almost surrealistic experience of an alien land and an alienated family surround him. Migration and age fuse here to provide fertile ground for anthropological understanding: the layers of experience—migration and settlement in an alien land, abrupt disjunctions with friends, family and traditions, the irreversibility of immigration for most refugees and the frightening prospect of death—create a cultural turmoil breaking apart and altering old beliefs and customs and producing the new.

I draw from several theoretical sources in setting the framework for this project, derived from anthropological work focused on aging, immigration, as well as broader issues: (1) the life-course approach which I consider to be both theoretical and methodological, locates the project in the historical times and lived experiences of cohort members; (2) recent work which explores issues of inequality from the perspective of aging and immigration; and, (3) an expanded geographical vision which examines global events, their connection with state policies, and the ways in which they impact on elderly immigrants.

A life-course approach, which I will be using in this study, introduces history and process to the anthropological perspective and adds flexibility to the methodology. The flow of time for individuals and groups through historical time is the central theme of the life course approach. The convergence of research developments in the fields of psychology and sociology produced fertile theoretical approaches to the study of aging in the 1960's and 1970's—stratification theory in sociology (Riley et al 1972) and life-course and societal norms linked to culture in psychology (Neugarten 1968). Without losing

touch with traditional family and community moorings, it shifts focus from the functional context within the family and positions subjects of study within the sweep of historical time as actors. In this way, unique cohorts who have experienced significant historical events, can be studied for the ways in which they, as unique groups with collective identities, have acted to affect social change. This theoretical perspective is particularly apt in working with recent Russian Jewish émigrés. Not only have they lived through pronounced and dramatic social, political and economic events during which I anticipated a collective identity to have developed, but there is the additional shared experience of immigration and its potentially disruptive impact on the cohort and its collective identity.

Barbara Myerhoff, in noting the lack of ritual in industrialized societies to mark passage into old age, has described the elderly as liminals par excellence (Myerhoff 1984). Myerhoff describes an isolated group of elderly Jewish East European émigrés of the early twentieth century that creates its own shared ritual by recording and re-membering their lives through reminiscence. Without ritual, without resort to religion for the many years of their Soviet lives, cut off from their ancestral connections by immigration, uncertain, and facing the end of life, I believe that the cohort of Russian Jewish émigrés I have selected for study are indeed liminals par excellence and, as such, provide imaginative insights into the cultural construction of old age. I draw on Myerhoff's work particularly in finding ways to understand how cohort members engage in reminiscence about their lives. I also draw on Arthur Kleinman's interpretation of illness narratives to analyze similar narratives about loss, suffering and survival among elderly Russian Jews (Kleinman 1988). Kleinman finds story telling devices—plot lines, myth-making, core metaphors and rhetorical devices that structure narratives (Kleinman 1988:48-49). Where Kleinman

searches for the multiple meanings of illness from the perspective of the patient, I have listened for meaning in the narratives of émigrés touched by illness and suffering, and found rich and moving insights into the nature of survival.

A life-course approach also opens possibilities for exploring issues of inequality in aging from more than a one dimensional approach usually found in life cycle analyses. A life lived is usually an intricate network of cross-cutting inequalities, some inequalities diminishing, others increasing with age, but all contributing in varying ways to the accumulated experience of aging and inequality. Pernicious inequalities of gender and class experienced in some societies over the course of a life are carried forward into old age and influence the individual's experience and that society's perception of old age (Vincent 1995). Although the life-course approach is not at all new to anthropology, the focus on aging and the elderly is.

The study of inequality from the perspective of age and aging as a process opens questions about the relationship between ageism and other forms of inequality faced by groups over the life course. Here the life-course approach is key because it enables consideration of double jeopardy situations in which life-long inequities based on race, ethnicity and gender are super-imposed on age inequality. Studies of aging and the elderly have addressed the complexity of these cross-cutting influences: for class and age (Victory and Evadrou 1987; Dowd 1983), for race and age (Gibson and Jackson 1987; Jackson 1980); for ethnicity and age (Gelfand and Barrese 1987; Bengston and Morgan 1983; Johnston 1979); and for gender and age (Sankar 1981; Cool and McCabe 1983; Wilson 1971).

I use these perspectives on inequality to examine and interpret the highly complex, rapidly changing, sometimes contradictory and unpredictable interplay of privilege and discrimination affecting the lives of elderly Jewish émigrés during their communist lives in the former Soviet Union and later, as immigrants in New York City. There were, during their early lives, the kaleidoscopic leveling of class and promises of equality, followed by structures of inequality based on newly created forms of privilege, and restoration of old forms of inequality based on ethnicity and gender. State sanctioned anti-Semitism took on new forms, holding cohort members behind at the same time that educational opportunities opened for them. And later, as elderly applicants for emigration from the Soviet Union, cohort members were treated as pariahs in their own country, pawns of the Cold War, and then embraced as favored refugees in the United States. In this study, I trace their lives through these contradictory influences, to their current lives and identities as elderly immigrants.

A focus on the role of the state and its power to create and manipulate inequality has also been critical to understanding the convergence of immigration and aging on the lives of cohort members. Andrea Sankar approaches the anthropological study of the elderly in China from this perspective, using the case of social changes resulting from China's one child campaign (Sankar 1989). The state, forced to recognize the link between security in old age and the number of children people have, has for the first time, fostered concepts of care for elderly outside the boundaries and idioms of kinship, promoting pensions, preventive health care and treatment (Sankar 1989). Sankar takes advantage of these shifts in state policy to examine their effect on old age, particularly intergenerational relationships and the ways in which the family responds to and further

influences state policy. Although on the surface, the power of state policy to influence family life and, with it, the care of its elderly members, is considerably different between the United States and China, the looming global problem involving a demographic shift in population from young to old and limited resources to care for the disabled elderly, is the same. The question is the same” “Who will bear the burden?” The family? The community? The state? At a time in the United States when the issues of health benefits for the elderly and Social Security are being hotly debated, I insert the voices of elderly Jewish émigrés in one cohort, voices which I believe reflect a unique perspective on family expectations of the state born out of life experiences in the former Soviet Union.

On an even broader level, the impact of large scale global realities, namely, collapsed social, political and economic ideologies and failed states, and profound demographic shifts in population are embedded in local issues of immigration, ethnicity, aging and dependency among the old and disabled. The two themes, age and migration are woven together tightly here. Arjun Appadurai visualizes a radically altered global landscape, calling it an *ethnoscape*—a pastiche of many places, people, and objects brought together in time and sometimes in locality by an instantly accessible media made possible by accelerated electronic communication, capable of stimulating imagined visions and desires previously undreamed of in the minds of ordinary people (Appadurai 1996, 1991). These *ethnoscapes* are riddled with cultural and geographic contradictions. From these, Appadurai teases out ideas, trends, and currents that sweep about the world, touching down and altering in small and sometimes radical ways, the everyday lives of individuals.

I apply this perspective to the elderly Russian Jewish émigrés in New York in the late twentieth century in an examination of how past experiences of mobility across space and concepts of identity with place might have influenced cohort members' decisions to emigrate and might continue to influence their present lives. I find the suggestion of ethnoscape described by Appadurai in a story told to me about a small group of elderly Soviet veterans of World War II living in Boston. I track down the story and learn that they petitioned the United States government for recognition as veterans—a petition that raises unusual questions about sovereign states and state responsibility for the elderly—that might require an even more expanded perspective on migration similar to that raised by Appadurai. An imagination that makes it possible to selectively erase years lived in a country engaged in a “cold war” with the country in which one now lives, to reach back to an earlier time to reconstruct a shared history with the U.S., to expect state recognition, honor and support for soldierly duties performed while a citizen of another country is to raise far reaching questions about the power, rights and responsibilities of sovereign states and the present and future agency of elderly immigrants, their imaginations, and their rich histories. I take the story to the New York City cohort members and find not only this but imaginative full-blown cultural elaboration manifested in creation of a public ritual celebrating past heroism and nationhood, and the present.

1.6 FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY

I interviewed 34 people, 21 women and 13 men, during the course of this study. Their narratives form the core of my research. This focus derives from the significance I attach to the value of life course analysis in identifying key historical events experienced

by a unique cohort and the formation of a collective identity out of this experience. I use the data gained from these narratives to examine the cohort's identity as it intersects with immigration and undergoes revision. The narratives tell of the past but are colored by the present, and it is in these shadings between past as it was, the past as it is remembered, and the breakthrough of the present, that I have attempted to capture cohort members' transition as aging immigrants with an emerging identity.

The cohort members were born between the years 1910 and 1931, the majority, however, before 1925. They ranged in age from 69 to 90 years. Most were under 80, although ten formed a tight sub-cohort of those 80 years and older. They were essentially urban people, many having moved with their parents from small towns and villages mainly in Ukraine in the 1920's and 1930's as part of the massive population upheavals of the time. By the time they were ready to leave their homes in the former Soviet Union, they had been long-time residents of urban centers. More than two-thirds of the émigrés I interviewed departed for the United States from Moscow or St. Petersburg in Russia. The remainder, also urban, departed from Odessa or other smaller cities in Ukraine. Most had left the former Soviet Union in the late 1980's and early 1990's when they were in their sixties and seventies and had been in the United States for less than ten years when I interviewed them. Approximately a third had been in the United States less than five years.

They were well educated--more than two-thirds were graduates of universities. Only two of the entire sample had less than the U.S. equivalent of a high school diploma. All worked at jobs that required full time commitments and most liked what they did. Men and women shared equally in top level jobs in medical, legal and scientific disciplines. But of the few who worked in factory or service positions, all were women, one as an

automobile factory floor worker in Minsk, another as a food service worker in a cinema café and another as a stenographer. A number of men were in the military, most having been educated at elite military institutes as engineers.

All married for the first time in the late post-war years—1940's and 1950's. These marriages have endured for at least half the members of the cohort. Most of the remaining members have been widowed, losing a spouse usually due to cardiovascular disease, some at a relatively young age. Most had been widowed before emigration. Ten of the 12 widowed, were women. There were three divorces, and in two of these, a second marriage also ended in divorce (these two were the youngest members of the sample). One exceptional couple met in the United States at an English language school and married. They had both lost their spouses here in the United States due to illnesses.

Most came from small families with only one or two siblings. Despite this and despite the casualties of the war and their age, a number stayed in touch with their surviving siblings, some in the United States, others in Canada and Israel. Very few family members remained in the former Soviet Union. With the exception of one woman who had married a Jew, all were Jewish

I followed an open-ended interview outline structured along a chronological plane (Appendix A) with cues that allowed me to pose questions. My aim in introducing questions was to create something more than a chronicle or inventory; I tried rather for an approach that attached substance and meaning to events which join personal experience with the historical event. For instance, in an interview with Ena, I listen as she refers to packages of moldy bread sent to her and her grandmother in Ukraine from a Moscow aunt. I slow the interview down and ask more questions about the aunt and the bread.

What unfolds is Ena's description, 60 years after the event, of an elaborate kinship network extending from Poland to the Soviet Union, tying in urban and rural family members, that sustained a family through what was one of the worst famines to sweep across the Soviet Union in the 1930's.

The older ones had personal stories to tell of the Revolution and civil wars—Luba's mother serving tea to occupying soldiers, from the huge samovar in the drawing room of their home in Kiev. Most spoke of famine, the purges, anti-Semitism, and all dwelt at length on the Second World War. As they related their life stories with little prompting, I followed them, listening to descriptions of place—the size, the shape, the insulation of a family hut outside Smolensk, the dimensions of a communal apartment; the ways they obtained goods—their networks, the lines they stood on; their own and their families' illnesses and the medical care they received. I asked about ritual or the absence of ritual (they laughed when I asked about weddings). I heard about their education and their careers. In the final stage of the interview I explored with them the stages leading up to their decision to emigrate, a period paralleling glasnost and the beginning disintegration of the Soviet Union. I asked, "Why leave? What led up to it? Who was the first to go?" Their responses were a torrent of still angry frustration and protest. I had not anticipated their need to tell this part of their story, its strong emotional content, nor the carryover to their émigré lives.

I allowed approximately two hours for the interviews, adjusting the time based on the comfort of the interviewee, their willingness to continue, and the material covered. I scheduled follow-up interviews in several cases. I offered all participants the option of having their interview taped or their responses written down by me. All but four of the 34

wanted to be taped and, in fact, were remarkably untroubled by it. The taped interviews were invaluable for a number of reasons. Since at least a half the interviews involved translation back and forth between English and Russian I was able to validate translations and replay difficult to understand passages with help from the translators. The tapes were also a way for me to return something of value to the participants. I made copies for those who wanted them for their children and grandchildren; a few wanted to listen to themselves speaking English on tape as part of their preparation for citizenship examinations; the daughter of one of the participants who had died suddenly was grateful for a long tape we had made shortly before her mother's death.

Most chose to be interviewed in their own apartments but some preferred the boardwalk or a park bench. Despite the planning, there were many, mostly delightful interruptions—grandchildren, children, spouses, neighbors, drifting in and out of the living room, some sitting in for a while and volunteering an opinion or memory of their own, others just passing through. Eighty-two year old Galina interrupted the interview to give a demonstration of her daily workouts using an exercise bar installed at the top of her bedroom doorway. Schlem whipped off his shirt to show me the scars from his World War II shrapnel wounds. We changed location for Alexandra's interview when the sound of bird songs in a chestnut tree became too shrill. Family photos, newspaper clippings, paintings, military uniforms and medals, books, important papers and letters were brought out. Max arrived at my apartment with a briefcase full of family photographs, beautifully mounted. Victor, on the other hand dug into a pile of plastic shopping bags. The tapes captured all this as well as an assortment of city apartment sounds and the sounds of the

neighborhood—birds, ocean breezes—providing a background to the mix of English and Russian, sometimes somber and tearful, sometimes elated and joyful. Julia sang for us.

Since I do not speak Russian, three translators assisted me with interview scheduling and actual translation and accompanied me to many community events—parades, concerts, meetings, religious services. They were native speakers of Russian who were themselves immigrants. Two were professionals with established careers in their former countries but unable to find work in the United States. The third was a remarkable woman who had survived camps in Ukraine and Romania during the Second World War. She brought great depth of understanding to the work. They understood the project, contributed their ideas, and provided valuable information about life in the former Soviet Union and the immigration process

My approach to sample selection was the same in both neighborhoods. I did not select from a single source such as a local senior center or health care agency. Instead, I looked for several places where elderly Russian Jews were actively engaged. Based on the preliminary community survey I had done in both neighborhoods, I learned that the study of English and citizenship was a major activity. I found numerous sites, free-standing social and religious agencies where elderly Russian-speakers struggled through lessons, some attending classes at more than one school. I attended a number of these classes with permission of teachers and students, recruiting a number of participants in this way. Staff at neighborhood associations and senior centers invited me in for lunches and parties where I was able to meet potential participants. Probably the greatest source of participants, once contacts were established and the first interviews completed, were friends referring friends or family in a snowball effect. The sample therefore began as

single individuals and then burgeoned out into clusters—two women, best of friends, who swam together every morning, another cluster of three women who attended language school together, a group of musicians, a group of veterans, and so on.

The interviews led me, sometimes propelled me, into the daily give and take of local neighborhood life on the streets, in the shops, the meeting halls, the parks and the boardwalk:

- I went back after my recruitment visits to the language classes to confirm my initial impression of large enrollments of elderly students. Not only were there many but the levels of language skills and variety of classes being offered were surprisingly diverse. There was something, it seemed, for everyone. One class was preparing for the Immigration and Naturalization Service citizenship examination, attempting to learn English and the principles of American democracy, all in one series of classes; another was reading and critiquing popular American novels; and another, the elite “conversation group,” was working on American idiom and accent. Much more than language acquisition was going on. I was invited in and joined in these classes in both neighborhoods.
- On the day I interviewed one of the elderly men, a violinist, he was preoccupied with making last minute preparations for the Victory Day celebration the next day. He invited me to come along the next day. This led to my first encounter with the American Association of Invalids and Veterans of World War II from the former Soviet Union, a meeting that eventually opened opportunities to visit their headquarters, meet with their members and follow them as they moved about Brighton Beach and the larger community in pursuit of their mission.

- An interview with one woman led to a retrospective review, by way of a home video she had made, of a community conflict led by an elderly matriarch, a conflict with shadings of anti-Semitism, anti-immigration, and community profiling.

Field notes recording observations from these and other daily encounters in waiting rooms, lunch programs, and meetings, expanded on the narrative data, and began to capture the transition from past to present, for instance, how the old competitive zeal of the classroom, that worked so well in the past, continued to stimulate and challenge in the drive to learn to speak English; or how a past glory was resurrected and used to forge a new identity; or how old hurts continued to haunt.

On another level in the field, I maintained contact with policy planning and social agencies in both neighborhoods, attending meetings of community planning boards, committees on aging, and coalitions of social and health agencies where I was able to observe the interplay of interest groups among the old and young, the old and the “other” old. Experts gladly helped me. A case worker at a no-nonsense social agency in Brighton Beach serving elderly Russian Jews, was an expert in negotiating the maze of refugee benefits and holocaust payments. Social workers at senior lunch centers opened doors for me, gave instant readings on the ethnic composition of dining room seating and explained ethnic divisions as they occur in senior centers. People embroiled in housing protests took time to explain their position. I observed the physical construction and dismantling at work in both neighborhoods—the opening of a Starbuck’s in Washington Heights; the construction of a high-priced middle-income development on the site of the fabled Brighton Beach Baths--and wondered about the future viability of these immigrant neighborhoods.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF DISSERTATION

The dissertation follows the members of one cohort through time beginning in Chapters 2 and 3 in the Soviet Union, more that 70 years ago and, in their own voices, traces their daily Soviet lives to the point of departure for the United States. Later, in Chapters 4 through 7, it picks up on them as elderly émigrés as they arrive in the United States and settle down in the two neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Brighton Beach. In a series of neighborhood ethnographic accounts, it presents them in full color. Chapter 8 inserts their voices into a larger national issue of health care, touching not only on their lives but, more generally, those of the United States elderly population. Here they speak of their illnesses and the illnesses of others and their own survival. They give their opinions and advise on what might be done about some of the dilemmas of old age in America.

Chapters 2 and 3:

As essential background to understanding the cohort narratives, I provide a brief history of pre-Soviet Russia with a parallel history of the Pale of Settlement (Hosking 1997; Remnick 1994). On maps of the Soviet Union, I trace the migration routes followed by cohort members and their families in the 1930's and later, the eastward evacuation routes away from the Nazi invasion at the outbreak of the Second World War. I present a brief overview of the Soviet era relying on recent accounts based on material made available since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick 1999). I use the voices of cohort members to elaborate and confirm this history. Against this general historical background, I allow their voices to take over and to speak of lives lived through the

Soviet era. I introduce them first, providing demographic data, and then situate them in the Soviet world of their youth and middle years. I cluster significant themes that emerged out of analysis and coding of interview data, keeping their individual voices separate but building a composite picture of their experiences—the historical mooring of cohort identity. These themes also serve to open the door to the wellspring of imaginative material that feeds their present world as aging immigrants. Chapter 2 ends with the outbreak of the Second World War. (I intentionally omit the war years as a theme in these chapters. The war had a profound effect on cohort members and their memories of wartime experiences are relevant to the creation of a vital association of veterans in the present émigré community. I present their war memories, therefore, in a separate chapter on the Veterans' Association). Chapter 3 picks up with cohort members after the war, listening to their accounts of everyday life in the Soviet Union as they married, raised families, established their careers, and then began to face the prospect of leaving their homeland.

Chapter 4:

Chapter 4 introduces cohort members as New York City immigrants. I present them first as immigrants among the many of the late twentieth century entering the United States, then as refugees among others seeking refuge, and as elders among a younger population. I focus in this chapter on continuing and shifting levels of inequality resulting from their transition from Soviet citizen to United States citizen. I listen to their own attempts to define their identity as they work through ascribed and self-defined labels proclaiming nationhood, ethnicity, religion, immigrant, and age. I settle them in the two New York City neighborhoods describing the unique physical and social features of both

neighborhoods. I examine their daily lives in New York City and then begin to examine differences between those settled in Washington Heights and those in Brighton Beach turning to demographic and chronological variations within the cohort. I fill in the political and cultural territory of the neighborhoods that provide the ground for currents to flourish, and I reach back into the narratives of their past Soviet lives. What emerges is a cohort with strong similarities that even they sometimes deny, at least in part, but also a cohort that contains striking variations based sometimes on the smallest difference in age and sometimes based on place of settlement in New York City.

Chapters 5 through 8:

These chapters introduce the cohort members in full color, full voice. I draw from the past but I am interested here in tracing continuity with the present. The evidence comes from field observations and interviews supported by videos and photographs, newspapers and newsletters, and conversations with key professionals and workers.

Chapter 5 is an account which combines dramatic and vivid memories of the Second World War with a present-day organization of veterans having local and international connections. I explore its origins and its mission on its website and in interviews with its officers. I comb through its newsletters. And, finally, in a grand Victory Day celebration, I witness the makings of a secular ritual. In Chapter 6, I present cohort **members** as students of language and United States history, aspiring citizens struggling to pass their INS examinations but also deeply engaged socially in a project that supports them, fosters their independence outside the family, and attempts to draw them into the wider community. I also include here a collection of my observations and cohort memories and commentaries that begins to describe the ways in which the arts—music, literature,

painting—are used by immigrants, to establish a sophisticated communication that bridges language barriers to create immediate social communities open to others—in this case, elderly émigré musicians; or to explain ones deeply held complex convictions through the medium of a master short story teller; or to express ones fears, even terror, uncertainty, and wonder in the face of death.

Chapter 7 follows one of the older Brighton Beach cohort members as she leads her family in a protest against the police. It is a case of discrimination in which past experiences of anti-Semitism, still raw, mix with anti-immigrant sentiment and community profiling. It is in this chapter that past and present, tempered by age and immigration can be seen to merge and where the elements that make for culture-building have their play. Chapter 8, the final chapter, is about health and illness. It too is an ethnographic account but one which examines the elderly emigres' encounter, not with neighborhood community, but with the health care community—in this case New York City hospitals and clinics and the larger State and federal structures under which they operate. It combines narrative interpretation, opinion, and analysis. Cohort members speak of their by-pass surgery, agonize over nursing home decisions, compare their treatment with past care received in the former Soviet Union. They criticize but praise mostly, arriving through the telling, at an indictment of the unfulfilled promises of the Soviet healthcare system and a paradoxical conclusion about their treatment in the United States: "This here is communism." In a further ironical twist, they unwittingly reveal inequities in the United States healthcare system.

CHAPTER 2 SOVIET LIVES: BEGINNINGS

INTRODUCTION

The elderly Russian Jewish émigrés who I interviewed in 1999 and 2000, began their lives during the early years of the Soviet Union, lived through the momentous times of the Soviet era and exited at its demise. They have much to say. But the Russian past, prior to the Revolution of 1917, and the influence of vast geographical expanses covering two continents, also need to be considered as context for their Soviet lives. There were tsars before Communism; pogroms and labor camps before purges and the gulag; Tolstoy wrote about ethnic minorities in the Caucasus long before Chechnya and Central Asian minorities; there was serfdom before the kolkhoz, the collective.

In this chapter I present a brief history of pre-Soviet Russia's empire days. I draw on a historical perspective which views the core of Russia's problem as that of a nation engaged in empire building at the expense of national identity—a successful state but not a nation, one so engaged in building and maintaining empire that it obstructed formation of nation. Geoffrey Hosking quotes the Russian historian, Basily Kliuchevskii, "The State swelled up, the people languished" (Hosking 1997:xxiv). I trace the growing expanse of the Russian Empire providing maps to demonstrate the vast spaces occupied by the Soviet Union. I place cohort members on these maps and trace their journeys. This is helpful in discussing the significance of space, mobility and migration in the histories of cohort members as they lived their lives during the Soviet era through the 1920's into the 1970's, at first bombarded by Soviet propaganda, cut off from the outside and later, after the thaw and glasnost, with their eyes opened wide to the West. In a separate but parallel history I

present a Russian Jewish history originating in Europe, moving eastward to the Pale of Settlement, and ending with participation in the Revolution. Finally I trace Soviet era history beginning with a brief summary of key events, but here I rely almost entirely on the members of cohort to tell this history through their own life experiences.

2.1 HISTORY

There are a number of perspectives on Russian history. An ongoing debate which has recently increased in intensity among scholars of Russian history, views Russia, on the one hand, as not different from the rest of Europe, a nation grounded in Western European ideology, entwined in European history, and possessing a fundamental identity with Europe (Malia 1999). Pipes, on the other hand, counters with an argument that situates Russia firmly within the world of Eastern influences, defining Russia as distinctly different from the West, distinctly “other,” compatible more with oriental despotism (Pipes 1999:100-108). The tendency to reduce this highly nuanced debate to a dichotomous West versus East view has influenced other fields, including popular culture. The novelist, André Makine, struggles with memories of his own Soviet upbringing in the 1950’s mixed with profound longings for the France and French culture of his grandmother (Makine 1992). A recent French film, “Est-Ouest,” (Wagnier 1999) set in post-World War II, follows expatriate Russians as they leave Paris on their return to harsh, communal life in Odessa and far worse. I use Malia’s European perspective along with Hosking’s broader, more straight-forward approach, to create a historical base for the lives of the people I interview.

PRE-SOVIET HISTORY

In the fifteenth century, the Slavic peoples of Muscovy, an agricultural people, stood perched on the edge of Asia thousands of miles of steppes and the vast Siberian plains to their east, south, and north. Nothing separated them or protected them from the nomadic tribes, the remains of the Golden Horde, who inhabited these areas. As an agricultural people they were particularly vulnerable. In a project that was to continue for three centuries Russia's princely leaders set out on a career of imperial expansion ending in an enormous empire straddling two continents, pushing against the countries of Eastern Europe, Islamic lands to the south, and China in the east. Their justification was based on the myth of a genealogy that linked the Orthodox church and Russian princes back to the Byzantine Empire. Ivan IV was proclaimed Tsar (Caesar) in 1547 and claimed his natural rights to reclaim all territories in the name of empire. Moscow became the Third Rome (Hosking 1997:47). The method of acquiring territories varied. The Far East and Siberia, for instance, fell more or less into the Russian Empire by mutual agreement between private fur traders and Russian administrators: taxes and furs in return for protection from marauding nomadic tribes. The conquest of the Caucasus, a complex of Islamic and Christian religions whose people mounted fierce resistance, ended in genocide (Hosking 1997:13-22).

Within the Empire there were deep divisions between nomadic and sedentary peoples; Islamic, Christian, and Orthodox religions; those bound to the land and the landed. All were ruled by a long line of despots intent upon maintaining their hybrid positions as Asiatic empire and European great power. Although Russian language was a

tangible integrating factor, it was not successful in drawing diverse ethnicities, the Tatars, Central Asians, the Jews of the Pale, the Poles, etc., into a cohesive national group. In the interest of advancing and maintaining territorial borders, concessions were made. Newly acquired territories, customs, laws and religions were left undisturbed at the risk of national cohesion.

The empire rested, to a large extent, on the institution of serfdom. It was the source of food, taxes and recruitment for the military. Without the serf, there was no military; without the military, there was no empire. In 1811, 58 percent of the total male population of Russia was categorized as serf. The system was overseen by landed nobility who, in return for their services to the tsar, were granted large tracts of land and control over serfs who lived and farmed the land. Their emancipation in 1861, following a period of reform, did little to change their situation. They remained loyal to the tsar. Known as peasants, post emancipation, their agriculture remained backward. They comprised 70 percent of the population; 80 percent were illiterate.

The Russia leading up to the failed 1905-06 Revolution was a fragmented society, dominated by arbitrary tsarist rule, supported by police surveillance and censorship, and riddled with corruption. Slowly emerging political ideologies, influenced by Western thought, questioned the power of the monarchy. Industrialization, still in its early phases (no more than 2.4 percent of the population) led to the organization of unions in major cities that began to agitate for improved conditions. The intelligentsia, an institution with decidedly Russian characteristics, emerged as a potent political force for change. They represented a sector of society distinguished by education and service, and ideological commitment to a cause. They preceded the Socialists who later evolved into multiple

political parties—the Radicals and Socialists (Marxists among them). The October Manifesto of 1906, the Revolution's crowning achievement, was radical, given the history of Russian rule. The vote was made universal, direct, equal and secret. It abolished censorship and established right of assembly and association. It established a two chamber parliament and granted free speech and parliamentary immunity. The down side was a provision that the Duma, the representative lower house, could exercise no control over the bureaucracy and, most important, Article 87, which allowed for the dissolution of parliament. This last provision enabled the restoration of autocratic rule in 1906. The Revolution had failed but some called it a dress rehearsal to 1917.

Political unrest grew far worse at all levels and in all places: in the villages, peasants and owners of private property clashed; strikes continued in cities; religious dissension grew—Orthodox Ukrainians persecuted Jews, Muslims in the Caucasus clashed with Christians in Armenia. The standard of living was only 10 percent of what it was in the West. Russia entered the First World War prepared to fight a short war but totally unprepared to sustain a long war on three fronts. During the first year of the war, they suffered 1.8 million casualties. Poorly clothed, fed, and led peasant soldiers fought, at times, in their bare feet without ammunition. Self-inflicted wounds, mass desertion, and surrenders followed. As the war progressed, the masses of soldiers were radicalized. By 1916-17, people were in the streets, bread lines became organizing sites and by October 17, the country was paralyzed. At this point only a few people supported the government. The army collapsed—20 million soldiers deserted over six to seven months, workers seized the factories, peasants seized the land, and national minorities began to break away (Figs 1996:253-303).

Social Revolutionaries led the new government, at first as an interim government, but splitting almost immediately on ideological and personal lines. Lenin, the Bolshevik leader, more decisive, more aggressive and ideologically more pragmatic took action and took charge as control began to slip from the hands of the interim government. Lenin, made major compromises in the interest of gaining power, maintaining order and advancing the ideological commitments of the Revolution. Civil War, ending in 1921, solidified the Bolshevik position. Land was seized by the government out of the grasp of the peasants in order to neutralize a move by them to assume private ownership. A treaty costing extensive loss of land and resources ended Russia's participation in World War I and gained a breather for the new government; all distinctions based on class were eliminated; military officers were to be elected by their men; there was to be equality of wages, marriage and divorce were struck aside. There was great promise, at least for the worker. The rule of law had been established. Granted, the CHEKA, a secret police, was established and the press was suppressed. But a new government based on socialism was in power. There was more in the way of change to come, much more.

RUSSIAN JEWISH HISTORY

The Pale of Settlement was a narrow strip of borderland territory on the westernmost edge of Russia extending from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. The majority of Russian Jews were confined to this territory. It included portions of what are now Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Poland, Ukraine, and Moldova—their boundaries, their state names shifting as they moved in and out of Russian control over the centuries of imperial expansion and collapse. Since the Middle Ages, in

response to European anti-Semitism of the time, Jews had moved into this area of Eastern Europe. In 1791, following the Partition of Poland and absorption of eastern Poland by Russia, the Pale of Settlement was officially established in response to requests by Moscow merchants for protection from what they perceived to be dangerous competition from Jewish businesses. Jews were forbidden to live in Russian cities unless given permission, usually a privilege extended to wealthy merchants and some artists and professionals.

Along with the Catholic Poles, the Jews were considered to be an “awkward nationality.” Their religion, their culture, their high level of literacy, and communal cohesion made them particularly resistant to assimilation. Throughout the nineteenth century Russian bureaucrats struggled with conflicting mandates: integrate the Jews into Russian society but shield fearful merchants and others who felt threatened by them. This resulted in contradictory policies that promised and then reneged on certain freedoms. Jews were barred from military service, free to do certain business but barred from others. They were offered more freedom but it was conditional on their willingness to convert to Russian Orthodoxy. They had access to all levels of education but, since there were few schools for Jews to attend, it was an empty promise. They were forbidden to attend school outside the Pale. Those who did manage to get out, encountered strict quotas. Despite their success in the professions and in business, most were poor due to discrimination. They were taxed at double the rate for their land.

The first pogrom took place in Kiev in the twelfth century when the Jews were evicted from the city. As one survivor said, “There were always pogroms.” (Remnick 1994: 94). They became particularly virulent following the assassination of Tsar

Alexander II in 1881. The Jews were blamed for his murder. Until then the state, despite its discrimination against the Jews, had not pursued a concerted ethnic or racial doctrine against them. After the assassination, Jews became alien forces. Waves of pogroms swept through Russia. Anti-Semitism became a political doctrine (Hosking 1997:33). The expectation that the Jews would be assimilated, was abandoned. Instead anti-Semitism was used as a device in the Russification program for generating patriotism among the masses in a common rejection of Jews. A plot centered in France which placed the Jews at the center of a conspiracy to dominate the world, was circulated by the government (Hosking 1997:390). In 1882, "temporary rules" which never ran out, forbade Jews from resettling or acquiring property in rural areas, even the Pale, barred them from the law, military and the medical professions; strict quotas were placed on higher education. In 1891, they were denied the vote in regional and municipal elections. In the same year, there was a mass expulsion from Moscow of all illegal resident Jews, emptying the city of two-thirds of its Jewish population.

The most destructive pogroms took place between 1903 and 1906 at a time of severe disruption. The city of Kishinev in Bessarabia, now Moldova was the site of major loss of life and property. Forty-seven Jews were murdered and 400 wounded. Seven hundred houses were burned and six hundred shops destroyed. (Hosking 1997:395). From October 1905 to January 1906, more than 3,000 Jews were killed.

The Beilis case in Kiev in 1911 involved an accusation going back to Ukrainian folklore. A young Jewish man was accused of murdering a child to use its blood to make Passover matzoth (Remnick 1994:94). Seventy years later, in Ukraine, the story still persisted despite the sanitizing years of Sovietization. One man I interviewed, a man in his

seventies, who lived most of his life in Ukraine, talked about the bitterness he felt when his colleague, a man he considered to be a close personal friend, refused his offer to take care of the man's grandson, telling him that although he trusted him, he still could not rid himself of the belief that the folk story had some truth to it.

The members of the cohort remembered their parents' accounts of beatings and killings, destroyed homes and property. One woman remembered vividly her mother running with her through the streets of their village. "She was wearing a green cloak, there were men chasing her, they wanted a comb that she was wearing in her hair." She remembered her father's death after a series of beatings, the loss of their home and business.

The Revolution promised an end to all this. Jews were active in the revolutionary movement and participated in the October Revolution. They developed their own section of the Party, Evseksiia, and worked toward bringing Jews into the wider community. They worked at outlawing Jewish organizations and the speaking of Hebrew. They were against religion, synagogues and Zionist organizations. Their desire was assimilation. Their optimism was sadly misplaced. Contradictions set in. Anti-Semitism persisted. Along with other minorities, they were issued internal passports designating them as Jewish by nationality. They entered the Soviet era expectant but soon deeply disillusioned. The Pale, a form of spatial discrimination had been eliminated and they had successfully avoided banishment to an Eastern province. They were freer in that they had greater mobility, and, although still faced with quotas at universities, they did have greater opportunity to attain high levels of education. But anti-Semitism, in all its cruel and petty ways, persisted. Not one of the cohort members remained untouched.

SOVIET ERA

For those living in post-Revolutionary Russia of the 1920's and 1930's, these were desperate times. There was no normalcy. Civil war followed the revolution. Land dislocations, shortages, and famine contributed to the chaotic struggle to govern in a radically different way. Major programs were launched and then abandoned; others were tried. Massive social dislocation occurred. Small businessmen—tailors, carpenters became factory workers; intellectuals were cast out of universities only to be re-instated later. Peasants left the land to become factory workers and students, some replacing the old intelligentsia on university faculties. Levels of privilege involving access to food, goods, and housing were established, then changed, and changed again. Shortages were everywhere—housing, food. Few were spared communal apartment living, even the privileged. Cities had simply run out of room to accommodate the massive influx of peasant workers moving in to fuel Stalin's industrialization project. Webs of bureaucracy were laid down along with the informal circuitry for avoiding the system. Systems of patronage and exchange were created. The term, "Homo Sovieticus," was invented to describe a number of behavioral characteristics needed to survive under the new system. Skill at hunting scarce goods in an urban environment was one of them. "Stalinism" became short hand for the complex of institutions, structures and rituals that made up the habitat of "Homo Sovieticus" (Fitzpatrick 1999:1).

The success of the new programs called for the creation of social aliens. Kulaks, former peasants who had acquired some property, perhaps a few farm animals, a barn, were violently attacked and exiled during Stalin's forced collectivization of farmland.

Priests and rabbis were exiled as part of the anti-religious drives. Famines hit large cities and rural areas. Not everybody joined the Communist Party. Not everybody could join; not everybody wanted or did join. Some evaded, some feigned humility; Ludmila, a woman I interviewed who worked in a St. Petersburg factory, demurred, "I was not ready." Others joined during the war. Marxist-Leninist ideology was so well integrated that one cohort member, while counting off the five fields of study required for completion of a doctorate stumbled over the fifth field. And then, with riotous laugh, "Oh yes, Marxist-Leninist was the fifth." There were leader cults, state control over production and distribution, social engineering, affirmative action on behalf of workers, and police surveillance and terror.

Slogans abounded. Stalin's 1935 slogan was, "Life has become better, life has become more cheerful." The "Radiant Future," glossed the regime's attempt to shape stories to explain hardship and sacrifice in the present. An empty ditch became a canal, an old house or church became a future park. The people responded sometimes with hilarious black humor: In response to the regime's exhortation to "Catch up and overtake the West," they responded "When we catch up, can we stay there?" "Liquidation of illiteracy became "Liquidation of food." A famous queue story went like this: "What are they giving out says a deaf old lady, joining a line." "A slap in the face," says the person in line. She responds, "To everybody, or just Stakhanovites? (insufferable, high achieving workers held up and honored as models for the rest of the slackers on the workplace). The response is, "Just a Stakhanovite." And the response to that, minus the epithet, is a satisfied, "just what the ... deserves." (Fitzpatrick 1999:185).

Listeners and monitors in the employ of the NKVD kept the government informed of subversive conversations. The great purges occurred in 1937-38, although there were others earlier and later. The elite became the new targets, “enemies of the people.” But for the peasants, collectivization was worse and for urban workers, it was famine.

Cohort members lived their early years through these chaotic times. Most were children in the 1920’s and teenagers and young adults in the 1930’s. Their memories of the 1920’s are mostly those passed down from their parents and grandparents. Their 1930’s memories begin to reflect increasingly more of their own personal experiences and perceptions of the times. The Second World War dominated their lives during the 1940’s. By the 1950’s, they were establishing themselves in careers and raising families. They marked significant events in terms of public accomplishments of the USSR: Rita, one of the cohort members, gave birth to her son on the day Gagarin was launched into space. Ari, another cohort member, lost his first job as an engineer in Leningrad in 1952 when all Jews were fired from the plant where he was working during the Doctors’ Case. As the Cold War progressed, those who stayed in the military, were posted to border garrisons or military installations. Stalin’s death was a relief for all. They carried on with their lives, most pursuing successful careers as professionals, engineers and managers. They managed to stay out of big trouble.

2.2 THE COHORT

I have identified certain historical events and processes that emerged as themes in the lives of the people I interviewed, ranging from the daily annoyances of everyday Soviet life, to the frustrating and humiliating presence of personal and state-sponsored anti-

Semitism, to the cataclysmic events of the Second World War. This is the groundwork for examining the cohort members in later chapters as elderly émigrés. They carry heavy baggage. Themes of shifting inequalities, sometimes compounding with the passing of time, sometimes reversing with change of location, wind their way through their accounts. The role of state policy in structuring daily lives and the ways they found to resist oppression, is a dramatic and dominant theme which permeates their early and middle years in the Soviet Union and fashions their relationship with and expectations of the state. Even an examination of their movements across the spaces of their early and later lives helps to understand their decisions to emigrate at a late stage in their lives. Their experiences during the Second World War are unique and do much to explain their lives in the present. I use their voices in this section to tell this part of their story.

The Second World War had, unquestionably, the most far-reaching impact on their lives and remains their most vivid memory. The oldest ones were old enough to have served in the war (most volunteered--men and women). The youngest experienced the war as children. Their memories were of evacuations, separations, and starvation. A third of the cohort members lost family members during the war—husbands, parents, siblings. One man who was very bitter about his lifetime in the Former Soviet Union, particularly about anti-Semitism, spoke at the very end of the interview, about the ironic impact of war on his own experience of nationality, Russians and the Russian people. He said that, during the war and at no other time that he could remember, they were truly a united people, that “people rose above the meanness and conflicts of daily life.”

Anti-Semitism was pervasive and, if not taken for granted, so much a part of their daily lives that a sense of outrage was missing. Their memories of religion were extremely

fragmented stretching back at least two generations to grandparents. Those who had at least spent the early part of their lives in small towns and villages where synagogues were allowed to stand longer and where the speaking of Yiddish was tolerated, retained more.

Most, two-thirds, had no direct experience of the purges during the 1930's, but those who did remembered these events vividly—a father who died in a prison camp north of Moscow; the same man's step-father shot by a firing squad in Grozny; a young boy's father arrested in the middle of the night, accused of being a spy for the Japanese, tortured and returned to the family at the outbreak of the Second World War; another man, an adolescent at the time, remembered his father's arrest and disappearance in 1938.

At least on the surface, their decisions to leave the Former Soviet Union, although complicated in many ways by political and social circumstances, were straight-forward. Children, for the most part, or other family members were leaving or had already left; many were nearing retirement or were already retired. Very few remained engaged in any way in social and political life beyond their families. All had long been disillusioned but not all were certain about leaving, and not all were eager to go to the United States. A number left a relatively comfortable life behind. Certainly, as the nineties progressed, economic hardships for pensioners worsened. The pressure to leave increased. There were those who became *refusniks*,¹ pulled into the political noman's land by their dissident children. Along with their children, they were thrown out of good jobs, refused work and refused exit from the country. Most viewed their emigration as a family exit with the children and grandchildren providing the motivation and the plans. Those who left the former Soviet Union before 1991, faced hostile obstacles—long delays, paperwork

¹ The *refusnik* term derives from the official denial of an applicant's request for permission to emigrate.

nightmares—and were forced to leave most of their accumulated life possessions behind—World War II medals, family heirlooms, photographs. Those who left after the collapse of the Soviet Union, had an easier time of it. Some even owned their apartments and were able to sell them and other possessions to finance their trip and establish themselves in the United States. Instead of the circuitous route through Vienna and Italy, stop-overs along the way, they flew directly from Moscow to JFK. In a recent photographic exhibition at the International Center for Photography, entitled, “Migrations,” Sebastiao Salgado (2000) captures the welcoming embraces of Russian family members as their kin arrive at JFK in contrast to other less jet-powered migrations streaming around the world.

Given the short period of time that they have resided in the United States it is surprising that most were already citizens and the rest were awaiting their INS examination or processing of papers to become citizens. One woman had framed her citizen’s certification on the wall, others could recall in vivid detail the specific dates, events, and questions put to them on the day of their examinations.

2.3 COHORT VOICES: SIGNIFICANT THEMES

• MOBILITY—SPACE AND PLACE

The sheer geographic size of the Soviet Union invites wonder about place and its intersection with the climactic times of the Soviet era. The cohort members whose lives streamed through these times were swept up in a whirlwind. None remained in the place where they began. Whether they were living in dirt-floor huts in shtetls or comfortable, even luxurious homes in major cities, did not matter. By the 1920’s and 1930’s, they were no longer in their original place. They were set in motion early on, many of them children

of tradesmen—carpenters, tailors, middlemen—who traveled to larger cities in order to work in factories, to establish their proletarian credentials. There were those in cities who got into trouble because of their alien status (Iiana's father was a "NEP" man—hounded out of St. Petersburg when that program was officially discredited). Famine drove others out of the countryside into large cities. Priests, rabbis, political prisoners and their families were on the run. The Second World War broke out, unleashing a cataclysm that propelled whole towns and villages, some onto escape routes out across the steppes and onto the Siberian plains, others marched or were carried aboard trains moving in the opposite direction toward the front lines. Even after the war, those who remained in the military, traveled with their families to the outlying reaches of the empire borderlands; and although none of the cohort members spent time in the gulag, they spoke of relatives who reported long train journeys across the Siberian plains to labor camps. They remembered all this—the fear, the grief, but also the novelty of the places where they went and the excitement of the times.

I have traced their routes on two maps: Figure 1 displays their migration during the 1920's and 1930's, mostly from small villages and cities in Ukraine, to Moscow. Not one of them remained behind in the countryside. Those who did not go to Moscow, settled in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Saratov, a major city along the Volga, and mid-sized cities in Ukraine. They settled there and never returned. By the time they left for the United States, they were decidedly city folks. Figure 2 traces their escape routes during the German invasion of 1941 (I elaborate on this in Chapter 5). The trajectories on the map point to directions and places, but only their stories fill in the chaotic nature of these

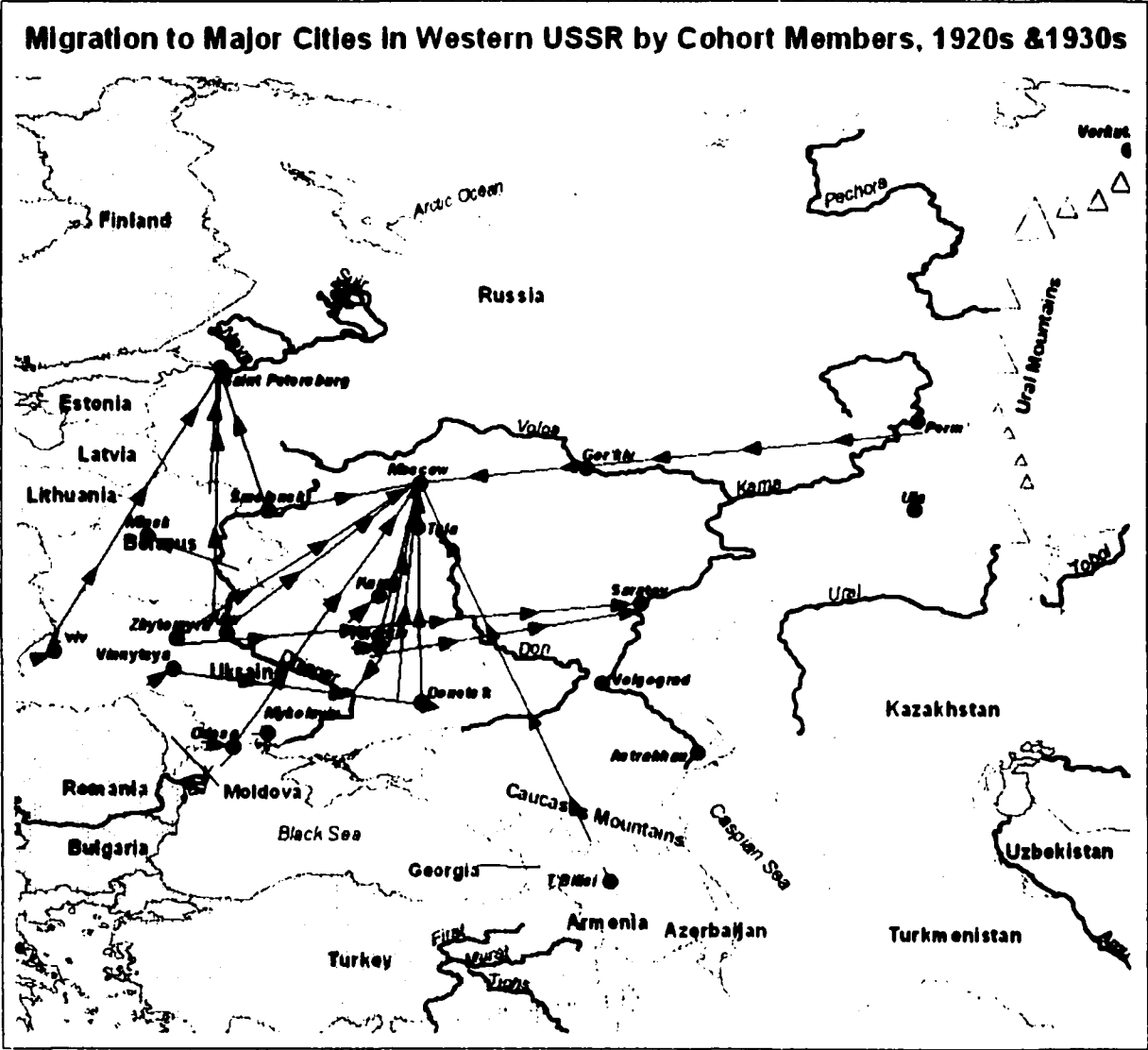


Figure 1

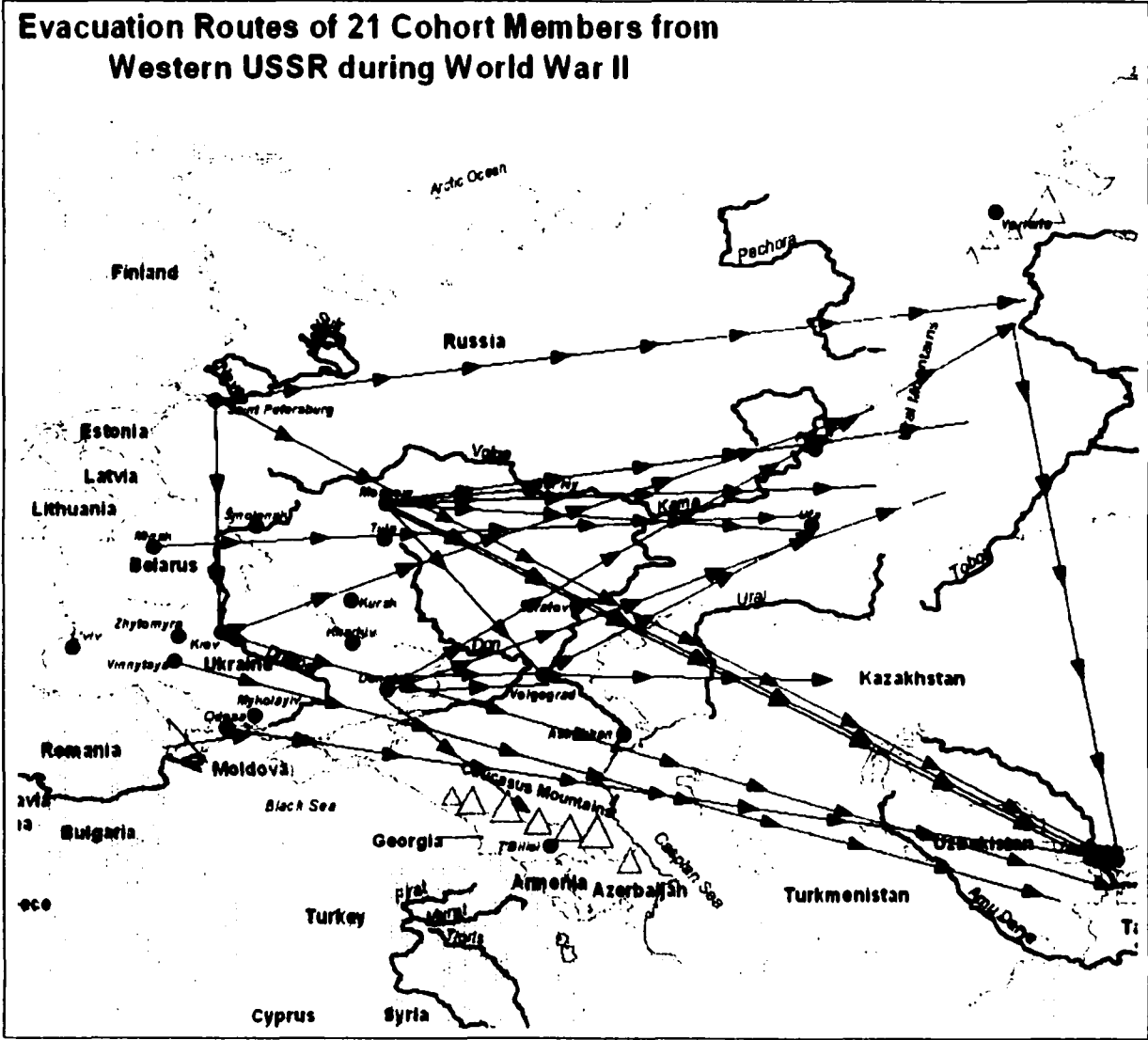


Figure 2

evacuations.

I wondered as I listened to their stories and later as I reviewed the tapes, about the impact that these early journeys across the land under conditions of uncertainty and, at times, the gravest danger, might have had on their decisions later in life, to emigrate. Certainly there were other factors pushing and pulling them—their desire to be with their children, refugee benefits, economic hard times. But I wondered: could these experiences have played a part in creating curiosity and building confidence—a kind of derring do, risk taking—that might have made emigration easier? I examine this possibility in conjunction with their experiences of Soviet communal life in which the lack of private property and the identity and attachments that grow up around it, might also have loosened their connection to the former Soviet Union.

- **ANTI-SEMITISM**

Anti-Semitism is the legal basis for the refugee status granted to Russian Jews entering the United States. When one of the cohort members, Yury, went for his interview at the American Embassy in Moscow he presented a chronological account of discriminatory acts, all state-sponsored, that had touched his life. He began his story with an account of his heroic acts during the Second World War when he was awarded, but then denied, the highest military medal of honor; followed by his exclusion from a prized military institute after fully qualifying for admission; later, in the 1950's, his trial and dismissal from the military for falsifying his name to hide his Jewishness, something that he proved to be untrue. After telling me this, he looked at me, still searching for confirmation, as if to say, "Was it enough?" Anti-Semitism touched the lives of all the

people I interviewed, some indirectly through their parents and children, some only mildly, others more blatantly and destructively. None of it was trivial. Although their reasons for leaving the former Soviet Union were strongly influenced by their desire to be with their children and economic concerns related to dwindling pensions, underlying fears related to anti-Semitism still lurked.

Anti-Semitism operated within a far more extensive system of centralized control growing out of the failure of the government to deliver on the promises of the social revolution. By the late 1920's agricultural and industrial production had failed to respond to social and economic measures. There was in-fighting at the top: Trotsky urging more aggressive measures—massive industrialization, higher taxes—and Bukharin favoring a slowing of the pace, while Stalin worked to consolidate power and gain control of the Central Committee. What eventually emerged was the nomenklatura system—"the most extensive and tightly controlled system of executive patronage the world has known" (Hosking 2000:447). The Central Committee became the control panel of the Soviet Union ruling class. Although the terminology of class was omnipresent—kulaks, bourgeois, specialist, class enemy, class war—the standard class relationships—worker, peasant and intelligentsia—had been eliminated. There was no longer a relationship between the classes; what prevailed was the relationship of all classes to the state. Soviet life was declassed (Hosking 2000:447-48). The Communist Party was able to define class in its own terms using internal passports and dwelling permits as a means of controlling the population. What was contained on the passport was key to understanding Soviet social structure including the ways in which anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination operated—whether one lived in a town or city where there were more

services and more opportunities was determined by what was on the passport.

Nationality, educational status, and work record as stated on one's passport mattered greatly. Jewish identity was but one of the factors, albeit an important one, that determined access to work, education, privilege. But Russian Jews were not alone. Other national groups found their designation on a passport, along with a lack of skills or education, sometimes an even greater disadvantage.

In a totalitarian state, one preceded by a centuries-long history of anti-Semitism under tsarist rule, it is difficult to separate state-sponsored acts from long-existing social practices. Where the rule of law is manipulated by the state the lines between de facto and de jure are blurred if not pointless. But it is significant to note that as the power of the state began to crumble, anti-Semitism continued and, as late as the 1980's and 1990's, open and frequently organized threats against Jews persisted (Remnick 1994:86-100). In the following accounts, cohort members speak of explicit restrictions, denied or unspoken discrimination, lies, contradictions and reversals in their everyday lives. I draw on this material later in describing their lives as elderly immigrants in the United States.

Gone was confinement to the Pale, gone were the pogroms, after the Revolution. Instead, cohort members encountered barriers to education, some blatant, others difficult to prove. In addition, career choices and the events of everyday life, some of them quirky, reflected the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in Soviet society. Those who remained in the military, all with promising careers following rapid promotions and honors during the war, spent the rest of their military careers in the stultifying atmosphere of backwater military posts, unpromoted and unrecognized.

Most of the cohort members had had their early schooling before the Second World War. In some cases, in the cities and rural villages of Ukraine, some reported that they even had the opportunity to attend Hebrew school for a while. For the older members, those now in their eighties, the opportunity to complete college and begin university study was relatively open. Some were actually sought out and recruited for study at specialized institutes particularly young men for military education. But for those few in the older group who entered universities in large cities, it was by dint of amazingly hard work and sacrifice. It also helped if they were Komsomol members.² Yetta, the oldest of seven, traveled from Smolensk to Moscow. She describes herself as poor, ashamed of her simple cotton dress, a symbol of her poverty, surrounded by privileged students, the sons and daughters of elite Communist Party officials. Ena, whose older brothers preceded her, made it to Moscow from Ukraine, passed the Medical Institute entrance examination and was about to begin study just as the war broke out in 1941.

Anti-Semitism took the form of quotas established at prestigious institutions located in major cities. The cohort members' experiences reflect a range of strategies for dealing with discrimination. For some, it meant using family contacts. Usually this strategy was used by Jewish families with long established professional and academic careers dating back to pre-Revolutionary times. Academic friends, uncles, professional colleagues were asked by parents to intercede. Sometimes they were successful. It worked for Rita when she applied for medical school but only after a number of tries. But in most cases, it meant finding another way around. Vasilii found himself, at the end of the

² The Komsomol was an organization for young adults. It sponsored academic, social and cultural activities for young people, served to advance careers, and was a stepping stone, in some cases, to membership in the Communist Party.

war, on the Eastern Front sitting, as he put it, “on the edge of the China Sea.” He formed a group within his army unit, getting all the necessary forms together to apply for admission to the engineering Institute in Moscow. They studied and took the test together. He did as well as his friends. All were accepted except him. He was the only Jew. So he elected to remain in the army in order to attend a military institute where he obtained an electrical engineering degree. “I didn’t want to stay in the army, but if this was the only way I could enter the institute, then I was willing to stay.” Another man, told me that his mother, and later on, his mother-in-law, tried everything to obtain a seat for him at the prestigious medical institute in Moscow. When all their efforts failed, he traveled to Tajikistan to study at the institute there. Sophia applied to law school and was excluded at the more prestigious Odessa and Kiev institutes but was admitted to Kharkov Law Institute only after she had worked for three years to gain credit for admission. She said, “It was either that or a bribe.” Ludmila was not as lucky as Sophia. In 1949, during the postwar years, she applied to study at the Leningrad Law Institute and was rejected. “It was a very difficult time for Jews in Leningrad. There was a commission. They wouldn’t explain but everyone knew.” I asked her if she was very disappointed. She said that no, she had decided to study engineering at night and work during the day. “It was easier for Jews.” Many expressed this sense of resignation, of settling for less than they desired.

Yury, a major in the Red Army at twenty-four, after surviving the war, heard at the last minute about a special examination being given in Moscow for men who had served in the war. Admission to a prestigious military institute was the prize. Yury and his friend, a fellow officer, traveled hurriedly from Romania where they were stationed, not sleeping,

cramming for the exam along the way, and arriving in Moscow in time to take the test.

There is excitement in his voice as he tells the story. He and his friend received the results at the same time. Their scores were the same. They were to appear at a certain date at one central great hall where the winners were to be announced. The hall was crowded with nervous young men awaiting the calling of names in alphabetical order. His friend whose name began with a letter before his in the alphabet was called. He had been admitted. Since Yury had risen to a rank higher than his friend's, he breathed a sigh of relief, assumed he was in and waited easily for the calling of his name. It wasn't called. He had been rejected. His friend was "Russian." He and his friend found one of the officers responsible for administering the test. He pressed him for an explanation. None was given. He went above him but received no satisfaction. He remained in the army, "That's all I knew—artillery."

They spoke too about their children and the barriers they encountered in gaining entrance to universities. Perhaps the most poignant and interesting story was told by Minna. It was interesting because, while it is a story about anti-Semitism it is colored by another deeply affecting theme in Soviet life—the profound and lasting impact of the Second World War and the role of the state in maintaining and manipulating that memory. During 1930's, Minna was the oldest child in a household where there was not enough food to go around. She made her way to Moscow and got a job digging ditches, earning enough to pay for a bed in a communal apartment, and enough to eat, finally moving on to a job serving food in a small cinema café. Her husband was the delivery man for the café. Her daughter was born just before the war broke out. And then, in quick succession: Germany invaded; she was again pregnant; her husband was killed in the first battle of the

war, and she was on a train being evacuated to the Ural Region. She gave birth to twin boys on a collective farm where they had been deposited. She worked on the farm throughout the war, returning to Moscow in 1944 where she fought to regain occupancy of her one room in a communal apartment and resumed her work in the cinema café. She described this return as the lowest point in her life. It was coupled with the death of her mother and the return from war of her disabled brother. She managed. In later years, her daughter, an excellent student applied to the university and was rejected despite her qualifying credentials and bonus points because of her father's death in the war. This was a terrible blow to Minna and her daughter. She knew that the rejection was due to anti-Semitism and took on the local party officials and, in a series of meetings, confronted them with her conviction that her daughter had been excluded because she was a Jew. The party reversed the institute's decision reflecting perhaps a deeper and more accurate understanding of the operation of anti-Semitism on a day-to-day basis in the Moscow of the 1950's and 1960's. Certain Communist values continued to take precedence. The honor due to the daughter of a man who had died in the Great Patriotic War still prevailed over quotas maintained by universities limiting the number of Jews allowed admission. It also suggests that at least in some instances, university officials were more zealous in their anti-Semitism than Party nomenklatura.

Although their narratives speak of the pervasive obstacles created by anti-Semitism, they also describe the successful strategies to overcome them. They used connections, Komsomal membership, sheer determination. Other factors were also at play: more than half of the cohort members were children of professionals or successful merchants, raised in homes where educational expectations were high despite the social and economic

turmoil of the times; although some were still living in small towns and villages in the 1930's, most were already in cities where the presence of universities, their students, the libraries, the academic atmosphere, held out the possibility of study. The position of peasants living in small villages was quite different. In the 1930's and even after the Second World War, peasants were denied passports that would have enabled them to escape to the cities. This was in the interest of maintaining and boosting grain production. Although peasants had the right to a passport if they were leaving for higher or special education, the village primary schools were of such poor quality that few qualified. Their poor education also put those living in villages at a disadvantage even if they were admitted to the university. Unless they were fluent in Russian, the language of higher education, they were unlikely to do well (Hosking 2000).

There were obstacles in the workplace, as well. Four members of the cohort, all physicians, related stories describing how publication of their clinical work was blocked. Two orthopedic surgeons failed to get publication approval for their work. Sergey had extensive experience treating over 600 patients for traumatic hand injuries. He described trips to Moscow to the Medical Institute to meet with and discuss his work with the department chairman. The chairman put him off; there were confrontations with publishers who failed to respond to his inquiries. He described one meeting with a publisher who had printed his paper in book form and submitted it for review prior to publication. It was rejected. Sergey confronted the publisher and, finally, was allowed to look through the book and read the editorial notes in the margin. The notes bore no relationship to the text. They seemed to have been randomly inserted. He was furious, bewildered. He put the book away and stopped trying. Years later, in an amusing

epilogue, Sergey described a hotel room meeting at a medical conference held in Tashkent. “My friend pointed out the Director of the Institute of Medicine in Moscow and told me that he wanted to meet me. I was invited to a party that night after the conference held at the home of one of the big medical consultants, and was introduced to the director. We were staying at the same hotel and he invited me to his room for a drink. After we had had some cognac, he asked me if I had ever wondered who had rejected my book. Of course I wanted to know. ‘It was I,’ he said, and went on to explain why he had done it.” The reason, said Sergey, was due to a scarcity of paper—there was a limit to what could be published. The Director said that it was too embarrassing for the government to acknowledge this. Sergey laughed as he told this story, but was it really the paper scarcity that explains the rejection, as he seems to think? Or was it the scarcity that forced the choice about whose work was to be published, a Russian’s or a Jew’s? Was it anti-Semitism at all? Sergey was not sure. Neither was I.

Tatyana, a psychiatrist, was more certain as she described a career-long encounter with anti-Semitism. She described each encounter matching it sometimes with the ebb and flow of public repression beginning in 1945–48 and ending with more subtle professional and personal experiences. At the very time that she was completing work on her dissertation which had, as its major focus, genetics, the State declared all geneticists, who were “all Jewish,” according to Tatyana, to be “enemies of the people.” Her director who had been working with her, was laid off. She too was caught up in the sweep. Her dissertation was thrown out, she was let go and then re-hired at a lower level, losing status and income. There was the “Doctors’ Case,” in the early 1950’s, and although all students were “called up and investigated, only Jews were fired.” (In 1953 Stalin ordered the

arrest of nine prominent doctors, six of them Jewish. Party papers claimed the doctors were poisoning Kremlin leaders.). But, “in a stroke of luck,” said Tatyana, “Stalin died the next day and the order was never carried out. Later in the 1950’s, she remembers the assignment of an NKVD agent to the psychiatric clinic as an undercover worker. Still later, in the 1960’s, when she had become an expert in the treatment of the psychological aspects of physical illness, she wrote a book on the subject. Her immediate supervisor, the director of the clinic, however, advised her that she would never be able to publish the book under her name. He suggested that the best way to go about it would be to allow him to co-author it. Then it would be published with, of course, half the profits and professional recognition going to him. She refused. This meant forgoing publication and her job as well.

Ari, a young boy who spent the war years as a metal worker in an improvised munitions plant just south of Stalingrad, returned to school, finished college prepared as an engineer. From Adjenikizenin in the Caucasus, where his family had settled after the war, he made his way to Leningrad and went to work in a huge ship-building plant. As with so many memories of their lives as young adults in their twenties, Lev speaks with great animation about life in Leningrad and his work at the massive plant. He drew a diagram of the city, the buildings lining the canals and river’s edge. He lived in a dormitory with other engineers. Life was good until 1952 when he was summarily fired along with other Jews at the plant, including those in high positions. This was part of an aggressive government repression of Jews ordered by Stalin at the time of the so-called Doctor’s Case. Lev returned to his parent’s home in Adjenikizemin, helped his father in

his tailoring work for a year until Stalin's death and then returned to Leningrad. Stalin's death was a great relief for all!

Men in the military, regardless of rank and number of medals awarded, all suffered the same fate: assignment to the farthest reaches of the empire. Yetta's husband, a colonel at the end of the war, a graduate of the Military Institute in Moscow, was assigned to the Kamchatka Region. As Yetta described it, "it was only a short distance from Alaska." Yury's assignment as a major was out across the steppes, in an outpost at the southeasternmost tip of Uzbekistan. Andrei, despite his medals, his rank, his "highest honors" at the Military Institute, was turned down for graduate study at the Institute. He stood fast in Moscow, refusing assignment after assignment, writing letters, protesting until he received short notice of his assignment to a naval post in Koenigsberg. Andrei's English is excellent, he speaks it with great strength and precision, searching for the most appropriate word, drawing from a rich vocabulary. It is a voice with great humor full of Soviet stylistic turns and, above all, command. (He fussed over the structure of the interview since I was also interviewing his wife, Rita, working out with us who was to go first, making corrections in his wife's chronology or elaborating on her more understated narrative). He protested that he was not a naval officer, knew nothing about the navy, couldn't even swim, but then he realized that the offer had its appeal. His wife, an electrical engineer, would be able to work, and there were many privileges attached to the position (privileges, especially housing, were very important). So he packed up and left for Konigsberg.

All of these officers knew that they would never be promoted beyond the rank they had attained by the end of the war. They remained colonels or lieutenant colonels while

their fellow officers were not only promoted, but also given travel opportunities outside the Soviet Union and choice assignments. Most were not bitter, although one, Vassily, a colonel who spent most of his career in Lvov, a city so close to the West that he felt he could see it, expressed deep regret that he had not taken advantage of so many opportunities to leave. When I asked about the danger of leaving his family behind, he responded that he could have dealt with that. I think, in an attempt to express his deep regret and sense of missed opportunity, this might have been a wistful, almost poetic statement stripped of the reality of the Iron Curtain that prevailed at the time.

In other ways, too, state sponsored anti-Semitism sometimes took peculiar turns. Rita's husband, a violinist, participated frequently in competitions. A curtain was placed between the judges and the musicians at these contests. Vladimir, Rita's husband, was Jewish but he had a "Russian" name. She laughs about the looks of surprise and dismay on the faces of judges when they saw her husband's face, which, according to Rita, is obviously Jewish. Alexandra's husband and Alexandra, by way of her marriage to him, found themselves in double discriminatory jeopardy. Her husband, although a Soviet Jew, had been born in Texas but had returned as a teenager with his family in the early 1930's (The family had left Russia in 1911 in response to advertisements for workers in the Texas oil drilling fields). Her husband had done well, completing his studies as a physicist but, when the Soviet Union began atomic weapons research in earnest, he was thrown out of this work because of his American background. Anti-Semitism was a factor, although his American background might have been a stronger reason. Alexandra said that it was really both.

Sophia loved her work as a lawyer. She describes herself sitting up in bed at night, nodding off as she read through journal articles. She negotiated on behalf of a large plant, a huge coal producing and shipping plant located in the Dumbas coal fields of eastern Ukraine. In a country and a system beset with chronic shortages, hoarding, bartering and delays, she negotiated contracts and then entered into arbitration with defaulting suppliers and purchasers. Large fines were involved. For Sophia, “Arbitration was my life.” But, her happiest, “the best of the best years” were those years that she spent in the Arctic city of Vorkuta. An unlikely city covered with ice and snow seven months of the year, without summer, it was built by convicts as a prison during an earlier time and then had been resurrected by the government as an industrial site for the production and distribution of coal (in fact, the father of one of the cohort members died as a prisoner at Vorkuta). I asked Sophia why it had such appeal for her. Initially she said it was the money. Since no one really wanted to be there because it was so isolated and cold, the government enticed people by paying very high salaries and by bringing in the best of everything—food, drink, entertainment—in order to retain people. Both she and her husband were prized workers because of their experience, so they were paid premium salaries and provided with all sorts of privileges. I wondered about the isolation of a place like that despite its perks. I asked Sophia about friends and colleagues. It was then that she spoke about the feeling of freedom that she had there. She said there was a great mix of people. People were brought in from all over the Soviet Union because of their special skills “They didn’t know who was Jewish.” There was no anti-Semitism. They were very good people.” This unintended Soviet-style utopia that she described, an anomaly for sure, loaded with contradictions, perhaps expresses best what the USSR had come to be in the late 1980’s:

competitive workers, working for the highest pay, pampered and privileged with material enticements to motivate their continued efficient production with no room for discriminatory practices that might interfere with production—a worker's paradise but not the one intended at the outset.

Time obviously has softened their memories. Most laughed about the absurdity of these barriers. There was an impersonal quality to most of their stories about anti-Semitism as well. The bureaucracy, the Party, the rules were the source of their injuries and, therefore, less hurtful on a personal level. There was almost a packaged quality about some of their stories, as if they had been told many times, rehearsed in a way, told to layers and layers of immigration officials, a price put on their exit from the former Soviet Union; told again to social agency personnel to qualify for benefits (a sign posted in the front office of a Brighton Beach social agency one summer, announced eligibility for air conditioners for Holocaust survivors). But there were parts of stories that seemed so unrehearsed that the tellers seemed startled to find themselves talking about things that they had completely forgotten or perhaps never fully allowed themselves to reflect upon. In the interview with Minna, a stillness followed her narration of her successful confrontation on behalf of her daughter. It was as if she had realized in the remembering that she had won something important for herself and her daughter in a Soviet life that she had described as “all suffering.”

- **RELIGION**

Soviet Jews, members of the Russian Orthodox Church, and other minor religions, experienced the same religious cleansing following the Revolution. According to the decree of 1918 on the separation of church and state, all ecclesiastic land was confiscated and all religious associations were stripped of juridical status. A group of people could still lease back the property and hire a priest or rabbi as an employee for weekly services but there was to be no bell ringing or pastoral work. Some members of the clergy, especially bishops, became part of the nomenklatura hierarchy (Hosking 2000:442). Orthodox priests and rabbis became aliens, subject to arrest and deportation, their families ostracized; synagogues and churches shared equally in destruction or conversion to more utilitarian purposes, although some remained standing. The near erasure of religion did not occur in a day, it seemed to creep outward from the cities; compromises were made. Religion was never totally suppressed.

By 1939 only a few hundred orthodox parish churches were still open—one percent of the pre-Revolutionary number. Although the figures are not certain, it is estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 priests had been arrested and many executed during the 1930's (Hosking 2000:441). Despite this near erasure of religion, a resurgence of religious practice occurred after the Second World War. Under Khrushchev, a campaign to repress religion led to massive closings of churches, mosques and synagogues. A third of the still existing synagogues were closed as well as a fifth of the mosques and half the churches. This second wave, occurring at the time cohort members were approaching middle age—raising their children and building their careers—was powerful enough to have discouraged any re-thinking of religious conviction. Although I expected to see the

imprint of this absence in the lives of cohort members, I was surprised to find little remaining of religious sentiment and only fragmented memories of religion. Victor's response to my questions about any recollection he had about religious sentiment or practice, perhaps, comes closest to stating the way things were for most Soviet Jews. "Yes, my grandparents and parents were religious but then the Rabbi was sent off to Siberia in the 1930's, and the Jewish school was closed." Most memories are variations on Victor's story. It did make a difference whether one lived in a city or a small town or village. But having parents and grandparents who continued to observe religious practices did not seem to influence their own beliefs as they grew up. Several explained it this way, "We were Soviet people. It was not the style of Soviet life."

I expected that the elders of the group, those in their eighties, would have had more to say about their own religious memories and experiences since they were children in the 1920's during the post Revolution transition, a time when grandparents were still around (most could remember at least one grandparent or parent who continued to observe some religious practice), some synagogues were still standing, and, at least some rabbis were still living in the community. This was not the case. Of the twenty-eight people who talked at considerable length of their memories of religion, regardless of age, most denied any real involvement with religion in the Soviet Union. Their memories dealt almost entirely with the cultural expression of Judaism. Religion, for these new post Revolution Soviet Jews, seems to have become strictly a cultural practice consistent with their national identity. Although anti-Semitism continued in full force, the religious underpinnings were absent or muted. Their fragmentary memories support this:

Liana, the daughter of a wealthy merchant family, a successful pediatric surgeon, had lived most of her life in Moscow. She described herself as an atheist. But, she remembers her annual trip to the synagogue in Moscow to buy matzoth. The synagogue was the only place in Moscow where it was made and each person of Jewish nationality was allowed six boxes. Her “Russian” friends put in their orders with her early. She picked up and delivered them amid great festivity.

Galina’s father, almost immediately following the Revolution, arranged with a rabbi in Moscow for Galina and her sister to study Hebrew. He took them by the hand to the rabbi’s home (Galina is one of the oldest members of the cohort. This took place during the early years following the Revolution.). “We weren’t interested. We were surrounded by our Russian-speaking playmates. We didn’t remember any of it.”

Yetta, the oldest of seven children, said that her parents went to the synagogue in Smolensk maybe once or twice a year. They lived very poorly on the outskirts of the city and were too busy staying alive. And besides, she says, she “would have been kicked out of the Komsomol” if her parents had been religious. For Yetta, Komsomol membership meant a chance to go to university or a decent job. Others talked about this kind of pressure on young people. Sophia was kicked out of the Komsomol because she was unsuccessful in getting her parents to give up their Jewish religious practices.

The break with religion for Alexi was abrupt rather than a gradual erosion. He talked about his mother’s strong religion, her fierce vigil following his father’s arrest as a political prisoner and then her sudden abandonment of religion following his father’s execution. She later became a woman known for her wisdom (Alexi described her this way), sought out for advice but not a religious woman. People came from all over to

consult with her. Alexi believes in God but “that’s it.” He jokes gently about how he and his wife struggle to perform the candle lighting ritual on Fridays—how they forget the time and miss the lighting and then the struggle to decide whether they should go ahead and light the candle anyway or start all over next week.

Alena, raised in the city by atheist parents, described a visit from her mother-in-law after her marriage. They took off on a shopping trip around Moscow and came back with a set of pots and pans. The lesson began: the pots, turned upside down, were heated on open burners; at the end of the process, when the pots were inverted, they were kosher. Alena demonstrated the process in her small kitchen in Brighton Beach.

Raisa remembers her grandfather who was a Rabbi and her parents who were deeply religious. She remembers the cordoning off of the synagogue in her village by Komsomol members and insults hurled at those who attempted to enter. But then she moved to St. Petersburg after the war. Her connection with religion was cut off. “It just was not done in cities.”

These memories, even their fragmentary nature, deal almost entirely with the cultural expression of Judaism. They help to explain the émigrés’ later encounter with American Judaism. At the time of the interviews, most of the cohort members were either self-described atheists or “had little interest at all in religion.” Most believed in God but “that’s it,” as Alexi put it. Some had no use for the social aspects as well and were disdainful of what they believed was the hypocrisy of their fellow émigrés who attended holiday parties sponsored by American Jewish social agencies. But the few who delighted in the social occasions—the seasonal holidays, the food, the candles, the celebrations—seemed to feel no conflict between their lack of belief and enjoyment of a song and a

prayer at the Friday Shabbat ceremony. Perhaps the most interesting group was made up of those who described strong desires to gain some understanding of religion. There were only a few but they were passionate about their experience, displaying a novice-like desire to seek understanding about religious experience working from a near tabula rasa—from the perspective of a lifetime without religion. All used similar phrasing to describe their struggle. Vasilii put it well, “ I try, I read, I want to believe, but it is not in my heart. It is a different ideology.” Anastasia struggled with it and looks back with a mixture of regret and disdain, “I don’t understand it. It’s theater.” Only two continue to study and search.

- FAMINE, HUNGER, STARVATION

Casual talk of ethnicity leads eventually to talk of food. To describe the presence of a new immigrant group in the neighborhood is to discuss the newly opened food shops and restaurants, and, at least initially, the exotic foods being served up. For the Russian Jews in Washington Heights, the shops are newer and neater and smaller and less frequented than those in Brighton Beach where the organization is helter skelter, the atmosphere noisy and crowded. Smoked fish, perogies, farmer cheese, candies wrapped in shiny colorful paper are the standard fare. A bowl of borscht and black bread at a boardwalk cafe is heaven. Sunday shoppers in Brighton Beach are different from the everyday neighborhood shopper. Sable coats, youth, glamour, brush up against traditional berets, coarse unstylish overcoats at meat and bakery counters. Korean-run green grocers and pizza stores hold out but, on Brighton Beach Avenue, they are eclipsed by Russian restaurants and a profusion of freshly baked sweet rolls and cakes literally flowing from storefront windows onto outdoor tables. This sumptuous display of plenty in an

immigrant community, when seen from the perspective of earlier lives in which hunger and starvation were a significant presence, raises questions about connections with the past and how they manifest themselves in the present.

Severe shortages and lack of access to food were a part of everyday life in the postwar Soviet Union. But shortage and scarcity are one thing. Hunger and starvation are something else. Cohort members, particularly the older group, those now in their eighties, made this distinction in talking about their lives. Hunger was the issue in their childhood memories of the 1920's and 1930's, and then, later, in memories of the war years. It seldom came up in their stories about later years, years of shortages and standing in line. Basing his figures on population data now available, Hosking (2000:469), estimates that it is likely that 5 to 6 million people, mostly peasants, died in the worst famine year of 1932-33. In a countryside already devastated by years of civil war and social upheaval, food production to feed an expanding urban population had reached crisis proportions by 1928 when the first 5-year plan was implemented. There was to be no more trouble with attachment of peasants to the land. Collectivization was begun on a forced and massive basis. The party, lacking the agents to carry out such an extensive campaign, engineered class warfare, drawing poorer peasants into denunciation of slightly better off peasants known as kulaks. Collectives were set up, the kulaks excluded and their property confiscated for use by the collective. The kulaks were often beaten, declared enemies of the people, deported in cattle cars; some escaped to the cities. Young Komsomal members were incited to bait kulaks. There was chaos in the villages. The collectivization project extended into Kazakhstan and the Caucasus where land cultivation was contrary to nomadic culture resulting in catastrophic failure—loss of life, decline in

livestock. As resistance mounted, military force was used. A dry summer in 1931 compounded the poor agricultural output. Despite accurate forecasts of famine, Stalin refused to interrupt grain export, instead, directing the imposition of severe penalties on collectives unable to meet grain quotas. Grain left the villages, leaving the countryside to starve. In the country's most productive grain growing regions, Ukraine, the Kuban, west Siberia, the Volga Basin, people died of hunger. A health inspector described conditions in a collective: a family sat at a table of "gnawed bones from a dead horse." People were eating grass, bark from trees, sparrows, cats, rats—even cannibalism was not unknown (Hosking 2000:454). Famine persisted throughout the 1930's. By 1937, 90 percent of the land in the Soviet Union had been collectivized. After all this, no agricultural gains had been made.

For those who talked about hunger and starvation, famine-related deaths loomed large: "A lot of people died." "They were dropping dead in the streets....in Odessa....in Moscow"—they named the cities closest to where they lived. They were mostly town people, not peasants, and their memories were vague about the brutal collectivization project underway in the 1930's and the impact this had on farm production and food distribution. Ena was a teenager during the famine of 1934. She was living in a medium-sized city in Ukraine. Her family had already begun the exodus from their small village. Her father had moved from their village to the city of Chitoma in the 1920's, after her mother's death from tuberculosis. Ena was left in the care of her grandparents. Her brother and an aunt were already in Moscow. Another aunt had married and moved to what was then Poland. Their survival through the famine depended on the functioning of this family network. An aunt sent bread, bought in Moscow which, when opened in

Chitoma, was covered with mold (Ena attributed some of those famine deaths more to the moldy bread than starvation). Relatives in Poland sent family possessions, jewelry, heirlooms, which Ena and her grandmother brought to the center of the city, to the “torg-sin,” to be exchanged for food.

Lev, younger than Ena, remembers the famine well, although he said that his family was untouched. They lived in a small Ukrainian village where his father worked as a tailor. They owned a cow and a small piece of property. But he remembers his classmates, all Russian peasants, who were starving. They were served a bowl of “balinda,” cabbage soup, by the staff of the German-run school in their village. He didn’t need it but he still remembers a classmate eating the soup, finishing it to the last drop and then licking the spoon over and over again. Yetta’s family of nine struggled with how to divide up their allotment: they tried having family members collect their own tiny allotment but that didn’t work. Then, they tried collecting the whole chunk and dividing it up among themselves; that didn’t work either. They had no land, no garden. “We were skin and bones,” said Yetta. Max, another cohort member, remembers with delight, the arrival of food packages in Odessa, sent from New York City by his uncles who had left the USSR just after the Revolution. He remembers the colors of the labels, the sweet taste of cocoa, the aroma of coffee. Minna, one of the two cohort members who had any experience with collective life, remembered a bread prepared with grass and corn flour—the corn given to them by one of the peasants who hoarded corn under the floor of his hut. As she talked, she slapped her hands together, making flat bread again. (Lev and Minna’s descriptions of their exchanges with peasants are rare in that most cohort members’ stories lacked any reference to peasants).

With the exception of Minna cohort members were a few steps removed from the direct impact of the famine. Minna's parents were kulaks . Her father had been beaten up in the streets by a mob and eventually died from his injuries, leaving seven children. Her mother faced exile but negotiated with the collective to be taken in in return for a grain storage silo that her husband had owned. Minna described the dirt floor hut, the backbreaking field work, the desperation, but also the generosity of the "Russian" peasant who shared his corn with her family. In the cities and towns, there was at least some room for maneuver—family networks, exchange, hand-outs, even a cow in Lev's case. There was hunger but they survived. Minna never returned to the collective after her evacuation during the war. She made it to Moscow and the university and stayed there—a story repeated by millions. In 1946, one million people died during a famine and five million left for the cities (Hosking 2000:521).

The old and the young talked about hunger during the war. Anastasia's in-laws survived the siege of Leningrad because they were in contact with a relatives in the army who would, from time to time, bring them some food. Others, Anastasia said, who were alone, had no one. "They died." The evacuations produced unexpected contradictions: fresh food all about, but no money to purchase it until the evacuees could find some employment. Government plans to distribute food were non-existent. Survival meant selling the clothes off one's back and dependence on the kindness of town and city residents along the evacuation route. The greatest blessing was assignment to work on a farm collective with access to food. Alexandra's entire family survived on her access to dairy food at the collective where she worked. Service in the army was no guarantee of a meal. Chaotic distribution due to disruptions at the front as well as inadequate supplies

led to starvation. Yury remembers leading his blinded men as they stumbled out of their battle emplacements. They were suffering from severe vitamin deficiencies.

Three quarters of the sample, twelve in Washington Heights and eleven in Brighton Beach talked about hunger in stark and memorable terms, either due to famine or warfare. In a later chapter I examine the meaning of this in their lives as émigrés in a land of plenty where they, without exception, receive the benefits of the federal Food Stamp program, shop in supermarkets filled with an excess of food, where even their cultural food preferences are catered to, and where they celebrate family occasions at lavish restaurants.

• THE PURGES

A third of the cohort members bore the direct onslaught of political persecution—imprisonment, torture and death by exposure, starvation, or execution. Family members—parents, uncles and aunts—perished. Purges began in the early 1930's during the worst of times—famine, failed productivity, chaos, political in-fighting, and the emergence of Stalin as leader of the party. Major decisions about the direction of the country, the socialist state and the international movement were at issue with key revolutionary leaders and their disciples engaged in a struggle for power. Out of this a purge of leaders at the highest levels, led by Stalin, grew into a monstrous, paranoid system of false accusation, surveillance, imprisonment and execution extending over twenty years and involving millions of innocent people. The years 1937-38 were the worst (Hosking 2000:468). More than six and a half million people were arrested, 87 percent of them on political charges. The prison population grew from one million in 1937 to two million in 1939. By

1941 there were 3.3 million and by January 1953, there were 5.5 million people in prison. The elite suffered more than the ordinary workers and peasants. The military, diplomats, scientists, lawyers, doctors, even the secret police, were more at risk. It was one's position within the nomenklatura elite rather than one's ethnicity or nationality that was at issue (Hosking 2000:467). However, as time went on, the system engulfed the entire population; smaller people were swept up into the whirlwind.

Max, now 80, a successful journalist and public relations administrator who left the former Soviet Union with reluctance, describes a lifetime of persecution until he learned "to keep my mouth shut," first as the child of Jews living in the Northern Caucasus, eventually settling in Grozny, where the family was the target of anti-Semitism, mostly at the hands of Cossacks. Later in Grozny, Chechnya, his father, 44 years old, a frail, bespectacled lawyer (pictured in Max's photo album) was arrested in 1934 and accused of treason because of his association with a group of lawyers, many of whom had migrated from Leningrad to the Caucasus where they thought they would be less closely monitored. They were accused of plotting against the state. Despite his father's innocence, he was imprisoned in a work camp north of Moscow, one of thousands of prisoners who constructed the White Sea Canal, a massive engineering project of the 1930's. He died in 1939. Max did not learn of how he died or actually when he died until many years later when he applied for emigration. Ironically, he was required by the state to provide information on where and when his father died, information that only the state could provide. After a series of letters bouncing about from one unit of the NKVD to another, he received a terse reply stating that his father had died on March 20, 1939. The cause of death stated in the letter was, "heart attack," which was the official reason given to cover

a multitude of the real reasons—starvation and exposure to extreme cold. He died in the city of Verkuta, a permafrost region in Northern Russia, rich in coal resources, where prisoners were not only engaged in mining but in building the city where they were housed.

Max himself was also imprisoned briefly at Butyrskaya, an eighteenth century prison in Moscow, while he was a student. He was accused of treasonous behavior, according to the famous Article 58, Paragraph 8—betraying his country, Paragraph 10, propaganda, Paragraph 11, and Participation in a plot (very familiar terminology which both he and the translator rattled off. They agreed on the bureaucratic language but squabbled over the use of the word, propaganda). Actually, Max had been swept up and accused with other students of altering the wording on a large parade banner being prepared for a patriotic rally. He spent six months in a prison cell, the youngest of 10 men, some of them admitted radicals who were awaiting certain execution. Max described the interior of the prison, the bonds that he formed, the etiquette of prison life, and most of all, the great care and nurturing he received at the hands of the older men. He believes he was released, not because he was found to be innocent, but because his mother paid a bribe.

Shortly after his release from prison in 1937, his step-father was arrested and accused of being an American spy. He was shot by a firing squad along with other English-speaking, American-educated men. His step-father, as a young man had signed onto a ship in Odessa headed for the United States. He stayed on in the United States long enough to get an education and then returned to Grozny. Americans were starting to build oil refineries in 1933 and his step-father, with his knowledge of English, was

appointed as Chief of Department of Foreign Relations at the largest plant in the city.

After his death, Max's mother advised him, "Max, hide your tongue, bite it and don't speak openly." Max remains today the fiercest of all the cohort members in his support of socialism. While acknowledging the excesses of Stalinism, he remains unimpressed with capitalism

Alexi, a younger man, in his seventies, recovering from by-pass surgery, talked about his father. He was arrested by the NKVD and shot in 1938. The family knew nothing of what had happened, what he had been accused of, how and where he had died, and even if he was dead, until 1966 when, under Khrushchev, his father was "rehabilitated." Not until 1996, thirty years later, did the details of what had happened become known. His father was a factory worker swept up with others by the NKVD in the search for the names of spies. He was tortured and executed. There were repercussions for the family. His mother and brother and himself became enemies of the state, always in danger of being picked up by the NKVD. He was a cinematographer and, although he was a graduate of the Institute of Cinema Engineers in Kiev and had become an expert in his field, he accepted lower level positions. Although he had no desire to join the Communist Party, he could not, as the son of an "enemy of the people." Even for the position he held, membership was required but his boss simply assumed he belonged or, because he was good at what he did, turned his head the other way. His older brother is also here in the United States in Brooklyn. Alexi is in touch with his brother, sees him often enough, but there's a note of ambivalence, perhaps anger, as he talks about him. He tells me that his brother volunteered to fight "for the Motherland which destroyed our father, his father."

Ilya's father, an influential engineer in construction, was imprisoned in 1938, accused of being a Japanese spy, tortured and released from prison in 1940, his back broken and unable to walk without crutches for the rest of his life. Since he was still hospitalized at the time of the German invasion, the family was unable to be evacuated to safety. They survived the years of the war in concentration camps.

Anastasia's father, an ophthalmologist who had a long successful career treating eye injuries in the small industrial city of Kryvoy-rog (Kryvy-Rin) where eye injuries frequently resulted from mining accidents. But, in the last of Stalin's purges, he was hounded out by bureaucrats and his own patients and falsely accused of practicing poor medicine. He was not allowed to perform surgery. "He died a year later—"a heart attack."

Other relatives suffered too. Sergey's uncle was the Trade Secretary to Germany, called home in 1937, sent off to the gulag for seventeen years and released. He died a year later from tuberculosis. Tatyana's uncle, a physician, was arrested in 1934, accused of being a Trotskyite and given a five year sentence which was extended another five years, the additional five years because of his value as a medical doctor in the camps. Although many prisoners, despite their horrible treatment by the government, wanted to fight in the war, they were not allowed. They were permitted, however, to volunteer to serve on suicide teams. These were the mine clearing units that preceded infantry and tank units on the roads and into fields of combat that had been mined. Few survived and casualty rates were close to 100 percent. Tatyana's uncle volunteered out of desperation and managed to survive by treating wounded soldiers in the unit transporting him to his assignment. The commandant was so grateful that he asked the uncle what he could do for him. Of course, he asked for his freedom. Unable to grant that, the commander re-

assigned him to another infantry division. He survived the war, won medals, and returned from the war an honored soldier, hoping to resume his life in Moscow. But he remained an “enemy of the people,” not in prison but not allowed to return to Moscow.

In-laws too, including fathers-in-law, cousins and friends were also included in memories of terrorism. Rita’s cousin was a German POW, shot as a traitor on his return from the Front. Alexandra’s father-in-law, who had returned with his family from America in the early 1930’s, was imprisoned in 1938 and died. Professional colleagues and good friends were arrested, some released after trial; others disappeared without a trace.

Families of “politicals” suffered. They were usually turned out of their apartments, unable to find work and held suspect so that, at any time, they too were subject to interrogation. Although most of those families affected lived in Moscow at the time of the arrests, families in St. Petersburg, Odessa, Grozny and Chitoma were persecuted. The well educated—lawyers and physicians and scientists—were often the targets but then, Ari’s uncle was a small businessman in a small Ukrainian village. Alexi’s father was a plant worker.

With the exception of Max, who was an enthusiastic storyteller, well acquainted with the gulag literature, the narratives were terse, bleak and sad. Max’s descriptions, in contrast, were filled with drama. There was dialogue, descriptions of prison life and the personalities of other prisoners. The others spoke only of the event and the aftermath with no attempt to fill it in, to express what seems the inexpressible. There was mostly silence and sadness, and an unspoken, “That’s the way it was.” And an implicit warning, “Don’t ask me anything more.”

CONCLUSION

There are multiple dimensions to these narratives that reach back over many years and thousands of miles to memories of childhood, young adulthood and middle age. These life stories are colored by the teller's own unique talents and the unique situations in which they found themselves: the cinemaphotographer's vivid visual description of the pilot's face from the plane that had just bombed his village or Max's storyteller gift for detail, infusing a whiff of hot chocolate into his account of an uncle's famine food package from New York City. Famine, anti-Semitism, the purges, religious repression were there from the start providing a malevolent physical, social, and cultural setting. Geoffrey Hosking describes the Soviet population during the two and a half decades ending in 1953 as a population in torment (2000:469). But even within this oppressive climate, advantage and disadvantage shifted about. There were levels of torment. Minority status on a passport could be balanced against skill and education to secure a privileged position; service in the military provided an escape from the village and an opportunity to attend the university in the city.

Although these themes of tragedy sometimes threatened to dominate the interview, matters of everyday life crept in, especially after the war, when cohort members returned to marry, complete their education, work, and raise families. I continue with their narratives in the next chapter as they lived through the 1950's into the 1970's when they began to consider emigration.

CHAPTER 3 SOVIET LIVES: POST WORLD WAR II

INTRODUCTION

After the war, through the purges, the shortages, the famines, through the worst of times, everyday life went on. Films were made, music was played, hair was cut, circuses were performed; the Cold War was launched and carried forward. Most of the cohort members lived and worked in the largest cities of the USSR, rubbing up against one another in cramped, communal apartments, seeing to the education of their children and the care of their elderly parents. Most held responsible positions, some enjoyed privileges—a car, even a driver, their own apartment, access to goods not available to the general public, a vacation on the Black Sea. Some even traveled out of the country. They talked freely about these experiences, many with pride and commitment to their work. And, although they complained about things such as the required trips into the country to harvest the crop on collective farms—how they missed the city, how they detested the backbreaking farm work—there was something joyous in their telling.

3.1 WORK

Industrial production returned to pre-war levels by 1947-8. This rapid rebound was mainly due more to the building of new plants in the western regions of the Soviet Union while those in the east, built during the war, continued to produce. No fundamental changes in production methods were made. In fact, the old authoritative system based on shortage, poor and unsafe working conditions, shoddy production and high worker turnover, persisted. No new technology was introduced. Instead, new workers were brought in. A form of social contract between workers and their managers, enterprise

bosses, became more embedded: workers accepted low wages in return for cheap food, housing, social benefits—health care and education—job protection, easygoing work practices (Hosking 2000:536). After the initial burst of productivity, stagnation set in. Later, Khrushchev attempted to stimulate production by offering incentives to workers but the system was so deeply embedded in social and economic structures of the workday and lives of workers that the effort failed. The majority of urban residents worked out their lives within this system. Privilege, however, operated on many levels. Space technology and the military were highly valued and those who worked in these fields were rewarded with privileged access to luxuries such as summer camp for their children and dachas. The State held the monopoly on the patronage system and politburo members cultivated clients by dispensing favors. Cohort members, most of them highly educated members of the intelligentsia, and some in the military, found themselves among the privileged.

Their work lives reflect not only the flow of everyday life in the Soviet Union, but also the larger political and economic developments inside and outside the Soviet Union. Ari began his career in a recently built submarine construction factory in Leningrad at the dawn of the Cold War; Luba and her husband were musicians who taught music and musical production for over fifty years to Komsomal-sponsored students in Moscow; Alena's husband was first violinist with the Moscow Symphony, her sister a musical director at the Bolshoi. Elena was at the center of an elite and privileged circle of talented but closely supervised and controlled artists. Galina's husband, a seasoned engineer, traveled all over the Soviet Union, designing and directing re-construction projects after the war. He worked in Moscow later, in a building adjacent to an early atomic research

laboratory where little attention was paid to protecting workers. By the time the risks to workers were acknowledged and the laboratories moved out of the city, Galena's husband had been exposed to heavy doses of radiation and died in the late 1950's. Yaacov, throughout the cold war, continued his work as a meteorologist, traveling to attend conferences outside the Soviet Union, and although he was not permitted to work with Americans, he did collaborate with English scientists.

A number of the cohort members, men and women, described themselves as engineers, a generic category that seems to have qualified them for a broad range of occupations. Lev, educated as an engineer, was the director of a huge clothing manufacture plant in Kursk, employing over two thousand employees, mostly poorly paid women (They made uniforms for all the schoolchildren in the Soviet Union). He was the second in command. He, like Sophia, a lawyer who negotiated contracts in the coal producing regions, was caught up in the endless formal and informal negotiations for delivery of scarce goods being hoarded in other regions and the drive to meet deadlines. He described the process of negotiations beginning with legitimate contracts, advancing to informal meetings over drinks and dinners and finally, hard bargaining for exchange of goods: potatoes or apples to the supplier in exchange for the promised fabrics for Lev's plant.

Alexi was the Chief Engineer of the Saratov Documentary Studios which made technical documentary films. He showed up for his interview with me on the boardwalk with some foam rubber in an "I love New York" plastic shopping bag. We began the interview and when I mentioned my concern about the wind and seagulls and boardwalk traffic drowning out our voices, he offered to help me wrap the foam around the tape

recorder. It worked. We talked about films, Russian and American-made, and I asked him if he liked what he did. I was surprised to hear him say that he would never do it again, that it was a terrible nerve-wracking job. In Saratov, the quality of all the equipment was so inferior that his studio was seldom able to produce a work that would satisfy his standards. He compared what he was able to do in Saratov with Moscow where filmmakers had access to equipment imported from the West. There was no comparison.

The men who remained in the military, although far from elite even within the armed services, enjoyed more privileges than most others in the group. Andrei who held out for a half-way decent assignment, one closer to the center of Russia, spent his earliest post-war years in Koeningsburg (now Kaliningrad). There, and later in Moscow, he had his own apartment, a car, even a garage. Lev too, as a plant manager in Kursk, enjoyed the same privileges although it was a long wait for a car and apartment. He vacationed every year at a resort. Of course this was arranged by the plant and it was just for him as an executive. His wife, a designer of circus costumes, stayed home. Others who held responsible positions, seldom enjoyed these privileges.

None of the women in the cohort stayed home. Few of their mothers did either. In post-revolutionary Russia, married women were not required to work although, according to the parasite laws, all others were. Early intentions to provide support to married women fell by the wayside as the massive industrialization program of the late 1920's and 1930's was initiated, drawing off funding for childcare and other family support services. Childcare was made available to only a small percentage of families. Equal pay, a guarantee of the 1936 constitution, although still on the books, never materialized.

Instead women earned on the average one-third less than their husbands (Simon 1986:79). On-job “protection” was intended to help women, but actually its provisions were manipulated to repress their advancement, lower wages, and pensions and reduce opportunities for promotion. In the interest of “protecting” them, women were excluded from higher paying jobs in heavy industry while they were allowed to work in light lower paying industries where the level of work was just as demanding. The loss of life during the Second World War had also created a male-female demographic imbalance that was not restored until the 1960’s. Women, during this time, carried a very heavy double burden, many raising children on their own, the sole support of their families. The majority of women had to work.

The women members of the cohort had little to say about these inequities. On the one hand, they were revolutionary women, their mothers worked, they worked and most held responsible positions at a time when women in advanced western societies had not achieved these levels. On the other hand, their careers pre-dated the woman’s movement of the 1970’s and perhaps this partly explains why they did not speak about gender discrepancies. Also, as comfortable members of the intelligentsia, most of the women members of the cohort earned higher wages and had access to privileges not available to most women in the Soviet Union. They were in a position to arrange for better childcare. And, although they were burdened with the double shift of full time employment and household maintenance, they were able to cushion some of the demands.

Although several spoke in general about the continued dominance of men in management positions, this did not appear in their own personal narratives. Ludmila’s experience is the only exception and even it is not quite clearly a gender issue. Ludmila

worked in a huge automobile factory in St. Petersburg as an engineer, electing to work on the floor as a welder instead of in an office. She liked it. And, although she denied any anti-Semitism or gender discrimination, she did speak about disparaging remarks made by the men at the plant, “You are a woman, you are not experienced, you are not an expert.” She didn’t believe that she had been disadvantaged. “It was very hard work, but, it was very interesting, very interesting.” She did have to contend with her boss, also a Jew, who she described as an aggressive self-promoter who used his workers to make himself look good to Communist Party officials. She used the Russian variation on the universal put-down to describe his tactics in making himself look good at the expense of his workers: Of her work he would say to party officials, “She’s a good worker despite the seizures.” She laughs as she tells me about her discovery that he too has emigrated; fortunately, she says, he settled in California.

A few of the women became bosses along with the men. Although many of the women worked in teaching and caregiving professions, they occupied positions that required more skills, more education, and allowed more autonomy. These jobs did not, however, provide much more money or privilege. For instance, Rita, now in her eighties, was a specialist in ear, nose, and throat diseases. She directed her own clinic in a large Moscow hospital where she performed surgery. Tatyana, a psychiatrist, was free to collaborate with other disciplines in the clinical management of patients. Alena worked for the House of Sanitary Enlightenment as a health educator in a management position. These women were hampered more by anti-Semitism than by gender bias. The few cohort members who worked in factories, food, and office services, were women—and gender-related factors were involved. Although one worked in that position by choice, the others

had had their education cut short because they married either before or immediately after the war, one had lost her husband in the war; they had to work at any job they could find to support their children.

Yetta's work years spanned the early years of the war when she led a contingent of women students like herself on a trench-building detail on the outskirts of Moscow. She says that she doesn't know why she always was put in charge (a short time with Yetta is all that is needed to understand why she was put in charge; she is energetic, smart, dramatic—a presence). She remained in Moscow during the bombing, working as a nurse, pulling victims from the rubble of bombed buildings. During the war, she translated English-language aeronautical journals for inexperienced Russian engineers who were rushing to construct war planes. At night, she monitored work in the airplane factories. Sixty years later, sitting in her Brighton Beach living room, she describes the step-by-step process of constructing airplane fuselages—a thin layer of glue followed by balsa wood, repeated over and over, always allowing time for the glue to dry. She uses her hands to describe the layering process. Planes coming out of the factory were breaking up in mid-air as soon as they were aloft. “They weren’t allowing the glue to dry in between applications. As soon as the fuselage was subjected to extreme temperatures, it fell apart. I told them but they didn’t want to hear about it. Stalin’s order was to produce as many planes in as little time as possible. I was transferred.” Once the war was ended, she began her career as an English teacher, traveling with her husband from one military assignment to the next. She shows me a photograph taken in Kamchatka in the 1940’s of her twin daughters, Tanya and Leila, playing on a blanket outside their home. They were living so close to Alaska you could almost see it.

3.2 COMMUNAL LIFE

The people I interviewed occupied space in their cities but, as individuals and families, they owned none of it. The cities where they lived were huge collectives. Their narratives lacked reference to place in the sense that urban residents usually draw on local background to tell their personal stories. There was no talk of neighborhood, local events, local shops, cafes. Instead there were state stores located at strategic sites, not necessarily neighborhood localities. There was the district party headquarters where Lena went to argue her daughters case. Iliana spoke of the synagogue where she picked up her matzoth. But it was a synagogue, not her synagogue, where she attended services. They spoke in general, almost impersonal terms about the beauty of their cities, in Ari's case, the canals and buildings of St. Petersburg.

Most of those I interviewed lingered long over descriptions of living arrangements. All remembered the dimensions of each room they occupied. They discussed moves from one communal apartment to another; the number of moves from one room to another; and the number of square meters gained or lost, along with the planning and negotiations that went into these moves. Death of a parent who had been living with them meant a reduction in space, and an elderly parent come to live with them meant more space. When Rita's parents became ill, she and her husband agonized over their decision to return to Moscow from Königsberg, where life was comfortable. One factor was the Moscow apartment that her parents would then lose if they left Moscow. It was too much to give up. They moved back to Moscow. When I asked Tatyana to describe living conditions in her Moscow communal apartment, she said, "They were horrible." And yet, she described

the day of the move to their own apartment (her husband was an architect who had designed the building into which they were moving). All the tenants came out to say good-by; there was a little party. Recalling this led her to tell some hilarious anecdotes about communal living. One involved her husband and the woman across the hall. Since Tatyana was doing her residency, she had to remain on call at the hospital on certain nights. The woman, described by Tatyana as a prostitute, offered to keep her husband comfortable on these long lonely nights.

Although most cohort members had lived in some form of communal housing, there were differences. The passage of time, a change in the political or social landscape, a change in personal fortune helped to ease living conditions for some. During the early post-revolutionary period, overcrowding was extreme with peasants-turned plant workers pouring into the major cities. No new housing was built. The post-war period was even worse with people living in huts on the outskirts of the cities. But in the late 1950's, new housing construction was begun under Khrushchev. Housing stock was doubled. Accessibility of new housing, however, was distributed through cooperative housing arrangements made available to groups of professionals, not to the average worker (Hosking 2000:534). Here, as in other vital areas, privilege and higher salaries won out. Only those who could afford to form cooperatives were eligible for the apartments, and a number of cohort members benefited.

3.3 "HOMO SOVIETICUS": SOCIAL NETWORKS

"Blat" is a Russian slang expression that grew out of the Soviet style system of distribution and selected privilege in which money did not matter but access did. Blat

referred to goods and services. A consumer did not buy a food item. It was “obtained” through a distinctive form of non-monetary exchange, a kind of barter based on personal relationships. Favors were done, people were helped out through extensive social networks operating sometimes through elaborate and confusing links where reciprocity was actually difficult to identify. What was exchanged was a favor of access such as the opportunity to buy prime cuts of beef from the local butcher in exchange for theater tickets. Sometimes neither party was the actual consumer but merely an intermediary, the butcher passing on the tickets to a friend and the musician passing on the meat to a needy relative outside Moscow. One of the features of blat was that it was misrecognized by many individuals who practiced it. The individual sometimes recognized it in others but not in themselves because the practice was so embedded in social relations. Individuals saw these favors as personal, done for family and friends.(Ledenova 1998:11-35).

I asked cohort members about blat, what they knew of it and if they had any direct experience of it. All acknowledged it but few wanted to talk about it and seemed uncomfortable when it was mentioned. Ludmila was, perhaps, the most pointed in her response. “Yes, there was blat, but it was not my way.” For Ludmila, her rejection of blat was one of principle and consistent with other decisions she had made. It was Ludmila who elected to continue working on the factory floor although she was a qualified engineer and eligible for an office position. She also refused to join the Komsomal and later the Communist Party. Of all those who left the former Soviet Union, Ludmila was the only one of two I interviewed who had no children and no husband pushing her to go. When I asked why she left, she told me that she was so tired of the lying, “everyday lying.” She had traveled all over the Soviet Union. “I knew the real situation. I knew that

only in the largest cities life was half-way good, but not for the rest of the country.” For Ludmila, putting up with standing in line endlessly rather than dealing in favors, seemed a principled decision.

Rita was one of the few who spoke openly about the robust quality of blat. “Everything was blat.” One day she showed me an extraordinary coat that she had had made for her in Moscow (a place where coats count). The fabric was a heavy coarse gray wool, the kind that had been used to make coats for soldiers of the Red Army. Elaborate black braiding decorated each buttonhole. The buttons were military, big and metallic. It was so heavy, too heavy for Rita to wear. She’s 82 now but worships it. Blat brought it all together.

A musician talked about her uneasiness with blat. She usually played music early in the day and then taught in the late afternoon, stopping off at the meat market to shop for the evening meal on the way home. She remembers one evening, weary and hungry, arriving at the market. “There was nothing left but a pile of bones. I’ll never forget the look of contempt on the face of the clerk when I complained. I was tempted to offer a concert ticket in exchange for a better cut of meat but couldn’t bring myself to do it.”

Minna, who stood on the lowest economic rung in Moscow, responded bitterly that for her and her family, there was no blat, no privilege, no access.

3.4 HEALTH CARE

In Chapter Two, I described a relatively hardy group of elderly people, many of whom have survived battle wounds, infectious diseases, near starvation and, now later in their lives, surgery related to cancer and heart disease. Many of them are being treated for

chronic conditions here, most frequently cardiac disease. All, however, remain active, mobile, mentally alert and engaged.

Many were eager to tell me about their experiences with the Soviet healthcare system. Since some were health care workers themselves, they talked about insider as well as outsider experiences. They had strong opinions. They related stories that took place over a broad historical period and spread over a wide geographical area. What was accessible and available in the 1930's and '40's and '50's was different from what was accessible and available later, post Stalin, post thaw; and what was available in Moscow or St. Petersburg was significantly different in the smaller towns and villages outside the major cities.

Most members of the cohort began their lives outside major cities, some in the rural villages and towns of the 1920's and '30's, in areas relatively untouched by early modernizing trends in healthcare. Ena, one of the older members of the cohort, spoke of her mother's isolation and eventual death from pulmonary tuberculosis, the family's breakup, and of the personal upheavals in her own life stemming from this. Others spoke of siblings who died of infectious diseases and how they survived. However it was not so much their isolation in rural areas as it was overwhelming external events that affected the health of the population: famine in the late 1920's and 1930's; social disorganization and displacement brought about by implementation of the massive industrialization and collectivization of the 1930's; and the chaos of war and its aftermath in the 1940's. There were all the sicknesses along the evacuation routes; women spoke of husbands lost in the war or maimed, and their struggles to continue on with their lives. By the late 1950's and '60's, most of the cohort members were approaching middle age, and retirement in the

1970's and '80's. Instead of famine and war, they spoke, on the one hand, about advanced medical technology—chemotherapy and radiation, surgery; on the other hand, there were shortages and continued inequities, aggravated by the erosion of governmental supports and the rise of private care. Family members developed cancers and heart disease, some were disabled, others died. The cohort members participated in their care, witnessed illness and deaths, but survived. They remembered and many recalled the larger issues surrounding their death—the Chernobyl accident tied to a daughter-in-law's death from radiation exposure; a husband's death in Moscow from radiation exposure related to the early days of atomic research in an adjacent plant located on the outskirts of Moscow that took no precautions.

From the very start, privilege operated alongside supposedly guaranteed equal access in the Soviet Union. The elite and the powerful received privileged care; the workers and those in collectives scrambled for services, petitioning, bribing, confronting. The director of a large plant in Odessa, the husband of one of the cohort members whose father was a KGB officer, was flown to Moscow to be examined and treated by a noted cardiologist. A chemical engineer, a project director responsible for major construction sites throughout the Soviet Union, was treated for her diabetes at a “privileged” clinic, in the medical office of the Academy of Science in Moscow. On the other hand, a man who as a child had chronic ear infections lost most of his hearing after improper treatment. His parents, plant workers, described inadequately heated isolation units of hospitals, unresponsive physicians, trips to regional facilities, bribes paid in order to obtain appropriate care. Boris had his coronary by-pass surgeries (two of them) performed after arriving in the United States. He was ill before he left Saratov, but did not want to have

surgery there. “I was not an important bureaucrat. I would not have been treated at the Moscow hospital where special treatment was available. ‘Politburo Central’, we called it.”

All the privilege in the Soviet Union, however, could not obtain clinically expert treatment. The plant manager who was flown to Moscow was flown back to Odessa to die. His cardiologist told him that there was treatment available but not in the Soviet Union. This cardiologist, in fact, was on his way to the United States to get the training he needed in a procedure that would have helped the man. He was too late. And, in a further demonstration of how the system worked, for three years the Moscow hospital that could not help him sent his widow a notice for her dead husband to report for surgery. The absurdity of this unintended but cruel bureaucratic blunder was published in Krokodil, a satirical journal which flourished in the USSR throughout the Soviet era. The journal was named after an ironic short story by Dostoevsky.

The physicians I interviewed had received their medical education during the 1950's. All, as discussed in an earlier chapter, encountered anti-Semitism, either in applying to medical schools, during their education, or later on in the workplace. Rita described the efforts of her uncle, a specialist employed at the Institute in Moscow, to get her admitted. Connections in her case. meant her uncle's colleagues on the faculty. But party membership and bribes also influenced who got in. She described the division of the school where she was eventually admitted, known as the “Flower Bed,” as a place where the daughters and wives of generals and professors studied. “They didn't want to do surgery, so I did it for them. That's how I learned and was recognized.” Publication of their clinical research was suppressed either through coercion, rejection based on lies, or government policy. Later on, these physicians talked about their conflicts over collecting

fees as private practice became not only legal but required. For Sergey, the change over to “private” care pushed him to retire. “I retired because, in Russia (he’s talking about the post-Soviet period, around 1992-3), in the hospitals where I used to work, people were required to pay money, cash, for everything that the doctors do. To have to pay for an operation! I didn’t like that. I wanted to provide service that was free. I preferred to receive a salary plus the tips—like a bottle of vodka or cognac.” Rita joked about the prices that were set, “To remove the adenoids, doctors received one ruble; to remove the adenoids and tonsils, it was 3 rubles. Can you imagine?” Despite all this—the privilege and uneven access, gaps in competence and suppression of knowledge—many expressed gratitude for what they considered to be the good care that was available and provided. Those whose family members died of cancer talked about the comprehensive treatment they received in the 1950’s and on into the 1970’s.

Their stories are moving glimpses into the Soviet Unions’ extraordinary failure to provide health care for its population. The interviewee’s experiences hint at the gross inequities between urban and rural locations, regional imbalances, scarcity, bureaucratic rigidity, and over-supplied but inadequately prepared medical practitioners, all part of an overblown system that built up over time. Out of the glowing revolutionary commitment—“Protection of the people’s health is one of the most important tasks of the Soviet State,” (Ryan 1978:5) and the creation of the People’s Commissariat of Health Protection in 1918—grew a disorganized structure that failed its people on a profound level. Life expectancy, considered the most important integrative index of health by the World Health Organization, dropped steadily for men in the Soviet Union: in 1986, it was

66.6 years and by 1993, for the first time, it had dropped below 60 years; the decrease for women parallels that of the men, but it is less alarming (Feshbach 1995:31-22).

Although life expectancy is a complex measure shaped by fertility and death rates, its precipitous drop requires an understanding of the social and economic factors that shaped healthcare in the Soviet Union over its history. There was promise and, at first, great improvement: the infant mortality rate was 80.7 per 1,000 live births in 1950; in 1974 it had dropped to 27.9 per 1,000 live births, an extraordinary achievement; crude death rates went down; hospitals and clinics were built and people, regardless of position in society, were admitted and treated free of charge. But reversals set in during the 1970's. The crude death rate had increased by 50 percent by 1980. By 1989, the infant mortality rate, at 22.7 per 1,000 live births, had shown little improvement over the 1970 gains (Feshbach 1985:iv). And, although the amount of spending on health increased, it was unevenly distributed among regions, one western republic spending almost twice as much as a central Asian republic (Ryan 1978:19). Hospitals were often built one on top of another by competing ministries catering to their workers. The extent of the decline remained hidden, masked by reports that emphasized the number of hospitals built and specialist physicians prepared rather than actual outcomes—morbidity and mortality. The cohort members are survivors of these times. Their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the treatment they and members of their families received reflect the unevenness and almost randomness of the system. Although other factors—water pollution, toxic chemicals in the soil, urban congestion, diet deficiencies, and the social implications of alcoholism—are major contributors to the state of health in the former Soviet Union, the breakdown of medical care was significant. The cohort members' Soviet histories speak

of this time. Later, in the United States, they continue to live out these histories (Chapter 8).

- **Personal Narratives**

Although illness was not a dominant theme in their histories, it was present in almost every narrative. Interestingly, many talked more about the illness of others, lingering on a son's illness or a husband's gradual decline and death. These family illnesses were textured descriptions of personal suffering—pain, frustration, agony, grief—told with feeling even some 40 and 50 years later. When they spoke of themselves, it was more in a matter-of-fact way: “I had by-pass surgery, I can't travel the way I used to,” and then, on to the next topic as if eager to get away from it; perhaps eager to mask its seriousness and meaning at this late stage in their lives.

I have drawn on Arthur Kleinman's (1988) interpretation of illness narratives to analyze similar narratives about illness and suffering contained in the life stories of cohort members. For Kleinman, the meaning of illness is bound up within relationships, belonging to the sick person's spouse, child, friends (Kleinman 1988:8). Kleinman searches for the multiple meanings of illness from the perspective of the patient. In the stories of the cohort members, I look for meanings in the narratives, not of those suffering the illness, but in those touched by the ill persons who have constructed their own narratives. Kleinman finds story telling devices—plot lines, myth-making, core metaphors, rhetorical devices that structure narratives—drawn from cultural and personal experiences. “Thus, patients order their experience of illness—what it means to them and to significant others—as personal narratives.” (Kleinman 1988:48-49).

Listen to these narrators, all women, who speak about their husbands and children who became ill. They were not the exception; the majority of the cohort members, both men and women, spoke about the illness or death of someone close to them, some at greater length than others. The women's stories, perhaps because of their extended involvement as caregivers, tended to weave these memories more intricately into their narratives, experiencing them as integral parts of their lives. These are events that took place many years ago in their native land under circumstances that have changed radically. Yet the details, the words spoken, the ambiance, all are alive in their voices. There are layers of personal meaning that seem to infuse their current lives; there is also social and political commentary.

LENA'S NARRATIVE

Lena sits with me and Raisa, the translator I have asked to come along to help out if necessary. Lena speaks English but I think she might be more comfortable speaking Russian. She is 90 years old now, surrounded by children and grand and great-grandchildren. We've made a little circle around the couch just inside the living room. The evening meal is heating on the stove. We've tested the tape recorder and Lena has read through the entire consent form. She doesn't mind being taped at all. Her framed citizenship certificate is on the wall above her. During the interview people are coming and going. Lena's daughter, Olga, pops in and out (she lives in the same building, upstairs), insisting on translating for her mother and squashing her attempt to speak English, but, on the helpful side, filling in a child's perspective on some of the events in her mother's life. Phones ring, a granddaughter breezes through. Lena tells about her early years—getting kicked out of the Komsomol for failing to correct her parents'

religious observances, the blowing up of the Orthodox church in their town, the Moscow factory where she worked to earn her proletarian status in order to attend the university, her marriage, the children, the war. But when I ask about her health and the family's, she pauses and begins an account that is somehow different, told on another narrative plane. There is some of the, "I thought you'd never ask" tone about it.

She lingers over the circumstances leading up to her youngest son's hearing loss as a child, describing the month-long stay in the kinderhospital; her daily vigils at the hospital and her inability to even hold her son in her arms. "They would bring babies wrapped in blankets to be seen through a window." But her son was not shown. She stepped up her bribes, bringing candies instead of bread, finally being allowed inside the room to see her son. "It was cold. He was starving." She took him out of the hospital, promising to bring him in daily for injections. "He screamed day and night." But then he stopped crying and she knew that it was more serious. Her husband spoke "not nice" to the doctor, pleading that their child be seen by the professor at the Medical Institute. They were plant workers; her husband worked days at the large automobile plant in Moscow, she at night in an escalator parts plant where she was responsible for distributing welding equipment to the workers. They had no privileges. The doctor refused to make a referral and became angry telling them "I will not give nothing, I will not help you. Go away." She carried her son, accompanied by her two older children, to the Institute specialist who told her that the son had nerve damage and prescribed simple warm compresses. No more injections, the damage was done. This was not the end of it. Her narrative continued beyond the acute phase of his illness, filling in years of encounters with health and educational experts and uncertainty about his hearing loss. There were her husband, her two other children,

and now, her grandchildren, but her concern for this son, even today, seems just as alive, just as troubled as she describes his struggles here in New York City to learn to speak English—a graduate of the university in Moscow, driving a van for a senior center in Brooklyn.

KATIA'S NARRATIVE

Katia was one of the youngest cohort members. She was also one of the newest arrivals in the United States, having only lived in New York for two years at the time I interviewed her. Sonia, the translator who was helping with the Brighton Beach interviews, came along since Katia spoke very little English. Katia lives in an apartment on one of the better streets in Brighton Beach, away from the “El” and bordering on Manhattan Beach, an exclusive community along the beach peninsula. Her building is new with a showy lobby but her apartment is not nearly as spacious as those in the older buildings. I interviewed her on a bleak blustery March day with the wind blowing in off the ocean. It was Easter but there was not a sign of rejoicing in the air. She had prepared an elaborate Russian feast for us—soup, blinis, spreads, pastries.

She was very upset when she greeted us, speaking rapidly and tearfully in Russian about her distress, before we had a chance to sit down. Both I and the translator listened which is what she needed. I understood enough to know that this was a sorry tale of disappointment and grief. Later on, as she relaxed and spoke of other things, I learned more of the details of her present situation.

She talked about her early years in Lvov and then later in Odessa. She was the only daughter of an NKVD officer who “disappeared without a trace” during the war (so the official letter to her mother stated), only to re-appear at the end of the war, released from

his secret assignment. Before his disappearance he had arranged for Katia and her mother to get out of Ukraine riding in the washroom of a special train on its way to Khazakstan. Nineteen members of her mother's family died in the Odessa ghetto. Her father's family was also decimated: two brothers killed in the war, two sisters shot by Germans, twin brothers shot by Ukrainian nationals in an earlier pogrom. Her father's response to her decision to marry a "Russian" (a non-Jew) at the end of the war, was "never. If you marry him, you are not our daughter." She married him anyway. She and her husband finished school and worked together as economists. Her husband rose to a high management position without joining the Communist Party. They lived in the best residential section of Odessa across from the Opera House; they traveled freely, raised their daughter, even reconciling with her parents. As she talked about this time in her life she began to relax, pulling out family photographs, referring to a framed picture of the Opera House on the wall. She closed this part of her story with a narrative unprompted by my questions as she drew that part of her life to an end:

Katia's husband died at home in the month of May. He was 40 years old in end-stage cardiac failure. It was a few days before her birthday and he said to his daughter, "Let's go shop for a present for mother." She too had gone out and had her hair cut. She had always kept it long. "He wanted me to keep it long, but this time, he said, 'Go and cut.'" He insisted on giving her the gift that night despite their daughter's insistence, "It's not mama's birthday yet." It was a fan—"a beautiful lace fan." They went out for a stroll after that. When they returned, suddenly he said, "I want to eat borscht, the borscht you cook." She responded, "It's evening, it's night, it's not time for borscht." But he ate. He died the next morning. Katia remembers every detail of the months and days leading up to

his death—the trip to Moscow to see the specialist, her volunteering to work as a nurse in order to be with him, the bad news about his condition, their trip home, the many emergency room visits, their time together. She requires little prompting to tell the story. It is almost seamless as she narrates it. It is suffused with love and loss. Despite its unhappy ending, it seems to relax her as she remembers this earlier, richer time in her life in sharp contrast to her present predicament: Her new husband, who she married just before leaving Odessa, has deserted her within two weeks of their arrival in Brighton Beach. She now believes that he insisted on marrying her to take advantage of her daughter's sponsorship. She tells us that he has abused her physically. She speaks with disbelief and uncertainty about whether she really wants to be rid of him. Perhaps the re-telling of this earlier relationship helps her to see the present more clearly.

SONYA'S NARRATIVE

Sonya and Yaacov had heard about the interviews I was doing in Brighton Beach. They sent word via one of their friends that they'd like to meet me and tell their stories. Our first meeting was almost celebratory. They wanted to be taped and on a second visit, couldn't wait to play back the copied tapes I had given them. They were delighted. Part of the welcome on a number of interviews I conducted was a grand tour of the apartment. After years in cramped quarters, these apartments seemed like palaces to them. Sonia, my translator, was with me just in case she was needed (both Sonya and Yaacov spoke English although Yaacov at 80 said that he was having trouble remembering vocabulary). The tour began with the back room which served as a bedroom, studio, library. There was a wall of bookcases, a large desk, a sofa, and a cat named Marshikita. Paintings, some done by friends and several by Sonya's daughter (a painter), filled the walls. A large

round table in the living room was set with china and a coffee pot and spread with dishes of homemade food. There was Russian bread, homemade nut bread, cheese. There was coffee served with a liqueur, Irish Cream, if we wished.

We talked, we ate, we sorted out who wanted to go first. We rearranged the microphone, changed seats and got on with the interview. Yaacov began by making some minor stylistic changes in the consent form. There was laughter and tears. Yaacov cried as he spoke of his younger brother's first letter from the front during the war. "I can not forget. I can not forget. I remember, he wrote, 'Be attentive, be careful with the parents' It was his last letter." He joked about his age, "My age is 100 years. Maybe this is the first time you've seen such an old man. I was young. I was young at one time about 50 years ago, or 60 years ago." I turn to Sonya who is offering food and translating for Yaacov who gently rebuffs her. She can't wait to begin. I realized later that she has wove into her narrative a story about her first husband's life. This is the way she told it:

She describes her first husband, Victor, and his struggles first to overcome the disabilities of his war injury and then anti-Semitism as an aspiring doctoral candidate, a historian, and eventually his death in the United States within a few months of his arrival. Sonya's life, in contrast, as she presents it, is blessed. She and Victor, met as young students at the university after the war. She was a philology major and Victor's field was history. He had been a commander in a tank division of the Army during the war. "He rode not in the tank but on it. The tank was bombed and he lost his hand." He seemed after that, as Sonya tells it, to have led a life of personal defeat and frustration. "He was so bright. He scored all 'five's' on his doctoral exam, even excelling in English, and yet he was not appointed to a prestigious position in Kiev that had been promised to him."

Instead he was assigned to a small museum in Poltava, an outpost, at least in the academic world. What was his loss though, turned out to be Sonya's gain, as a philologist. The museum housed the archival papers of a Russian writer she had been studying. She found stimulating work, the opportunity to advance in her field, traveling often to Moscow, Kiev, Leningrad. After nine years, her husband lost his job, bumped by a powerful bureaucrat's relative, at the very point where they had become eligible to move out of a miserable one-room basement apartment into a two-room apartment with their own bathroom and kitchen. They thought long about making a move but they decided to return to Leningrad where Sonya's father was going to help them to obtain jobs. It meant moving back into a communal apartment shared with five other families. Unfortunately Sonya's father died suddenly. This was a major blow to her husband. Sonya, however, found work, returned to the university, and completed her doctorate. The denouement was her husband's death shortly after his arrival in the United States. He had been treated for a heart condition in St. Petersburg. Sonya's life, in contrast, has almost begun anew. She has re-married, gained step-children and more grandchildren; she tutors English-speaking students in Russian. Looking back on her first husband's death, she feels that he was not treated well at the medical center (a large highly recognized center in Brooklyn). She feels that he would have been better off in Russia. She leaves unspoken any regrets about their decision to come to America. Her story is not simply one of survival, of simply outliving her husband. It pays tribute to him and his suffering as counterpoint to her own good fortune. In a way, it is an apology.

In these narratives there is physical injury, infection, death, but they are always surrounded by layers of social and cultural expression—a bricolage of experiences to form a paean, a memorial, a tribute to the other, the family member who was less fortunate, whose life and suffering impacted so heavily on their own lives. Illness narratives can be taken at face value—so and so got sick, got cancer, died of tuberculosis, just the facts, the disease. Or they can be seen as explanatory stories aimed at interpreting why it is that one person has survived all these obstacles—indeed not only survived but has achieved unanticipated riches and satisfactions.

3.5 THE REFUSNIK PERIOD AND EMIGRATION

Conditions changed, their lives changed. Beginning in the 1960's and continuing into the 1970's and 1980's, there were profound changes in the Soviet Union, sometimes signaled by futile attempts to erase the past and start over. Place names were changed—Stalingrad became Volgograd, Leningrad (once St. Petersburg, then Petrograd for a while), became St. Petersburg once again after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Many struggled with these name changes as they recalled events in their lives, some simply unable to call Leningrad anything but Leningrad, others, meticulously accurate, using the historically appropriate name to fit that point in their own lives. Stalin died in 1953 and, although persecution and repression continued under other leaders—Beria's regime was probably the most retrogressive—life on the real and psychic level was fundamentally changed. After Stalin's death, Tatyana's uncle could return home to his family in Moscow. Lev could return to St. Petersburg to work and school; the arrest and execution of Alexi's father were acknowledged as an error. The Arab-Israeli war of 1957 launched another

round of intensive anti-Semitism with Jews being accused of disloyalty to the USSR in their support of Zionism, whether they supported it or not. It was following this period, in the mid and late 1960's, that a small group of Jewish political activists began the campaign for emigration rights. By the late 1960's, tens of thousands of Soviet Jews had applied for permission to emigrate to Israel. This was the beginning of the third wave of immigration, described by Olneck (see Chapter 1) during which Soviet Jews emigrated at first to Israel and later to the United States. Many Jews, however, were denied exit. By the 1980's, more than 22,000 Soviet Jews had been denied exit, many of them persecuted, thrown out of their jobs, and imprisoned for "anti-Soviet activities" and Zionism (Olneck 1999:54, 67-68). The Cold War continued but with glosnost and peristroika, the stirrings of freedom and dreams of emigration surfaced and became real possibilities. As these possibilities became more real, the level of dissatisfaction grew. At this point, the cohort members were middle-aged, nearing the official age of retirement (for women, 55; for men, 60), although many did not retire then. Their children were young adults. More than that, these children, fired up with dissatisfaction, their aspirations fed by glasnost, began to feed their parents' faint longings for change, buried for years under Soviet life. These times leading up to emigration, lasting sometimes more than ten years, were filled with uncertainty and in many cases, emotional and physical hardship.

Those who left in the late 1980's faced far more trying and extended periods of waiting than those who left in the 1990's. A third of the cohort members became refusniks, most of them dragged into this position by their children who were attempting to leave the Soviet Union. Another third, all who left in the 1990's, were sponsored by a child who had already emigrated. Most of the others found other ways. Some applied on

their own; one couple came to visit a daughter and applied for and won asylum when the husband became so ill that he was no longer able to travel. One woman, already living in Israel, won a “green card” in the Israel lottery.

Very official, Soviet style, letters were sent to those who applied to leave the Soviet Union in the 1970's and 1980's. The wording was the basis for refusnik status—“...you are refused permission...” Andrei has saved the letters that he exchanged with the government department that handled immigration services in all their bureaucratic detail. He read sections of them to us (his wife, Rita, the translator and me). He was employed at a research institute in Moscow. Because of his position doing “top secret” work, his son, a physicist, was refused permission to leave. His son had been invited to Israel in 1979 and offered a teaching position at the university. What followed were ten years of hardship for the entire family. Andrei was thrown out of his job which, despite his ideological differences with Soviet government policies, he liked. His son went from one job to the next—as a cab driver, a swimming instructor, a sports instructor, etc. The dilemma they faced, which was the same for all of the cohort members, was that they were not allowed to leave the country while at the same time, they were deprived of the opportunity to work at their profession. In addition, they faced the threat of being exiled from the Moscow region unless they could show proof that they were working. Andrei's son waited eight years until 1987. “This was Gorbachev time, a new era,” said Andrei, when he finally received permission to leave. But now, Andrei and his wife were worse off than before because their only child and recent grandchild whom they adored, were no longer around and the chances of seeing them again were not good. Despite the fact that he had not worked at the research institute for ten years, he was told by state officials,

“You are a secret man, you cannot leave. You have knowledge of state and military secrets.” Andrei pulled out all the stops, Soviet style: he wrote to Gorbachev, the NKVD, the Soviet Congress, the Commission on Women’s Rights, “there was such a commission,” he says. After two years of writing he received a call from “the immigration” in 1989. “They were frightened of me.” He had set off a bureaucratic crisis among all the agencies. “They were tired of my story. I don’t know whether the Americans helped.” He received another notice. “‘Come immediately to us and go out. Get away from Moscow to Israel,’ and so in 1989 in October, through Austria, Italy, we arrived on October 18. I will never forget this, we arrived in Kennedy Airport and there, our son met us.”

In their stories about the difficulties they faced, more than half involved sons who were agitating to get out and were refused. The parents, devoted to their children, but with none of the youthful angst and drive to emigrate, were drawn into the struggle. One son, an only child like most of the others, married an American woman, a law student, while she was traveling in Moscow. Over the next five years, the daughter-in-law, the son, and they, the grandparents, fought for his release. A grandchild conceived in the USSR and born in the USA to his American mother, traveled to and from Russia, and was even brought into the Immigration Service to support their argument for immigration. “They put him right there on the desk.”

Anastasia’s son was refused in 1978. Immediately, she and her husband, along with her son, were thrown out of their jobs (all three of them started to do private tutoring and did quite well). Anastasia tells the story of her encounter with the NKVD agent who was attempting to enlist her son’s cooperation in spying, which he had refused. “He was

threatened, 'If you refuse, you'll never ever go abroad, never.'" The agent telephoned once while her son was out. She recognized his voice and laced into him. "I ask you to leave my son alone. What do you want from us? Never call him. Even now, I don't understand how my son went abroad." She went on to explain a complex arrangement made by Canadian supporters, for him to marry (and later divorce) an elderly Swedish woman. This got him out.

For others, children had already gone abroad and they themselves were refused exit. Rita, a physician, waited eight years finally paying a bribe to an NKVD official. He delivered. Galina's grandson was the only family member fired up with the ambition to emigrate. He was refused for six years but eventually his exit led to the departure of the entire family: Galina, then 74 years old, two daughters, sons-in-law and their children. Raisa, 60 years old, one of the youngest at the time of departure from St. Petersburg, had been refused for ten years—1977 to 1987. She gave up on seeking a legitimate release, and instead, requested a visa to visit her daughter and simply stayed on, knowing that she would receive no help from refugee agencies once she got to the United States. Her daughter helped but she did laundry and food service jobs. Raisa is one of only three in the group who have children remaining in Russia. Raisa's son has visited her here in the United States but she does not expect him to visit again soon, if at all.

These years leading up to emigration were years of inner family turmoil during which these deeply devoted parents were faced with separation from their children, perhaps for the rest of their lives. Andrei repeated what he said to his son when he learned of his son's decision to apply for emigration. "'Boris, what are you doing?' I knew that he could be stopped but I understood, for sure, that I could not follow him. My son told

me, 'I will not live in this country. I will emigrate.' We could do nothing. And we gave our permission to him." Andrei emphasized that money did not play a part in his own decision. He had all the privileges of a retired colonel. His wife had a high level job in the civil government leading a team of electrical engineers in major construction projects throughout the USSR.

CONCLUSION

A careful examination of émigré stories, told in Chapters 2 and 3 reveals a complex process of identity creation out of a lifetime interplay between privilege and discrimination under the harsh conditions of Soviet life. The persistence of anti-Semitism worked against them, holding them back. At the same time, perhaps the most important achievement of the revolution, education, made it possible for most of the cohort members to enter the ranks of the intelligentsia where opportunities for intellectually stimulating work, better pay, and privileged access to goods and services were available (some were already there or had a head start as children of successful merchants and professionals). Others in the cohort who remained in military service as officers were passed over for promotion as Jews, but because of their military status, they were eligible for privileged housing, medical care, and other benefits. Not all, of course, made this leap, but most did; the stories of those who did not, provide dramatic contrast.

Over and over again, as émigrés spoke of their work, their health, and their families, these countervailing forces were highlighted. These forces at once held them back and thrust them forward, leading to what seemed to be genuine commitment and fulfillment in their work in the midst of a harsh failing society and a nagging awareness of and

dissatisfaction with discrimination. One writer, in describing Russian Jewish women's accomplishments during the Soviet era, chose the word, *distinguished*, qualifying it by noting that none had achieved eminence (Simon 1986:79). The same might be said of all the cohort members, men and women.

The cohort members share memories of war, famine, and persecution with all who lived through the Soviet era, but as a cohort, they share a far more distinctive identity as members of the intelligentsia or elite military corps who because of their position, fared better than most in the Soviet Union.

On the softer side, forgetfulness, selectivity, embellishment are all at play in these narratives. The way their personal histories intersected with broad historical events unfolding about them were also the focus of my interviews. I was not interested so much in accuracy as in their recall in the present, as elders, removed in time and place, from earlier events. What they were able to remember, what they chose to remember, and the particular interpretation they attached to their memories were what I was looking at. I was interested in examining how memory and identity are linked—how memory shapes identity (Damousi 2001:2). These stories and the themes that have emerged are the material I study in the following ethnographic chapters dealing with the shaping of their identities as aging émigrés in the United States.

CHAPTER 4 THE COHORT SETTLES DOWN IN WASHINGTON HEIGHTS AND BRIGHTON BEACH

INTRODUCTION

This chapter picks up with the elderly cohort members as they entered the United States as Russian Jewish émigrés in the late 1980's and 1990's. The 34 people I interviewed form two groups, one settling in Brighton Beach and the other, in Washington Heights. I first examine, their experiences as immigrants, then as refugees, and lastly as elderly residents of the particular New York City neighborhoods in which they live. I describe the local landscapes—the physical, the political, social and cultural features of the two neighborhoods. I then begin to delineate differences among cohort members based on area of settlement in conjunction with elements of their past lives—differences that, at first, appeared to be minor, but later, took on greater meaning in helping to understand the ways in which they have drawn on past and present life experiences and the places in which they have settled to construct identities as aging émigrés.

4.1 SOVIET IMMIGRATION TO UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK CITY

Israel was originally the destination of choice for early émigrés I spoke to who left before the collapse of the Soviet Union. For those who elected not to settle in Israel, who chose the United States instead, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), an international non-profit agency with a long history of aiding Jewish refugees, shepherded them through the waiting period, providing stipends, putting them up in hotels, first in Vienna and then in Rome, as they waited sometimes for months for their applications as stateless refugees to clear the U.S. State Department (Markowitz 1993:265). In some

instances, HIAS employed them as translators or travel guides to assist fellow émigrés. A number described this interlude with enthusiasm, almost as if they were tourists. It was their first trip outside the Soviet Union. They were ecstatic about Vienna, visited museums in Rome, including the Vatican, and shopped. One woman, given a stipend to live on, spent most of it on a rabbit fur coat, a birthday present for the daughter she had left behind. This indirect route ended in 1989. Clearance, after that, was obtained before leaving and the exit route became an international flight ending at JFK Airport.

The Council of Jewish Federations devised a plan to locate émigrés throughout the United States in accordance with the proportion of Jews in each region. New York City with 45 percent of the United States Jewish population, was allotted 45 percent of the Soviet émigrés, followed by Los Angeles, and Chicago (Markowitz 1993:267). Once their destination had been established, they were flown to the United States and again, through HIAS, helped to settle. Other organizations, including the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA) in New York, and associated local agencies, continued to provide assistance in settlement.

Russian Jewish émigrés shared common resettlement problems with other immigrants. They entered the United States at a time of peak immigration. They struggled along with others with language, housing, and jobs. But it was their refugee status that set them apart from many of their fellow immigrants. Although they did not fit the haunting image of persecution and desperate flight that the word “refugee” conjures up, they qualified as refugees on the basis of religious persecution. Their long years as victims of state-sponsored anti-Semitism provided the basis for determining their eligibility as refugees. Although their testimonies in Chapter 2 reveal the extent of anti-Semitism

directed at them throughout most of their lives and do support the official definition of religious persecution, the unspoken explanation for their refugee designation is different and comes from a far distant quarter—the expediency of cold war politics during the 1970's and 1980's. Russian Jews, eager to emigrate but denied exit became symbols of Soviet inhumanity, were exploited as bargaining chips in international confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States eventually won the round and with it, the release of Russian Jews seeking to emigrate. This benevolent but ambiguous designation, however, adds to their already complex identity as immigrants. Russian Jews benefit materially as refugees, but they must live with contradictions. Their benefactors, American Jewish social agencies and they themselves question whether they are Jews in the religious sense? or the ethnic sense? Their testimony leans heavily toward the ethnic. They are Russians most simply; Soviets, at one time appropriate, but now outdated. They are white Europeans, not targets of discrimination experienced by many immigrants of color.

The issue of identity threads its way through their personal stories and broke out in a community conflict in Brighton Beach led by one of the cohort members (Chapter 7). It popped up, unrelated, unasked for, in random conversations. Sonya, one of the translators, articulate, educated, an atheist, was scornful and uncomfortable with Soviet-style behaviors which she pointed out to me again and again, and ashamed of her fellow immigrants and their collection and hoarding of unneeded food doled out by Jewish social agencies. But she was at a loss to find some term, some way to define her own or her fellow-immigrants' identity. She thought it was a good question, worth thinking about. An elderly former teacher from Moscow, also an atheist, came up with Russian Jew as the

way she would identify herself. She said, "I'd call myself a Russian Jew, just as those here in the neighborhood call themselves German Jews."

The Research Institute for New Americans (RINA) in a 1999 study conducted for the American Jewish Committee addressed the issue of multiple identities, describing the Russian-speaking immigrant community of New York as a multicultural enclave simultaneously Jewish, ethnic, immigrant, American, and cosmopolitan. Researchers developed a list of 14 identities from which respondents could choose any combination in answering the question, "Who do you think you are?" Within a hierarchy of identities, the most commonly selected identity was Jewish (71 percent), in the majority of cases in combination with other identities such as Russian Jew and Ukrainian Jew (Research Institute for New Americans 2000:20-21). Cohort members responded similarly to my questions, coming up most frequently with Russian Jew as the best although not an easy fit. Most saw the question as a problem, and although not uncomfortable about it, seemed dissatisfied with the need to struggle for an answer.

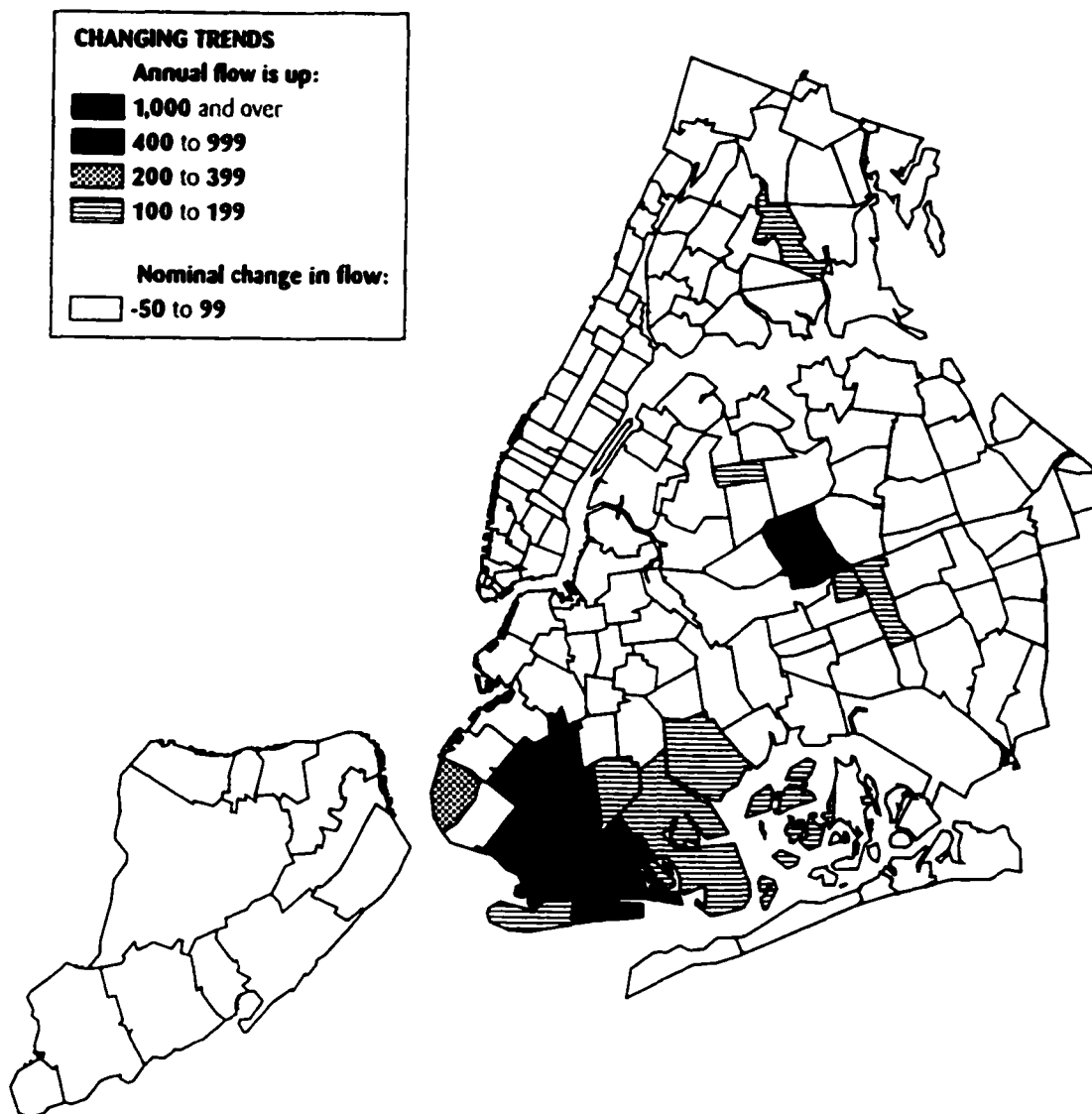
In the 1980's immigration from the Soviet Union to New York City stood at 1,033 annually, increasing to 13,300 annually in the early 1990's. In the 1995-96 period, flows averaged over 20,000 annually, making the now former Soviet Union the top sender to New York City, topping the Dominican Republic which, until then had led in numbers (Part of the Dominican slide into second place was due to an increase in numbers of Dominicans electing to by-pass New York as a first place of residence (City of New York Department of Planning 1999:15,19). Joseph Salvo, Director of Population Division of City of New York Department of Planning, reported that these high numbers continued to the end of the decade (phone conversation August 23, 2001). An estimated 400,000

Russian Jewish immigrants live in the New York City metropolitan area with approximately 300,000 residing in the city proper (Research Institute for New Americans 2000:5).

Maps prepared by the New York City Department of City Planning (1996:110,111, fig. 434, 435; 1999:16) to indicate residential settlement of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, show the growing numbers over time. Map 3 depicts changes in average annual immigration from the former Soviet Union between 1983-89 and 1990-94 (1996:111). Map 4 shows the former Soviet Union immigrant settlement in New York City neighborhoods between 1990 and 1994 (1996:110). Map 5 reflects the surge at the end of the 1990's (1999:16). Clearly the destination for most émigrés was Brooklyn: 70 percent settled in neighborhoods in South Brooklyn, including Brighton Beach. Due to overcrowding in Brighton Beach, which was the original place of settlement for Russian Jewish emigres, recent immigrant arrivals have moved into adjoining neighborhood—Bensonhurst, Sheepshead Bay, Gravesend, and Midwood, as well as other parts of Brooklyn. Maps 4 and 5 show increasing densities of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in these areas. Olneck (1999) refers to the bonds that have formed between Italian-Americans in Bensonhurst and with the Hassidim in Borough Park and Williamsburg. Co-op City in the Bronx has also become one of the newest neighborhoods for the recent immigrants, who, as former residents of densely settled urban neighborhoods of Moscow and St. Petersburg, are undaunted by the high-rise towers of the Co-op City development (Olneck 1999:117). In Manhattan, Washington Heights shows a much sparser population, absent on the early map, appearing and

Figure 3

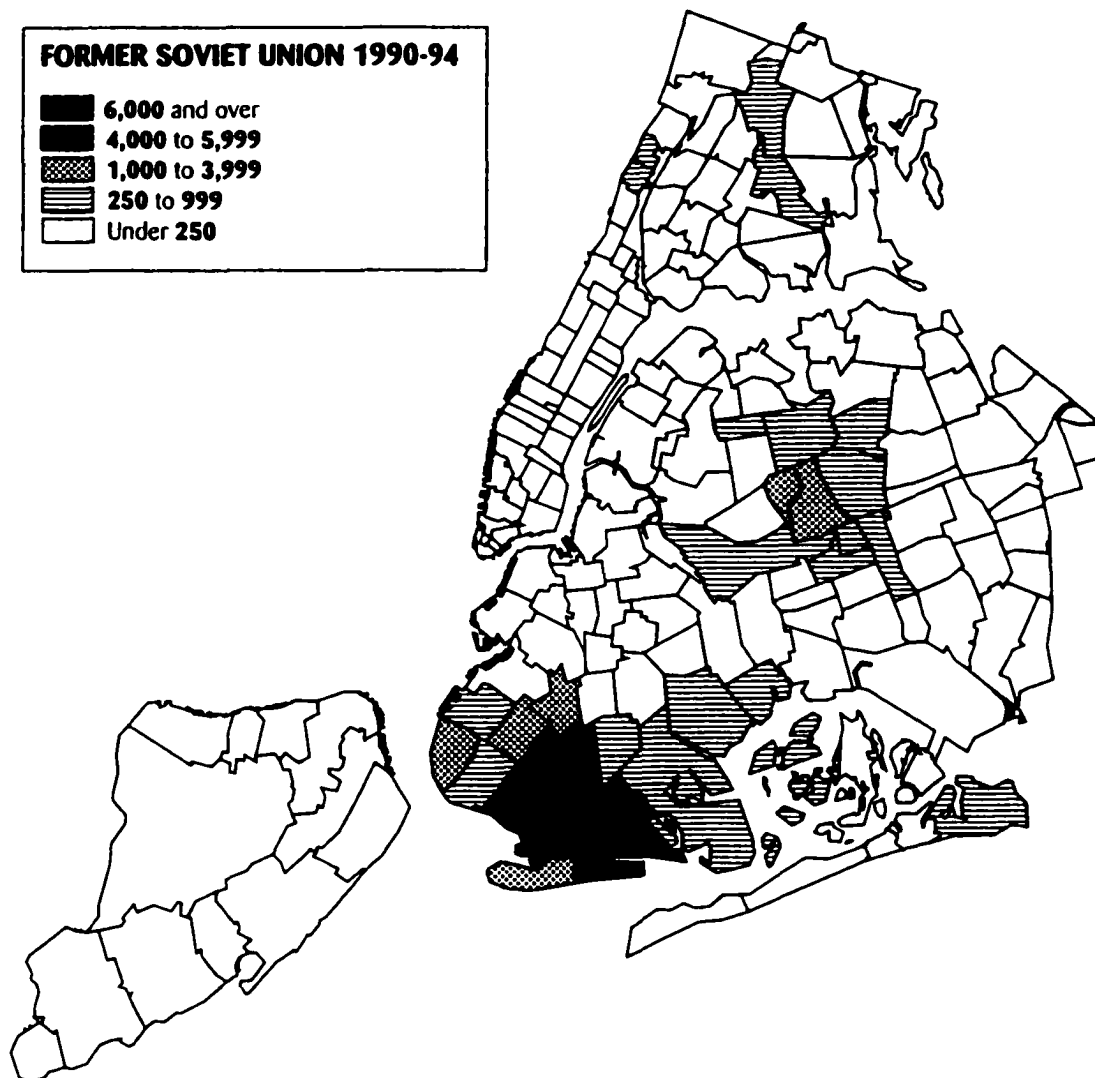
**Change in Average Annual Immigration from the
Former Soviet Union by ZIP Code
New York City: 1983-89 to 1990-94**



Source: Annual Immigrant Tape Files, 1983-94, U.S. Immigration
and Naturalization Services Population Division.
New York City Department of City Planning

Figure 4

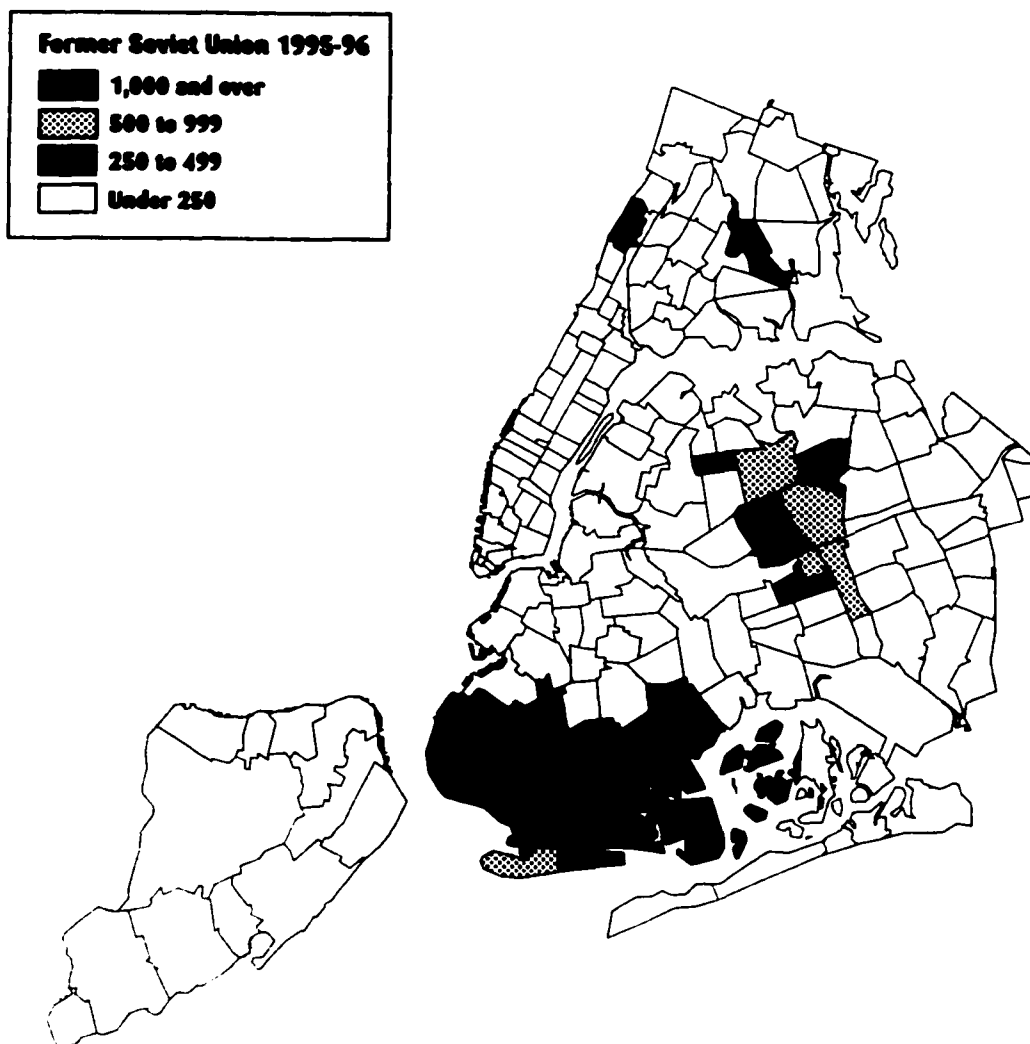
**Residential Settlement of Immigrants from the
Former Soviet Union by ZIP Code
New York City: 1990-94**



Source: Annual Immigrant Tape Files, 1990-94, U.S. Immigration
and Naturalization Services Population Division
New York City Department of City Planning

Figure 5

**Residential Settlement of Immigrants from the
Former Soviet Union by ZIP Code
New York City: 1995-96**



Source: Annual Immigrant Tape Files, 1995-96, U.S. Immigration
and Naturalization Services Population Division
New York City Department of City Planning

growing stronger in the late nineties. An area in central Queens was also heavily settled by Soviet émigrés, but there is a difference. Most, 70 percent, of the Soviets settling in the Queens neighborhoods of Forest Hills and Rego Park, had arrived from Uzbekistan, whereas the bulk of Soviets settling in Brooklyn and Manhattan had come from Russia and Ukraine (City of New York, Department of Planning 1996:108-109). This was, in fact, one of my reasons for selecting the Brooklyn and Manhattan communities as field sites. The experiences of Russian and Ukrainian Jews would be likely to differ from those of Central Asia because of cultural differences and other contrasts owing to where they lived in the former Soviet Union. By restricting my study to Russian and Ukrainian Jews I would be working with a more homogeneous sample that would allow for a clearer analysis of changes related to aging and immigration influenced by past experiences of Soviet life

Thirteen percent of the New York City resident population in 1990 was 65 years and over. Comparative data for all immigrants for 1982-89 and 1990-94 show an increasing but still tiny number of immigrants 65 years and older, advancing from 2.9 percent to 4.3 percent of the entire immigrant population. The median age among immigrants advanced from 26 to 27 years (City of New York Department of Planning 1996:19). As expected, immigrants as a group remained young. When these data are broken down by source country, however, the prominence of elderly émigré arrivals from the former Soviet Union becomes obvious. Among Russian Jews, 13.1 percent are 65 years and older, the same as for all New York City residents. Peruvians are a far from close second at 6.6 percent. No other immigrant group comes even close to this percentage (City of New York Department of Planning 1996:19). Among the Russian

Jewish elderly émigrés, there is variation by sex: women represent 14 percent of the entire female Russian Jewish population entering New York City; men of this age group represent 11 percent of all male Russian Jewish émigrés. By contrast, those 65 years and older were only 2 percent of the Dominican immigrant population during 1990-94 with equal representation of men and women (City of New York Department of Planning 1996:187, 191)¹

Data for the neighborhoods in which I worked reflected these overall numbers, Washington Heights in particular. Dominicans are the dominant immigrant group in this neighborhood. For the years 1990-1994, the median age of Dominican immigrants in New York City was 23, the youngest, along with Bangladeshis, for all the entering groups (City of New York Department of Planning 1996:17-18). Russian Jews, the second largest immigrant group in Washington Heights, (although representing only 4 percent of the immigrant population there), are the oldest, their median age, 36 years (City of New York Department of Planning 1996:19). Similarly, in Brighton Beach, where Chinese are the second largest immigrant group (again, a distant second in a neighborhood in which Russian Jewish émigrés make up 74 percent of the immigrant population), their median age is 30 years (City of New York Department of Planning 1996: 264, 19)

When these extreme variations in age among immigrant groups are added to the population variables already in place in neighborhoods, the mix becomes even more complicated. In Washington Heights where the population is young, the elderly account

¹ Data reported in this section is based on analysis by the Department of City Planning of the City of New York. It is flow data which is not adjusted for immigrants already in the country, does not count non-immigrants and aliens, and reports only intended residence, not actual destination (Kraly and Miyares 2001:45-46).

for only 11.2 percent of the population. In Brighton Beach, the elderly constitute 22.9 percent of the population (City of New York Office of Planning 1992:139,211). The two neighborhoods, juxtaposed, thus present a demographic contrast: one neighborhood in which elderly Soviets represent a tiny minority and are immersed in a young and unrelated immigrant majority; and one in which elderly Soviets represent a minority but a substantial one, surrounded by a not so young population but, most important, one dominated by fellow émigrés from the former Soviet Union. The following description of the physical settings and social organization of the two neighborhoods begins to enlarge upon these differences.

4.2 THE NEIGHBORHOODS

The Washington Heights neighborhood sits close to the northern tip of Manhattan separated from Brighton Beach by hundreds of tiny neighborhoods lining the routes of the A and Q trains, down through Manhattan, under the East River, into Brooklyn and its endless neighborhoods and finally ending at the southern tip of Brooklyn. The neighborhoods of Brighton Beach and Washington Heights are an hour and half apart on the subway, almost as long by car. Despite this geographic separation and, as I note later, the lack of connections between the two neighborhoods, they have much in common. Their strong immigrant pasts and presents tie them together, particularly the settlement of Jewish immigrants now and the remaining traces of an earlier immigration at the turn of the twentieth century and at the outbreak of World War II. Strong networks of social agencies supportive of the elderly exist in both neighborhoods. And both neighborhoods offer physical settings which appeal strongly to what is generally believed to be hospitable

and beneficial for the elderly—the Atlantic Ocean, the beach and boardwalk in one place and a grand park overlooking the Hudson River in the other. They are both densely populated, Washington Heights more so because of its greater proportion of high rise buildings and its greater population growth of 10 percent compared with Brighton Beach's 2 percent in the years between 1980 and 1990 (City of New York Department of Planning 1993:198, 304). Both neighborhoods are situated in community districts that have experienced significant increases in poverty levels in the years between 1980 and 1990. In the community district representing Washington Heights, 29.9 percent of the population was below the poverty level in 1990 and in the community district representing Brighton Beach, it was 28.6 percent for the same period. Although these are not the highest poverty levels in New York City, they exceed 19.3 percent which is the level for the city as a whole. When the elderly are looked at separately, the discrepancy between the city-wide level and the local communities is slightly less. Twenty-two percent of those 65 and older were below the poverty line in the district representing Washington Heights; in Brighton Beach, it was 23.4 percent; the level for the city as a whole was 16.5 percent (City of New York Department of Planning 1993:10,200,306).

Despite the seeming austerity of their lives, none of the cohort members complained about money. No one spoke of running short at the end of the month, scrimping on food, or doing without. On the contrary, most celebrated the bounty of their food stamps and their Supplemental Security Income (SSI); this was despite the relatively high rents some were paying. What they received though in government benefits, they lacked in other sources such as private pensions and annuities and income from assets. In 1994, 30 percent of incomes for Americans 65 and older consisted in part of income from private

pensions and annuities; for the same year, 67 percent of incomes for Americans 65 and older consisted in part of income from assets, mainly interest (Social Security Administration 1996: Table I.1). In Washington Heights, cohort member incomes, based on their SSI monthly benefits of \$512 a month for one person and \$769 a month for a couple, fell short of the community district's 1990 annual median household income for persons 65 to 74 years and 75 years and older. For instance, annual household income for persons 75 and older was \$12,670. In Brighton Beach, the 1990 income of those 75 and older was closer, at \$9,650, to what cohort members were receiving. Their gratitude for food stamps and the significance of their eligibility for health care coverage under the Medicaid program is easy to understand given their limited income. They spoke freely of the support their children provided. Some received help on a regular, arranged basis like Yetta whose rent at \$750 a month, was more than she could afford. Her son had been supplementing her monthly income for several years. For others, help came more in the form of gifts—trips to visit relatives in Israel, vacations in the country. Help came from other sources as well. For example, one woman rented out a room in her apartment; a couple surprisingly began to receive their Soviet pensions—minuscule—but welcome (technically they had not left the Soviet Union as emigrants, they were asylees, stranded in America due to illness); one or two were receiving Holocaust payments.

In the Washington Heights and Brighton Beach sections of the city, Russian Jewish immigrants live in old pre-war apartment buildings in what would be described by New York City housing standards as “good housing stock” but which have seen better days—no door man, sparsely furnished, well worn lobby furniture, chained to the floor, once distinctive mosaic and marble floors and entrances, chipped and faded by cheap cleaning

detergents, walls covered over with layers of glossy paint, barely working intercoms, and poorly lit hallways. In Brighton Beach, these apartment buildings are within one or two blocks of the boardwalk and ocean and are in the heart of the largest community of Russian immigrants in the United States. Not only Russian food shops but Russian speaking senior centers and social agencies, book stores, travel agencies, insurance companies abound. It is a place where people joke about never having left Russia: “Why do I bother learning English, I need to sharpen my Russian.” In Washington Heights elderly immigrants live in housing that is surrounded by parks. Although their presence has made an imprint on the neighborhood, the small cluster of Russian émigrés is immersed in a community dominated by a much larger and younger settlement of Dominican immigrants. Although food shops specializing in Russian products, synagogues and social agencies are all around, they compete with services catering to the needs of the Dominican and the established German Jewish population.

Contrary to what one would expect of immigrant families, especially those coming from a society in which three generations usually lived together, most of the elderly émigrés live apart from their children and grandchildren. Most live in one-bedroom apartments with their spouses or alone. (This is, in part, attributable to social welfare policy more than any significant social change with migration. Social service policies regulating eligibility require the applicant to demonstrate that they have no means of support—no job, no pension, no family that could step in and provide. Fiena told the story of her blunder in an interview with a city agency. She was asked how she intended to pay the rent on an apartment she had found and was planning to rent. She responded that her son-in-law was going to help. The size of her subsidy was immediately cut). The

interiors of their apartments, their homes, are comfortable, a mix of U.S./Soviet decor—second-hand furniture, photographs of parents, siblings and themselves decked out in uniforms mostly (no wedding pictures), a picture here and there of the old Opera House in Odessa or the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, a table filled with American-style photographs of children and grandchildren, no samovars.

Although their children do not live with them, almost half, fifteen of the 34 in the group, had at least one child living in the immediate neighborhood, while 27 had at least one child living in the United States. A few children had settled in Israel and Europe. Only two remained in Russia. The immigrants were in touch with their children whether near or far, and were involved in their lives and the lives of their grandchildren and great grandchildren, perhaps more closely connected geographically than most American families (although Shanas [1979:3] has challenged the myth of absent family involvement in care of the elderly). Extending outward from the networks of the elderly émigrés of Washington Heights and Brighton Beach was an aggregate of kin totaling 53 children and 82 grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Despite the similarities of the two neighborhoods and the many similarities in the émigrés' past Soviet lives, there were very few connections between the elderly émigrés living in Washington Heights and those living in Brighton Beach. One of Lena's sons lived in Brighton Beach. But there was no mutual going and coming. Her son did the visiting since Lena, at ninety, was unable to travel that distance. Nicolai spent the early years of his immigrant life in Brighton Beach where his daughter lived. But after his wife died he moved to Washington Heights where he married an old friend. He never goes back to Brighton Beach. His daughter lives on Long Island where he visits. Victor, the

President of the Manhattan and Bronx chapter of the Washington Heights Veterans' Association, does travel out to Brighton Beach on a regular basis for meetings at the Association office and to visit his son. With the exception of these three, however, the neighborhoods seem to be mutually exclusive enclaves devoid of extensive networks that connect them. Certainly cohort members in Washington Heights were aware of Brighton Beach, aware enough in several instances to express a dislike of that neighborhood's distinctly ethnic identity and its insistence on preserving the past and all that it constitutes. The most vehement were critical of the veterans and their ostentatious display of World War II heroism. As for the Brighton Beach residents, there was only a vague awareness of the Washington Heights' location in New York City. Some were even surprised to learn that fellow émigrés had settled there. They showed little curiosity about the neighborhood. The networks that do appear to be developing are those connecting Brighton Beach residents with family members who have moved into adjoining neighborhoods in south Brooklyn and, for people in both Washington Heights and Brighton Beach, with relatives in the suburbs outside New York, especially New Jersey.

BRIGHTON BEACH

Brighton Beach, brash, blustery, flamboyant, is synonymous with the stereotypical New York City neighborhood of immigrant Russians, Little Odessa. The boardwalk, the beach, the ocean; garish night clubs, the Russian Mafia, the "El," the Russian food emporiums, are all images that come to mind. For those elderly Soviet immigrants who have settled there it is another set of images: early morning swims with friends, the celebration of Victory Day on May 9, Russian spoken everywhere, familiar food, cultural

events, the screech of the elevated train on Brighton Beach Avenue and the supportive social agencies, senior centers, and synagogues.

Most commuters enter Brighton Beach on the “Q” line, an express to Brighton Beach at the end of the line. The subway train, above ground, slows as it enters Brighton Beach and begins the sharp curve as it turns in the direction of Coney Island, just west of Brighton Beach and running parallel to the ocean only a block away. From atop the tracks, it is possible to see what is in store: a piece of the ocean in the distance, the boardwalk, and closer, the great building site of a high-rent terraced, oceanview cooperative complex, the former home of the famous Brighton Beach Baths as well as the rooftop of the old Loew’s movie house, now the Millennium, the meeting place for gala celebrations, community meetings, and Russian entertainment. The screech of the train wheels against steel tracks is prolonged but bearable until one stands or walks on Brighton Beach Avenue underneath the tracks. The sound dominates the neighborhood; the elevated tracks filter out sunlight, the sky even, casting a dim and dusty atmosphere all along Brighton Beach Avenue from Coney Island Avenue to the western reaches of Brighton Beach. This is the dingy, noisy part of Brighton Beach. There are side streets leading off the Avenue on both sides, the oceanside blocks filled with 1920’s and 30’s apartment buildings, ten to twelve stories high leading to the boardwalk and ocean, and the landward side filled with a mix of small private homes, businesses and apartment buildings. To the east, Brighton Beach Avenue opens into a wider, brighter and sunnier boulevard, unshaded by train tracks. Both sides, the dark and the light, are lined by Russian food stores, restaurants, cafe’s, and fish markets (The Korean green grocers also hold their own along with some old family luncheonettes). The food tumbles out onto

tables and makeshift trays and stalls. Freshly baked pastries are especially appealing. There are florists and the Brighton Beach Neighborhood Association, the Black Sea Bookstore and, of course, a Russian-run pizza place.

There are many people crowding the sidewalk but, despite the dominance of things Russian, there is a mix of people. Brighton Beach was not always (and it might not be for too much longer) Little Odessa. Alongside a young Russian-speaking woman, an elderly woman in a wheelchair steered by a companion or aide, is a frail American woman, an East-European immigrant of a bygone era. A number of shoppers are in wheelchairs or pushing walkers, laden down with string and plastic shopping bags, many with home attendants accompanying them. Their presence is in evidence on the boulevard as they mix with the new young and old Russians and the even newer Asians, mostly Bangladeshi and Pakistani, who now appear at the outer edges of the neighborhood, moving east and south into Brighton Beach from Coney Island and inner Brooklyn neighborhoods. This is the marketplace. A short block away, the sound of seagulls competes with talk and shouts of chess players, the clink of glasses and silverware at the boardwalk cafes, the occasional boom box, drowned out by the grating clash of the train and steel workers at the fancy water-front construction site. Clusters of elderly men, only men, sit at boardwalk tables or benches playing and kibitzing at chess. They know one another, they smoke, they laugh, they don't miss a passer-by. Few people sit alone. They walk, they sun themselves. Women sit with friends, they talk, they watch. There are not as many of them. A wide sandy beach, the glint of broken glass visible on sunny days, spreads out to the water's edge, populated mostly by younger sunbathers and swimmers. Few of the elderly swim during the middle of the day, preferring the early morning hours when it is cooler. The

shadiness and suspicion associated with the Mafiya's reputed presence in Brighton Beach is nowhere to be seen.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS

The Dominican migration to New York City began in the 1960's following a period of restrictive immigration policies under right-wing dictator, Rafael Trujillo (Foner 1987: 24). By the 1980's the Dominican Republic had become the leading source of emigration into New York City. Based on the March 1998 Current Population Survey, there were 412,000 foreign-born Dominican residents in New York City (Pessar and Graham 2001:251). Washington Heights is home to one-third of all Dominicans in New York City. The neighborhood is teeming with young Dominican immigrant children, crowded into schools and parks and playgrounds and after-school programs—there is never enough space. The School Board and Community Planning Board are the setting for fierce political activity as fledgling Dominican politicians, first and second generation, cut their teeth in competition for leadership positions, elected office, and control of public agendas. Dominicans are a dominant cultural presence. Their music, their restaurants, their language form the Washington Heights rialto. There are the old timers though, the American Jews, the émigré German Jews, the Irish, who retain some power, but their numbers have dwindled dramatically (a local temple's membership numbered in the thousands in the 1960's, is now less than 500 and seeking to merge with another neighborhood temple in the same predicament).

The neighborhood is roughly segmented along ethnic and class divides, with Dominicans occupying a larger and poorer area east of Broadway, extending north into

Inwood, the adjoining neighborhood. A mixture of longer-settled first and second generation Irish and Germans, the newly arrived Russian Jews and young migrant families from downtown in search of space occupy the area west of Broadway. Broadway is, in fact, the base of a canyon, a valley, separating the two elevations of Washington Heights, the heights overlooking the Harlem River looking eastward to the Bronx; the second elevation overlooking the Hudson River—the west side having the better housing stock, access to parks, services and claim to the highest peak in Manhattan, all of 265 feet. The Russian Jews occupy an enclave, situated along one avenue and its side streets. They have moved in over the past twenty years, into apartments that had been slowly vacated by elderly German-Jewish émigrés of an earlier time.

In contrast to the children on bicycles tearing down the hills created by these heights, the elderly Soviets stroll through the neighborhood usually in threes and fours and five's. One of their favorite places is the wide promenade in Ft. Tyron Park leading up to an overlook shaded by old linden trees with views of the palisades. They share this place with their age cohort members—the German-Jewish émigrés of the earlier twentieth century who attribute their great love for the park to the fact that it reminds them of their childhood years in German and Austrian cities. They mingle with one another only slightly; usually one person reaches out to another and an acquaintance develops. They may meet in the park, share a bench. Rita, an outgoing adventuresome Russian Jewish woman in her eighties, whose English is good (so is her German and Georgian), speaks of her friendship with Henry Kissinger's mother who used to spend time in the park (Kissinger's mother died in the late 1990's) and of the two German-Jewish men, both also in their eighties, whom she meets frequently. For the most part though, they stroll, they

talk with great intensity in Russian, well into the evening. They have, in a way, opened the park, making it safe for others in the neighborhood to venture out at night.

4.3 DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS/DIFFERENT VOICES

Social agencies dating back to earlier waves of immigrants, line the streets of both neighborhoods drawing on accumulated experience and knowledge and strong connections with important funding and political groups to extend support. Both neighborhoods provide an abundance of social services for all the Russian Jewish elderly, ranging from the most concrete supports such as housing location and food, to legal services, even in one man's case, assistance with divorce. The relationship between the émigrés and the highly skilled staff of these agencies is crucial. It is to these sources that the émigrés turn for help and advice. In both neighborhoods elderly Russian Jews live not only within a larger and politically active immigrant population but within an equally, if not more powerful group of elderly citizens, mostly aging immigrants of an earlier era, including Dominicans who settled in Washington Heights as young adults and have grown old. Aging German Jewish émigrés who arrived in the late 1930's and pockets of Irish and Cuban and Greek immigrants are also sprinkled about in Washington Heights' enclaves. Aging Eastern Europeans people the senior centers and health agencies of Brighton Beach. Many share common needs for socialization (some much more than others), health care, nutrition, help in negotiating bureaucratic agencies and in applying for entitlements. The geographical, class, and ethnic divisions of the neighborhood, however, combine to support a landscape of ethnically distinct senior centers or divisions within centers. Diners sit apart at lunch programs and Senior Citizen centers, separated by

language more than anything else, but also by long standing relationships within their own groups, reticence, fear, discomfort at the unfamiliar. For those who speak English, the barriers are less daunting. Russian Jews, although well served by social agencies, remain isolated as a sub-group, part of the “Russian Program” or seated at a table with Russian-speaking members.

The voices of the Russian Jewish émigrés are heard, however, in different ways. In Washington Heights, the expression of need, opinion, and ideas of old people is mediated by the professional staff of social agencies. In Brighton Beach, although the voice of social agencies is heard, there is much more direct and diverse talk between the old people and the rest of the community. A good example of how the voices of Brighton Beach and Washington Heights differ is in their response to housing issues. The housing problems in both neighborhoods are similar, endemic really in all New York City neighborhoods—housing shortages, high rents, and complaints about landlords. Throughout my conversations with the Russian Jewish elderly of Washington Heights and Brighton Beach, the theme of housing surfaced as their primary concern. There is, for example, Yetta, an 82 year old émigré who occupied a one bedroom apartment in a building located a half a block from the ocean. Suffering a caved-in bathroom ceiling reeking of mildew, and paying rent of \$750 a month, she complained about having missed out on a Section 8 housing subsidy. She had arrived in New York shortly after this benefit had been discontinued. Referring to her neighbors upstairs and downstairs, she complained, “They pay \$250 a month for what I pay \$750.” Her children are subsidizing her now. On a broader level, a social worker tells me, “They sell their Food Stamps to get the rent money.” Apartment rents were reasonable in the 1970’s at the time social

agencies were first looking for suitable, affordable housing for émigrés. Both neighborhoods were selected for that reason. Times changed, federal and State housing support programs have diminished, (critical New York City housing supports remain) the value of residential real estate, even in these two neighborhoods, has gone up. Other changes threaten the already precarious position of the elderly in both neighborhoods. In Washington Heights, the appearance of a Starbuck's on the corner of 181st Street and Ft. Washington Ave. signals the good—enough prosperity in the neighborhood to turn a profit—and the bad—rising rents and food prices, affordable by the young and prosperous but not the elderly émigrés.

Brighton Beach faces a similar transition. Arising out of the former site of the famous Brighton Beach Baths, a windswept excavation site on the edge of the ocean, a huge billboard announces the coming of a seaside cooperative development, one side bordering the ocean, the other side on Brighton Beach Avenue and a long string of small, colorful shops. The buildings that now rise attempt to blend with the terra cotta, slate roof, Alhambra-style of the surrounding 1930's apartment buildings, themselves imitations of another much earlier Mediterranean style. Of course, the elderly can not afford them. Indeed, the luxurious apartments and high rents are beyond their aspirations. They are not aware, however, of the possible negative consequences of gentrification. They see no threat to their easy and cheap Russian-style food markets and accessible social service offices. They don't realize that property owners along the Brighton Beach Avenue shopping strip will begin to raise rents too high for small entrepreneurs, that upscale businesses will move in, that prices will rise. They know about dealing with government bureaucracies, they know about rent supplements and government programs, but the

inevitability of urban transition is new to them. At their advanced ages, they have no time, as do the young, to move on to another neighborhood and no time to withstand the cyclical changes, the ups and downs of where they are.

Housing support programs, in a way, have placed them in a more precarious position than they would have been without them. When they arrived as émigrés, they were assisted by social agencies in locating their own one-bedroom apartments, apart from their children. This was a gain at the time. They were able to establish eligibility for benefits easily because of this independence. But now that apartment rents have gone up for those unprotected by housing supports, and as food prices in the neighborhood rise beyond Food Stamp levels, they face the prospect of diminishing funds. For many it might be too late to move back in with children. It is also questionable whether their children have the room for them now, or want them, or whether they want to live with their children. There is worry, talk of what to do. In each neighborhood, there is action, but it is different.

In Washington Heights, protest, whether against housing or other issues, rests in the hands of expert professional staff of community agencies. A report from the Committee for the Aging, a subcommittee of the Community Planning Board for the neighborhoods of Washington Heights and Inwood, is on the agenda of monthly public meetings. Its ideas, its projects, its proposals are heard and its support sought out by community leaders. Its membership and active participants, however, are mostly professional staff from public and voluntary social agencies providing services in the community. They are the spokespersons for their constituencies. They are vocal, insistent, and successful most of the time. For instance, the staff of one of the large nursing homes

in the community advocated successfully, through the Planning Board and local Police Precinct, for a quiet zone surrounding the home. On a less public level, they ousted an elderly guest from an adjoining Community Planning Board, who sought support for free New York City public transportation for seniors, instead of the current half fare. Voicing concern about other services needed in the community, especially education, members of the Committee for the Aging declined to even consider the proposal. The committee monitors the performance of the large medical center serving the elderly. Hospital representatives are called to task at these meetings about treatment of the elderly in the Emergency Room, attitude problems with hospital staff, dirty IV poles, etc. The Committee, at one point, became the battleground for a confrontation between old and young over the use of a renovated playground. Elderly chess players returned to find that their space had been given over to an after-school program, and to top it all off, their allotted space had been filled with elaborate work-out equipment. One old, obese man cried out at a meeting, "What do I need with all that stuff?" They felt squeezed out. To a certain extent they had been. A desperately needed program for children, mostly Dominican, had been created. The professional staff at the center with the help of the Committee for the Aging, went to work immediately. Key people—political representatives, high level Parks Department officials—were called to meetings. Not much compromise was made but more staff was provided for the recreation center, hours were expanded, feathers were smoothed and the recreation center opened to all its members—young and old. The voice of social and public agency staff gains additional strength from a formidable coalition of sophisticated agency representatives capable of immediate response to any threat to the needs of the elderly. They have anticipated and

have already mapped out the dimensions of the housing problems of the elderly, inviting experts in government and housing to meetings and contacting legislators. There is, however, little direct vocal protest by the elderly beyond a preliminary display of dissatisfaction. Their representatives take it from there.

The voices of the elderly are heard on two levels in Brighton Beach. The elderly Soviets circulate within a similar array of social and political structures as in Washington Heights, where representatives advocate for services for the elderly although there is less cohesion, less dynamism. The same divisions are apparent at local senior meeting places. One social worker told me that her center had only a few Russian Jews as members, that her elderly members, Jewish immigrants of the 1930's and '40's from Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Belarus resented the Russian Jews, and that I would be likely to meet Russian elderly at other centers, one, in particular, where free lunches were provided (Hers charged fifty cents). Matters of concern to the elderly seldom appear on the agenda of Community Planning Board meetings; in fact, there is little representation of the large Soviet population living in the Board's purview. And although a Committee for the Aging is said to exist, it does not appear on meeting agendas. There is a coalition of public and social agencies that represents the needs of the elderly but it covers a broader geographical area in Brooklyn, dealing with more generalized issues.

On another level, however, an exuberant voice, coming directly from the elderly Russian Jews, speaks out frequently, expressing sentiments and ideas not easily comprehended by the established representatives in the neighborhood. The elderly Russian Jews speak of housing issues from the stage of the giant Millennium theater on Brighton Beach Avenue. They dress in their military uniforms to add gravitas to their

statements. They engage in political squabbling with their younger fellow émigrés, and board buses for Washington to meet with congressmen about housing legislation. These elderly Soviet voices speak out of past experiences and current desires. They speak of injustice, inequity, and, as in the case of an old Veterans' Association, question concepts of nationality and its meaning to immigrants. In the next section, I examine other differences and similarities between the two groups from a different perspective. I look at the ways that personal demographics and memory come together in the present and are influenced by place in shaping identity.

4.4 VARIATIONS WITHIN THE COHORT

My original research plan had been to study elderly émigrés in Washington Heights. Based on my preliminary work, however, I began to realize that I was dealing with a strikingly elite population of immigrants. They were highly educated people who had worked in responsible, high level positions as managers, engineers and professionals in law and medicine during their Soviet years. As elderly immigrants, they were fit and motivated and engaged in the life of their Russian-speaking community. In addition to this initial impression about the Washington Heights group, I had heard from informants, enough by way of suggestions and outright remarks, about the differentness of Brighton Beach—everything from, “You don’t want to go out there,” “I don’t want anything to do with them out there;” and silence when I brought up the subject of Brighton Beach. Fran Markowitz’ ethnography (1993) of Brighton Beach also documents an elderly population that, at least on the surface, was different—a more fragile, more passive group of people—perhaps different because of the area within the former Soviet Union from which

they had emigrated or, perhaps for other reasons such as available housing. I decided therefore, to see whether there were, in fact, differences in the immigrants who moved to the two places. In addition to basic demographic data, I looked at length of time members had lived in the United States, the year they had left the Soviet Union and their age at that time; their current citizenship status; health information and some family data such as number of children and grandchildren, the location, and frequency of contact with them; and why they decided to live in the Washington Heights and Brighton Beach neighborhoods.

Cohorts have a collective identity shaped out of shared historical events. The Soviet cohort of this study meets the four general assumptions underlying cohorts: (1) they share a given life experience; (2) the experience is socially or historically structured; (3) it is experienced within a common generational framework; (4) the effects are relatively stable over life (Rosow 1978:67). But this does not mean that cohorts are homogeneous. Even in the most rigidly defined age structure, different events sweep in to shape the experience of members. The speed, instability and radical extent of social, economic, and political change in the Soviet Union during the cohort's lives, is, perhaps, the best explanation for the variations I found in their life experiences, and later, their lives in New York City as elderly émigrés. There were multiple identities within the cohort, their differences demarcated by only a few crucial years in some cases. For instance, the year that a member reached child-bearing age and its coincidence with changes in abortion policy in the 1930's; or, the year that a member reached an age old enough to fight in a war and its coincidence with the outbreak of the Second World War. These variations made it possible for me to analyze intra-cohort variation. It became easier to place their

lives within the flow of historical time with connections not only within the cohort, but beyond, with other generations, networks, and groups. I was able to capture data related to the earliest post revolutionary times in the USSR, while still focusing on an elderly sample population. I interviewed members in their eighties who had fought in the Second World War as well as those in their early seventies whose lives as teenagers had been disrupted by the war. In fact, one of the most striking differences to surface within the cohort was between the oldest who served in the war and those who had been too young to fight but who had been uprooted by the experience. The difference was significant and also correlated with differences in their later lives as émigrés which I document in ethnographic data in later chapters.

- **Age and Historical Experience - Two Sub-Groups Emerge:**

There were 18 people in the Washington Heights group, seven men and eleven women. In Brighton Beach there were 16, six men and ten women. In my preliminary analysis, differences within the sample were not immediately apparent. Instead I found broad similarities in their Soviet lives and the histories they carried with them to the United States. There was the same high level of education and professional achievement; the same fitness and engagement with life. Their origins, their urban experiences, their exposure to famine and war, and their day-to-day Soviet lives, were very similar. Differences emerged later and were related to age and the experiences that followed from that. For instance, there were more octogenarians in Washington Heights—one-half of the sample (9) was 80 years of age or older. In the Brighton Beach group, only two of the sixteen were 80 years or older. As would be expected more women were found to be

living alone in Washington Heights. Julia, 92, the oldest member of the Washington Heights group, had outlived two husbands. In Washington Heights there were only five couples living together; in Brighton Beach, there were eleven. But beyond this evident variability-related difference, the significance of age emerged later on based on the cohort members' earlier memories, their war experiences, and later, their experiences as immigrants. Here the difference between those 75 and older and those younger than 75, seemed more significant. Using 75 as the dividing line also erased the unevenness in the two groups with equal numbers above and below 75 appearing in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach. By holding age groups constant, I was able to identify differences beyond mere chronological time. History, including immigrant experience, did matter.

- **Immigration Experience:**

The Washington Heights group had left the former Soviet Union a few years later than the Brighton Beach group: the peak year for the Washington Heights group was 1992; for the Brighton Beach group, it was 1989. In Washington Heights, the mean length of time in the United States was thus shorter--seven years compared to eleven in Brighton Beach. The difference between 1989 and 1992 in Soviet history is vital. Those who emigrated prior to the fall of the Soviet Union faced serious barriers including longer waiting periods prior to departure. And although Soviet society was more open, those departing in 1989 tended to know less about the United States and the reality of life as immigrants. Differences in length of time in the United States and year of departure from the former Soviet Union did not, however, seem to make a difference for these earlier arrivals. In fact, at least a quarter of the cohort members in each group in both

neighborhoods had been in the United States for less than five years. I had expected that these very recent émigrés, all of whom had been sponsored by their children or other relatives in New York, would be the less harried, more secure part of the cohort, who departed the former Soviet Union with relative ease and possibly more prepared to live in the United States. This was not the case. They seemed more ambivalent about their identities and expressed more uncertainty about their decision to leave the former Soviet Union: “I should have left earlier.” “I left a good life behind.” One person was hospitalized, another was recovering from by-pass surgery. Many were enmeshed in preparations for their citizenship exams. The stress of immigration in this group of recent émigrés, despite their relative ease of exit and the support they received in their communities did not erase the disturbing early impact of immigration. Passage of time, on the other hand, for those who had arrived earlier whether seven or nine or eleven years had elapsed, seemed to have erased differences.

- **Place of Birth and Place of Settlement in New York City:**

I had also expected that those leaving Ukrainian cities would settle in Brighton Beach and those leaving Russian cities would settle in Washington Heights. Instead, an equal number of elderly Ukrainian émigrés settled in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach. And elderly émigrés from Russia, Moscow in particular, appeared in both groups, not just in Washington Heights. This was a surprise since I had been led to believe, based on my preliminary interviews with émigrés of all ages in Washington Heights, that those who had settled in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach had emigrated from different parts of the former Soviet Union. It seemed to them almost a given that those who had

settled in Brighton Beach were Ukrainian. Even the dubbed title, “Little Odessa,” for Brighton Beach, a major seaport city in Ukraine, seemed to support this assumption. City of New York Department of Planning statistics also seemed to validate this impression. For the years 1992 to 1998, when country of birth for immigrants from the former Soviet Union was recorded for the first time, 50 percent of immigrants from the former Soviet Union entering New York City and settling in Brighton Beach were Ukrainian. Russia was the second leading source but represented only 20 percent. The reverse occurred in Washington Heights with the Russian-born representing 41 percent of former Soviet Union emigrants settling there, followed by 32 percent from Ukraine (City of New York Department of Planning Letter to author August 25, 2000).

It turned out, after reviewing personal histories and migration patterns within the Soviet Union, that the discrepancy between my findings, what I was hearing on the ground, and official reports was a quirk of Immigration and Naturalization data collection. A more detailed breakdown by age and zip code obtained from the City of New York Department of Planning Division of Population (letter to author, August 25, 2000), helped to explain the near equal distribution of Ukrainian and Russian elderly émigrés in the two neighborhoods. The question asked by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of émigrés from the former Soviet Union is not about the country from which they departed but the country of their birth. In the case of the elderly émigrés the country of birth was very frequently different from country of departure. Many in the cohort had been born in Ukraine and, during their childhood or early adult years, had migrated to the larger cities of Russia. Twenty-three cohort members had been born in Ukraine. At the time of emigration 23 departed from Russian cities. Many were educated in Moscow and either

settled there or in other larger industrial cities in Russia. Their children were born in Russia, not Ukraine. As their children migrated to the United States, they identified their place of birth as Russia while their elderly émigré parents claimed Ukraine as their place of birth. These differences stand out most starkly in the Washington Heights data where only 32 percent of émigrés from the former Soviet Union are from Ukraine while 45 percent of those 65 and older are from Ukraine. The same ratio appears among émigrés settling in Washington Heights, identifying their place of birth as Russia. Forty-one percent of all émigrés identify Russia as their place of birth while only 19 percent of those 65 and older said they were born in Russia (City of New York Department of Planning Letter to author August 25, 2000). The same pattern, although less dramatic, is also present in Brighton Beach: a higher number of elderly report Ukraine as their place of birth than the younger generation.

Although place of birth explains the apparent differences among the elderly and where they settled, there is still the dominance of younger émigrés in Washington Heights who are Russian-born and the dominance of younger émigrés in Brighton Beach who are Ukrainian-born. Choice did not play a part at the outset for émigrés. Availability of housing and a generous community, as one woman who had participated as a social worker in the early settlement of over 500 émigrés told me, were the determinants of neighborhood selection. The designated settlement agency for the area, the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA), assigned newly arrived émigrés to neighborhoods based on what was available. Choice played a part only later. Once a family member was established, a newly arrived immigrant had the option of settling with them. Also, once settled, a younger immigrant might have been more likely to relocate,

perhaps choosing to move to another New York City neighborhood, although, based on my interviews with older émigrés, the young were more likely to move to the suburbs. This important split in the two neighborhoods might explain the lack of networks connecting the Brighton Beach and Washington Heights neighborhoods, especially as Soviet identity fades and national identity gains strength.² Since my work was focused on older immigrants, the opportunity to trace this division did not arise.

In a broader sense, choice did play a major role in determining where the elderly émigrés settled. Regardless of where they were born or where they lived prior to departure, the determining factor in where cohort members decided to settle in New York was overwhelmingly the desire to live near their children. For 23 cohort members, 10 in Brighton Beach and 13 in Washington Heights, their children were already settled in the neighborhood. Social agencies helped émigrés to find apartments. Five in the cohort though, all in Brighton Beach, made more independent choices about where they wanted to live. For several couples whose children were living in comfortable suburban communities, Brighton Beach was their choice. For instance, Rita and Andrei had lived with their son and daughter-in-law on Long Island for several years. When they decided to live on their own, they chose Brighton Beach for the ease of living. Both spoke English, Andrei better than Rita, but the shopping and the decent rent and the opportunity for sociality were important. Iliana and her husband stayed with their daughter in New Jersey initially, but quickly got hold of a Russian-language newspaper, found a terraced apartment with a glimpse of the ocean in Brighton Beach, and sublet it. Tatyana and her

² Although the breakup of the USSR into pre-existing or newly created states is unique, the issue of understanding immigrant identity based on place of birth might bear re-examination.

husband visit their daughter in Connecticut but are insistent about their independence. Ilya moved with his new wife into her daughter's apartment (he had married her, sad to say, to avoid a long wait to leave the former Soviet Union because he had no one to sponsor him—her daughter sponsored both of them). Once in the United States, he moved out, began divorce proceedings, and found his own apartment.

- **Implications of State Policy, Family Size and Later Decisions to Emigrate:**

Most members of the cohort had small families consisting of one or two children. Although the variation between one or two children did not at first appear significant, an interesting pattern that seemed to coincide with their histories emerged. The youngest, those whose ages ranged from 69 to 74 years, were more likely to have had two-child families. This was the group of 13 within the cohort born during the late 1920's and early 1930's, reaching their childbearing years in the 1950's. The war was behind them; bureaucratic expectations of family size had undergone a shift during these years; Stalin died in 1953, the thaw was on; there was some hope. Another child was possible. The ten cohort members, five or so years older, ranging in age from 75 to 79, were one-child parents. Born earlier in the mid 1920's and reaching their childbearing years in the 1940's, they bore the brunt of war time sacrifice and its aftermath. The oldest nine members in their eighties, born before the Revolution in some cases, were the only group to have four and three-children families. They reached their child-bearing years in the mid-1930's at a time of severe social upheaval and uncertainty, far worse than the 1920's. The famine of 1932-33 had left at least three to four million dead. The birth rate had dropped throughout the country during this period, although most dramatically among the peasants

(Fitzpatrick 1999:41). Pro-family policies were initiated, abortion was outlawed in 1936; monetary rewards were given to mothers for having more children. The birth rate rose from 25 per 1,000 in 1935 to almost 31 per 1,000 in 1940 (Fitzpatrick 1999:39).

The significance of this variation in family size, although small, suggests that family size had some influence on decisions to emigrate, the place selected for settlement in the United States, and the nature of kin support provided. Perhaps the greatest agony concerning the decision to emigrate occurred among cohort members who had only one child (see Chapter 3). The sense of loss, of separation from an only son or daughter who left for the United States leaving parents behind, especially in the 1980's when the possibility of return or visit was out of the question, seemed to break their hearts. In the two and three child families, sometimes the second child remained behind in the USSR, easing the sense of loss. The parents of only children as a whole left the Soviet Union earlier and under greater hardship. They settled mostly in Brighton Beach and are, today surrounded by grand and great grandchildren. By way of contrast, more Washington Heights immigrants were parents of two children. In Washington Heights, cohort members had 56 grand and great grandchildren, 37 of whom were in the United States, 19 living in their neighborhood. In Brighton Beach, cohort members had an aggregate of 33 grand and great grandchildren, 23 of whom were in the United States, 13 living in the neighborhood. There are other factors, of course, that contribute to these numbers. The older age of the Washington Heights group, explains some of it—living long enough to see one's great grandchildren. But this is offset by the greater number of the Washington Heights group with children and grandchildren in Israel—three children and 14 grandchildren as opposed to just one child and one grandchild in the Brighton Beach

group. Whatever else might be said about these figures, the presence of children and grandchildren has a significant impact on the making of “old age.” Even the two women without any children had very close ties with their nieces and nephews. Ludmila for example couldn’t stand her sister and brother-in-law but loved her nephew and his children and spent much time with them. Julia agreed to leave the former Soviet Union with her nephew when he told her that everyone else in the family had left, that he wanted to leave, but he would not go without her. The joys and comforts of births and wedding celebrations, visits, achievements, even the trials and tribulations—helping to look after a divorced son’s daughter, a grandson’s admission to the hospital with pneumonia, even the obligation to pick up a great-grandchild at school—are rich ingredients in the construction of old age. Both groups were nourished by these familial ties. The differences were in numbers. The Washington Heights group had more opportunities for contacts with grandchildren.

As noted earlier, the cohort members did not live with their children and grandchildren, so although some childcare might have been part of their day, it did not require a twenty-four hour presence in the home. Family involvement was not central to their lives. Many other concerns occupied their time--good friends, language classes, pursuit of citizenship, recognition, protest, culture, chess on the boardwalk, literature, politics. In the ethnographic accounts that follow, I describe their daily lives centered around these community activities. As will become evident, further differences between the Brighton Beach and Washington Heights groups are attributable more to place of settlement as émigrés than to age and family. These differences emerged not so much in their histories as in the daily round of neighborhood activities I attended with them, in

meetings and classrooms, conversations with children and grandchildren. Especially marked was a different emphasis on the public and private in daily life. In Washington Heights, there was a calm, inward directed focus on self and family concerns and an absence of interest in local politics. There were walks in the park, a concert or an exhibition downtown, grandchildren to pick up after school, always the concern about improving ones' English. In Brighton Beach, there was also some of this, but in addition, there was an almost frenetic atmosphere, in which cohort members engaged in public display and demonstration. Their private and public lives merged in expressions of patriotism, religious belief, and protest.

CONCLUSION

The variations among members of the cohort which I examine in this chapter relate primarily to place of settlement in New York City but also to chronological age at which historical events in their early lives occurred. The degree to which these components contribute to variation is difficult to measure. But what does emerge is a quieter, less politically active Washington Heights group surrounded by more supportive family members and a strong, coordinated network of social and public agencies focused on care for the aging members of the community. In contrast to this almost idyllic image of an elderly community, the Brighton Beach elders were active and engaged in a neighborhood where their participation was enhanced by the ease with which they communicated with their Russian speaking neighbors, and where the dominance of Russian culture enabled such activities as cultural expression.

The following four chapters help to explore these similarities and differences and how they manifest themselves in the everyday lives of the cohort members. In each chapter I move from personal narratives to social encounters within the urban ethnoscape of the two diverse neighborhoods. Chapter 5 is a reflection on the profound influence of the Second World War, the great Patriotic War, in the lives of cohort members. It explores ways in which men and women hold onto their experiences and use them to create recognition and respect in the alien world of the immigrant. Chapter 6 describes a quieter aspect of daily life in both communities where the passionate pursuit of learning to speak English takes on meaning beyond simply passing a citizenship examination. It examines socialization at the heart of the intense learning sessions, the relevance of past Soviet lives in which education played such a major role and how this persists, in different ways, into the present. It also explores ways in which cohort members draw on the arts to carve out places for themselves, make up for losses in old age, and, in the absence of ritual, express their deep concerns about uncertain futures. Chapter 7 presents an encounter with the police in which an eighty-two year old matriarch takes the lead in a dramatic confrontation with the police in Brighton Beach. It examines intergenerational relationships and the persistence of old experiences of anti-Semitism into the present and how they influence the direction in which ethnic conflicts flow. Chapter 8 draws from individual narratives, but expands the perspective as cohort members encounter the U.S. healthcare system. They speak of by-pass surgery and deaths in the family; they ponder the social, ethical, and economic dilemmas surrounding nursing home care. This chapter, while descriptive of the universal quality of suffering and the disadvantages of immigrants in a strange land,

exposes the contradictions of the unmet promises of communism against a backdrop of the cohort members' good fortune as beneficiaries of an imperfect U.S. health care system.

CHAPTER 5 VICTORY DAY CELEBRATION: MEMORIES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

5.1 MEMORIES OF THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

Memories of the Second World War, the Great Patriotic War as it is called in the former Soviet Union, were a major theme in the interviews. Everyone remembered and wanted to talk about the war. In their accounts, some fifty or sixty years after the event, the tellers spoke with excitement, their stories full of action. Their experiences were heroic in anyone's estimation. A whirlwind of motion had swept them along. Train journeys set in motion by the war, carried them across vast expanses of the continent depositing young men and women, born in small villages in Russia and Ukraine, in tiny outposts on the China Sea and mean and frozen villages and cities on the steppes, and the Siberian tundra. Many of them made this journey across the Soviet Union a number of times, as nurses and doctors moving with the wounded from the front to rear positions in the Urals and then back again, or as soldiers moving from one front to another, thousands of miles away.

Those who were in their eighties or late seventies when I interviewed them were old enough to have served in the army during the Second World War. A third of the sample had served at the front. Their accounts, especially those of the women, were filled with the horrors of war but also infused with the excitement of being young and the novelty of being transported to places never dreamed of before, of being caught up in the drama of events. They dug anti-tank trenches outside Moscow; young men of twenty commanded troops outside Moscow and at Stalingrad and won medals; they were wounded; they had their first drink—the soldierly allotment of vodka. Some fell in love

and married. They gave orders. The strictures of Stalinism which had dominated their childhood were shaken loose temporarily and were replaced by a deeper, more visceral nationalistic response to an invading enemy. As one veteran told me, “We were, for that time only, a united nation.”

For the part of the sample that was younger, teenagers mostly, when the war broke out, their telling of the experience was less colored by excitement. But their accounts, as told from the perspective of children, were horrifying in a different way, colored by a different kind of suffering: separation from parents and siblings; hunger, cold, death, and, of course, the sheer terror of the bombing. Those in Ukraine and Belarus, of course, bore the immediate impact of the German invasion, its speed, suddenness and nihilistic force. Their descriptions of the evacuations all along the route of invasion are filled with vivid memories: packed cattle cars; clothes, everything they had, sold for food and water all along the way; miles of walking and finding safety in cities and villages, only to be moved on again as these places were attacked. One woman remembers a train passing her train in the night, moving in the other direction. She heard voices from the passengers in the other train crying out for food and water: “Give us water. We’re dying.” She repeated this phrase over and over explaining that she has never been able to forget the sound which still rings in her ears. “They were prisoners.” I asked, “Prisoners of war?” She said, “No. They were our own prisoners from the camps.” Labor camps located in Siberia, displaced by the turmoil of war, were also on the move.

Most of those who remembered these evacuations were women and children and men too old to serve in the army. They recalled the bombings in very personal ways: One of the youngest people I interviewed walked outside his home in a village that had been

bombed the night before. He saw two children, his playmates lying dead on the street, and he heard a plane and looked up. He could see the pilot's face looking directly at him as he flew the plane low over the village. Others remembered terrifying separations from families. One man described the bombing of a steamer in the harbor at Odessa, filled with fleeing inhabitants of the city, and the confusion and terror of his separation from his sisters and parents. Many traveled long distances across the steppes and into Tashkent and the small villages and farms surrounding the city. There was no "good place" but there were some places that were worse than others. Those who had family living in the Ural region and beyond were less at the mercy of evacuation orders. Although Tashkent might be considered paradise compared to Siberia, others described the inhumanity of having to buy water, of being surrounded by fresh food but with no money or means to buy anything.

Although most in the younger group were teenagers and coming of age during the war years and were later drafted into the army, three were only ten years old at the outbreak of the war. One had been away at a Young Pioneers camp for the summer when Moscow was evacuated so suddenly and hurriedly that he returned to an empty apartment. His mother had been evacuated with her department to Sverdlovsk. "My father was a soldier. He came to the apartment, picked me up in his arms, carried me to the train station and threw me aboard a train headed for Sverdlovsk, and took off for the front." Another ten year old walked 100 kilometers with her family on the second day that their village, outside Minsk, had been bombed. She spent the war years working in a gun factory in Tashkent, a city turned into a munitions manufacturing center. She was placed on a special ladder so she could reach into the barrels of the guns to perform the

delicate work only her small hands could perform. The third survived the war years in a concentration camp outside Odessa which was a work camp composed of women, the elderly and children who were barely fed, became ill and died of disease or starvation. He, his mother, grandmother and older brother survived because his grandmother and mother were experienced nurses who were selected by the German officers at the camp to care for their families

Threaded throughout these fragmentary accounts are piercing insights into survival: Rita's mother, a musician, improvised a piano to practice on by filling bottles with different levels of water and setting them up in a shed outside the village where she and her family were housed. A young violinist carried his violin tucked into a pack on his back as he traveled by foot and train across the steppes into Tashkent and there continued to play. Several women, born and raised in cities, learned how to cultivate the land. One spoke with great delight about the cucumbers she grew during her stay in Siberia. She smiled suddenly in the middle of her story as she remembered this. Another woman, raised in poverty and backbreaking labor on a collective, spoke happily about how her experience as a farm worker earned her and her sister jobs working on a Siberian collective, where, at least, there was the guarantee of food.

Many continued to attend school. Although barely subsisting on famine food—potato peels, cabbage and bread—and spending most of the time in bed in order to keep warm, school work went on. One woman described how she and other students held ink wells in their clenched hands to prevent the ink from freezing. She remembers the measurement of a Siberian breakfast: "A two inch square piece of bread, one teaspoon of sugar, one teaspoon of sour cabbage and no lunch." One of the youngest remembers

standing in a field, a collective outside Tashkent, surrounded by adoring adults who looked at him expectantly as he began his first drink of milk in a very long time. The collective had traded its gasoline with a roving band of soldiers for the milk. He drank the milk and gagged. “It was too rich, I couldn’t tolerate the richness.” Even a wedding in Tashkent was pulled off: a wedding dress sewn by a neighbor and a white jacket donated by doctors in the hospital where the bride worked, a wedding cake made from beet root and egg powder and homemade cherry wine prepared by the mother. The guests were family and fellow students from the Leningrad Institute which had been evacuated to Tashkent.

Those who work with life histories warn against the golden days phenomenon—memories grown mellow and embellished with nostalgia by the years, perhaps in an effort to soften the assault on one’s consciousness as the years go by. There is this in many of the stories told to me. The embellishments are there, the emphasis shifted from the horrifying to the hilarious, the unthinkable to the mundane, the heroic to the melodramatic. Ena recalled her experiences as a young nurse of eighteen with skillful story-telling twists and turns as she regaled us, her listeners, with tales of delousing demonstrations delivered before young lice-infested naked soldiers entrenched for weeks and months on the front lines. Rita, a young orthopedic surgeon, told stories of drunken debauches among hospitalized and badly wounded officers at the front. But beneath these entertaining anecdotes, there were unvarnished memories: a snow-covered wooden shack in the woods outside a camp, stacked with half naked bodies of German soldiers, some dead, some dying, stripped of their boots, warm hats and mittens. Rita’s outrage and disbelief that her own people would do this is still fresh. There was Ena’s account of a helter-skelter

evacuation of an encampment that had been surrounded by the German Army. She made a valiant effort to describe the chaos and desperation in comic terms—nurses, doctors, fleeing half-dressed, in the middle of the night, families with their farm animals and bedding, piling onto cattle cars. But she failed, breaking down as her memories of panic and desperation overwhelmed her.

Absent from all of their accounts is any sense of totalitarianism. These are patriotic accounts. The fascists are the enemy, the invader. There are no elites and even the gulag prisoner, granted the opportunity to escape another five years of imprisonment, volunteers to serve. The war for these survivors is liberating, purifying, transcends all. All of the accounts are steeped in a deeply felt, almost visceral patriotism. Even among the youngest, this sentiment predominates. This, despite what is known of the utter disregard by the Stavka, the Soviet Staff Headquarters, for the welfare of the ordinary Red Army soldier—the desertion rates and executions to deter desertion, and the execution or imprisonment of most soldiers who had been prisoners of war (Beevor 1998:85-89,128, 166).

I have taken the time to analyze these remembrances of the war because they have left such an imprint on so many of the participants, the oldest in the most obvious and possibly most constructive way, the youngest in more subtle and destructive ways. Later in the next section, I will examine ways in which these memories are carried forward and used in creative ways to cope with the uncertainties of life in America as immigrants, to negotiate secure niches for themselves and to gain honor, respect and recognition as older citizens in an alien land.

5.2 VICTORY DAY

It is May 9 and it is Victory Day in Brighton Beach.. This is the fifth and most festive year of its celebration in New York City, a day commemorated each year in Moscow since the end of the Second World War. Many of the veterans that I have interviewed already had talked about that first Victory Day in Red Square when the Soviets celebrated the end of World War II. In Brighton Beach, the sound of sea gulls and the taste of salt are in the air as the small band of elderly men and women, no more than a hundred, march along the boardwalk. They are resplendent in their neat, well-fitted military uniforms, bedecked with medals, real medals, not the subdued battle ribbons of the U.S. military. In addition to the Brooklyn veterans, there are contingents from the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island. The men outnumber the women but the women are also there with their medals, a well-known sniper among them. People have come out. The press is there, the children and grandchildren. The musicians, this year, are to give a concert at the bandshell at the end of the parade. The conductor is elegant in his meticulously tailored tuxedo bedecked with medals.

There is something for everyone. Russian émigré musicians have come together this day to play a program that pleases all: triumphal marching songs of the USSR, Yiddish folk songs, Brighton Beach night club fare—"Strangers in the Night," and an original émigré composition extolling Brighton Beach. A brief intermission is taken while the conductor sheds his medals in preparation for the more serious music coming up (It is a very hot day). The Saber Dance is followed by an aria from Carmen and then the grand finale, "God Bless America," "America the Beautiful," and the Soviet anthem, sung by all,

standing at attention. Hundreds of red balloons are released into the air as the final chords are played.. The wind whips in off the ocean, the clickity-clack of the Coney Island Cyclone Roller Coaster is heard in the background. It is a glorious moment, as a time lived over fifty years ago, is re-gained. For as long as these men and women continue to relive this moment they keep alive a truth, they believe, that has been denied by the West these many years. Their truth is that it was they, the Soviet Union, who won the Second World War for the West. They have stopped being amazed at America's ignorance of Russia's role in the war and, instead, seek to educate us. The Soviet Union's casualties were estimated to be 27 million (soldiers and civilians), almost double the total German war dead, and far in excess of any other country involved in the war (Beevor 1998:428).

After the parade and concert, small groups celebrate at restaurants along Brighton Beach Avenue and, in the next few days Russian language newspapers, which overflow racks at newsstands in the neighborhood, feature veterans' pictures, interviews and commentaries on the front pages and center-folds. Most speak of past battles and bravery. One man wears a uniform but no medals. He claims that he is making a political statement. Others tell me that he is "trash." What is his political statement? In order to understand his politics, it's important to go beyond this single event.

5.3 THE VETERANS' ASSOCIATION

Here I describe how the seemingly small, quintessentially ethnic association of elder immigrant veterans is actually a provocative and imaginative embodiment of transnationalism. The Soviet Jewish immigrant community already has solid transnational

Figure 6





Figure 6 a. Top Left: Victory Day participants May 9.2000
(courtesy of interviewee)



b. Top: After the Celebration May 9, 2001 (photograph
by author)

c. Bottom Left: Association Member:
Trip to Washington DC (courtesy of interviewee)

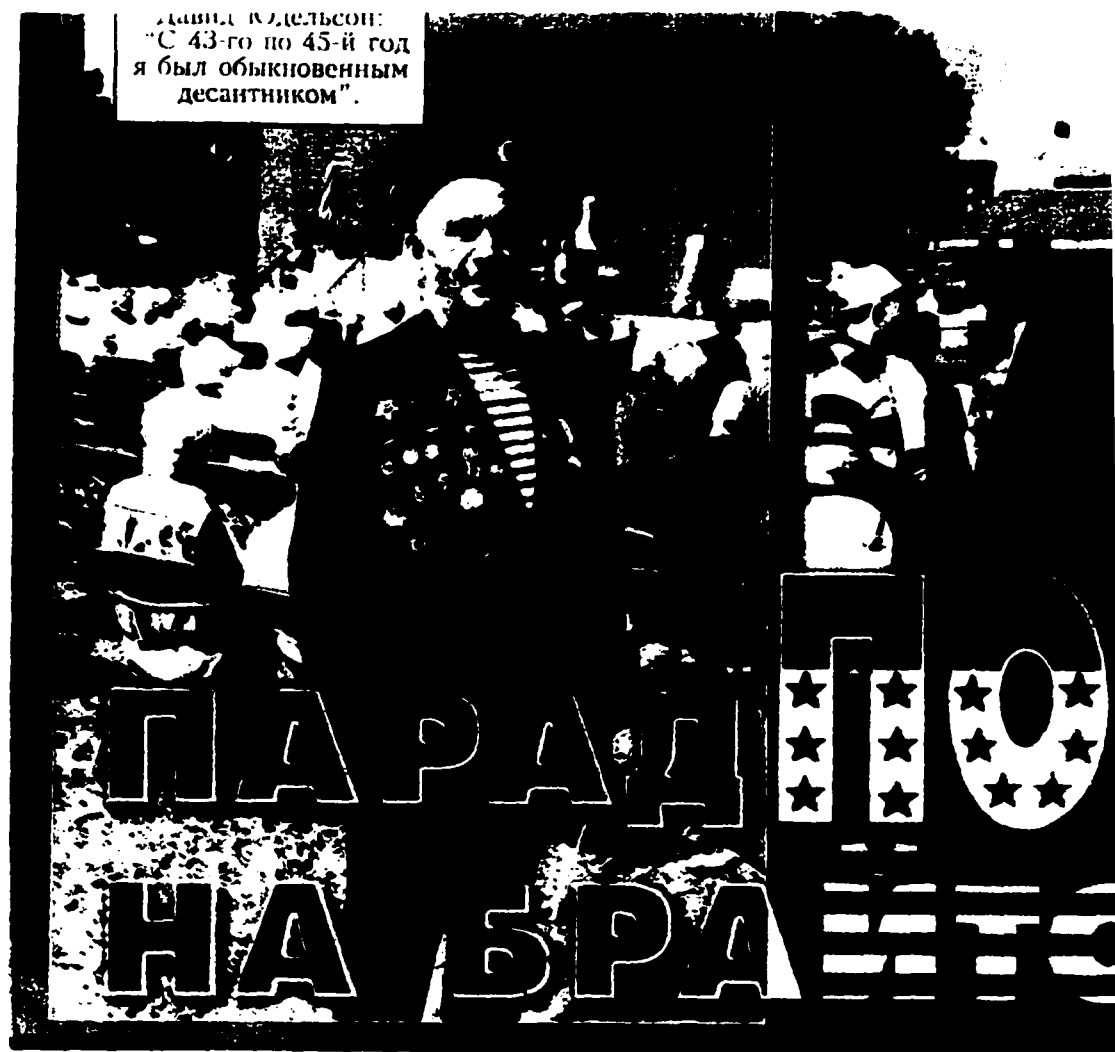


Figure 7

Victory Day, Brighton Beach, 2000
(Русская, May 12 - 18, 2000)



Victory Day, Brighton Beach, 2000
(Русская, May 12 - 18, 2000, p. C-18)

credentials, beginning with its origin in a recently fragmented nation-state, in which immigrants find themselves natives of old-new, new-old nation-states emerging out of the dissolution of their old country. Members of the community remain in active communication with relatives and friends in the former Soviet Union, Israel, Canada, England, and Germany. Whether one is talking about the Mafiya (Russian Mafia), with its global connections extending into the South American drug trading countries and its Swiss bank accounts, or discussing the Holocaust claims of Soviet survivors, it is difficult to avoid addressing transnational issues. The veterans are far from being a community-based, brotherhood-type social club. They are affiliated with groups spanning international landscapes; they travel to and from these places with relative ease; their web site presents their image on the world wide web. But perhaps it is in the realm of ideas that they demonstrate what it means to be a transnational group. In trying to understand the veterans' views about nation-states, patriotism and history, I tracked their organizers down at the local office, I pored through their newsletters and interviewed members of the association.

The Victory Day parade is but the culmination of year-long activities of the American Association of Invalids and Veterans of World War II from the Former Soviet Union, an association that operates out of a tiny second story office, up one creaky flight of stairs in an old building on Brighton Beach Avenue around the corner from the Millennium, a 1930's Loew's movie house with marquee and glitz, now a major Russian meeting and entertainment center. The office is a beehive of activity, made even more intense by the cluttered and crowded setting. The room is filled with gun metal gray file cabinets, wall-to-wall desks piled high with papers, tea pots, every inch of wall space

papered with enlarged group photographs of the membership, always in uniform, on the steps of one municipal building or another—in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Washington, Tel Aviv. Proclamations by the Governor of New York State and Mayor of New York City recognizing the Soviet Union's role in the Second World War and the Association's valor, legitimacy and good works are prominently displayed.

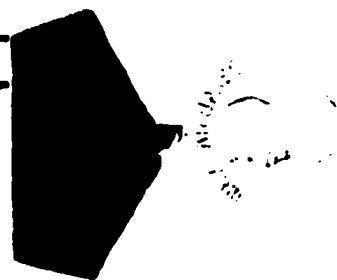
The home page of the group's web site (www.nyinfoguide.com), has at its center a Soviet military style gold medal with red ribbons commemorating the fifty-fifth anniversary of Victory Day. The text announces the founding of the Association in 1995 at a meeting attended by seventy veterans and it proudly displays its "Taxation and Finance Department Certificate" and thus, its legal status. Its mission statement appears on the next screen: "To provide care and comfort to veterans, the wounded and families of the Great Fatherland War." In this respect, it is quite similar to American veterans' groups. The association's membership, however, is more inclusive reflecting the far more extensive involvement of private citizens in the war. Partisans and Leningrad Blockade survivors, veterans of Labor—those rewarded with the Medal of Labor during the Great Fatherland War—as well as former prisoners of ghettos and concentration camps are eligible for membership.

I comb through the monthly newsletter entitled, Veteran (BETEPAH), looking at issues dating back to 1998. Volume 23 commemorates the fifty-fifth anniversary of victory. A colorful front page portrays the blues and reds and whites of the British, American and Soviet flags enfolding one another, a young smiling Soviet soldier, the red star on his cap, a bayonet protruding from his backpack with Berlin, the Bundesstag in the background. The issue follows the usual format: memoirs written by veterans (in this

Figure 8

Cover Page: Association's
Newsletter
Commemorative Issue:
WW II Victory

№23
55лет
ПОБЕДЫ



№23
55лет
ПОБЕДЫ

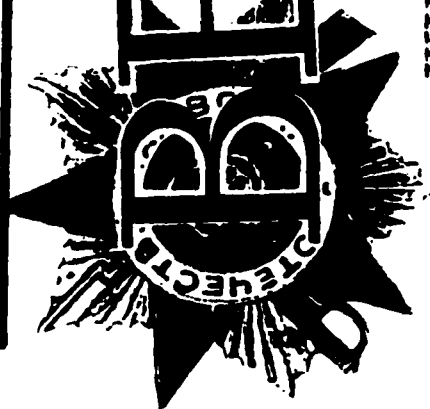


1945-2000

ВЕТЕРАНЫ

журнал выходит шесть раз в год

Издатель: Американская Ассоциация инвалидов и ветеранов
США: Американская Ассоциация инвалидов и ветеранов



case, accounts of the last days of the war) with one memoir of prisoner # 55487 that includes copies of his ID card as a civilian internee of Buchenwald; poems and memorials; and always, at least one battle scene. The newsletter focuses solely on the Great Patriotic War and the Great Victory. A history of the Battle of Kursk appears, along with maps and lists of all those who participated; the fifty fifth anniversary of the liberation of Kharhov is celebrated. In one issue there is an article discussing fear in the war. The text of the president's holiday greeting to the membership is laced with Soviet-style speak, "good wishes for health, good spirit and optimism;" a reference to villages "cleansed of fascists;" and to "the fighters perished during the liberation of our Fatherland and Europe from Nazism." The advertisements reflect the readership and their consumption needs. It is overrun with medical supply and service offerings—rehabilitation, massage, ambulance transportation.

Several men are already there when I arrive for my 11 o'clock appointment to meet the president and vice president. The atmosphere is austere Soviet-style bureaucracy rather than social club. I am welcomed officially but not made too comfortable. I find a seat and wait my turn. This is my third visit. I have done preliminary work and hope that I will be more successful than on my earlier visits when it was almost impossible to establish any sustained communication with members due, in part, to the constant buzz of conversation, the shuffling about as members came and went, and the telephone calls; but also due to their caution and evasiveness. Always one more piece of paper describing my work and my interests was needed.

As I wait, members begin to arrive and go to work at their desks immediately. The vice president is already at his desk, on the phone, but also in conversation with members who have just arrived. He invites me and Sophia (Sophia was my translator in Brighton Beach) to draw our chairs up to his desk. It is very tight quarters. The man sitting next to his desk, by the window, will have to climb over us to get out. This man has taken it upon himself to begin the interview while the vice-president is on the telephone. He worries over the proposed interviews and the need to allow the veterans time to think about the questions, collect their thoughts. We listen and agree but no one else seems to care. It is as if he hasn't spoken. He is brushed off by the Vice President and later, the President.

The President arrives. He squeezes in behind the Vice President's desk, causing those in adjoining desks to get up and rearrange their chairs. There are now about fifteen people crowded into the tiny room, all in motion. We talk but there are distractions. The phones ring constantly, a file cabinet is dragged out into the hall, the fax machine must be repaired, a lavish lunch—champagne, caviar, etc.—is delivered and set up. Above all the phone must be answered and each arriving member must be greeted. The questions I've come to ask get lost in the din and distraction. I find myself being introduced to the president of the Manhattan chapter of the Association who offers Sophia and me some Russian-made chocolate candies wrapped in brightly colored shiny paper. He tells me about his experiences as a partisan leader in Ukraine during the war. I meet the Bronx chapter leader. And now, perhaps it is because I have given up asking questions and everyone else has had a say, the President begins to talk with us about his own personal experiences during the war, showering us with stories about his family and the upcoming celebrations of his sixtieth wedding anniversary. He becomes even more expansive as he

drags out back issues of the association's monthly newsletter and photographs taken at meetings in Washington and Albany. He points to a picture of himself at a Washington reception standing next to Stalin's daughter. He tells us that there are four thousand members in the Greater New York area, "But they are dying off rapidly." He counts off: two additional chapters in Brooklyn, two in Queens, two in Manhattan and one in the Bronx. The Boston and Cincinnati chapters are also associated with them and they are in touch with Israel.

He talks about the work of the association. One of its projects takes members into neighborhood public schools where they talk to the children about their role in the Second World War. He says that the Russian-speaking children make up about 20 percent of the students but they do not seem nearly as interested as the American children in what they have to say. He becomes more and more expansive, giving me back issues of the newsletters; candy is offered all around. It is noon, the din rises, the shuffling about increases, the dishes are being uncovered. It's a feast. We are not invited. Sophia and I leave.

This club for old men and women, this Veterans' Association, could pass at first glance for a social club—one you would expect to see in any New York City neighborhood—ethnic or otherwise. Its military overlay makes it easy to categorize with the traditional American Legion. But it turns out to be more than a place for the elderly to meet, to socialize, to engage in activities and talk about issues of common interest. Of course, it is certainly all that. But it is much more.

On another level, the association members are engaged in the traditional work of the elders in any society. It is memory work and it is compelling. Its task is to preserve

the memory of an extraordinary time in the history of their home country, a country they have left behind and, in fact, a country that no longer exists. They are concerned with preserving for future generations the memory of an event whose importance and significance to its descendants' collective memory is teetering on the edge of oblivion. They are the last generation to have lived through that period, and they speak out of a deep, almost visceral experience of nationhood that drew them into an atavistically brutal war in defense of a dubious "Fatherland." It was a patriotic surge that overwhelmed and contradicted the deep divisions within the country under Stalin in the 1930's, so much so that the sons of fathers executed and imprisoned during the purges volunteered to fight; even gulag prisoners anticipated that they would be called upon to fight (Beevor 1998:85).

The formation of an association such as this in an immigrant community is not at all unusual. Local immigrant associations present the public face of the immigrant group, they provide the means for members of the group to help one another. But what makes this association stand out is that it is so strong, so visible and so successful in an immigrant community that has produced so few grass roots organizations (Markowitz 1993:225). Some have attributed this lack of formal association to the Russian émigré's intolerance for anything that smacks of bureaucracy. They have had enough meetings. They will organize spontaneously around specific events springing out of community concerns, but once the organization moves on to forming membership lists and scheduling meetings and formulating rules, they lose interest. An abundance of long standing public and private social agencies in their communities, the private ones almost entirely sponsored by American Jewish funding, provide services needed by most émigré residents. It could be argued, therefore, that the need for grass roots organizations is simply not there.

However, a cluster of small agencies representing Russian émigrés, most formed in the late 1980's and early 1990's, is beginning to build some strength. But in contrast to the Veterans' Association, they draw little on the past, celebrate nothing in the past and are not anchored in any one geographical location. Instead, they are products of the immigration experience focused on preparing highly qualified, well educated professionals for the United States job market and forging cultural relationships with the American Jewish community. The headquarters for these agencies are located in a Manhattan downtown office building. In fact, they share the same floor in the same hallway in that building, each office along the hall representing a separate agency. The Research Institute of New Americans, RINA, is a good example of the relationship these agencies have with the American Jewish community. RINA proudly proclaims that it is "the first social research institute ever founded in the United States by immigrants to study themselves." Its first major study, "Russian Jewish Immigrants in New York City: Status, Identity, and Integration" (2000), was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. Its findings are informative particularly in identifying the major strengths and achievements of the Soviet émigrés over time, citing employment and economic achievements. But, there is also a sizable portion of the project findings devoted to identifying religious sentiment and affiliation, a subject of great concern to the American Jewish community but not particularly important to the Soviet émigrés. Another organization founded in 1994, The New Americans Foundations, Inc. (NAFI), also stresses the need to further integrate Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union into American society and to foster a renaissance of the Russian-Jewish community and its integration into the American Jewish community. Its background statement states that "social cultural and community

adaptation priorities for Soviet Jewry, are to bring them to their Jewish roots, Jewish learning and to active community life" (NAFI 1994:3). Although of benefit to immigrants in need of traditional services, these organizations appear to be heavily influenced by American Jewish funding and ideology and committed to the integration of Soviet émigrés into the larger United States Jewish community.

The American Association of Invalids and Veterans of World War II sticks out like a sore thumb within the context of the Russian émigré community of New York. Its center is located solidly within the ethnic enclave of Brighton Beach and its founding in 1995 the work of Soviet World War veterans with no assistance—monetary or mentoring—from the American Jewish community. Advancement or assimilation or actual help beyond its own limited membership is not its concern. Its uniqueness is that it is not an expanding organization. Rather, it has been dying since its very inception, its membership dwindling each year. Each month, its newsletter carries memorials for those members who have died. The Association is almost single-minded in its pursuit and preservation of the past, unhampered by the buffeting experiences of the immigrants, the fragmentation of their numbers, the stress of resettlement, and their advancing age.

Despite the association's involvement in educational projects, its advocacy for improved housing and other social welfare issues, there is no reference to this work in its newsletter. Although members do attend and speak out at public meetings, especially those related to housing, these issues appear to be peripheral. Remembrance of the Holocaust, although supported by them, is seldom referenced. This single-mindedness is similar to what I encountered in individual interviews with several veterans who were active in the association. They were eager to talk about their war experiences, leaving out

big chunks of time in their life stories. One responded to my question about other parts of his life which he touched on lightly. "I think I've told you all that matters."

In one sense the Association, with its involvement in community outreach projects such as the school program and housing advocacy, is similar to traditional neighborhood organizations. The Brighton Beach Neighborhood Association, a grass roots organization formed in 1977, sponsors similar programs, although on a much broader scale. Yet the pursuit by the members of Veterans' Association of recognition as veterans within the United States military structure raises some tantalizing questions about these aging traditionalists. During the early stages of my research, I interviewed the wife of an American-born Russian Orthodox priest. She and her husband lived in a New Jersey suburban community and served a Russian orthodox congregation whose members commuted from relatively distant towns to attend religious services. She told me about her sister who had become involved with a Russian immigrant group in Boston, actually locating some family cousins in Belarus. She heard the following story: A small group of elderly Soviet émigrés composed of World War II veterans had organized themselves and then petitioned the United States Veterans Administration for official government recognition as veterans of the Second World War. They were recognized as a separate chapter within the larger Boston organization. They then took it one step further. They requested consideration for veterans' benefits on a par with United States veterans. The reasoning was, "Same war, same side, same cause, just a different banner." And since they as immigrants and refugees had had to forfeit their veterans' benefits when they left the Soviet Union, why shouldn't they now be eligible for benefits in the country which had provided refuge? They were turned down. There is support for the Boston position in the

New York association. Keep in mind that the war, its battles, its wounds, its victories, even the details of triumphant meetings with American soldiers in Koernigsberg and Berlin at the end of the war, are kept very much alive in their memories by the monthly newsletters and daily meetings at their office. They preserve their uniforms, adorned with medals, donning them each year in May to commemorate their experiences. They meet fellow soldiers and work with them in the Association office surrounded by talk of military encounters and walls filled with photographs of members in military uniforms. For them, spanning the fifty-five years that have elapsed since the end of the war may be relatively easy, the intervening years of Soviet life, isolation and propaganda, relatively easy to erase, and the assumption of a position that challenges tenaciously held national ideologies also natural.

I pursued these issues in interviews with veterans and also in more general discussions at the Association office. There were contradictions, there were evasions, and there were clearly conflicts. I spoke with Yetta, now in her eighties, an active member who marches in the Victory Day Parade in Brighton Beach and with the Russian contingent in Manhattan on Memorial Day (she had to leave the Manhattan parade last year because of the heat) where she not only displays her medals on her uniform but also carries a large poster covered with her dead husband's picture and his medals. I asked her about the request for United States Veterans Administration recognition and benefits and she gave me a look of patient indulgence. "They will never get it. They are wasting time. They should be working on other things that are more important, like housing." Housing is her issue. Yury, on the other hand, awarded the prized medal, Hero of the Soviet Union, for his valor at the Battle of Stalingrad and ousted from the Red Army because of

accusations about his “lying” about his Jewish ancestry, was wholeheartedly in support of veterans’ benefits. He feels entitled. Others, Vassily and Sergey, and Nicolai, in Washington Heights, all veterans, do not belong to the Association although they know many members and know its position. Their medals are buried in suitcases or boxes. Vassily expresses the position of all three most articulately: “I have closed that chapter of my life. It’s over.” He wants nothing to do with veterans’ group. And, Andri, although he has very strong identification with the War and the need to preserve the history, even marching proudly in the parade, wants “nothing to do with them. They are always fighting. I’m grateful for everything. Food stamps, we have more than enough. We have enough. If we want caviar, we can have it. I give to my children.” Victor, the Manhattan sub-group leader, a former Ukrainian partisan colonel, provides the most straightforward response to my question. “I do not feel that Soviet veterans are entitled to the same level of recognition as American veterans. After all they served under one banner, we served under another.” But he would like to see the group provided with special health care benefits such as those provided at the United States VA hospitals and clinics. Since he has Medicare and Medicaid benefits already, I asked him if the VA benefits were any better. Although he agreed that they were not necessarily better, the setting apart of treatment services for veterans was what was important rather than coverage of services or access.

The leaders of the Association, Goldberg and Sterling, were difficult to pin down, answering my questions about the petition to the U.S. Veterans’ Administration for benefits in the most general terms: “Yes indeed,” they were aware of the Boston group’s petition. They said that they were, that very day, meeting with affiliated veterans’ groups

to discuss the issue. But they were more evasive about the particulars including whether, as Victor said, the petition included only health care or more far reaching benefits.

The veterans are divided on this issue, at least the particulars. But the desire for recognition by the U.S. Veterans' Administration is clear to those who identify with the Association. Interest in recognition is more than just a desire for acknowledgment that they, as soldiers who fought in the Second World War, share a valid common cause with American veterans. They appear to be looking for legitimization, a Soviet-style certification, a kind of blanket medal of honor awarded by the United States government. They enjoy some of this recognition now, but it is more a token than substance. To gain full legitimacy it would mean that the United States government would also have to somehow transcend those fifty-five years of national ideological cold war conflict and grant their petition.

CONCLUSION

S.N. Eisenstadt, in his essay on multiple modernities, traces the shift in the twentieth century away from movements oriented to the nation-state as ideological and symbolic center, as charismatic locus of major components of the cultural programs of modernity, to movements that are more local in scope. In the last two decades of the twentieth century he sees some particularistic "ethnic" movements, shifting into the international arena and positing far-reaching claims to the re-definition of citizenship and the rights and entitlement connected with it (Eisenstadt 2000:1-29).

This small band of soldiers I have described, émigrés from a fallen nation-state, is an, albeit faint, local reflection of this monumental, global transition. Recognized as

heroes in a state that no longer exists, they erase or forfeit whatever ideological belief that they might have had about their nation's political conflicts with the United States. In a way they compartmentalize those fifty-five years of their post-war lives to create a new ideological link to the United States. They erase those fifty-five years and build on a common war time experience shared with United States veterans. They march alongside U.S. veterans on Memorial Day, they circulate newsletters that promote the wartime bonds between US and USSR soldiers and, in their plea for formal, substantive recognition, they challenge the United States nation-state ideology that dominated cold war relations with the Soviet Union in the past; in the present, they raise fundamental questions about immigrant rights. For the United States Veterans' Administration to grant the Association's request would require the United States government to do what the Soviet veterans have already done—overcome years of conflicted relations between the United States and the Soviet Union—relations in which the very Soviet military officers requesting recognition played a part.

CHAPTER 6 LANGUAGE LESSONS

INTRODUCTION

The cover of a video for sale at Barnes & Noble's proclaims "English for the Real World." The blurb at the bottom reads, "Meet people and make friends, speak confidently on the telephone, go to job interviews, get by at the airport, the bank, the post office, and anywhere." The shelves are overflowing with similar books and videos touting the same social and economic promises. New York City is a multilingual city that celebrates the hundreds of languages and dialects spoken by its inhabitants; it is a city where public schools boast of the number of students whose native language is not English. It is where Korean merchants speak Spanish and Yiddish links Russian-speaking immigrants with American Jews. It is a place where children accompany parents and grandparents to medical clinics to translate intimate medical findings and sad prognostications. Its citizens create new words and phrases by the minute.

Polyglot is everywhere, so omnipresent, so culturally pervasive, that it we frequently misread it, seeing in it only a kind of ethnic boosterism that celebrates diversity. What we miss is its more sober side, its real meaning in terms of the lives of immigrants who speak these exotic languages. Language lies at the center of the non-English-speaking immigrant struggle. It is, in a sense, the 800 pound gorilla in the hiring hall, the school room, the checkout counter. There is nothing new about this. Novels, songs, and jokes about the problem of language acquisition abound. Language skills lie at the center of immigrant vulnerability. Lack of language skills makes exploitation in housing and jobs easier and isolates individuals and groups from the dominant society. Along with skin color, it deprives, it isolates, it demoralizes.

For the elderly Russian Jews, learning to speak English is far more difficult than it is for the young. There is no job, no school pressuring them to learn. The ensuing inability to speak English can have devastating effects on their lives by isolating them from the larger community, frequently even from their own families. They get out less, watch more Russian TV, lose confidence and give up. They do, in fact, become cut off from the "Real World" promised on the video cover. The Russian Jewish elderly are not the only elderly non-English speaking group in New York. They are unique, however, in that they are the largest group of elderly who have entered New York in the 1980's and 1990's already old (65 years and older). And, with the exception of Iran, they also lead the numbers of elderly entering the United States in the 1990's although their number is beginning to decline (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1998:61-63; 1996:55-57). It is this unique characteristic of the Russian Jewish elderly that provides the opportunity to examine how language, a key cultural marker, is acquired by new immigrants of advanced age. They do have one quasi-advantage: they are children of the Revolution who, despite the Ukrainian and Belarusian origin of more than half the cohort members, have grown up speaking Russian as their common language. I examine here not only their personal accounts, particularly their education and exposure to other languages as children, but also how these experiences are carried forward, providing the motivation and desire to learn. I do this against a backdrop of social and political immigration policies that influence the learning of English--governmental and private funds that support language classes, immigration policies that speed or delay the process, and the dynamics of socialization that draw émigrés into language classes. The following section provides a glimpse into the every-day life of learning to speak English. An additional section explores ways in which

cohort members communicate beyond formal language drawing on personal talent and cultural experience to communicate ideas and express feelings.

6.1 LANGUAGE CLASSES

Although I have given them the dull generic name of "Language Classes," they are much more--socialization par excellence, intellectual stimulation, source of fun, dread, success, failure. These classes become meeting places and testing grounds. Yaacov, a widower, whose wife died shortly after their arrival in the United States, and Sonya, a widow whose husband also died in New York, met at a language class and are married now. The day after Elena passed her citizenship exam, there is a flurry of excitement in the crowd at the luncheon club as members gather round to congratulate her. Vladimir, the philosopher, delights in picking holes in the teacher's presentation. In Washington Heights and Brighton Beach, there are at least five or six active classes being taught within the small confines of each neighborhood offering various levels of language skills from basic, highly structured introductory courses to informal conversation groups.

Leonid's English class meets twice a week at a luncheon club across the street from a yeshiva, in Washington Heights. The club has been serving meals and providing recreation services to seniors in the neighborhood since the 1940's. The meals are good, great, in fact. They are more than most can eat at one sitting. Many of the members bring plastic containers so they can take home the equivalent of another meal. Until the Russian Jews began arriving in the 1980's and 1990's, the luncheon club membership was homogeneous, composed of elderly German Jewish immigrants. The large lunch room that I enter today reflects a mix of the old and new. The long paper-covered dining tables

are always filled. But in the rear and to the right, a long table is filled with elderly Russian-speaking diners. Not all Russian Jews sit at these tables. Some are scattered about the rest of the room; I know some. I've interviewed some. Some have passed their citizenship examinations, some have been in the United States for a long time and do not want to sit at the back table with the "others."

I'm on time for the twice a week "language and civics" class taught by Leonid Markov. The class meets at the back table after lunch. It takes a while for all of us to get settled around the table. There is a reason for this. The people who have been dining at our long table in the back corner must first wrap up their left-over lunches, pack their milk, say their good-byes, and move over to the bingo tables or exercise corner, or head on home. Then we must slide a large room divider over to our table to block out the sound. The bingo numbers are shouted, not called, from another corner of the room. Favorite seats are dragged noisily to the table. Leonid sits at the center. David, an elderly German Jewish member, a perennial guest, sits at the end of the table. At the end of each session, his role is to pose a question to the group in English. It's usually a giveaway but the students have so much trouble understanding his heavy New York German accent that they fail the quiz. An attendance list is passed around (required in order to document attendance to support funding), notebooks and workbooks are opened. The workbooks are donated by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a very old and well known agency established by the Jewish American community to assist Jewish refugees of an earlier period. The group is small, no more than eight to twelve; most are regulars, some come and go. This is a serious class. This is where the students must learn how to answer questions put to them by INS officers, how to speak English at least well enough to get

through the citizenship examination. They learn test-taking strategy as well. Leonid instructs them on how to respond to questions when they don't understand a single word that's been said: "Tell them, 'Would you rephrase that please'?" They are fearful, intense about their studies as they huddle close to one another, voicing their fears about failing the examination

Leonid is in his late 70's, an "early" émigré, here in the United States twenty-three years. He is a former English-language teacher from Ukraine where he taught English in a private school. His teaching style is tough, demanding, didactic. He spares no student who arrives unprepared or who dares to speak Russian. He shows up for class wearing a baseball hat, a suit, and sneakers. He carries his class notes in a large, red, white and blue, U.S. Post Office Priority mail envelope. He is in love with American English, particularly the production of new words and expressions (He calls me in the evenings to ask about the meaning of American expressions--slang, rich metaphors picked off the pages of The Washington Post or The New York Times, expressions such as, "pushing the envelope," "below the radar," "Bubba", etc.). He wants to know everything about their origin. He has published twelve books, all about American idioms, written for Americans. He promises to autograph his latest for me. He is equally in love with American politics and mixes this in with his lessons, frequently getting carried away with his political analysis.

The students must learn the structure of United States government. They study in order to get it down pat: the three branches of government, the number of amendments to the Constitution, the number of representatives in the House of Representatives, the capital city of New York State, and on and on. Leonid tells them, "They can ask you anything. Be prepared!" They know "Rudy" Giuliani, they know Pataki and that there

are 435 representatives in the House of Representatives. They know the story of the Boston Tea Party. Leonid holds up a picture of Jefferson and someone shouts out, "Lincoln" (An easy mistake given the quality of the photocopy). It is torture! Leonid has invited me to attend with the consent of the group. They listen to me read material that they must write down. "It's important to get used to the American accents. You never know in advance, whether you'll get an interviewer who has a heavy accent," warns Leonid (in a city where more than half the population speaks a language other than English at home, this can be a challenge). The students love my accent, "You could be an anchor" (an anchor-woman). They turn to me for some of the fine points of pronunciation. "How do you say branch as in branch of government? Is it brench or branch?"

Despite Leonid's attempt at structure and discipline, the real world seeps in. The year 2000 presidential campaign is getting under way, the Social Security debate is emerging, and every minute of Elian Gonzalez' life in Miami is being followed. This seemingly elementary language class frequently bursts into a new-style American focus group, an instant measure of opinions forming among the members of this new immigrant group also swept up in America's pop politics.

They debate Elian Gonzalez' fate. Most agree that he must be returned to his father. One stalwart believes he should be given the opportunity to live in America. All agree with Leonid's solution: the father and son should be given citizenship so they can remain in the United States. Only one person speaks of Cuba as a communist country, and therefore, a place to which this boy should not be returned. They are all grandparents first.

In an uncanny discussion about the electoral college (something Leonid wants to skip over—"Too complicated, they don't need to know."), they anticipate, in a way, the 2000 Presidential election crisis. Michael, the gadfly, usually late, unprepared, unorthodox in his translation, refuses to "skip" the electoral college. He's a mathematician and philosopher now in his late seventies. We're in too deep. Everyone is confused. To Leonid's dismissal, "One single vote really doesn't matter?" Michael insists that it does matter. "Where does my vote go? What happens to it?" To him, it's as real as a Dade County ballot.

Leonid makes his students work hard. He's at the center of English-language studies in Washington Heights where he teaches at least three levels of English. Those at the luncheon club are the newest immigrants. There is a second level, a larger class meeting at the education center, part of a large neighborhood synagogue, also on Bailey Avenue. Here, Leonid sheds his baseball cap for a yarmulke. Most of these students have a better command of basic English, have lived in the neighborhood longer, some traveling up from other Manhattan locations to attend. They range in age from 60 to over 80, with most in their 70's. Here they are not so much interested in the citizenship exam as the desire to learn American English as it is spoken around them, devoid of the British-influenced Russian accent that many of them were exposed to at universities in Moscow and St. Petersburg. They want to get rid of archaic expressions and, above all, they want to speak without a Russian accent (They love Leonid, but can't stand his Russian accent).

This class, more animated, more assured, is reading Catcher in the Rye. They have been working on the first few chapters for a long time now. Everyone gets a chance to read a paragraph or two. Each reader must be able to withstand the corrections in

pronunciation shouted out by Leonid and other class members. They must struggle with Salinger's American slang, a vintage slang in a way, since Salinger wrote the novel in the 1950's. The discussion (the requirement that it must be in English is not so successful if the argument becomes heated), ranges from language itself, such as comparisons with Russian expressions and similarities, to criticism of the book's literary merit. Some detest the book, "It's boring. It was boring even in Russian!" Some are irritated with Holden, the protagonist, "Why does he have to use all those obscenities?" One woman lives downtown and tells us that she visits Central Park everyday. She too, like Holden, visits the lake and watches the ducks and wonders about them and where they go in the winter. There are different levels of aspiration and interest; there are those who come to learn to speak English better; they stick to the text; others, perhaps more comfortable with English, who no longer worry about the citizenship examination, are carried away by the story. A similar group in Brighton Beach has just finished a reading of a Kate Chopin novel and are now working on a mystery story. But again the present intrudes. The instructor, Marsha, mentions that she is still upset about an encounter with the police at her subway station. They drop everything and launch into an animated dissection of the event: "Was this an anti-Semitic or anti-immigrant attack?" "File a complaint." "No, don't. They won't do anything." "What is to be done?"

The "conversation" group stands out at the top of the language class hierarchy. Here there are those who, after five to ten years of study are fairly fluent. Some had studied English in the former Soviet Union and had begun speaking much earlier. They find themselves surrounded, however, by Russian-speaking family and friends with almost no opportunity to practice. This is a problem even in Washington Heights where there are

more opportunities to speak English. The students volunteer for these conversation groups, work out meeting times informally, set their own agendas, paying their own way in some cases. An American English speaker is present to help with pronunciation and idioms. They know their grammar better than most Americans. The group basically leads itself.

Here the English conversation ranges from contemporary events—politics, community gossip, food marketing—shopping for potatoes ("What is I-da-ho? What does it mean?"). I'm the English-speaking guest at the Washington Heights and Brighton Beach classes for a while. In Washington Heights we talk about food shopping locally and entertaining friends at home and movies we've seen. We talk about "American Beauty," a film devastatingly critical of many aspects of American culture. It had just won the Oscar for best picture of the year. They can not understand how Americans can be so critical of what they, as immigrants, value about this country. In their conversations they describe their custom of toasting. "It is an art form. There are those who prepare ahead of time; they must outdo one another; it's like poetry. The Georgians are the best." In Brighton Beach, they too talk local and national politics. It's the summer of the 2000 Presidential campaign. They analyze Senator Lieberman's Vice Presidential nomination, and the chances that a local, first American-born Russian candidate has for getting elected to a council seat in their Brooklyn neighborhood. There are also hilarious stories remembered from the past about communal life and work. There is give and take between the students and me, the American. At meetings, the group willingly answers my questions about health care.

6.2 TWO PROFILES: NOT EVERYONE ATTENDED CLASSES

There were two women who arrived already speaking English fluently:

Yetta, at 21, was translating technical specifications in British aeronautical journals for Soviet engineers during the war. As a young woman, she had made her way from Smolensk to Moscow in the 1930's to enter the University. She was the oldest of eleven children. She had just completed her degree when the war broke out. She dug trenches outside Moscow, trained as a nurse, rescued victims of the bombings in Moscow, translated during the day and supervised workers in the airplane factories at night. After the war, she taught English in the towns and cities throughout the USSR, traveling with her four children as her husband, a colonel in the army, was transferred from post to post. Ironically, none of her four children speaks English with the same facility as their mother. Yetta wonders about this and chastises herself for being too much the teacher and not enough a mother. She and her younger sister, Vera, remain very close. Yet Vera lacks the English-language skills of her sister. Although overflowing in their affection for each other, sparks fly mostly from Vera, as her older sister corrects her English or jumps in to complete her halting sentences. Yetta is 82 years old, Vera is 68. It is this age difference that I think might explain some of the differences in language proficiency. In a sense, Yetta got in under the wire. Her generation made it to the big Soviet universities in the 1930's when opportunities opened up for those without connections or privilege. It was a time of major upheaval in education as members of the intelligentsia, students and faculty, were kicked out of universities. Hard work, academic achievement, and membership in the Komsomol became the new criteria. Yetta met them all. She graduated just as all this

shut down for the following generation. Years of education were lost to the turmoil of war and its aftermath. Although educational openness was restored, it lacked the free and exciting appeal of the post-Revolutionary, pre-World War II period (Fitzpatrick 1978:113).

Rita was the only other émigré in the cohort who entered the United States with a good command of English. Her life was very different from Yetta's, especially the early years. From childhood she was immersed in a rich atmosphere of languages. Her mother had come from an aristocratic family in Poland where German was the language of the intelligentsia. Rita's first language was German, and then Georgian, and then Russian as the schools in Tblisi, Georgia, where she lived, converted in the 1930's to the language of the motherland. Although she was educated as a medical doctor and practiced as a pediatrician, her passion was literature. Her conversation is filled with literary references. She has read classics in two and three languages. During the long years in Moscow while she and her husband waited for permission to leave (they were "refused" permission to leave the country for ten years), they studied English, exchanging English lessons with an elderly retired English teacher for shopping, cooking, and a shared meal. On the day of the lesson, Rita would do her marketing before arriving with her husband at the teacher's apartment. The lessons would begin, Rita going first. Once her lesson was completed, her husband's would begin. During his lesson, Rita would be in the kitchen preparing the dinner (she was a much admired Georgian cook). Dinner was ready by the time her husband's lesson was over. They'd all sit down to a congenial meal. "Read Agatha Christie," is her advice to those struggling with the language. "It's easy, the words, the sentences. And, I watch the 'soaps.' My daughter told me I must do this to learn the

language." And that she does. There is no reaching her between the hours of one and four in the afternoon. Her English is elegant, sprinkled with expressions that one might run across in English novels and sometimes very American, right out of the "soaps." She reports one day to me that her German is coming back. "I haven't spoken it all these years. I don't know why." I ask her if it might be due to the Greene brothers, German immigrants whom she meets frequently in the Park. "No, no, we always speak English. Maybe it's something that comes with age." Her husband has been a patient in the nursing home around the corner for the past year. He has advanced Alzheimer's disease. She tells me that he is no longer speaking Russian or English. He is speaking French, an earlier language for him too.

In a sense Yetta and Rita represent two competing trajectories that merged in the post-Revolutionary period. There was a leveling for both women, Yetta achieved a level of education unreachable to the previous generations in her family and Rita lost assured opportunities and the enriched life of her parents. Rita retains an aristocratic elegance that Yetta does not have. But this is surface, just as Brighton Beach and Washington Heights present different surface images—one brash and noisy, the other quiet, almost pastoral. Yet Yetta and Rita are also very much alike. Their approach to language goes beyond citizenship requirements, beyond cultural display. Both use language in a utilitarian way. Yetta is fully engaged in the life of her children and community, using her facility with English to negotiate conflicts and benefits and proclaim causes. Rita, quite ill now with cancer, steps outside her Russian-speaking community to engage the larger community of English-speaking neighbors.

6.3 THE CITIZENSHIP EXAM: LANGUAGE: BARRIER OR INCENTIVE?

Most of the elderly émigrés of both neighborhoods attend language classes. Some attend the basic course. Others take on the more sophisticated courses. Those who attend the elementary classes, clearly are there to learn enough English to pass the INS examination required for citizenship. "The EXAM," preparing for it, waiting to be called for it, and waiting, and waiting; the delays, the delays and then the examination; and then, more waiting. Everyone is afraid of failing and yet I meet no one who has. The requirement itself for the elderly to be English-speaking is complained about. "Why, why must this be so?" There are stories about those elderly with memory problems and physical and mental conditions who can't possibly pass an examination.

These are the ones who study the HIAS-issue workbook and come to class well prepared. They shout out the answers to the civics questions and compete with others to read their prepared English sentences. They frequently voice their feelings of dread and anxiety about passing the test. They tell me about forgetting words learned just the day before. They fear that their very nervousness will lead to failure. Many of their families are in the neighborhood but not living with them. So they are not exposed on a daily basis to even rudimentary communication in English spoken by their children and grandchildren who are rapidly mastering the language. There is, of course, visiting and after-school child care but their children usually revert to Russian to speak with them. There is little expectation coming from others for them to learn English. Aside from the citizenship exam, there is little incentive.

A 1994 law passed by Congress requires the INS to accommodate immigrants disabled by conditions like Alzheimer's disease, mental retardation and neurological damage due to strokes. This allowance, the disability waiver, as it is called, addresses many of the problems confronted by the elderly. The I.N.S., however has been slow in implementing the legislation, admitting openly that they have failed to provide guidance to its officers, those who conduct the interviews. One agency official explained that the main problem in administering the disability waiver program is that field employees are asked to make judgments about medical or developmental issues that are rarely clear-cut. One official explained it this way: "Most of the field employees have a law enforcement background, no medical training, and are naturally cautious when reviewing immigration applications, more attuned to fraud detection than sensitive to disabilities (Sachs 1999:B8).

It was not until 1997 that the I.N.S. actually issued administrative regulations concerning the disability waiver. Class action suits in Florida and California have been brought by immigrants, accusing the I.N.S. of arbitrarily rejecting waiver applications and rejecting out of hand any that mention age-related illnesses, such as dementia and depression. A survey conducted by the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella organization for about 200 advocacy groups, found that out of 300 to 400 applications submitted in September 1999, only 1 to 2% were approved. Horror stories circulate, recounting rejections of medical documents by examiners and scoldings, such as, "In this country we speak English. There are always some of you who try to get the easy way out." One woman's request for a waiver was thrown out: "Find a 'real doctor, not a Russian.'" (Sachs 1999:B8).

Given the long drawn out waiting periods for examination dates, these horror stories have time to percolate through the expectant community, feeding anxiety. By this time the applicants have learned their civics well but their greatest fear remains: they are afraid that they will get an examiner with a heavy accent whom they will not be able to understand. In some cases, this leads ironically to efforts to avoid the examination altogether by requesting a medical waiver for which they don't qualify, thereby confirming the convictions of those who oppose medical waivers. A solution would be to eliminate the language requirement for the elderly altogether. This would be in keeping with I.N.S. regulations regarding non-English speaking immigrants who have grown old in this country: The English literacy requirement is waived for applicants over 50 years of age who have been permanent residents for at least twenty years and for applicants over the age of 55 who have been permanent residents for at least 15 years. Unfortunately, the elderly Soviets do not have the luxury of this time. A New York City congressman, Jerrold Nadler, proposed legislation in 1998 to change the residency requirement to allow for the literacy waiver, but it did not pass. Those opposed, argued that English was necessary in order to be an effective voter. They suggest that it would be better to remove the citizenship requirement in order for the elderly to receive benefits (Kratovich 2001:3).

Several of the cohort members saw the opportunity to be taped by me in an interview, as an additional way to prepare for the citizenship examination. Sophia, who passed her exam in record time, was running from one classroom to another to prepare. She saw in this taped interview an opportunity to try out her English. The wife of another applicant, whose examination date was approaching, was afraid that her husband would fail. "He forgets everything." He agreed to be interviewed at her insistence. Actually, in

the interview, he expressed in English a sophisticated analysis of his experiences and beliefs about anti-Semitism, nationalism, and religion. I copied the tapes and he used them to listen to himself. His wife passed, and he passed.

If passing the examination can be counted as a valid indicator of English language proficiency then cohort members in the study were highly successful. Of the 34 interviewed, 26 were already citizens. Time in the United States was a key factor. The required period of residence in order to be eligible for citizenship is five years. The émigrés who were already citizens had been in the United States for five years, but not much longer than that. Two thirds had left the former Soviet Union in the 1990's. The remaining eight were, without exception, in the United States for less than five years. All but one in this group were actively pursuing citizenship. The exception was a 92 year old former pianist who had been in the United States for two years.. She told me that she would not pursue citizenship

Approximately one-half of the cohort members had already completed their language courses and passed their citizenship examination before I interviewed them. The remainder were still attending classes, most in basic English language skills (two passed the INS exam shortly after I interviewed them). Some were motivated beyond merely getting their citizenship: Leo's success in representing Soviet Holocaust survivors in the United States depended upon his ability to communicate with key contacts in the United States and get published; Eugenia, at the center of a wide network of Russian musicians wanted to expand her circle to the larger American community. Others without specific goals but still highly motivated struggled against physical disabilities and memory problems.

Although all language classes in the two neighborhoods continue to draw new students, many drop formal classes once they pass the citizenship exam. Among people I interviewed in both communities, this included all the men, nearly a third of the sample, and a number of the women. There were lapses, not just in Brighton Beach where the lure of easy Russian conversation on the boardwalk or the markets is almost irresistible. Those interviewed in Washington Heights also had lost the English they had learned. There were several who continued to use their knowledge of Yiddish as a communication bridge with Jewish American friends. A small core group carries on in both communities, all women, in the "conversation groups." They are good friends and share common interests. The Brighton Beach group swims together in the morning. The Washington Heights group strolls in the Park together. Both are intensely interested in the New York City cultural events, visiting museums and concert halls in Manhattan. A late night and a trip home on the subway are no barrier.

In a way, their dedicated study of English is one more manifestation of their pursuit of high culture. In her survey of the social and economic adjustment of Soviet women in the United States (1988), Rita James Simon considers a stream of historical events in the Soviet Union affecting women beginning in the immediate post-revolutionary period and continuing on through the 1980's. For older women, events in the post-Revolutionary and the pre and post-World War II periods were significant, events that only indirectly influenced younger Soviet women. Many of the older women entered their adult years on the wave of intellectual idealism; some were the first women in their families to enter the university and, as shifts in membership in the intelligentsia occurred, they were able to enter the intelligentsia class, a class having particular cultural and

political meaning in the former Soviet Union (There were many definitions of the intelligentsia provided by cohort members, ranging from rigid educational and family pedigrees to no education at all but a deep spiritual commitment to humanitarian values.). A characteristic of the Russian intelligentsia cited by Simon (1986:81) is its members' pride in their non-worldly pursuits and their intellectual independence. Women who came of age during this time also lived through the lost promises and contradictions of Soviet life. Although most achieved high levels of academic and professional achievement, they continued to work the double shift and to earn incomes a third less than men's (Simon 1986:77,79; Clements 1991:275). Simon (1988) provides an example of "female protection—work rules in a brewery limited the amount of barley a woman could lift in one shovelful but still required her to shovel 15 to 16 tons of barley a day (1988:78). Unlike younger Soviet women émigrés, the women I interviewed had reached retirement age by the time they arrived in the United States. They did not have to enter a job market where their skills and educational preparation were less valued economically and culturally than in the Soviet Union. Instead the majority could look back on successful careers, while taking advantage of their leisure time and accessible cultural programs to pursue intellectual pleasure, long delayed. Language, I suspect, was one of them.

The habit of learning, developed early in life can explain the motivation and success that most of the Soviet elderly achieve in learning to speak English, even if it is only enough to pass the citizenship examination. In speaking about their lives, many took time to dwell on academic accomplishments. Some were born into elite Jewish families in which high academic achievement was expected; others, without a hope in the world

before the Revolution, became the first generation to sweep through the universities in the 1930's and 1940's. As they sit around tables or at desks lined up in Yeshiva classrooms, they are eager to be challenged, threatened and scared perhaps, about making fools of themselves as they stumble over the tough pronunciations, but also comfortable and triumphant.

There is also something about the intensity of the participation taking place within the classroom itself. There is a competitive edge—Leonid's dogmatic insistence on discipline, the frequent undisciplined eruptions of opinion, the side remarks, the mutual support, the obvious cheating, the sheer novelty and triumph of learning—that seems to bind and sustain them in a commitment to the project of learning a new language in a strange land. And, unlike their children who are rushed on by the imperatives of job-searching and career-building, they have the time as elders to drift off on tangents, to examine important and even some trivial aspects of the American culture. In their transformation from Russian to American citizenship, the language classes become workshops for absorbing and practicing American cultural ways.

In a sense, there is no break in continuity here, rather there is a relatively easy transition from a way of life in the former Soviet Union that rewarded learning and intellectual curiosity, to an American schoolroom setting that holds out the same promise. Rather than the discontinuity encountered by most immigrants in their struggle to learn a language, the cohort members find familiar challenges.

The requirement created by U.S. immigration policy, that they must be able to speak and understand and write English, becomes a challenge rather than an unreasonable barrier. They combine their privileged positions as refugees, recipients of generous

government and private funding with their past success in education to enhance their learning; they make friends; they secure their benefits; they solidify their positions as citizens.

6.4 BEYOND LANGUAGE

Beyond formal language classes, cohort members struggling with the demands of language and profound change in their lives as aging émigrés, turn to literature, poetry, music, and painting as ways to express ideas and feelings that go beyond words. They draw on personal talent exercised over lifetimes of music making, writing, the visual arts and absorption in the riches of Russian literature, to communicate ideas and feelings. Many interspersed their narratives with references to Russian literature to make a point or to explain something that was too complex. I asked Tatyana once about the war in Chechnya. She began to respond, “Chechnya will not go away. There is a long, long history. It won’t be easily solved.” But then she stopped and said, “Read Tolstoy, ‘The Cossacks.’ You’ll understand Chechnya.” Alexandra too, turned to Chekhov to explain the deep bitterness that she felt toward her own people. She was telling me about her last years in Moscow. She spoke about a country house that she and her husband owned outside Moscow. “It was burned to the ground.” She went on to comment, “Things will never, never get better. There is such envy. If one person has a good house, the envier in another place will build his own good house. But in Russia, they tear it down. Read Chekhov’s ‘New Dacha.’” There were also poets. Every edition of the Veterans’ Newsletter contained at least one commemorative poem; one of Ena’s eulogists was a

poet; and Yetta's sister is a musician-song writer, the author of what has become a traditional Brighton Beach song at public gatherings among Russian-speaking immigrants.

Tatyana's husband, an architect before his retirement, took up painting after a series of critical illnesses that left him without speech and little memory. His painting began in response to Tatyana's complaint that the walls of their apartment were so stark and her suggestion that he fill the walls with paintings (the core of her work as a psychiatrist dealt with the psychological aspects of physical illnesses. She would have you believe that she just happened to want the walls decorated). The living room entrance, hallway and bedroom of their apartment are covered with his paintings. He works with gouache, painted on paper cartons and framed with gold wrapping paper. An occasional frame is obtained from a flea market or a gift from a friend. The works are filled with mythological representations, playful manipulations of myth and musical themes. In a series of paintings entitled, "The Family of Vases," there is more emphasis on spiritual representation—ghostly forms and plays on religious symbolism. He has named (or Tatyana has named for him) one very moving painting, "The Last Performance." In it are carnival figures dancing about a dark curtain where a black skull is barely visible. Tatyana says, "This last painting is not finished yet. He keeps working on it." Here is sustained liminality par excellence as Myerhoff describes it (1984), its drama, its uncertainty, its anomie, unleashed in an intensely creative gesture. The rich creative expression of uncertainty about the meaning of life and fear of impending death reflected in this painting provides a deeply moving glimpse of the potential creative energy of the elderly. Although his paintings reveal his Russian origins—Chagall-like ghostly forms haunt the frames—they express universal human questions.

Where literature and painting serve personal expression, music reaches out, drawing in others and creating instant communities of understanding. In New York City, music permeates neighborhoods and drifts through the tunnels and stations along subway routes, in an out of Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. Boom boxes are out, live music is in. Small and large groups of people, immigrants and non-immigrants, are drawn into immediate communication as they listen to the music, crossing the barriers of language, creating moments of untainted joy and communion. Now, as the music makers for their community, elderly émigré musicians are beginning, it seems, to provide the source for emerging ritual. The stirring music in the bandshell at the Victory Day ceremony in May 2000, suggested some of this power to stimulate deep emotional responses and upheaval, and an emerging group identity shrouded in an old patriotism.

Music in the Soviet Union continued after the Revolution. Conservatories, ballet companies and symphonies continued to flourish. In fact, state-sponsored youth programs fostered musical education, promoted competition, and recruited and developed talent. But, as in all the arts during the Soviet era, musical composition and performance were controlled by the state. A number of the cohort members played music under these restrictions. None complained. Rina's husband, the first violinist for the Moscow Symphony, pulled out old programs from international tours. Julia, a musician, the oldest member of the émigré cohort, was born three years after George Balanchine. Balanchine emigrated to the United States in 1924 where he, free of restraint, created a revolution in dance. Julia stayed behind in a country filled with beautiful music but destined for the next seventy years to have its musical soul and creativity deadened by state control. The year that George Balanchine left for the United States, she graduated from a state conservatory

with a diploma in teaching and performance. She worked for years in the Cultural Center, a part of the Young Pioneers, and later in a unit of the Komsomol, setting up cultural activities, directing performances and teaching music. As we sat on a bench overlooking the Hudson River one chilly evening at sunset, she sang for us, and talked about her favorite composers. She talked about Van Cliburn's triumph in Moscow in the 1950's and how they all loved him.

Many elderly émigrés who have settled in New York City are violinists, pianists, and conductors. They arrive with their instruments and instantly join a welcoming circle of fellow musicians who move together in social circles about New York and New Jersey. They play, they sing together in outdoor Brooklyn bandshells, Carnegie Hall, churches, temples, "Y's". They perform with community groups composed of old and young émigrés and native musicians. They ride uptown to Washington Heights on the A train in the late hours of the night, mixing with the older, established musicians in the neighborhood traveling home after their downtown gigs.

Rina is at the center of a large Brighton Beach classical musician set whose members reach as far as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Her home is the stopping off place for visiting musicians. Rina's husband was the young boy who carried his violin in his rucksack as he walked from a small village in Ukraine to Uzbekistan at the start of the war. He has never stopped playing. "I played in the Moscow Symphony Orchestra right up to the day I left Moscow, and resumed playing almost the day I arrived in the United States." Rina's sister is a former director of the Bolshoi Opera, a woman in her late seventies, elegantly dressed, exotic, regal, but not above moving furniture about the stage as the young look on. To attend a concert with Rita is to become part of a joyous celebration. It begins in the

lobby of the concert hall as friends arrive. She glows! She is dressed, bejeweled, her silver hair coifed (one of the few Russian women of her age who does not “henna” her hair). The celebration continues as composers and conductors, friends flow in and out of her circle.

In New York and within the Soviet immigrant community, one circle intersects with another. At the Victory Day celebration of 2000 in Brighton Beach, players from the Bolshoi and the Moscow Symphony join with a folk/pop circle led by Yetta and her sister Leah who are active at less formal events in the community. Yetta and Leah sing medleys of Russian and Yiddish folk songs, and, of course, American ballads. Leah also plays the violin. (Before the outbreak of World War II, she had been identified at school as a talented musician, given a violin and provided formal lessons for a short while. She practiced in the outhouse since there were seven children and parents living in a one-room hut on the outskirts of Smolensk). Although her formal education was cut short by the war, she plays very well and loves to entertain.

Yetta and Leah are leading participants at the “Y”’s Shabbat ceremony every Friday, dominating the performance, comfortable with the microphone, singing, dancing, assisting with the ritual ceremony, at times upstaging other more experienced religious leaders. Both are accomplished camerawomen, always with still camera or camcorder in hand, filming everything in sight. I notice that there are very few Russian-speaking members attending. Most are older members of the “Y”, East European Jews from an earlier period, an earlier migration. The two sisters draw others in making connections with American Jews in Brighton Beach without surrendering the Russianness of their music or their own disinterest in things religious. Yetta and her sister cross into adjoining

neighborhoods, performing in Bensonhurst, Manhattan Beach, Sheepshead Bay, using their music, their joy and a smattering of Yiddish, to make places for themselves. They sing in any chorus that will have them and they sing for all occasions—at Battery Park to celebrate Soviet immigration, at the Holocaust Memorial ceremonies in Manhattan Beach.

Not all émigrés brought with them this rich cultural heritage. But at least a third of the cohort members were actively engaged in and used these art forms as ingredients in the structuring and expression of meaning in their lives. Vassily was not a musician or a poet or painter. But when I asked him toward the end of my interview what he missed most about his homeland, he said, “I miss the music, the literature, the culture, but not the people.”

As elderly Russian Jews, their taste in music seemed more embedded in pre-Soviet times—folk and classical music—than that of their children and grandchildren. And they are more likely than a number of younger people to turn out on a summer evening for a concert at the oceanfront band shell bordering Coney Island and Brighton Beach. Free concerts were the norm in Soviet Union. The July 2000 Seaside Bandshell program invited people to a Russian International Festival of Hits. The New York Philharmonic it is not, but the turnout is good. The elderly Soviets arrive with their beach chairs and find places for themselves on the edges of the large field. In the center of the field, directly in front of the stage, there is a wide expanse of wooden chairs, perhaps five hundred, most of them empty. They are fenced off for those who are willing to pay. Few pay, very few. What appears to be a public concert, one that most of the émigrés, as former Soviets are used to, is actually a fund raiser for the local political leader. The sponsors of the event are an array of national and local businesses who announce their largesse with a display of

large billboard-size posters and pennants draping the stage. As the concert begins, the audience sits in a bizarre pattern, distributed along the outer edges of the field, standing or sitting in beach chairs or on benches, enclosing the unoccupied chairs at the center. No one complains. To top it off, the political aides who control the entrance gate, pass a bag through the crowd requesting donations to the election campaign of the politician who sponsored the event. Most just pass the bag along. They go home and complain the next day to their councilman. At the next concert, there are no more chairs in the center of the field. They have the field to themselves.

Expression beyond language, in song, literature and painting, is less about acquiring new knowledge, mastering a new skill, as the cohort members do in their language classes; it is more about giving new voice to what they have brought with them and finding new ways to express, with as much depth and clarity, the range of emotional experience growing out of their situation as elderly immigrants. They evoke the past, fuse the past and present, create ritual, contemplate the future. They confront death in a shadowy painting, use music to forge connections with strangers, and they find pleasure in an evening of music. They transform themselves in the process.

This chapter has attempted to capture the cohort members as they search for and shape new identities; first, in concrete terms, detailing the learning of a new language, acquiring knowledge and practice in a new culture; and second, in less concrete terms, it traces the work of imagination and artistic expression in forging past with present. Old

habits of learning and still vibrant talents and desires provide the material for transformation.

CHAPTER 7 A CASE OF BIAS: COMMUNITY PROFILING? ANTI-SEMITISM? ANTI-IMMIGRATION? GENDER BIAS? -YETTA'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE

INTRODUCTION

As I have already noted, Russian Jewish émigrés occupied a privileged position among immigrant groups who entered the United States in the late twentieth century. Their refugee status entitled them to immediate benefits such as direct cash payments and health insurance coverage. The support of well established social agencies in locating housing and finding jobs eased their settlement. As white European immigrants, they stood out among their fellow immigrants who had to confront, in addition to a formidable array of obstacles, discrimination based on skin color. Unlike many Afro-Caribbean immigrants who were stunned by their first encounter with American racism, the Russian Jews were amazed to find a lack of discrimination against them as Jews. They were welcomed into a comfortable white Euro-American society. In fact, their emigration to the United States had, in a number of ways, reversed inequalities that had dominated their lives in the former Soviet Union, particularly their identity as Jews. In the Former Soviet Union, their national identity, documented on their passports, was Jewish, not Russian. In the United States, immigration officials, census takers, social agencies referred to them, at least up to the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, as Soviets in order to deal with their diverse origins. In everyday life, in the neighborhood, in the media, they are Russians.

They bring with them another advantage. They are urban folk, the majority from the Former Soviet Union's major cities—Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Odessa. They are familiar with crowded housing, urban conflict, the police, and they know brutality.

They know the downside of city living, and are, if not comfortable, inured to its stresses. They are experienced urban dwellers, especially the elderly, after near lifetimes of putting up with inconveniences, inequities, conflicts, of making deals in the interest of small comforts. They have stood in line. Their stories are filled with social and political accommodations: a mother's night-long stand in a line to purchase her sons first suit; the zealous guarding in a communal apartment of one's own matches to light the water heater in the bathroom; keeping quiet about a father's persecution during the 1930's; avoiding Communist Party membership without standing out.

On the other hand, there were no accounts in their individual stories of public confrontation or protest. Here and there, there was an individual effort to take on a party official. And later, with the thaw, their children began to protest, drawing their parents into their efforts to leave the country. But as one man told me, after his own imprisonment, his fathers death in a labor camp outside Moscow, and his step-father's death before a firing squad, he finally did what his mother told him, "Keep your mouth shut."

7.1 BACKGROUND

One day toward the end of my interview with Yetta in her apartment, she told me about her family's encounter with the New York City Police on the beachfront terrace of a Brighton Beach club where they were celebrating a family birthday. She handed me a video that she and her sister, with the help of a journalist friend in the émigré community, had made the day after the confrontation. (It is not surprising that she recorded the event on video. I attended many social gatherings with her where she and her sister were never

without their cameras and the camcorder. They filmed everything. But this is not to say that it was done without thought of its implications. Yetta was a well-known activist who was well aware of the value of documentation.). She had entitled the film, "Police Brutality." She said, "You can see for yourself." The story demonstrates the complex ways in which actors bearing immigrant histories intersect with local conditions in the places where they settle, to shape conflicts and find resolutions that are sometimes satisfactory, sometimes mistaken, and sometimes ambiguous. Issues of anti-Semitism and anti-immigration arise; inter- and intra-neighborhood tensions, some based on community profiling, surface; gender enters the mix.

7.2 THE VIDEO ACCOUNT

The documentary runs about 45 minutes. The title on the battered plastic holder reads, "Police Brutality." It is the typical family video, shot on a camcorder, out of focus most of the time, jumpy, fragmented, but with a strong story line. Loud Russian nightclub music made brassier by the hollow sound of the cheap equipment, plays in the background. The voice of the narrator introduces the story which follows a "20-20" style format. The first scene takes place in his office in Brighton Beach on the day following the family's release from jail after an over-night confinement. Yetta's daughters, Lydia and Rachel, one of her sons and her two sons-in-law are lined up facing the camera. A voice-over tells the story as the camera focuses in on each family member. The camera pans the line-up, lingering on sutured lacerations, swollen eyes, abdominal and upper back contusions. The camera moves in providing close-ups as the narrator asks questions, each person having an opportunity to respond, mostly in Russian, translated into English. Tears

flow as interruptions and corrections are shouted out by other family members waiting their turn. More tears flow as the stories continue. Yetta's voice, either as translator or outraged, grieving mother, is heard throughout. The injury scenes are repeated over and over, at first, serving as an introduction, then repeated as each member gives an individual account with more close-ups, and then, repeated again at the conclusion.

The narrator tells the story in a calm manner and it is repeated by the victims, each version keeping to the basic facts and laced with expressions of hurt, outrage and excitement. Yetta's account, told to me before showing me the video, fills in the details: She and her husband, Ari, were gathered with family and friends at a well known Brighton Beach restaurant to celebrate their grandchild's birthday. This was a big celebration. It was the second of two parties thrown by her son, one in Queens for the other side of the family and then this, in Brooklyn. Yetta's husband, her four children, Sasha, the oldest, Michael, her second son and her twin daughters, Lydia and Rachel, were there. Spouses, more children and grandchildren, Yetta's sister, her husband, and many friends were also guests. The restaurant was alive with dancing, live music, a sumptuous feast; a bottle of vodka and brandy stood on every table.

The following is Yetta's account, delivered in the present tense. Although all this took place four years ago, she continues to experience it in real time.

7.3 YETTA'S ACCOUNT:

The trouble begins when Yetta's son and son-in-law step outside on the deck, overlooking the ocean and boardwalk, for a smoke. They begin to argue. Sasha, who has been in the United States for over twenty years claims that in America it is easy to get a

job. His brother-in-law, in the United States for less time, nine years, and out of work, argues that this is not the case. Their voices are loud, they have been drinking. Yetta doesn't deny that. They are spotted by a plainclothes policeman who is walking along the boardwalk. He alerts other policemen who proceed to the restaurant deck. Neither of the men understands much English. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding. Yetta says that she still doesn't know what triggered the conflict. One of the two men is thrown to the ground. The older brother who does speak English steps out on the deck. He is outraged when he sees what is happening, "What is going on here? What are you doing?" He, too, is attacked by the police, says Yetta. A daughter and daughter-in-law join in. Police cars—one, two, three, with whopping sirens—pull into the curb at the restaurant and more police rush to the deck. There is shouting and still no indication of what is happening and why. The music inside has stopped. Yetta rushes out, she tells me. "Oh you should see! My children, my Lydia, beaten, her eyes, my son-in-law in handcuffs, my son also. They had been beaten. There are policemen in uniform, more of them. They are Irish cops. My family, my family! They take them away, four of them, in police cars with sirens, to the police station. They will not let my son go to the bathroom. He's handcuffed to a chair. All of them are too hurt and the police take them to the Emergency Room at Coney Island Hospital where they must be treated. They receive stitches."

The final scenes of the video take place on the boardwalk possibly a week later. The narrator is standing among a number of elders, mostly men at a well known gathering place on the boardwalk, where it has been widened and sheltered from the sun. The benches and tables are crowded with chess players and on-lookers all gathered round the microphone responding to the narrator's questions and the camera. Some are calm, others

excited, but all agree with the family's position. They speak of violence by the police, some mention anti-Semitism. The word, "brutality" (in Russian), is frequently spoken. The scene moves back to the narrator, standing alone on the boardwalk. He sums up the story, repeats the family's outrage, referring again to the family's account (the close-ups of the family's injuries are run again). A plea for justice is made and the film comes to an end

Yetta tells me of the aftermath. On behalf of her children, Yetta found and hired a lawyer. Her son-in-law, Daniel, put up the money for the legal fees—over \$1,000, money he had just been awarded in another case involving injuries. They filed a formal complaint against the police. There was a hearing at Police Headquarters in downtown Manhattan. The entire family testified and the video was shown. They won. The Board ruled in favor of the family awarding them \$25,000 in damages. Yetta's daughter, however, the principal victim (Yetta claims that the injuries she received in this police attack caused her to develop multiple sclerosis), refused to accept the money claiming that it did not nearly make up for her and her family's injuries. Although the family agreed with her, they also listened to the lawyer who advised them that they would risk losing everything, and that it was very unlikely that the amount would be raised. They urged Lydia to accept. She refused. With that, the offer was taken back. They lost \$25,000, along with the money that Daniel had put up for the lawyer (Daniel refused to override his wife's decision).

There was satisfaction of another kind, however. The police who were involved were never seen again in that precinct. Yetta knows that one or two were re-assigned to another police station. She doesn't know about the others. There is no question in her mind that the attack was unprovoked and the result of anti-Semitism. She refers to "white

and black cops” but more specifically, to “Irish cops.” She speaks of other incidents.

When I ask her about Mafiya-police conflicts and perhaps, over-vigilance by the police because of the Mafiya presence in Brighton Beach, she replies, “No. That is not a factor, it is more that they are poor Jews and immigrants and it's the same as it was in Russia, the ‘politzi.’” (The Mafiya is the Russian equivalent of the Mafia, operating independently as an international crime syndicate. This is discussed later in the chapter).

7.4 ANOTHER ACCOUNT, ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE? MILA’S STORY

Another woman, Mila, tells a similar story which, although less dramatic, might be more typical of everyday Russian resident-police urban encounters. Mila is a younger, cooler, sophisticated Russian Jewish émigré of the 1970's, a fluent speaker of English on the faculty of a community college where she teaches English Language and Russian Studies. She lives in Midwood, a greener, more comfortable Brooklyn neighborhood at one time heavily populated by American Jews but increasingly inhabited by young middle class Russian Jewish émigrés.

She begins: “I was rushing for the train on my way to work in the morning.” Her subway stop is Kings Highway, a busy station on the “Q” line, used by the Midwood neighborhood. “My metrocard had expired, so I tossed it into a garbage bin, a big dumpster, outside the station, as I entered. I missed the overflowing bin and the card slipped to the ground. I was rushing to buy another card and was only vaguely aware that the card hadn’t gone into the dumpster. As I started through the turnstile, I was grabbed on both sides by two plainclothes policemen who led me over to the side of the station. They began to question me about myself and my identity without even telling me what I

had done or why they had stopped me. They asked for my ID card and wanted to know where I worked. I told them where I taught. They looked at me and one of them said, 'You don't look like a teacher. Why are you going this way if you work at the college? (the college is in the other direction). She doesn't even know the direction to Brighton Beach.' He leered at me. Every time I opened my mouth to explain, they ignored me. They took out handcuffs and dangled them in front of me. They finally gave me a summons for littering."

She tells this story to a group of about ten students in an English Language class. The students were full of speculation about what and why this happened. Mila tells them that her husband said that she talked up too much. "Not like Americans. They keep their mouths shut. They know about police and that it's best not to talk." Most of the students are not concerned about the police request to see her ID before even informing her about the reason for stopping her. Some see in it anti-Semitism, others, more as anti-immigrant sentiment. Mila, in the United States longer, sees it as more anti-immigrant.

The encounter had taken place on March 7, 2000, the day after a jury decision was announced in a highly publicized case of police brutality, the Abner Louima case, an incident that took place in a radically different Haitian neighborhood just five short subway stations away from Midwood. A week later, Mila had not decided whether she would file a complaint with the Civilian Complaint Review Board. She had discussed it at home with her husband and they were uncertain. The students, all in their 60' and 70's, said that yes, she must do so, but they were not optimistic that anything would be done.

7.5 A SEARCH FOR UNDERSTANDING

Both victims attribute the abuse to anti-Semitism, and/or anti-immigrant sentiment on the part of the police. But is there more to it than that? Are Yetta and Mila and others missing other forces at play in the community? Are they relying on past experiences of anti-Semitism, embedded in their early lives, to explain other forms of prejudice and exploitation? Do they misrecognize forces that operate independently or in conjunction with the old forms of anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant feelings? A closer look suggests a more nuanced explanation, taking into consideration gender, ethnicity/race, and immigration disguised under an elaborate display of community ethnicity and crime.

Yetta's account raises questions about flamboyant family celebrations—music and vodka and lavish restaurant entertainment—that to some border on and become synonymous with crime. Do police officers focus on restaurant and night club celebration in their vigilance about organized crime and does this lead to repression and abuse of community residents—a kind of trigger-happy response to ethnicity in the name of crime prevention? Does being Russian mean being a criminal or at least complicit in Mafiya activities? Mila's story suggests elements of gender bias—the ogling policemen, the derisive comments. The incident, occurring so quickly on the heels of the Louima case, also suggests something other than anti-Semitism and something more complicated than anti-immigrant feelings. Perhaps the incident reflects re-directed anger, from race to immigrant, directed at white immigrant communities (black neighborhoods, for the interim, off limits).

7.6 COMMUNITY PROFILING: THE RUSSIAN MAFIYA

Yetta lives in Brighton Beach which has become infamous as the center of the Russian Mafiya. Although not home to the Russian Mafiya bigwigs at this point, many of their activities originate in Brighton Beach and the neighborhood serves as a recruiting ground for workers. Crime leaders are heavily invested in the area, particularly in numerous Russian-style night clubs. The neighborhood has been the scene of gangster-style killings. The organization's local activities in Brooklyn, New York, nationally, and internationally are well documented by police enforcement agencies throughout the world. The "Russian Mafiya," is frequently compared to the Italian Mafia in terms of brutality, brains and power. It wins on all counts, especially for its ruthlessness. Its international network of illegal operations is far more extensive, reaching into Latin America, Eastern Europe, North America, and of course, Israel. Robert I. Friedman, a journalist who has reported on Russian Mafiya activities, provides a dramatic example in the story he tells of the Mafiya's failed but boldly imaginative and scary plan to sell a nuclear submarine, smuggled out of Murmansk in Russia, to Colombian drug dealers for use in drug shipments (Friedman 2000:xii).

None of this complex criminal activity, however, shows up in the elderly social circles in which I traveled during a year of fieldwork in Brighton Beach. Few of those I interviewed talked about the Russian Mafiya in anything but the most general terms. The Mafiya became the topic of conversation at a weekly "English conversation" group which I had been attending. I had volunteered to attend meetings over the summer to help out with their English conversation skills. The topics were open-ended and conversation flowed. The Mafiya came up when one of the group members talked of her suspicions

about a family who lived in her apartment building who had disappeared in the middle of the night. She remembered hearing fighting at all hours, the face of a young, unhappy wife seen in the laundry room downstairs, tears, followed by this secret move-out in the middle of the night. Each of the four women in the conversation group attributed the husband's behavior to his Mafiya connections rather than to domestic conflict. But these same women had no knowledge or other first-hand experience with Mafiya types. Most of what I heard was rumor. A translator in Washington Heights had heard that the Mafiya finances the Veterans' Association. I probe more but get nowhere. I wonder about a mysterious son who travels back and forth between New York and Moscow, whose mother describes him as an "entrepreneur." He is a physicist by education but not able to find work. His mother, Katia, describes him as "lost—too many of his promising early years spent in dissent, unable to work, desperately fighting to leave the Soviet Union. I wonder about some of the husbands who drift quietly in and out of living rooms as I interview their wives. I wonder about the Veterans' Association's initial reluctance to allow me to interview their members. As I walk through the adjoining prosperous neighborhood of Manhattan Beach, I wonder about the elaborate and costly renovations underway in the substantial 1930's Mediterranean-style homes. The faux Riviera-style homes formerly occupied by successful American Jewish professionals and businessmen are being replaced by a more ostentatious, bulky, monumental style reminiscent of public office buildings. I wonder also about the little cafes along Brighton Beach Avenue which are frequented mostly by young people. They are usually empty with at least two TV sets on all the time tuned to Russian music video stations. None of the people behind the counter seem much interested in selling anything and are distinctly unfriendly.

Friedman goes beyond rumor and speculation. He documents the early years of Mafiya invasion of Brighton Beach and the delay in recognizing its presence by the New York City Police Department. In the early years, the 1970's, he cites the cases of a mob-run ambulance service in Brighton Beach operating without a license; and, the early planning and development of what turned out to be a billion dollar gasoline swindle involving the Federal excise tax fraud which spread beyond Brighton Beach to Long Island and the rest of the country. He speaks of the mob's employment of highly educated and experienced technicians as valued assets in establishing electronic and financial networks (Friedman 2000:288).

The rumors, the speculation, Friedman's documentation become the stuff of community profiling: The profile: Brighton Beach has a reputation as the center of the Russian Mafiya. It is, therefore, a neighborhood teeming with crime and criminals. Is it this profile that provokes Yetta's account of "police brutality" or perhaps, more likely, is it this that provides the rationale for the anti-Semitism, anti-immigrant, gender bias directed at the community?

"Community" as caricature or theme park is also worth thinking about in the context of profiling. Brighton Beach has become, over the past 25 years, a marketable ethnic commodity, a tourist attraction that draws visitors out to Brooklyn to see, to shop, and to tour "Little Odessa." On the shelves in the travel section of bookstores in New York City, a guide to Brighton Beach which provides maps, directions, lists of shops and restaurants and "must see" attractions, reflects the theme park sale of the neighborhood (Freudenheim 1999). There is no mention of crime but the neighborhood image as rich ethnic center for things Russian is deepened. This is good for the most part, good for

business, good for recognition but it also strengthens the equation between Russian ethnicity and crime for those who make this connection.

Recent newspaper accounts indicate a community response. A front-page article in the New York Times (July 16, 2001) reads, "Movie Made for Russia Roils Brighton Beach." The article reports outrage among residents of Brighton Beach about an American-made (but produced and acted in by Soviet-American citizens), TV pilot movie to be run as a TV series in Russia. The outrage is directed at the show's content which portrays the stereotypical image of Brighton Beach as a neighborhood infested with crime, the home of mobsters, dirty, inhabited by unhappy, failing and frequently victimized residents. As one protester put it, "How dare you show the community in such a light: The daughter does coke, the mother gets raped, the brother is a bandit! Why not show people who are successful?" (Sachs 2001:B4). This is not a small protest. Everyone, it seems, is heard from. In letters to the editor and interviews after screenings in Brighton Beach, the protesters express ideas and voice complaints that resonate with the everyday dialogue of the streets and markets—anti-Semitism, the Mafiya, the desire to escape "Soviet mentality." The Russian title of the two hour pilot turns out to be a Russian acronym for "Permanent Residence," a term used by the old Soviet regime as a shorthand reference to Jews and others who emigrated (Sachs 2001:B4). The Russian Jews of Brighton Beach read anti-Semitism into the use of this title. Those who disagree or, at least, take a softer position, criticize the objection to the movie as "Soviets who can't free themselves from the old Soviet realism that requires that everything in art must show the dominance of good over evil." (Sachs 2001:B4). In defending the film's emphasis on crime, loneliness, and unhappiness, the young American-born Russian actor, who is in the

film, argues that the film is an accurate reflection of Brighton Beach, not a caricature, not a documentary, but the real Brighton Beach which comes across as a caricature.

A front page article in USA Today (7/11/01:1-2) describing the accomplishments of the “new Russian population” appeared at about the same time. The reaction to this article was much talked about. Sophia, my translator, called me as soon as she heard about it and clipped it for me. This was news. The first research study conducted entirely by Russian researchers was published during the summer of 2000, and documented the Russian immigrant population in a more positive light. There was no mention of crime (Research Institute for New Americans 2000).

Does it matter whether those who are victims of “police brutality,” as Yetta labels it, attribute it to anti-Semitism or anti-immigrant sentiment or more complex factors? Does it change anything for the abused to know the origin of the abuse? Does it change the way in which the victim responds? In seeing anti-Semitism as the cause, are Russian Jewish émigrés re-enacting past experiences under new circumstances of free expression—taking care of old business, in a way? The opportunity to protest against anti-Semitism as a U.S. citizen is a particularly cherished freedom for Russian Jewish émigrés—perhaps more so for the elderly whose long lives were drenched in state-sponsored anti-Semitism. As urbanites, they are quick to pick up on the workings of power structures in a complex city like New York and highly skilled, using technical and psychological expertise, at engaging in conflict.

But in exercising her right to protest against anti-Semitism here, does Yetta lose the opportunity to act against other forms of bigotry and hatred directed at her and her family? In a community with a long-standing history of Jewish refugee settlement,

supported by a strong network of social support agencies, the charge of anti-Semitism may not hold water. Anti-immigrant sentiments, however, are strong. In fact, intra-community conflict between the earlier generation of German and East-European Jews and the Russian Jews is a frequent topic in interviews and casual conversations with immigrants of an earlier period. One social worker described the ethnic make-up of three Senior Citizen centers in Brighton Beach. Her center served a predominantly German and East-European population where members were not welcoming to Russian Jewish émigrés; the other two were more open. One gentleman, Alexi, talked to me about his disappointment at his neighbor's rejection of his efforts to strike up a conversation. He attempted to talk with him in Yiddish, knowing that he spoke the language. His neighbor denied that he spoke Yiddish. In both communities, Washington Heights and Brighton Beach, unprompted observations by neighbors were explicitly couched in terms of the "other"—"they get so much, not like it was for us, we had to struggle for everything." "They expect so much." "They're so demanding."

Is there also an ambivalence about the Mafiya's presence in Brighton Beach, similar to what has been said of neighborhoods in which members of the Italian Mafia live? Is there identification and perhaps some hidden support for the émigré community from the Mafiya which prevents recognition of the connection between them and community profiling? Does this also explain at least in part the vociferous response to the TV film discussed above that was so critical of Brighton Beach? Is there an underlying sensitivity to the social ills of the community about which émigrés are unwilling to talk?

In denying or failing to recognize community profiling based on its Mafiya association, either as direct assault or as excuse for religious, ethnic and gender bias, do

they, the Russian Jews, contribute to this image and encourage further community surveillance?

CONCLUSION

The ambiguities underlying these conflicts, in a way, reflect the cohort members' struggles with Jewish and Russian identities, both of which are in transition. Although most of the cohort are not religious Jews, they clearly identify themselves as Jews; but then again, just as clearly, they identify themselves as Russians. Kliger cites numerous surveys of Russian Jews in the former Soviet Union and the United States who, when asked questions about their identity, overwhelmingly identify themselves as Jews, selecting this designation over other numerous national and ethnic categories (Kliger 2001:150-155). They identify strongly with statements such as "feeling oneself part of the Jewish people" (Research Institute for New Americans 2000:20). Their identities as Jews in the Soviet Union have been shaped out of the negative encounter with anti-Semitism persisting up to the time of their departure for the United States. A survey in 1991 revealed that more than 50 percent of the Russian inhabitants of Moscow and St. Petersburg wanted Jews to leave (Kliger 2001:150). And, although they are not nearly as convinced of the prevalence of anti-Semitism in the United States as American Jews, it remains a significant issue.

But then, there is their Russianness, so strongly a part of their being—the language, the dominance of the Great Patriotic War in their stories, their almost reflexive use of the full range of rich Russian cultural production in expressing complex ideas, even their immediate and emphatic support of Russia's position on Chechnya and the NATO

bombing of Kosovo. These dual identities are just that: there are two identities and they are not necessarily compatible. They can cause troubling contradictions born out of loyalty to one or the other, resentment, and contradiction. Jews living in Moscow and St. Petersburg, surveyed in 1993, said that they felt themselves culturally and spiritually closer to Russians in their city than they did to Ukrainian and Byelorussian Jews (Kliger 2001:154). And Kliger, after exhaustive comparative study of the subject of Jewish identity among Russian and American Jews, concluded that “American Jews are profoundly American and Russian Jews are intensely Russian” (Kliger 2001:161).

The process of immigration and settlement in New York City has, in a way, intensified this internal struggle with conflicting identities. Cohort members have lived in a communist state where they were the recipients of government provided services, albeit unevenly supplied and inequitably distributed; in the United States they find, instead of the government, the Americana Jewish community with its generous and efficient network of social agencies, as patron. But in accepting help from the American Jewish community, cohort members enter into a patron-client relationship that perhaps supports and shapes an evolving strengthened Jewish identity, but one with underlying feelings of obligation and guilt. A number of cohort members, in talking about religion in their lives, were apologetic about not being able to become believers after trying out synagogue attendance, Hebrew study and everyday religious observances (See Chapter 2). This conflict has arisen with immigration. As Jews in Russia, their position was well defined; in fact, their identity as Jews was so well defined, it became the reason for their emigration. In America, their identity as Jews and as Russians has become malleable—there is room to

think and act and question their Jewishness and to experiment with versions of being Russian and Jewish Russian and Russian Jewish.

The events in Brighton Beach surrounding Yetta's confrontation with the police reflect, on a dramatic, communal level, the social and ideological forces at play in this struggle. Yetta, one of the more vocal and forceful members of the elders of Brighton Beach, uses her gravitas as an elder, enhanced by her Russian identity as a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, in a powerful protest against anti-Semitism on the American stage where other ethnic and racial factors become a part of the conflict. It is a protest that can take place only in Brighton Beach, not Washington Heights, where the combined identities of Russian and Jew can be recognized, and where the message can be instantly recognized and understood. This is not creation of ritual as in the case of the Victory Day celebration but it is another form of cultural construction that examines and plays with changing identity born of immigration, incorporating new ideas, the experience of others, and new sources of conflict as it undergoes transformation.

CHAPTER 8 AGING, ILLNESS AND IMMIGRATION: EMIGRE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE U.S. HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

My first interest in studying elderly Russian Jewish émigrés grew out of a curiosity about their encounter with the United States' healthcare system after lifetimes spent as citizens of a communist state. I anticipated sharp differences in their Soviet and American experiences and expectations. I take this chapter to present a composite ethnographic account of the cohort's encounter, not with neighborhood community, but with the New York City healthcare community and the larger state and national healthcare systems in which it operates. I draw on the cohort members' personal accounts of hospitalizations and treatments, and their attitudes and opinions about how care of the elderly in the United States should be managed. Comparison with their Soviet experiences is always in the background.

As I began to examine the data, only small differences were apparent; mostly there were surprises, the most significant being their relative comfort in comparison with other immigrants and many American elderly. As recipients of refugee benefits in the United States, they were better off, at least in their protection from excessive health care costs, and as a result, they were in a way, insulated from the current United States debate over state, family and individual responsibility for the care of the elderly. The stories they told of inequalities in access to health care within the Soviet system, although not too unexpected, were a surprise all the same (See Chapter 3). Their ideas and in some cases agonized uncertainty about nursing homes and the issues surrounding the location of responsibility for care of the dependent elderly, were also similar to those held in the

United States, although they, themselves, did not believe that Americans held the same views. There was also in their narrative descriptions of family illness and death, instead of difference, a universal quality of suffering. Their opinions about state support for health care, however, which I had expected them to treat as an entitlement, ran the gamut from a clear expectation that the cost of medicines should be covered by the government to insistence that care of the elderly at home is the responsibility of the family. Although I focus on specific diseases and disabilities—coronary artery disease, arthritis, cancer—my intent is to view these through the wider lens of national, social and cultural realities experienced by cohort members as aging émigrés.

8.1 ARRIVAL AND ENCOUNTER WITH US HEALTH CARE

Unlike an earlier time when immigrants were quarantined on Ellis Island with infectious diseases, mental disability and other suspicious diseases, cohort members entered the United States freely with incipient chronic illnesses—many with the clogged arteries of atherosclerosis, high blood pressure, cancer and mental illness. Already advanced in age when they arrived in the United States, they encountered the United States healthcare system in all its technological gloss, its bureaucratic foul ups, its own inequitable delivery system based on race, ethnicity and class; its clinics, hospitals, and emergency rooms; its public and private practices and the complex and inequitable health insurance programs used to pay for them. Some have faced the dilemma of nursing home admission. They had much to say about their experiences—about the benefits of the system and the quality of practice and hospital and nursing home care. It is mostly a rosy, “God Bless America” paean that they sing to Medicaid, Medicare and food stamps. One

man, Max, who had undergone twelve surgical procedures—six in the Soviet Union and six in the United States, said: “I didn’t work one day in this country. For people my age, this country is very good. I have been cut so many times, there’s no place left to cut.” He points to the paradox, “It is here that we have communism.” I attempted, however, to get beyond these celebratory reports. I was interested in what they thought about their medical treatment in the United States, and if they had been treated for the same conditions in the former Soviet Union. I wanted to find out if there had been differences in access and availability and differences in competence and comfort. And, most of all, I wanted to know whether their expectations of the United States healthcare system had been met. Through these questions, I hoped to get at how the process of immigration influences perceptions, expectations, and experiences of healthcare.

8.2 CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE AND BY-PASS SURGERY: A REASON TO EMIGRATE?

Six in the cohort and the spouse of one of the cohort members underwent coronary artery bypass surgery, most within five years of emigration. This is close to 20 percent of the cohort (admittedly a very small sample), high enough to wonder about the toll on physical health that emigration takes. But consideration of this figure has to take place within the context of an immigrant population that is old and has a high rate of cardiovascular disorders. There are other questions too, questions about healthcare availability and access in the Soviet Union and the United States. Soviet Union death rates from diseases of the circulatory and cardiovascular systems, reported by the Soviet

Health Ministry for the years 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1982 show unusually high rates, moving upward over time, particularly between the years 1960 and 1970, when they almost doubled. The most remarkable increases were deaths due to ischemic heart disease and myocardial infarction excluding hypertension, the conditions for which coronary artery by-pass surgery is done. Ischemic heart disease comprised one-third of all causes of death in the Soviet Union in 1960; by 1980 the percentage had increased to one-half (Feshbach 1985:9). Although changes in cardiovascular disease rates were the most striking, cancer death rates also increased by a third between 1965 and 1982; infection rates for diphtheria grew to more than 4.5 times the 1965 incidence level, and other common infections followed the same upward spiral (Feshbach 1985:10). These figures are but one of the numerous manifestations of the emerging failure of the Soviet healthcare system (See Chapter 3).

Although the United States' rates for cardiovascular disease were higher during the same time period, there has been a marked decrease beginning in the 1970's that does not appear in the Soviet numbers. It was in the 1970's that procedures such as by-pass surgery, other technological breakthroughs, and new medications were introduced. The U.S. government launched a campaign to stop cigarette smoking and the movement to change life styles for healthier living got underway. None of this was happening in the Soviet Union at the time. Feshbach (1995) reports that during the 1970's, only two out of five physicians in the Soviet Union were able to read an electrocardiogram and that technology for diagnosing and treating coronary artery disease was extremely limited. None of the cohort members reported that they or any of their immediate family had had by-pass surgery in the Soviet Union.

None of the cohort members spoke directly of an intention to emigrate, based on a knowledge of better care and easier access in the United States. But health care considerations are not unrealistic when one is older and more prone to illness. There was enough said indirectly to suggest that the need for better care for their worsening cardiac conditions was a major consideration in the decision of many to leave. Ludmila, one of only two women to have by-pass surgery, had her surgery done at a medical center in Brooklyn.¹ She felt that if she had had it done in St. Petersburg where she lived, she would have died. She compared herself to Yeltsin who had the same surgery as she, but only with consultation from a world-renowned United States cardiac surgeon. Alexi too, as noted earlier, did not have access, in his judgment, to quality care. Most of the émigrés in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach are treated at large medical teaching centers where access to a cardiologist is much more likely, even in a clinic setting, than in a small, suburban community non-teaching hospital. Coronary artery by-pass surgery is also done almost routinely by an experienced staff at these medical centers. In addition, all cohort members had almost immediate access to health insurance benefits under the Medicaid program, which further increased their chances of being diagnosed and treated for their coronary artery disease.

8.3 DEALING WITH THE SYSTEM: FINDING SUBSTITUTES FOR CANDY AND VODKA

In addition to treatment for coronary artery disease, cohort members' experience with the U.S. healthcare system had been fairly extensive and varied despite their relative

¹ Most of the cohort members in Brighton Beach were treated at a well-known medical center in south Brooklyn

health and vigor. Having used the system for themselves and close family members, they have formed some strong opinions about its effectiveness, and, based on their stories, they have identified some of the gaps in the U.S. healthcare system. Most have found their way to some of the best medical centers for treatment. They know where to go for highly specialized orthopedic and heart surgery. They have already gained a taste of some of the inequities of United States healthcare financing, such as the significant differences between the partially state funded program, Medicaid, and the fully funded Medicare program.² As refugees, they are immediately eligible for Medicaid but must wait five years to become eligible for Medicare.

Despite their awareness of discrepancies between the two health insurance programs, they were surprised to learn that many American elderly are not eligible for Medicaid and are unable to afford private insurance, which pays for medications in New York State, and have to struggle to pay their medical bills. Although I repeated and re-phrased my questions, they seemed reluctant to consider the implications. When I asked about problems in the healthcare system, they tended to speak not about gaps in service and the lack of health benefits. Instead they discussed the relative strength of clinical services. Their opinions and expectations of the U.S. system and comparisons with the Soviet system tended to be directed at qualitative issues—the clinical expertise of physicians and routine hospital services, such as the frequency of bed linen changes in the

² Although both Medicare and Medicaid are government funded health insurance programs, there are major differences: the Medicare program benefits the elderly and disabled whereas Medicaid benefits all age groups; Medicare eligibility is based primarily on age (65 and older) and, in some tightly defined cases, physical disability, while the Medicaid program is structured to aid the medically indigent with eligibility based on means testing; Medicare is a federal program administered uniformly throughout the country while Medicaid, although partially funded by the federal government, is administered by the individual states with eligibility varying by state; New York State, one of the more generous states, provides coverage for medications.

hospitals, rather than financial barriers to care. In the United States where medical care expenses are a major concern among the elderly, the cost of care for cohort members seldom came up in their accounts. Rita, a retired specialist in children's ear, nose, and throat diseases, praised United States hospitals, comparing them with the Soviet and post-Soviet era, and tracing the Soviet decline over her 50 year career in Moscow. "The sheets are washed every other week, if you give some money. You must always give money to the nurses. You die there, you famish if family doesn't bring food. Now it's much worse. There are no medicines."

Several cohort members underwent extensive treatment in New York hospitals resulting from complications following relatively simple procedures. Lydia, who is passionate about learning English, suffered brain damage and now lacks the memory required to learn vocabulary. She entered a world famous orthopedic hospital for hip replacement surgery, suffering one complication after another—blood clots, infections, a stroke. The operation was a success and the new hip functions but her other hip is arthritic, and at this point, she is a poor risk for more surgery. Her friends have suggested that she sue the surgeons and hospital because of all the complications she has suffered and because she is still unable to walk. She disagreed. She is grateful. "They were very caring." She liked and respected the doctors and hospital staff. She uses a wheelchair but can't get to English classes held in the neighborhood. She has amassed a collection of self-instruction tapes and plans to teach herself. Alexi too, has the same problem with his memory following his by-pass surgery. He has tried to work but can't concentrate long enough to complete a task. Tatyana's husband has had seven surgical procedures (she counts them off, naming each one), since they came to the United States and now, after a

stroke, he has lost his memory and most of his speech. A former architect, he spends his days painting. Despite these complications, these three are deeply grateful to and uncritical of the healthcare system. But, when the general statements of others about the beneficence of the U.S. healthcare system are taken apart and their individual encounters are examined along with stories about family members treated in the United States who have since died, the picture is not as positive.

Some of their complaints arise from their inability to maneuver within the U.S. healthcare system. Yaacov described his sense of helplessness in obtaining better care for his wife. "I had nothing." He lacked the connections, the leverage, the knowing what to say or with whom to speak. The time honored Soviet system of gifts of vodka and candies for doctors and nurses didn't seem the correct thing to do. He didn't know how it was done here, what alternative forms for exerting pressure were available. He felt that his dying wife did not receive good care, that she would have been better off in St. Petersburg. Yetta also railed against the hospital where her husband died. She believed that the hospital refused to admit her husband because he did not have Medicare, the federal program that reimburses hospitals at a higher rate than the Medicaid program. "We had only half a year to wait for Medicare. I sued them for two years and seven months." She lost. "I was told that the hospitals have such lawyers that my lawyer is nothing for them. And what lawyers I spoke to, nobody wanted to take the case." She told me that the hospital, at first, wanted to send him home without doing any tests. She refused to take him home. The hospital did the diagnostic studies but found nothing wrong with him except arthritis. She objected but they refused to admit him. She took him home, cared for him in a hospital bed in the middle of the living room, assisted by her

four children and grandchildren who live in the neighborhood. He died a few days later. She again returned with him to the emergency room where he was pronounced dead. She enacted for me with great sorrow and outrage what she said to the emergency room personnel. "Look, look, look what you have done to my husband! This is your fault."

8.3 DEATHS IN THE FAMILY

There were nine deaths of close family members since arriving in this county; most—four women and two men—died within the first five years of their arrival. The remaining three deaths occurred later, more than seven years after emigration. Cancer took the highest toll, followed by heart disease and then suicide. Most were ill at the time they left the former Soviet Union. Even for those who committed suicide, there had been warning signs. I explored each of these deaths to the extent those interviewed were willing to talk about them.

Was this an unusual number of deaths in the families of immigrants? Given the age of the cohort (seven of those who died were contemporaries of the cohort members), the causes of death, and the incidence of cancer and heart disease among the population, I don't believe so. Perhaps the saddest account of all was the death of a daughter of one of the cohort members. Minna's only daughter died within five years of arriving in the United States. The cause was bone cancer, a condition that was diagnosed in the United States. Minna said that it was this daughter who had dreamed and planned for the longest time to leave the Soviet Union, engaging the rest of the family in planning the departure. It was a three generation family project, grandmother, daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren. I asked her how they were able to finance the trip since this woman had

worked in a service job with no access to privilege. She told me that they pooled everything, planned everything and, although they earned little money, all of them were working. The mother is disconsolate. She has no regrets about coming and staying and is involved in the lives of her now great grandchildren but misses her daughter terribly.

Suicide is something else. It provokes all the unanswered questions despite family knowledge of warning signs and precipitating factors. What was the immediate cause? What could have been done to prevent it? What was missed? In the case of immigration, questions arise about the displacement and separation, the stress of change, and whether these factors played a part in a person's decision to end a life. These questions, of course, are never answered fully. The relationship between migration and suicide related to poor levels of social integration has been studied (Raleigh et al 1992; Monk 1987; Moscick et al 1986). The findings, however, are inconsistent: in one case, suicide rates among immigrants to the United States and Australia were higher than for the native born (Monk 1987:63), but in another case, a study of Asian immigrants in England and Wales, contradictions within the study itself were identified, showing higher rates for young immigrant women from South Asia and lower rates for old men from the same region of the world than for their counterparts in the originating country (Raleigh et al 1992:92). The field of suicide study is so fraught with methodological problems in collecting accurate data and analyzing conflicting variables that some have even discouraged research calling it intellectually dishonest (Monk 1987:63). Strong relationships however, have been identified between suicide, age, gender, physical and mental illness, and among the elderly who have the highest rates. Also, a recent trend indicates a marked increase in suicide among young males, 15 to 24 years of age and 25 to 34 years (Hawton 2000:250).

In the two suicide cases in my sample, the connection with immigration is weak. A step-son in his thirties committed suicide by taking an overdose of medication. Natasha, his stepmother, who now looks after his family, reveals the extent and complexity of the extended kinship networks that both assist in the emigration process and support family members once they are in place. Her step-son, Jacob, with whom she had minimal contact while in the Soviet Union (he was raised by his mother, Natasha's husband's first wife, in another part of the Soviet Union), was the first to leave the Soviet Union in the 1980's. Natasha's son tracked Jacob down in New York, wrote to him and asked him to sponsor the family which he very generously did. He sponsored his half-brother and sister and their spouses and children. Natasha came later. Jacob's own mother, who none of them had ever met, found an apartment for them in her building in Washington Heights. It was in this way that Natasha met her husband's first wife and they became friends. Natasha talked about her step-son's death, saying that he was a "drunkard" before he even left St. Petersburg. He became an alcoholic, she said, when he was a student. He studied at night and worked as a plumber during the day. People paid him with a bottle of vodka. She blames his alcoholism on this. He continued drinking in the United States. His last job was as a taxi driver in New York City. Natasha remains close with and continues to help his wife and children. "All Thanksgivings and the birthday, they come to my family."

Nicolai's wife committed suicide after struggling with depression and physical illness (unable to walk) for three years after her emigration. Nicolai told it this way: "She had been threatening suicide and had made several attempts before she hanged herself in the apartment one evening when I went out for a walk." He attributed the underlying cause to the long waiting period in Odessa between the time their only daughter left for

the United States and the time that they were cleared to leave. He described his wife as deeply depressed during this time. But her physical health was also deteriorating. He denied that she had become worse in the United States, or that being an émigré caused or exacerbated her condition. In fact, he described the support that she received—a medical center in Brooklyn provided extensive medical and psychiatric care for her and help at home.

Neither of these suicides seems to support the picture of stress and disorganization related to immigration leading to depression and suicide. But if emigration is looked at from a broader perspective, not just the circumscribed time of departure and arrival, then it is likely that the period leading up to emigration might have played a part in the two suicides. Both individuals left in the earliest stages of the recent wave, before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The obstacles were far more difficult than later, including the waiting, the paper work, the threat to family and relatives, the severing of ties, the finality of separation. Their knowledge and experience of the West and preparedness for life in the United States was far more limited than among those who would follow. The accounts of others, even those who left in the early 1990's, also dwell upon the period of waiting, particularly those caught up in the "refusnik" period: the uncertainty of this time, the real material hardship resulting from unemployment, the alienation from friends who disapproved of their decision, and, most of all, the departure of children who they thought, at the time, they would never see again. All of this took its toll. Others in the cohort talked about this time, Sonya attributing her husband's worsening heart condition to the stress they underwent.

8.4 A FUNERAL

One woman's sudden death at eighty-one was a shock to all of us—her companion, her family, her friends, me, her interviewer. A number of cohort members vacation in the Catskills at an inexpensive resort that caters to Russian Jewish émigrés. Ena, with two of her friends, was sitting on a bench at the side of a narrow country road leading into her camp. It was a hot summer's day and the bench was in the shade. A van driven by a student driver lost control and ran into the bench, killing Ena and injuring her friend. Her son-in-law had told me just before I interviewed her that I “shouldn't wait too long.” He hadn't had this end in mind, rather it was her advancing age and her heart condition that were his concern. She was vibrant, her long hair dyed henna, colorfully made up, attractively dressed, bejeweled. She was an active member of the “Y” Russian program where she had made good friends, one of whom was Paulo, her companion, who lived with her.

She had not been one of the cohort members who actively sought to emigrate. Although she had her daughter and son who were settled in the United States, she had returned to Moscow. In an effort to explain her ambivalence about leaving the former Soviet Union, she told of her interview with a United States Customs agent when she was leaving. “He wanted to know what I thought about the United States after my visit. I gave him a very honest answer. I said that I was ready to bow to this country and I wished all the best to this country, and I wished all the best to the people who live in this country but, at the same time, I can see nothing bad about my own motherland. It was perhaps a bad motherland but I'm still grateful to my motherland for everything it has

given me. Whatever happened in the Soviet Union, whatever is happening now at this time, I am still grateful to the Soviet Union because it gave the best education to my children. It helped me to raise my children.” She acknowledged the threats against her daughter when she was preparing to leave, and her own rejected application and treatment as an “enemy of the state.” But she spoke of her colleagues, friends, the chief of her bureau and how they had helped her during this time, using their connections to override the “refusal” and to re-employ her. It was the memory of these strong social relations which, for Ena overrode the negative influences of state power.

Her funeral—the memorial service at the Upper West Side chapel, the burial at the Jewish cemetery in New Jersey, and the gathering of friends in her apartment—reflected the range of cultural expression found among immigrant communities, some of the old, the new, the blend, the synergisms. The participants were a blend of fellow émigrés, friends she had made during her years in the United States, including her American son-in-law, her son and daughter, and daughter-in-law who had been in the United States at least twice as long as Ena, and her granddaughter, a young Hunter College graduate on her way to medical school. The Cantor from the neighborhood temple, which Ena did not attend, provided the Russian translation from English and Hebrew to Russian although only with the shouted-out corrections and prompts to his translation from the gathered Russian-speaking mourners. There were speakers, the most eloquent of all being Raisa, a good friend from the “Y” who paid her tribute and then recited a Pushkin poem in the traditional expository Russian style. The Russian speakers were deeply moved; but, equally moved, were the non-speakers of Russian who understood the mournful cadence, the cry of grief. Flowers, not considered a part of the American Jewish service, draped the casket. The

coffin was closed, much against her daughter's wishes who was astounded that her mother, never a religious woman, had made arrangements for a ritual burial. She was distressed as she encountered each of these American Jewish customs, so unfamiliar to her and which she believed were counter to her mother's wishes. The American Jewish custom of placing stones on the eyelids, and of dusting the face with ashes was incompatible with Valentina's vision of her mother. She brought along her mother's makeup and compromised with the women who were preparing her body. But she was most concerned about the closed casket. She wanted her mother's friends to see her body, felt that it would ease their shock and inability to accept the reality of such a traumatic end.

Ena's death in the Catskills and burial in New York City seem worlds removed from the beginning of her life in a Ukrainian village hut, two years before the Revolution. She had survived exposure to her mother's tuberculosis, famine, poverty, abuse as a child, and battlefield horrors as a nurse during the Second World War. Her family and friends mourned her in a moving ceremony of fragmented language, mixed symbols, and confusing ritual, signifying the end point of her life as an immigrant—a rich cultural mix of past and present, old country and new.

8.5 THE NURSING HOME DILEMMA

Admission to a nursing home is a dread that lurks in the consciousness of most elderly in the United States. In fact the high priced long term private insurance policies being sold to the not yet elderly capitalize on this dread. The fear is fed by scandals involving physical and psychological abuses and financial profiteering that erupt

periodically. The term, “nursing home” evokes many negative images. For those about to become residents, it signifies loss of independence and with it, not only one’s own place, but one’s privacy; it means “the last stop,” an end, and an end in an unwanted place, a strange place, an institution. For most family members, it is an agonizing decision laden with feelings of abandonment and guilt. It is a terrifying economic concern. Nursing home rates range from \$200 to \$400 a day. Medicare which most elderly have, pays for only a small part of the costs. Twelve percent of the United States population and a progressively higher proportion of the elderly are covered by Medicaid which does cover the cost of nursing home care, paying out close to 30 percent of the Medicaid dollar for benefits for the elderly in 1998 (Littman 1998:55, AARP 2000:138-139). And, although a large percentage of the elderly are covered by costly private insurance to supplement what Medicare covers, most of these policies do not cover nursing home expenses. What is missed in all this concern is the fact that only five percent of those 65 and over are in nursing homes at any one time (U.S. Bureau of Census 1998). Nursing homes though, continue to provide a last refuge for families no longer able to care for elderly parents and grandparents and for those who have no one to care for them or for whom no one wants to care.

The topic of nursing homes seemed to be just as loaded for the émigrés as for American elderly. Their troubled and uncertain responses were similar to those of Americans who have struggled with the social, emotional, and economic issues for many years.

I introduced the nursing home topic in two different settings. In one, I used a small, already existing informal women’s conversation class as a focus group. Several in

the group were retired health care professionals. In the other setting, I incorporated questions about nursing homes in 12 of the 34 interviews I conducted in Washington Heights and Brighton Beach. I presented the nursing home problem differently in the two groups. I presented a scenario to the focus group which forced them to consider options and to reach a decision, one way or another, about placing an elderly woman in a nursing home. My interviews with individuals were one-on-one, occasionally with a translator. I asked questions about nursing homes at the end of the interview unless an opening occurred earlier. My questions were preceded by a statement of interest in hearing about their impression of America, followed by an expression of interest in their opinions about healthcare and then, more specifically, about nursing homes.

In both settings most responses at the outset indicated a reluctance to even consider the nursing home as a viable alternative, but then moved on, aided by remembered experiences, to the dilemma facing those who had no other option but nursing home admission. The focus group responses were different from the responses in the individual interviews. The conversation group members listened to the scenario I presented to them describing a dilemma confronting the family of an elderly parent who needed around the clock care. In contrast to what I had expected, they spent little time examining the options or delving into ethical considerations governing family and government responsibility. They tended to distance themselves, speaking not so much in general terms but about cases they had heard about, or about the situation of more distant friends. Perhaps in a group setting like this, the questions were too sensitive, too controversial. Their professional backgrounds in health care also probably influenced this objectification. In the individual interviews where cohort members were not open to peer

criticism, it was different. The responses were more thoughtful and personal, in some cases agonized and uncertain. And, although they arrived at similar conclusions as the conversation group, their decisions were filled with regret and sadness.

I introduced the nursing home topic to the conversation group, all women, who had invited me to join their weekly talk sessions over the summer. Their classes at the “Y” were not held during the summer and they were looking for some way to keep up their English conversational skills. They were familiar with my work and knew that I wanted to know what they thought about issues related to health care. Each of them was a health care professional—three were physicians, and one, a medical record librarian. Tatyana, Anastasia, Iliana, and Marsha were good friends. They had met in Brighton Beach at language classes and from there had discovered other mutual interests. Iliana and Tatyana swam together, Anastasia and Iliana traveled into Manhattan on the subway to attend concerts. They all shared a passion to speak English and speak it well. All were at least 75 years old. We rotated host apartments, meeting at Tatyana’s apartment first. We sat around a table in the living room on hot, humid Brighton Beach days with big noisy floor fans blowing away at us and pitchers of water and juice on the table. I told them a story about a family faced with a crisis—a scenario I had prepared (Appendix B): An elderly mother, living alone, has suffered another stroke which has rendered her barely able to help herself. She had been an invalid for several years but had managed by herself at home with the help of a home attendant a few hours each day. This arrangement was no longer feasible. She needed to have someone with her all the time since she was now confused and confined to bed. After presenting the story, I proposed several alternatives for their consideration: Admission to a nursing home? Family member, son or daughter,

take care of her in their own home? Stay in her own home with 24 hour home attendants, paid in part by the Medicaid program, with family members picking up the rest of the expenses?

Tatyana was the first to respond stating that she believed that the woman must go to a nursing home. Iliana disagreed, saying that she felt that the woman should remain at home. Marsha reluctantly agreed with Tatyana that the only alternative was nursing home. Although they were all in their mid-seventies, Anastasia the oldest at 79, was evasive, perhaps made uncomfortable by this.

Iliana spoke of her own experience in caring for her mother in Moscow. For five years her mother was bedridden although she remained mentally alert. According to Iliana, and the others agreed, nursing homes were out of the question in the Soviet Union, unless there were no family members to offer care. "Even at that, people usually died within two weeks of entering a nursing home." There was no such thing as a publicly funded home attendant as there are in New York City, at least for those who meet the criteria for medical indigence. Families were expected to arrange for care. Iliana hired an attendant privately, using her entire salary to pay for the services. "Even at that, I and my husband provided all the care." The woman, whom she paid only sat with her mother. "In Russia, nothing more is expected. It is very difficult to get people to do that kind of work."

Tatyana's story was different. She presented to the group the case of a woman with Alzheimer's disease. She lived isolated in her apartment in Brighton Beach. "She was disheveled, confused, unable to care for herself. Her son came to me for advice and I recommended a nursing home, but he was reluctant." Tatyana and the son went looking

for a nursing home and found a suitable one. "The sheets were snow white, the staff was friendly. I gave money to the son to buy flowers and other gifts for his mother once a month. He took my advice and one day he took me to see his mother. She was changed—clean, coifed and well cared for. I turned and said to the son, 'See, it is you who was suffering, not your mother. It was your feelings, not your mother's.'"

Marsha told her story, although she never got around to telling us of the outcome. She spoke of an old woman, her husband's cousin, who had a stroke. Both of her children died and then her husband died. "She was a 77 years old woman in the neighborhood, alone, deeply depressed. Home attendants, really strangers, were taking care of her all the time, twenty-four hours a day." Tatyana, the psychiatrist, joined in, "The depression, you can't help it." But then, Iliana shifted the discussion to her American daughter-in-law, whose mother had Alzheimer's. She told us that the family sold her house and found a very good nursing home. "They used the money from the sale of the house. When the money ran out and she became eligible for Medicaid, she was transferred to a good nursing home, but not as good as the first one where she had a private room."

They were ambivalent but somehow distanced and insulated from consideration of the underlying issues. Their stories do touch on intergenerational responsibilities, guilt, financial stress, but their accounts are more prescriptive, more, "Here, this is what must be done," rather than, what in the following individual accounts, is a searching, more uncertain, "What is to be done?" The following excerpts from interviews with several cohort members represent their more personal responses:

- Rita's Husband

When I met Rita, her husband was living at home but he required almost constant care. He was in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's Disease. He had, in his confusion, reversed his day, remaining awake most of the night, restless, confused and agitated. Friends were urging Rita to place him in the nursing home around the corner, right in the Washington Heights neighborhood. She delayed, she denied, becoming more and more depressed herself, and eventually placed him in the home. He is there now. She speaks with him everyday and visits him. "He's crazed with the idea that he is a prisoner of the NKVD. He's beginning to speak French again." She speaks more freely now about the deep depression she experienced while attempting to reach a decision about this separation after so many years of marriage.

"His life in America did not turn out as he had planned. He was a mathematician and had taught at the University in Moscow. In preparation for his move to America, he had translated all his lecture material into English. He looked forward to teaching, not a full time position, but at least the opportunity to teach. He learned how to speak English. His plans never materialized. His English was not good enough. He was already in his seventies. No one needed or wanted him. And then the mental deterioration of Alzheimer's began to take its toll. She muses, "I suppose even here it is bad to go to a nursing home, unpleasant, but nevertheless...." She sighs and leaves her thoughts hanging. "I heard a lot of things. A lot of people blame nursing homes. I don't know. Some things are awful."

- **Sasha's Advice**

Sasha lives with his wife in Brighton Beach. He examined my questions about nursing homes from a number of perspectives, examining ethical and religious aspects of the

problem. Sasha taught physical medicine at the university in Lvov for many years. He continues even now to provide advice to friends about their own or their parents' physical disabilities. Since settling in New York, he has begun to study the Talmud and draws much of his thinking from the scriptures. He recalled having a friend in Ukraine a number of years ago who sent his mother to a nursing home. "I severed my relationship with him. And here in the United States, it is the same. The American government does not pay enough attention." But he places the major responsibility for care of the elderly on their children. He quotes Yanconyensky, a European pedagogue of the early nineteenth century: "If you neglect your parent, your children will neglect you." Drawing from the Jewish Life, he tells me, "I washed my father," adding his advice, "Give your parent the best." He acknowledges that there are cases of abandonment by children, but again holds the state, not responsible for providing care, but for educating children to their responsibilities for caring for their parents. "Only the children are responsible for the care of their parents." Only when all else has failed, does he acknowledge that the state is responsible for the care of the elderly who have no children and are alone and helpless. "It is most frightening for an old person to stay alone. Alone he destroys himself."

- **Andrei's Choice**

Andrei says that the nursing homes here are better than in the former Soviet Union. And that "nursing homes in Moscow are better than those outside the city, as they are here in the United States. There are splendid nursing homes which are paid with much money and there are ones that are not so good. My opinion is that it is a good way. I do not want to talk about nursing homes. But I think it would be better for me to be in a good nursing home than lie in my son's home. He can do it but I don't think that it would

be good for me. Such is my opinion." He adds, looking upward, "But I hope I do not have to face this, that I will be taken before that." He states this as a declaration of his independence of his son, a son for whom he has sacrificed a great deal—a very comfortable and respected position in Moscow, a life he enjoyed—in order to remain with him in the United States.

- **Ilya's Soviet Perspective**

Ilya was one of the few who brought up financial considerations: "It's a financial situation, this nursing home. Is it free or do you have to pay and how much?" I see this as a Soviet; and from a Soviet's point of view, this is paradise. This is communism! There is a difference between government providing and caring about the elderly in America and the former Soviet Union. It's absolutely different because there's no money for nursing homes in Russia. People do not have salaries and there's the problem with food, with money." Ilya is the latest cohort member to arrive, and is speaking out of his experience in Odessa as recently as 1998.

Although they share the same aversion but regrettably realistic acceptance of nursing homes as do most Americans, several cohort members believed that Americans had different attitudes toward nursing homes. They stated that Americans tended to turn to nursing homes much more readily. The low percentage of elderly who are actually residents of nursing homes in the United States (5 percent, mentioned earlier) would indicate otherwise. A comment in one report reads, "Thanks to Medicare, all but 1 percent of those 65 and older are covered by the Medicare insurance program." (Courtney, et al 2000:15). This is correct but fails to take into consideration the lack of

nursing home coverage under Medicare. Also missed is the high percentage of American elderly who, although not below the poverty level, are at risk of falling into that category when confronted with out of the ordinary medical expenditures. The cohort members' eligibility for Medicaid (which pays for nursing home care) again seemed to insulate them from considering the financial burdens encountered by the American elderly and their families.

Perhaps the financial complexities of nursing home decisions for American elderly are simply too confusing or perhaps so contradictory to what they have experienced in the Soviet system (privilege, bribery, scarcity, connections—yes, but complex state and private regulations, cash expenditures—no). At issue for many Americans, many of very moderate means, are small savings and a paid-up mortgage on a house, that must be liquidated and spent on nursing home care. Dreams of leaving the house and small savings to the children are dashed. Sometimes there is more at stake. Around this issue in New York State, a complex legal and financial industry has grown up to assist the elderly and their families to transfer savings to their children's accounts in order to avoid spending everything on nursing home care. What might be missed by cohort members is a core reality of the United States economic system—private property. I asked Tatyana about inheritance and she seemed puzzled. She remembered a gold link chain left by her grandfather to his three sons to be divided equally among them. Since two of the sons died in the war, her father used the chain to pay for the evacuation of the family from Moscow to Tashkent during the war. That was the family fortune—that and photographs and dishes. Ilya worked in Odessa and continues here in New York City as the representative at-large, of Soviet Holocaust survivors. One of the problems he encounters

is that Soviets owned no property, and as a result, have less basis for claims against Germany for compensation and restitution. For this generation of émigrés who are the recipients of social welfare benefits, some in excess of other immigrants and older Americans, the essential difference between the United States economy and the economy of the former Soviet Union is partially masked. They are right, in a way, to describe the benefits they receive as a better demonstration of communism than what they received in the Soviet Union.

CONCLUSION:

Aging is not all about social organization and cultural constructs. There is the hard reality of physiological breakdowns encountered in old age—physical illness, sensory loss, aches and pains. These losses lead the elderly more and more into contact with individual healers—physicians, therapists, pharmacists, and on a broader level, with clinics and hospitals, and, on an even broader level, into contact with powerful institutions that systematize and drive treatments for illness and loss. If illness is an undeniable component of old age for most people, then the ways in which cohort members experience pain, disability, and loss reveal something vital about the ways in which their experience as immigrants seeking health care shapes old age.

This chapter began with cohort voices raised in celebration of the United States as they encountered its healthcare system. They tell of their successful surgery, expressing forgiveness for the post-operative complications. They give mixed reviews to the clinical expertise of U.S. physicians and begin to describe their dissatisfactions ending with Yetta's rage against the hospital for her husband's death. Some of the same people who

praise also condemn. As with other opinions they have expressed about United States, there is a rush to “God Bless America” followed by a less global, more realistic and particular account, one that risks being critical of the United States. They speak of their struggles as immigrants to negotiate an alien system—how to advocate for better care for an ailing family member, how to deal with the formidable administrative structures of large medical institutions, how to scout out and obtain the best care, and the limitations of health insurance. Especially because they have lived so long and seen so much, they know the stark differences between the U.S. and former Soviet systems. They know the difference between scarcity—having no antibiotics or cardiac drugs available—and, not only having these drugs available, but having the wherewithal to obtain them. For this they proclaim their gratitude. The criticisms come later and with the exception of Yetta, they are muted, a murmur of resistance born out of an awareness of defects in the U.S. system, but defects that they are willing to live with.

Their struggles, in many ways, run parallel to those of the American elderly. Clearly there is a universality to the suffering they describe, not only their own experiences caring for family members but in many of the opinions they put forward, particularly about placement of responsibility for care of the elderly infirm. But, just as clearly, their encounters with the social and economic structures of their past Soviet lives and current New York lives, dramatize the difference between the two systems and explain their celebration of the United States social and healthcare systems. “This here is communism,” is an indictment of the failed communism of their past lives. And without their knowing it, in a strange twist on this paradox, their good fortune as refugees serves to demonstrate

what is missing for many less fortunate elderly immigrants and Americans in the United States.

CONCLUSION

The images of elderly Russian émigrés appeared in two major photographic exhibitions mounted by the International Center for Photography (ICP) in New York City, one, several years ago, and one, more recently in July 2001. The émigrés appear in the first exhibition, entitled “Propaganda and Dreams: Photographing the 1930’s in the USSR and US” (Ben-David-Val 1999:cover, 10, 34, 32, 111, 100, 98, 89) as young, vigorous members of youth organizations—the Pioneers, the Komsomal—as students and workers. They are children and teenagers in these photographs, their images used to portray the ideology of communist aspirations—a dream in the making. In the second exhibition, they appear, many years later, as émigrés. They are at JFK airport in the embrace of younger, welcoming relatives (Sebastiao Salgado, “Migrations”). Their images here portray them as only one of the myriad streams of immigrants moving about the world. They stand out though, for a number of reasons. They are older than other migrants; they are being welcomed where other migrants are outcast, tolerated at most; they appear in an airport terminal, not on dusty, war-torn or impoverished roads

Both exhibitions provide dramatic photographic accounts of the émigré lives I have examined in this study, bracketing their stories with their earliest and most profound memories reaching back to the 1920’s and 1930’s and then their more recent memories of emigration. Their stories, however, fly in the face of the 1930’s photographic propaganda mounted by the Soviet state. Their narratives tell of another reality. There is a photograph of youthful women glowing with health and vitality marching energetically in Red Square, dressed in their Komsomol uniforms. The women I interview look at this photograph and laugh. They remember, not so glowingly, their Komsomol and Pioneer

days. Some remember being excluded, another being kicked out. Some merely used their membership to get ahead. None had fond memories. Another photograph documents the blissful pastoral work of harvesting in the daily life of collectives. Valentina who lived on a collective, remembers it as backbreaking labor. Their memories of emigration also provide not so much a different, but a more expanded and realistic version of their arrival at JFK airport. Michael remembers his son's warm greeting but also the long years of humiliation and loss as he waited in Moscow for permission to leave.

In its simplest terms, this has been a study of relationships between advancing age and immigration in the cultural construction of identity. It is set in a time of a stunning re-emergence of immigration in the United States and within a time of profound demographic change involving shifts in population size between the old and young. It's subjects occupy densely settled urban spaces extending geographically and historically from the great cities of the Soviet Union to the United States and ending in two thickly settled neighborhoods in New York City. Aging is a process of accumulation—history piles up. In the case of the elderly Russian Jews of the former Soviet Union who have come to the United States as émigrés, their lives lived through the extraordinary times spanning the birth and death of the Soviet Union, have provided rich opportunities to examine change at the convergence of aging and immigration.

Photography's manipulative ability to capture a moment in time—a human face, an action—and portray it as real, factual, is now well known. The cohort members set the story straight as they viewed some of the photographs I refer to above. But they too brought their imaginative skills to play as they remembered—editing out, embellishing here and there, softening, forgetting as they relived the past, refashioning the past, using

the past to explain the present. Augé quotes Pierre Nora writing about memory, as an attempt to find in “what used to be” what there is about us that is different, new and with it the sudden flash of an unfindable identity—what we are in the light of what we are no longer (Augé 1995:26). The cohort members are no longer Soviets, no longer young, no longer Soviet-style Russian Jews. They are elderly émigrés, survivors, most of them already American citizens. This study has been an examination of their struggle to realize this new identity.

In their narratives, they gave voice to these struggles, ruminating over the past, seeking to explain what happened, what they did, what they didn’t do, remembering and celebrating their glorious accomplishments, and, not so much their failures, as their frustrations and unfulfilled dreams, the things they settled for as young and middle-aged Soviets—soldiers, workers, parents. They sought to explain themselves as survivors, weaving elegant narratives of others who did not survive, leaving unspoken their own good fortune; their frequently intoned, “God Bless America” to steady their perspective in search of American identity as they wavered, seeing, as in their assessment of healthcare in America, defects in the United States system.

Memory, time, place, space, and the broad sweep of historical events have been the prime materials which have fed the individual and collective imaginations of cohort members as they have struggled with immigration and aging. In Augé’s words, “the sudden flash of an unfindable identity—what we are no longer” (Augé 1995:26), they are composites of many particular identities reshaped by the intertwining experiences of aging and immigration. As a cohort of elderly Russian Jews, former Soviets, entering the United States as refugees to join their children they appeared, at first, to be a relatively

homogenous group. But the places where they settled and the means of cultural expression open to them made a difference in their daily lives. The immigrant histories and ambiance of the neighborhoods in which they settled influenced their positions and daily lives in the neighborhoods among other immigrants and other elderly. Their favored position, resulting from their refugee status among American and other immigrant elderly, ironically exposed the failed promise of communism as well as indirectly revealing inequities in American health care. Memories of their dramatic Soviet era histories split their identity as a cohort into several layers depending upon events that transpired in their youth and young adulthood. The oldest stand out foremost as survivors, conscious of this identity and actively seeking to explain it while at the same time memorializing those who did not survive. The younger ones are dubious survivors burdened with more physical illness and personal problems. Perhaps more than anything, their lives here in New York demonstrate the power of imagination, stimulated by lush memory, liminality, and the novelty of new places to transform identity, to create ritual, and to remain vital to the life of the community.

Theoretical considerations in the anthropological study of aging are tested out in this research. The use of life course and cohort analysis confirms previous work in the field on the role of the state in creating inequality, the significance of shifting and cross-cutting inequalities, and the profound influence of historical events in shaping and demarcating within cohort experiences that continue though a lifetime. The findings also demonstrate the usefulness of narratives as means of understanding the creative processes involved in explaining and transforming identity under the dual influences of aging and

immigration. Theoretical concepts used in the study of immigration, particularly transnationalism and the ways in which time, place and space work to shape individual and cohort identity, have also been tested.

THE PAST AND THE MAKING OF THE PRESENT: LIMINALITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

The very fullness and richness of their lives as elderly émigrés are the strengths which have borne them and bolstered them through their passage from the former Soviet Union to settlement in New York City. Unlike the young who arrive fresh, eager, but with less experience of life and who must face the pressing demands of the workplace, the already old have the leisure and opportunity to draw from an endless stock of life experiences to find comfort and novelty in their settlement. Their stories demonstrate the power of narratives to expose the imaginative work entailed in the construction of new identities. They provide rich insight into the play of memory and show how the past is brought into the present, and used instrumentally to carve out a new place, to achieve recognition, to take stock. It was in the countless narratives about their youth and Soviet days, that their past lives intruded and gave shape to the present. In their narratives they wove sadness and loss with present happiness and fulfillment; one cried for a lost brother and, in the next breath, spoke of his own achievements. They balanced past with present. It was clear that they are survivors, and survivors of most dramatic times. The facts of famine and persecution, war and Soviet hard times were contained in their stories, but there was also their survival. Not only did they survive others but they survived their own nation, leaving as its power and elaborate structure slipped into oblivion. In many ways

their narratives were meditations on their own survival. Their stories of war, purges, famine, illnesses were peopled by the death of parents, siblings, friends, wives and husbands, and children. An interesting characteristic of these narratives is their lack of self reference as they dwelled upon those who they had survived. They memorialized those they loved who did not survive and indirectly celebrated their own survival and happiness. In small ways too, in their daily lives, they dealt with the unhappy present by reviving an old memory to soothe, to balance out.

Barbara Myerhoff's description of the elderly as "liminals par excellence" (1984), aptly expresses the tone and creative production of the narratives in this research. Their sense of disorientation heightened by immigration, cut off from a nation that no longer exists as they remember it and sadly lacking in ritual to support themselves through the uncertainties of old age, they use their life stories not just to recall but to relive their past lives and shape the present. They imbue their lives and the events of their lives with meaning. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has produced a rush of memoirs that provide vivid accounts of what life was like in the Soviet Union. Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's classic, Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich (1978), Eugenia Ginsburg's personal account of her long years in the gulag (1983), and recently, Andrei Makine's novels (2000, 1995), are stunning literary accounts of incredible suffering and loss. When Makine writes about two couples living out their lives in post World War II Soviet Union (men and women of the same age as the cohort members), he speaks of their "quiet heroism" and "...the discrepancy between the ideological current and the ordinary struggle of ordinary people to live ordinary lives, to choose the immemorial real over the bombastically expressed fake." (Bernstein 2000:E9). The stories told by cohort members reflect this struggle: The

ordinary moments—a woman sitting on the couch opposite me recalling a time long ago in a Moscow neighborhood where she triumphantly stood her ground against her daughter's rejection by the university because she was a Jew; another woman's startled look of comprehension as she realized in her remembering the sheer joy she felt as she learned to farm, raised cucumbers and enough food to feed her children amid the devastation of war.

Despite the depth, length and emotional content of these narratives, they seldom lost touch with the present. The present always intruded. It was there, at the edges of past and present, where they seemed to straddle both worlds, that their transformation from young to old, Soviet to American was most apparent. There were the well rehearsed war stories of the past, the display of medals and uniforms mixed with heated discussion about the politics of seeking veterans' benefits from the United States Veterans' Administration; old musical programs from St. Petersburg and stories of improvised music-making in Tashkent evacuation sites during Great Patriotic War were displaced by last week's program at the Brighton Beach bandshell; a poignant love story of married life in Odessa was interrupted by tears and hurt over a failed marriage in New York. Most of the interviews took place in cohort members' homes, adding texture to their stories and displaying concretely the physical trappings of their transformation. Pictures of the Opera House at Odessa and old photographs of parents and grandparents were displayed alongside framed U.S. citizenship certificates and recent snapshots of grandchildren's weddings celebrated at Brooklyn restaurants. One daughter-in-law showed me pictures of herself and her husband swimming during the winter at Brighton Beach. She said that Ena, her husband's mother who had just died, loved to collect these American photographs of her family.

Beyond these more personal and private narratives, there was another level at which their transition from Soviet to American took place—in their social encounters within the urban ethnoscares of two diverse neighborhoods. It was here that the transformation was most dramatically and imaginatively manifest. Old soldiers, veterans of the Great Patriotic War, holding onto their Soviet hero status, transformed themselves into fellow war veterans with Americans, gaining recognition from the U.S. Veterans Administration and marching alongside American veterans in Memorial Day parades. Even the oldest stepped forth courageously to learn to speak English, turning their local language classes into workshops for absorbing and practicing American culture, going beyond mere language to speak out with their opinions on popular political culture—about Pataki, Clinton and Guiliani, about Elian Gonzalez, and the power of the vote, to find out about the American brand of anti-Semitism when a Jewish senator was selected to run for Vice-President of the United States.

The Victory Day parade and concert held in Brighton Beach to celebrate the 55th anniversary of the end of World War II for the Soviet Union, was probably the most dramatic display of ritual-making emerging out of the conjunction of immigration and aging. Here the oldest of the old—a number of them were members of the cohort—invoked their own past glories and those of their former fallen nation in a performance intended to provide continuity with their past heroic lives, their Soviet nation and their present American lives. Here they moved beyond private narrative to public ritual, a Soviet style secular display significantly devoid of religious overtones (the only reference to God is in the rousing “God Bless America” sung after the Soviet anthem) to renew solidarity among themselves as old warriors worthy of recognition and respect, to reach

beyond themselves to the generations who follow, and to connect in some sense with American nationhood. Appadurai's emphasis on the role of the imagination in shaping possibilities for lives that go beyond the ordinary, is found here. He speaks of migratory groups who "regroup in new locations" and who "reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic projects..." (Appadurai 1991:48).

Immigration and age work in two ways in this case. Seen from the immigrant perspective, the war, their survival, the celebration of victory in Moscow each year, take on intense significance. The strong sense of identity with nation that some cohort members said occurred only during the war years, becomes the focus for yearnings for their past lives, what was left behind, and even regret for what might have been. On the other hand, immigration coupled with advanced age works against the preservation of an institutional memory. The old soldiers tell me that the Russian school children are not interested in their stories of the war. Their own children pay homage but are busy with their lives. Immigration demands too much of them—no time to dwell on the past. It is an old story. They are also getting older. The President of the Association had just had by-pass surgery and was not well enough to march in the parade. They tell me of the number of veterans who die each year and I realize how very fragile they are and how fleeting this moment of ritual is, unlike similar national memorials which have taken root among native populations and have been successfully passed on to younger generations (Damousi 2000, Ingles 1998).

SPACE, PLACE AND LOCALITY

The vast spaces of the Soviet Union, the dense urban places of New York, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Odessa, and the imagined locales that the cohort members created out of their émigré encounters with America were central to an understanding of their transformation and the ways in which the convergence of immigration and aging influenced it. One of my earliest questions was about the reasons why cohort members decided to emigrate—why the numbers of elderly were greater than for any other immigrant group entering the United States during the late 1980's and early 1990's. There were, of course, the obvious explanations—desire to be with children and the promise of refugee benefits to ease their settlement. But in addition to these pulls, I began to consider other influences as they talked about their lives. Cohort members infused stories of their early years with descriptions of long unpredictable journeys across the Soviet Union. From my perspective, peering back across time and the enormous distances they traveled, first as migrants into large cities from small towns and villages, later as soldiers and evacuees during the war, there was the suggestion that possibilities for emigration had been raised then, possibilities that had lain dormant for many years, suppressed by state-imposed travel restrictions. Their survival during these perilous journeys and the unpredictable living conditions where they settled was a major theme in their narratives. In addition to detailing the dangers and hardships they encountered, they described the land and the novelty of cities and places they visited—one woman enthused as she remembered the book shops in Lvov where she spent a few days on leave from the army; a former artillery officer described the cities of Bucharest and Budapest as he led his

unit in pursuit of the Germans toward the end of the war. There was the faintest air of excitement in their voices as they talked.

Cohort members also had lived long years in the large major cities of the Soviet Union—Moscow, St. Petersburg, Odessa. They were city folk and the knowledge that they would be settling in New York City might also have inclined them to consider emigration with less trepidation. Yetta's story in Chapter 7 of her family's encounter with the police displayed, among other things, a high level of urban sophistication about the workings of power in a complex city. I also wondered whether long-term urban residents of communal apartments in a communist state might have been less wedded to place. They occupied space in their cities but did not own it. Identification with place was missing in their stories of everyday life. Although they extolled the beauty and sometimes the ugliness of their cities, and referred individually to local Party offices or a synagogue that belonged to all the Jews of Moscow, there was an absence of personal identification with neighborhood. There is enough data it seems—a certain risk-taking and curiosity about unknown places, their urban experience, and a lack of attachment to place—to suggest that these factors influenced the ways in which they experienced themselves in the world and might very well have been sufficient to tilt their decisions in favor of emigration.

Place also mattered when cohort members reached New York, settling down in one of two traditional immigrant neighborhoods that appeared on the surface to have similar characteristics but were actually ones in which significantly different social forces were at play. Although both neighborhoods provided an abundance of social and health services and were appealing settings for the elderly, there were differences that mattered. In one neighborhood, Washington Heights, I found cohort members who displayed a quieter, less

politically active, more inward-directed persona. They were surrounded by family members and a strong network of social and political supports. In contrast to this almost idyllic image of an elderly community, cohort members in the other neighborhood, Brighton Beach, were actively engaged in the life of the community, at times almost frenetic in their pursuit of causes on behalf of themselves and the community at large. After teasing out the differences among cohort members living in the two neighborhoods attributable to age, place of birth in the Soviet Union, and length of time in the United States, differences remained, leaving neighborhood as a plausible explanation for difference.

Appadurai distinguishes neighborhood from locality, the former an actually existing social form and the latter having a more complex phenomenological quality (Appadurai 1996:180). Despite their similarities, the existing social forms of both neighborhoods were distinctly different: in the more idyllic, almost pastoral Washington Heights neighborhood enclave, elderly émigrés were immersed and outnumbered by a young immigrant Dominican population, their Russian language drowned out by Spanish and their needs as immigrants and elders, so carefully looked after that they were seldom required to act on their own behalf; in Brighton Beach, cohort members, as elders, commanded a larger portion of the neighborhood population and, although they too were immersed and outnumbered in a larger population, that population was connected to them by a common culture. It was here in the social medium of Brighton Beach that cohort members were able to express themselves in a language, using social forms, and drawing on familiar cultural expression to create the locality about which Appadurai writes (Appadurai 1996:186). Fertile ground is needed. Lacking a place in which the

opportunity for this kind of cultural expression is possible, the Washington Heights cohort members, although active and engaged, were not involved in the production of locality to the same degree that the Brighton Beach group was.

CHRONOLOGY, DEMOGRAPHY AND DIFFERENCE: COHORT VARIATION

Chronological age mattered, even as little as two or three years made a difference in some cases. Their narratives and the accounts of classroom struggles and triumphs, community conflict and celebration opened a complex field of cultural construction in which demography, chronology and their long and rich historical experiences mixed with the everyday realities of their émigré lives. There were times when, in the analysis of data, that I divided the cohort into three and then two age categories, settling eventually on two age spans: those 75 years and older and those under 75 years. A striking difference in their experience of the Second World War divided them. They talked about the war in different ways. They had different stories to tell. The older members had been actively engaged in fighting the war. A sense of autonomy, exhilaration, heroism, even romance broke through in their accounts of battles and retreats and victories. Their post-war experiences were also different. The older group was old enough to marry and begin to raise families, perhaps better able to pick up the pieces and carry on. Looking back over their narratives, I see too that their childhood recollections were far more likely to contain detailed and joy filled memories of grandparents and parents, of advice given and conversations had. These were memories of ordinary family life. Galina, now 86, talked lovingly about her family's home in Tula, not far from Moscow. Rita, 81, remembers wonderful summers spent at her grandparents' home in the Caucasus. The younger cohort members did

remember but their memories were painful and haunting recollections of survival in camps and separations from family. They seem to have missed out on the intimacy of family life.

These differences are significant and appeared to divide the cohort—an older group born in time to have been nurtured with a rich heritage of family life laid down early in their lives and a younger group whose early and teenage years were shattered by the violence and chaos of war—two identities, one nourished, strong, accomplished, confident; the other, fragile and unsure.

In these accounts the older members of the cohort turn out to be the founders of the Veterans' Association. The younger ones are members but not leaders. The same leaders in the Association—Leonard, its President, Yetta, one of its most vocal spokespersons, Victor, the leader of the Washington Heights chapter—are also engaged in other activities related to housing protests and Holocaust memorial ceremonies. They are present at protest meetings, on the stage, in uniform, speaking out. And, in her account of “police brutality,” it is 81 year old Yetta who leads her large family in its contest with the New York City Police. Of course, not all of these elders, all in their late seventies and eighties, were as actively engaged as these. But when placed along side the “youngsters” in their early seventies, their daily lives reflected closer attachments with family, friends, and associations in the neighborhood. The younger members were more solitary. One man, the youngest in the cohort was engaged in a project brought along with him from the former Soviet Union. He continues to work on the Soviet Holocaust survivors' project, struggling to gain support but getting little of it. He is separated from the wife who arrived with him. Ludmila lives alone, has a good neighbor who she swims with in the morning but is at odds with her older sister who lives nearby. She remains aloof from

most community activities. This younger group has also had a greater share of physical illness, mostly cardiovascular diseases. In fact all of the six members of the cohort who have undergone by-pass surgery in the United States, are in this younger half of the cohort, four of the six having surgery within the first five years of their emigration. This is, of course, a very small sample capable only of raising questions about the carryover into the present of past experiences and their power to influence aging and the impact of immigration. An alternative explanation might be that this combination of physical illness and anomie is a depressing foreshadowing about their survival. Will these “youngsters make it into their eighties? Will their decision to emigrate and to have surgery have improved their chances for survival?

In a lesser way, demography, historical events, and shifting state policy dating back to the 1930's and '40's in the Soviet Union also had their impact on cohort members in later years. Revolutionary ideals fleetingly supportive of free marriage and women's rights, followed by famine and war, led to rapidly changing state policies. Depending upon the time at which they reached their child-bearing years, the number of children born to cohort members varied. The oldest members for instance, having reached their child-bearing years at a time when the state had changed its policies in an effort to reverse the extreme population decline of the 1930's, had more children than those younger cohort members. The significance of this variation in family size, although small, sometimes influenced the timing of their decisions to leave, the place where they settled and, sometimes in the amount of support they received from children and grandchildren.

SHIFTING INEQUALITIES

Their lives, both in the former Soviet Union and later as émigrés in the United States, followed a complex and sometimes contradictory path of shifting inequalities, touching on religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, race, and even age. These shifting inequalities over time and place demonstrate the role of state policy in creating inequalities and privilege but also reveal the ways in which people work around state power in order to achieve advantage or at least a reasonable accommodation. One of the most striking impacts of their immigration has been a reversal of their status as Russian Jews, turning disadvantage into advantage. Their stories are personal but the broader social and political forces shaping these changing inequities are also traceable. For them as Russian Jews, anti-Semitism was an unrelenting personal and political force (they denied any religious content to the persecution, going out of their way to point out that priests as well as rabbis were exiled, and churches as well as synagogues were destroyed), a source of personal suffering for them and their children, and a constraint on their aspirations as students and workers. They were clearly at a disadvantage. Analysis of ethnographic and narrative data reveals great variation within the cohort but the impact of anti-Semitism on their lives was perhaps the more enduring and consistent theme. All were touched in some way and readily talked about it. Many continued to struggle with Jewish identity and, as in Yetta's account of her conflict with the New York City police, an acute sensitivity continued. But, as young adults in the early post-Revolutionary years, they lived alongside others in major cities of the Soviet Union, taking advantage of educational opportunities and rising to relatively high levels of responsibility in their work, some achieving "privileged" access to goods and services. They were not shut out altogether.

Some used Party membership to advance themselves, others stood on principle, finding ways to avoid joining; others were not asked. They were Jews, openly excluded, but they frequently spoke of themselves as Soviets caught up with others, non-Jews, in accommodating to the inequities of state controlled distribution of goods in which informal networks, party membership, and other forms of privilege counted more than anything else. Despite the promises of the Revolution and the high levels of education achieved by women in the cohort, the men held more command positions as plant managers and military officers and were paid higher salaries with more access to privilege. But most cohort women were able to arrange for help with childcare because of their relatively higher paying jobs among women workers.

Their decision to emigrate upset this uneven but livable balance of advantages and disadvantages that they had achieved, intensifying the level of anti-Semitism directed at them, resulting in loss of hard-earned positions and privileges and, in some cases, threats directed at them and their children. Ironically their identity as Jews, a disadvantage in the Soviet Union was taken up on an international scale as the Cold War began to unravel. Their disadvantage as Jews was turned to advantage as the United States government, in an act of political expediency, moved to denounce humanitarian violations in the Soviet Union, advocating for release of Soviet Jews who had applied for immigration and had been refused. Soviet Jews were designated refugees and individual cases publicized and exploited in the interests of U.S. policy. Russian Jewish identity became an advantage, providing preferred consideration for emigration. The stories of cohort members recounting instances of anti-Semitic acts against them became required texts told at the American embassy to legitimate emigration.

In another shift, their arrival in the United States as elderly émigrés further strengthened their advantage. In a country where race remains a dominant determinant of inequality, their white European status made them welcome residents in formerly European immigrant neighborhoods. Their Jewishness, no longer the object of state-sponsored anti-Semitism, entitled them to social supports which supplemented the refugee benefits they received. Age and their need for health and social services beyond the needs of a younger immigrant population, in a way, created an advantage by providing additional benefits. Cohort members, although not unaware of flaws within the United States healthcare system, sang out their praise and gratitude to America as they recounted the social and health benefits that have accrued to them as elderly immigrants. My initial expectation that they, because of their near lifetimes lived as Soviet citizens, would have decidedly different expectations of government than American elders, was never really put to the test because of their relatively advantaged positions as elders and as immigrants. The failed promises of the Soviet government had become fulfilled promises in the United States.

They stand now, many already citizens—a mix of relative privilege and disadvantage: as immigrants among immigrants, they are better off than most; as Russian Jews they retain a sensitivity to anti-Semitism and a conviction that it still has a bearing on their lives; as elders they benefit from health insurance benefits where other older Americans do less well. They struggle though, as do many American elderly, on austere budgets—their SSI checks and food stamps. They have no reserves, no inheritances. The extras come as gifts from children. Their lives are a far cry from gated retirement communities and generous pensions. Their hard journeys through a lifetime of conflicting

advantage but mostly disadvantage, and their present sanguine outlook say much about the lessons of the spirit learned along the way and the nature of survival: It is their own subjective exhilaration in their spacious apartments, the bounteous food markets, the free cultural events and their access to medical care, that conveys their sense of good fortune. They value and celebrate these good fortunes in contrast to their Soviet lives and perhaps it is this windfall, this reversal of fortune, that explains their heartiness and endurance.

APPENDIX A INTERVIEW GUIDE

LIFE PHASE DIVISIONS

- **Childhood**
- **Early and Middle Adult Years**
- **Work/Retirement**
- **Emigration and Resettlement**

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- **Date of birth**
- **Place of birth within the Soviet Union - republic, rural/urban**
- **Place(s) lived during adult years - republic, rural/urban**
- **Place from which departed - republic, rural/urban**
- **Age when left former Soviet Union**
- **Year of emigration**
- **Immigration status on entry to U.S. - refugee, asylee, sponsored, other**
- **Length of time in U.S.**
- **Citizenship status - citizen, pending, other**
- **Education - years of school, where and when attended, area of study**
- **Marital status - married/single/ widowed, partner's background, when and where married**
- **Political affiliations - membership in communist youth organizations, communist party, circumstances of membership**
- **Children and grandchildren - number, ages, location, degree of contact**

KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS TO BE INCLUDED IN ALL PHASES OF INTERVIEWS

- **Second World War**
- **Anti-Semitism**
- **Famine**
- **Purges**
- **Collectivization**
- **Internal migration**

KEY MEMORIES

EARLY

- **Parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family - intergenerational relationships, stories, conversations, vivid recall of events, moments, parents work**
- **Place - description of home, village/city, household composition**
- **Language(s) spoken - how acquired**
- **Ritual - birth, religious observance, marriage, deaths and burial**
- **Health/Illness - self and family - specific illnesses, treatments and accessibility, deaths**
- **Education - early schooling**

EARLY ADULT AND MIDDLE YEARS

- **Education** - access to higher education, content of study
- **Work** - positions held, discipline, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, accomplishments, relative pay
- **Marriage** - decision to marry, circumstances of meeting, satisfaction, current status
- **Children** - decision to have children, number of children - their health and education, number of grandchildren
- **Health/Illness** - self and spouse, children, care of elders

APPROACHING RETIREMENT/RETIREMENT

- **Decision to retire** - pressure to retire, pension, satisfaction with work
- **Health/Illness** - self and spouse, care of elders
- **Decision to emigrate** - refusnik status, reasons for leaving, preparation, obstacles

EMIGRATION/RESETTLEMENT

- **Place** - neighborhood in which settled and why, relationship and distance from children and grandchildren, satisfaction with location
- **Household Income** - source of support - SSI, food stamps, social agencies, refugee benefits, gifts from children
- **Networks** - family, extended family, friends
- **Community involvement** - membership and participation in neighborhood organizations, frequency, type of activities
- **Health/Illness** - self-assessment of health status, recent illnesses, when and where treated, satisfaction/dissatisfaction

INTERVIEW TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- “Ups and Downs” graphs
- Photographs
- Heirlooms
- Music, books, stories, documents

APPENDIX B SCENARIO

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF AN ELDERLY MOTHER - WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Sofia's daughter doesn't know what to do. She must make a decision about her mother's care now that she needs someone to be with her all the time. This is what has happened.

Sophia came to the United States in 1988 when she was 70 years old. She settled in New York City where her children, a son and daughter, were living. Before coming to the United States, she lived most of her life in Moscow working as an economist. Her husband died in 1982 in Russia.

Sofia had been in good health most of her life until the past year when she had a serious stroke which weakened her left side and affected her speech. Since she lives alone, the New York City Department of Social Services had been providing a home attendant to help her each day to bathe and dress. The attendant also shopped and prepared meals for her and helped her get out each day to the local day care program.

This arrangement had been working smoothly until last week when Sofia had another stroke. Now she is in bed most of the time. She has lost control of her bladder and needs to be changed frequently. Her memory is failing also, although she still knows her family.

The New York City Department of Social Services has increased the amount of time that the home attendant stays with Sofia. She is now with her 12 hours a day. She does almost everything for her during the day until 8 PM, but after that she is alone. She has an "emergency alert system." It's a buzzer that she can push if she needs help.

Unfortunately, this arrangement is not working. Her attendant feels that she is not safe when she is left alone. She has told her daughter that she found Sofia on the bedroom floor when she arrived yesterday morning. She must have tried to get up during the night and fallen.

What to do?

Sofia's daughter lives in the neighborhood. She lives with her husband and two teenage children. She works part-time as an x-ray technician. She is 56 years old. Sofia's son lives in New Jersey. He is 50 years old. He commutes every day to Manhattan to his work as a programmer. He too is married and has a son who is attending college in Manhattan.

SOME QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE DISCUSSION IF NECESSARY

Should she stay at home or go to a nursing home?

What would be the best arrangement?

If she stays at home, what can be done to make it safer for her?

Should family get money together to pay someone to stay with her at night?

Should the government pay for the care at night?

Should daughter or son have her move in with them?

Should daughter or son or grandchildren take turns staying with her?

Should daughter give up her part-time job?

If she refuses to go to a nursing home, can family force her? Would they? Should they?

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