Cultural Identity Construction in Russian-Jewish Post-Immigration Literature

by

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Abstract

The following dissertation examines narratives of immigration to Western Europe, Israel and North America authored by Russian-speaking writers of Jewish decent, born in the Soviet Union after World War II. The project seeks to investigate representations of resettlement experiences and cultural identity construction in the literature of the post-1970s Russian-Jewish diaspora. The seven authors whose selected works comprise the corpus of analysis write in Russian, German and English, reflecting the complex performative nature of their own multilayered identities. The authors included are Dina Rubina, Liudmila Ulitskaia, Wladimir Kaminer, Lara Vapnyar, Gary Shteyngart, Irina Reyn, and David Bezmozgis. The corpus is a selection of fictional and semi-autobiographical narratives that focus on cultural displacement and the subsequent renegotiation of 'self' following immigration.

In the 1970s and final years of Communist rule, over one million Soviet citizens of Jewish heritage immigrated to Western Europe, Israel and North America. Inhospitable government policies towards Soviet citizens identified as Jewish and social traditions of anti-Semitism precipitated this mass exodus. After escaping prejudice within the Soviet system, these Jewish immigrants were marginalized in their adopted homelands as Russians. The following study of displacement and relocation draws on Homi Bhabha's theories of othering and unhomeliness. The analyzed works demonstrate both culturally based othering and unhomely experiences pre- and post-immigration resulting from relegation to the periphery of society. Based upon the concept of performativity developed by Judith Butler, this study maintains that the cultural display of self is a performative act which manifests in a variety of ways.

Chapter One presents the research problem, introduces the corpus of analysis, discusses the concepts of unhomeliness, identity and performativity as theoretical tools, provides a justification of the methodological framework being utilized, and finally positions Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature within the canon of diasporic world literature. Chapter Two focuses on a contextualization of Russian-Jewish character portrayal from a historical perspective, charting the metamorphosis of the Wandering Jew, as first conceived of by Christian society, through this enduring figure's transformation beyond stereotyped caricature. This study postulates that contemporary Russian-Jewish authors have reclaimed the literary image of the Wandering Jew as their own, effectively reconfiguring the character for their post-immigration narratives of displacement. As this project shows, the multilayering of cultural influences often results in ambiguous conceptualizations of self, a common feature of the literary make-up of Russian-Jewish post-immigration protagonists. Such ambiguity is often accompanied by a desire for self-definition and is frequently associated with the *geroi khudozhnik* (artist figure), who symbolically embodies post-immigration identity renegotiation. The artist appears regularly in these works as the perpetual creator and designer, who is equally engaged in the ongoing reformulation and shaping of his/her own post-immigration identity. Chapter Three focuses on the literary construction of post-immigration spaces and how they both inform and reflect cultural distinctiveness. Through examinations of unhomeliness, nostalgia, and the search for belonging, the project approaches representations of both physical and symbolic spaces as culturally significant. Chapter Four deals with the construct of performativity as it applies to displays of cultural identity. The chapter explores the culturally performative actions of post-immigration

protagonists through the consideration of established character types, language usage, and the physical presentation of self in connection with multilayered identity.

By identifying significant themes common to the project's literary corpus the symbolic implications of everyday choices made by the analyzed characters exemplify the importance of understanding Russian-Jewish post-immigration experiences. The present comparative literary investigation of seven authors from this group demonstrates how the presence of multiple simultaneous cultural influences -- Soviet, Russian, Jewish, German, Israeli, American, Canadian – results in highly specific and complex presentations of ongoing identity negotiation.

Dedication

For Benji

May your culturally multilayered journey bring you adventure, inspiration and wisdom without borders.

"Understand a man by his deeds and words; the impressions of others lead to false judgement."

-- Talmud

"Keep your language. Love its sounds, its modulation, its rhythm. But try to march together with men of different languages, remote from your own, who wish like you for a more just and human world."

-- Hélder Câmara

"Who is a wise man? He who learns of all men."

-- Talmud

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University of Hawaii forty years after completing her post-secondary education the first time around – I will always strive to be like her.

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A Note on Translation and Transliteration

For the purposes of this study, all quotations are provided in English. When available, published English translations are used. For texts only available in their original language, all translations are my own and are indicated as such.

I comply with the Library of Congress transliteration system when rendering written Russian in Latin letters. However, exceptions and alternate spellings are used in cases of widely accepted pre-existing standards (e.g., Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Vygotsky). For some names I adhere to the spellings used in these authors' published works (e.g., Wladimir, Yelenevskaya).

Renderings of Yiddish and Hebrew terms employ the most common English spellings.

Introduction

> You are gathering your entire spiritual strength to find the path of salvation, and then you believe if only for a moment, that you have found it – but I do not believe, and am reluctant to console myself with fairy tales, and I am telling you with a cold confidence with every atom of my existence: there is no salvation, you are in a foreign land, and until the end the will of the foreign land will be upon you.[1]
>
> (Zhabotinskii, *O zheleznoi stene: Rechi, stat'i, vospominaniia* 36; my translation)

As globalization has facilitated ongoing cultural diversification, questions of identity construction, performativity and belonging have become present realities. To be permanently displaced from one's homeland is culturally disorienting, but to be displaced from a homeland in which one experienced ongoing unhomeliness is a more complicated matter:

> Today's exiles, both voluntary and involuntary risk being misunderstood because of language barriers. They face the potential humiliation of having to exist outside of their social class and familiar discourse and thus need to fight for various forms of economic recognition and means of self expression. They also face the processes of cultural loss, breaking with their past collective mythology, and the necessity of coming to terms with the values of an adoptive nation. (Meerzon 7)

From a place of displacement arises the need for what Yana Meerzon calls "self expression," or what I term the performativity of identity. I have begun to regard the realities of dislocation and displacement as psychological and physical processes that are reflected in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. After the authors of these literary works had become Germans, Israelis, Americans and Canadians, they were still

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[1]...Вы напряжете все силы духа, чтобы найти тропинку спасения, и сами себе поверите на миг, будто нашли ее, - но я не верю и гнушаюсь утешать себя сказками, и говорю вам со спокойным холодом в каждом атоме моего существа: нет спасения, вы в чужой земле, и до конца свершится над вами воля чужбины!

seen as 'Russians' despite the presence of these additional cultural labels, as Gary Shteyngart acknowledges in *Little Failure*:

> We came to be Jews, right? Or at least my father did, I didn't really have any feelings on the subject one way or another. And now there has to be *simvolizm*. And that's why I've been cut so brutally, to be more like the children who hate me so much at school, who hate me more than I will ever be hated for the rest of my life. They hate me because I come from the country our new president will soon declare to be the "Evil Empire" giving rise to the endless category of movies beginning with the word "Red" – *Red Dawn*, *Red Gerbil*, *Red Hamster*. "Commie," they shout, with a jolly push into a soft Hebrew school wall. "Russki!" (119)

The narrator details his memories of leaving the Soviet Union because his family was Jewish, and arriving in the United States only to be seen as Russian, not to mention, an enemy. In fact, Shteyngart's physical 'arrival' is only the starting point for an ongoing personal journey, as he illustrates in his 2014 memoir.

The authors of "Recollections and Relocation in Immigration: Russian-Jewish Immigrants 'Normalize' Their Anti-Semitic Experiences" observe that the post-immigration struggle to reconcile past, present and future is a balancing act that informs ongoing negotiations of multiple cultural identities:

> Movement in space, and certainly immigration as cross-cultural movement, disrupts the spontaneous experience of time; it raises a 'problem' of continuity for the individual who seeks a 'solution' for linking the past present and future. Immigrants find a solution through choosing what to make of their past experiences and how to remember and represent them. The disruption of temporality by movement drives their need to deal with the past and widens their space for manoeuvring and selecting recollections. (Rapoport, Lomsky-Feder and Heider 176)

Grappling with this bizarre paradox of multifaceted cultural self-identification is a process that continues long after physical resettlement occurs; thus, physical arrival does not equate psychological arrival. Melanie Fogell explains in *Ambiguous Selves: New*

Jewish Identities (2006) that migration, or similarly, relocation, need not be seen only in tangible terms:

> The whole concept of migration can also be seen as a metaphor for making changes in one's life – moving on. It is not necessary to travel to the other side of the world to experience change. Migration can be also envisioned as a coming into awareness from one state of mind to another. This changing of thought as it affects identity can be viewed as a kind of migration. (15)

The literary works discussed in this project generally cite physical dislocation as the initial catalyst for cultural diversification. However, these narratives all focus on the subsequent journey of ongoing personal metamorphosis. By researching the literary reflections and representations made by authors who had themselves undergone dramatic experiences of cultural identity discovery, I began to realize how impossibly difficult their own experiences must have been. Majid Al-Haj makes the grim observation that although Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel based on a common identity, and resettled in countries and communities based upon that same identity, this is not how they would be regarded in their new homes:

> We may conclude, that even in a nation state heavily based on nationalist ideology, ethnic tensions may evolve in the wake of immigration once it is perceived as threatening to one's group mobility. In this sense, economic and political effects are viewed as more threatening than the cultural one, since they have more immediate repercussions on the power structure and mobility opportunities. Hence, the perception of immigration as culturally contributing to the host society does not necessarily ensure high receptivity of immigrants by the locals. (302)

Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature exemplifies the complicated relationship between the hope of uniting Soviet Jewry with their fellow Jews, and the reality of their perpetual struggle to belong.

This project focuses on the multilayered cultural identity constructions of characters in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. I examine works by seven

authors, all of whom were born in the former Soviet Union after World War II to Russian-speaking ethnically Jewish families, all but one having since emigrated. This study is concerned with the narrative of dislocation and post-relocation search for belonging, including the physical act of displacement as well as the process of cultural acclimatization following immigration. Within the Russian-Jewish post-immigration narrative is an ever-present theme of identity negotiation. The term *negotiation* here refers to the process of redefining one's concept of self while being influenced by multiple distinct additional cultural identities. The negotiation processes these characters undertake assume various forms depending on at what stage in their lives the subjects were initially displaced. Those protagonists who relocated as children experience very different circumstances than those who emigrated as adults. However, regardless of this distinction, there is an inevitable journey of self-discovery and identity redefinition, common to all immigrants, a process on which Edward Said comments in *Reflections on Exile*:

> Exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as "good for us". Is it not true that the views of exile in literature, and moreover in religion obscure what is truly horrendous; that exile is remediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography? To see a poet in exile – as opposed to reading the poetry of exile – is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity. (174)

Though the 'exile' to which Said refers is different from immigration as discussed in this project, in many ways the decision of ethnic Jews to leave the former Soviet Union amounted to self-elected exile. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three

of this study. Those Soviet Jews seeking a place to belong abroad were stripped of all their valuable possessions and had their passports confiscated before departure, thus losing any tangible identity they once had: "But I am no longer a Soviet citizen, and I am no longer worth according any special childhood privileges. I do not know it, but I am a traitor. And my parents are traitors. And if a good many people got their wish, we would be treated as traitors" (Shteyngart, *Little Failure* 79). Although they would never be allowed to return to the Soviet Union, even to visit family members left behind, their departures would not sever their ties to Russianness as an identity. The purpose of this project is to explore the complexities and unique nature of such characters within contemporary prose writing.

Chapter One of my dissertation is devoted to outlining my research problem, defining key terminology and theoretical approaches. Because of the nature of the subject matter, I adopt a specific conceptual apparatus informed by postcolonial theory. My discussion employs the concepts of unhomeliness, drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha, and othering as the main driving forces of the post-immigration experience. I rely heavily on the juxtaposition and social power dynamics of the dominant and the dominated, albeit outside of the classical relationship of a colonizer imposing influence on a colonized subaltern. While the Russian empire sought to expand its borders prior to 1917, Soviet domination was not an external conquering of eastern territories by western powers, but one that seized control initially from within its own borders before absorbing and moving outwards:

> Indeed a lack of adjacent ice-free ocean was exactly Russia's problem, and much of its expansion toward – the Baltics, the Crimea, the Persian Gulf and finally the Pacific – was a frank attempt to get some. This widespread adjacent myth is likely influenced by Russia's purported Eurasian character – a notion (expressed

> at various times by Russians and non-Russians) that has long typed Russia as neither European nor "Asiatic" but as somehow in between, and particularly as more primitive than (Western) Europe. Whatever the truth of this odd, unprovable idea, which rests on hypostasized continental essences, that notion causes analysts of Russian colonization once again to deviate from Western models. (Moore 119)

Following the Bolshevik Revolution and Communist seizure of power, Soviet control expanded from within the former imperial borders moving outward. Those falling forcibly under the Soviet sphere of influence found themselves dominated in a similar manner as did colonized groups. When applied to the post-immigration narrative, the juxtaposition of *us* and *them* becomes the central relationship that catalyzes all other thematic components. In my conceptualization of this approach, the former Soviet regime takes the place of 'colonizer,' and the ostracized ethnic Jewish population on the periphery of society, the 'colonized.' Although the classical binary of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' is not applicable within this particular cultural dynamic, the sociocultural power relationship of domination created under the previously established postcolonial model remains the same despite diverging given circumstances.

All seven authors whose works are examined here are introduced within the literary niche of Russian-Jewish post-immigration writing, which I define in this study as a specific form of contemporary literature. I position Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature within the canon of world literature, and give a brief overview of its overarching themes, tropes and motifs. Within this positioning, I emphasize the necessity of specifying terminology by defining the distinction between Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature and seemingly similar forms: Russian-American, Russian-German, Russian-Israeli and Jewish-American literature. I begin a discussion of othering that will continue throughout this study.

Chapter Two outlines the historical and cultural context for the depiction of Jewish characters throughout Russian literature, and also discusses how this previously stereotyped and often anti-Semitic caricature eventually gave way to more sympathetic renderings of Jews as seen in Russian-Jewish post-immigration prose. I demonstrate this progression in Jewish literary portraiture by citing classical examples of stereotyped Jewish characters, relating these renderings to Jewish representations created by Soviet-Jewish authors, and finally demonstrating how this long legacy of othering and unhomelieness has informed the contemporary works of this study. This draws on Chapter One's analysis of Soviet Jews as a persecuted minority under an unorthodox colonial regime. Within this chapter, I map the development of the myth of the Wandering Jew and this character's evolution into the culturally complex characters examined in this corpus. I draw connections between these previously borderline anti-Semitic character types and contemporary examples of what Eleonora Shafranskaia calls the *geroi khudozhnik* (artist figure) and discuss parallels between the *geroi khudozhnik* and the post-immigration protagonists in these texts. I demonstrate why the presence of artistic creation, which arises from the pervasive theme of unhomeliness, is an almost universal feature within the post-immigration narrative. This solidifies the conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis of post-immigration spaces examined in the third chapter.

Chapter Three discusses the creation and habitation of post-immigration environments, both physical and symbolic. I rely on the works of the late Svetlana Boym in my analysis of nostalgia within the post-relocation context, a major theme in post-immigration literature. Examples treated in the works under discussion range from home

décor to food, all matters of cultural familiarity. By interpreting aspects such as home décor and food within the post-immigration environment, I believe a connection can be made between nostalgia as a feeling and nostalgia as a practice. I identify the uniquely Russian-Jewish post-immigration components of place descriptions in order to illustrate the significance of physical spaces within these narratives. The understanding of post-immigration spaces is critical to the overall understanding of the characters that inhabit them. However, my analysis is not limited to the creation of physical spaces, but also considers the cultivation of symbolic environments as well: imagined spaces, linguistic spaces and psychological spaces.

Chapter Four is devoted to the analysis of cultural identity performativity. I discuss the significant components that make up the complex and varied cultural performances of the post-immigration experience. While there is an inherent necessity for cultural mimicry, a term borrowed from Homi Bhabha, authors such as Dina Rubina and Wladimir Kaminer discuss cultural performance as a disguise rather than an attempt at assimilation. Irina Reyn and Lara Vapnyar illustrate cultural performativity as capitalizing on an exotic image of the other for seductive purposes. Others depict performativity as entirely subtle and unconscious.

In my conclusion, I outline my findings and projections for potential subsequent research within this field. Though there has been considerable scholarly work on diasporic identity construction, hybrid identities, and Russian Jewry. This project brings together all these areas of inquiry with a specific focus on cultural identity construction in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature transcending multiple borders. To date, I am aware of no other study that explores the cultural multilayering of Russian-Jews identities

from a comparative trans-national literary perspective. This study seeks to fill a void in current scholarship by delving deeper into the narratives of this insular and unique culture.

Chapter 1: Context, Corpus and Theoretical Approaches

> Exile is strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.
>
> (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 173)

1.1 Introduction: Statement of Purpose and Research Problem

This chapter aims to lay the groundwork for the theoretical and analytical approaches that this study takes toward the discussion of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. This analysis postulates that the Soviet Union, and its collapse, resulted in a multitude of splintered identities that would be further complicated and diversified by the transcendence of cultural and international borders through immigration. Post-immigration identities are inherently transient as they result from dislocation and subsequent feelings of unhomeliness, as discussed by Bhabha: "[i]ndeed the intervention of the 'beyond' establishes a boundary: a bridge where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (*Location of Culture* 13). For Bhabha, location and belonging are decisive factors in being "homed."

In *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization* (2008), Nataša Kovačevič regards the former Eastern Bloc as a transitional postcolonial space: "The term *postcolonial* traditionally signifies fragmentation,

disjunction, the crossing of national, cultural and linguistic borders, figuratively and/or literally" (5, emphasis in original). As all the post-immigration narratives discussed in this dissertation were written by authors from this fractured cultural space, questions of identity perception present themselves even before any borders have been crossed. With questions of cultural identity at the core of Russian-Jewish post-immigration studies, this analysis lends itself well to theories influenced by postcolonial criticism:

> In view of these postcolonial-post-Soviet parallels, two silences are striking. The first is the silence of postcolonial studies today on the subject of the former Soviet sphere. And the second, mirrored silence is the failure of scholars specializing in the formerly Soviet-controlled lands to think of their regions in the useful if by no means perfect postcolonial terms. (Moore 115)

This chapter discusses concepts of identity and performativity that will carry throughout this dissertation, outlines the context for the following critical analysis, provides an overview of the primary corpus, establishes working definitions of key terminology and finally presents the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

The analysis that follows concerns the exodus of Russian-speaking ethnic[2] Jews leaving their birthplaces in the former Soviet space for Israel, Western Europe and North America, in the years leading up to the collapse of Communism or soon after. As Michaeline A. Crichlow explains, physical remapping necessitates transformation at all levels. The opening of the Soviet Union's formidable borders culminated in the systematic reconfiguring of Eastern Europe and former Soviet territories in Central Asia. As disillusioned former Soviets sought out new lives abroad, communities of immigrants were established, adapting to their new surroundings and diversifying their cultural identities in the process. This analysis assumes that identity is a performative construct

[2] When I use the term "ethnic Jews," I am specifically referring to individuals who possess a Jewish heritage regardless of maternal lineage (i.e. at least one Jewish grandparent).

that is essentially limitless. Such co-mingling of multiple performed identities has been the topic of much discussion in recent academic discourse. I believe it is more correct to refer to this phenomenon as the multilayering of identity since additional influences add to existing identities. The implications of what Chan Kwok-bun terms "hybridity" is accomplished by various additional considerations:

> Hybridity is a difficult concept. It eludes and motivates at the same time – neither here nor there; it is somewhere in between. When scholars speak of the hybrid person the almost inevitably emphasize a figure who is at once a combination of cultures, a melange of influences, and somehow better for it. The whole is always greater than the sum of its parts, or so it seems. But my research in recent years has shown that an entirely positive outlook for the hybrid actor, the person who slips and glides between cultures, is not always accurate. More often hybridity offers promise – the best of both worlds; or even the best of all worlds – but also a very heavy burden. Of necessity a hybrid person rarely sits easily on this globe stuffed tight with nation-states demanding allegiance, with races insisting on purity and fighting spiritual pollution, contamination and invasion by aliens, with societies insisting that one way is the best way – perhaps the only way. (1)

Citing the inherent link between performance and projected identity, May Joseph echoes Kwok-bun's primary thesis when she points out that "the internationalism embedded in contemporary discourse of hybridity and its mobilizing political energy open up new ways of perceiving cultural and political practices" (1). In fact, internationalism positions itself at the crux of the multifaceted identity construction, as multiple cultural influences converge to inform the overall composition of 'self.'

The corpus of this analysis illustrates the exhibition of identity through fictional and semi-fictional narratives.[3] The pageantry of layered cultural identity construction exhibited by Russian-Jewish immigrants demonstrates cultural transience within this unique literary niche. It is the emergence and manifestation of such narratives that

[3] Although Shteyngart and Kaminer present their work as autobiographical, my discussion will approach these narratives as semi-fictional. This distinction is made with the assumption that any presentation of 'self' is the result of self-editing and embellishment.

Adrian Wanner begins to identify in "Russian Jews as American Writers: A New Paradigm for Jewish Multiculturalism?" (2012). With complex layering and many contributing cultural influences, ongoing artistic themes take form, such as assimilation, determination for advancement, and persistence in overcoming the hardships of resettlement. As Wanner attests, these post-immigration hardships indoctrinate their sufferers into a distinct socio-cultural group: "Ironically, under the existing multicultural rubric, personal hardship appears to be advantageous for an author, since it facilitates inclusion into artistic canons reserved for oppressed and victimized minorities" ("Russian Jews" 157). The works produced by authors within these marginalized minority communities have brought about the development of a highly specific body of contemporary literature: the Russian-Jewish post-immigration narrative.

I purposefully categorize the works of this corpus as *post-immigration* rather than *émigré* literature specifically to highlight the concentration of the narrative on themes of resettlement and cultural identity reconstruction following displacement. This is not to say that post-immigration refers only to the time period directly following displacement and relocation. In fact the post-immigration renegotiation of identity is an ongoing process. These writers share a proud heritage and complex history with their émigré author compatriots, but their works by the same token certainly cannot be called *émigré* literature. However, all of the works discussed depict exile as a theme.

Russian-Jewish post-immigration authors follow in the exilic footsteps of a generation of dissident writers who reaffirmed western society's collective consciousness of 'exile.' In *Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile,* David M. Bathea outlines the condition of the exiled artist:

> A writer is not usually expelled from society because the artistry of his work does not meet, as it were, industrial standards. Instead, whether implicitly or explicitly, that artistry and the individual projecting that artistry somehow violate the social contract, the norms of the majority that grant the minority a place within its midst. This inability, or what is more likely wilful refusal to think, write or act like others can be interpreted, regardless of whether the individual is calling for emulation, as political treason. (37)

Although the authors included in this study never underwent a forcible exile based upon nonconformity, they still exist in a reality of permanent displacement. Malcolm Bradbury asserts, "Almost every country and culture in which the arts have been seriously pursued has produced its literary exiles; its voyagers, its expatriates and émigrés" (15). The distinction between immigration and exile may not be as vast as one may initially believe; as Edward Said points out, "Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider" (*Reflections on Exile* 181). If these are the tenets of exile, then the case of Soviet Jewry certainly fits the model: those departing had their Soviet citizenship revoked (the only citizenship they had ever had), and bid farewell to their loved ones believing they would never be able to return to their native soil, as Shteyngart illustrates: "Waiting before the customs line, the Jews are saying goodbye to their relatives with all the emotion they are well known for, saying goodbye forever" (*Little Failure* 78). Said theorized that the state of exile depended on the perception of nationalism:

> Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by community of language, culture and customs; and by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and consulting each other. All nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement. (*Reflections on Exile* 176)

One could argue that the distinction of *immigrant* or *exile* depends on the displaced individual's perception of the dislocation experience. The former suggests a conscious decision, while the latter indicates that the individual has been expelled from his/her homeland involuntarily. Further still is the label of 'expatriate,' with an array of more socially prestigious connotations. Expatriation, referring to one's self-elected habitation within a foreign country, is often determined by professional or elitist factors. Those with the moniker 'expatriate' as opposed to 'immigrant' have not relocated out of necessity, and are often differentiated as people of means. Leonid Livak argues, "The distinction between emigration and expatriation is of crucial methodological value for Russian exilic studies. It allows us to test a common claim supporting the myth of émigré cultural isolation" (*Russian Émigrés in the Intellectual and Literary Life of Interwar France* 7). These are important differences to note; although, expatriates do not feature in this study, as most of the characters in the works under discussion have experienced what is tantamount to exile. Many of the scholars I cite use the term *émigré* to refer to those who have relocated, while I use the term *immigrant* because of the connotation that the individual is still in the post-immigration phase of displacement and identity renegotiation.

For ethnic Jews living in the Soviet Union and subsequent former Soviet republics, anti-Semitism and prejudices against Jews should be seen as catalysts for self-elected exile. Indeed, this exile differs from that of a writer who departs for fear of political or artistic reprisal; but in both instances, there is an ideology or overwhelming sentiment that makes the place hostile and uninhabitable, forcing the individual to leave. Though the result of each process is the same, the connotations of each are different.

Edward Said is critical of the modern intrigue surrounding 'exile' as a sort of romanticized chic:

> The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enticing motif of modern culture? We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement. (*Reflections on Exile* 173)

As such, the representation of exile should not necessarily be seen as completely involuntary, because exile can also be a cultivated identity. For the purposes of this analysis, and the case of former Soviet Jewry, I contend that the divide between post-immigration immigrants and exiles can be simplified to a matter of preferred terminology. For Said, "Much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule" (*Reflections on Exile* 181), but could this not also be said of immigrants? He continues, "No matter how well they may do exiles are always eccentrics who feel their difference (even as they frequently exploit it) as a kind of orphanhood" (*Reflections on Exile* 182); is not the observation of cultural differences, and the performance of such identities, the essence of the post-immigration narrative?

Like exiles, former Soviet Jewish immigrants too have left behind all that is familiar. Within academia, scholars are careful to differentiate between immigrants and exiles, and indeed they should. However, in the case of former Soviet Jewry, one should regard the act of immigration as self-elected exile, as Joseph Brodsky acknowledges:

> Nobody ever counted these people and nobody, including the UN relief organizations ever will: coming in the millions they elude computation and constitute what is called – for want of a better term or higher degree of compassion – migration. Whatever the proper name for these people, whatever their motives, origins, and destinations, whatever their impact on the societies

> which they abandon and to which they come may amount to – one thing is absolutely clear: they make it very difficult to talk about the plight of the writer in exile with a straight face. Yet talk we must; and not only because literature, like poverty is known for taking care of its own kind, but more because of the ancient and perhaps as of yet unfounded belief that should the masters of this world be better read, the mismanagement and grief that makes millions take to the road could be somewhat reduced. (3)

Joseph Brodsky (1940-96) was a Soviet-born writer of Jewish heritage, and the 1987 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, who was stateless for five years following his departure from the Soviet Union in 1972.[4] His observations are all the more insightful when one considers his position as a vocal opponent of the Soviet Union, unable to return to the place of his birth. The demarcation between immigrants and exiles should be more flexible when considering the emigration waves of Jewish Soviets in the 1970s and 1990s; these individuals were shunned in much the same way as Brodsky himself. Although with the fall of the Soviet Union, this would all change, these immigrants were nevertheless, essentially, entering into exile.

Whether or not the exile takes place because of government edict, or because of mounting social prejudice, the end result for former Soviet Jews was identical: they were considered deserters and could never return. In many respects, for the Jews of the Soviet Union, this exile predated their departures, as they were regarded as outsiders:

> Aside from individuals who have either escaped tyranny or been driven away from their land, there are entire nations whose people, without moving from native soil, have been robbed of their right to be citizens of their motherland, while being citizens of the state, because their country itself is under foreign rule; this is the destiny – temporarily, let us hope – of Central and Eastern European nations. The split between the State, which people feel is not theirs, though it claims to be their owner, and the motherland, of which they are guardians, has reduced them to an ambiguous status of half-exiles. (Kolakowski 192)

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[4] It should be noted that the long road to citizenship Brodsky underwent to become American bears a striking resemblance to the journey of the Wandering Jew.

Although this is less true for writers such as Dina Rubina, who travels to the former Soviet space regularly, the post-immigration experience changes the individual's cultural self-identification in a way that sets them apart from those who never left. This is not a physical exile, but a cultural exile, in which the individuals are no longer able to seamlessly exist within their native social structure the way they were able to before immigrating. The post-immigration experience cannot help but alter the individual's cultural conceptualization of 'self.' In "The Russian Immigration Narrative as Metafiction" (2011), Adrian Wanner proposes that the literature surrounding the immigration experience is coloured by universal situational themes:

> [i]nitial linguistic inadequacy, disorientation and alienation in the face of an unfamiliar culture, material difficulties, the necessity of having to accept menial jobs, depression and loneliness, intergenerational conflict paired with a sense of moral duty to one's family members, the vapid materialism of the American Dream. ("Russian Immigration Narrative" 65)

In broader terms, Anjali Prabhu supports Wanner's observation when she interprets Freud's work to conclude that "it is the memory of shared trauma that assures diasporic cohesion in the present" (Prabhu 10). Prabhu's observations are additionally echoed by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper ("Beyond 'Identity'" 2-3). Within the cohesion to which Prabhu refers, a community of immigrants with parallel experiences and circumstances, all attempting to negotiate a reconciliation of their past cultural heritage and present cultural surroundings, is created. However, with multiple cultural contributors, this becomes a more complex matter. Current scholarship in the humanities no longer discusses hybridity in binary terms, but rather sees it as a multifaceted state of being in which several influences come together as one – what I have termed the multilayered identity. Despite recent re-evaluations of the concept of hybridity, I still

choose to avoid this term in my own interpretations for the sake of clarity. For example, Bettina Hofmann asserts, "Upon closer inspection, the term 'American Jewish writer' almost always turns out to be problematic. Often the term 'Jewish' is hard to define, but here the term 'American' adds to the complexity" (102). Where once cultural hybridity was seen as a duality of self, it must now be regarded as a multiplicity of cultural identities; therefore, the academic terminology should accurately reflect this. These seven authors, all of whom spent their early childhood in the Soviet Union, were identified first and foremost as Soviets at the time of their birth. Secondly, their identification and internal travel documents indicated their ethnic inherited Jewish identity. This multilayering would continue further with the addition of the cultural identity of their adopted homes, all combining to create the complex post-immigration self.

The post-immigration narrative itself is defined by themes of physical and cultural displacement in addition to the overcoming of social and bureaucratic hurdles, all in pursuit of an imagined ideal. Often a key feature of the post-immigration narrative is the eventual disillusionment of this dreamed existence, as characters, such as those in David Bezmozgis's story "The Second Strongest Man in the World," discover that their new lives fail to measure up to their pre-immigration conceptualization:

> Gregory admitted he should have left when he had the chance. Now it was too late. My father looked at my mother before speaking. "Don't be fooled Grisha, I often think of going back." "Are you insane? Look at what you have. Take a walk outside. I saw beggars on the street wearing Levi's jeans and Adidas running shoes." "Three days out of five I'm afraid I'll join them." (*Natasha* 60)

The character tries to explain to a non-immigrant seeing Toronto for the first time that life is a daily struggle for those in the immigrant community. It is these shared

experiences and mutually relatable struggles that unite these people as a group. The two characters vividly illustrate the two poles of the immigration dream: the first sees only what is new and desirable, while the other has grown weary fighting to re-establish a life for his family.

Russian-speaking ethnic Jews born in the Soviet Union as a cultural group automatically inherit the social complications of conflicting cultural identities. Ridiculed in the Soviet Union for being Jewish, and ostracized in Israel, Western Europe and North America for being Russian, they have been stigmatized as foreigners no matter where they settle. In "Ethnic Identity and the Lore of the Supernatural" (1975), Rosan Jordan establishes that ethnicity and community are major forces in defining each other. She defines ethnicity based on the work of Tomatsu Shibutani and Kian Kwan who state that an ethnic community "consists of those who conceive themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others" (qtd. in Jordan 370). Ethnic Jews from the Soviet Union were unified by an identity shielded under much secrecy. Those who emigrated would find solidarity in their experiences of dislocation, and later in their relocation: according to Gary Shteyngart, "We are refugees, and even Jews, which in the Soviet Union never won you any favors" (*Little Failure* 109).

Eastern Europe has a long history of anti-Semitism, particularly during the time of the Tsarist monarchy that carried on into Communist rule: "Under Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) young Jewish boys were drafted into the military for terms of twenty-five years […] The aim was not so much to beef up what was already the largest standing army in the world, but to remove Jewish youngsters from their families and communities, and

thus to wean them away from their faith and people" (Gitelman 1-2). Imperial Russia saw the advent of the Pale of Settlement[5] in what is now Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. According to Solomon M. Schwarz:

> Throughout the history of the Jews under Tsarist rule, legislative and administrative restrictions slowed down or stopped completely the integration of Jewish masses in the economy. Scarcely any of the conditions of Jewish life even remotely approached normality. (9)

Shtetl[6] culture blossomed from these concentrated pockets of Jewish society within the empire. After 1917, citizens were ideally expected to identify themselves as 'Soviets,' followed by their ethnic heritage group. However, as with many utopian Soviet constructs, this was not the cultural paradigm. Those Jews who were not killed during the Stalinist Purges[7] were executed by the Nazis, and many of the few who remained thereafter were ultimately lost in the lifeless void of the Soviet Gulag[8] system. Those who miraculously escaped these horrible fates hid their Jewish backgrounds in order to better integrate, so that a generation later, Jewish culture was foreign and exotic to the vast majority of the Soviet Union's ethnic Jews. As Wladimir Kaminer notes, "Normally most people in the Soviet Union tried to cover up any Jewish forbears they had, because you only had hopes of a career if your passport didn't give you away" (*Russian Disco*

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[5] The Pale of Settlement (Черта́ осе́длости) permitted Jews permanent residence, where elsewhere they were often banned from anything more than temporary visitation.

[6] *Shtetl* (in Yiddish, שטעטל) is a term derived from the Yiddish word for 'town.' These communities, with nearly entirely Jewish populations, were segregated from the rest of society. They could be found in Central and Eastern Europe prior to World War II, but were completely obliterated following the liquidations prior to the Holocaust.

[7] The Stalinist Purges were the systematic elimination of all Soviet citizens who were believed to oppose the totalitarian government. Those suspected were arrested, interrogated and either exiled to a Siberian Gulag or executed.

[8] The Gulag (ГУЛАГ) was the abbreviated name for 'executive camp magistrate' (Главное управление лагерей), which refers to the complex system of Soviet forced labor camps that was first established in 1918 and grew exponentially during Stalinist rule. These camps incarcerated both criminals and political dissidents.

13). Those who did not conceal their Jewish roots were met with significant challenges within society, such as increased difficulty achieving promotions or being appointed to higher office, as well as suspicions of cosmopolitanism by officials, as the experience of Wladimir Kaminer's father illustrates:

> My father, for instance, was a candidate for Party membership four times, and every time he failed to get in. […] Every year my father made a fresh attempt to join the Party. He drank vodka by the litre together with party activists, he sweated to death with them in the sauna, but it was all in vain. Every year his schemes foundered on the same rock. 'We really like you, Viktor. You're our bosom pal for all time,' said the activists. 'We'd have liked to have you in the Party. But you know yourself that you're a Jew and might bugger off to Israel any moment.'" (14)

Despite the absence of cultural awareness of their Jewish roots, Soviet Jews could find unity in their ambivalence towards the Jewish traditions that seemed so alien to them. For many who sought to flee the grey institutionalism of the Soviet machine, immigration to the State of Israel provided a plausible, attainable escape route, regardless of the individuals' attitudes towards their personal Jewish identity.

Israel's Law of Return was first passed on 5 July 1950, and was amended in 1970 to include any person with a minimum of one Jewish grandparent.[9] Thanks to this law, immigration to the Jewish state (*Eretz Israel*) granted instant legal rights and freedoms to those who availed themselves of this seemingly lenient policy. Although those persons born to a non-Jewish mother would never be considered legitimate Jews under *Khalakhic* Law,[10] the philosophy behind the 1970 reform was that any person with a Jewish grandparent, on either side, would be categorized as 'Jewish' and therefore persecuted

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[9] Details of *Aliyah* (עֲלִיָה) immigration are cited as stipulated by Israel's Ministry of Aliyah and Immigrant Absorption.

[10] *Halakhic* Law (הֲלָכָה) is the sum of all written and oral Torah teaching governing Jewish everyday life and spiritual activity. In Israel, all matters surrounding an individual's life-cycle are governed by these laws.

and killed under the Nazis' 'Final Solution.' Therefore, the *Knesset*[11] advocated that any such person should be afforded all protections and liberties granted by the State of Israel on these grounds. However, as Olga Gershenson points out, "The new Soviet immigrants did not answer to the Zionist expectation, according to which they should be earnestly learning Hebrew while working in the kibbutz[12] field. Fed up with ideology in their Soviet past, and coming from successful professional backgrounds these immigrants were not in a rush to leave behind their diasporic past and plunge into a new cultural reality" ("Lure and Threat" 110). For decades, Soviet Jews who attempted to make *Aliyah*[13] (immigrate to Israel) or to join relatives in North America were denied exit visas. The two major waves of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union took place in the 1970s following the Dymshits-Kuznetsov Hijacking,[14] and in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a result of *Perestroika*.[15] Following resettlement, these displaced former Soviets would still experience prejudice, but this time, ironically, as 'Russians.' Immigrants to Western Europe and North America would face similar obstacles of discrimination from Jewish communities already long established in these regions. Russian-Jewish author Ellen Litman (1973-) provides an example in *The Last Chicken in America* (2007): "She didn't

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[11] *Knesset* (הַכְּנֶסֶת) is the legislative branch of the Israeli government.

[12] A *kibbutz* (קִבּוּץ) literally means "gathering" in Hebrew. This term refers to the collective farm system in Israel that provides housing and work to many new immigrants.

[13] *Aliyah* (עֲלִיָּה) is the Hebrew word for 'ascension.' It is used to refer to the process of immigration to Israel based on the Law of Return.

[14] On 15 June 1970, sixteen Soviet citizens attempted to hijack an aircraft and escape to the West; their plan proved unsuccessful.

[15] *Perestroika* (перестро́йка) was a political movement implemented under Gorbachev. The term literally means 'restructuring' and was characterized by increased freedoms and opportunities.

invite me to her Seder.[16] She said to tell my parents Good Pesach[17] and to try Rodef Shalom synagogue, which was Reform[18] and more accessible for immigrants. She herself had always gone to Beth Shalom" (67). Those who, like Litman, left the Soviet Union in the 1970s were granted exit permits to travel to Israel. These migrants did not immediately relocate, but became stateless refugees in Italy for an average of six months while their immigration papers were processed by countries willing to accept them. Despite officially being bound for Israel, as other westernized countries began to open their doors to these refugees, many families opted instead to relocate to the United States, Canada and Australia. An example can be seen in the experience of the protagonist of Bezmozgis's *Natasha*:

> On the railway platform in Vienna my mother and aunt forbade my cousin and me from from saying goodbye to our grandparents. Through the window of the compartment we watched as they disembarked from the train and followed an Israeli agent onto a waiting bus. The bus was bound for the airport, where an El Al plane was waiting. We were bound for somewhere else. Where exactly, we didn't know – Australia, America, Canada – but someplace that was not Israel. As my mother, aunt, cousin and I wept, my father and uncle kept an eye out for Israeli agents. These agents were known to inspect compartments. Any indication that we had close relatives on the buses would bring questions; Why were we separating the family? Why were we rejecting our Israeli visas? Why were we so ungrateful to the State of Israel, which had, after all, provided us with the means to escape the Soviet Union? (*Natasha* 67)

Bezmozgis and Shteyngart both recall this liminal existence of extended transit as a period dominated by prolonged waiting. Their recollections of statelessness represent yet another layer of identity. As Bhabha reiterates, "These 'in-between' spaces provide the

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[16]The holiday of Passover is a celebration of the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. The Passover Seder is a traditional ritualized meal (consisting of bitter herbs, boiled eggs and matzoth) that Jews celebrate to mark the beginning of the holiday. During Passover, no leavened bread is consumed.

[17] The term *Pesach* (פֶּסַח) is the traditional nomenclature for Passover.

[18] Reform Judaism is a liberal branch of the religion that places less emphasis on the strict observance of Jewish law as opposed to Orthodox Judaism. Reform Judaism is not recognized officially in Israel, and those practicing Reform Judaism are marginalized within society.

terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (*Location of Culture* 2). The most interesting aspect of the narratives analyzed in this dissertation is not the stories themselves, but the characters: their fears, dreams, foibles, aspirations, and pain. The characters whom these authors vividly bring to life in their prose are especially remarkable because of the ways they manifest and negotiate their many cultural presentations.

1.2 Corpus

The authors whose works will be discussed in this study are Dina Rubina (1953-), an immigrant writer living in Israel; Liudmila Ulitskaia (1943-), who has never emigrated from her native Russia but conceives of an imagined post-immigration experience; Wladimir Kaminer (1967-), who immigrated to Germany in 1990 and writes in German; Lara Vapnyar (1971-), who immigrated as an adult after the fall of Communism to the United States and writes in English; Gary Shteyngart (1972-) and Irina Reyn (1974-), who both emigrated from the former Soviet Union as children in the late 1970s and who both write in English; and David Bezmozgis (1973-), who was originally from Riga, Latvia, and who now lives and writes in Toronto. I have selected one primary work by each author to illustrate how the multilayered cultural identity construction manifests within Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. However, supplementary examples from additional texts appear in order to augment discussions of primary materials. There are as many differences between these writers as there are similarities. The thematic, stylistic and linguistic choices they make reveal manifestations of their own complex identities and feelings of unhomeliness, while their narratives illustrate the distinctiveness of post-immigration fiction:

> Whereas earlier Eastern European Jewish writers such as Mary Antin revelled in becoming "American" and severing the connection to their "old-world" identities, contemporary Russian-American pointedly resist such assimilation, insisting instead on maintaining both sides of the hyphen. Both the way(s) their view themselves and the way(s) they construct their texts image on the sustained interplay of Russian, Jewish and American facets. (Furman 20)

Furman's use of the term "interplay" is very apt, as it clearly reflects the constant negotiation of multiple cultural identities that these authors recreate in their prose. All of the authors presented in this analysis were born in the Soviet Union after World War II, speak Russian as their native language and are ethnically Jewish.

Dina Rubina, a descendant of Ukrainian Jews who were displaced during World War II, was born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She is one of the two writers discussed here who was not born in Russia. Her mother was a history teacher and her father an artist; the 'artist figure' is a recurring motif throughout her works. Rubina was a prolific writer during the Soviet era before immigrating to Israel in the early 1990s; she now resides in Jerusalem and continues to write in Russian. Anna P. Ronell says of her: "While enjoying a near-celebrity status in the Russian Jewish communities of Israel, the United States, Germany and the former Soviet Union, her works are virtually unknown to the English-speaking public" (198). Rubina herself, in an interview with Dmitry Babich, has said of her trans-national identity:

> Yes, theoretically it is possible now to have apartments both in Moscow and Jerusalem and to be a leading Russian writer with an Israeli passport in your pocket. But I still have no Russian citizenship and somehow do without an apartment in Moscow. I have one husband and one home. I am a person of serious intentions in general. If I leave some place, I leave it. But fiction is a different matter. This is the language that you were born with and that you will die with. And, what is more, I do love and I do value my Russian audience. These are the people who live in an authentic world, the world of Russian language. Everything connected to that language is ingrained in my heart, in my brain, in my memory and in my body – it just won't go away. No other language will play the same role in my life. ("Dina Rubina")

Rubina's characters often exist in a state of flux, travelling between locations or occupying other realms of liminality, as Ronell points out:

> As characters travel to and fro between Moscow and Jerusalem, we learn their personal stories and their political and ideological positions. Central to this trope of journey is the question of identity and belonging. This question is raised in many of Rubina's works especially in *Vot Idet Messiya*, where it is reflected through the multiple characters all of whom represent part of the authorial persona. This authorial persona acts as a connective tissue between things Soviet and things Israeli bringing into sharp focus the confusion Russian Israelis experience while differentiating between 'here' and 'there' and 'us' and 'them'. (218-19)

Unlike Rubina, who is able to draw on her own experiences of emigration and resettlement, Liudmila Ulitskaia – a well-known figure in both Russian women's literature and Russian-Jewish literature – approaches the post-immigration experience from a different vantage point. Ulitskaia was born in the Bashkiria[19] of Russia and raised in Moscow. She was educated as a geneticist at Moscow State University, and despite pursuing a career in writing, still enigmatically incorporates components of her scientific background into her works. Having come from a secular Jewish family, she maintains that, despite having converted to Russian Orthodoxy, she remains culturally Jewish if not religiously so. She began her literary career as a consultant at a Jewish theatre, and has said of the inspirations for her work: "I am an observer by nature. And life offers me such delightful images and scenes, such wonderful, big-hearted people" ("Interview"). Unlike the other authors discussed here, Ulitskaia has never emigrated from Russia, but does own a modest home in Italy, where she spends half the year, and has travelled extensively. Ulitskaia stated in an interview with *The Guardian*: "In Russia, there is a

[19] Bashkortostan, or Bashkiria (Башки́рия) is located in Russia between the Volga River and Ural Mountains.

drastic gap between rich and poor, to the extent that I feel the country is on the brink of civil war" ("Why I'm Not Afraid").

Wladimir Kaminer, whom Sander Gilman has described as "Certainly the 'hottest' of the 'cool' multicultural Jewish writers to come out of the newest Russian Jewish Diaspora in the New Germany" ("Becoming a Jew" 22), is a Moscow native who emigrated to Berlin as an adult and now writes predominantly in German. He continues to be active in many facets of popular media culture in Berlin while still publishing and maintaining a high profile in radio broadcasting. He was formally educated as a sound engineer, and later studied acting while still in Moscow. His work is characterized by its semi-autobiographical nature, taking the form of short vignettes. He himself describes his individual writing style as follows:

> I never write much more than 4 pages in a week. At home, I can't write; there's way too much going on. It comes easier when riding the train. Over the years I've accumulated so much material. If these pages of material counted, then I'd have five or six books by now. But they aren't books; they are all different stories on various topics, like chapters from novels that do not exist.[20] ("Guter Humor"; my translation)

Kaminer is the only Russian-Jewish post-immigration author from Germany to be included in my analysis, specifically because of his focus on the melding of both the Russian and German aspects of his life. His depiction of his Jewish identity is far more enigmatic. It could be argued that the first half of his life spent in the Soviet Union instilled in him a necessity to conceal his Jewishness, or that it is not a layer of his identity that he has had an opportunity to cultivate. Sander Gilman observes of Kaminer,

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[20] Ich schreibe nie viel mehr als eine Din-A-4-Seite in der Woche. Zuhause kann ich gar nicht schreiben, da ist viel zu viel los. Aber unterwegs im Zug geht das sehr gut. Ich habe so über die Jahre sehr viel Material angesammelt. Wenn man diese Seiten zählen würde, hätte ich zurzeit noch fünf oder sechs Bücher vorrätig. Aber es sind eben noch keine Bücher, sondern verschiedene Geschichten zu verschiedenen Themen. Kapitel aus Romanen, die gar nicht vorhanden sind.

"He thinks about the role of being a Jew only when he represents his life in the USSR. Antisemitism is not a feature of Germany but of the USSR" ("Becoming a Jew" 23). This is not to say that the Jewishness of Kaminer's writing is absent, only that it is less dominant than his Russian and German identities. Gilman provides a possible explanation for this:

> The transformation of the "Soviet Jews" into Germans is reflected in the literary products of these new Jews in Germany, for whom their central question is their integration into a new Germany. A Germany, one may add, with very different expectations for the literary representation of the Jew. ("Becoming a Jew" 17)

If, as Gilman theorizes, Kaminer and his peers are hesitant to explore their Jewishness openly through prose because of what one can only assume is a deeply-rooted sense of German historical guilt, then it is equally reasonable to assume that Jewish characterizations are simply represented in a far less obvious way than the Russianness of Kaminer's intentional use of kitsch stereotypes.

In *Russian Disco: Tales of Everyday Lunacy on the Streets of Berlin* (2002), Kaminer appears to tell his own story of dislocation, unhomely feelings and cultural performativity. However, as Kathleen Condray points out:

> In examining Kaminer's oeuvre as an immigrant autobiography, one should consider to what extent he is a typical autobiographer. He is certainly not a deliberate autobiographer per se, but his work would be unthinkable without autobiographical elements; in chronicling his daily life as an immigrant at the beginning of his career, he inevitably had to relate details from his own life. His narrative tone is seldom the reflective one of more traditional autobiography but rather that of more factual reporting. (230)

Condray further observes: "Ultimately, however, Kaminer regards his own writing as a blend of truth and fiction, a style I term creative reality" (229). For the purposes of my analysis, I will regard the text as partial autobiography with the assumption that he has taken artistic liberties, keeping Condray's discussion in mind.

Like Kaminer, Lara Vapnyar had to learn a new language as an adult. Vapnyar, who grew up in Soviet Moscow before emigrating in 1996 and teaches creative writing at New York University, is ethnically Jewish, speaks Russian as her first language, and writes in English. She published her first English work after having lived in New York for only four years. Vapnyar is the only author included in this study who left her birthplace after the fall of Communism; thus, her account of Russian immigration to New York varies somewhat from the perspective of her peers who immigrated as children. She explores the Jewish identity far less prominently than any of the other authors in this dissertation; however, it is not entirely absent from her work either. Rather, her incorporation of the Jewish identity into her writing is not separate from the Russian identity or the immigrant persona. In this way Vapnyar embeds the Jewishness of her characters as a second nature, as is demonstrated in her novel *Memoirs of a Muse* (2006), in which "[t]he protagonist and first-person narrator, Tanya Rumer, is also a partially autobiographical character" (Wanner, "The Russian Immigrant Narrative" 60). Her allusions to Jewishness in this text are so subtle that they could easily be overlooked. This understated integration sets Vapnyar apart from the other authors discussed in this project. Vapnyar centres her narrative on the complex internal struggles related to the post-immigration redefining of cultural identity: "The scene captures emblematically Vapnyar's own chosen role as a translingual immigrant storyteller who aims to gain the acceptance of her new host society by exploring her inside expertise on her culture of origin" (Wanner, "The Russian Immigrant Narrative" 62).

Kaminer, Rubina and Ulitskaia have been noted for their infusions of humour into their prose. One author whose style is entirely dependent on his tongue-in-cheek

narrations is Gary Shteyngart. Shteyngart, who emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States as a child, adopts a satirically critical tone when describing post-immigration culture. Born into a Soviet-Jewish family in Leningrad, Shteyngart exemplifies the generation of ethnically Jewish Soviet citizens who had little to no understanding of their heritage. Despite immigrating at a young age, Shteyngart recalls speaking with a heavy Russian accent almost into his teens, because English was never spoken at home. He has gained wide success outside of the Russian-speaking immigrant microcosm, and currently teaches creative writing at Columbia University.

Shteyngart has been celebrated for his first three novels, *The Russian Debutante's Handbook* (2002), *Absurdistan* (2006) and *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), and now for his memoir *Little Failure* (2014). *Little Failure* gives an intimate perspective into the author's own post-immigration journey while incorporating many of the same themes from his previous works, such as "the self-portrait of the author as a translingual and transcultural storyteller" (Wanner, "The Russian Immigrant Narrative" 58). Shteyngart assumes the roles of storyteller and of critic, whose self-analyzing gaze is rarely redirected far from his innermost family circle, and who is often self-effacing when contemplating the labels of his own identity:

> If the many-universe hypothesis that the scientists are working on is true, perhaps that Gary could meet this Gary, maybe after I've given a reading at a Jewish center in Chicagoland or LA. Perhaps alternate-Gary would come up to me and say, "I'm Russian too!" And I would say "*Ah, vy govorite po-russki*?" And he would say "Huh?" and explain to me that, no, he doesn't speak Russian, but his great-grandmother was from *Dub*-something, a town near Vitebsk. And I would explain that Vitebsk's not really even in Russia, It is in Belarus, and that what alternate-Gary truly is an American Jew or, better yet, an American, which is a fine enough identity that one doesn't have to add Russian or Belarussian or anything else to it. (*Little Failure* 68-69)

Unlike Kaminer's "creative reality," Shteyngart's memoir is reflective in nature, and identity is at the core of its text. His goal seems to be the chronicling of his post-immigration unhomeliness and his ongoing feelings of being the other, existing in an 'in-between' existential space of past and present:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living. (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 10)

In this way, Bhabha positions the unhomely as a realm of temporal liminality, or 'in-betweenness,' that cannot reconcile past with present. Therefore, the unhomely person exists somewhere between these two states of being.

Irina Reyn, a contemporary and childhood friend of Shteyngart, merges Russian, Jewish, and American cultures together in her 2008 novel *What Happened to Anna K.* Unlike Shteyngart, Reyn reflects rarely, if at all, on these cultural nuances, leaving readers either unaware of the many additional layers of the narrative's significance, or free to draw their own conclusions. Having emigrated from Soviet Moscow at the age of seven, Reyn speaks English without a discernible accent, but is nevertheless acutely aware of being branded as an 'immigrant.' Her novel reflects a deep consciousness of both Russian and Jewish culture, while regarding American society somewhat from the vantage point of an observer looking in. Like many of her post-immigration literary peers, Reyn teaches creative writing; she is a professor at the University of Pittsburgh.

Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature in Canada is currently not nearly as widespread as in the United States, but one prominent name associated with the Russian-

Jewish resettlement experience in Canada is David Bezmozgis. Born in Riga, Bezmozgis was a young child when he and his family escaped from the Soviet Union, eventually settling in Toronto. He has been much celebrated for his collection of short stories *Natasha and Other Stories* (2004), which was adapted into a film in 2016. In a 2016 interview for the CBC, Bezmozgis comments on the discord between waves of immigration as depicted in "Natasha":

> They come from the same world at different times, and I think that's an important distinction when we talk about immigrant communities and refugees coming. There's the community at large that wonders how the refugees are going to fit in, et cetera, but I also think, as anybody who is part of an immigrant community knows there are different waves of immigration, and that those communities don't always integrate very well, or there's suspicion and conflict between waves. ("David Bezmozgis on Natasha")

Bezmozgis's observation exemplifies the uniqueness of Russian-Jewish post-immigration culture as unique and separate from post-Communist Russian diasporic culture. In this cycle of seven short narratives, Bezmozgis, through his narrator Mark Berman, describes the post-immigration world as seen through the eyes of a child, then an adolescent, and finally a grown man. In the first story, "Tapka," Berman is six years old, and in the final instalment, "Minyan,"[21] he is well into adulthood.

Although there are many other authors of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature, I have specifically chosen these authors to illustrate the major themes of the literature and analyze their presentation of the multilayered identity. My selections were significantly influenced by the work of Adrian Wanner, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude as his research introduced me to some of the writers and works I discuss in this thesis. I believe that these authors balance each other well: three of the authors write in a

[21] A *minyan* (מִנְיָן) refers to the quorum of ten Jews that is required for public prayer. Traditionally, only Jewish men who have already celebrated their Bar Mitzvah (ascension to manhood) can be counted towards the ten.

language other than English, two of them write in their native language, five write in their second language, and all depict the Russian-Jewish post-immigration experience.

1.3 Identity and the Post-Immigration Experience

The term 'identity' is a cross-disciplinary one that at its most basic refers to a means of distinguishing one thing from another. According to Brubaker and Cooper, "'identity talk' – inside and outside academia – continues to proliferate today. The 'identity' crisis – a crisis of overproduction, and consequent devaluation of meaning – shows no sign of abating" (3). To avoid overusage of what Brubaker and Cooper term "identity talk," I draw on parameters that focus specifically on the cultural aspects of 'self.' For the purposes of cultural analysis, *identity* can signify how an individual sees oneself and how he/she subsequently self-presents, or a social group affiliation that the individual is either born into or adopts. As postcolonial criticism can attest, the assimilation of an identity is not necessarily a voluntary process. As Rogers Brubaker elaborates, "Formal membership in a club, church, family, or association does not entail informal acceptance; formal membership may be informally contested or subverted" ("Migration, Membership and the Modern Nation-State" 66). Exclusion, or lack of acceptance into a group, therefore, can be based on subtle innuendoes and not formal rejection. The resulting state is unhomeliness:

> To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalences and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire of social solidarity: 'I am looking for the join…I want to join…I want to join.' (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 27)

As feelings of unhomeliness are combated within the post-immigration text, belonging is the abstract construct being perpetually sought: "The unhomely moment relates the

traumatic ambivalence of a personal psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 15). Even after successfully immigrating, characters in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature are continuously plagued by the desire for a sense of belonging. This belonging is all the more critical for resettlement because of their previous feelings of unhomeliness within the Soviet Union due to their Jewish heritage. Brubaker and Cooper explain that contemporary applications of identity theory have evolved beyond a serving as general means of differentiation:

> 'Identity' and cognate terms in other languages have a long history as technical terms in Western philosophy, from the ancient Greeks through contemporary analytical philosophy. They have been used to address the perennial philosophical problems of permanence amidst manifest change, and of unity amidst manifest diversity. Widespread vernacular and social-analytical use of 'identity' and its cognates, however, is of much more recent vintage and more localized provenance. ("Beyond 'Identity'" 2)

For the purposes of my analysis, I believe it is most essential to focus on "permanence amidst change" and "unity amidst diversity." Despite their inherent transience throughout the Russian-Jewish immigration journey, the post-immigration protagonists discussed in this study are unified first by their ongoing unhomely feelings. Then, as they undergo the transformations of relocation, their pre-existing complex identities continue to unify them. And following their absorption into their new adopted countries, they continue to be unified by their past and present experiences.

When previously the nation-state served as a political as well as cultural means of unity and group identification based upon prevalent commonalities, the current global trajectory emphasizes moving away from societal homogeny. Russian-Jewish post-immigration depictions of identity demonstrate how the greater the number of cultural influences an individual lives with results in a greater number of personal identity

configurations. For example, a child of Russian-Jewish immigrants may associate with Anglophone children at school and identify as American, return home to a dwelling with a *mezuzah*[22] on the door's threshold, to a dinner including *salo*[23] and black bread. The simultaneous existence of multiple cultural identities, however, does not mean that any one identity is more dominant than the others. This scenario also combines three of the cultural identity indicators that will be discussed further: language, space and food. The narratives that comprise this study show how feelings of unhomeliness or, conversely, belonging, dictate the way individuals will performatively present themselves. Therefore, the dominance of one cultural identity over another is entirely dependent on how the individual feels in a given situation. In *Little Failure,* Gary Shteyngart describes his feelings of comfort with his new American life, simply with the addition of other Soviet Jews:

> The summer of 1985. I am about to become a man according to Jewish tradition. As in the past few summers, my family is staying in a Russian bungalow colony in the Catskill Mountains. The colony consists of a dozen sunburned wooden cottages squeezed inbetween some unimpressive hills and a daunting forest-and-brook combination that for kids from Queens might as well be the Amazon. During the work week it is just the Grandmas and their charges (a few grandpas have survived World War II to play competitive chess beneath the easygoing American sun). (*Little Failure* 164)

The narrator describes a deep sense of belonging within this kaleidoscope of cultural contributors. All of the families vacationing within the group are Russian-speaking; they are Jews; and they are Americans. They are not all from the same part of the vast former

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[22] A *mezuzah* (מְזוּזָה) is a slip of parchment containing a prayer, which is placed into a decorative casing to protect it from the elements. It adorns the upper right corner of doorways in Jewish households. In the Ashkenazi tradition, it is always placed at an inclined angle. The *mezuzah* creates a barrier between the Jewish dwelling and the outside. It is intended to protect the Jewish home and its inhabitants by symbolizing a protective border. More observant households will place a *mezuzah* on the door-frames of rooms within the home in addition to the outermost door.

[23] *Salo* (сало) is the fatty part of pork which is either salted or marinated in brine. It can be served with or without the pig's skin still attached. It is commonly served throughout the Slavic world.

Soviet territory, and are all the more diverse as a result. The narrator, who describes feelings of deep unhomeliness throughout the memoir, feels a sense of belonging within this vacation setting. He and the other adolescents his age all speak a hybrid of Russian mixed with English, and have experienced the transition from a Communist-Soviet environment to an urban-American one. In essence, their commonality makes it unnecessary for them to have to explain themselves culturally to one another. They exemplify "unity amidst change."

Conversely, Irina Reyn's Anna K. feels as though she is sitting between two chairs when her cousin Katya's husband Lev comes to pay her a visit at the new home she shares with her American lover:

> "Lev Gavrilov," she announced entering the room as if graciously filling it with the unexpected. "This is David, Matt and Jim. Two friends of David's from Columbia." Lev stared at David. This guy, what was it about him? Lev had been expecting a muscular guy, one of those beefy, assertive Americans in a jeans shirt and khakis, the ones with firm opinions on any topic. […] "What do you do?" the guy Matt asked, and Lev immediately hated everyone. (173)

After witnessing the awkward exchange, Anna retreats to the kitchen. She is able to exist comfortably within both worlds, while Lev cannot. Despite this, Anna is still able to relate to Lev on a cultural and social level illustrating "unity amidst diversity."

The cultural identities that manifest within Russian-Jewish post-immigration prose are complex by nature. If the primary obstacle of the Russian-Jewish cultural condition is to battle feelings of an unhomely existence, then the performance or presentation of a unified identity provides a possible solution. Identity as a cultural construct should therefore be interpreted based upon Brubaker and Cooper's categories of "unity amidst change" and "unity amidst diversity."

1.4 Performativity and the Post-Immigration Self

Performativity as it applies to the literary construction of Russian-Jewish post-immigration identities refers to the behaviours, practices and presentations of cultural acts as indicators of self, whether Russian, Soviet, Jewish, Israeli, American or Canadian. Butler explains that "[t]he body is always an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 521, emphasis in original).

This study approaches the application of performativity as a social construct. I utilize the theoretical framework first proposed by Judith Butler (1956-) regarding gender. As Sara Salih reiterates in her own analysis of Butler's work, "All bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social), which means that there is no 'natural body' that pre-exists its cultural inscription" (55). The same theoretical apparatus used by Butler to re-envision concepts of gender can be reframed to bring post-immigration identities into greater focus:

> Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pressure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds. (Butler, "Performativity Acts and Gender Constitution" 531)

In my implementation of Butler's theories cultural exhibition takes the place of performative gender displays. Like gender, which Butler contends results from external influences, cultural awareness is not inherent, but acquired. These acquisitions additionally transpose onto the performative body and speech: "[o]ur body is not simply 'over here' as a spatiotemporal given, but is itself given over, exposed, and 'spoken'

through the speech act that emerges either as sound, as text, or in some visual form" (Butler, "Response: Performative Reflections on Love and Commitment" 237). For the authors included in this study, performative speech, as expression, is an integral aspect of self-representation within predetermined social parameters. Such observations are culturally notable as "'performativity' describes the culturally scripted character of identity, which is generated by power through repeated citations of norms and their transgression" (Butler, "The Politics of Performativity" 113). Butler shows that speech and the display of identity do not function independently of one another, but rather, that speech is a product of the greater performative body.

Applying this theoretical apparatus to the Russian-Jewish post-immigration self, I propose that Butler's conceptualization of gender as a social construct is not dissimilar to the cultural performativity that features in this study. The notion of performativity in this context refers to how post-immigration characters present themselves following displacement and relocation, as "[e]xile as a state of displacement triggers the mechanisms of self-performativity" (Meerzon 171). Both exile and immigration cause the individual to enter into cultural and social surroundings that necessitate performative acts in order to fit in. With the assumption that assimilation, to some extent, is often a goal, cultural dislocation presents the obstacle of attaining social acceptance:

> Butler figures identity not as something interior – an essentializing 'given' – but rather as something exterior, a discursive external effect. It is born of 'acts, gestures and enactments', as Butler puts it, that are performative 'in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.' (Leech, "Belonging" 77)

In the same way that gender is performed through speech (in the broadest sense) and self-presentation with the goal of achieving social equilibrium, cultural identity is a

performative act intended to gain acceptance within a variety of group situations. Butler sees such acts as having infinite possibilities:

> That the body is a set of possibilities signifies (a) that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and (b) that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities. Hence, there is an agency which is understood as the process of rendering such possibilities determinate. These possibilities are necessarily constrained by available historical conventions. The body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality: it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 521, emphasis in original)

Keeping in mind the multitude of possibilities, I believe that characters negotiating several cultural identities may highlight or conceal specific aspects of themselves for the purpose of social belonging. With the complex identity structure of Russian-Jewish newcomers the variety of performative manifestations of cultural acts can be related to any number of the individual's social spheres. Russian-Jewish post-immigration characters may accentuate their Russianness when found within a group of fellow former Soviet expatriates, emphasize their Jewishness to gain acceptance within the Jewish communities of their adopted homelands, or suppress both these identities in order to blend in more successfully with the social peers of their new surroundings. Butler contends that "one binds oneself to the process of becoming different as circumstances demand" ("Response: Performative Reflections on Love and Commitment" 239). The desire to belong fortifies a clear juxtaposition of the *inside* and *outside* of a social group, which is reiterated by Rebecca Jablonsky:

> After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet Jews who flocked to New York discovered they did not fit in with American Jews, whose identities were centered around shared cultural and religious practices, such as the celebration of holidays, keeping of the Sabbath and going to Hebrew school – all practices to which

> Soviet Jews historically did not have access. ("Russian Jews and 'Gypsy Punks'" 5)

As Jablonsky demonstrates, a shared Jewish heritage did not automatically result in cultural unity. Because of such differences in developmental, backgrounds Jews born in the Soviet Union, for the most part, were not able to blend into the Jewish communities of their adoptive homes without a performative veneer. Meerzon, using exile as an example, explains that these identities are often results of discomfort and insecurity:

> Exile as banishment or displacement not only changes one's social and political status but also changes an émigré's perception of self. The need to communicate in a second language (even if one has mastered it at home) increases an exile's insecurity not only in his/her own eyes but quite often in the eyes of residents in the newly adopted home country. (14)

The insecurities of not fitting in are not limited to language, but apply to all components of the external self. Like the cultural masks that will be discussed later in this chapter, performativity represents a manipulation of the presentation of self, much like the donning of a mask. This process is a necessary, and moreover universal, part of the post-immigration experience. Leech explains that "[w]hat is so suggestive of the concept of 'belonging' as a product of performativity is that it enables us to go beyond the limitations of simple narrative" (80). Initially, as new immigrants are relegated to positions on the periphery of mainstream society, this opposition of *us* and *them* establishes a clear hierarchy and power component centred on belonging. The performative acts of cultural identity serve as a means of inter-personal communication intended to elicit specific feelings of relatability and unity.

1.5 Implications of Postcolonial Theory for Conceptualizing Post-Immigration Identity

The post-immigration search for belonging leaves characters in a state of in-betweenness or liminality. They are neither at home in their places of birth nor in their adopted countries. Identity, or the performance thereof, becomes a decisive indicator of how characters in these narratives see themselves. Postcolonial theory finds its origins in the history of human exploration, expansion and conquest. As empires formed they spread not only their geographic boundaries, but also their spheres of political and cultural influence. However, as David Chioni Moore elaborates, international configurations have, and continue to necessitate the application of postcolonial models outside of their original theoretical parameters: "Postcolonial theory […] was initially a critique of Western powers. And yet the West has hardly monopolized colonial activity. For one thing the West has often colonized itself" (114). All of the narratives discussed here are the result of an initial uprooting precipitated by existing unhomely feelings. Moore makes a compelling case for classifying the former Soviet space as a postcolonial one, an opinion echoed by Dorota Kołodziejczyk:

> 'Fiction of displacement' is a provisional term in which I want to include both postcolonial fiction that is almost always fiction of displacement and fiction from Eastern and Central European cultures written after the fall of communism that usually refers to the communist epoch as a profoundly displacing experience. Critical debates have been running on for more than a decade on whether we can rework postcolonial theory to describe the situation of post-communist (post-socialist) countries and societies. (261)

Today, the former colonial divisions of the globe, and Communism in the Eastern Bloc, have given way to independent republics, countries, and other sovereign bodies, as is indicated in "Empire, Union, Center, Satellite: The Place of Post-Colonial Theory in

Slavic / Central and Eastern European / (Post-) Soviet Studies: A Questionnaire.". Harriet Murav notes that regarding Russian colonialism "Recent studies have explored such problems as the encounters between the native peoples of the borderland regions and government officials, the tension between national and imperial models in relation to Russia's ethnic diversity, and Russia's changing self-image as European and Asian" (5). But even as the power of dominant colonial entities has waned, the legacy of their presence has not, as Bill Ashcroft acknowledges:

> There may have been much good, in medical, educational and technological terms, in the colonial impact upon the non-European world. But the simple fact remains that these colonized peoples, cultures and ultimately nations were prevented from becoming what they might have become: they were never allowed to develop into the societies they might have been. (1)

Edward Said (1935-2003), a secular Muslim born in Jerusalem during the British Mandate of Palestine, may be regarded as an exemplary figure of multiple interwoven cultural identities, quite aside from his significant contributions to postcolonial theory. In this, he has much in common with the authors I discuss here:

> What I should like also to have contributed here is a better understanding of the way cultural domination has operated. If this stimulates a new kind of dealing with the Orient, indeed if it eliminates the 'orient' and 'occident' altogether, then we shall have advanced a little in the process. (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 28)

The imprint of cultural dominance upon characters who experience unhomeliness emphasizes divisions of *us* and *them*. Bhabha points out, however, that "[t]o be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'homely' be easily accommodated" (*Location of Culture* 13). Murav elaborates:

> Bhabha's critical analysis of the relations between the colonizer and the colonized can provide a fresh perspective on the kinds of transactions that took place between the acculturating Jews and Russians. According to Bhabha the colonial power must produce colonized subjects that are almost, but not quite the same as they. (6)

This analysis aims to observe the liminal space of *neither* us *nor* them, or between the homely and the exilic. The post-immigration narrative has an inherent preoccupation with movement and space. While the search for belonging is paramount, the conceptualization of tangible ownership contributes significantly to how post-immigration characters self-identify. Bhabha explains, "Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively" (*Location of Culture* 3). It is from Said's pioneering of an analytical process that would take into consideration concepts of imperialism, power, and cultural domination that scholars such as Homi Bhabha (1949-) have been able to develop cross-disciplinary analytical processes, even ones that do not operate within the traditional paradigm. The concept of the other implies a lack of belonging and conceptually ties into feelings of physical and psychological displacement, or manifestations of the unhomely. Bhabha further elaborates on his interpretation of postcolonial theory as follows:

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge for the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geographical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, people. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. (*Location of Culture* 245-46)

Bhabha demonstrates that postcolonial theory has resulted from the experiences of indigenous populations in territories conquered during imperialist European expansion, as well as marginalized minority cultures throughout the globe. However, as Bogdan Stefănescu explains:

> The postcolonial critic's gaze avoids the second world and the (post)communist interlude as if there were nothing there to look at. Ironically the oversight replicates the blank gaze of the colonist which creates the colonized as an ontological and historical vacancy. (107)

Soviet expansion throughout Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and its eventual demise, has produced an aftermath reminiscent of the rise and fall of imperial occupations, like those experienced by Said and Bhabha. Sneja Gunew comments on this in regard not to former Soviet republics but satellite states of Soviet influence: "Based on the assumption that the former USSR may be understood as centre by its political, military, economic and ideological parameters in its relationship with its satellite countries East Central European Literatures are understood as the periphery in relation to the Soviet centre and consequently as post-colonial situations" ("Hauntings by Otherness" 400-01). The theoretical approaches employed in this analysis seek to build upon the traditional postcolonial paradigm to demonstrate that the fundamental structure of this criticism can be applied to contemporary post-immigration literature. This analysis of post-immigration prose approaches texts with the assumption that the dominant entity does not overtake the dominated one completely, but grafts itself onto, and integrates into, the existing cultural tapestry. For example, as Rubina's protagonist Zakhar crosses borders, it is he who is the other, no matter where he goes. Instead of a colonizing force inhabiting his home, it is Zakhar who moves from place to place. The dominant culture is stationary in this scenario; nevertheless, there is a contrast between Zakhar and those around him where he will always represent the other.

The precepts of postcolonial studies have evolved from the teaching of anti-colonial writers such as Franz Fanon (1925-61) and Aimé Césaire (1913-2008). Césaire, born in Martinique and educated in Paris, became an influential figure in early

postcolonial discourse with *Discourse on Colonialism* (*Discours sur le colonialisme,* 1950), a harsh critique of Eurocentric values and colonial racism. Despite being educated in Paris and living there for several years, he could not deny his distinctly postcolonial identity, much like the Soviet Jews who tried to blend in undetected by those around them. His work as a writer and politician had revolutionary significance for postcolonial theory as well as *négritude*, the ideological movement founded by francophones of colour. Here a parallel can be drawn between the complexities of ethnicity in Martinique and the experiences of many minority groups that suddenly found themselves under Soviet rule. As Obioma Nnaemeka observes:

> Césaire's work draws its salience from its vigorous insurgency against the disease of racial reasoning (unreason to be more precise) that has eaten into the fabric of intellectual life. The race question is an enduring one – extending from the evolutionary theories of the beginning of the nineteenth century and subsequent racist pseudoscience to present day racist pronouncements by scientists and intellectuals. (1749)

Césaire found the most troubling remnant of colonial rule to be the culture of racism it left behind. This racism parallels attitudes towards ethnic Jews by Soviet society. More than two decades after the fall of Communism, the former Soviet space continues to be plagued by xenophobia and racism.

Unlike his contemporary Césaire, Frantz Fanon was far more aggressive in his philosophical approach to postcolonial society. Bhabha observes, "Fanon recognizes the crucial importance for subordinate peoples of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories" (*Location of Culture* 12). Fanon's answer to the repercussions of European expansion was *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre,* 1961), in which he advocated justified violence against foreign occupiers by native populations. His work was enthusiastically supported by Jean-Paul

Sartre (1905-80), who had himself heavily criticized the French government for its presence in Algeria:

> Fanon felt the split between blacks and whites to the depths of his soul, but his zeal was to overcome it, not to solidify it. He gave himself wholeheartedly to the anticolonial rebellion in Algeria, but he feared and hated violence even while he glorified it. Fanon has been made the symbol of conflict; we must see that he also stood for reconciliation. To do so is to move a step closer to reconciliation ourselves. (Seigel 84)

Seigel goes on to state that "the Fanon who did not trust fervor must be confronted if we are to understand the Fanon who later preached violence" (85). Fanon's condemnation of racial divisions between colonizer and colonized, and his conflicted yet ultimately pro-violence advocacy, fell on fertile soil.

Certainly, teachings of non-violent resistance were prominent as well, the most notable being that of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi preached equal respect and love for all mankind as well as non-violent protest. While Fanon sounded a call to arms, Gandhi vocally called for tolerant and peaceful opposition to the British occupation of his native India. It is this colonial legacy in India that inspired academics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942-). Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" not only coined the term *subaltern*, but also set forth the preliminary framework from which to begin to discuss the postcolonial cultural identity. Spivak, like Fanon, saw the result of the forcible marginalization of indigenous populations, giving rise to her definition of the subaltern as the person or group that is relegated to positions outside the sphere of power. She points out that it is often a Eurocentric voice, rather than the subaltern itself, that describes the subaltern. This sentiment is echoed by Said:

> We must take seriously Vico's great observation that men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities – to say nothing of historical entities –

> such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made. Therefore as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other. (*Reflections on Exile* 5)

Said, Spivak and, later, Bhabha share the central idea, if not terminology, of the subjugated cultural identity reshaping itself based on the imposed influence of a dominant power within the global context. The psychological displacement of feeling different has a powerful effect. This effect may well have fuelled vocal Zionists[24] within the Soviet Union. In the same way that Césaire and Fanon sought a platform from which to defy their colonial oppressors, Russian-Jewish Zionists such as Vladimir Ze-ev Zhabotinskii (1880-1940) fought to free their marginalized cultural groups from the rule of dominant groups.

The characters analyzed in this dissertation are born into unhomely circumstances simply by being ethnically Jewish within the Soviet Union. As Bhabha elaborates, "Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical states" (*Location of Culture* 13). When connecting Said's concept of orientalizing with concrete social examples, Said depends heavily on identity representations in literature. The Nobel Prize-winning author S.Y. Agnon (1888-1970), who, like Said, lived under the British Mandate in Palestine, provides excellent illustrations of the depiction of a literary orientalized identity. Agnon's Zionist narratives routinely depicted British soldiers on the streets of Jerusalem as heartless enforcers set on tormenting their marginalized subjects, and thus orientalizing

[24] Zionism is a nationalist movement inspired by Theodor Herzel (1860-1904), which arose in Central Europe as a reaction to rampant anti-Semitism. Zionism is based upon a nationalist ideology and call for the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

the non-European population. Said identifies the orientalized identity in all manners of social representation, but seems to regard literature as an intrinsic component of given circumstances in the historical global landscape:

> My contention is that worldliness does not come and go; nor is it here and there in the apologetic and soupy way by which we often designate history, a euphemism in such cases for the impossibly vague notion that all things take place in time. (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 34-35)

Said cites the link between past and present – or what can be regarded also as pre- and post-occupation – not as separate components of chronological time, but as indecipherably interwoven. This is certainly the case for Russian-Jewish immigrants, who are themselves in a cultural milieu of their past and present circumstances of unhomeliness. Spivak shares this opinion to the extent that Said is critical of history as a biased representation of time and space, while Erin O'Connor concludes the paradox of revisionist history: "What is needed, the argument concludes, is a literary history that can illuminate the imperialist underpinnings of narratives that often neither know they have such underpinnings, nor care" (O'Connor 215).

Within the post-immigration context, there is a fundamental bias because the individual's perception of the past is based entirely on memory. As new cultural experiences continue to influence the many layers of post-immigration identity, it is the person's experiential memory that dictates the remapping of their sense of self. In a more recent examination of the postcolonial landscape, Ming Dong Gu expands upon Said's criticism of history as an inaccurate rendering of time and space:

> It has become a cliché to repeat: knowledge is strength and power. But since 'a little learning is a dangerous thing,' in many circumstances biased and distorted knowledge is no better than ignorance. In some circumstances, manipulated knowledge is worse even still, for it arouses mistrust, fear, and even hatred which may bring about strife, conflict and war. (Gu 15)

For Gu, "knowledge" is the representation of the cultural narrative perpetuated by the dominant power, what Spivak would call the Eurocentric perspective. But Gu's explanation cites the ulterior motives for specific representation of the other. In the Soviet Union anti-Semitism was fostered and encouraged by officials who justified it with skewed historical narratives of Jews as wicked. The narrative of the orient can be, and has been used, to manipulate popular opinion from basic relations to all-out war. However, Said, while acknowledging the revisionist narration of dominant cultures, also takes into account the role of the critic, or perceiver of culture, in so much as these prejudices too have a colouring effect on reception:

> Moreover, critics are not merely the alchemical translators of text into circumstantial reality or worldliness; for they too are subject to and producers of circumstances, which are felt regardless of whatever objectivity the critic's method possesses. (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 35)

The issue at hand becomes the perceived exoticism of the orientalized post-immigration character. Four of the authors included in this analysis write in English while emphasizing their exoticism as the basis for their narration. This articulation of self in the context of the orient emphasizes the lack of belonging, or unhomeliness, of the post-immigration experience. As Valerie Kennedy notes, "It is almost impossible to overestimate the significance of *Orientalism* for the study of literature in English in the Anglo-American academic context" (14). This concept, in a general sense, was first explored by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who claimed that the self cannot exist in the absence of an entity by which to define itself in juxtaposition. Said explains that what is oriental is "tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history" (*Reflections on Exile* xii), but that this can manifest itself in several ways. The

first position of what is oriental is purely historical; a physical positioning of *here* and *there, us* and *them*. But this is not a two-way process, as Josaphat Kubayanda acknowledges: "The Westerner, especially the 'ethnographer-observer' has always applied a certain logic to the non-Westerner without being equally scrutinized by the later" (28). This leads to what Said calls an "academic designation," the most universally applied denotation of the term. The third position that the idiom *oriental* assumes, in Said's explanation, is the "imagined" meaning of "orientalism" (*Reflections on Exile* 3). It is in the imagined realm of what is oriental where Said sees the power dynamic come into play. Said very correctly applies the philosophies of Michel Foucault (1926-84) and the power of domination: "My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, socially, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively" (*Reflections on Exile* 3).

In "Style, Expertise, Vision: *Orientalism's Worldliness,*" Said outlines and explores the paradox of the oriental identity. He explains that because the orient is established as a contrast to the normative occident, all features of the former automatically become foreign simply because they exist in juxtaposition to the European standard (*Reflections on Exile* 230). Said explores the possibility that the exoticism of the orient may fall under a one-sided Eurocentric evaluation, citing Lionel Trilling's "race theory" (*Reflections on Exile* 232). Unlike the other, the orient carries connotations of exotic intrigue, and this is precisely how the "imagined orient" arises: not from valid qualitative observation, but from a superficial fantasy resulting in reinforced stereotyping:

> Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a 'fact' which if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically, stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it' – the Oriental country – since we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as* we know it. (Said, *Reflections on Exile* 32)

Simply put, the defining of the foreign as exotic or strange creates an artificial reality in which the manufactured oddity of the orient becomes reality merely because it is a *real* fabrication. Bhabha echoes this highlighting of *us* and *them* in his discussion of stereotyping:

> The construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual. Such an articulation becomes crucial if it is held that the body is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire, and the economy of discourse, domination, and power. ("The Other Question" 19)

Othering has become a cross-disciplinary term and can be seen as the natural response to Said's discussion of the orient as well as Spivak's subaltern. A person or group is othered by defamiliarization and the perpetuation of preconceived stereotypes. The defining of other has given way to more focused identity studies, and to what Bhabha calls the hybrid identity. Kubayanda equates much of the individual cultural identity with language, particularly spoken language:

> The national language was used historically as a means of homogenization and as a machinery of deterritorialization (or marginalization). However, the Other has always survived by a process of self-reterritorialization which, in turn, has its source in ancestral collective codes. (32)

This asks the question, *Who am I?* As Olga Gershenson notes, "Bhabha's theory of colonial discourse offers insight into the ambivalent relationship between colonized and colonizer" ("Postcolonial Discourse Analysis" 129). Cultural stereotypes, an essential

component of Homi Bhabha's philosophy of othering and Said's assertion of the self-fulfilling exotic, are born out of this relationship:

> To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its *effectivity*; with the repertoire of positions of power and resistance, domination and dependence that construct the colonial subject (both colonizer and colonized). (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 95)

Bhabha sees fixity as the discourse of the dominant power. If one regards fixity as the imposed standard, then the other, in essence, is yet one more term for the periphery. From this emerges a natural desire for the other to un-other themselves by emulating their dominator, resulting in "mimicry," which "conceals no presence or identity behind its mask" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 126). Murav explains that "As a tool of power the imposition of mimicry makes colonized subjects almost the same, so that they can be ruled, but not the same, because then there would be no rationale for their subjection" (6). This evaluation is a less black-and-white comparison when considering the case of Russian-Jews following immigration. Newcomers observe and adopt characteristics manifested by the host culture, but also from fellow immigrants who preceded them, and as Murav elaborates there is a "process of creating oneself in relation to another, whose identity is also called into question, a form of self-authoring in which the boundaries between oneself and another break down" (5). There is an inherent theatrical aspect of such post-relocation identity renegotiation. Bhabha's use of the term 'mask' which immediately evokes the performative nature of 'mimicry,' albeit in absence of any real adoption of identity.[25] But as Murav notes, "The cultural and personal transactions that take place across the boundaries separating two cultures are not necessarily voluntary or

[25] The discussion of cultural 'masks' was previously introduced by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*) in 1952.

positive, but more often the result or a tool of force, especially in the context of colonialism" (5). Bhabha acknowledges the in-between, or liminality, of cultural identity, and in this way expands upon the binary structure of Said's orient:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from setting into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without and assumed or imposed hierarchy. (*Location of Culture* 5)

With this discussion of cultural hybridity, Bhabha begins to move beyond the standard imperial perspective of postcolonial discourse; and with the introduction of liminality, Said's original contrast of the occident and orient evolves past its historical constructs.

With such contemporary applications, postcolonial terminologies remain at the root of any multifaceted cultural discussion. I regard this approach as an interdisciplinary apparatus, one that considers worldliness in lieu of cultural dominion, and the multifaceted identity rather than the homogeneous models of the past. Bhabha cites a temporal component to this, noting the importance of time and place:

> The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. ("The Other Question" 35)

This analytical framework borrows from postcolonial discourse with the former Soviet Union cast in the role of colonizer. However, with the worldliness of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature presents, what I believe, to be some of the positive effects of a murky history. The consideration of a difficult past and uncertain future are vital when approaching culturally dislocated writers, who were born into one cultural identity and write while existing in another. Gu identifies a possible side effect of this merger: "Many

far-sighted scholars have expressed their concerns over the fact that the irresistible trend of globalization is Western-centric, having the danger of becoming varied forms of Westernization and even Americanization" (14).

Cultural diversification, including mimicry, factors into Bhabha's analytical process more often than not, especially concerning feelings of unhomeliness:

> Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (*Location of Culture* 3)

Nowhere is this transformation more pronounced than in the cultural diversification of immigrant communities throughout the western world. Even so, such an analysis of several cultural contributors, as in the case of former-Soviet, Russian-Jewish émigrés, the comprehension of identity is not without its inherent problems. Gershenson warns against approaching such analyses from too pop-cultural a vantage point:

> In any discussion of cultural politics 'hybridity' is recited along with other catchy refrains such as 'multiculturalism' 'diversity' and 'globalization'. Such floating and uncritical use become possible partly because the academics themselves cannot figure out what 'hybridity' means. The point of contention most relevant to the discussion of cultural politics is whether the term refers to a progressive or conservative phenomenon. ("Lure and Threat" 106)

Tying all of this back to Said's definition of the orient, Tahrir Khalil Hamdi contends, "Some criticisms of Said mourn the pre-Saidian days of 'true' scholarship when the Oriental scholar could pursue sincerely and presumably innocently, before Said and his disciples put them under a tainted political and ideological lens" (135). As Hamdi demonstrates, Said's, and in turn Bhabha's, methods are being modified by many

scholars to better serve a modern framework. Gershenson exemplifies this with what she terms "mutual colonization," which she defines as follows:

> As a result of these ambivalent cultural attitudes, the vectors of colonisation in the relationship between veteran Israelis and Soviet immigrants are not clear. In the process, which I call mutual colonisation, both take positions of coloniser and colonised. ("Lure and Threat" 110)

Scholars such as Gershenson have, in this way, adapted postcolonial applications in order to better approach the complexities of modern globalization and cultural multilayering specifically regarding Soviet Jewry. In "Postcolonial Discourse and Intercultural Communication Building a New Model," Gershenson begins to delve into the cultural representation of Russian-speakers in Israel from a non-literary vantage point. Her research applies the methodology that was first outlined by critics like Said and Spivak, but uses Bhabha's contemporary framework when exploring this topic. Gershenson illustrates that universally innovative postcolonial criticism is outside the traditional colonial paradigm. In "The Lure and Threat of Cultural Hybridity," Gershenson takes a more pointed approach and focuses specifically on the modern manifestation of hybridity: "Hybridity and its political alignment can be theorised only as grounded in the localised discourses that embody it" ("Lure and Threat" 106).

Hence, identity – or the definition thereof – is unequivocally linked to the internal cultural dialogue of the individual. As I demonstrate, the perpetual negotiation of culture is the central feature of post-immigration literature. As Adrian Wanner points out, the typical components found in stories of post-immigration are as follows:

> Initial linguistic inadequacy, disorientation and alienation in the face of an unfamiliar culture, material difficulties, the necessity of having to accept menial jobs, depression and loneliness, intergenerational conflict paired with a sense of moral duty to one's family members, the vapid materialism of the American Dream. (*Out of Russia* 65)

The author's identity as an immigrant does not define the narrative as post-immigration writing in and of itself. Rather, it is the content of the piece that defines it. For example, although Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) published *Lolita* (1955) after immigrating to the United States, this novel cannot be considered post-immigration literature. Neither can prose be solely defined by content alone: though Upton Sinclair's (1878-1968) *The Jungle* (1906) touches on the experiences of Lithuanian newcomers to the United States, it would not be considered post-immigration literature because the immigration component is a secondary feature and not an essential trope. The post-immigration narrative is defined by, and dependent on, the search to reconcile being unhomed and longing for belonging. This leaves a very narrow, but culturally significant, sampling for analysis. If additional national affiliations are regarded as a component of an individual's self-presentation, then their narration can, and should, be read as layers of culturally performed identity. Although this may occur simply through the juxtaposition of contrary representations of self-narratives, the transcending of borders marks a definitive break between narration:

> The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified, nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced, and the problem outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity. (Bhabha, "Introduction – Narrating the Nation" 4)

Therefore, some examples of this literature might include, but certainly are not limited to, such works as Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976), Marina Lewycka's *A Short History of Tractors in Ukraine* (2005), and Liudmila Ulitskaia's *Daniel Stein: Translator* (2007). What all of these authors and their works have in common is that they

exhibit many cultural influences, possess personalized experiences with multiple layers of identity, and present themes of post-immigration assimilation. Another illustration of the diversifying of identity that results from immigration is the cultural contradiction Frantz Fanon experienced in his later years. His transnational experiences led him to model what has become an extremely modern aspect of cultural identity construction, a component of contemporary postcolonial discourse:

> Fanon became Algerian or, to be more accurate, recreated and defined himself as Algerian, but he could eradicate neither the influence of the time and place of his birth, nor the circumstances in which he grew up. His relationship with the island where he was born was complex and tormented, but he was born on and of that island. In some respect Fanon remained Martinican to his death. (Macey 31)

It can be argued that authors who have themselves not undergone an immigration, or at the very least displacement into another culture, cannot produce the sort of literature being discussed in this analysis, which by its nature poses the complex questions of identity and cultural diversification. The depiction of these themes by an author who only imagines the experience could be interpreted as examples of orientalizing or othering – this study does not subscribe to this philosophy. In the aptly titled *Nation and Narration,* Bhabha highlights the connection of a perpetuated national identity with narrative:

> Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force. This is not to deny the attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval presence of the Volk. (*Nation and Narration* 1)

Immigration is in many respects the opposite of imperialist colonizing, but the analytical processes remain essentially the same, giving further credence to Gershenson's "mutual colonization" theory. As Bhabha asserts, what once was rooted in opposition has now culminated in cultural diversification.

Though postcolonial discourse occurs in many disciplines, its literary rendition is an essential component in the narration of cultural identity performativity: "Making literature into a small but paradigmatic aspect of a far larger system of narration has thus been one of the central tasks of post-colonial literary theory" (O'Connor 218). In conclusion, the world that was examined by Césaire and Fanon, and later inspired the approaches of Said, Spivak and Bhabha, can have applications beyond its previous cultural configurations. Murav notes that "A growing body of scholarship has focused on tsarist Russia as a colonial power, which encompassed a multitude of ethnic, national and religious groups within its ever-expanding borders" (Murav 5). And as scholars now begin to re-examine the post-Soviet space, it becomes clear that the influence of postcolonial critical thought endures. Its persistence also means that these approaches to cultural discourse are not limited to traditional imperialist semiotics, but will continue to expand their analytic parameters and be transposed liberally to diversifying cultural and trans-national experiences.

1.6 Situating Russian-Jewish Post-Immigration Narratives within the Canon of Diasporic World Literature

As this is a study within the discipline of comparative literature, it is necessary to discuss the place of Russian-Jewish post-immigration prose within the context of world literature. In "Jewish Literature/World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational," Lital

Levy and Allison Schachter try to reposition Jewish literature within the world canon. They attest that the legacy of Jewish literature "brings the trajectories of cultural transmission among Jewish and non-Jewish communities to light while crossing the seemingly impermeable border between East and West" (105), and that there is far more dialogue between Jewish literature and the world canon than scholars have noted in the past. The same can be said specifically of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature as of Jewish literature as a whole: "The rich multilingual body of modern Jewish writing exemplifies the dynamic interaction of diverse literary cultures" (Levy and Schachter 105). Levy and Schachter, who assert that Jewish literature has not historically existed in a creative literary vacuum without external exchange, establish that the Jewish canon has always been cognizant of the literature of external dominant society. This self-awareness is indicative of Jewish literature's contribution to world literature, which I argue extends to Russian-Jewish post-immigration prose.

The terminology I employ in this study is contrary to that used by scholars such as Yelena Furman or Amelia Glaser, who refer to Russian-speaking ethnically Jewish post-immigration writers in the United States erroneously as 'Russian-Americans.' Although they both acknowledge the complex nature of these post-immigration identities, their choice of vernacular does not accurately reflect the cultural complexities involved. In her article "Hybrid Selves, Hybrid Texts: Embracing the Hyphen in Russian-American Fiction," Furman simplifies the matter by choosing the term 'Russian-American':

> As its name suggests, Russian-American fiction is predicated on never fully belonging to either term surrounding the hyphen, on inhabiting the in-between space created by the combination of the terms. Like the writers that create it, this literature is hybrid: both Russian and American, neither wholly Russian nor wholly American, it is precisely Russian-American. (21)

Although she focuses on Russian-speaking immigrants to the United States, many of whom are Jewish, Furman's oversimplification is misleading at best. Her exclusion of "Jewish" from her discussion of hyphenated identities unnecessarily reflects a value judgement on the perception of self-representation. Additionally, her uncritical use of the term "hybrid" compounds this oversight even further. To avoid problematic over-hyphenation while still maintaining accuracy, I define "Russian" in Russian-Jewish as a Russian-speaker from the former Soviet Union, "Jewish" as anyone of ethnic Jewish descent, and "post-immigration" as the process of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation that these persons undergo.

As demonstrated by Bharati Mukherjee, the multilayered cultural makeup of the authorial voice distinguishes post-immigration literature from other narratives. She states that "the works that emerge from this struggle to find a 'common place' between languages and countries of the brain and the heart will cast that supernatural shadow […] I feel that the academy has not yet developed the grid and the grammar to explore American works that are not 'American' in a canonical sense" (695). Mukherjee is herself the product of multiple cultural influences: East Indian, Canadian and American. As the post-immigration narrative permeates into the literary canon of dominant cultures, the definition of what constitutes a national literature has begun to change as well. Neither language nor conventional representations of cultural identity are constant:

> Of course, we have always been aware that both the poetics and the politics of 'high modernism' were influenced in an essential manner by theories and practices of migration and translation. But our dual concern with migration and translation has also raised a series of questions. How was it possible that modernist literary history relegated to a secondary status precisely that type of literature which was immediately defined by these two categories the immigrant literature contemporaneous with high modernism? In other words, it appears that

> it was precisely an aesthetic of international cultural migration that rendered the cultural products of the immigrant experience almost invisible. (Végsö 24)

As societal modernity continues to reflect a diversifying globalized populace, it is no longer the select elite whose voices dominate the literary stage: "world literature is multitemporal as much as it is multicultural" (Damrosch 10). The major tropes found in post-immigration literature concern the hardships faced during relocation. Quite often, in the case of immigrant writers in particular, this identity is attached to language. Adrian Wanner makes a similar point in "Russian Hybrids: Identity in the Translingual Writing of Andrei Makine, Wladimir Kaminer, and Gary Shteyngart":

> Authors writing in a language other than native tongue have become a common phenomenon in our era of porous borders and international mobility. Many postcolonial writers resort to an imperial lingua franca as their literary medium. Others have embraced a foreign language as a consequence of emigration or out of a deliberate aesthetic choice. (662)

The choice of creative language is noteworthy for what it indicates about the author's identity. Those writing in a second language do so purposefully. For example, Kaminer and Vapnyar, unlike the other authors I discuss in this project, emigrated as adults and write in their non-native tongue; such a choice demonstrates not only a mastery of a second language, but a projection of assimilation. Peter Hitchcock, author of *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (2010), believes that such literary developments are shaped by social organization:

> Both world literature and nation are unthinkable outside a logic of institution, a complex matrix of legitimizing mechanisms – from governmental infrastructure, schools, media industries, or "departments" of various kinds, to ideological reflexes that bind worldviews from moment to moment in a manner just cohesive enough to appear a material second nature. (7)

In other words, writers of, for example, Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature create from an intangible place that, at least on a subconscious level, is governed by social factors.

Post-immigration narratives written in a native tongue have a specific target audience, while prose in a second language not only demonstrates a certain level of cultural assimilation by the author but is also more accessible to those outside of the immigrant community. One can assume that writers such as Kaminer and Vapnyar are not writing for audiences in contemporary Russia, but for the communities in their adopted homelands, thus binding them to the institutional values of that culture. Relating this to Said's critique of orientalized power structures, the orient itself, or for Kaminer and Vapnyar, the Russianness they are marketing to western audiences, is entirely a construct of cultural distancing:

> Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two geographical entities thus support, and to an extent reflect each other. (Said, *Orientalism* 5)

This relationship of *West* and *East* is dependent on a basic power dynamic. In the classical implementation of postcolonial analytical methods, the expansion of Western civilizations was seen as the assertion of dominating colonial power. Globalization has changed the playing field, but the participants remain. Orientalizing reflects both the evolution of postcolonial relationships and the traditional structure which continues to manifest itself. As David Chioni Moore points out, the imposing of dominance, while still creating a need for the performance of assimilation, additionally presents marginalized groups with a desire for a deeper connection with an "authentic" culture:

> As many colonization theorists have argued, one result of extended subjugation is compensatory behaviour by the subject peoples. One manifestation of this behaviour is an exaggerated desire for authentic sources, generally a mythic set of heroic, pure ancestors who once controlled a greater zone than the people now possess. Another such expression, termed mimicry, occurs when subjugated peoples come to crave the dominating cultural form, which was long simultaneously exhaled and withheld. (118)

For Kaminer and Vapnyar, this can either be read as their attempts to move their prose out of the literary periphery by writing in an acquired language, or an attempt to achieve cultural acceptance within their new societies. As the other is defined, both dominant and submissive identities become more articulated. For example, Lara Vapnyar says of her desire to read in English and develop a relationship with the literary world around her:

> Once my understanding of unintentional humor rose to a certain degree, my tolerance of romance novels fell. But the feeling of power remained. If I could understand unintentional humor, what about intentional humor? I tested myself with the exiled New Yorkers. I'll never forget the first cartoon that made me laugh. ("Words That Are Not Yours" 15)

In her short-story collection *Broccoli and Other Tales of Food and Love,* Vapnyar's characters often assume performative stances of mimicry when dealing with the world around them. When relating the necessity for mimicry to a trans-cultural dialogue, the question becomes one of multifaceted juxtapositions. The case of Russian-Jewish immigration preserves the orientalized power dynamic, but does so in variation. It is the marginalized cultural identities of the authors that provide the material for their writing. Initially, they are essentially powerless. Authors such as Kaminer and Vapnyar attempt to reclaim this power by depicting their orientalized selves wrapped up in neat relatable packages intended for local literary consumption. Spivak's position on power relationships would seem to suggest that the most likely motivation to align with, or in this case, target, a dominant group would be to assert power through gaining notoriety:

> When we look at these differences we realize that using the colonizer/colonized model creatively in your area will enhance existing colonial discourse and postcolonial studies as well as provide you with an interesting model. Historically it has been the powerful who have spoken or been spoken of. (16)

The colonizer/colonized power dynamic translates well to the post-immigration experience. In the case of authors such as Shteyngart, Reyn and Bezmozgis, world literature will remember them as English-language authors who write in English not to present their orientalized selves to western audiences, but immigrant writers writing in their dominant language. The choice of writing in one's native language or in a second language should be considered a significant contribution to the growing trans-lingual nature of world literature. However, as Adrian Wanner notes, "Russian-Israeli literature leads a largely ghettoized existence ignored by the mainstream public" (*Out of Russia* 89). It is perhaps more correct to say that this literature is not ignored, but is inaccessible to the greater readership. This inaccessibility is the same reason Levy and Schachter cite for Jewish literature not playing a larger role in world literature.

The perception of mimicry is subjective, illustrating how the literature in question must be approached in trans-cultural terms. Although she writes in English, Vapnyar's characters' struggles mirror those of new immigrants from the former Soviet space, themes not always easily identified by non-Russian-immigrant audiences representing a very specific niche within world literature. The world canon also offers authors such as Rubina, Ulitskaia, Reyn and Vapnyar a place within women's literature. Vapnyar incorporates both cultural and gendered power dynamics, both illustrating and criticizing the Russian cultural expectations of women through her prose:

> To be sure Russian women enjoy the double burden of women the world over – that is, child-bearing frequently combined with work outside the home, domestic indispensability combined with political invisibility, psychological and biological

> needs often not satisfied in institutions created with men in power. Nevertheless, that case could be made that whatever her inferior status, Russian woman culturally has a superiority complex: a self-image rooted in shapeless, immortal Mother Earth, a sense of herself as a person who presumes strength and autonomy even under the most adverse conditions, who does not expect help, who is willing to endure; in short, and image of Russian woman as savior, survivor, and arbiter of the mess left by generations of 'superfluous men.' (Emerson 5)

Within the post-immigration experience, there is an expectation that the other will be presented in a specific way that satisfies the reader's appetite for exoticism. How various components of the cultural self are performed does affect how the narrative is seen within world literature:

> We may want these writers to fill the reservoirs and exercise the memories of distinctiveness that we feel are waning. In the immigrant writers, we see or think we see a link to authenticity and origin, to the *gubernya* of our fathers. Yet this authenticity may never really have existed except as myth. (Rovner 324)

The work of immigrant writers who emigrated at a young age provides a different tone than that of writers who emigrated later. Reyn also falls into the same category of post-immigration literature as Vapnyar, but from a far more 'Americanized' vantage point: "As both a Russian-Jewish-American novelist and a reviewer of other fellow writers from that group, Reyn displays an extremely self-conscious attitude toward the genre of Russian-American immigration fiction" (Wanner, "Russian Immigrant Narrative" 66). As Wanner suggests, Vapnyar's hesitancy may be attributed to her lack of time spent in Russia, in contrast to her contemporaries. Wanner gives the example of Reyn's soft approach when reviewing authors such as Ellen Litman. Litman's work more closely resembles features of both Rubina's and Ulitskaia's genesis of the exponential identity, but nevertheless comes from a situational position not unlike that of Shteyngart or Vapnyar. Because Litman emigrated as an adult, her prose works are punctuated with the jarring trans-cultural misunderstandings that are more prevalent in the writings of authors

who came of age in the Soviet Union before their departure. Wanner points out that Litman does not resort to "performative ethnic *shtick,*" but still manages to pinpoint the major universal elements that define post-immigration literature:

> Litman assumes the earnest stance of the traditional immigrant chronicler. The coming-of-age story of the protagonist coincides with her gradual integration into American society, highlighting the classic staples of immigrant literature. ("Russian Immigrant Literature" 65)

The performative aspect of identity brings with it cultural satire. Wanner does accuse Shteyngart of "performative ethnic *shtick.*" Shteyngart is noted for making use of both Russian and American stereotypes in a sort of meta-absurdism, exploiting his Russian identity in intentionally ridiculous and comical ways. He essentially uses the vivid juxtaposition of a Russian childhood with that of an American immigrant upbringing. Like Vapnyar, he exoticizes the other, but casts himself in the role of other for the specific purpose of comical effect, a feature Joseph Brodsky has also described:

> If one could assign the life of an exiled writer a genre it would have to be tragicomedy. Because of his previous incarnation he is capable of appreciating the social and material advantages of democracy far more intensely that its natives are. Yet for precisely the same reason (whose main byproduct is the linguistic barrier) he finds himself totally unable to play any meaningful role in his new society. (Brodsky 4)

Therefore, the role that is assumed is that of observer and story-teller, preserving the post-immigration cultural narrative in print.

Wladimir Kaminer is commonly associated with the Russian literary diaspora. Though he is an icon of the Russian immigrant culture in Germany, he exists in almost total obscurity, except among those literate in German, in his native Russia. Even among Russians who are familiar with Kaminer, however, he is seen less as a Russian and more as a German with Russian heritage, illustrating the power of performative identity to

influence social perception. Wanner observes that, despite writing exclusively in German, "Kaminer revels in his foreign accent and uses it as a marketing tool selling his books in audio format" ("Russian Hybrids" 669). To date, his only publication that has been translated into Russian and English is his most widely recognized collection of short stories, *Russendisko* (Russian Disco), though Michael Hulse's translation is considered mediocre at best. In addition to Jews from the former Soviet Union, *Russlanddeutsche* (Russia Germans), ethnically German descendants of those who settled in southern Russia during the time of Catherine the Great, represent a sizeable Russian-speaking population in Germany today. Accordingly, the *Russlanddeutsche* literature illustrates a unique multifaceted cultural voice as well (see Berger, Voight, and Leinonen).

In her study of Portuguese-American literature, Nancy Baden explores hybrid national identities in the literature of immigration; however, it must be noted that she only considers the binary nature of these identities and does not acknowledge their multilayered construction:

> We should be very aware of the fact that the label 'Portuguese-American literature' used to describe the existing body of works is a misnomer if we mean by it a fully developed ethnic literature. What exists is a young immigrant literature, the product of two successive waves of immigration. The flurry of current activity may tip the balance one way or another. The term 'Portuguese-American literature' is useful and does serve to describe the works of writers who are neither Portuguese nor American in the usual sense and thus will undoubtedly be used for the sake of convenience. (27-28)

Whether or not one agrees with her narrow classifications of literature, Baden does illustrate how immigration from Portugal to the United States has resulted in the writing of prose that is influenced by two cultural identities. Although Baden does not consider this as its own literature per se, her analysis does support my key conceptual argument in so much as her article outlines and highlights the heterogeneity of post-immigration

identity as a distinct voice in literature. Baden illustrates her argument with a discussion of the Portuguese-born writer José Rodrigues Miguéis (1901-80), whose works – particularly the provocatively-titled *Gente da Terceira Classe* (Third Class Passengers) – frequently explore the post-immigration experience. Baden points out that "Miguéis is a sympathetic observer who looks at the problems of his people as reflections of universal human concerns" (23).

Similarly, it has been said of Bharati Mukherjee that her work is "caught in the awkward act of juggling with multiple cultures" (Rustomji-Kerns 655). Originally from Calcutta and now living in North America, Mukherjee is an author whose writing is very much tied to post-immigration literature as well as multicultural identity studies. Mukherjee's works describe "the difficulties of being a South Asian writer in Canada and discusses the constant search by many immigrants and expatriates for a secure and familiar place" (Rustomji-Kerns 657). Mukherjee herself comments on her feelings of displacement in both life and writing:

> If they wanted to resist self-transformation, if they wanted to remain immured from their adoptive society and unmolested by its unfamiliar culture, if they wanted to confine their interests exclusively to events in the homeland, and to communicate only in the mother tongue, they would be exiles or expatriates, not immigrants. (689)

Mukherjee points out that the identity of the 'immigrant' depends on a desire to assimilate new cultural identities to some extent, and shows how integral this multicultural hybridity is to the post-immigration narrative, including her own fiction writing.

Cultural diversity has become a way of life in many parts of Europe, as demonstrated by scholars such as Ingeborg Kongslien, who says of the demographic transformation of Scandinavian literature:

> Immigrants and second-generation representatives since about 1970 have increasingly published poems, short stories and novels in Scandinavian languages and thereby expanded the national literatures with new themes, settings and fields of reference. These new narratives by and about immigrants in Norwegian and other contemporary Scandinavian literatures are cultural representations of our changing societies, where questions of identity, nationality or ethnicity, and location are placed in the forefront. (197)

Like Baden, Kongslien identifies multiple cultural influences on contemporary post-immigration literature; however, unlike Baden, she seems to regard it as a fully-developed and actualized multilayered entity in and of itself. Kongslien astutely relates the plurality of cultural voices within a national literature to Said's concept of the "awareness of simultaneous dimensions. [….] [a]s immigration remakes Scandinavian societies it kindles creativity in life and literature" (208, 221).

For more insular cultures such as Japan, this diversifying of the cultural identity construction in literature has been more gradual:

> Contemporary Japanese literature in particular has become quite nebulous in its ethnic character due to recent developments such as geographical mobility available to writers and rampant invasion of foreign loan words into advertisements, routine writings, and even daily conversation. Yet this important phenomenon has been generally ignored by specialists of native literature. (Fujisawa 9)

The hybrid Japanese-North American identity is far more developed than the budding multiculturalism that Matoshi Fujisawa has observed in Japan. Several Japanese descendants of immigrants have made important contributions to North American diasporic culturally multifaceted literature, among whom is the second-generation Japanese-Canadian writer Joy Kogawa (1937-) whose work does deal with fundamental

issues of cultural identity. Kogawa, a recipient of the Order of Canada, is not a post-immigration writer but should be noted within the context of complex cultural identity and othering. She is recognized as a prolific poet and is best known for her 1981 novel *Obasan* (Aunt). Regarding this work, Christina Tourino points out, "Combining prose, poetry and documentary, *Obasan* records the struggle of the Japanese Canadian community against a hostility that takes many forms – long-standing racial prejudice, wartime internment, and double dispersal and exile – all perpetuated by Canadians against Canadian citizens of Japanese descent" (134). Despite not being a post-immigration work the text forces the reader to consider the concepts of nationality and identity in their current applicability.

Similarly, much Muslim-American literature has demonstrated the same type of displacement. Discussing depictions of Muslim women in literature, and specifically women who wear hijabs, Samaa Abdurraqib notes, "Because Islam is currently still considered foreign to America, much of the literature can be considered immigrant fiction" (55). Abdurraqib demonstrates that even American-born Muslims exhibit the same hyper-exoticism outlined by Said: "The current trends in fiction about immigrant Muslims seem to fall into two categories: fiction that focuses on culture and assimilation, rather than religion, and fiction that focuses on the oppressive nature of religion and assimilation" (Abdurraqib 56). One prominent mainstream Muslim-American writer is the Afghan-born physician-turned-novelist Khaled Housseini (1965-), whose novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) explores the imposed cultural expectations of women within Islam, and the Afghan female experience in particular. Of subject matter such as that of Housseini's novel, Abdurraqib says:

> Immigrant narratives that focus on religion have the potential to follow the same patterns as normative immigration novels. However, when Muslim women are placed at the center of these oppositions the patterns are revised. The opposition becomes stauncher – and the divisions between 'us and them' are relied upon more heavily. Islam becomes the religion of the 'other' and the culture from which women need to be liberated. (56)

Within the Russian-Jewish post-immigration narrative, similar identity division and othering are never secondary. As Abdurraqib clearly shows, the integration of marginalized religious identity, and more directly the motif of the hijab, emphasize and highlight this culturally significant contrast. Unlike *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Housseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) does present some post-immigration themes. Although the protagonist has already undergone acclimatization to his adopted home, the need for identity definition is reawakened in the character as he is confronted with the contrast of his American life in juxtaposition with the culture of a deteriorated Afghanistan he is disassociated from.

Authors of post-immigration literature throughout the world grapple with similar themes, universal experiences, and the same questions of ethnic and cultural identity. But as post-immigration literature becomes a stronger presence within the world canon critics must re-examine previously held beliefs regarding identity depictions within narrative as well as world literature, as demonstrated by David Damrosch:

> A crucial feature of world literature is that it resolves always into a *variety* of worlds. These different worlds vary by era, region, cultural prestige, and the works that come to us from these varied worlds can in turn be read in a variety of ways. This sort of variability involves constantly competing ideas of literature, and our contemporary definitional debates can be seen as an episode in the shifting relations among three general concepts. Literature in general and world literature in particular has often been seen in one or more of three ways as an established body of *classics*, as an evolving canon of *masterpieces*, or as multiple windows on the world. (9 emphasis in original)

Though the position of post-immigration literature in the world canon is firmly established, I believe that its full impact has yet to be realized. The analysis presented here is all the more relevant as this particular literary culture has only recently begun to gain momentum.

Chapter 2: Unhomeliness and Mobility in the Literary Construction of Russian-Jewish Identity

> It is a mistake to think of the expatriate as someone who abdicates, who withdraws and humbles himself, resigned to his miseries, this outcast state. On a closer look he turns out to be ambitious, aggressive in his disappointments, his very acrimony qualified by his belligerence. The more we are disposed, the more we are disposed, the more intense our appetites and our illusions become. I even discern some relation between misfortune and megalomania. The man who has lost everything preserves as a last resort the hope of glory or of literary scandal. He consents to abandon everything except his name.
>
> (Cioran, "Advantages of Exile" 150)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the inception, portrayal(s) and evolution of the Russian-Jewish protagonist, all culminating in the development of the multilayered post-immigration identity. To fully understand the Russianness and the Jewishness of characters in contemporary post-immigration literature, one must ask where this figure first originated. There are many potential answers to this question, and this chapter aims to explore one such trajectory by demonstrating how the Russian-Jewish post-immigration protagonist has been shaped by its literary predecessors. Leonid Livak points out that generalized characterization of Jews had previously become a longstanding tradition throughout European societies:

> The representation of Jews by European artists and thinkers is notorious and repetitive. For almost two millennia, it has drawn on a fixed imaginative lexicon with little variation or originality suggesting the existence of a common *model* that generates the Jewish image in theology, philosophy, literature, visual arts and folklore across European cultures. The concept of stereotype does not convey the durability and continuity of Europe's imaginary Jews. (*The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination* 1, emphasis in original)

To thoroughly explore the origins of these complex characters, I begin with the mythology of the Wandering Jew in Russian literature. Despite moving away from classical Russian depictions of Jewishness, the authors discussed in this study all incorporate elements of the tradition of the Wandering Jew, most prominently in regard to mobility. Kaminer illustrates this in "Russians in Berlin," the first of his *Russian Disco* vignettes:

> The decision was taken spontaneously. In any case, it was far easier to emigrate to Germany than to America: the train ticket cost only 96 roubles, and for East Berlin you didn't need a visa. My friend Mischa and I arrived at Lichtenberg station in the summer of 1990. In those days one was still given a most democratic reception. In view of our birth certificates which bore in black and white the information that both of us had Jewish parents, we were issued special certifications by an office specially established for the purpose in Marienfelde, West Berlin. These stated we were recognised by Germany as citizens of Jewish origin. With these papers we then proceeded to the East German police headquarters on Alexanderplatz, and there, being recognised Jews, we were given an East German identity card. (*Russian Disco* 15)

This passage is demonstrative of perpetual movement associated with the narrator's Jewish identity; in other words, his mobility is made possible by his Jewish label Perhaps he is not 'wandering' in the conventional sense as his movement is based upon a destination, but this mobility is nevertheless evocative of the Wandering Jew. It is from a synthesis of Yiddish mythology and Christian legend that the character and story of the Wandering Jew first emerged.

This chapter focuses on discussions of physical and psychological mobility, resulting from feelings of unhomeliness, as they pertain to Russian-Jewish post-immigration depictions. I begin by providing a detailed survey of the Wandering Jew throughout Russian-language literature and relate these portrayals to those found in Russian-Jewish post-immigration narratives. It is my assertion that the well-established

literary legacy of the Wandering Jew has embedded certain universal themes of othering, cultural disillusionment, dislocation and the unhomely in the marrow of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. The chapter culminates in an analysis of the artist figure as a recurring presence in post-immigration writing, exploring the significance of the artist in the forming of a performed post-immigration cultural identity. The state of the artist figure is tied to mobility, symbolically if not literally. As a character, the artist figure remains in motion, moving from inspiration to impulse, vision to realization, idea to creation. This figure is perpetually transient, as the act of creation is a process without a final destination. This chapter ultimately demonstrates a direct correlation, historically and culturally, between the Wandering Jew and the post-immigration protagonist as self-fashioning artist. In partial answer to Dorit Lemberger's question, "Is hybridity a unique autobiographical language, or perhaps it reflects universal problems?" ("Questioning Boundaries of Language and the World" 266), I argue for the former and contend that all post-immigration characters are artists, to varying degrees, because they are responsible for the crafting, shaping and performance of new post-immigration identities. As this process can never be completed, it should be regarded as a journey of developing and changing artistic necessity.

2.2 The Myth of the Wandering Jew and Its Implications for Post-Immigration Unhomeliness

Representations of Jewish figures in Russian-language literature involve a number of easily identifiable themes, such as mischief, deception, cunning, and con-artistry. Although these unflattering stereotypes are part of the greater Russian cultural consciousness, mainstream world literature has abandoned these portrayals. In "The

Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos," Laura Makarius discusses the roles of the trickster, who is not entirely unlike the Wandering Jew:

> The mythic hero transforms nature and sometimes, playing the role of a demiurge, appears as the creator, but at the same time he remains a clown, a buffoon, not to be taken seriously. He checks the course of the sun, cleaves monsters asunder, and defies the gods; at the same time he is the protagonist of obscene adventures from which he escapes humiliated and debased. (67)

This figure appears universally in the folk narratives of many cultural groups. He is often depicted as sly and underhanded, and his misdeeds typically land him in unfavourable situations. He is a habitual bender of rules who most commonly exhibits an above-average intellect. However, what characterizes the trickster is that he uses his intellect for irreverence and tomfoolery. Different cultures present the 'trickster' in a variety of forms: fairies with celestial powers, animals with personified human character traits, or simply humans. In the Slavic world, he takes the form of a supernatural entity named Veles.[26] Veles, generally described as a minor god, appears in the mythology of all Slavic cultures, sometimes taking a non-human form. Later Russian folklore would witness the introduction of Ivan the Fool (*Ivan durak*), the smallest and youngest of a poor farmer's four sons. Despite being weak of body and dull of mind, Ivan is a comic figure, and his adventures ultimately end without tragedy. In Yiddish folklore, he is Hershel of Ostropol, more often referred to by his Yiddish diminutive, Hershele. Eleonora Shafranskaia cites the importance of the trickster within Jewish cultural traditions:

[26] Велесъ in Old Church Slavonic. Russian folklore refers to this figure as Волос.

> Jewish folktales about the fools of Chelm[27] are not a copy of foreign texts on similar topics. These folktales recreate the mentality of the Jewish people and their unique world view.[28] (*Sindrom golubki* 191; my translation)

Instead of occupying a position of mockery and ridicule, the trickster, according to Shafranskaia, is an indicator of the celebratory nature of Jewish culture. It is from the trickster that subsequent literary figures such as the Wandering Jew begin to emerge.

Where does the Wandering Jew originate in world literature? How did this character make his way into the Russian literary consciousness? Without dwelling too heavily on the harshness and cruelty endured by Russia's Jews at the hands of their countrymen, it is necessary to cast a critical light on the historical injustices suffered in the name of cultural assimilation as all of this would later affect Russian-Jewish emigration. Shaul Stampfer explains "[t]ime after time, persecution led entire Jewish communities to put their packs on their backs and seek a safe refuge – a haven that would ultimately prove to be temporary as well" (127). To grasp the significance of contemporary Russian-Jewish literature, this tragic legacy of persecution must be noted. As Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern attests, Russian anti-Semitism predates the forcible assimilation of the Soviet Union, and makes itself known throughout the history of pre-revolutionary Eastern Europe:

> Once the vision of the Jew as a sleazy *gesheft*-maker[29] dominated Russian discourse and the government was seeking out the best ways to undermine what it saw as Jewish trade, instead of liberating and benefiting from it, the era of the golden age shtetl came to a halt, and with it the great promise of the Russian

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[27] Chelm is a city in Eastern Poland. In both Polish and Jewish folklore, Chelm is traditionally described as a city of fools.

[28] Еврейские фольклорные повествования о хелмских дураках - это не калька с иноязычных текстов на подобную тематику. В них воссоздана ментальность еврейского народа, национальная картина мира.

[29] *Gesheft* means maker – in this case, 'business maker.'

> Jewish encounter. The shtetl marketplace emptied, and a premonition of bloodshed permeated the air. (119)

Pogroms devastated what the Russian Empire once had of a vibrant Jewish community, and what the Russians did not destroy was eventually obliterated by the Germans. According to Olga Budnitskii "The pogroms of the Russian Civil War period (1918-1921) were the most serious outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe between the Khmelnnytxky Uprising of 1648 and the Holocaust. In 1918-1921, in the Ukraine alone, there were over 1,500 pogroms and 'excesses' in about 1,300 localities. According to various estimates, from fifty to sixty thousand to two hundred thousand Jews were killed or mortally wounded. Another two hundred thousand were injured and mutilated" (187). These violent mob attacks on Jews were so common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the term itself is a derivation of the Russian *gromit'*.[30] In "The Story of My Dovecote," Isaak Babel' describes a pogrom in Odessa: "The dove's tender entrails slithered over my forehead and I closed my uncaked eyes so that I would not see the world unravel before me. This world was small and ugly" (373). Similar large-scale actions of mob violence were directed at Eastern European Jews well into the twentieth century, the most recent of which took place on 4 July 1946 in Kielce, Poland. Society had cast the Jew as the other, so that the maltreatment of Jews seemed far less personal. These historical events not only coloured the culture of Eastern European Jewry, but also influenced the literary representation of Jewish characters.

To appreciate the significance of the literature included in this project, I believe one must first look at the historical literary tradition of Jewish character depictions in

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[30] *Gromit'* (громи́ть) is a Russian verb that means 'to violently destroy.'

Russian culture. These portrayals would remain in the background of the post-immigration Russian-Jewish consciousness, as David Bezmozgis demonstrates:

> Babel needs no introduction from me. Anyone familiar with his work should also be able to see the way in which *Natasha* is indebted to his Odessa Stories. […] The cycle he wrote about his childhood and maturation in and around Odessa very much influenced *Natasha* in both mood and form.[31] ("P.S. Ideas, Interviews and Features" 15)

Bezmozgis's own evaluation of his work cites a connection to the Russian-Jewish literary consciousness and should be noted as an indication that even in diaspora these literary traditions continue to inform contemporary Russian-Jewish narration. Babel''s influence demonstrates a tether between modern Russian-Jewish prose and that of past generations, as Bezmozgis illustrates in *Natasha*: "It was hard to imagine, Herschel said, such a man. A real Odessa character, right out of the pages of Babel. He had even grown up on Babel's street. As a young boy Itzik had carried watermelons for Babel's uncle. What hadn't he done in his life?" (139). Bezmozgis even weaves in a subtle allusion to the Wandering Jew in reference to Itzik when Herschel elaborates: "At thirteen he was working two shifts in a munitions factory. At seventeen he was at the front. He fought the Germans, he survived the Communists, he had an appetite for the world" (139).

The character of the Wandering Jew, like any other legend, has grown, evolved, and taken new forms over several generations. Dina Rubina characterizes the collective experience of European Jews as follows:

> That's how we ran from Spain, that's how we ran from Germany, that's how we ran from Poland, that's how we ran from… that's how we ran… That's how I chose you from all the nations, as my herd, and I shall run you, as a herd, from

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[31] "P.S. Ideas, Interviews and Features" is included as an addition to Bezmozgis's volume of stories.

> place to place, so you won't forget, and won't relax, and would not mix with other peoples...[32] (qtd. in Shafranskaia, *Sindrom golubki* 143; my translation)

At a cursory glance one might believe that the post-immigration protagonist shares no commonalities with the antiquated and often backwards representations of the Wandering Jew; however, my analysis demonstrates that in many respects they are one and the same. George K. Anderson observes in *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (1965), "We are handicapped by the lack of material relating to the Legend of the Wandering Jew in Slavic regions. We know that he is there in folk tales, to be described in a moment, and in certain later literary treatments, but we could profitably know more than we do" (67). My research generally disagrees with Anderson's assertion, and contends that the Wandering Jew of the Slavic world has a long and well-researched history, as I believe is evident from the publications of Shaul Stampfer, Gabriella Safran, Moshe Rosman and Zsuzsa Hetényi, among many others. Readers of Russian literature have been introduced to the Wandering Jew in classical texts and Soviet literature, and can continue to encounter twenty-first-century equivalents in contemporary Russian-Jewish post-immigration prose. Lara Vapnyar's protagonist Tanya describes this overwhelming urge for change and craving for mobility:

> The change… That's what I get out of coming to the United States. The change. My whole life would be different. The word 'different' had something magical about it. I could see it. A gentle word come out of the modest INS envelop and take everything that surrounded me now and exchange it for something else, something unknown. I had no idea what my new life would be, but I knew one thing for sure it wouldn't be the same. It would be different! (*Memoirs* 59)

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[32] ...вот так мы бежали из Испании, вот так мы бежали из Германии, вот так мы бежали из Польши, вот так мы бежали из... вот так мы бежали... Вот так я избрал тебя из всех народов, как стадо своё, и стану перегонять тебя, как стадо, с места на место, чтоб не забывал, и не успокаивался, и не смешивался с языками другими...

Tanya is driven by the desire for change and reinvention. She embodies the spirit, if not the specific characteristics, of a Wandering Jew and inadvertently becomes a sort of artist in her endeavour to become a writer's muse.

Returning to the conception of the Wandering Jew, the figure originated in Christian European legends, and has been thought to have evolved from the story of Cain and Abel in the Book of Genesis. Abel is a shepherd, and his brother Cain a farmer. After killing his brother, Cain must wander in exile; in an ironic reversal of roles, Cain becomes a shepherd without flock or home. Anderson says of this legend:

> What man has done to man is the saddest chapter in the history of the world. The story of the peoples of the earth is in large measure the tale of how the world whipped the nonconformists with its displeasure and visited upon him dishonour and ignominy, torture and death. The story of punishment has written its own commentary. (1)

In practical terms, this rejection of nonconformity is the social persecution of the subaltern, or the process of othering, albeit on a much larger scale. Songs and folktales circulated in Early Modern Europe tell of a wicked Jewish character who taunted Jesus on his death march to crucifixion. This Jew is punished for his cruelty, and must wander the Earth without home or rest until the second coming of Christ: "The direst of punishments would necessarily be that which lasted the longest. Thus the eternal tedious punishment is common in the folklore of most peoples and races" (Anderson 2).

Subsequently, in many literary depictions throughout western civilization, Jewish characters continued to reflect a 'wandering' legacy. As Jews were restricted by law to professions of trade and bartering, the 'Jew' was relegated to itinerant and unstable positions in society. In reference to the Russian perspective of Jews, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern notes: "At the turn of the nineteenth century, negative ethics became negative

politics. The rejection of the Jew morphed into a rejection of the capitalist way of life" (119). Eventually, decades later, "[t]he Soviet imagination amalgamated 'Jews,' 'business,' 'trade' and 'treason' into one nasty concept" (119). The othering of the Jew within literature directly resulted from the dehumanization of the Jew within society, as Semen Reznik notes:

> According to a misconception that was spread by the ruling powers and the masses, working in trades and being a merchant was not considered a producing vocation. Hence, the conclusion was that Jews were not working but making a living exclusively from lies and deception. The idea to 'fix' the Jews by teaching them how to work the land was documented in many 'notes', 'projects', and 'directives' by various government committees since the days of Derzhavin,[33] but the paradox is that these directives coexisted side by side with a total ban prohibiting Jews from renting or buying land within their permanent settlements. The notion was that if the Jews were allowed to own land they would steal it all piece by piece leaving the peasants with nothing and enslaved.[34] (54; my translation)

Such a culture of anti-Semitism made possible societal attitudes that did not regard Jews, or Jewish characters, as human. Michelle Maiese outlines the psychological distancing that occurs with othering:

> We typically think that all people have some basic human rights that should not be violated. Innocent people should not be murdered, raped or tortured. Dehumanization is a psychological process whereby one group is considered as less than human and thus not deserving of moral consideration. Those excluded are typically viewed as inferior, evil or criminal. Any harm that befalls such individuals seems warranted and perhaps even morally justified. Dehumanization makes the violation of generally accepted norms of behaviour regarding one's fellow seem reasonable, or even necessary. Psychologically, it is necessary to

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[33] Gavriil Derzhavin (1743-1816) was a poet and politician.

[34] Однако, согласно предрассудку, разделявшемся в России властями и массой простого народа, занятия торговлей и ремеслами не считались производительным трудом. Отсюда убеждение, что евреи якобы не трудились, а добывали хлеб исключительно обманами и гешефтами. "Исправить" евреев, приучив их к земледелию, такова была идея многих "Записок", "Проэктов", "Постановлений" различных правительственных комитетов со времен Державина, но она парадоксальным образом уживалась с запретом на приобретение или аренду евреями земли в местах их постоянной оседлости. Считалось, что дай им только такую возможность, они приберут к рукам всю землю, а крестьяне, работающие на своих куцих наделах и на земле помещика, окажутся в кабале у евреев.

> categorize one's enemy as sub-human in order to legitimize increased violence or justify the violation of basic human rights. Moral exclusion reduces restraints against harming or exploiting certain groups of people. (Maiese)

By not regarding Jews as human, Early Modern European civilization carried over these prejudices into literary renditions that can be regarded as some of the first examples of Jewish othering committed to print. One of the earliest such recorded depictions of this figure in Early Modern Europe appears in the song "The Wandering Jew or the Shoemaker of Jerusalem," printed in London around 1693.[35] Earlier Medieval texts referred to the Wandering Jew, but it was only later that his search for belonging appeared in print. The German four-leaf seventeenth-century publication *A Short Description and Tale of a Jew With the Name Ahasuerus* (*Kurtze Beschreibung und Erzählung von einem Juden mit Namen Ahasverus*) was one of the first publications featuring the character of the Wandering Jew. This work depicts a vagrant Jewish man passing through Hamburg, and was subsequently translated into several languages, thus carrying the character of Ahasuerus into many European cultures, including Russia. Over time, the Wandering Jew evolved from the stock character of early puppet theatre to Ahasuerus, and found new voices in the prose of post-immigration literature.

Many scholars, such as Shaul Stampfer, have noted the intertwined nature of Ashkenazi Jewry with the Eastern Slavic regions. The history of Jews in the Slavic territories dates back over nine hundred years, according to Maurice Friedberg.[36]

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[35] The original printing of the song was distributed by the Booksellers of London, and it was subsequently reprinted several times.

[36] This article appears online courtesy of the American-Israeli Cooperative. The article is originally taken from the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

A well-known Jewish folk legend, apocryphal though it may be, tells of the Ashkenazi settlement in what is now Poland, in which a group of Jews stop to rest for the night in a forest near Lublin. In "Forest" (1919), S. Y. Agnon imagines the forest as follows:

> When they came from the land of the Franks, they found a forest in the land, and on every tree, a tractate of the Talmud was incised. This is the forest of Kawczýn which is near Lublin. And every man said to his neighbour "We have come to the land where our ancestors dwelt in ancient times of Torah and learning. And those who delve into the scriptures say: This is why it is called Polin. For thus spoke Israel when they came to the land, "Po-lin! Here rest for the night." And this means that we shall rest here until we shall merit going to the Land of Israel. (qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Polonsky 37)

In some versions of the tale, "Polin" is whispered through the trees; in others, it is written on the leaves that fall to the ground; but all versions share the themes of mobility and semi-permanent resettlement as well as a correlation between the land of Poland and biblical Jewish destiny. *Po-lin*, which means 'here rest' in Hebrew, according to the legend, was the great sign from God to the Jewish people to settle in the Eastern Slavic territories, ending their wandering until summoned back to the Land of Israel. This pause in the wandering of the Jewish people began a long history of Ashkenazi communities in Poland, modern Ukraine, and parts of European Russia:

> At the beginning of the modern period, let us say in the fifteenth or beginning of the sixteenth century, there were hardly any Jews in Eastern Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century there were millions of Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews in Eastern Europe. (Stampfer 127)

This dramatic boom in population, accompanied by the existing legend further served to bolster the public view of Jews as itinerant. They came and settled, lived forcibly in insular isolated communities (*shtetls*), maintained their own language and traditions, and did not begin to integrate into Russian society until much later - only adding to the stereotyping of a group that had already become the scapegoat of Europe.

The character of the 'Jew' becomes standardized first in Russian puppet theatre: a comical ugly creature hungry for wealth. Quoting Lev Vygotsky[37] (1896-1934), Moshe Rosman elaborates on this image of the Jew:

> Evidence is abundant of the hostile attitude in many works of Russian literature. Lev Vygotsky, a well-known Russian psychologist, has argued: "The future historian of the Jews in Russia will be puzzled by the attitude of Russian literature to the Jew (*zhid*). It is both strange and incomprehensible that Russian literature, being so much informed by the principles of humanity, brought so little humanity to its portrayal of the Jews. The artists have never noticed a human being in a Jew. Hence, the lifeless mechanism of the puppet, the ridiculous movements and gestures of which are supposed to make a reader laugh, the stamped cliché of the Jew, has replaced the artistic image. Hence, the similarity and even complete identity of the image of the Jew is always, and everywhere a reincarnation of the vile, grovelling, greediness, infamy, filthiness, the embodiment of human vices in general and the specific ethnic vices in particular (surly, spy, traitor)…" (64)

Russian literature has been endlessly punctuated by the *lishnii chelovek* (Superfluous Man): haughty, self-confident, and without motivation, a staple of the Russian canon. The *vechnyi zhid*,[38] the Wandering Jew, is likewise a formulaic literary template replete with compulsory character traits and physical attributes. It can be argued, as Sascha Goluboff does, that the very terminology, *vechnyi zhid*, is blatantly anti-Semitic: "In Russian the word *zhid* (kike) means both 'JEW' and 'stingy' and the slang word *zhidit'sia* mean to 'be stingy' and to 'show stinginess' like the English slang "to jew" (86). The character of the Wandering Jew is alive and well in modern Russian and Russian-Jewish literature in both the former Soviet space and its diaspora, a fact that is often overlooked by contemporary scholarly discussions of the figure. Although the features and details have changed over time, so have national attitudes regarding identity issues: as Levin

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[37] Lev Vygotsky was a phsychologist who was noted for his work with the cultivation of higher reasoning skills.

[38] The adjective *vechnyi* (вечный) is literally translated as 'eternal.' Some controversy has arisen regarding the use of this terminology following the 1940 Nazi propaganda film *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), a wildly anti-Semitic narrative commissioned by Joseph Goebbeles (1897-1945).

illustrates, Russian literature depicting Jewish themes, written by non-Jews, carries with it an inherent cultural disdain for the subaltern character:

> Nationalistic Jewish writers have repeatedly noted a certain anti-Semitic tradition in Russian literature, from Pushkin to Chekhov. Some of them have been puzzled by the fact, as it seems to them, that Russian literature, so generally humanitarian in its aims and ideals has singled out only the Jew for portrayal as either ludicrous or repulsive stereotypes. (13)

Historically, the Jew as depicted in classical Russian literature has always manifested shallow stereotypes, reminiscent of early puppet theatre. For example, Ivan Turgenev (1818-83) describes his Jewish character Hirschel as "small of stature, thin, pock-marked, and red haired; he was incessantly winking his tiny eyes, which were also red; he had a long cooked nose, and was eternally coughing" (5). The character is most often used as comic relief or as the cunning villain. In recent decades, as Levin notes, it has become clear that the bulk of Russian literature has moved beyond limiting Jews to fools or villains. Although these traditions may still appear they are usually intentional and self-aware. This can be seen in Shteyngart's self-deprecating description of himself as comic relief:

> His dashed dreams of becoming a professional opera singer will fall away as he tries to fix the broken child in his arms. He will have to do it quick! Swaddling is still merrily practiced at the Otto Birthing House, and the dachshund-shaped me is tied with a giant blue bow (*bant*) around my neck. By the time the taxi from the birthing house arrives at our apartment, my lungs are already empty of air, and my comically large head is nearly as blue as the bow strangling me. I am revived, but the next day I start sneezing. (*Little Failure* 22)

With his characteristic comical flare Shteyngart depicts himself as sickly, weak and coughing, but with an entirely different effect than the attributes provided by Levin. This effectively demonstrates how contemporary depictions of Jewish characterization move

away from narrowly framed superficial archetypes while still referencing these previous models.

It is also important to note that not all Jewish characters are necessarily wandering Jews. What distinguishes these particular characters, besides the obvious stereotypes, is that they experience unhomeliness, lack ties to the land, and are seen as perpetual outsiders engaged in the all-consuming quest for a sense of belonging. But as Tamara Rapoport, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Angelika Heider elaborate, such anti-Semitic cultural attitudes, while being condoned by society, additionally shape the Jewish cultural narrative:

> Anti-Semitism is the epitome of an imposing grand narrative – a constitutive story that underlies national identity, constructs collective identity and memory, and guides the nation's morality. Like any narrative that seeks to manage memory and representation, the narrative on anti-Semitism is absolute, conclusive, and fixed: it identifies categorically the victim and the persecutor. The narrative never tolerates different understanding, justification or consideration, or reconciliation or pardon. It does not allow victims to lay blame on themselves or claim personal responsibility for their suffering. Furthermore, it always addresses any manifestation of anti-Semitism as the result of groundless stigmas and stereotypes. This narrative assumes that experiencing anti-Semitism, regardless of historical period of Diasporan context, bears permanent traumatic consequences on both the personal and the collective level. Anti-Semitism is inseparable from the metanarrative of Jewish history that refers to the never-ending and recurring cycle of persecution, redemption and salvation. (177)

If contemporary cultural narratives of the Russian Jew are engaged in 'salvation,' then Russian Romanticism certainly marks the 'persecution' stage of the cycle. The classical canon of Russian literature is littered with appearances of the *vechnyi zhid*, perhaps not always literally wandering like Ahasuerus, but still embodying the features and attributes designated to this figure. Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) highlights some of these physical characteristics in *The Steppe*:

> The swing-door squeaked and on the threshold appeared a shortish young Jew with a large beaky nose, coarse curly carroty hair and a bald place on top; he wore a short very shabby jacket with rounded folds and abbreviated sleeves, so, with short woven trousers as well he presented the appearance of a tailless fledgling. (*The Steppe* 27)

Chekhov's narrator describes the appearance of one such Wandering Jew with a mixture of comical and pitiful characteristics. Chekhov employs the universal generalization of a "beaky nose" for his portrayal of the Jew, which Livak attributes to depictions of the devil: "A grotesquely large or misshapen (often hooked) nose, is among those readily recognizable features of the devil that pass on to the image of "the Jews" and the fool" (*The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination* 93). This physical description paints the Jew as a poor vagrant who cannot even secure suitable clothing; his attire makes him instantly laughable. This is not the author's only depiction of Jewish characters; Chekhov has yet another character who wanders, but in an entirely unique way. In "Ward No. 6," a Jewish patient at an asylum is allowed to venture outside of the hospital walls. He gathers trinkets and trifles that he greedily hoards, a characteristic in direct adherence to common stereotypes and is depicted in a role of complete subservience:

> Moiseika likes to oblige. He brings his comrades water, covers them up when they sleep, promises to bring each of them a little kopek from outside, and to make them new hats. He also feeds his neighbour on the left, a paralytic, with a spoon. He acts this way not out of compassion, nor from any humane considerations, but imitating and involuntarily submitting to Gromov, his neighbour on the right. ("Ward No. 6" 173)

It can be argued that, like Moiseika, the Jewish character in Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle" is a sympathetic character because he is not overtly devious or manipulative. However, this is not supported by the tone of the narrative as he is presented, similarly to Moiseika, as pathetic and pandering, with all the stereotypical Jewish physical attributes.

The greedy Jew, hardly a unique characterization, has also appeared in Aleksandr Pushkin's (1799-1837) *The Miserly Knight* (*Skupoi rytsar',* 1830), Fedor Dostoyevskii's (1821-81) *The House of the Dead* (*Zapiski iz mertvogo doma,* 1861), Mikhail Lermontov's (1814-41) drama "The Spaniards" (*Ispantsy,* 1830) and Ivan Turgenev's (1818-1883) short story "The Jew" (*Zhid,* 1870). All of these works feature Jewish characters with similar physical and situational characteristics, all of them described as short with curly red hair, freckles, and big noses.

The first half of the twentieth century marked a transformation for the *vechnyi zhid*. Under Soviet rule, the *shtetls* of the Pale became obsolete, as Yohanan Petrovsk-Shtern points out:

> After all, 'shtetl' as a word is nothing but a cultural artefact, a caprice of collective memory. It signifies a vanished Jewish Atlantis, a yearning for a distant and utopian national culture and for the redeeming traditional values of Eastern European Jerusalem, the 'holy community' that we tend to strip of corporeality and then sugarcoat its imaginary residue. (27)

All idyllic preconceptions shattered, the segregated Jews began their compulsory integration into Soviet society, although in doing so they would still be met with prejudice and racism. When ethnically Jewish authors began to adopt the Wandering Jew from their Gentile counterparts, these characters began to develop more depth and balance. Foremost, this manifested itself as Jews assuming leading roles. A stepping stone in this evolution was the character of Ostap Bender in Il'ia Il'f (1897-1937) and Evgenii Petrov's (1903-42) *The Twelve Chairs* (*Dvenadtsat' stul'ev,* 1928). Members of the Odessa School,[39] Il'f and Petrov were very much immersed in Jewish culture, though only one of them was ethnically Jewish. Bender is the primary companion of the

[39] The Odessa School refers to a group of authors from Odessa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As pre-war Odessa had a large Jewish population, many of the authors included in the Odessa School are associated with Russian-Jewish literature as well.

narrative's protagonist, and thus he has a crucial position. He is, however, still a sly and cunning con artist, with no ties to the land, in search of personal gains – all signifiers of the Wandering Jew stereotype. Despite conforming to this model, he is portrayed with far more nuance than Jewish characters from the pre-Soviet era. Interestingly, Bender is commonly regarded as a Jewish character, despite the text never expressly indicating that he is:

> The young man's name was Ostap Bender. Of his background he would usually only give one detail. 'My dad' he used to say 'was a Turkish citizen'. During his life this son of a Turkish citizen had had many occupations. His lively nature prevented him from devoting himself to any one thing for long and kept him roving through the country. (*The Little Golden Calf* 37)

He is eventually murdered by his supposed partner so that the protagonist will not have to share the plunder with the covetous Bender.

Il'f and Petrov's 1931 novel *The Little Golden Calf* (*Zolotoi telenok*) reveals that Ostap Bender was not murdered, as *The Twelve Chairs* would have the reader believe:

> A citizen in a white cap with a white top, the kind worn for the most part by managers of summer gardens and masters of ceremonies at vaudeville theatres, undoubtedly belong to the greater and best part of humanity. He moved through the streets of the town of Arbatov on foot, looking around him with tolerant curiosity. (*The Little Golden Calf* 23)

He is alive and well and in need of a new quest to guide his wanderings. In this narrative, Bender is the principal protagonist, a significant move away from the pre-Soviet model. He devises a scheme to trick a millionaire out of money. Bender is ultimately successful but is, paradoxically, unable to enjoy his ill-gotten gains in the Soviet Union. The standard myth of the Wandering Jew is told with slight variations by Bender himself:

> I will not remind you of the long and tedious history of that wandering Hebrew. I will only say that for a thousand years this commonplace old man loafed over the entire world without registering in hotels, and annoyed citizens with his

> complaints about the high railroad fares, which compelled him to walk. He had been seen a multitude of times. (*The Little Golden Calf* 304)

As he weaves his tale for his listeners, Bender describes how the Wandering Jew has been ever-present throughout history, at the most monumental of moments, and in a diverse cultural sphere. It is interesting that Il'f and Petrov present the legend of the Wandering Jew so directly in this self-aware monologue, as the acknowledgment of the character as a standardized type seems to absolve the text of the perception of anti-Semitic connotations. Il'f and Petrov reclaimed the Wandering Jew, flaws and all, as a Jewish literary figure through their presentation of Ostap Bender.

Perhaps one of the most symbolically meaningful representations of the Wandering Jew as displaced and transient appears in Il'ia Ehrenburg's (1891-1967) novel *The Stormy Life of Laz Roitshvantz* (*Burnaia Zhizn' Lazika Roitshvantsa*). In the introduction to the English translation, Alec Brown calls Laz Roitshvantz "pure of heart if not pure of deeds". Roitshvantz is a tailor, a profession commonly attributed to Jews, from Gomel'. Laz Roitshvantz is truly a wandering Jew: he is completely transient throughout the novel, perpetually migrating from Kiev/Kyiv to Moscow, Warsaw, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, London, and finally Tel Aviv. Like the protagonists of post-immigration literature, he must reinvent his identity each time he relocates, and accordingly, Roitshvantz assumes a new profession with each physical arrival. During the liminal time spent as refugees in Italy, the narrator of Shteyngart's *Little Failure* describes how he, like Roitshvantz, adopts a vocation out of necessity to suit his surroundings:

> At Porta Portese, I walk around the perimeter of the bedsheet that defines our stake, brandishing a sample compass, and hollering at passersby with my now healthy little-boy's lungs, '*Mille lire! Mille Lire!*' A thousand lire, less than a dollar, is what each of the compasses costs, and the Italians, they are not animals. They see a poor refugee boy in a polka-dot-vertical-striped shirt, they will give

> me a thousand lire '*Grazie mille! Grazie mille!*' I reply, as the money is trust in one hand and a little piece of Russia leaves another. (*Little Failure* 89)

Shteyngart's text uses the liminal space as a turning point for the narrator's 'wandering.' As he sells the Soviet souvenirs, he lightens the literal burden of his past in pursuit of the family's yet unattained permanence. The narrator is very conscious of his presentation as a "poor refugee" and capitalizes upon his ability to accentuate the performance of this identity. Unlike the benign pageantry of Shteyngart's narrator, Roitshvantz is a con artist, a master of deception, even going so far as to impersonate a rabbi. Because he is a slippery prevaricator, Laz's Jewishness is only skin deep, a cultural identity he puts on only when it suits him:

> "The Law," replied Laz, "states '*thou shall not seethe a calf in his mother's milk.'* Butter is made from milk. Yet how can a man tell which cow was the mother of any particular piece of veal, or even a slice of adult bullock?" Schwarzberg heaved a dismayed sigh. "No, just a moment, please," said Laz, "it is a little early for sighs. You can serve pork. For instance, I am very fond of pork chops. Now a pig simply cannot be the daughter of a cow. So let yourself go and fry pork chops in butter." (Ehrenburg 164-65)

Ehrenburg concludes Laz Roitshvantz's journey with the character's death in Tel Aviv, the Mandate of Palestine. The reader infers that this particular Jew's search for belonging has been realized upon reaching the Holy Land – a not-so-subtle allusion to Zionism:

> And when the innkeeper beheld Laz's smile, he was overcome. He forgot about money for the funeral. He did not repeat the customary prayers. No, he dropped his candle to the ground, and burst into living tears. Sleep on in peace, poor Roitshvantz! No more shall you dream of great injustice or a modest slice of smoked sausage. (Ehrenburg 269)

Initially, the character of the Wandering Jew may have been confined to a specific narrative model, but it has since come to denote a theme rather than a rigid structure. Laz's entire journey takes place in a state of liminal flux; he arrives in a place only to

depart soon after. The character, assuming new identities with each arrival, is continuously building upon his multiple identities. In this sense, the reader's understanding of Laz's identity is somewhat ambiguous, as it is never clear what is authentic or how he defines himself.

Isaak Babel' (1894-1940), also from the Odessa School, has been noted for his depictions of *shtetl* life and portrayals of Jewish characters in his short stories that describe a world that would later be obliterated. The *shtetl* culture of Jewish history boasts a unique signature of piety and tradition, but for Babel', images associated with the *shtetl* take on dark undertones and sinister realities. In the *Odessa Stories* (*Odesskie rasskazy*) Benia Krik and his boisterous band of gangsters come into vivid focus. Almost comical in the absurdity of their exaggerated features, these gangsters capture a significant moment in Odessa's underworld culture referencing the legendary Misha Iaponchik[40]. The association of gangsters with Odessa is present within the consciousness of Russian-Jewish post-immigration writers despite the passage of time, as Shteyngart acknowledges: "Our pastel apartment is crumbling, but cheap, rented from a small, but budding Odessa mafioso who will soon seek greener pastures in Baltimore" (*Little Failure* 88).

Babel' depicts a number of characters who exhibit culturally complex identities and also embody the tenets of the Wandering Jew model. One such example appears in Babel''s early work, "My First Fee" (*Moi pervyi gonorar*). The protagonist is a young Jewish writer working as a correspondent in Tbilisi. By the nature of his profession, he is transient, without ties to the land; he is a foreigner in Georgia. This character also

[40] Misha Iaponchik (Ми́ша Япо́нчик 1891-1919) was a Jewish gangster raised in the Odessa ghetto of Moldavanka.

embodies elements of the con artist as he lies to a prostitute and concocts an elaborate tale of his sexual exploits and lifelong turmoil. The prostitute, taking pity on him, returns the money he has paid her out of sympathy; the narrator calls this his first fee. Babel''s protagonist illustrates the core structure of the Wandering Jew while also demonstrating elements of complex identity construction, albeit an artificial identity.

In "Isaac Babel's Il'ia Isaakovich as a New Jewish Type," Gabriella Safran discusses the characterization of a Jewish merchant from Odessa, showing concretely how depictions of Jews in Russian-language literature began to move away from the standardized template during Babel''s lifetime. Il'ia Isaakovich is a kind, mild-mannered merchant, a Wandering Jew simply because of his vocation. He has business to conduct, but without a permit of residence, he cannot stay in town to complete it. He hires a prostitute, Margarita Prokofievna, for several nights simply so that he may stay in her apartment, establishing the legitimacy of residence he requires. As Safran illustrates, this character deviates from many of the established stereotypes of the Jew, except for a few minor details. He is shown as virtuous, never betraying the fidelity of his marriage; he lives for a short time with Margarita, platonically and respectfully, while sharing a certain tender intimacy between them. Most notably, Babel' is not only a Jew writing about Jews: he also depicts a relationship between a Jewish man and gentile woman without significant conflict arising from either one's social identity. Safran calls this a "new Jewish type". Il'ia Isaakovich is not only a "new Jewish type," but also a marked step forward in the characterizing of Jews in Russian-Jewish literature. Perhaps this is the

juncture at which literature can cease to call this character the *vechnyi zhid*, and instead dub him the *vechnyi evrei.*[41]

Babel''s most significant contribution to the legend of the Wandering Jew is his cycle of short stories, *The Red Cavalry Stories* (*Konarmiia*). These stories follow the movements of Liutov, a Jewish newspaper correspondent who accompanies a battalion of the Red Army in the Polish-Soviet War. He is naturally guarded about his Jewish identity, as he is the solitary Jew amongst gentiles, the perpetual other, "Budennyi dismisses the writer and his alter ego as effeminate and sexually deviant exemplars of the decedent intelligentsia" (*The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination* 334):

> "So your one of those little powder puffs!" he yelled, laughing. "With spectacles on your nose! Ha, you lousy little fellow, you! They send you to us, no one even asks us if we want you here! Here you get hacked to pieces just for wearing glasses! So, you think you can live with us, huh?" (Babel' 231)

Liutov is Jewish, dislocated and separated from his people: drifting through unfamiliar surroundings and circumstances, he adopts a Soviet identity to protect himself. Occasionally, Liutov does find himself among other Jews, giving him the freedom to expose the inner core of his performed complex identity. For example, in "The Rabbi," Liutov and a Jewish junk peddler named Gedali find themselves at a devout table of Jews in the Zhitomir ghetto, where they are invited to celebrate the Sabbath. Although Liutov is able to drop his assumed identity, he is the only newcomer to the Shabbat table and is again positioned as other despite being Jewish. This otherness is compounded by the fact that he is within a group of Hasidim. Liutov is established without ties to the land, and

[41] While *zhid* (жид) is a derogatory term in Russian, the word *evrei* (еврей) carries a much more socially acceptable connotation and is the preferred term. However, in many other Slavic languages, the former is the accepted term.

his identity must also be reinvented as he travels with his regiment, but he has no exaggerated attributes of the Jewish stereotype aside from his unhomeliness.

In her book *In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860-1940*), Hungarian scholar Zsuzsa Hetényi claims that the death of Babel' at the hands of the NKVD in 1940 marked the end of Russian-language Jewish literature: "The masterpieces of Russian-Jewish literature remain unknown even in their birthplace" (10). The justification Hetényi gives to support her main argument are sound: Babel' was the last of a generation that came of age in the *shtetls* of the Pale, and his death did signify the end of a literary era. The ethnic Jews of subsequent generations did not grow up with the same cultural influences. During this period of relative silence in Russian-Jewish literature, the Wandering Jew became a figure relegated to literary history, a fossil of a world long since assimilated. The Wandering Jew evolved beyond its original narrow character constraints, essentially making the terminology a relic of pre-Soviet and early Soviet literature. The Soviet-Jewish character, having come of age without any cultural ties to Jewish culture, focused on a search for identity definition. This often manifested itself in a desire to escape from the Soviet Union. Perhaps the first to re-envision the Wandering Jew as the Soviet citizen seeking escape was Eduard Topol' (1938-), whose novels continue to chronicle experiences of immigration and cultural liminality.

One of the authors included in this study, Liudmila Ulitskaia, can be regarded not only as one of the most prolific authors of women's post-Soviet Russian literature, but also as a noteworthy contributor to the canon of Russian-Jewish literature as well. Her novella, *The Funeral Party* (Veselye pokhorony[42]) brings to life the world of post-

[42] In 2007 *The Funeral Party* was made into a feature film *Niotkuda s liubov'iu, ili veselye pokhorony* (Ниоткуда с любовью, или Веселые похороны).

immigration Russian-Jews for Russian-speaking audiences within the former Soviet space and its diaspora. If Babel''s works portrayed the Russian-Jew in search of acceptance in pre-Soviet and early Soviet society, and Topol''s works of the Soviet era presented the search for escape, then Ulitskaia's *The Funeral Party* begins a trend of focusing on life after relocation, the post-immigration context. Where Jews in Russian literature were once characterized by a lack of connections to their surroundings, Ulitskaia's prose focuses on Jewish immigrants creating ties to the land, a complete rejection of the tradition of the literal Wandering Jew. This novella is an eccentric and colourful portrayal of a New York loft in which a Russian-Jewish artist named Alik is dying. He is surrounded by a diverse cast of characters, both close loved ones and disconnected passers-through. These dislocated passers-through are never Russians or Jews; none of the main characters who keep vigil by his deathbed are native to New York or the United States. Fate and an assortment of circumstances have brought them all to this place, and Ulitskaia's narrative reveals a plethora of reasons that they have all left their native land.

Alik's character is in search of a definition for the ambiguity of his own cultural identity: "When Alik was younger he had gone to India in search of ancient wisdom, but the basket was all he brought back with him" (4). He had been a wanderer in his youth, but it is unclear whether he ever attains the 'ancient wisdom' he once sought, although his vocations always position him in a state of creation. Before becoming an artist, he was a performer with a travelling circus in Russia, further augmenting the liminality of his pre-emigration existence. This is contrasted by his eventual absorption into the New York expatriate community; in this hot and sweaty loft in New York, he and his friends

have found and created a sense of home. Brought together by their common experiences as foreigners in a new land, they have been able to create a place of belonging within non-native surroundings. They are united by their Russian heritage, and by their struggles to reconcile their Soviet upbringings, Jewish heritages and new American lives.

For Shteyngart the representation of wandering is signified by the world atlas he uses as a toy. The memorizing and charting of commercial airline routes as his childhood hobby is a symbolic indication of mobility, "The fastest way to fly to N'Djamena, Chad is through Air France's hub in Paris. Under optimal conditions it can be done in sixteen hours and thirty-five minutes. I am flying there still" (*Little Failure* 116). Similarly, Reyn captures the essence of the Wandering Jew as her protagonist, Anna, begins to spiral out of emotional control. Anna has always been inexplicably drawn to trains, establishing a thread throughout the narrative of the character's fixation with mobility which ultimately foreshadows her death. She feels incapable of maintaining David's affections and constantly compares herself to David's non-immigrant former lover, Lauren. Despite her efforts, she is plagued by feelings of inadequacy. She finally concludes that she will be able to gain control over her relationship with David with a change of scenery:

> After everything she'd given up, Anna K. couldn't afford to see clearly. The next day, Anna made a decision: a vacation, of course, that was always the answer. Summer was coming and the studio would be stifling. They had settled into a routine; David went to teach, and Anna remained at the computer fruitlessly matching herself to job descriptions. Seeing a new place together would bond them further, an English-speaking new place. (Reyn 153)

Like the classical renderings of the Wandering Jew, Anna K. is escaping her given circumstances. She believes that she will be able to transform the nature of her relationship with David simply by changing their physical location. Reyn highlights that

within the couple's routine David engages in movement from one place to another while Anna remains stationary. The character specifies that they should go to an "English-speaking new place" as an indication that she wishes to associate their encounter with what is familiar to David. In Anna's mind, the choice of an Anglophone destination elevates her status as compared to David's former lover Lauren. Her efforts are in vain; however, Anna's need for mobility emphasizes this principal literary trait of mobility.

Dina Rubina's short story "Fog," which takes place in Israel and features a Russian-speaking protagonist, explores the idea of separate worlds within the same nation. The main character is Arkadii, a detective with the Israeli police; he and his family, originally from Russia, are part of the 1990s *Aliyah*. Unlike Liutov or Ostap Bender, Arkadii is not a solitary Jew amongst gentiles, but a solitary Russian amongst Israelis, perpetually relegated to the position of other for an identity denied him prior to emigration. He is charged with the task of investigating a suspicious death and during his sleuthing, he discovers that the decedent was the victim of murder.

Feeling disconnected and isolated, Arkadii comments to himself, "and these people are foreign to me… Everyone's foreign to each other in this foggy world here" ("Fog" 238). He is troubled after learning that a fellow police officer, a Muslim colleague, committed the honour killing of his sister. Arkadii tries helplessly to understand how such a barbaric custom could take place in his first-world nation. He is plagued by his Russian upbringing and Jewish sensibility, which both tell him this is wrong, but he still cannot reconcile how such things as murder can be regarded so lightly in the name of God and familial dignity.

He meanders through twisted old streets paved during a time before Christ and is astonished to find that he is almost lost in a town in which he has spent years. Here the reader can identify the remnants of the Wandering Jew as a literary figure while noting how Rubina twists her protagonist's circumstances to mirror these attributes in distortion. At the suggestion of a bartender, Arkadii seeks out another bar, where he hopes to drink until he finds answers to his ponderings. Upon locating this place, he is met by a rather strange sight of two men debating an ancient text in the traditional Judaic practice of *chavrusa.*[43] When Arkadii asks what they are debating, the bartender replies, "The idea is that comparing two different accounts of one and the same event they can grasp its essence" ("Fog" 246). Arkadii's seemingly aimless wanderings have brought him to a philosophical and theological intersection. Rubina leaves her protagonist's journey rather open-ended because Arkadii's efforts to balance the contradictions of his multifaceted identity are ongoing. He will continue to search for answers and only come up with more questions, just as in *chavrusa*:

> But it seemed to Arkady that it was precisely at this moment that he heard, and understood everything without missing a single beat, not one profound nuance, not one additional interpretation; every one of white's words was illuminated by the sunny clarity of meaning, and every one of black's words shrouded essences and objects in the shadow of doubt. Arkady felt that he must, absolutely must pose the question that had tormented him for the last few days. ("Fog" 247)

Like Arkadii, Zakhar is searching for answers to impossible questions. Zakhar embodies the superficial model of the Wandering Jew mythology. He lacks a sense of belonging wherever he goes, and feels hopelessly lost. Despite having immigrated to Israel, he exhibits no real ties to any one place. Like Laz Roitshvantz, and many others before him,

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[43] In Aramaic (אֲחָוּרְבָּח), *chavrusa* literally translates as 'companionship,' but the term refers to a form of Talmudic study practiced in Yeshiva. The participants argue and debate concepts and ideas in order to enhance their mutual understanding of the Talmud.

Zakhar is a con artist; specifically, a forger of paintings. Additionally, similarly to Roitshvantz, Zakhar's voyages take him across borders and cultures. During his childhood in Ukraine, Zakhar has the ever-present sense that he is a Jew amongst gentiles; in Israel, he is a Russian amongst *sabrot*;[44] and in Spain, he is a foreigner. Zakhar, like any immigrant, has many identities simultaneously:

> Often in reading contemporary scholarship on Jewish cultural history, it seems to me that it has developed two "meta-solutions" that are applied to virtually any question, "influence" and "pluralism". That is, if the question is why Jewish family life is organized in a particular configuration, or why Jews eat specific foods, or how certain institutions of communal governance evolved, or what the basis for Jewish prayer ritual is, or any of the multitude of issues, the answer almost invariable relates to influences of the surrounding culture, the existence of competing or cooperating Judaisms, or both. (Rosman 129)

As Moshe Rosman shows, the context of the Jewish cultural identity cannot be separated from the influence of the cultures around it, and this is, perhaps, what prevents Zakhar from ever embracing any one identity. Like Liutov in "The Rabbi," Zakhar can be with people of a similar heritage, but the lack of shared experiential history still isolates him. Like the Wandering Jew of European mythology, Zakhar experiences a sort of exile; he is unable to settle or assimilate in any one physical location. The desire to belong is universal. As Debra Renee Kaufman notes, "Although anti-Semitism is certainly a component in the construction of Jewish identity, the strongest issues emerging were not couched in terms of perceived or real anti-Semitism but rather in the need to belong to a group one could call their 'own'" (45). Zakhar performs multiple identities throughout the novel repeatedly, illustrating his inability to identify with any one cultural distinction. Like Ulitskaia before her, Rubina combines this conscious creation of cultural identity with the figure of the post-immigration artist. By employing the basic model of the

[44] *Sabra* (רבצ) literally refers to the fruit of cacti, but in contemporary Hebrew vernacular is a term used for a person who has been born and raised in Israel.

Wandering Jew, she effectively claims this mythology as a Jewish construct and fuses it with the motif of the post-immigration artist. Just as Moses and his followers wandered the desert for forty years so that only free men would enter the Holy Land, it seems that Russian-speaking ethnically Jewish immigratns undergo a cultural exile all their own. Ostensibly living their lives in cultural liminality, it is only the children of immigrants who will be born into a national consciousness with ties to the land, eliminating the necessity for conscious identity performance.

The literal and metaphorical movement of the Jewish people is one that is historically linked to the very concept of 'diaspora.' In "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," Rogers Brubaker elaborates on this point:

> Most early discussions of diaspora were firmly rooted in a conceptual 'homeland'; they were concerned with a paradigmatic case or a small number of core cases. The paradigmatic case was of course, the Jewish diaspora; some dictionary definitions of diaspora until recently did not simply *illustrate* but *defined* the word with reference to that case. As discussions of diasporas began to branch out to include other cases they remained oriented, at least initially, to this conceptual homeland – to the Jewish case and the other 'classical' diasporas. (2, emphasis in original)

It could potentially be argued that Zionism is the answer to the wanderings of the Jewish people. It is perhaps more correct to say that the globalization of the twenty-first century promises a future of increasing cultural and ethnic complexity. However, there is still a huge effort to encourage Jews around the world to make *Aliyah*, with countless organizations devoted to promoting immigration to Israel: "These tours and trips often situate Eastern Europe as the center of Jewish suffering and death, America as an exilic place of weakening Jewish identity and Israel as the center of Jewish life" (Aviv and Shneer 67). These organizations strive to create a feeling of cultural unity in Jewish youth to make them feel more connected to Israel, and regard Eastern Europe as a

counterpart to the desert that Moses wandered in exile: "Eastern Europe in Jewish identity travel is negatively depicted as the site of Jewish catastrophe a despotic place of forgotten and long-lost shtetls, murdered Jewish ancestors, and death camps" (Aviv and Shneer 74). These organizations, specifically designed to cultivate feelings of cultural belonging, are the real-world equivalents of contemporary Jewish writers reinventing the Wandering Jew as a post-immigration creator of his own cultural identity.

The legend of the Wandering Jew has survived, changed and developed, but has not disappeared. From Ahasuerus and the classical caricatures to pre-Soviet Jewish written depictions, Soviet cosmopolitan portrayals and the post-Soviet exodus, these literary depictions have evolved beyond their original parameters. Efraim Sicher observes that the academic collective consciousness has begun to differentiate between Jews as stock characters and sincere portrayals of Jewishness: "The 'jew' – without capitals and within quotation marks – is a term that has come into usage among cultural historians for a stereotyped image in social discourse" (690). The dehumanization of the Jew in literature has ceased to be a staple of Jewish literary portraiture, but the struggles for identity definition continue. Jewish characters in post-immigration literature still grapple with questions of national ties, cultural diversification and othering. Now free of the burden of the stigmatizing attributes of the Wandering Jew mythology, these characters are able to contribute significant perspectives to the post-immigration experience.

2.3 Displacement and the Ambiguous Cultural Identity of Post-Immigration Protagonists

For several centuries, the perception of the Wandering Jew as existing without national ties has contributed to an extremely narrow conceptualization of Jewish characters. Fortunately, as social attitudes evolve, literary renditions have followed suit. However, this transition has left Jewish characterization in a state of liminal flux:

> Enlisting these writers for the cause of Jewish multiculturalism becomes complicated because of their triple identities as Jews, Russians and Americans. This mixed status makes them multicultural, but how exactly does their Jewishness coexist with the other two components of their identity? How can we be so sure that the 'Jewish voice' they have allegedly brought to the center of American literary culture is not rather a Russian voice? (Wanner, "Russian Jews" 158)

Being culturally situated as neither *here* nor *there* gives rise to the necessity to perform multiple cultural identities in order to integrate into society, which bears similarity to Bhabha's concept of postcolonial mimicry. However, there is also an element of performance associated with discussions of mimicry and cultural ambiguity. Within Jewish literary portraiture, as characters move between identities, they settle more comfortably somewhere in the middle: "[t]he in-between state of immigrant struggles between old world and new world mentality, guilt and shame generated by intergenerational conflicts, and ethno-religious marginalization" (Royal[45] 239). One character may simultaneously embody and identify with several cultural identities. In *Little Failure,* Gary Shteyngart illustrates the chameleon-like nature of the ambiguous cultural identity as conscious performance:

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[45] Derek Parker Royal's 2012 article utilizes some of the same quotations from *Natasha: And Other Stories* as my analysis does. However, our analytical focuses are vastly different and the direct quotes we share in common are all key examples of the immigration experience.

> Just before puberty begins in earnest I come down with Dissociative Identity Disorder, evidenced by "The presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states [with] to of these identities or personality states recurrently [taking] control of the person's behavior" (DSM-5). At least two? I've got four! To my parents and Grandma Polya I am Igor Semyonovich Shteyngart, disobedient son and beloved grandson, respectively. Very respectfully. To the American teachers at SSSQ, I am Gary Shteyngart, strange salami-smelling boy with some aptitude at math. To the Hebrew teachers at SSSQ I am Yitzhak Ben Shimon, or some shit like that. And to the children, to my fellow pupils in their Macy's regalia, I'm Gary Gnu the Third. (144)

The author looks back at his first few years in America, and in hindsight can distinguish the various roles his position within society required him to perform. This leaves many Russian-Jewish characters feeling ambiguous about their own identities. The fact that Shteyngart draws such a clear distinction between these identities indicates that these portions of his life have remained entirely separate from one another. Conversely, as Wanner reiterates in "The Russian Immigrant Narrative as Metafiction," the purposeful exoticizing of post-immigration stereotypes can also be an avenue by which to gain acceptance, as Irina Reyn demonstrates:

> "It reminds me of home." So she would play the immigrant card after all, the story that never failed her, the story that always sucked them in. But now there was a kind of heightened desperation in returning to the same old ploys of seduction; this time, she wanted to exude authority. "Really? Did you come from Eastern Europe? I thought I heard a Russian accent." She didn't answer; it was too easy, after all. (Reyn 18)

Wanner echoes the assertion that the performance of multiple cultural identities is an inherent part of the post-immigration reality, and moreover an unavoidable side effect of post-immigration writing: "It does not take a big leap of imagination to compare Anna's attempts at seducing an American stranger with her Russian 'authenticity' to the situation of an immigrant author striving to capture the attention of an American reading public" ("Russian Immigrant Narrative" 66). But for Reyn's heroine Anna K., this performance

of the exotic is also a manifestation of an ambiguous cultural identity, as she is in reality much more Americanized than she admits to the stranger in Penn Station.

Olga Gershenson suggests that there is a post-immigration sense of ambivalence amongst Soviet-born Jews, and further that this sense manifests itself predominantly out of feelings of unhomeliness:

> They were subject to humiliating anti-Semitism which they internalised to some extent. The resulting self-hatred made Russian Jews feel inferior vis-à-vis the Russian cultural majority. On the other hand, they developed a defensive reaction to anti-Semitism and took great pride in their ethnic heritage and traditional Jewish values of family and education. This defensive response allowed Russian Jews to feel superior to ethnic Russians. These conflicting attitudes set up the Soviet immigrants to experience the ambivalent feelings of cultural inferiority and superiority in Israel. ("Lure and Threat" 110)

One of the major obstacles faced by Jews from the former Soviet space has been the cultural ambiguity that results from these multifaceted identities. This sentiment is reflected in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature, showing how multilayered cultural identities can manifest with vacillating power dynamics. For instance, Shteyngart's memoir illustrates an example of a community that views other ethnic immigrant groups as inferior, while they themselves are regarded as inferior within Jewish circles. In *Ex-Soviets in Israel: From Personal Narratives to a Group Portrait,* Larisa Fialkova and Maria Yelenevskaya discuss the consequences of social divisions, as Israeli society fails to distinguish immigrants from the former Soviet territories beyond labelling them as 'Russian:'

> There is hardly a society without the division of *we* and *they* based on various distinctions, be it race and ethnicity, religion, or social status. The problem of the other has long been studied by philosophers and sociologists in the context of self-definition. This is a process of comparison of the self with the others on the basis of similarities and differences. On the one hand people tend to choose the familiar and reject the unknown, on the other hand the distant and the unfamiliar

> have in the lexicon of Israeli society have all members of the diverse group of FSU are dubbed Russian. (89, emphasis in original)

This lack of distinctions raises the question of the effect of this sort of generalization on the formation of post-immigration cultural identities. The individual carries a primary identity that is shaped by home, upbringing, and early life experiences. This is followed by any national identities that might pertain to the environment in which the individual was raised, as well as the consciousness, in varying degrees, of the Jewish identity both pre- and post-immigration. In addition to these is the 'immigrant' identity imposed on the individual by the new society, the fulfilment of the social expectation of what constitutes an 'immigrant:'

> The immigrants travel with their memory kits to the host society. There they encounter new cultural, national models that maintain a certain idea of the immigrants in their native land before they arrived: their culture and identity, how they lived and why they left. These national models contain the immigrants' expectations and sometimes requirements for immigrants to embrace certain conceptions about themselves. In reality, however, the immigrants are free to adopt or reject them conform to or defy them. (Rapoport, Lomsky-Feder, and Heider 176)

Additional identities based on education, vocation and social status may all come into play as well, but as the individual begins to balance these many identities, whether in Israel or North America or Western Europe, interesting contradictions begin to surface:

> The first experiment was successful you might say. The Diaspora proved exceptionally valuable for the entire world. Of course you've brought back together what's left of you over there, but so many Jews have assimilated, diluted, there are so many of you in all countries, in sciences, culture, and arts. (Ulitskaia 66-67)

However, as Ulitskaia demonstrates, the mass emigration of ethnic Jews from the former Soviet Union has not in fact resulted in a more cohesive Jewish presence, but rather has produced microcosms of Russian-speakers who happen to be Jewish. It is the Russian

identity that provides a sense of comfort in times of anxiety over dislocation, indicating that many consider this their primary identity: "Stores selling Russian foods and gatherings around a festive table help immigrants cope with the stress of adapting to a new situation" (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 121). However, the Russian identity may in fact be less familiar than is apparent. As most ethnically Russian Jews were stigmatized in the former Soviet Union for having Jewish heritage, the moniker of 'Russian' may in fact be foreign to them. This disagreement of cultural labels transposes itself into post-immigration prose and manifests as the protagonist's search for definition within an ever diversifying cultural milieu. For example, Gary Shteyngart discusses the mutations of his name as an indication of his own ambiguous identity:

> Recently I found out from my father that Shteyngart is not our name at all. A slip of the pen in some Soviet official's hand, a drunk notary, a semiliterate commissar, who knows, but I am not really Gary Shteyngart. My family name is – Steinhorn. Meaning "Stone Horn." Though I was born Igor – my name was changed to Gary in America so that I would suffer one or two fewer beatings – my Leningrad birth certificate should have welcomed into the world one Citizen Igor Stone Horn. I have clearly spent thirty-nine years unaware that my real destiny was to go through life as a Bavarian porn star, but some further questions present themselves: If neither Gary nor Shteyngart is really my name, then what the hell am I doing calling myself Gary Shteyngart? (*Little Failure* 32-33)

Although it is phrased as a humorous anecdote, Shteyngart's main question yields insight into the paradox of identity definition for post-immigration writers at the most basic level. It is therefore not surprising that the figure of the post-immigration artist reappears throughout the works discussed in this study.

The ambiguity imposed by the vacillation between being regarded as Jewish and as Russian serves to dislocate the post-immigration identity, creating a cultural liminality that is neither *here* nor *there*. The post-immigration narrative walks a tightrope between competing cultural collective tastes, as Wanner points out: "The 'Russian' features in the

identity of the trans-lingual writer, while providing a source of exotic appeal to the western audience, may be precisely the elements that strike a Russian reader as phoney or clichéd" ("Russian Hybrids" 680). The lack of a homogeneous cultural cohesion thus allows those within the post-immigration community the freedom to move between identities in accordance with their surroundings:

> Shteyngart's Russianness plays an important role in the promotion and reception of his books, but it is more than a marketing strategy adopted by his publishers. The question of his national identity is in fact deeply embedded in Shteyngart's fiction. A closer analysis of his novels can provide insights into his self-fashioning as an 'ethnic' writer. (Wanner, *Out of Russia* 95)

What Wanner calls 'self-fashioning' is the crux of the post-immigration identity conflict. How and why individuals present themselves becomes a fascinating puzzle to be decoded. However, why is the figure of the artist so prominent in literary depictions of identity transformations?

2.4 *Geroi khudozhnik* and the Unhomely Condition: The Artist Figure in Post-Immigration Texts

Frantz Fanon once wrote, "In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (qtd. in Bhabha, *Location of Culture* 12). For the purpose of this study, the creation of self is regarded as an artistic pursuit. As Yana Meerzon asserts, the desire to express oneself artistically is a common feature of displacement, because "in their performative utterances exilic artists seek symbolic and poetic means of expression" ("David Bezmozgis on Natasha" 302). In reference to his lifelong dream of becoming a writer and filmmaker, David Bezmozgis says, "I think I'm somewhat of an anomaly in my community, artists usually are" (2016). The lifestyle of the tortured starving artist has often been romanticized both in print and in popular culture:

> It is not very important in what time the artist happens to live and create, the core of his relationship with his era (ruling powers, fashion, the masses) remain constant for all time. A true artist will choose the ability to give himself fully to his profession over happiness, family, comfort, and peace of mind.[46] (Shafranskaia, *Sindrom golubki* 214; my translation)

Although the sacrifices that new immigrants make in their pursuit of belonging are very different from what Shafranskaia describes, they are no less vital. New immigrants set aside careers, homes and stability in order to relocate and sculpt out a new existence. No better marriage of symbolic figures can be made than that of the striving artist and the determined émigré. Each layer of the diverse cultural identity is added as the individual's identity is further exposed to stimuli, but these do not cancel out previous influences. In *Sindrom of the Dove: Mythopoetics of Dina Rubina* (*Sindrom golubki: mifopoetika prozy Diny Rubinoi*), Eleonora Shafranskaia broaches the topic of the *geroi khudozhnik*, or the artist protagonist, which she argues can be read as a specific character type:

> In most of Rubina's texts the reader will find a character overwhelmed by his passion for art: either a creator or someone who is suffering from never realizing this call to art, or someone who is in one way or another occupied with art while being unable to create. The theme of the artist figure is one of the main features of Rubina's prose. Possibly because in the metatext of Rubina's storytelling, there is a constant presence of the Main Creator.[47] (*Sindrom golubki* 213-14; my translation)

However, Shafranskaia's analysis is limited to the presentation of textual examples, and fails to draw conclusions regarding the significance of the *geroi khudozhnik* in any greater context. Her observations of the principal features of the figure, however, are

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[46] И не столь важно, в какое время доведется жить и творить художнику, - мифологема его взаимоотношений с временем (а именно - с властью, модой, толпой) одна на все времена. Истинному художнику важнее всего: счастья, семьи, уюта, покоя - извечных субстанций блага - возможность отдаться своему ремеслу без остатка.

[47] ...в большинстве рубинских текстов присутствует персонаж, одолеваемый тягой к художеству: или собственно творец, или страдающий от творческой несостоятельности, или обывательски ориентированный на "художество", не будучи способным к творчеству. Тема творческой личности, таким образом, одна из главных в прозе Рубиной. Возможно, еще и потому, что в метатексте рубинского повествования присутствует Главный Творец...

very accurate, highlighting the character's need to strive for something larger than himself. This study, by comparison, goes beyond merely acknowledging the artist as a literary figure, finding a direct correlation between this literary type and the Russian-Jewish post-immigration narrative. If once the Wandering Jew symbolized the search for Jewish permanence, the *geroi khudozhnik* is this century's expression of the struggles associated with social dislocation and ambiguous cultural identity post-immigration. In other words, the artist figure serves as a metaphorical reminder to the reader that post-immigration, Russian-speaking, ethnically Jewish protagonists are in a *constant mode of creation*: the creation of their performed post-immigration identity.

In the *White Dove of Cordova,* Rubina's portrayal of the art forger Zakhar is an illustration of Shafranskaia's vision of the *geroi khudozhnik*. Prior to his emigration from Russia, Zakhar is in fact an artist, legitimately creating his own pieces. It is following his immigration to Israel, and the death of his closest friend, that he begins to assume the role of trickster and artist by plagiarizing the styles and techniques of master painters. His inability to produce original pieces mirrors his failure to define his cultural identity. Zakhar repeatedly attempts to adorn himself with various metaphorical masks, but just as he cannot create anything of original artistry, his attempt to define his complex cultural identity amounts to nothing more than shallow pantomiming. Zakhar's presentation of self is very much a metaphorical mirror of his forgeries:

> It has it all: the artistic mannerism, emotional rhythm, unique movement of the brush, the method of applying paint – all, that belongs to him and to him only… Just like a spy, who changed his appearance: shape of eyebrows and nose, hair colour, - all changed… But he still steps forward exclusively with his left foot, and that's it! Here is the left foot – it gives him away.[48] (*White Dove of Cordova* 45; my translation)

[48] В нем все: живописная манера, эмоциональный ритм, индивидуальное движение кисти, способ нанесения краски, - все, что присуще этому, и только этому художнику... Как, знаете, в случае со

The ‘left foot’ mannerisms that Zakhar is incapable of shedding are akin to the white dove that adorns all his forgeries as his solitary personal identifier. It must be noted that Zakhar does not plagiarize specific paintings, but rather the artistic presentations, forms, and techniques employed by famous artists. The images, like the cultural layers of Zakhar’s identity, are his own, but the works themselves are presented as lesser-known pieces created by renowned painters. The dove, a solitary concealed signature, suggests an ‘authentic’ identity beneath Zakhar’s outwardly deceptive performed manipulations.

Alik, the Russian-Jewish protagonist of Ulitskaia’s *The Funeral Party*, exemplifies the post-immigration artist figure. As an artist, Alik creates; more specifically, he paints. Much as one would create a work of art, Alik must use the many layers of his identity to sculpt his self-presentation, creating an image much as he would create images on a canvas. This can also be seen in Alik’s former lover Irina, who is a performance artist turned lawyer. Irina’s various character layers are represented both through action and memory, starkly contrasting the identity she has created post-immigration. Of all the characters in Ulitskaia’s novella, Irina has assimilated into American society the most convincingly. Although Irina is no longer a circus performer, her pre-immigration artistic identity is referred to frequently. What Bhabha calls cultural mimicry allows Irina, the pre-immigration performance artist, to create her post-immigration persona, enabling her to slip in and out of both worlds seamlessly. Ulitskaia indicates that this post-immigration identity is both artificially fashioned and performed:

> Irina Pearson, formerly a circus acrobat, now a high-paid lawyer, looked stunning with her waxed bikini-line and a new bust constructed for her by an American surgeon to look no worse than her old one. (Ulitskaia 4)

шпионом, изменившим внешность: форма бровей и носа, цвет волос, - все изменилось... а ступает исключительно с левой ноги, и точка! Вот эта левая нога - в ней разоблачение.

Irina's identity reinvention includes a literal re-sculpting of her physical appearance. Just as an artist manipulates clay to take on a new from, Irina crafts an entirely new form to accompany her new post-immigration identity.

The narrator of Gary Shteyngart's memoir *Little Failure* describes the artistic identity that he assumed from childhood in order to attempt to blend into his new surroundings. The narrator is very much the creator of his performed identity. As a child, he reconstructs his personal narrative to attempt to create an image that he believes will be accepted by his non-immigrant peers:

> I am truthful most of the time. Except when one day after one Commie comment too many, I tell my fellow pupils that I wasn't born in Russia at all. Yes, I just remembered it! It had all been a big misunderstanding! I was actually born in Berlin, right next to Flughafen Berlin-Schönefeld, surely you've heard of it. So here I am, trying to convince *Jewish* children in *Hebrew* school that I am actually a *German*. (*Little Failure* 145, emphasis in original)

From the moment individuals are given the label of 'immigrant,' they become performance artists, authors of their post-immigration narratives. As such, they are in a constant state of performance when they are removed from their dominant cultural surroundings. In Shteyngart's case, his parents' idealized American identity, which they have imagined for their son, does not coincide with his actual American self:

> The mailbox of my parents' sturdy colonial in Little Neck, Queens, continued to bulge with the remnants of their American dream for me, the pretty brochures from graduate school dropping in quality from Harvard Law School to Fordham Law School to the John F. Kennedy School of Government (sort of like law school, but not really) to the Cornell Department of City and Regional Planning, and finally to the most frightening prospect for any immigrant family, the master of fine arts program in creative writing at the University of Iowa. "But what kind of profession is this, writer?" my mother would ask. "You want to be *this*?" I want to be this. (*Little Failure* 5)

The narrator's desire to be a writer is not only a cultural rejection of what he views as constrictive Russian-Jewish values, but an expression of his desire to author his own reality. Likewise, the authorial voice is critical of the superimposed 'American' image that is thrust upon him post-immigration. Performatively, he is able to bring these conflicting cultural opposites together in a synthesis that suggests each is mutually aware and critical of the other. Despite his parents' criticism of his chosen profession, the narrator's father strives to assume the role of the artist, and in so doing, to be the creator of his own post-immigration identity. Throughout the memoir, the narrator dreamily reminisces about his aspirations to be an opera singer:

> It's about him now. About his opera career, the one he gave up to become, like most Soviet Jewish men, a mechanical engineer. It's not about me. I breathe easily. At another recent dinner my father had put his arm around me, his face so close to mine that the whites and grays of his goatee nearly touched the grays of my stubble, and said "I burn with a black envy [*chyornaya zavist'*] towards you. I should have been an artist as well." (*Little Failure* 42)

The identity of artist is first and foremost an ideal, much like the dreams and hopes for an ideal post-immigration life: "Shteyngart's fervent embrace of hybridity leads him to reject any claims of ethnic purity. As a result he treats the identity politics of American academia with satirical flippancy" (Wanner, "Russian Hybrids" 677). As a writer, Shteyngart's protagonist is able to realize his own cultural destiny, or at least the cultural destiny he designs for himself. But it is this vivid contrast of his Russian-Jewish upbringing and his liberal American persona that fuse to create the author's notably satirical voice. Within the postcolonial model, this embracing of distinct cultural identities exoticizes the individual from both the Russian-Jewish and American perspectives. Wanner refers to this as 'auto-exoticism:' "By ironizing his own identity as a translingual writer, Shteyngart aims to forestall any potential criticism that he himself

might be playing a 'professional immigrant game'. His implicit response, though, is not to deny the charge but to point out that all literature is a game of identities" ("Russian Hybrids" 678). This 'game,' as this project demonstrates, is especially articulated in post-immigration prose.

In Irina Reyn's *What Happened to Anna K.,* both the protagonist and her cousin Katia are performance artists, not in the literal sense, but within their social interactions. The novel is a modern-day retelling of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877), in which Anna K. takes the role of Anna Karenina, and her cousin Katia that of Ekaterina. The central romantic interest who assumes the position of Vronsky is David Zuckerman. Initially, when David is courting the devoutly Jewish Katia, it is her exoticized immigrant identity that inspires him as a writer; for example, while sitting together at a coffee shop, "they pretended she had just immigrated the day before from Uzbekistan and this was her first introduction to American food" (Reyn 67). David tries to cast this love interest in roles that suit his own need for artistic stimulation, essentially turning real life into a sort of performance-art experiment. Although Katia is an American-born Bukharian[49] Jew, she is more appealing to him as a fully-exoticized recent immigrant. After Katia has married Lev, the counterpart of Tolstoy's Levin, she begins to realize how exploited she had been as David's would-be muse. During their short-lived courtship, David even sees Katia's American childhood as foreign: "One afternoon while they were walking together on the Queens College campus, she told him a story from her childhood; he loved her immigrant stories; he said he was charmed by their sweet shabbiness" (Reyn 131). Eventually it is

[49] Bukharai or Бухарские евреи (בוכרים), are Jews from Central Asia and the Caucasus. They are Sephardic Jews, and practice their traditions slightly differently from Ashkenazi Jews.

Anna who will be cast in the role of exotic foreign muse, and she too begins to act out her part for the aspiring writer.

As a university student, Anna K. makes an attempt at writing: "Anna' he began again. 'This is a fine fictional effort.' He pronounced her name the same way her parents did, patiently, the long tender 'A' for 'Ah-na' (Reyn 28). Her professor is Russian, and Anna's desire for his love and acceptance necessitates her accentuation of her own Russian identity at the expense of her Jewish one. Being rather young, her unhomely experiences drive her to attempt to be 'Russian.' But despite receiving praise from her professor, her inability to artistically sculpt herself into a 'Russian' sees her fall short of her goals for seduction. She has repeatedly sought out cultural belonging by vying for her professor's approval while also cultivating a bond based upon their mutual Russianness. However, Anna is not *only* Russian; she is also Jewish and American, two additional identities her professor lacks. Her attempts to manipulate her presentation of self, coupled with her initial desire to become a writer, illustrate the presence of the artist figure within Anna K.

Ultimately, Anna abandons writing in favour of becoming an artist's source of inspiration. Having previously played the muse to an American lover, she is compelled to embody her idealized Russian image, while she is repulsed by the images reflected back to her:

> What did they leave Anna with? A few badly written stories in literary magazines, utterly unworthy of her, where she made her fictional appearances under names like Olga (*Olga!*) or Larissa; unread copies of Evgenia Ginzburg's war diaries. They never sat still, never committed, were always on their way out; too quickly, they lost interest in creating her, molding her onto the page. (Reyn 47)

When she becomes David's muse, the cycle repeats itself. Anna's desire to re-create her idealized self-image highlights the ambiguity of her own understanding of what her cultural identity is. In fact, she is so oblivious to her own reality that she does not realize that she is not the substance of the heroine in David's novel until nearly a year after leaving her husband:

> But now in the St. Petersburg Bookstore, Anna understood. All this time it was not she who was the muse, but Katia. Young, simple, Bukharian Katia had been fuelling David's imagination. It was Katia's story he wanted all along, never her own. Somehow Anna's story was yet again unpalatable for the writer. The narrative of her life would disappear. (Reyn 227-28)

She becomes so consumed in performing her role that the lines between herself and her character are blurred. All the features and attributes that she believes are hers present themselves as superficial, a pantomime play-acting of the immigrant chic she wants desperately to emulate. She regards her Russianness, not as an integral part of herself, but rather as quirky details and fashionable accessories:

> Eventually all those details would become useful, the negative change of her identity neutralized and switched to its opposite. In college, and beyond, her Russianness would be an asset, the signifier that would set her apart from others, that would lend her a distinguished glow. "She's a Russian immigrant," they would whisper about her, respect and awe in their voices, the derision, the hatred, all gone, smoothed away by the passage of years. (Reyn 48)

Following her separation from Alex K., Anna amplifies this identity even further, as her life itself is transformed into performance art. David may be the writer, but Anna K. is the artist, sculpting the post-immigration chic that she believes will immortalize her in print.

Similarly to Anna K., the protagonist of Lara Vapnyar's *Memoirs of a Muse* is not the aspiring artist herself, but performs her immigrant identity as an aspiring muse. As a child, Tanya Rumer is enchanted by classical Russian authors, but is even more

fascinated by their muses. Tanya narrates imagined scenarios between Apolinaria Suslova and her adulterous lover Dostoyevsky, and dreams of emulating Suslova:

> To become someone really accomplished, a luminary? That sounded nice, even ticklish. But a luminary in the field of what? Where could I display my extraordinary abilities? What if there weren't any? "She is a gifted girl," people said about me, sending chills down my bones, because I knew that if I had been really gifted they wouldn't have called me a "gifted girl." They would have said "a gifted artist" or "a gifted musician." (*Memoirs* 27)

After an off-hand prediction from a classmate in high school, Tanya becomes convinced that her great accomplishment in life, the indelible mark she will leave on the world, is to inspire the prose of a great and talented author.

Vapnyar subtly illustrates the connection between artist and immigrant when juxtaposing Tanya with her mother. When Tanya emigrates from the Soviet Union, her mother, an established university professor, does not come with her. The reader may infer that this is because Tanya's mother is very set in her identity, an identity tied invariably to place. Conversely, Tanya is not an artist in the conventional sense, but like Anna, she will assume the role of performance artist in order to take on her identity as muse, as Tanya's conversation with her mother demonstrates:

> "Once or twice I even attempted to draw a picture of my dream child." "Did it look like me?" I asked with a faint jealous feeling. "It didn't look like anything. I've always been a terrible artist." (*Memoirs* 84)

Tanya's mother's inability to successfully render her imaginings in reality can be read as an allusion to her decision not to emigrate. Her lack of artistic sensibility tethers her to the reality of her current circumstances, while Tanya's ability to create her vision of emigration allows her to perform her new role in her new society. For Tanya, artistic necessity is vital, especially if she is to avoid becoming a computer programmer as her Aunt Maya in America expects of her.

In the short story "A Bunch of Broccoli on the Third Shelf," Vapnyar outlines the desire of the post-immigration Russian soul for a creative identity, despite one's vocation:

> Not one of Pavlik's guests was a professional poet or musician, though. Most of them worked as computer programmers, the occupation they took up in America, finding it easier and more profitable than trying to prove the value of their Russian degrees in science or the arts. Some of them, Nina's husband included, adopted a condescending slightly snobbish attitude to their new profession, as something easy and boring, something beneath them. "A computer programmer, like everybody else," they answered reluctantly, when asked about their present profession. "But that's not what I used to be in my previous life." (*Broccoli* 9)

Vapnyar draws the reader's attention to the position of the soul before and after immigration, suggesting that the post-immigration soul lacks satisfaction because its artistic nature lacks opportunities for realization.

In reference to *Memoirs of a Muse*, Adrian Wanner briefly comments on Vapnyar's integration of the post-immigration artist protagonist in conjunction with multilayered cultural identity construction, dubbing this process "emancipation through creative writing" (*Out of Russia* 30). Vapnyar's protagonist Tanya Rumer manifests aspects of Shafranskaia's definition of the *geroi khudozhnik*: she is not a writer at first, but desires to be the muse to an artist who will immortalize her in an artistic medium:

> A muse on the other hand does not simply entertain. She inspires, she influences the great man's work. In some very subtle and magical way – it's elusive, it's indescribable. He, the great man, would be frozen in front of a blank sheet of paper, empty canvas, silent piano, and I would walk in. Five feet five, flat-chested, and skinny, but with a great fire in my eyes, or a strange remarkable gait or carriage, or speaking in an especially melodic or powerful voice, -- and he, the writer, artist, or composer, would snap his fingers and say "Yes!" and his piano, slab or marble, or creaky typewriter and create with great fire in his eyes an enormous, magnificent work. (*Memoirs* 48)

Ultimately, Tanya does "abandon her passive role and recover a sense of agency as the author" (Wanner, "Russian Immigrant Narrative" 63). She discovers that the imagined

identity she wants to portray is not in fact the one that will bring her happiness. The novel concludes with Tanya becoming a suburban housewife, an ironic contrast to the glamour and romance she had imagined as the author of her own identity: "Taking control of the narrative certainly indicates a sense of empowerment" (Wanner, "Russian Immigrant Narrative" 62). Once Tanya herself becomes the writer, she is able to determine the form and content of her post-immigration self.

The *geroi khudozhnik,* or artist protagonist, is a recurring motif in post-immigration prose for the simple reason that it is a vocation devoted to creation, an unsettled state and process of perpetual movement. This is especially meaningful within the Russian-Jewish culture, as artists, across the disciplines, are held in high regard. These narratives are constantly revisited by the *geroi khudozhnik* because, like the 'trickster' and the Wandering Jew before him, he serves a distinct function within the greater context and evolution of contemporary Russian-Jewish trends. Eleonora Shafranskaia cites a humorous anecdote widely circulated within immigrant communities: "if a new Jewish immigrant descending from an airplane isn't holding a violin case, that means he must be a pianist"[50] (*Sindrom golubki* 213; my translation). In a sense, all immigrants must be the artists/creators of their own post-immigration selves, as Fanon suggested in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. But, as the next chapter will illustrate, the process of artistic identity sculpting is not limited to the realization of a post-immigration self, but extends to creation within/of the immigrant's physical and symbolic lived environments as well.

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[50]. ..если в руках спускающегося по трапу самолета нового репатрианта нет скрипки, значит он – пианист.

Chapter 3: Physical and Symbolic Post-Immigration Spaces

> Novels featuring displacement and home-seeking are strongly mediated by the voice of memory, or, more often than not, post-memory. The narrative develops through negotiations with stories and discourses and pertinently interrogates its own claim to truth (e.g, historical truth) or authenticity. I would suggest looking at this rhetoric as part of a larger critical memory culture in postcolonial and postcommunist fiction that pertains most saliently to the concept of place and the sense of emplacement while working simultaneously as a familiarizing and estranging agent. In the fiction of displacement memory turns out to be a powerful intersubjective force transferring experience, especially the sense of place and locality, across temporal and historical divides, working independently of a delimited singular consciousness.
>
> (Kołodziejczyk 267-68)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of post-immigration spaces: how they are created, what characterizes them, and why they are important for the process of identity negotiation. According to Rebecca Jablonsky, "Considering Russian Jews as a highly mobile group that centres on the exclusion of others, *inclusion* manifests itself through the construction of, and participation in, spaces that represent their physical and imagined community" (3, emphasis in original), establishing the spaces inhabited by Russian-Jewish immigrants as symbolically significant. In her essay "The Organic (Re)Turn – The Ecology of Place in Postcolonial and Central/Eastern European Novel of Post-Displacement," Dorota Kołodziejczyk analyzes the relationship of post-displacement identity and environment and poses interesting questions about how the two overlap:

> Opening up the sense of dwelling to an interaction with the environment not limited to its function of passive landscape results in the bringing of agency of the non-human component of locality into the foreground. This entails a

> simultaneous withdrawl from identity-accumulating narratives usually associated with the idea of place and its function as the basis for identity development. (263)

Although her references to location are associated with non-urban settings, her discussion of place and identity illustrates how interconnected these two contructs are. In summarizing this passage, Kołodziejczyk argues that determinations of composition related to place are overwhelmed by influences of identity (263). With the consideration that the post-immigration environment is a product of unhomely feelings in a past and present reality, Ashcroft's observations cast the scholarly gaze towards the consideration of cultivated space and identity as linked:

> The issues surrounding the concept of place – how it is conceived, how it differs from 'space' and 'location', how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience. (124)

However, my discussion regards the relationship of created post-immigration spaces and identity as a dialogue that goes both ways. The post-immigration environment is a place of exile and reinvention, in which everything from décor to language preferences is significant:

> In fiction of displacement, re-creation of place requires a combined effort of the work of imagination, of archival search and translation. It is a story of realization that the self is always dependent, relational and environed. Locating oneself will always in a way be about finding and embracing one's environment. (Kołodziejczyk 270)

The representations of past and present within the post-immigration environment are heavily influenced by cultural and social nostalgia, an inner craving for a sense of the familiar, consciously or not. Sergei Dovlatov (1941-90) once described his post-immigration Russian community as follows:

> We have Russian stores, day-care centers, photography studios, and barber shops. There is a Russian travel agency. There are Russian lawyers, writers, doctors and

> real estate agents. There are Russian gangsters, madmen and prostitutes. There's even a Russian blind musician. For us the native residents are like foreigners. (3-4)

Dovlatov's impression of Brooklyn as a little piece of Russia in New York demonstrates how the vibrance and complexity of post-immigration culture is articulated. The newcomer community he describes has created a Russian-speaking microcosm. The reader must note that for these characters, and for émigrés in general, the internal conceptualization of their pre-immigration home temporally freezes at the moment of departure. Any subsequent return is coloured by this memory of the past: "Simpler times. And now, since it was nostalgia that had, however convolutedly, brought him back to this place, he had no cause to regret what had happened" (Bezmozgis, *The Betrayers* 7). The impermanence of place and the unreliability of memory make post-immigration spaces significantly complex and intimate places.

The post-immigration community is united by displacement and relocation experiences, as well as by the obstacles associated with resettlement. As Larisa Fialkova and Maria Yelenevskaya observe, "Soviet ideology proved successful in rearing several generations of optimists convinced that the 'bright future' awaiting them or at least their children justified the hardships of the present" (299). Many of the fictional narratives composed by Russian-Jewish writers who have resettled in America and Israel illustrate repeatedly this cultural willingness to endure poverty, poor working conditions, low wages and a lack of social status, all in pursuit of a better life: their imagined post-immigration ideal. For Vapnyar's Tanya Rumer has the following dream:

> "I will get to travel, I will get to fly on a plane," glided through my mind as I lay in my bed that night unable to sleep. "I will buy clothes that I saw on the much-handled pages of foreign magazines at my friends'… What else? Oh yes, I will own a videoplayer and see as many foreign videos as I want. Movies too. Foreign

> movies. I won't have to stand in a two-hour line to see an American movie…" (*Memoirs* 59)

At this stage, Tanya's vision of post-immigration life is an ideal that is the opposite of what she experienced within the former Soviet space. Ultimately, however, she will be confronted with reality: "Possibly humiliation was a requisite state for recent immigrants. 'Humiliation, yes! That's what immigration is all about. You have to be sufficiently humiliated at first to be able to get your rewards later,' I imagined Dena saying" (*Memoirs* 87). This progression of dreaming a new post-immigration life, relocating, struggling to establish and attain this imagined ideal, and becoming disillusioned, is a set of the main structural components of the post-immigration experience. What gives colour and definition to the intricacies of this world are the many layers of identity associated with the Russian-Jewish persona:

> Leaving for Israel, Soviet Jews dreamed of finding a homogeneous society in which they would feel secure and welcome. Unprepared for the multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic nature of Israel, FSU immigrants were confronted by a paradox: they came to realize that they had been at home among strangers, and they were strangers among their own people. (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 298)

Social alienation and the turmoil of relocation combine to produce the opposite effect of the immigrant dream, resulting both in the fortification of a highly insular community and a yearning for an idealized past. Svetlana Boym, widely noted for her work on nostalgia, likens this longing for the familiar to the parable told in Luke 15:11-32, "The myth of the prodigal son returning to his fatherland, forgiven but never forgotten, is rewritten throughout these texts, without its happy traditional denouement" ("Estrangement" 514). But the return can be achieved either physically or emotionally; Irina Reyn demonstrates the latter:

> When she was younger, how embarrassed she was by Brighton, that this was what Americans knew of the Russian community. The babushkas gossiping outside their buildings on rainbow folding chairs, their daughters in blue eye shadow carefully matching the blue of their handbags, their sons in gold chains and track suits unzipped just enough to reveal a smattering or wiry hairs. But now, of course, Anna was beginning to feel differently about Brighton, affectionate, wistful. Had she reached the age of the prodigal daughter? Because she was ready to be embraced again by the very people she had rejected. (194)

In fact, many immigrants do return to their countries of birth only to experience further disillusionment after finding that these places are not the same as their recollections. When shared with one's fellow émigrés, this community that longs for a time and place that no longer exists is referred to as *zemliachestvo*.

In "*Zemliachestvo kak malaia sotsial'naia gruppa: spetsifika fol'klora,*" Eleonora Shafranskaia turns to Dina Rubina's *Na solnechnoi storone ulitsy* (On the Sunny Side of the Street, 2006) in order to discuss the concept of *zemliachestvo*. *Zemliachestvo*, the nostalgic shared cultural memory of a specific time and place that no longer exists, is an integral term and concept in any discussion of the post-immigration space and its inhabitants. Shafranskaia describes *zemliachestvo* more narrowly because she is discussing Rubina's literary relationship with Tashkent, although the concept can be generalized to the post-Soviet space as a whole:

> In the realm of the twentieth century there are cities that have given birth to their own text. Because of geopolitical reasons, cultural loci break apart, people leave them – but the cities continue to exist in a different manner, with a different city folk culture. But while the people themselves are still alive, those who bear witness to the folklore of the abandoned locus, the city text continues to exist: in memories, literary creation, online, in recognizing what is "their" or the culture of *zemliachestvo*. (*Zemliachestvo* 135)

In addition to the *zemliachestvo* that provides comfort to immigrants following their relocation, there is a new shared identity that has already begun to form: that of the émigré: "The majority of the stories in the sample share the same deep structure. The

phenomenon of immigration is viewed as a trying experience. Hardships and pain are seen as an unavoidable part of this experience" (Fialkova and Yelenevskaya 234).

Although *zemliachestvo* is not a tangible object, I postulate that, as a state of existence, it should be regarded as a space. This chapter discusses both the physical and psychological manifestations of nostalgia as shown in fictional narratives, as well as how *zemliachestvo* plays a prominent role in the definition of the post-immigration identity both in groups and individuals. Additionally, this chapter investigates the effects of exile, both voluntary and involuntary, on the post-immigration identity. By demonstrating the connections between emigration and exile, time and space, nostalgia and *zemliachestvo*, I will delve into the intricacies of the multilayered post-immigration identity. David D. Laitin contends that identity is created: "There is a growing consensus among academic observers of identity politics that identities are not inherited like skin color – which is the Stalinist view; its academic variant is called 'primordialism' – but constructed like an object" (11). Closely related to post-immigration identity negotiation, post-immigration spaces are also creations, perhaps yielding equally as much insight into the post-immigration narrative as the many layers of performative identity.

3.2 Post-Immigration Nostalgia

By its nature, nostalgia, when shared, creates feelings of belonging. The resulting bond is community, as demonstrated in Bezmozgis's description in "Minyan" of the weekly synagogue services at the narrator's grandfather's old age home: "Most of the old Jews came because they were drawn by the nostalgia for ancient cadences. I came because I was drawn by the nostalgia for old Jews. In each case, the motivation was not tradition, but history" (*Natasha* 134). Those who gather in the synagogue combat feelings of

unhomeliness by establishing a sense of unity based upon shared traditions. Such discussions are critically important to analyzing Russian-Jewish post-immigration texts because the nature of the multilayered identity is highly specific. Nostalgia is a popular subject in the humanities, but despite its popularity among scholars, the concept still remains ambivalent:

> The nostalgic disorder was first diagnosed by seventeenth-century Swiss doctors and detected in mercenary soldiers. This contagious modern disease of homesickness – la maladie du pays – was treated in a seventeenth-century scientific manner with leeches, hypnotic emulsions, opium, and a trip to the Alps. Nostalgia was not regarded as destiny, nor a part of the human condition, but only as a passing malaise. (Boym, "Estrangement" 511-12)

For émigrés and exiles, just like for new immigrants, nostalgia is a constant peripheral presence of one's self that may wax and wane, but never disappears. For each individual, the nostalgic experience is unique as well as unpredictable. One can identify its manifestations and explain its social presentation, but nostalgia is difficult to define within any set parameters because of its variations and its universality:

> Nostalgia produces subjective visions of afflicted imagination that tend to colonize the realm of politics, history, and everyday perception. Modern nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that the universality of its longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, and yet the moment we try to repair that longing with a particular belonging – or the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity and especially of national community and unique and pure homeland – we often part ways with others and put an end to mutual understanding. (Boym, "Nostalgia" 9)

The act of emigration is, in essence, the disconnection of oneself from a national community. After relocating, the individual occupies a space of liminality. They may have physically arrived in a new country that they will begin to call home, but it will take them considerably longer still to arrive psychologically. They have divorced themselves from the national identity of their birthplace, but have yet to affect an identity of their

adopted home. The ambiguity of this liminal psychological space is an ideal breeding ground for post-immigration nostalgia. What Fialkova and Yelenevskaya identify as the formation of a close-knit *oleh hadash* community is reflected in post-immigration prose as nostalgia for a familiar pre-immigration time and space.

In "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," Svetlana Boym shows that the physical dislocation of the self from one's homeland does not disrupt the narrative of identity definition, but rather redirects it. For instance, Boym says of Brodsky that "he never leaves his poetic home of an imagined Leningradian classicism and the boundaries of the timeless poetic empire" ("Estrangement" 513). Many post-immigration authors make similar observations in their own communities. In *The Funeral Party,* for example, Liudmila Ulitskaia describes a clash of Orthodox Israeli conservatism and Soviet-reared pragmatism:

> Out of habit Reb Menashe averted his eyes from the naked limbs, male and female, just as he did in Tzfat when guffawing foreign tourists piled out of their buses onto the stones of his holy town, repository of the lofty spirit of mystics and kabbalists. He surveyed the people in the room. He had turned away from this life twenty years ago and had never regretted it. His wife Geula was now bearing his tenth child but had never been naked before him so shamelessly as these women here. (54)

The Rabbi is unable to separate himself from his religious and cultural upbringing, while his Soviet-born hosts exist in an environment that is indifferent to nudity. Rabbi Menashe demonstrates nostalgia arising from cultural displacement; he yearns for home simply for its inherent familiarity, as he is unaccustomed to his present environment. Like Brodsky as described by Bohm, Rabbi Menashe may physically occupy one space while his temperament and psychological perception occupy an entirely different one.

Nostalgia requires a separation from an established conceptualization of normality. However, unlike Rabbi Menashe's longing for the familiarity of a place, nostalgia can also manifest following a displacement of time. Although Lara Vapnyar's "There Are Jews in My House" does not depict a situation of immigration, the themes of temporal nostalgia and identity juxtaposition are both present in the context of dislocation. In the story, Galina is hiding Raya and her daughter from Nazi occupiers who are liquidating Jews from the town. Cut off from the Soviet Union, amidst ransacked stores and pillaged streets, the two women reminisce about, not a different place, but a different time:

> Six weeks ago, when Raya and Leeza first came to live at Galina's place, it had been different. Galina and Raya spent the evenings talking, mostly about the prewar life that seemed now unreal and perfect. They retold some minor episodes in meticulous detail, as if the precision of their memories could turn that prewar life into something real, and failure to remember something could unlock the door of Galina's apartment and let the war in. ("There Are Jews" 5)

The case of post-immigration nostalgia is particularly complex. In addition to the nostalgia one feels for the physical place from which one has departed, one's perception of one's temporal reality freezes at the moment one leaves. In this way, post-immigration nostalgia cannot be separated into the temporal and the locative; both components are interdependent. Therefore, the post-immigration nostalgic will yearn for a place that is frozen in time.

What must be highlighted is that, like the characters in Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature, actual-world émigrés can be simultaneously nostalgic for their homeland and also reject it in pursuit of an imagined ideal. For immigrants such as Irina Reyn's protagonist Anna K., the prospects of marriage to a fellow immigrant can be both

comforting and detestable, as illustrated when Anna K. reflects on the power of her native tongue:

> "*Moia dorogaia Anna*." He kissed her quickly on the lips. Did anyone say those words in the exact way that he did? The singular way he dragged out the word "dear" in Russian, how melodious, *dorogaia*. There was no American man that could hit the precise nerve of nostalgia with that word. (Reyn 17)

This unconscious attraction to her native language shows how Anna K. is profoundly influenced by the foundation of her mother tongue. Her idealized image of herself does not include sentimentality about being Russian, but she is nevertheless overpowered by it. For Gary Shteygart, who, like Reyn, immigrated at a very young age, these imagined ideals would be thrust upon him by his parents' Soviet upbringing. As such, Shteyngart depicts a very cynical perception of the relationship between American dreams and Soviet nostalgia:

> Realizing that I was never going to amount to much, my mother, working her connections as only a Soviet Jewish mama can, got me a job as a "staff writer" at an immigrant recruitment agency downtown, which involved maybe thirty minutes of work per year, mostly proofing brochures teaching newly arrived Russians the wonders of deodorant, the dangers of AIDS, the subtle satisfaction of not getting totally drunk at some American party. In the meantime, the Russian members of our office team and I got totally drunk at some American party. (*Little Failure* 4)

Shteyngart's views of both the pre-immigration environment and post-immigration mentality intentionally show little contrast. There is a sense of self-loathing attached to Shteyngart's sense of nostalgia. His protagonist perpetuates the cultural stereotype of Russians as heavy drinkers, while he and his Russian immigrant colleagues emulate the very behaviour they discourage. Similarly, individuals can feel a deep nostalgic draw to their origins while rejecting them at the same time. In this way, the term *nostalgia,* when

applied to the former Soviet space, is a complex web of cultural influences and conflicting identities.

Within the post-immigration context, deeply-rooted nostalgia can unite people of similar cultural backgrounds, but can also prevent the individual from ever fully arriving in his/her adopted country:

> A new Russian soap opera set in the Stalin era comes on and I hope that it can move our conversation in a different direction. When we had just arrived in America my father used to take me for long walks around leafy Kew Gardens, Queens, trying to teach me the history of Russian-Jewish relations through a series of vignettes he called *The Planet of the Yids*. Whenever I sense him falling down the rabbit hole of depression, preceded by him acting out something violent or phallic (cue the cucumber), I like to move us back to the past, where neither one of us is guilty of anything. (*Little Failure* 29)

Shteyngart shows that nostalgia can be both debilitating and uplifting. His father is comforted by the memory of his pre-immigration life, but his yearning draws his focus backwards instead of forwards. This particular passage illustrates many manifestations of nostalgic elements. First, the *new* Russian soap opera is capturing an era of Soviet history, an era commonly associated with the Great Patriotic War and the triumph of the Red Army. The narrator remembers the time of his early post-immigration experience, while his father is shown to depend heavily on his recollections of his Soviet life in order to feel at ease. Shteyngart demonstrates how diverse nostalgia can be, but that it is, nevertheless, a staple of the post-immigration existence.

Nostalgia, as post-immigration reality, is ignited by the contrast of *then* and *now*. For example, Shteyngart uses the description of mushroom soup to demonstrate the contrast involved with dislocation nostalgia:

> I want to finish the Russian show on TV. Finish the cucumbers and the soup choked with the mushrooms he has picked himself in a dense upstate forest. "Forty dollars, each mushroom would cost in the store!" my mother is yelling at

> my cousin who is failing to partake of the dense fungus. "And still he won't eat it!" (*Little Failure* 31)

Shteyngart contrasts this description of mushroom soup from his past with a description of mushroom soup consumed in the liminal space of the family's journey to America. After having been stripped of Soviet citizenship, the family finds itself in Vienna, a liminal point on their voyage toward new lives and new identities:

> "Decent soup, but not like ours back home," my father says. "Real white mushrooms from the forest near Leningrad, cooked in butter, and then you make the soup with sour cream and with lots of garlic. There's nothing better!" Already, the nostalgia. And the echoes of patriotism. But somehow this little packet of Knorr has produced enough mushroom soup to feed three refugees. (*Little Failure* 85)

What must be noted is how these two experiences with something as banal as mushroom soup can illustrate the depths of nostalgic contrast. The more typically Russian type of soup is produced in the family's post-immigration Russian-Jewish home, indicating an attempt to maintain ties to the old ways, while they had consumed a more 'foreign' type of soup while in transit. Although both their home in Queens and hotel room in Vienna are located in the west, this particular Russian-Jewish family, like many others, manage to recreate a facsimile of the world they left behind. And as Svetlana Boym asserts, this is a very individualized and complex relationship to place:

> Diasporic intimacy is not limited to the private sphere but reflects collective frameworks of memory that encapsulate even the most personal of dreams. It is haunted by images of home and homeland, yet it also discloses some of the furtive pleasures of exile. ("On Diasporic Intimacy" 500)

This experience that the family shares over soup is symbolic of where they came from as much as it is an indication of where they are going. They are instantly reminded of the homeland they just departed, and the unfamiliarity of the home they will soon meet.

In "On Diasporic Intimacy," Svetlana Boym discusses the idea of nostalgic connections:

> The notion of intimacy is connected to home: *intimate* means "innermost," "penetrating to...one's deepest nature," "very personal," "sexual". I will speak about something that might seem paradoxical – a diasporic intimacy that is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it. In the late twentieth century millions of people have found themselves displaced from their places of birth, living in voluntary or involuntary exile. Their intimate experiences occur against a foreign background, where they are aware of the unfamiliar stage set whether they like it or not. (499)

Shetyngart simultaneously expresses the permanence of his family's voluntary exile, while also drawing the reader's attention to the unhomely group surroundings and circumstances. The soup, therefore, becomes not simply a comparison of *then* and *now*, but a reminder of how common details of daily life will highlight the family's displacement.

However, as Boym contends, there may come a time when even the cultivated post-immigration environments can become unhomely as individuals move farther from their initial displacement and no longer need reminders of the past to create a 'home.' For example, Boym describes her own experience after living in the United States for several decades as follows: "The second home that I made for myself in Boston didn't feel like home anymore. It became a maze of displaced objects, souvenirs of past lives, gifts from forgotten friends, extension cords connected to nothing" ("Like New" 76). The mounting unhomeliness that Boym describes is a symptom of cultural diversification and the assimilation of new identities, creating a greater sense of liminality. For instance, for characters such as Mark Berman, Anna K. and Shteyngart's narrator, being 'American' is simple. However, the more they integrate into their American peer groups, the more conscious they become of their otherness. Even with the acceptance of their

peers, these characters are made aware that they are still not native-born. Similarly, they feel detached from the Russian-speaking community as their language skills and cultural understanding give way to their present, establishing the unhomely as an ongoing post-immigration reality.

3.3 Mapping the Post-Immigration Community's Cultural Landscape

The label of 'Jew,' especially within the realm of dislocated persons, is extremely nondescript. This deceptively decisive title does not indicate the level of religious observance or social ideology, nor whether the individual is Ashkenazi or Sephardic. In fact, as Masha explains in Ellen Litman's story "The Last Chicken in America," there are well-defined divisions within Jewishness: "They leave miserable tips, or sometimes no tips at all. Goddamn Jews, Alick says, and smiles. He is, like the rest of us, unmistakably Jewish with his squiggly looks and black curly hair. We don't like Hasids[51] either" (12). But as Rebecca Jablonsky points out, the roots of these divisions predate immigration:

> Such internal divisions are not unique to the post-Soviet Jewish community in New York, but were also a point of contention in the Central Synagogue of Moscow […] after the Soviet Union's collapse the Jewish community in Moscow began a transformational period in which immigrant Jewish communities, Georgian and Mountain Jews (the *Mizrahim* or Oriental Jews from lands once part of Persia), and Bukharan Jews (the *Sephardim* who were linked to Jews from Spain), arrived in Moscow and began to interact with the Russian Jewish *Ashkenazim*, whose ancestors were from Germany. Their different racial backgrounds and divergent understandings of Jewish practices promted battles over Russian Jewish authenticity and control over the physical space of the Central Synagogue. Issues of authentic Russianness and Jewishness when not

[51] Hasidism, meaning "piety" (חסידות) is a devoutly observant branch of Judaism. The Hasidic movement traces its roots to Eastern Europe in the early part of the sixteenth century. Despite the prolific spread of their teachings prior to World War II, according to the 1997 documentary *A Life Apart*, four out of every five Hasidic Jews died during the Holocaust. Today, the largest community of Hasidim lives in Crown Heights New York, and continues to advocate for an insular lifestyle: "Hasidism still stands at the crossroads of the wind and history" (Babel' 234).

> dictated according to racial divisions that gave preferrance to to the Ashkenazim, were proven through performances of ritual that simultaneously encapsulated Jewish practices and Soviet culture. This contentious situation points towards the precariousness of Jewish life in the Soviet Union. (5)

These internal hierarchies and classifications of pre-immigration life make the landscape of the post-immigration map far more diverse, allowing the "[a]uthor to juxtapose individual and group awareness – of Russianness, Jewishness and Americanness – where one is inextricably linked to the other. Or put another way both the individual and the community become protagonists" (Royal 239-40). These additional layers of the Jewish identity are in fact crucial to the understanding of character construction within post-immigration narratives:

> People as they go through their youth, are exposed to family, community and national histories; they are brought up with a particular repertoire of languages and speech styles; they may be given training in certain religious rituals. Within their wider societies others have adopted a variety of other social categories, local, national, religious, linguistic. Usually people's identities change with the level of aggregation; within their community, they may identify themselves on the basis of socioeconomic background; within their country, outside their community, they may identify themselves with a brand of politics; and outside their country, they may identify themselves with their nation. (Laitin 11)

As all the authors discussed in this study indicate in varying degrees, most Russian Jewish immigrants are ambivalent toward their place of birth. In addition, as Dalia Kandyoti acknowledges, the distinctions among Jews themselves become prominent following relocation: "Operating like whiteness in the United States, Ashkenazi studies does not name itself but names its others (with Sephardim as a 'subgroup' with a designated small place in 'Jewish' institutional contexts)" (49). Although unified by language and origins, Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union can regard one another as foreign. Irina Reyn's Bukharian character Lev experiences this sensation when observing a group of Russian teenagers at a concert:

> Listening to the familiar songs of Auktyon, all these Russian kids around them (because they were kids, really, clearly, in their teens and early twenties, and unattached and Russian, with no religion to tether them, only culture and language and money). Lev felt lucky to be Bukharian. Still there was something in it, this shared language, originating from the same basic slab of land. He felt a warmth for everyone here. (128)

The aligning of one's self with one or more national identities makes a clear statement about how the individual views oneself. However, quite often post-immigration characters exemplify a lack of strong national identity. For Lev in *What Happened to Anna K.,* the place of his birth – a legacy that permanently brands him as other within American society – exists only as unrecognizable foreign snapshots:

> Lev no longer thought about Samarkand.[52] His memories were impressionistic at best: the tugging feel of his mother's hand dragging him through the marketplace, the sticky air of summer, the hallucinatory feel of walking down narrow cobblestone roads, claustrophobic care rides past miles of prickly wheat fields. Later he would see pictures of turquoise mosques, the cupolas majestic and swollen, and he might as well have been gaping at them as an American tourist. The Jews did not live in those pictures in guidebooks. (Reyn 57)

To the Israeli or American native, immigrants from the former Soviet territories may be unilaterally given the label of 'Russian.' However, post-immigration narratives clearly demonstrate further identity divisions within the post-dislocation community. In *What Happened to Anna K.,* Irina Reyn chronicles the movements of her protagonist Anna, and Anna's cousin Katia. Katia is a Bukharian Sephardic Jew, while Anna, an Ashkenazi Jew, regards many Bukharian customs and traditions as foreign:

> When visiting her Bukharian relatives, Anna would see the women on food and baby duty. The men with their glasses of cognac, how primitive it seemed to her then. Later of course, a year or so into her marriage, Anna would come to envy the Bukharian Jews with all their boundaries, so Cleary demarcated, when her own were tenuous, shifting, murky. Vaguely, without fully realizing it, she would come to appreciate the power of a shared narrative, with its sacred ideals, without

[52] Samarkand, meaning "Stone Town," is a part of Central Asia situated along the Silk Road. This region marks the oldest civilization within Central Asia, in what is currently Uzbekistan.

> them, an immigrant is lost, stretching towards a mirage that once seized, immediately disintegrates. (Reyn 40)

Through the course of the novel, the reader begins to see the extent of the distinction between Ashkenazi and Bukharian Jews. But while Anna, as an outsider, looks in at Bukharian culture and sees it as exotic and unfamiliar, Lev's perception of his identity is entirely different:

> Now other than food and the occasional Bukhori expression, he no longer knew what made them so Bukharian. But each Bukharian wedding was celebrated more ferociously, more chaotically than the one before – the whirling, interlocking arms, the hoarse voices, the empty bottles of Georgian wine. At each wedding, the reminder, a warning to the unmarried, the Bukharians are uniquely capable of preserving traditions, for didn't they flourish in the most inhospitable of areas among Muslims and Soviets, ethnic Koreans and Chinese? In other words, we dare you to get yourself an American bride, we dare you to murder your own future people. (57-58)

These distinctions between Russian-speaking Jewish immigrant groups are entirely alien to an onlooker, but within the émigré sphere, these sub-groupings inform how the individuals will regard and perform their immigrant role within the greater community. As such, cultural subdivisions add additional layers to the physical and symbolic post-immigration space.

On a larger scale, the separation between Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants and Russian-speaking non-Jews illustrates that, despite the unity and shared experiences of post-dislocation society, prejudices nurtured within the former Soviet space endure nonetheless. In Shteyngart's *The Russian Debutante's Handbook,* for example, one Russian immigrant remarks to a Russian-speaking Jewish immigrant:

> But I read about her in the business section of the *New Russian World*. What a Jewess! The pride of your people. A capitalist she-wolf. Scourge of the hedge funds. Ruthless czarina. Oh my dear, dear Yelena Petrovna. And here I am, chatting with her son! Surely he knows the right people, fellow Hebrews perhaps, among the dastardly agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Services. (10)

Vladimir's eccentric client rattles off these comments in a less-than-coherent train of thought. However, despite the scattered nature of his thought, his references towards Jews demonstrate clear subdivisions within the post-immigration space. The older man refers to Vladimir's mother with a mixture of awe and disdain. Although the two men share much common cultural ground, having lived in the Soviet Union and having experienced the trials and tribulations of immigration, the older man is very pointed in referring to "The pride of your people," making an unmistakable distinction. They may be from the same place, speak the same language, and share mutually understandable experiences between them, but as Vladimir and his mother are Jews, they are relegated to the cultural position of other. But perhaps Shteyngart's most telling and painful discussion of the cultural hierarchy of his post-immigration childhood is his discussion of the realization of the divisions between being Caucasian and being other:

> There are decent public schools in Queens, but we are scared of blacks. If you put together two Soviet immigrants in Queens of Brooklyn circa 1979, the subject of *shwartes*[53] or 'the Spanish with their transistor radios' would come up by the third sentence. (*Little Failure* 109)

Although the presentation of Shteyngart's memories takes on a humorous façade, his ultimate conclusion is both disturbing and profound: "There's hatred and fear, sure, but just a little down the line, laughter and relief. The happy recognition that, as unemployed and clueless as we are, there is a reservoir of disgust in our new homeland for someone other than ourselves" (*Little Failure* 109).

For Kaminer, the post-immigration landscape is far more ethnically diverse. For him, early 1990s Berlin is something akin to an airport arrivals terminal; it is full of

[53] This is a derogatory Yiddish term for a person of darker complexion. It can also be transliterated more commonly as *schwartze*.

people who have just recently arrived from all corners of the globe, but are still yet unsure of where they are going:

> The home was all life and bustle. The Vietnamese discussed their future prospects in Vietnamese, not yet knowing anything about flogging cigarettes. The Africans cooked couscous all day long and in the evening sang Russian folk songs. Their knowledge of the language was amazingly good. A lot of them had studied in Moscow. The Russian Jews discovered six-packs of beer at 4.99 marks, traded cars among themselves, and made their preparations for a long winter in Marzhan. (27)

Unlike Anna K.'s environment, entirely united by the Russian language, Kaminer's narrator exists in a multiethnic post-immigration setting. Instead of insular groupings, Kaminer's experience seems to highlight a multicultural environment. Similarly, Gary Shteyngart comments on his narrator's transcendence of post-immigration environments: "We are climbing upwards! Past the welfare queens, past the Spanishers with their transistor radios, up to the working-class white Catholics with the Yankee penants who populate our courtyard" (*Little Failure* 136). Unlike Kaminer's melting-pot scenario, Shteyngart sees racial divisions in addition to the ever-present economic ones.

Even among other immigrants, Bezmozgis's Mark Berman describes feeling further marginalized within an already marginalized social group, on his first day of first grade in Toronto:

> In a first-grade classroom a teacher calls on her students and inquires after their nationality. "Sasha," she says. Sasha says "Russian." "Very good," says the teacher. "Arnan," she says. Arnan says "Armenian." "Very good," says the teacher. "Lubka," she says. Lubka says "Ukrainian." "Very good," says the teacher. And then she asks Dima. Dima says "Jewish." "What a shame," says the teacher, "so young and already a Jew." (*Natasha* 4)

Although Dima identifies as a Jew, his name indicates a Russian origin. By identifying as a Jew, Mark is met with benign ridicule from the teacher, illustrating the hierarchy

within the fabric of immigrant society. With that in mind, Bezmozgis does additionally discuss the internal workings of the post-immigration social network:

> The system was inscrutable. At least in Russia you knew who to bribe. But unable to give up, my family sought angles. My mother made inquiries in the community. Apartments had been had. Others had experienced success. No doubt an apartment existed, and waited, like America, to be discovered. My father canvassed his patients in search of a lead. Many patients were the children of Polish Jews who had made their money in real estate. They owned buildings all over the city. Surely one of them could find a place for an honest man, a war hero and a pious Jew. My uncle played his trump card and exploited a political connection from his days doing business with the new Russia. (*Natasha* 130)

Even a decade after their arrival in Toronto, the family will always turn to the support of their close-knit immigrant community when faced with a predicament. Bezmozgis illustrates how the Soviet culture of being well-connected carries over into North York's inner workings. This network, as Bezmozgis shows, is also a souce of information for a group often isolated by language. In "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist," the narrator describes his mother's reaction after they are invited to dinner at the Kornblums' home:

> I gave her the sheet of paper with Kornblum's name and telephone number and she quickly started dialling. My aunt was certain she had heard of this Kornblum before. When Victor Guttman's father slipped on the ice, wasn't it a Kornblum that did the operation? That Kornblum was very nice. Also very rich. It could be the same one. My mother called others. Sophatchka was studying to pass her medical boards and was familiar with many doctors. Did she know Kornblum? Kornblum the family physician or Kornblum the orthopedic surgeon? Not that it made a difference, they were both very successful. If either one referred even a small fraction of his patients our troubles would be over. (*Natasha* 19)

Mark's mother's reaction is indicative of an intricate network of information sharing, a complex web resulting from the desperation to succeed post-resettlement and the necessity for community.

3.4 Text and the City: The Unspoken Character[54]

When considering the works of Irina Reyn, Gary Shteyngart, and Wladimir Kaminer, it is impossible to remove the importance of 'the city' from the literary equation. In "The Ultimate City: New York and the Russian Immigrant Narrative," Yasha Klots discusses the significance of New York to Russian immigrant literature:

> Since at least the end of the nineteenth century, when New York became one of the major centers of Russian literature in diaspora, it has gained enough individuality, thematic as well as stylistic, that it has become possible to speak of the so-called *gudzonskaia nota* [the Hudson note] of Russian poetry and perhaps even the "New York text" of Russian literature. As a repository of urban impressions migrating from text to text, generation to generation, New York has a tangible literary dimension, especially potent in immigrant narratives. (38)

This is supported by Rebecca Jablonsky, who associates New York with Russian-Jewish immigration in particular: "The Russian Jewish population of New York mobilizes its identity in ways that separate it from mainstream groups" (4). Aviv and Shneer postulate in *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, that "New York is the new Zion of the Jewish world, with its complexity, density and sheer cacophony of Jewish voices, institutions and cultures" (137).

The technique of personifying a physical place as though it were a participant in the narrative depends entirely on the reader's perception and comprehension of what 'the city' as a non-stationary reality signifies. William Alexander McClung notes, "Literary texts sometimes state, but more often merely imply, a set of values grounded in one or the other models" (35). In "Dialectics of Literary Cities," McClung discusses the sensations and images evoked by the mention of specific cities and how they relate to the reading of

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[54] The following section contains material from my article "Jerusalem and Istanbul: Juxtaposing and Personifying Ancient Cities for a 21st Century Readership," which was published in *Quality, Social Justice, and Accountability in Education Worldwide* (2015). Portions of this text have been reproduced with modifications.

a literary work. McClung gives examples of several North American cities and the images associated with them: San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge, Los Angeles and the iconic Hollywood sign, Seattle and the Space Needle. From here, he takes a post-structuralist approach to deconstructing many aspects of the city such as architecture, layout, and demographics. One aspect McClung does not mention, however, is local mythology: traditions, cultural components, legends, folklore, and history. For the North American reader, McClung's method becomes infinitely more complicated when dealing with trans-national authors read in translation, such as Rubina, Ulitskaia or Kaminer. It can be generally assumed that the reader's previous understanding of the mythology of foreign cities is not as intimate as the readership of those within the country being described. This makes the role played by the city all the more integral to the post-immigration text as a whole:

> A history of the imagination of the city, including though not limited to literature, might begin by describing the divided sensibility that, in western thought at least, has produced the dialectic so prominent in cities of fiction: on the one hand, ideal, objective apprehended forms, and on the other, compromised, experiential, subjective systems. The meeting of the narrative and plastic imaginations in both kinds of literary architecture – verbal cities and specialized language – is a point of departure. (McClung 37)

As McClung demonstrates, the "literary architecture" bears the burden of formulating and sustaining the many layers of the "imagination of the city," which in a broad sense can also be seen as one component of a city's mythology. Klots equates the cultural significance of literary portrayals of Saint Petersburg as a similar phenomenon to post-immigration fiction: "It can be argued that 'mapping' New York City within the English coordinate system entails a breakup with the Russian literary tradition, whose mode of urban poetics has largely drawn on the 'text' and mythology of St. Petersburg" (39). The

two cities are admittedly very different, but share some key similarities, as Klots points out. They both combine dense urban settings with island geography, as well as a rich cultural and artistic history. Klots further explains, "The eccentric and multicultural New York, a city that stands apart from the Old World just as it does from the rest of America, generates a universe of its own kind with Russian émigré literature as one of its orbits" (38-39). Although Klots discusses Russian-American or Russian émigré literature, and not specifically Russian-Jewish fiction, his observations and conclusions are relevant for this project: "It is to a large extent the city itself that guides each author in his or her journey" (55).

For many post-immigration narratives, the story cannot be separated from 'the city,' and vice versa. This is a logical relationship between place and narrative, since post-immigration literature deals with displacement and relocation, both of which rely on the definition of a physical location. Wladimir Kaminer discusses the significance of Berlin as an example of this relationship:

> For some time now, Berlin has been considered by Russian travel agencies to be some kind of insider tip for the wealthy. You can have a really wild time there, they say. In one Russian guide to Berlin, the tour operators' slogan runs: 'Raise your very own personal flag on the new German Reichstag – see Berlin and conquer it!' (*Russian Disco* 142)

For Kaminer, text and city are interwoven; the central action of his narratives cannot be removed from the Berlin backdrop. The relationship between the Russian consciousness and Berlin that is created by the advertising slogan is of particular importance, both to understand the characters that Kaminer is portraying, and to comprehend the complex relationship between images of Russianness within the former Soviet space and in diaspora. The perspective that Kaminer illustrates is that of one who has left Russia and

can regard Russianness within Russia from an outsider's perspective. He refers to the Battle of Berlin (1945) and the historic photograph of the Soviet flag being raised over the Reichstag,[55] demonstrating that the marketing of Germany for Russian consumption is entirely dependent on a sense of Soviet patriotism and a post-Communist devotion to capitalism. Characterizing Berlin as a commodity to be attained suggests that Russians have a certain symbolic entitlement to the German capital city. Viewed from the vantage point of Kaminer and his peers, however, the slogan is simply ridiculous.

Aviv and Shneer dub New York to be "ground zero of the diaspora business" (138). For characters such as Reyn's Anna K. or Vapnyar's Tanya associate a certain mystique with living in New York in general and Manhattan in particular: "Everything seemed within reach, but at the same time inaccessible, unless I could find some kind of secret key that would open this life for me and make me belong there" (Vapnyar, *Memoirs* 99). They both idealize the Manhattan lifestyle and continue to romanticize their experiences after being hit with the realities of dislocation:

> Central Park seemed the only place where I could breathe. I still took every opportunity to come uptown, but not every stroll now produced such an intense feeling as the first one had. At times, I felt what I called "a high burning". The anticipation of happiness throbbed in my temples, tickled the tips of my toes, rolled into a sweet lump in my throat, behaved as something separate and alive inside of me. I would become acutely sensitive to men's presence, – and buildings, trees, squirrels and passing women and children would fade into the background, cease to exist for me. (*Memoirs* 89)

Tanya equates Central Park with sexual desire and seduction. Her glamourized image of the Central Park she has seen in pictures has given way to the immediate reality of her

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[55] After the fall of the Soviet Union, the identity of the photographer of this iconic image came to light: Evgenii Khaldei (1917-97). Khaldei was born to a Jewish family, and it has been speculated that his true identity was kept secret in order to conceal his heritage. He was greatly inspired by Joe Rosenthal's (1911-2006) photograph of the American flag being raised in victory at the Battle of Iwo Jima. On 2 May 1945, Khaldei photographed the Soviet flag raised atop the Reichstag, with the rubble of Berlin smoldering on all sides.

post-immigration circumstances. Nevertheless, her idealized conceptualization becomes an overwhelming sense of sexual power. Despite her feelings of overall unhomeliness, Tanya regards this particular Manhattan space as an oasis. Because promenading through Central Park requires no direct interaction, Tanya's physical appearance is the only communication she presents to those around her. Because she is able to captivate the attention of the men around her, she is endowed with a unique sense of power that she does not possess elsewhere: "Never before had men noticed me in such a spontaneous way. They couldn't help but notice me" (*Memoirs* 89). Anna K. feels similarly confident in Central Park. Manhattan chic was once second nature to her, but after leaving her husband, it is only on rare occasions that she takes her son to the park that she feels something of her old life. This life of Upper East Side glitz, despite feeling stifling to Anna K., was at one point a romanticized fantasy for her cousin Katia. However, after marrying Lev and attaining a sense of belonging, this idealized image of Manhattan fades for Katia:

> Manhattan, once so desirable, was out of reach, and she found she no longer yearned for the myth. Rego Park was fine with her, with its Russian stores and Bukharian restaurants, the trailing scent of spiced lamb on a skewer, ambling *babushka* arm in arm, heads bowed together – at least it was human, heartfelt. (130)

The way that Katia mentally characterizes Manhattan changes as her own post-immigration feelings of unhomeliness begin to dissipate. For her, Manhattan once symbolized a disassociation with her Russianness, but the culturally diverse space of Queens is where she feels the most comfortable.

3.5 *Zemliachestvo*: The Memory of a Place, Frozen in Time

Cultural memory, group memory and shared experiences can create a community. The atmosphere that is created by the gathering in a foreign environment of newcomers with common origins is something beyond both community and nostalgia. Peter Hitchcock explains that despite the collapse of a colonial power, in this case the Soviet Union, the lack of a tangible imperial existence does not eliminate feelings of group affiliation based on the past:

> Chronotope[56] is not any old coordinate of time and space, but the figural semantic process allowing narration to proceed to form. In every space of postcoloniality, marked by nation or locale, movement or embeddedness, inscription or orality, culture refracts duration: not just that colonialism was endured, but that its figures of time did not absolutely displace or dismantle local forms of temporality. The transnational Chronotope does not contend that time's arrow, a dubious chronologism of "post" as "after" in postcolonialism confirms the end of colonialism, but rather accentuates the distillation of specific coordinates in its moment. (4)

This translates onto the Russian-Jewish post-immigration stage as individuals collectively recall their shared cultural memories of the past. In other words, many ethnic groups can experience cultural unity based upon memories of life under the rule of a dominant power. Such is the case of former Soviets in diaspora.

Svetlana Boym's analysis of diasporic intimacy explains the significance of the post-immigration space as well as the individuals that fill the space:

> Diasporic intimacy is belated and never final; objects and places were lost in the past, and one knows that they can be lost again. The illusion of complete belonging has been shattered. Yet one discovers that there is still a lot to share. The foreign backdrop, the memory of past losses, and the recognition of transience do not obscure the shock of intimacy, but rather heighten the pleasure and intensity of surprise. ("On Diasporic Intimacy" 502)

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[56] *Chronotope,* as a literary term, was coined by Mikhail Bakhtin. It refers specifically to literary coordinates of time and space and how the two intermingle within a narrative.

From the outsider's perspective, close-knit immigrant communities can seem like mysterious secret clubs beyond our sphere of understanding, and therefore are often easily misunderstood. In "Nostalgia and Its Disconnects," Svetlana Boym makes the following observations about the human condition in displacement:

> Modern nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that the universality of its longing can make more empathetic towards fellow humans, and yet the moment we try to repair that longing with a particular belonging – or the apprehension of loss with rediscovery of identity and especially of a national community and unique and pure homeland – we often part ways with others and put an end to mutual understanding. (9)

When there is a lack of cultural common ground, the individual becomes isolated; but, in this isolation, a new community begins to form. The term *zemliachestvo*, as previously mentioned, describes a sort of nostalgic community exclusive to certain pockets of post-immigration society. What differentiates the constructed memories of *zemliachestvo* from traditional nostalgia is the specificity of shared group consciousness. *Zemliaki*, persons of shared *zemliachestvo*, possess mutual understandings of a time and place that no longer exists. Together, *zemliaki* are able to create a feeling of camaraderie by remembering a specific time and place. Eleonora Shafranskaia cites the example of Soviet Tashkent, the city in which Rubina was born and raised, and which bears characteristics and qualities known only to those who have experienced them. Shafranskaia notes that in Rubina's *On the Sunny Side of the Street* (*Na solnechnoi storone ulitsy*), people of shared *zemliachestvo* are brought together by their understanding of a feeling produced by memories. The Tashkent that Rubina's characters remember is not the Tashkent of today; characters recall monuments that have been dismantled, stores that have closed and buildings that have been torn down and rebuilt.

Similarly to Shafranskaia, Mykola Soroka also outlines the cultural complications of a post-immigration return:

> Scholars have defined three major phases of displacement marked by the relationship between the homeland and the hostland which are encountered chronologically: 1) an imaginary return home often with a new vision of it, and intense rediscovery of the past and longing for it; 2) a clash with a new society and attempts to adjust to it; and 3) adjustment to a new society or, in the case of failure, marginalization and even death. The state of "in-betweenness" determines the quality of displacement. (7)

Soroka's outline of the displacement chronology certainly suggests that once a person is displaced, what he calls "in-betweenness" will never fully disappear. This can also relate to languages. From a trans-lingual perspective, *zemliaki* will share the memory of regional slang that has since gone out of use or jokes that are no longer in fashion. In essence, were these characters to return to contemporary Tashkent, they would not recognize their surroundings:

> When exiles return "back home," they occasionally discover that there is nothing homey back there and that one feels more at home in the comfortable exile retreat that one has learned to inhabit. The exile state has become familiar and it is the experience of returning to the country of birth that might become defamiliarized experience of being. (Boym, "Estrangement" 529)

Shteyngart also illustrates this point with his description of a trip back to the city of his birth. In an attempt to understand the cultural and philosophical mind-set of his aging parents, Shteyngart travels back to a homeland that has, for quite some time, not been home:

> How much time have I spent in the last twelve years running up and down this exhausted, melancholy city, retracing their steps, trying somehow to make them my own. And then with the first Russian word out of my mouth, I realize the truth of the matter. It's not possible to make their lives my own. (*Little Failure* 326)

Shteyngart refers to the *steps* of his mother and father. He has travelled to Saint Petersburg in an attempt to understand them better by immersing himself in the city of his birth. Realizing he can never truly understand them, as the place they were shaped by no longer exists, he is also forced to confront the city before him as alien and unrecognizable. Not only is the Leningrad of his youth now Saint Petersburg, but the American capitalist values he had been taught to fear as a child in the Soviet Union are amplified before him in the Russia of 2011:

> Ironically, the city founded as Russia's "window to the West" still functions in that capacity, but the West now stands for detritus of global capitalism washing up on its shores. Shteyngart's city of birth, together with the rest of the Soviet Union, has turned into a sort of third-world post-apocalyptic wasteland. (Wanner, *Out of Russia* 107)

The narrator cannot comprehend the complete scope of his parents' cultural mentalities by walking the streets of the city they all once called home, because that place of his family's collective memory no longer exists. Boym calls this "cultural baggage" ("Estrangement" 526), but as Shafranskaia attests, *zemliachestvo* is the main driving force that unifies communities of displaced persons post-immigration:

> But what I love most are the sounds of our hoarse excited voices. The Russian noise lacing the barrage of English verbs, or vice versa ("*Babushka, oni poshli* shopping *vmeste v ellenvilli*" – "Grandma, they went shopping together in Ellenville"). (Shteyngart, *Little Failure* 170)

The familiarity of the linguistic code switching is a variable dialect of the post-immigration *zemliaki*, easily identified as foreign on the streets of Saint Petersburg. For Russian-Jewish newcomers to America, the specificity of nuance takes on additional layers, adding both Hebrew and Yiddish into the multicultural vernacular. The fascinating reality of this unique communication system is that it cannot be simply acquired; it is learned through experience.

Zemliachestvo with its sense of cultural belonging can also be detected from outside the group. Shteyngart discusses how he first came to reflect on the truer sense of cultural community when he describes a class reunion:

> And as I glance around at my former classmates, a thought occurs to me. *This is a community*. These people know one another, understand one another, came of age with one another. They were tied by kin and outlook, as were their parents. As were their parents before them. Moms making rugelach[57] in advanced baking ovens, dads talking mileage on their new Lincolns, the drowsy, hypnotic hum of cantors and rabbis on Saturday mornings. What happened here, this was nobody's fault. We Soviet Jews were simply invited to the wrong party. And then we were too frightened to leave. Because we didn't know who we were. In this book, I'm trying to say who we were. (*Little Failure* 204)

At face value, in the most cursory of readings, one might think that the author is describing his own community. In fact, the conceptualizing of the community around him is one to which he considers himself an outsider. The reader is to infer that the author is coming to regard the assimilation of Soviet Jews into Jewish culture as an artificial endeavour. He suggests that the basis for emigrating from the Soviet Union was initially to be able to claim their Jewish identities more freely, but that their absorption into Jewish society was superficial at best. The "party" is in fact their Jewishness, and the realization that they are at the "wrong party" is to say that they do not conform to this cultural group. They are, of course, Jews, but they are Soviet Jews, an identity that, as the author shows, is not as simple as calling oneself a Jew.

3.6 Creating the 'Home' and Redefining Normality

Within the post-immigration text, many everyday objects take on hidden layers of cultural expressivity, as this unhomely displacement necessitates specific choices in décor and style:

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[57] Rugelach (רוגלך) is an Ashkenazi pastry, which can resemble croissants.

> My site of diasporic intimacy is the "second home," which preserves many archaeological layers of underground homemaking, fantasmic habitats, clandestine spaces of escape and intimacy. Here aesthetic and everyday become closely intertwined. (Boym, "On Diasporic Intimacy" 502)

The classic saying, "Home is where the heart is," holds particular significance for the post-immigration soul. People take refuge in familiarity, while desperately establishing a new feeling of belonging. These feelings are invariably an extension of identity, as established by Kołodziejczyk, who refers to such narratives as 'post-displacement fiction:'

> In my view, though these narrative patterns in the post-1989 wave of fiction reflecting on displacement in a way that makes it necessary to term it 'post-displacement fiction' are uneasy about the notion of identity itself. They profoundly call into question the necessity of harnessing one's place and dwelling to identity. Such a cautious approach to identity which always seems to be exterior and to place too great a demand on the sense of dwelling, is articulated in this fiction most specifically through its special receptiveness towards the environment and nature, which act as active constituents of space. (262)

However, the term *post-displacement* can be misleading as displacement can he an entirely non-physical event. Nevertheless, Kołodziejczyk clearly asserts the dialogue between identity and the creation of home. Sensations of familiarity can push feelings of unhomeliness out of mind, at least within "spaces of escape." In *What Happened to Anna K.* Reyn describes this as follows:

> How do immigrants retain their culture? By tethering themselves to the older generation, by procreating with a sharer of the language, by returning to the country of origin – taking its public transportation, staying with relatives, paying the lower museum entrance fees reserved for locals buying potatoes in its marketplaces. But the country Russian immigrants left behind has transformed; it has become a brand new overcoat, unrecognizable from the old. The road back severed. (204)

If the road back is truly "severed," as Reyn suggests, what is left for immigrants from the post-Soviet space is to create new realities of home. Often a bizarre mix of the old and

the new, these spaces formed within the post-immigration community are the critical backdrop for nurturing and shaping the post-immigration identity. When *zemliaki* are brought together, they are able to revive the remembered time and space that has been left behind, by re-creating elements of that temporal reality:

> They exaggerate the otherness of the other, preserving nostalgic difference while disregarding differences within the foreign culture and its forms of political authoritarianism and media manipulation. Whether it is a matter of past grievances or present self-assertion, one always has to recognize the modernity of the other, the shared world of modern reinvented traditions and transnational individual dreams for reform or improvement. While the story that nostalgics tell is one of local homecoming, the form of that story is hardly local. Contemporary nostalgias can be understood as a series of migrating cross-cultural plots that go beyond national attachments. (Boym, "Nostalgia" 18)

Boym's observations of the pre-immigration dream contrasted with the post-immigration dismantling of the ideal are a harsh testament to the disillusionment that occurs with non-optional cultural assimilation. Ideal and reality will invariably never reconcile, but this conflict is at the core of the post-immigration identity. One attempts to find a balance between new and old. Ultimately, the comfort of the old will become dominant once the enthusiasm for the new diminishes along with the previously maintained ideal. However, this can additionally include a desire to incorporate components of the adoptive society, resulting in a bizarre mélange that is decipherable only to fellow *zemliaki,* as Gary Shteyngart demonstrates in *Little Failure*:

> Thanksgiving 2011. A three-story minor colonial in Little Neck, Queens. What a class-obsessed Britisher might call middle-middle-*middle* class. My small family is gathered around a reflective orange mahogany table – product of Ceausescu's Romania, dragged against all common sense from Leningrad – on which my mother will soon serve a garlicky, wet turkey kept gurgling beneath a sheet of plastic wrap until the moment it is presented and a dessert made out of a dozen matzos, a gallon of cream and amaretto liqueur, and a tub of raspberries. What I believe my mother is aiming for is a mille-feuille, or in Russian, a *tort Napoleon*. The result is a vaguely Passover based departure from pastry reality. In deference to its point of origin, she will call it "French." (27-28)

Though presented as humorous, this passage is particularly significant for its cultural amalgamation of nostalgia and assimilation as experienced through the post-immigration process of identity construction. By juxtaposing iconic images and concepts associated with various cultural spheres, Shteyngart astutely presents various facets of post-immigration reality. Maria Rewakowicz similarly elaborates on the paradox of displacement:

> Displacement brings uncertainty, but it also opens up many new opportunities. Émigrés often look nostalgically back to the past and the country of their origin, but they can also embrace their new home and immerse themselves in the culture of the new land. (Rewakowicz 1)

The embracing of local tradition, while natural, is an exercise in cultural interpretation. The initial setting of Thanksgiving connotes North American surroundings. From this cultural icon of Thanksgiving, Shteyngart immediately deviates from any preconceived notions of what this holiday might entail. By incorporating the image of a Soviet Bloc table, Shteyngart disrupts the reader's process of imagining a Thanksgiving setting. Instead, the scene that Shteyngart illustrates is remarkable for its attempts to adhere to the North American mould, while in fact more vividly bringing to life the family's Soviet and Jewish cultural identities. The cross-cultural *tort Napoleon*, seemingly the pastry equivalent of Frankenstein's monster, is especially telling. The substitution of *matzoh*[58] for pastry layers indicates assimilation into Jewish cultural traditions to which the family would have only been introduced after their departure from the Soviet Union. The post-immigration desire to embrace Thanksgiving is an experience mirrored in Reyn's *What Happened to Anna K.* in a scene that couples the post-immigration attempt at assimilating

[58] *Matzoh* (מַצָּה) is unleavened bread eaten during Passover. It resembles a cracker.

holiday traditions with Anna K.'s rejection of her parents' pre-emigration Soviet dreams for their daughter's future:

> During Thanksgiving dinner Anna told her parents that she had selected English as her major. Twenty relatives internally flambéed on vodka, sat around the table, waiting for Anna's parents' reaction. And Anna found herself wanting to hurt her parents, because if they had stayed in Russia, wouldn't she have had a clearer focus for her life: some babies on the way, a budding career as an engineer? The Roitman table was the Russian interpretation of the first American meal – parsley-dusted potatoes instead of yams, two roasted chickens (pregnant with apples) instead of turkey. Anna's father squinted at her. "What career is good with English major?" he asked. "In the Soviet Union" – he began good-heartedly, but the relatives broke in to remind him as if he had forgotten that there was no Soviet Union, and thank God for that. Another round of toasts broke out. (Reyn 24)

Similarly to the Shteyngarts' table, the recollection of the central protagonist's family Thanksgiving evokes an endearing émigré charm. Both Shteyngart's narrator and Reyn's Anna K. are able to passively observe the distinctly Russian flair brought to their respective Thanksgiving tables. For Shteyngart, it is his mother's dessert, piecing together countless culture specific ingredients in a culinary compilation reminiscent of Frankenstein's monster, while for Anna K., it is the far more subtle, but equally unorthodox, marathon of vodka toasts. Equally exotic to both sets of parents are their children's American sensibilities and refusal to bring to fruition the Soviet destinies of their pre-emigration dreams. Both characters appear to be the sole embodiments of Americanized mentalities within their families, making them, in a sense, cultural ambassadors between mainstream American society and the Russian-Jewish post-immigration community.

Both Shteyngart's narrator and Reyn's Anna K. observe that American culture is still new to their parents; however, their Jewish identities prior to emigration are equally mysterious. Both families attempt to adopt customs they regard as innately American,

but they also fumble through the cultural realities of being Jewish. In essence, due to a lack of Jewish self-awareness in the former Soviet Union, this wave of emigration in particular illustrates the post-immigration inundation of conflicting and confusing cultural information as both Jews and newcomers to America. Shteyngart elaborates further on the lack of pre-emigration Jewish awareness:

> The ham is often not precisely ham, but the fat around the ham. My mother wages a weekly battle with the *gastronom* staff to make sure they cut her the rosy, edible part of my favorite snack. On one fearful occasion, right before we emigrated, my mother begins to shout at a woman, "Why are you giving me nothing but fat?" The year is 1978, when Soviet Jews are finally allowed to leave for Israel and, more happily, for the United States or Canada. My mother's enemy in the stained white smock appraises her nose and dark hair and shouts back: "When you move to Israel they'll slice the ham for you without fat!" "Yes," my mother answers, "in Israel I'll have the fatless ham, but all you will ever have is the fat." (*Little Failure* 47-48)

The obvious ridiculousness of this exchange is a clear indication of the lack of cultural consciousness among Soviet Jews.[59] Both the *gastronom* worker and the protagonist's mother are evidently unaware of the Jewish dietary laws barring the consumption of pork. Subsequently, the integration of matzoth into the family's culinary repertoire, though unconventional, shows the reader some added layers of post-immigration cultural awareness. Shteyngart further indicates that any Jewish influences in their home are purely for show: "There is a credenza, equally orange and glowing, upon which two Jewish menorahs[60] are placed when visitors come, one in front of the other, one borrowed from a perch atop my mother's Red October piano, as if to say that here Chanukah[61] is a

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[59] The Jewish kosher (כשרות) laws strictly prohibit Jews from consuming pork products or shellfish, as they are considered *treif* (טר״ף).

[60] A *menorah* (מנורה) or *hanukkiah* (חנוכיה) in this context is a candelabra with places for nine candles. It is used during the Jewish holiday of Hanukah.

yearlong proposition" (*Little Failure* 137). The insertion of the classically Russian *tort Napoleon* to the post-immigration Thanksgiving table also illustrates the family's attempts to embrace American customs while also showing that being American is not their dominant identity within their group dynamic: "Except for Leon Uris and his tales of Israeli derring-do, our house is Russian down to the last buckwheat kernel of kasha" (*Little Failure* 137). Even environments that psychologically embody their new home, such as the narrator's bedroom, are shown to be slightly distorted mirror images of their pre-immigration Soviet reality:

> My first bedroom, formerly the apartment's dining room, covered entirely in cheap wooden panelling, is given over to my folding couch, which itself is draped in velvety green-and-yellow stripes, oh-so-soft to the touch. When erect the couch feels like it could belong to a corporate office of the famous International Business Machines, and when folded open it feels luxurious beyond belief. Only now do I realize that minus the polka dots, the couch has the same striped color scheme as the singular shirt I brought with me from Leningrad. (*Little Failure* 139)

By likening the couch to the frequently mocked shirt that he associates with immigration, Shteyngart demonstrates the ever-present consciousness of *then* and *now*. This is further compounded with the juxtaposition of the narrator's beds pre-immigration and post-immigration: "I am on the living room couch that serves as my bed" (*Little Failure* 52). In this post-immigration setting, the narrator has not deviated from his place sleeping on the couch in the family's communal space, even as this apartment in Queens becomes a relic of Soviet chic: "On the other side of the couch is the glass-and-mahogany bookcase that is the focal point of every Russian household" (*Little Failure* 139).

The purchase of the family's first home is a milestone in their post-immigration search for belonging. Despite the cultural unhomeliness within their new surrounding,

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[61] Hanukah, also spelled Chanukah (חֲנֻכָּה), is the Jewish festival of lights. The holiday commemorates the Maccabean Revolt.

their possession of a physical home that is solely their property serves to establish a feeling of 'home' that is permanent:

> We bought our own cooperative garden apartment, and now even the peaked attic roof above my head is ours. Let me tell you what else is ours. There is a living room with a cottage-cheese ceiling and a small closet with a bookshelf built *directly* into the closet door! You can store Papa's fishing stick inside the closet and put books on the outside of it. Here we display the trashier American novels we find on the street curb with the pictures of women and men kissing each other on horseback and a special hard cover copy of Leon Uri's *Exodus*. The furniture will be the Romanian ensemble we brought from Russia: the already-mentioned dining table with an extra leaf for when kindly Zev and our other American supporters come over. (*Little Failure* 137)

The purposeful display of expressly American books is a superficial attempt to indicate assimilation. However, the narrator's admission that the books were acquired second-hand indicates that these books are not being genuinely appreciated, but were bought simply for show. This is not the case with the Russian-language classics that the family has brought, first from Leningrad to Rome, then from Rome to New York, and later from their rented apartment to their home. Unlike the American novels, used only for display purposes, the Russian volumes hold an important place in the family's cultural consciousness, as well as the physical location within the home. Later, however, the narrator feels a stronger draw towards his Manhattanite American home:

> I want to close my eyes and feel a part of the cornucopia of insanity swirling around the table, because that insanity has alighted on my shoulders as well. But I also want to go home. To Manhattan. To the carefully constructed, utterly inoffensive apartment that I have wrought to show in part that the past is not the future and I am my own man. (*Little Failure* 32)

Shteyngart's narrator relates both to the cacophony of the Queens home in which he spent his formative years, and to the solitary generic cliché of his adult American existence.

Language and the choices of spoken language have a significant effect on the composition of the home within the post-immigration environment and on the image that

the home produces. The narrator equally discusses his parents' insistence that only Russian be spoken at home, and his frustration at feeling further isolated from his American English-speaking peers:

> It occurs to me that if we had spoken English instead of Russian at home, my father would have lost some of the natural cruelty that comes with our mother tongue. *Eh, you, Snotty, Eh, you, weakling*. Because all I want to do now is to speak to Papa and Mama in Jonathan's English. Which also happens to be my own. (*Little Failure* 194)

The identity that is linked with language is perhaps the biggest hurdle associated with the post-immigration experience. For writers such as Shteyngart, who spent the overwhelming majority of his life in the United States, there is a dramatic differentiation between the home and outside world, based solely on language. However, in the author's home, Russian was the sole language of communication. As such, he describes his perception of himself as having maintained his heavy accent even decades after resettling in New York. He notes that if there had been a stronger emphasis on English at home, he might not have preserved his accent as noticeably, which for him becomes a source of great frustration.

In *The Funeral Party,* Liudmila Ulitskaia describes this process of linguistic acclimation, pointing out how tenuous the post-immigration connection to English can be:

> Most of them had arrived in this country with twenty kilograms of luggage and twenty words of English, leaving behind hundreds of ruptures large and small – with jobs, parents, streets and neighbourhoods. The rupture they were slowest to recognize was with their native language, which over the years became more and more instrumental and utilitarian. The new American language came to them gradually in their new émigré milieu and was also instrumental and primitive, and they expressed themselves in a terse deliberately comical jargon, part-English, part-Russian, part-Yiddish, which took in the most exotic criminal slang, and the playful intonation of a Jewish anecdote. "Oy, this isn't music, it's *koshmar,*" Valentina grumbled. "Be an angel and shut your window. Do they think only

> about eat and drink, and have fun and get the good mood? They make such *gevalt*, we get all the headache." (22-23)

In the original Russian version, the grammatically problematic English phrase is included as an example of foreign text, while the word *gevalt* appears as a solitary Yiddish punctuation. To the Russian reader, these additions illustrate the collision of cultures and languages that Ulitskaia aims to depict. Just as Shteyngart reflects on the social isolation of Russian as a dominant language within the post-immigration home, Ulitskaia's passage depicts how émigrés experience a dislocation of language in addition to one of physical space. The language choice made by the individual is perhaps one of the most culturally indicative aspects of the post-immigration identity construction. With time, these choices and language patterns will change as local vernacular and colloquialisms become less foreign. Significant research has been conducted from a socio-linguistic perspective regarding the construction of identity through language, including Mark Wilkinson's *The Discursive Construction of Russian-German Identity: Interviews with Russlanddeutsche University Students* (2008). Wilkinson, like Fialkova and Yelenevskaya, draws a correlation between language voice in Russian immigrant communities and the presentation of identity.

Like Shteyngart, Ulitskaia incorporates linguistic code-switching in a humorous context. However, as both texts demonstrate, language obstacles prove to be most noteworthy for post-immigration newcomers. The initial, more superficial aspects of the post-immigration cultural acquisition process quickly lose their lustre as the harsh realities of post-dislocation life set in: "There were many things in this country which Faika had yet to try, and she was in a hurry to buy everything, taste everything, check everything out and form opinions" (Ulitskaia 14). This wonderment is thus often short-

lived. As Reyn illustrates, after the romance of cultural discovery passes, the unfamiliarity of one's surroundings can be more jarring than fascinating. Anna's mother Natasha demonstrates, for example, that the desire to reject newness can be equally strong as the desire to embrace it:

> You have to start early, you know. You will have to learn to keep a man's love. We're not like those Americans, in their mannish pants, their form-hiding sweatshirts, let them get divorced. We Russian women are feminine, Anyechka, and look at you, with your sneakers untied, and that horrible skranchi, as you call it, on top of your head? *A chuchelo*! (165)

The term *chuchelo* (literally, *scarecrow*) in contemporary vernacular can refer to a person who is scattered or on the fringe of society. Anna's mother uses this term in order to emphasize her daughter's lack of Russianness. While Americans regard her as Russian after detecting the hint of an accent, Natasha chastises Anna for being too American. When comparing herself to American women, Nadia identifies herself as Russian, not as Jewish. In creating her feeling of 'home,' Nadia's mentality has not acquired any American characteristics. This cerebral existence in a place of Russian identity directly translates into how Nadia creates her physical environment as well as the environment in which she chooses to place herself. Anna has divorced herself physically from this post-immigration space, but even decades after resettling in Queens, Anna's parents Boris and Natasha derive great comfort from the security of a Russian microcosm:

> She walked by the Russian groceries, where women abused store proprietors over the price of sausages. Anna passed stores she had not entered in years. There was European Fashion for Less, and across the street, International Couture and Parisian Chic, with their mirrored walls, their fur-swaddled mannequins, their sequined gowns with padded shoulders. Their saleswomen, who swore that only the most fashionable women in Moscow, Paris, London were stepping out in this leopard-print pants suit, that fur-collared ballerina dress. (Reyn 1)

In this passage, Anna is walking from the subway station to her parents' apartment in Rego Park. She experiences involuntary nostalgia as she is struck by the unchanging familiarity of the post-immigration community, but she is simultaneously eager to disassociate herself from it. It is almost as though the familiarity of the space her parents call home embarrasses her because she is confronted with visual and tangible reminders of her immigrant identity, the very same identity on which she occasionally chooses to capitalize.

Tanya, the protagonist of Lara Vapnyar's *Memoirs of a Muse,* is a more recent arrival to New York than Anna. When she arrives at her relatives' government-subsidized apartment, she finds a space deliberately constructed as Russian:

> There was something wrong with this room. The sideboard stood in exactly the same spot by the window, and it was filled with the same dishes and figurines as in my uncle's Moscow apartment. The bookshelves were in the same spot too, in the back of the room, and on the upper shelf I saw a piece of whalebone, a sea lion's tusk, and the picture of my uncle playing with polar bear cubs, and my uncle's trophies from his many expeditions to the North. But along with these objects the shelves now boasted letters from Social Security and Medicaid offices tacked to the side, supermarket coupons, a modest black yarmulke[62] for the trips to a Jewish center where they gave out free gefilte fish along with other food, a collection of cheap souvenirs – little cups with names of American cities embossed on them in gold letters, a Mexican hat, a two-inch high Eiffel Tower and a three-inch-long London double-decker. Next to them, the whalebone and the sea lion's tusk looked as if they had been bought in airport gift shops too. (78-79)

Tanya's uncle has, for all intents and purposes, recreated his Moscow environment and superimposed it onto his American surroundings. The placement of the furniture in precise locations and the overall ambiance created by the Russianness of the space indicate to the reader that these are people who identify as Russian.

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[62] A yarmulke is the skullcap worn by religious Jewish men. In modern denominations of Judaism women have also begun to wear garments traditionally reserved for men. In Canada the alternate "kippah" (כיפה) is used more often to refer to these small cloth caps. The yarmulke, or kippah, is a symbol of reverence to God.

For Tanya, who will eventually live with an American Jew on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, the bizarre reality is that she feels most at home in the apartment they share when her lover is away:

> I felt the most comfortable on Tuesdays, the day Mark spent at Bard College, and I stayed alone. With Mark out, I wasn't a bothersome houseguest anymore. I felt that I really lived in this apartment, that everything belonged to me and I could do whatever I wanted. Happy energy would fill me as soon as I heard the low drone of the elevator taking Mark down and away. I'd hum a cheerful tune, dart back and forth through the kitchen and living room, unable to choose from a medley of opportunities Mark's absence afforded me. (137)

Despite living with her lover Mark, Tanya still sees herself as a "bothersome houseguest," because there is no expression of her own identity reflected in the space. Unlike her uncle and aunt's home in Brooklyn that seems vividly reminiscent of their former Soviet space, the apartment in which Tanya actually does reside feels foreign and unnatural unless she is left alone. This indicates to the reader that, for Tanya, coexisting with a non-immigrant is reflected tangibly in the presentation of space. As Tanya is constantly engaged in the performance of her role as artistic muse in Mark's presence, she is unable to feel any sense of authentic belonging, except in his absence.

Tanya has adapted to existing between the two worlds of the Upper East Side and Brighton Beach. Much like Irina in *The Funeral Party*, Tanya does not create any spaces of her own, and her identity presentation is strictly based on her surroundings, such as the environment in which she lives with Mark:

> Central Park, observed with a drink in my hand, looked like an enchanted forest surrounded by fairy-tale castles. The few streets that made up the grid around the big park-adjacent buildings I took to calling the castle grounds. The supermarket, the coffee shops, the stores, the movie theater belonged to the castled grounds, and all the people who worked there as chefs, waiters, movie ushers, book-sellers, or doormen, like Bruno, were there to serve the castle's inhabitants. (*Memoirs* 141)

For Tanya, who feels like an outsider within Mark's upscale environment, the best way to process the world around her is through a mixture of imagination and reality. In both locations, she performs her identity accordingly; however, this also creates a great deal of anxiety for her, especially considering the possibility of her two worlds coming into contact, as though these worlds would be incompatible:

> Afterward, in the quiet of Mark's place, Mark would try to shake off his disgust and would look relieved that he was back in his world, while I would hate myself for sharing his disgust and betraying my relatives, who had meant well and tried hard, and most frightening of all, I would have to hate Mark for making me betray them. (*Memoirs* 149)

Tanya has reached a point in her American acclimation at which, by existing within the non-immigrant world, she is able to see the characteristics that outsiders would interpret as culturally eccentric. She too can detect the unconventional elements of the post-immigration space, but as she additionally understands their nuances, she has sympathy for their inhabitants who are in cultural transition. Tanya herself, despite occupying a similarly luxurious space, feels very much like a shabby piece of furniture that does not fit in while attending literary soirées with Mark's Upper East Side circle; as she puts it, "Being among Mark's friends made me feel especially immigrated" (*Memoirs* 153). Vapnyar very clearly pinpoints the necessity of the post-immigration space with this statement; it exists as it does so that its occupants can have one oasis in which they are not repeatedly confronted with their otherness.

Like Tanya, Anna K. enters a space that is not her own. Both Tanya and Anna are captive to the habitats created by their secular Jewish American-born lovers. While Tanya makes no significant effort to imprint herself upon Mark's space, Anna very much wishes to integrate herself into David's world:

> Anna K. did not fit easily into her new neighborhood. A neighborhood where the remains of old Jewish tailor shops were rubbed off the facades of buildings. Where couples wolfed down burritos on street corners before disappearing into underground nightclubs. Where synagogues had been turned into performance spaces or restaurants, anything but synagogues. Spare boutiques were splattered with brown vintage clothing. Relics of early twentieth-century immigration – yellowing lace tablecloths, rusty samovars, mismatched silver – calcified in the window of the Tenement Museum. (133)

Reyn expresses how lost someone may become within an environment in which everything is clouded by a film of trendy chic and commercialized old world nostalgia. The neighbourhood was once populated by Russian-Jewish immigrants escaping pre-Revolutionary Imperial Russia, but, as Reyn illustrates, this immigrant history is but a shadow, detectable only in the fashionable presentation of a romanticized ethnic quirkiness palatable to American consumers. In fact, what should be noted is that the only true bit of immigrant culture present in the area is Anna herself:

> David's studio apartment was above a bakery, its braided challahs[63] gleaming in the window. She had expected warmth from the owners; she was frequenting a dying operation wasn't she? She could have opted to munch on fashionable cupcakes, but instead she came here straining to understand a single word of Yiddish. But the owners had decided they didn't care for her, she was too flashy, they said in Yiddish as she stood right in front of them, a challah and open wallet in hand. Their own children couldn't afford this neighborhood anymore. How was it that all the rules of immigration were being upended in New York real estate – the children were supposed to have more. (133-34)

Anna is initially confronted with being ostracized by the Jewish bakers from downstairs, who work but do not live in the area. She believes that she will find acceptance from them since they too are presumably immigrants. But this is not their neighbourhood, and they resent her attempts to engage them because they see her as any other image-conscious, trendy young person living within the artificial atmosphere. In reality, she is not young, and does not fit into the dynamic of the neighbourhood any better than the

[63] Challah (חלה) is traditionally Jewish braided bread, often eaten with Shabbat dinner.

Yiddish-speaking bakers. Immigrant culture has been glamorized within this space, but the image that is marketed is one of immigrant chic, just without the immigrants. What had once been tenements became highly coveted, choice living quarters because of the echoes of exoticism and novelty of immigrant culture.

David Bezmozgis's narrator Mark regards North York, Toronto as a modern-day *shtetl*, an immigrant ghetto populated mostly by newly arrived Soviet-born Jewish refugees:

> Goldfinch was flapping clotheslines, a tenement delirious with striving. 6030 Bathurst: insomniac scheming Odessa. Cedarcroft: reeking borscht in the hallways. My parents, Baltic aristocrats, took an apartment at 715 Finch fronting a ravine and across from an elementary school – one respectable block away from the Russian swarm. (*Natasha* 3)

Mark's family perceives an element of prestige in being separated from the nucleus of the Russian-Jewish part of town, as if this somehow distances them from the stigma of the immigrant label. This mentality runs parallel to the sentiments expressed in Vapnyar's text as well as in Shteyngart's. The borders between different levels of status within the post-immigration world are abstract in form, but clearly established for those within the community. Thomas Seifrid, who believes that Russian culture is preoccupied with border definitions, might agree that this can translate also to the borders of social status within the post-dislocation structure. He refers to the Russian cultural obsession with physical borders as "fictitious anxieties" (257). These abstract borders of status become very real following the initial relocation experience. From the apartment on Goldfinch, the Bermans move to a home of their own, crossing one of the most significant post-immigration social and financial borders:

> The year before, we had finally moved out of the apartment building and into a semidetached house. Geographically the move was negligible – looking out my

> bedroom window I could still see our old building – but we now had a backyard, a driveway, a garage for my bicycle and a carpeted basement. We also now had a neighborhood. Across the street, my aunt and uncle bought a similar house. In other houses lived other Russians who had succeeded in accumulating downpayments. (*Natasha* 68)

The family has technically relocated, but, as Bezmozgis indicates, their surroundings essentially remain the same. However, they have managed to create a new post-immigration feeling within their original surroundings.

The perpetual motion of Zakhar's physical transcending of borders makes a tangible home as a site of prolonged residence virtually impossible. Instead, as Shafranskaia observes, Rubina more often equates *home* with a sense of belonging rather than a location:

> Traditionally the *home* in literature (appearing as a form, motif, or a concept) has both real and symbolic characteristics; they are realized in a full range, from the home's inception to its destruction. In Rubina's works *home* is less a dwelling and more the search for it – from spiritual homelessness to achieving harmony, even if it is not attainable, then at least connecting the personal, historical, and mythological experience of the conscious and the subconscious life of the protagonist.[64] (*Sindrom golubki* 21; my translation)

Like many of his fictional and non-fictional peers, Zakhar's search for belonging does not translate to a location, but an overall feeling. In fact, his paintings are perhaps the greatest indicator of the sense of belonging he seeks. His work is never fully his own, and his own signature, the white dove, is always concealed or camouflaged within the image. His lack of security in himself and his surroundings translate directly into his work.

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[64] Традиционно дом в литературе (являясь образом, мотивом, концептом) имеет как реальные, так и символические черты, они воплощаются в диапазоне от созидания дома до его разрушения. У Рубиной дом не столько жилище, сколько его поиск - от душевной бездомности к обретению гармонии, если и недостижимой вообще, то хотя бы интенциально увязывающей личный, исторический и мифологический опыт сознательной и бессознательной жизни героини.

In a broader sense, Zakhar is undergoing the ultimate quest of the Wandering Jew. Zakhar's reversed Exodus takes him across several borders in search of home, in a parallel to the history of the Jewish people as a whole:

> The mythological aspect of the *home* motif is tied to the holiest site for the Jewish people – the Temple, which is simultaneously the House of God, Temple of Holiness, and the House of Holiness, a Temple which rebuilt is deeply associated with the messianic ideal within the consciousness of the Israeli people.[65] (Shafranskaia, *Sindrom golubki* 21-22; my translation)

If for the Jewish people, *home* is regarded not as a place to live, but as the most sacred site from which to worship God, a greater significance is placed on the perpetual focus on movement, as can be seen in the cases of Rubina's female protagonists:

> The search for a *home* by Rubina's heroines is comparable to its "construction" – realizing your Jewishness, the feeling of belonging to your own people. The mythology of *home-Jewishness* is important to those representatives of Jewish history and culture that are concerned with the fate of the Jewish people within the global context.[66] (Shafranskaia, *Sindrom golubki* 41; my translation)

Within the collective Jewish consciousness, the search for permanence supersedes all; even secular Jews will understand the longing for a permanent place for the Jews of the world to call *home*. The concept of 'ascending' to Jerusalem is, therefore, particularly significant in the post-immigration narrative, as this can be regarded as a sort of holy pilgrimage to the cradle of Jewish civilization:

> Ascent in Jewish mythology comes in conjunction with expulsion from Jerusalem – both of these processes are referred to as *Exodus*, that have acquired a fateful

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[65]Мифологическая составляющая мотива дома сопряжена с главной святыней еврейского народа - Храмом, который одновременно и "Дом Господень", и "Храм святости", и "Дом святилища", Храмом, восстановление которого в ментальности народа Израиля ассоциируется с мессианской идеей.

[66] Поиск дома рубинской героиней сродни его "строительству" - а это осознание своего еврейства, ощущение себя частью своего народа. Мифологема дом-еврейство значима в сознании именно тех представителей еврейской истории и культуры, которые озабочены судьбой еврейства в контексте других народов.

> meaning in both Jewish mythology and immigration discourse.[67] (Shafranskaia, *Sindrom golubki* 42; my translation)

For Zakhar, the choice of Jerusalem as a home reflects his unconscious awareness of the city as somehow tied to being Jewish. Zakhar is a consummate wanderer in the tradition of the Wandering Jew, but by tethering himself to Jerusalem, he seems to acknowledge that at his core he considers himself a Jew. However, to a certain extent, he also recreates his pre-immigration environment within the post-immigration setting:

> Obviously, the dilapidated gate was actually solid metal, but was virtuously painted by the owner's own hand to appear though made of wood, with winding snake-like cracks and little eye holes simulating cut branches. A similar gate was used once in their yard's outhouse in Vynnitsa.[68] (Rubina, *White Dove of Cordova* 74; my translation)

Zakhar paints the gate in order to make it appear, on the surface, as though it were wood. Like his overall existence of deception, this disguising of metal as wood serves to artificially evoke a feeling of being in his childhood home in Ukraine. By using a gate as the manifestation of his pre-immigration environment, Zakhar unconsciously erects a border between his inner sanctum and the world beyond. Because of his lack of belonging, Zakhar's use of the gate is a critical indication of both his nostalgic longing and his desire to protect himself from external influences. Whether or not he has superficially integrated into Israeli society is immaterial, as his need to create a border, especially one reminiscent of his life in Ukraine, demonstrates that he still internally views himself as other.

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[67] Восхождение в иудейской мифологии сопряжено с предшествующим изгнанием из Иерусалима - оба этих процесса именуются исход, который в эмигрантском и иммигрантском дискурсах, а также в еврейской мифологии приобрел символический судьбоносный смысл.

[68] *ветхая калитка* на деле была цельнометаллической, но самолично и виртуозно раскрашенной рукою хозяина под деревянную, со змеистыми трещинами по доскам и глазками от спилинных сучьев. На такую запирался когда-то в Виннице их дворовой нужник.

3.7 Food and Consumption in the Post-Immigration Space

Cuisine is an essential piece of the cultural mosaic. As identities become diversified, this will also be reflected in food: its preparation, its fusion, its adaptation:

> Jewish food and Russian food share many features. Because the geographic space is the same, many ingredients are the same: the herring, the onion, the pot cheese and sour cream, the potato, the cabbage and the beet. Russian cookbooks list dishes that both Russians and Jews think of as Jewish. (Nakhimovsky, "You Are" 64)

Because of this overlap, many foods are recognizable to Russians who have had no contact with Jews, and vice versa. Despite this, Nakhimovsky further notes, "Russian culture harbors a longstanding aversion to markedly Jewish foods and smells" ("You Are" 65). She continues by noting that in Russian culture, the smell of garlic carries with it an unfavourable connotation of Jewishness. Additionally, during Soviet rule, Jewish cuisine was not openly acknowledged as Jewish: "The silence about Jewish existence that held for most of Soviet history meant that Jewish cookbooks were few and far between" ("You Are" 69). As a result, the composition and form of Jewish recipes became very individualized, as they were handed down from generation to generation. Just like a game of 'telephone,' with each new generation, there would be variations of and adaptations to Jewish family recipes. However, "despite the half-century during which American and Ashkenazi Jews lived under vastly different circumstances and almost wholly isolated from one other, the two groups would agree on the Jewishness of a large number of foods" (Nakhimovsky, "You Are" 74). Following the Russian *Aliyah* of the *Perestroika* era, there was an even greater melding of Jewish cuisine, as Ashkenazis were introduced to Sephardic foods.[69]

[69] Many Sephardic Jewish foods were introduced to Israeli culture by immigrants from Morocco and Yemen.

In "Food as Art: Paintings in Late Soviet Russia," Musya Glants discusses the connection of visual arts and the symbolism attached to the illustration of food. Having already established the relationship between the *geroi khudozhnik* and the post-immigration narrative, one must also begin to reconsider food within literature as more than merely descriptive:

> Bread, wine, salt, and all the fruits of the earth have a powerful symbolic significance in the culture of nations. Artists have historically included food in still life and genre paintings to enhance its spiritual and aesthetic appeal. Food and the process of eating often express delicate nuances of sensitivity and sensuality, while at the same time tapping into basic human experience. (Glants 215)

As post-immigration literature is by nature dependent on the expression of the experiential element, the necessity of the depiction of food is inherent to these narratives. When reading post-immigration Russian-Jewish literature, the reader is struck by the significant importance placed on food. Food is a pivotal centrepiece of the post-immigration space:

> Just as the portrait of someone who lived long ago brings us the aroma of the epoch, and gives us a chance to almost "touch" the past, so the vital thread of food habits gives us a better understanding of human psychology, intertwining the material and spiritual. (Glants and Toomre xi)

As Glants and Toomre note, food is a vital expression of identity. Many post-immigration Russian-Jewish writers are meticulous about descriptions of food; indeed, Lara Vapnyar even uses food as the connecting motif for her short-story collection *Broccoli and Other Tales of Food and Love*. The importance of what adorns the post-immigration table cannot be overlooked.

Sergey, the main character of Vapnyar's short-story "Borscht," visits a past-her-prime prostitute named Alla. Sergey is mostly desperate for Russian company and

shared *zemliachestvo* more than a sexual rendezvous. After he is unable to perform sexually, Alla offers him something to eat:

> And then the hot borscht was in their plates. Steaming, with colors. All shades of red in perfect harmony with the faded purple of beets, the deep orange of fat rings, the white of sour cream in the middle, and the dark green of parsley bits. (Vapnyar, "Borscht" 48)

The two forge an unlikely intimacy based not on any sexual attraction, but solely on *zemliachestvo*. Vapnyar does not indicate if either character is Jewish, but she does present them within a specific comfort-zone of Russianness. Sergey, who initially sought comfort through sex, finds this sense of calm in the familiarity of food. Both characters are alone in New York with family left behind in Russia. The narrative ends with the two drinking homemade berry vodka to a toast given by Alla: "For going home? No matter if they're waiting for us or not?" to which Sergey answers, "For going home" (*There Are Jews in My House* 49). The characters have created a microcosm of 'home' through food, as if by transporting their taste buds back to their places of birth, their minds too may momentarily exist in pre-immigration nostalgia. Glants asserts, "Food imagery not only deepens the viewer's knowledge of historical and social cultures and the details of everyday life but also intensifies the emotional dialog between the artist and the spectator" (215). If Glants's argument is applied to the relationship between author and reader in this particular story, then the sharing of a meal should be regarded as the most culturally significant point in the narrative. By sharing a meal of borscht, bread and vodka, the two characters are not simply sharing a meal, but a culturally Russian experience.

Reyn's Anna K. participates in a similar culinary transportation of the mind when nostalgically dining alone at a Russian café. She has lost herself in the role she

plays in order to be with her American lover David, and has been rejected by her own immigrant community. She has, in essence, lost her grasp on home:

> A boardwalk in winter – fog-drenched, a bitter wind. Cold penetrating her; Anna was not prepared for the fierceness of an ocean gale. Some days she would warm up at Tatiana's; one of the few diners in the room she ordered only those sentimental dishes from her childhood. Herring in olive oil enveloped by shaved raw onions, hearty borscht with grizzled pieces of beef, smoked sturgeon, marinated green tomatoes, pastry crammed with sour cherries, all washed down with kvas. (216-17)

The cold that Anna feels externally mirrors the chill she has experienced being shunned by her immigrant circle. Her conscious decision to seek out Russian food and a familiar location indicate her desire to reclaim a piece of the identity that she has herself pushed away: "She tried to speak with the waitress in Russian, but so many words came up. She had never had to say that word as a child, and now found it was hidden too deeply, irretrievably in her brain. 'Check please,' she said in English" (217). Although Anna seeks to reconnect with her heritage through the foods she associates with her childhood, her sudden inability to speak Russian with her waitress highlights her subordination of her Russian-Jewish identity to her role as an exoticized muse.

The descriptions of food that accompany meals with Alex K. are strikingly vivid. Anna herself has extremely strong reactions not only to the food, but also to its presentation. There is always something pretentious about eating experiences with her husband, in contrast to the rather humble meals she shares with her lover David. On their first date, "[a]t the end of their meal he picked out their cheeses from the cheese cart – he had known which goat would enhance the remainder of their wine" (Reyn 9). Alex K. is depicted as sophisticated and worldly, as indicated by his refined palate, but Anna K. is not overly impressed by such things: "But who could have imagined that the future Anna

K. of all people would be proposed to in this fashion? In a French restaurant in SoHo – an open kitchen, Languedoc wines, wood-burning oven, the whole cosy shebang – staring at a diamond ring in the middle of her spoon slathered in chocolate" (11). While Alex K. has gone to considerable efforts to impress Anna, these gestures only annoy her: "And the crème brûlée, when it arrived, was delicious, creamy, the perfect brittle blanket, you could barely taste the chestnut. Hence the proposal, the chocolate ring, the expected conclusion. The end" (Reyn 12). Anna's lack of enthusiasm and rejection of these romantic overtures serve to highlight the extent of Alex's cultivation of sophistication. These lavish images of elegant dinners come to a climax with Reyn's description of Alex and Anna's wedding:

> Faberge Russian Restaurant was located on a side street, directly removed from the traffic of Brighton Beach Avenue. (Did you think a restaurant like this could mingle with your common Nationals, the Rasputins, the Catherine the Greats?) Tucked away around the corner from a pierogi stand and a florist who also sold brand-name sneakers at a steep discount, the restaurant had no sign, just a neon egg blinking hot blues and purples. […] Faberge was famously hard to get into, boasting imperial service and a superior Russian-French kitchen. Where is the French part? an uninformed guest might ask, scanning the plates of Salat Olivier, vinaigrette, herring and smoked fish. Ah, but it was everywhere, from the bottles of Merlot on the table, the hors d'ouevres (rather than *zakuski*[70]) that peppered the lazy Susan, the coq au vin (easily mistaken for roasted *kuritza*[71]) glistening as the centerpiece. (29-30)

Despite the vivid description, the language Reyn uses leaves no doubt about the tone of the celebration. No expense has been spared for Alex and Anna's wedding, but the reader is led to understand that all these details are ostentatious examples of Alex's pretension. For Alex, these demonstrations of wealth are more than a haughty show of social status; they also serve to communicate to his post-dislocation community that he,

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[70] *Zakuski* (закуски) are appetizers that precede the meal, and are often accompanied by toasts.

[71] The Russian word for chicken (курица).

Alex K., has made it in the United States. The classification of the cuisine as Russian-French is a marketing ploy to make the restaurant appear more fancy, while still serving the exact same dishes as all the other Russian restaurants in Brighton Beach. Ostensibly, the entire wedding reception is one elaborate public declaration of status.

While Anna's meals with Alex are all coloured by sophisticated chic, her meals with David are far less grandiose, as first seen shortly after Anna leaves her husband to move in with David:

> They spent money on each other – on theater, impulse gifts, lingerie, fresh flowers every week. Then one day at Sephora, David turned a perfume bottle upside down and noted its price, "I can't take care of you like your husband did," he said, and the gifts became rarer, the restaurants cheaper, and the kisses deeper. (134)

Her life with Alex is punctuated by elegant meals, but with David, Anna's existence consists of take-out food containers in a cramped studio apartment. After moving in with David, Anna is constantly confronted with her Russianness by David's friends, his landlords, and his father. Anna and Alex shared a common culture, a common background, and common immigration experiences, so that there was nothing to distinguish Anna as the other; however, with David, she is the lone 'Russian' amongst secular American-born Jews.

Characters such as Anna and her family experience 'Americanization' after decades in the United States, but not the same American culture that David would recognize. Much like the hopelessly mismatched Thanksgiving dinner of Shteyngart's memories, Tanya's first meal in America in *Memoirs of a Muse* is characterized by its lack of cultural continuity. Instead, her aunt and uncle are concerned with the quantity of food served on the table in hopes of demonstrating to their newly emigrated niece the abundant riches of America:

> "Your uncle spent the whole morning and half of his monthly food stamps ripping off the shelves of Russian delis," Maya said, trying to keep her greasy hands away from my back as she hugged me in the little hall of their apartment. "I've never seen so much food," I hurried to assure them. There was indeed plenty of food on the table – sharp, heavy loud food. Each bit had to be announced and supported with comments. (*Memoirs* 73)

In this particular scene, the presentation of food is not used as a means of the mutual sharing of one's culture, but rather as an ostentatious demonstration of western superiority. The presentation of food in this passage serves to alienate Tanya from her family and she sees no reason for the unnecessary use of food stamps which will ultimately result in the family struggling for the rest of the month. Her Aunt Maya continues to impress her with the quantity of their food:

> "Try cream cheese, Tanya! It tastes like nothing you've ever tried before."
> "They have cream cheese in Russia."
> "No they don't."
> "Yes, they have."
> "No; it's called 'melted cheese' and it tastes differently."
> "Tanechka, put some smoked salmon on your cream cheese. Yes, like that. No, no, put some more! Don't spare it! Thank God we're not in Russia anymore!" (*Memoirs* 73-74)

After the meal is finished, Tanya becomes ill from the excess food. When her uncle comments that the smoked salmon must have given her food poisoning, her aunt replies, "The food was fresh. She just ate too much. She saw all the food and couldn't stop herself" (*Memoirs* 81). While Tanya has an idealized image of post-immigration life, her family in Brooklyn has an exaggerated, fatalistic view of the former Soviet space. Maya's declaration that Tanya was so seduced by the array of food that she lost self-control is obviously ridiculous, but the statement itself illustrates how the conditions of pre-immigration hardships are dramatized in the memories of those who have resettled. As Glants puts it, food becomes an "important symbol of well-being" (219). Tanya's

family attempts to create this picture of well-being, but much like the Thanksgiving meals described by Shteyngart and Reyn, this attempt appears to the outsider as awkward. Tanya's uncle wants to maintain this image of well-being, but it is the morning after her arrival that Vapnyar's protagonist sees her first glimpse of the family's reality:

> I was looking forward to my first American breakfast. "Americans are so stupid," my uncle said raising his head to me. He was crouched on the kitchen floor with a bunch of walnuts. "They buy these expensive kinds of cereal with nuts and dried fruit in them, when you can buy a cheap kind and simply add the nuts and the raisins." He cracked the walnuts with a chair leg, then brought them up to the table and crushed them with his fist. (Vapnyar, *Memoirs* 81-82)

Her uncle idealizes American chic while simultaneously resenting that it is still out of reach, even after several years have elapsed since the family immigrated. While this scene is intended to be comical, in reality it is also tragic, and Tanya begins to feel sorry for her aunt and uncle as she herself begins to transition into Mark's Upper East Side reality. This scene with Tanya's uncle is vividly contrasted by Tanya's description of breakfast with Mark: "Breakfast, Mark cooked himself – a strange but edible concoction of cereal, with dried fruits and nuts, plain yogurt, soy milk, organic grape jelly and some nasty powder from a plastic jar" (*Memoirs* 130). The representations of food in the two contrasting locations serves as an ongoing point of reference for Tanya in separating the post-immigration space from the apartment she shares with Mark.

Tanya associates these gourmet import foods, after the fact, with her time spent with Mark. Glants and Toomre note that food "brings together the past and present by shedding new light on former beliefs and customs. Food images in this sense convey meanings beyond their physical representation" (xxv). Initially, Tanya believes that Mark expects her to cook and clean for him, but she is not domestically inclined. While

speaking on the phone with her mother in Moscow, Tanya asks for her mother's advice, and her mother replies:

> "Do you remember that fish soup I used to make you? Your grandmother taught me right before my wedding. Your father liked it a lot. The soup is delicious, and so simple; you'll have no trouble cooking it. You put just any kind of fish there, even canned fish, and onions. Potatoes too. Carrots? I can't remember. I'll look up the recipe for you. Tanya, call me please keep calling me. And keep your job, okay? And promise you'll keep looking for a good school!" I turned onto my other side and suddenly had a vision of the fish soup in my bowl. A clear pond where bright green parsley sprigs and red discs of carrots swam amid grey bits of fish. "Wait, Tanya, wait," my mother told me, "Let me put the egg in." White-and-yellow circles of hard-boiled eggs slid off the cutting board and into my bowl. They were beautiful. They were the secret ingredient for the fish soup. I could do that. I'd make the soup and slice an egg for Mark, and he would smile at me, admiring the gentle taste and aroma. (*Memoirs* 128)

Tanya will in fact never make this soup for Mark, but her own memory of her mother's soup is both comforting and reassuring to the young woman. The description relies on both visual and taste sense memory, both of which transport Tanya to a place of security. It is not only that she associates this soup with her mother, her home in Moscow, and the familiarity of Russian culture; it also facilitates her imagining herself integrating into Mark's world. In reality, there is no such need for an integration of her Russianness into their life together:

> Lunch was served to us in one of the little cafés where I had peeked longingly in the window just months before. A dinner most often materialized from a pile of takeout menus. I soon learned to make simple sandwiches that Mark liked as a late-night snack, and brew coffee or tea the way he preferred. (*Memoirs* 130)

Although this passage does indicate that Tanya prepares food for Mark, it is specifically only the foods of which he has approved, and there is no indication in the text of her introducing him to anything Russian. In this way, Mark never actually knows Tanya, but only the image of Tanya that he dictates. But even as Mark is imagining a reality that does not exist, Tanya too is finding that her projections of who she would become in an

American environment are very different. At the same time that she is learning to brew Mark's coffee to his exact specifications, she begins to dislike coffee:

> Some time after I moved to the United States I grew to dislike coffee. I can't say that I developed a deep distaste for it; it simply didn't please me anymore. I stopped falling asleep with the thought of tomorrow's morning cup of coffee. I stopped feeling a thrill upon breaking cappuccino froth with grains of sugar. I stopped sneakily adding cream to my espresso to make it last longer. My enthusiasm was lost. (*Memoirs* 56)

This is the complete opposite of what she anticipates prior to emigrating: "Back in Russia I used to be crazy for coffee" (57). Prior to her self-elected displacement, coffee symbolized something exotic: "'He can get instant coffee,' my mother would say about somebody. And I would become filled with awe and think of that person as if he were a fairy-tale wizard with a beard and a magic wand" (58). But alongside Mark's exoticizing of Tanya for his own titillation, the allure of coffee to Tanya becomes banal. The symbol of coffee is a critical turning point in Tanya's post-immigration journey. It is unclear whether this change is precipitated by the necessity to cater to Mark's specifications or simply symptomatic of post-immigration adjustment, but nevertheless, the narrator articulates this as a major shift in her cultural consciousness.

Similarly, for Gary Shteyngart, certain foods and tastes become representative of various chapters in his life:

> The hunger is strong inside me. And it is strong for meats. "Doctors kolkasa," a soft Russian mortadella substitute; then as my teeth grow in completely, *vetchina*, or Russian ham, and buzhenina, dangerously chewy cold baked pork, a taste of which will linger on the tongue for hours. (*Little Failure* 23)

Shteyngart notes that these foods do not sound appetizing to the American palate he has cultivated, but nevertheless, there are particular foods that are associated with his pre-

immigration memory and assume the importance of nostalgic delicacies. Another example is his description of cheese:

> You can't just command 'Write!' to your charges. There must be a reward system. Grandma Galya does not have access to the cold baked pork I love so well, but she does possess another important staple: cheese. It is thick, hard, yellowish Soviet cheese, a poor relation to the megatons of orange lactose that the United States government will drop on my grandma Polya three years hence, in Rego Park, Queens. (*Little Failure* 59)

Shteyngart attaches a memory to both varieties of cheese. The first memory does not describe the cheese as appetizing, but nevertheless positive. It is the situational memory attached to it that gives the Soviet cheese its significance. The second, the American cheese, is described with equally unappealing attributes, but lacks the sentimentality of its counterpart. The mirroring of cheese being given to him first by his maternal grandmother and later by his paternal grandmother preserves this juxtaposition while also highlighting the separation of memories. Although foods the narrator associates with his pre-immigration life are illustrated in a manner that is undoubtedly unappealing to his American readership, his discussions of food that he encounters after immigration lack the former's nostalgic positivity:

> Back at my parents' house, we feast on Russian or, I should say, Soviet cuisine. Breakfast is a plate of roasted buckwheat grouts with a puddle of butter soaking up the middle. Supper is a plate of thick salty farmer's cheese with a can of frozen peaches dumped on it. ("just like they serve in the restaurants!" my mother cries, as if she's ever been to a restaurant). And around 3:00 PM a piece of boiled meat and some kind of wan vegetable are beaten into submission. "Please," I beg my mother. "If you let me eat only half a plate of buckwheat grouts, I'll vacuum the whole apartment tomorrow. If you skip the farmer's cheese I'll give you back part of my allowance." (*Little Failure* 152)

Because these foods followed the family to New York, they do not possess the same nostalgic appeal as the Russian meats or even the Soviet cheese. These foods remind the narrator of the Soviet experience, and symbolically evoke negative associations.

Conversely, the narrator describes the decadence of culinary variety experienced at his grandmother's apartment:

> Whilst I recline on the divan like a pasha, three hamburgers topped with coleslaw and mustard and a fart of ketchup are quickly brought to me. I eat them up with trembling hands as my grandmother peers turtle-like from behind the kitchen door, eyes wide with anxiety. "Are you still hungry my favourite one?" she whispers. "Do you want more? I'll run to Queens Boulevard, I'll run to 108th Street, I'll run anywhere!" "Run, Grandma, run!" And Grandma raises dust through central Queens, her arms straining under the weight of pepperoni pizza pies, greenish pickle slices, cervelat smoked sausages from Misha and Monya's Russian *gastronom*, ridged potato chips covered in some kind of orange crud, mayonnaise-heavy tuna-fish salad from the kosher store, thick pretzels that I pretend to smoke like cigars, ranch dip that brings to mind a hint of the garlic that's all but absent in our Little Neck garden apartment, packets of creamy chocolaty Ding Dongs, cartons of Sara Lee layer cake. I eat and eat, trans fats clogging my little body. (*Little Failure* 153)

Shteyngart juxtaposes the bland cuisine of his parents' home with that of extreme American indulgence. Even the sheer abundance of variety is a reference to the banality of Soviet food. For Shteyngart, because of this orgy of culinary decadence, the post-immigration space of his grandmother's apartment takes on a drastically different character than that of his parents' home. However, the narrator does also show a nostalgic fondness for what the Russian foods symbolize in his life:

> And I know this sandwich. Because he has made it for me. Two slices of that dark, unbleached Russian bread, the kind that tastes of badly managed soil and a peasant's indifference to death. On top of it, the creamiest, deadliest American butter, slathered in thick feta-like hunks. And on top of that, cloves of garlic, the garlic that is to give me strength, that is to clear my lungs of asthmatic gunk, and make of me a real garlic-eating strong man. At a table in Leningrad and a table in deepest Queens, New York, the ridiculous garlic crunches beneath our teeth as we sit across from each other, the garlic obliterating whatever else we have eaten, and making us one. (*Little Failure* 44)

The butter and garlic sandwiches transcend both time and space as unconventional constants connecting the nostalgic threads of past and present. The sandwich is the same in New York as it was in Leningrad, providing the narrator with a sense of familiarity and

comfort. Unlike the Americanized foods he consumes in bulk at his grandmother's, this sandwich is not a delectable treat for which the narrator yearns. Taste is beside the point in this instance; it is the composition and presentation of the sandwich, the mere presence of which is evocative of strong cultural associations.

Like Shteyngart's narrator, Vapnyar's Tanya feels a similar mix of exploration and liberation with food, but only while alone in the apartment she shares with her American lover:

> Mark's kitchen was a rich place to explore. He would often visit the gourmet department of a food store and be seduced by some foreign-looking jar, which ended up gathering dust in one of his kitchen cabinets or sweating in the back of the fridge. I would climb up on a chair and perform an act of liberation, pulling these jars out into the light, tearing off the protective tape, unscrewing the lids. I would scoop tiny bits of food from the jars and say "Exquisite!" mimicking the orgasmic beauties from the TV food ads. "Oh…such a sensual delight!" "Umm…so good!" "More, give me more!" My next step was to taste from the careful array of opened bottles in the bar. I'd never seen Mark drinking, yet there were at least twenty different bottles in his apartment. Most often I would take a sip right from the bottle, stir it in my mouth, raise one brow, and pronounce the verdict: "Fully-bodied…maybe just a little bit too full-bodied." (*Memoirs* 140)

Like Shteyngart's protagonist, Tanya is experiencing food as an almost overwhelming barrage of selection. Shteyngart's narrator, as an adolescent, exhibits little self-control and is mesmerized by the quantity and variety of food available to him; Tanya, on the other hand, is focused not on the sensual experience of the taste, but on the performance of a highly stylized eating ritual. By doing this in secret, she is able both to hide her naïveté about these new products and to maintain a specific identity that she has designed around Mark. Glants and Toomre note, "The absence or presence of food, as well as its preparation and elaboration, help us define ourselves and our relation to those around us and the world that we inhabit" (xxiv-xxv). The dichotomy over food within Tanya's and Mark's relationship highlights the power dynamics between them; Mark, the dominant

person in the relationship, makes the decisions about food, while Tanya, the subaltern of the pair, eats in secret. As Glants and Toomre point out, "These features inevitably turn food into a tool of power in its different manifestations" (xxv). Tanya acquiesces to Mark's peculiarities with food while remaining both puzzled and repulsed by his habits. Tanya will eventually be less dazzled by Mark and all that he represents, at which point she begins pilfering the discarded gourmet foods to take to her uncle. "The giving or withholding of food is perhaps the ultimate weapon of control" (Glants and Toomre xxv), and Tanya gradually asserts this control.

For Bezmozgis's Mark Berman, the depiction of food speaks to the juxtaposition the character and his family experience between their relationship to food pre-immigration in the Soviet Union, and post-immigration in Toronto. The protagonist comments on this first from the perspective of generational divisions:

> Before Stalin, my great-grandmother lit the candles and made an apple cake every Friday night. In my grandfather's recollections of prewar Jewish Latvia, the candles and apple cake feature prominently. When my mother was a girl, Stalin was already in charge, and although there was still apple cake, there were no more candles. By the time I was born there were neither candles nor apple cake, though in my mother's mind apple cake still meant Jewish. With this in mind she retrieved the apple cake recipe and went to the expensive supermarket for the ingredients. (*Natasha* 30)

The progression of the representation of apple cake illustrates how different generations of Soviet Jews were regarded. As Nakhimovsky notes, one generation would have the luxury of culinary variety and delicacies, while also openly observing the Sabbath, while the following generation would have fewer of these freedoms. As Bezmozgis's passage indicates, this progression continued from generation to generation until neither the availability of foodstuffs nor the observation of Jewish cultural traditions were present. Bella Berman tries to portray her family as respectable Jews by producing a food that she

equates with the essence of Jewishness. Despite this, the Kornblums politely reject the cake as not kosher.

The lack of food selection in the Soviet Union is combated by the depiction of plenty within the post-immigration setting. Mark Berman finds himself able to indulge in a way that was not previously possible: "When the phone rang I was already seated on the parquet floor in front of the television: I had a Hungarian salami sandwich on my lap as well as the plastic wrappers from a half dozen chocolate-covered prunes" (*Natasha* 28). He then proceeds to finish all the candy before his mother gets home. Although the author does not expressly put it in these terms, it is implied that Mark's excitement over having all of these products so readily available, and in hitherto unseen quantities, renders him unable to satiate his cravings. In "The Second Strongest Man in the World," the Berman family is excited to take Sergei to the grocery store in order to showcase this abundance of selection:

> "So where are you taking me today?" "Mama says we'll go to the supermarket, she thinks you'll like it."
> "The super market."
> "The good super market. They have every kind of food." (*Natasha* 52)

Although the reader may find the idea of a supermarket as a choice tourist destination somewhat unusual, the Bermans believe Sergei will be interested because a grocery store, taken for granted in North America, is a rarity in the Soviet Union. However, what Bella neglects to take into consideration is that, because of Sergei's high profile as an athlete, he has travelled the world extensively. From his early childhood in Riga, Mark recalls: "Dressed in the newest imported fashions, he brought exotic gifts: pineapples, French perfume, Swiss chocolate, Italian sunglasses" (*Natasha* 45). Because the Bermans themselves had not experienced the west until immigrating to Toronto, Bella assumes

that Sergei will be as awestruck as they had been following their first grocery store excursion.

Bezmozgis highlights the importance of variety and availability in his story "An Animal to the Memory." In this story, Mark Berman has already celebrated his bar mitzvah and has been in Canada for the better part of a decade. Still, the theme of the abundance and selection of food presents itself, as Mark gets in a fight with a boy after he is given a salami sandwich in his lunch:

> Less than a month before I gave Jerry Ackerman his concussion I'd gotten into a fight with two eighth graders. Because of dietary laws, the school prohibited bringing meat for lunch. Other students brought peanut butter or tuna fish, but I – and most of the other Russians – would invariably arrive at school with smoked Hungarian salami, Polish bologna, roast turkey. Our mothers couldn't comprehend why anyone would choose to eat peanuts in a country that didn't know what it meant to have a shortage of smoked meat. And so, I was already sensitive about my lunch when the two eighth graders stopped by my table and asked me how I liked my pork sandwich.[72] (*Natasha* 70)

This passage is particularly significant on several levels: the disregard for kosher eating, the social stigma associated with being different, and the juxtaposition between Canadian-born Jews and Russian-speaking immigrant Jews at the school. Mark's unkosher lunch very clearly identifies him as the child of immigrants, with all the negative stereotypes that accompany this label. Due to a lack of exposure to Jewish traditions under Communism, many Soviet Jews remained unaware of the specifics of Jewish laws, and such unintentional blunders would quickly identify them as outsiders. For instance, in "Russians in Berlin," Wladimir Kaminer describes the initial impressions

[72] Jewish schools and organizations will mandate that meat not be brought onto the premises in order to preserve Kashrut. By making their kitchens and utensils dairy-specific, these organizations are able to avoid the problem of people bringing the meat of animals banned under Jewish law, and also meat that has not been slaughtered according to Kosher standards.

of himself and his fellow Soviet-Jewish émigrés with similar unawareness of Jewish tradition:

> The rabbi asked one lady what Jews ate at Easter. "Gherkins," said the lady, "gherkins and Easter cake."
> "What makes you think they eat gherkins?" demanded the rabbi, agitated.
> "Oh right, now I know what you mean," returned the lady, beaming. "At Easter we Jews eat matzohs."
> "Well, fair enough, the fact of the matter is that Jews eat matzohs all year round, and that means that they eat them at Easter too. But tell me," enquired the rabbi, "do you actually know what matzohs are?"
> "Of course I do," replied the lady, delighted. "They're those biscuits baked to an ancient recipe with the blood of little children."
> The rabbi fainted clear away. There were men who circumcised themselves purely to avoid questioning like this. (17)

Although Mark is not being tested on his Jewishness per se, his experience at school with both Canadian-Jewish and other Soviet-Jewish students is not unlike a daily test of social observation. Mark is singled out and made to feel as though he is somehow not a real Jew because of his consumption of pork, isolating an already isolated character. Ultimately, what Bezmozgis himself remembers most vividly is not the cultural differences, but the poverty:

> It was class more than culture, I think, I think it was not having money. And I think it was feeling that, compared to some of my school-mates I had more than the culture itself, as I remember it now. The culture you acquire quickly as a kid. You pick up the language pretty quickly, you can do all those things. But I think the class issue which you feel, and also feeling that your parents are vulnerable – I think that's also tough. ("Bezmozgis on Natasha")

This poverty was compounded for those who emigrated from the Soviet Union, as they were prohibited from taking the majority of their possessions, sizable sums of money or anything deemed valuable to the Communist state. This reality makes Bezmozgis's repetition of selection and choice subtle allusions to the presentation of wealth.

Experiencing a lack of human comforts makes the creation of home a formidable obstacle within the post-immigration setting. All of the authors provide detailed juxtapositions of their pre- and post-immigration worlds. Interestingly, ethnic Jews from the Soviet Union experienced unhomeliness on both sides of their immigration journey; first because of their Jewish identities, and later because of their exoticness. This leaves characters such as Mark Berman in a perpetual liminal state. The post-immigration endeavour to create a sense of home is, in essence, an attempt to eliminate feelings of liminal existing. All of the authors discussed here present the persistent theme of unhomeliness more symbolically than physically. These texts would seem to indicate that the majority of these characters try to claim this sensation of belonging through the cultivation of homely spaces. However, because of a feeling of social rejection on both ends of the immigration process, this concept of home is an idealized falsehood that suggests that, for these characters, unhomeliness is a permanent state.

Chapter 4 -- The Performativity of Cultural Identity

> The Russian soul – *velikaia russkaia dusha*. Much ink has been spilled on it, no one can adequately articulate what it entails. It is generally agreed that the term is lazy, amorphous, an exclusive gift of the suffering Russians. Does it have anything to do with the bitter cold? Communist timetables? Policing Grandmothers? The addictive qualities of vodka? Wars fought with little training, shoddy clothing, and primitive equipment? An affection for murderous dictators? Ambivalence at the Westernizing innovations of Peter the Great? Fyodor Dostoyevsky called it the "Russian disease…an indifference towards everything that is vital – towards the truth of life, everything that nourishes life and generates health." But is there truth to any of it, or is it just a story, a myth created to justify ones suffering?
>
> (Reyn 13)

4.1 Introduction

When one hears the term *performance*, the initial associations that come to mind concern the theatre, actors and spectacle: "Philosophers rarely think about acting in the theoretical sense, but they do have a discourse of 'acts' that maintains associative semantic meanings with the theory of performance and acting" (Butler, "Performativity Acts and Gender Construction" 519). In Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock postulates, in one of English literature's most iconic monologues, that it is a Jewish identity, and not any fundamentally manifested difference, that serves as the cultural signifier of Jewishness:

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal'd by the same means, warm'd and cool'd by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? (*MoV* 3.1. 302)

Indeed, it is nothing more than Shylock's Jewish label that singles him out as other in the eyes of Christian society. But what is the outcome when the 'Jew' and the 'Russian soul'

collide in one character? Additionally, what happens when these already divided identities assimilate into the culture of the dominant adopted society? One such example is Rey Chow's question of whether the exotic cultural image as perceived by western society is original or performative. This would seem to indicate that in the modern globalized world, the oriental is capitalized on by playing into western stereotyping so that the other can appeal to the dominant cultural group. In essence, the visible minority exaggerates stereotypical features to perform a cultural identity as defined in popular culture. Livak notes that "[e]thnocultural otherness is not a matter of fully independent personal choices – our culture shapes us as much as it is shaped by us" (*The Jewish Persona in the European Imagination* 1). Chow's critique of Chinese cinema demonstrates how a caricatured cultural image is portrayed to draw in western audiences. Carrie Dawson also discusses this in "The Importance of Being Ethnic and the Value of Faking It," which focuses on the work of Asian-Canadian writer Fred Wah (1939-), who himself states, "the pressure to fake ethnic authenticity by considering what it means to consequently be construed and to construe oneself as fake" (Wah 50). Wah's work deals with a unique sentiment of cultural in-betweenness:

> Stances towards writing that have arisen out of an ethnic response demonstrate inventions of alignment and resistance. Immigrant, ethnic, and native writers in Canada have utilized most of the available public aesthetics in order to create a more satisfying space within which to investigate their particular realities. For some writers this entails an alignment with mainstream and traditional strategies while for others the tactics of refusal and retorritorialization offer a more appropriate poetics. (Wah 51)

Wah feels that, because he is a writer of Chinese heritage in Canada, his work is somehow expected to contain culturally demonstrative themes. Wah's case illustrates how self-orientalizing manifests as an external layer of the performative identity.

Dawson shows how Wah strives to identify himself as less assimilated into Canadian society:

> But unlike what he construes as his earlier attempts to mimic the formality of academic prose, Wah's return to the essay is, he says, not about 'trying to overcome the imprint of accent' but is rather about finding a way to articulate the imprint of accent, culture and colour without capitulating to the pressure to confess or perform his ethnicity for a largely white audience. (2)

Situations like that of Fred Wah are easily compared to the Russian-Jewish immigrant experience. As Adrian Wanner indicates, Wladimir Kaminer, like Wah, knowingly manipulates cultural generalizations in his own presentation of self:

> Kaminer skilfully capitalizes on German clichés about the Russian national character by playing on such stereotypes as the Russian penchant for hard drinking, sentimentality, and chaotic spontaneity, which are antagonistically opposed to notions of German neatness, dullness and pedantry. ("Wladimir Kaminer" 590-91)

Cultural stereotypes, although derogatory, and more often than not, unfavourable, are derived from and perpetuated by superficial observations. As is the case with Kaminer's use of stereotyping, these generalizations can also be manipulated as performative indicators to give the reader a point of reference. It is therefore not unreasonable to theorize that for many immigrants, who are exposed to and assimilate cultural stimuli routinely, stereotypes serve as introductory information to be discarded as cultural understandings deepen. These intricate identities are played out daily in all walks of life, as Shakespeare acknowledges in Jaques' soliloquy in *As You Like It:* "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts" (*AYLI* 2.7. 139). Performance, as Jaques acknowledges, is not limited to the theatre, nor is the concept of multiple roles reserved only for actors.

This chapter explores topics of character construction and cultural identity performance, and their representations in the various literary works discussed in this project. Ellen Litman calls the post-immigration identity "distorted" in the sense that already established identities are challenged and repositioned within each post-immigration situation:

> This is what's wrong with immigration. Those who would be your friends at home here become cautious competitors. Parents envy their children. Sisters become dangerous – all that private information they can unleash at a strategically chosen moment. It's about surviving. Immigration distorts people. We walk around distorted. (19)

But is this a "distortion," as Litman suggests, or rather the performance of multilayered cultural identity being constantly renegotiated? This chapter explores textual examples of identity performance, as well as the stereotyping that often colours such cultural pageantry. For instance, in Gary Shteyngart's *The Russian Debutante's Handbook,* Vladimir is told by "the Fan man" Rybakov:

> Yes, yes. My son and the Fan are of like mind on this issue as well: You are a Jew, and a Jew isn't stupid: you have to give him something to make it worth his while. I'm sure you're familiar with the old Russian proverb: if there's no water in the sink, then the Yids have had their drink… (22)

Rybakov, peculiar though he may be, does not mean to offend Vladimir Girshkin. However, this kind of flippant cultural othering, which would be distressing in Western society due to racial implications, can be seen as typical for those who have lived the majority of their lives under Soviet rule. Rybakov both reveres and fears Vladimir for his mysterious Jewishness. While relating to him as a fellow countryman, "a *russki muzhik*, not like some of these assimilationist children with their law degrees" (21), he feels and maintains a well-defined line between himself and the unfamiliar Jewishness of Vladimir. In reality, Vladimir is hardly projecting a Jewish identity within his social-worker office

environment. This poses the question of what cultural elements are being actively performed, and what is being perceived through the filter of a preconceived character type. Quite often it is the cultural stereotyping of certain archetypal figures that ultimately shape how identity is performed. In reference to Avraam Uri Kovner[73] (1842-1909), Murav observes "His life text can be read as a two-way mirror of the two cultures he inhabited. Sometimes the mirror is distorted, as in a funhouse. To examine how Kovner invents and reinvents himself as a man without a label means at the same time to trace the multiple forms by which he reinvents Jewishness and Russianness and is reinvented as a Jew" (8). With perpetual reinvention, how do the analyzed works present the performance of the Russian-Jewish post-immigration soul and illustrate the multilayered cultural identity, and what does this communicate to the reader about this highly specific socio-cultural group?

4.2 Creating and Performing Identity: Historical Factors and Stereotypes

In this section I explore the interrelation between the shaping and performing of the post-immigration identity, the superhero narrative in popular culture and stereotyping. Although a correlation between Russian-Jewish post-immigration characters and superheroes such as Superman (1938) or Batman (1939) might seem far-fetched, this is precisely what I am suggesting in my discussion of the genesis of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. In *Disguised as Clark Kent: Jews, Comics and the Creation of the Superhero* (2007), Danny Fingeroth explores a phenomenon that arose from the creative minds of young Jews from poor immigrant families in the United States following the Great Depression: the birth of the superhero. He associates the collective creative

[73] Kovner, born in Vilnius, was a controversial Jewish intellectual essayist and literary critic. He is also credited under the *nom de plume* Albert Kovner.

consciousness of those who created these characters with a necessity to assert power and strength within their own personal identities.

In June 1938, comic book creators Jerry Siegel (1914-96) and Joe Shuster (1914-92) made history when they introduced America to Clark Kent and his alter ego, Superman. Shteyngart describes his own childhood alter ego, Gary Gnu in *Little Failure*, in very similar terms; and, much like the characters of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature, Clark Kent was not a native of his surrounding culture. Forced to don a secret identity to assimilate into society, Clark Kent can be seen as a case of a multifaceted identity as an early manifestation of what would become the multilayered cultural distinctiveness. After all, as an extraterrestrial, Superman undergoes the ultimate cultural displacement experience.

In *From Krakow to Krypton: Jews in Comic Books,* Arie Kaplan notes, "there had been caped costumed characters, like Zorro and The Phantom, who wore masks and had secret identities, but here was a character with a real reason for having a secret identity: he was not one of us!" (13). Like his DC Comics predecessors, Batman, created by Bob Kane (Robert Kahn, 1915-98) and Bill Finger (1915-74), also embodied many of the characteristics to which two young Jewish boys from struggling immigrant families would have aspired: wealth, respect, and most of all, the ability to save the people of Gotham City from evil. Superhero fiction gave these Jewish creators an outlet for performing, by proxy, fantastical roles that did not have the same social limitations that their cultural status placed upon them:

> Jewish identity is historically about the push and pull towards and away from that very identity. As immigrants with a history of persecution, Jews came to America with their heads down but their eyes open. Finding in America a civilization freer of officially sanctioned anti-Semitism and replete with a philosophy that allowed

> the individual to succeed, at least in theory to the extent of his or her abilities, Jews were faced with unprecedented freedom and opportunity. (Fingeroth 27)

A discussion of the genesis of the modern superhero can in fact yield significant insight into the advent of the Russian-Jewish post-immigration character construction. Where once the superhero character served as a creative means for the children of Jewish-American immigrants to assert a sense of power and strength within society (albeit fictional), post-immigration narratives allow Russian-speaking ethnic Jews to showcase their intellect within societies that marginalize them for their post-immigration identities. However, as Shteyngart comments, "In three novels I have written about the immigrant experience in the final years of the twentieth century with a sense of righteous ownership. But my parents came to this country stuffed with advanced degrees and keen to master the international language of English" (*Little Failure* 35). This further highlights the nonreciprocal relationship between education and social standing in the post-immigration experience. Fingeroth further relates this lack of social standing to the superhero phenomenon:

> But the creation of the superhero seems to have been more than a function of happenstance. The creation of a legion of special beings, self-appointed to protect the weak, innocent, and victimized at a time when fascism was dominating the European continent from which the creators of the heroes hailed, seems like a task that Jews were uniquely positioned to take on. One might say they were cornered into it. The fantasy of godlike beings who could solve our problems was a cry of hope as well as of despair, as the Jews were the canaries in the coal mine of hate that was Nazism, sounding a simultaneous cry for help and a warning that *you could be next*. (17, emphasis in original)

Born under the shadow of the First World War, having come of age during the strife of the Great Depression, these sons of Jewish immigrants first found their voices in the supernatural powers and unrivalled might of their fictional characters. These characters assumed the qualities of which the authors themselves were deprived by prejudice. By

inflating their characters' abilities to astronomical levels, they were able to reclaim some of the outward strength they themselves lacked:

> It doesn't take much of a stretch to see these post-Holocaust young (edging toward middle-age) Jewish men – who, if their parents or grandparents hadn't fled Europe would very likely have perished in the Holocaust wanting to, in some way, journey across time and space to find out more about the world they (or parents) had left behind, a world which had since vanished. (Fingeroth 21)

American journalist Eric Weiner has recently presented a theory regarding the clustering of great human innovations within certain physical regions at specific times in history. Weiner's *The Geography of Genius* (2016) asserts that western civilization's most monumental discoveries, artistic accomplishments, musical brilliance and scientific breakthroughs, have not occurred at random, but are rather the results of the particular times and places in which the creative inspiration occurred. He theorizes that what he refers to as 'genius' is much like a wave of self-propagating productivity that remains in a given place for a span of time in which countless external factors come together to form a cultural climate conducive to such ingenuity:

> Every place of genius contains the seeds of its own destruction. The Greeks, I think, were aware of this. While they didn't know precisely when their day in the sun would end, surely they knew that just as "human happiness never remains long in the same place" as Herodotus said, neither does human genius. Sure enough, after the fall of Athens, genius drifted several thousand miles east, where a very different, but no less brilliant, golden age blossomed. (63)

Thus, New York of the late 1930s and early 1940s gave rise to the era of superhero, and specifically to what Arie Kaplan has called the "Golden Age" of comic books:

> A disproportionate amount of the talent brought into this fledgling industry was Jewish. A list of the major accomplishments of Jewish comic professionals during the comics' Golden Age reads like a list of the major accomplishments of the *industry* during this period. (Kaplan 27, emphasis in original)

With Weiner's theory as a foundation, similar principles can be applied to the study of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature. In the same way that Ancient Greece boasted unsurpassed levels of mathematical achievement, Renaissance Italy saw the unveiling of paintings and sculptures that set the standard for fine art, and Silicon Valley paved the way for technological trailblazing, so did the Soviet Union's collapse give way to the age of Russian-Jewish post-immigration narratives. Just as Weiner contends that 'genius' thrives in specific places, at certain times, due to a perfect storm of given social and cultural circumstances, the oppression and marginalization of Soviet Jewry brought about a sort of 'Golden Age' for immigration and writing. As Fingeroth explains, "The perennial outsiders' views enable one to process a society's values and to create entertainment that resonates with those values and that is perhaps occasionally able to rise above the level of entertainment to cultural contributions of meaning" (23).

Jews were compelled by circumstances within society to leave the Soviet Union, but there is something unique about this given time in history that has produced a great number of authors. What set these writers apart as a group, according to Sander Gilman, is that "Jewish authors have felt compelled to respond to this image of difference, and to create a counter image of the Jew who sounds Jewish, for within their creation of texts, Jewish authors are Jews who sound Jewish" (*The Jew's Body* 11). The decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union have seen a prolific 'Golden Age' of post-immigration writing in general and Russian-Jewish post-immigration writing in particular. At the forefront of this literary movement is the thematic exploration of cultural identities, both those that are consciously performed and those that are unconsciously manifested.

In *Little Failure,* Gary Shteyngart describes his mother as appearing to be "half Jewish, which, given the place and time, is too Jewish by half" (21). In early vaudeville, many North Americans were presented with the first caricatured impressions that they would come to associate with Jews. The stereotype of the Wandering Jew had crossed the Atlantic and landed squarely on American stages, replete with all his previously established grotesque features:

> These entertainers created caricatures that exploited the anti-Semitic attitudes of the time; their acts recapitulated negative stereotypes of Jews including their supposed unkempt appearance, unattractive faces, and pervasive dishonesty. By wearing crepe hair, exaggerated noses made from putty, and long dark clothes, these actors were able, with a few distinguishing features, to give audiences, many of whom did not know any Jews, the pleasure of indulging anti-Semitic feelings. (Merwin 19)

Jews in popular culture suffered even harsher ridicule in Germany under the fanatically anti-Semitic publications of Julius Streicher[74] (1885-1946). Meanwhile, Jews in the Soviet Union were depicted as cosmopolitan, and thus contrary to national culture and doctrine. Although the 'Jew' in contemporary mainstream popular culture no longer exhibits these stereotypes, modern perceptions of Jewishness are still influenced by social generalizations. The caricatured Jewish stock characters of Eastern Europe are in the past, but the Jewish character type still remains.

According to Wladimir Kaminer, Russians were regarded in early 1990s Berlin as being connected to the Mafia (94). Even in their own prose, Russian-Jewish authors are not entirely divorced from these proliferated generalizations. Irina Reyn's image of Russianness, for example, has moments verging on the stereotypical, revealing a

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[74] Julius Streicher, a prominent Nazi, founded the German publication *Der Stürmer*. The newspaper was famous for its anti-Semitic cartoons and sensationalized articles, which incited and nurtured anti-Jewish attitudes throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. He was found guilty of conspiracy to commit crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg Trials and hanged on 16 October 1946.

complicated tug-of-war between the identities of her characters' diverse cultural identity construction:

> Shards of the Russian soul might have lodged themselves inside her, unwilling to be removed. She loved to drink, even if it often made her combative, and depressed afterwards, for reasons she could not pinpoint. She had a fantastic binary mentality – things tended to be wonderful or terrible; there were few nuances to her failures. Like a child who builds castles with the aim to destroy, so Anna was tempted to topple her own best efforts – a hard-earned employment contact she didn't follow up on, a phone message from a promising romantic prospect ignored until it was too late. She didn't believe, or didn't want to believe in therapy as a cure for any of these ailments. Most damningly, even at the height of her pleasure – splashed by sun on a beautiful spring day or in the middle of an engrossing activity requiring all her concentration – she was engulfed by an overall feeling of doom. The Russian soul had come to claim her, extinguishing all that was sanguine and buoyant, all that was American inside her, leaving only the Siberian Steppe, the crust of back bread, the acerbic aftertaste of marinated herring, the eternal black winter. (15)

But the performed image of the 'Jew' and Russianness are entirely different phenomena, while the representation of Russian Jews in popular culture is still taking shape. Both have been studied separately, and the reality of their cultural synthesis lies somewhere in between these generalizations:

> To pick one trait or series of traits and say they are most or least typical of a particular group is an artificial construct. Worst, it has served – and serves to this day – as a way to discriminate against and persecute people stigmatized by certain characteristics. Yet the same traits that are used to disparage others are often seen in a positive light by those allegedly possessing them (or even by those of other groups, in attempts, misguided or not, to praise the subjects). (Fingeroth 25)

For the authors discussed in this study, it is the Jewish identities of their characters that serve as a driving force and/or conduit by which to escape the former Soviet space. As the Jewish identity is not one that was cultivated in the Soviet Union, many of these characters seem to be assimilating Jewishness from observations of social performances observed in their adopted homelands; in effect, they are learning to be Jewish by osmosis.

Thus, the understanding of the multilayered identity must invariably return to the image of the Jew as exhibited in popular culture, including its stereotypes:

> The early Christians found proof of the inferiority of the Jews in their refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah and convert to Christianity. This blindness and intractability became the definition of those psychological limitations of the Jew, which precluded the Jew from ever becoming a truly "cultured" member of Western society. (Gilman, *The Jew's Body* 19)

Gilman's acrimonious justification for the roots of anti-Semitism and the vilified Jewish image do succinctly, if cynically, provide an explanation for the derogatory characteristics attributed to Jews throughout history and even today. Even so, just as the image of the Wandering Jew has transformed with time, both social and cultural preconceptions of Jews have evolved as well. Gilman regards this social differentiation of Jews from gentiles as a matter of vernacular:

> The creation of the image of the Jew who is identifiable as different because he or she sounds "too Jewish" provides a model through which we can see the structure of the image to create an absolute boundary of the differences of the Jews even as this boundary historically shifts and slides. Jews sound different because they are represented as being different. (*The Jew's Body* 11)

What Gilman says of the stereotype of Jews as sounding different can easily be applied to the stereotyping of the Jewish image as a whole. Behaviours are observed and consciously, or unconsciously, assimilated, resulting in an upholding of certain stereotypes. Danny Fingeroth notes of the waves of Jewish immigration in the first half of the twentieth century, "One can say that immigrants have an outsider's view of a society and so understand it, in many ways, more clearly than someone born into that society" (23). Likewise, Soviet-born Jews have their own preconceived images of American Jews as decadent, privileged, and sheltered, all of which Ellen Litman's

character Masha illustrates when first meeting the children for whom she would later care:

> I asked him his name. He said, Kevin. He was in first grade. His father was a doctor; his uncle was a doctor too. Hi mother wasn't anything. He would go to Yale, like his father and uncle – they'd been roommates in college. In their dorm they had a little fridge, because their food had be to kosher. "Do you keep kosher?" he asked me. I didn't. It had been different in Russia, and I tried to explain in a way a first grader might understand. He said "Jews *have* to keep kosher." (57)

The complete disconnect between each one's cultural perceptions of the other indicates the connection between social preconceptions and their influence on the expectations of character performance. In essence, both Masha and Kevin are focusing on details and presumptions that are in line with what they associate with the other's cultural identity; Masha sees him as an elitist American, and Kevin regards her as an inauthentic Jew. The wealthy American-Jewish family for whom Masha works are unable to see outside the outline of their concept of immigrant character types; in this case, Masha will eternally be singled out as the other. Sander Gilman outlines this same concept in a slightly different context:

> Jewish authors have felt compelled to respond to this image of difference, and to create a counter image of the Jew who sounds Jewish, for within their creation of texts, Jewish authors are Jews who sound Jewish. Within the European tradition of seeing the Jew as different, there is a closely linked tradition of hearing the Jew's language as marked by the corruption of being Jewish. (*The Jew's Body* 11)

Masha is marked by being a Soviet-born Jew, which as she comes to see, brands her within the Jewish community as lower on the social hierarchy. In Gary Shteyngart's *Little Failure,* the narrator's father sincerely desires to transcend these boundaries. The character has an image in his head of what a 'Jew' should be, and attempts to emulate it:

> Around this time my father begins a difficult spiritual quest. He has found an Orthodox synagogue two blocks away from us. He does not have a proper

> yarmulke, but does possess a multicoloured baseball cap with a sea bass on it. One Sabbath he decides to walk down to shul and sits in a pew in the back. The worshippers at first think he's "a drunken Spanisher from the street." But when they realize he's one of the mythical Russian-Jews they've heard about on TV, one of their long-lost coreligionists, they shower him with unadulterated love. (109)

However, despite the boldness of his overtures for integration, his American counterparts are themselves unable to move past the media images that have influenced their discernment of Soviet Jews. In an interview with National Public Radio, following the publication of *Little Failure*, Shteyngart comments:

> I think my father ... was the one that believed in Judaism to a large extent, and he joined a synagogue immediately, and that was the one community that he felt really close to, these Orthodox Jews. I, on the other hand, was sentenced to eight years of Hebrew school for a crime that I didn't commit – a conservative school in Queens. To him, being Jewish was this amazing thing that he had fought for all his life and he was denied in Leningrad, but for me, it was a different experience. ("You Can't Be This Furry")

For Litman, this is presented as an awkward and unnatural obligation, unlike Shteyngart's father, who seeks out a connection to American Jewry:

> We'd gone to synagogue once. On Yom Kippur, in September. We walked to Beth Shalom on Beacon Street. The entrance was crowded. My father was handed a spare yarmulke and something that looked like a towel. Inside the synagogue was big like a theater, with tiers of upholstered seating, stained-glass windows, and bright round lights embedded in the ceiling. The service had already started. It was mostly in Hebrew, which neither of us knew. I had a hard time concentrating. I waited for it to feel meaningful. When the cantor started singing, I felt sad. He had a luminous voice that went up to the skies, and made my insides clench with loneliness. I glanced at my parents. My mother picked at the prayer book. My father sat shrivelled under an unfamiliar prayer shawl. They were filled with stifling discomfort. American Jews had it easy. (Litman 60-61)

Shteyngart's own experiences, as related by his narrator, do reflect a similar unfamiliarity during his initial experiences with Hebrew school, but his own comfort with Jewish culture within his prose indicates his introduction to the culture at a younger age.

For the artist figure, this process of transition is represented as far less dramatic and pop-cultural expectations play less of a conscious role. For example, Rubina's character Zakhar was an artist before emigration and continues to be one in Jerusalem; Alik is an artist in both Moscow and New York; and Wladimir Kaminer, active in theatre in both Russia and Germany, continues to involve himself in all facets of Berlin's artistic sub-culture:

> Many of the Russians who have settled in Prenzlauer Berg in recent years I already knew back in Moscow. Most of them were artists, musicians, or poets: people who have one idea and never develop any further; forever between the hammer and the sickle, already rather shabby but still in good spirits. (Kaminer 157)

The principal identity Kaminer and his fellow artists espouse is that of artist, which may be because artists often lead lives of little luxury, or because the essence of the artist is the ability to create, re-create, imagine and invent, which enables them to make cultural transitions more smoothly than they might otherwise.

Though the specific cultural preconceptions of Jewishness and Russianness differ in the three countries in which the authors and characters discussed here have resettled, the universal element of the Russian-Jewish post-immigration narrative is the merging of the 'Jew' and the 'Russian' into a new entity. Each narrative involves the perpetual negotiation of these two social concepts and their gradual synthesis into the post-immigration self.

4.3 Fashion and Identity: The Costumes of Literary Performance

Though I have already discussed clothing as it pertains to the creation of a post-immigration space, I have not yet done so in terms of the cultivation or presentation of one's image. This is a crucial distinction, as the presentation of post-immigration space

aims to produce a certain feeling, ambiance and atmosphere. Image, on the other hand, strives to outwardly project an identity intended for visual consumption by the greater populace, and in non-post-immigration spaces. In many post-immigration narratives, much attention is given to clothing both before and after immigration, particularly on how it changes following the immigration experience. For example, Litman's newly arrived character observes, "In the lunch room Russian seniors were clustered to the right. You could recognize them immediately: men in ill-fitting brown trousers, women in cotton dresses and knitted cardigans, all of it purchased a long time ago and altered repeatedly" (41). Just as Litman creates a visual separation between Jewish immigrants and American-born Jews, Shteyngart regards the post-immigration wardrobe as a crucial step in cultural transformation:

> But the first to go would be Grandma, that devoted country *baba* who had once bought Vladimir his first American cotton windbreaker – the only grown up to realize that his trendy Hebrew school chums were making fun of his ill-fitting overcoat with its inherent Eastern Bloc smell; the only one to understand the pain in being called a Stinky Russian Bear. (*The Russian Debutante's Handbook* 36)

The narrator of *Little Failure* likewise describes his clothes as a major social barrier for him as a child. Despite having physically arrived in New York, Shteyngart's chronicling of his gradual emotional arrival illustrates vividly how assimilation does not negate the pre-immigration self. These divisions, often indicated by choice of attire, are clear manifestations of performative cultural identity. For example, Shteyngart describes a shirt he wore when leaving the Soviet Union and its persistent presence in his life for some length of time thereafter:

> No one has told me where we are going, but I have already prepared to be a fine representative of the Soviet race. On my breast, beneath the monumental overcoat and the monumental winter sweater is a shirt sold only in the USSR, and perhaps in the more discriminating shops of Pyongyang. It is a green wide-

> collared thing with blue and green vertical stripes and, between the stripes, a galaxy of yellow polka-dots. The terminals of the shirt are tucked into a pair of black pants that reach up to my kidneys, ostensibly to keep them warm in transit. (*Little Failure* 80)

Later, while living in Rome as a refugee, he is photographed in "the same stupid Soviet polka-dot shirt, but most of it is hidden by a new Italian sweater, its shoulders ringed with something like epaulets so that I can continue the fantasy that I will join the Red Army someday" (*Little Failure* 87). After settling in New York, the family relies on the charity of others. When the narrator's English fails him one afternoon on the school bus home, he inadvertently communicates to his peers that the entirety of his apartment building is his private family home. His peers respond, "'That's your house?...*You live in that whole place*? You must be so rich! Why do you have to wear my Green Lantern T-shirt from summer camp?'" (*Little Failure* 106). As all his peers are acutely aware that the narrator's family wears donated clothing, it becomes difficult for him to escape the constant visual indications to the world around him that he is both an immigrant and poor:

> They present me with bags from places called Gimbels and Macy's, filled with batches of their children's old clothes, more T-shirt appearances by the man who turns into a bat and his masked young slave, the Boy Wonder. Upstairs back in class with the sacks of clothes at my feet the kids whisper at me. (*Little Failure* 121)

The juxtaposition of upscale department store bags with this newly arrived immigrant only fuels the taunting of the narrator's peers, and serves to further polarize the great economic and social divisions between the Jews who were born in America, and those who were not.

Pre-relocation aesthetic tastes carry over even after immigration, often in comical and overstated ways. This is a reality of Russian-Jewish post-immigration

fashion that Irina Reyn discusses several times in *What Happened to Anna K.* Both Anna and Katia are assimilated enough to be able to identify the purely pre-immigration trends that still permeate their immigrant community; however, they also cannot divorce themselves from these stylistic influences. When searching for a dress to wear to a Russian style New Year's Eve party, Katia is caught between two worlds. She hopes to impress her American secular Jewish boyfriend, but within a traditionally Russian-Jewish setting:

> She had not even planned on going into Parisian Chic; it felt like a store for those licentious, overstated Russian wives at Russian restaurants, bursting out of their outfits, flaunting their breasts in everyone's faces. Only the sheer terror of having no dress hurled her inside the glass door. She rifled, with little hope, through sequins and feathers, through faux-fur and lace, and as if by divine hand, there it was in the sale rack wedged between a crimson miniskirt and a canary-yellow silk blazer. (Reyn 68)

A contrast is created between Katia, who wears white, and Anna, who wears black, as well as between their colour choices and the many brightly-coloured and ostentatious garments that Reyn associates with Russianness. The critical confrontation between Katia's and Anna's visual self-representations occurs at the New Year's Eve party the following year, after Anna has left her husband Alex for her American lover David:

> The dress she bought; she could tell he despised it. She herself had been torn about whether to purchase it, had stood in the common Loehmann's dressing room for almost an hour, twisted in indecision. It was tight, no doubt about it, the décolletage quite low. Out they popped, her breasts with so little coverage. But the dress was black and lacy, a Vivienne Westwood, its price slashed by more than half. Just five years ago, she wouldn't have hesitated; she would have made her entrance at any party and taken her seat. She wouldn't have needed to rise, by the end of the night business cards would be lining her evening bag. (Reyn 212)

Mirroring Anna Karenina's tragic appearance at the opera, Anna K. wears the revealing dress to Katia's family's New Year's party in desperation to reclaim the comfortable life she herself rejected. Unlike Katia, who has happily assumed the identity of a mother,

Anna is unable to view her own self-image apart from the sexually charged glitz that she once reviled. Every clothing choice Anna makes is highly specific, and this image consciousness is an important part of her character, as seen in her entrance at a previous New Year's party:

> And then, suspension of breath, *she* walked in, with her husband. Even the band seemed to play softer music, because no doubt they were gawking at Anna as Katya was, as everyone was. Anna K did not walk on the ground; rather, she was transported as if on a cloud. Aphrodite unleashed in a Russian restaurant. Katya had never seen her look so transfixing. And yet, her dress was, as usual, a simple black, a corset top and a long form-fitting skirt, a pendant hanging between her breasts. She wore pale makeup and a blood-red lipstick, and those curls fell where they could, here and there, untamed. The men froze in their conversations, put out their cigarettes, ran over to say hello, their wives hanging back with pursed mouths, clicks of their tongues. It was disgusting what she was doing and having just had her baby, what was she trying to prove? She should be with her baby tonight and not flaunting her body like an aging tramp. (Reyn 70)

Similarly to Alex's posturing, Anna's entire presentation is predicated on eliciting envy and desire from those around her. She tries to repeat this the following year with no success. Her black attire at the first of the soirees offsets the pure virginal white of Katia's dress, a visual juxtaposition that Reyn revisits several times within the narrative. At the second party, Katia wears black: "Anna was surprised to find Katia wearing black, a color she usually avoided. She always said it made her look old before her time" (213). Now, however, it is Anna who is betrayed by her age, and this is accentuated by her overly provocative attire. Where once Katia epitomized youthful naïveté, the younger cousin has matured, while the elder regressed:

> She paid the driver and walked inside, carefully gauging the height of her heels; her feet had become accustomed to an old pair of sneakers. Her toes were already pulsating with the effort to walk compressed into the pointy tips of her shoes. At the coat check she gave away her protective shield, and as she climbed the stairs toward the restaurant, she glimpsed herself in the full-length mirror. What did she see? All the excess flesh, a few new spots, darker than she remembered them dotting her chest. Her courage failed her. (212-13)

By removing the signature elegance that once characterized Anna's image, Reyn makes her protagonist vulnerable in a way she has never been before this point. Anna remains oblivious to the warnings and criticisms of those around her, but her confrontation with her own tarnished image is the first instance in which she herself appears defeated, precipitating her further downward spiral. Even when she adopts a more casual wardrobe after leaving her husband, this too is done with calculated style: "Anna would have to buy a new wardrobe in keeping with her new life, she would return to jeans, to discrete cashmere sweaters" (134). As Anna's carefully maintained image begins to crumble, so does her psyche. She descends further into her own self-indulgent madness. Anna's choice of clothes becomes a highly stylized ritual of calculated exhibitionism:

> By the time David returned to the room Anna was entirely composed, and he would exclaim immediately upon seeing her, ravishing. She wore a thin silk dress, body-skimming, cut off at the knee, her usual simple black color. What David didn't realize: how hard simplicity was to pull off, harder and harder with each passing year. (Reyn 166)

Reyn emphasizes the desperation of Anna's self-presentation. The character is purposefully staging herself within her surroundings to appear a specific way. All of her efforts are focused on remaining the object of David's affections. Anna is acutely aware that the nature of David's interest in her is based upon his own idealized image of a Russian woman as exotic, mysterious, effortlessly stunning and unrivalled beauty. Anna finds this unrealistic expectation harder to satisfy as she ages, thus every moment of her time with David is meticulously choreographed: "The day they saw the porpoises, Anna had put on her turquoise head-band. It was an accessory that always drew the attention of men, a bright, unexpected splash of color. She knew its power and used it as a talisman,

an incantation" (Reyn 169). Eventually, David will take Anna's head-band and throw it overboard, symbolizing his rejection of all her superficial efforts.

The experience of Lara Vapnyar's protagonist, Tanya, is slightly different from that of Reyn's Anna, as she emigrated as an adult. It is her cousin Dena who has attempted to Americanize, and in doing so, she rejects all outward displays of Russianness:

> 'This is America, my dear,' she was saying to me. 'You don't come here to live, you come here to work.' 'Dena, tell her about clothes,' Maya said. 'Oh yeah, clothes. I hope you haven't brought many Russian clothes with you, because tomorrow you'll have to throw them away. Nothing will betray and humiliate you more than your Russian clothes.' I plunged into eating to drown out her voice. (*Memoirs* 75-76)

Any good performance requires a suitable costume. Dena, who strives to perform the identity of an assimilated American, rejects any physical adornment that is a reminder of her pre-immigration self. She in turn projects this onto her cousin Tanya. As if she were arriving from a primitive *shtetl* having never been acquainted with the wonders of the first world, Tanya is being advised to shed her former self, and through fashion, reinvent her image. In reality, Dena's American ideal appears just as repulsive to her as that of her rejected Russian image: "She thought that buying inferior things would betray her lack of cultivation" (*Memoirs* 132). Eventually it is Mark himself who will reinvent Tanya's image as he prefers it:

> Sometimes we shopped for things for me. But in this case, Mark tended to choose clothes that would "look good" rather than "feel comfortable". He was tactful and didn't want to embarrass me with questions about which designs and materials I preferred. He knew that I had no idea. (*Memoirs* 132-33)

Mark dresses Tanya up like a living doll. She embodies his fantasies of the exotic, and she assumes the place of a prized possession. She has already consciously assumed the

position of Mark's muse, and obliges him. Although it could be argued that his moulding of Tanya in the fashion of his choice rather than hers is chauvinistic, in reality this is a calculated manoeuvre on Tanya's part. Her ultimate goal is to be the inspiration for his writing, so she believes that he is creating an image by which to be inspired. Tanya, in reality, is playing her chosen role, the exoticized muse:

> And I…where was my place in that fairy-tale hierarchy? A few reassuring swigs of my drink would give me the answer. I was the princess from another land living with the great man, the prince, in the upper tower of the castle! I was different from other castle inhabitants, but not because I was inferior. Indeed I was superior to all the people I saw in Mark's building and on the streets surrounding it. I was a princess from another land. A big love of the prince, and they were just castle people. Yes, that was it. That felt right. (*Memoirs* 141)

Mark has shaped Tanya, and Tanya is able to shape her own perception of the world around her. For Tanya, who never strays from her understanding of her position as muse, her clothes and her fairytale narrative are merely costumes and scripts.

For David Bezmozgis's Berman family, the presentation of self often includes the choice of wardrobe, as seen in the trip to Dr. Kornblum's home in "Roman Berman, Massage Therapist":

> Three abreast, we went up Kornblum's walk. My father was dressed in his blue Hungarian suit – veteran of international weightlifting competitions from Tallinn to Sochi. I had been put into a pair of grey trousers and a pressed white cotton shirt, with a silver Star of David on a silver chain, not under but over the shirt. My mother wore a green wool dress that went nicely with her amber necklace, bracelet, and earrings. (*Natasha* 31)

The narrator specifies that his father is wearing a "blue Hungarian suit." On the one hand, the suit derives an exotic chic from not being Soviet; on the other, despite being imported, it still comes from the Communist Bloc. The suit was not purchased in Toronto, but while the family still lived in the Soviet Union. The use of an article of clothing from Roman's old life to create a good impression in his new life suggests that

even though he cannot afford new clothes, he still wants to exude professionalism and success. What is noteworthy about Mark Berman's attire is the presentation of the Star of David. He specifically notes that the pendant is worn over and not under his shirt. The pendant is being boldly displayed in order to make a strong statement: that the family is openly and proudly Jewish. As for his mother, Mark notes that all her jewellery is made of amber. This detail is an allusion to the Baltics, the place of their origin.

In "The Second Strongest Man in the World," the narrator describes going shopping with his mother and Sergei, their family's visiting friend from Soviet Latvia. Mark's mother Bella thinks that Sergei will be impressed by the variety and selection of what Toronto has to offer customers, as he indeed turns out to be:

> Sergei bought blue jeans for himself and for the woman he was dating. Also, on my recommendation he bought some shirts with the Polo logo on them, which were very popular at the time. Against my mother's protestations he also insisted on buying a shirt for me and one for my father. "Bellachka, don't forget you wake up in the morning, you get into your car, you go to a store, you can buy anything you want. In Riga, people no line up just for permission to line up." I was grateful when my mother didn't say anything to contradict him, since both she and I knew that the only way we could afford fifty-dollar shirts was if Sergei paid for them. (*Natasha* 54)

Sergei, who is visiting Toronto to compete in an international weightlifting event, has a great deal of notoriety, prestige and social standing within the Soviet Union. He is thus financially better off than the Berman family, despite being less fortunate in other respects. For Sergei, purchasing jeans and buying shirts with brand-name logos visibly emblazoned on them is a novelty. The irony is that Sergei has the money to purchase whatever clothing items he wishes, but lives in a society where such things are not permissible, while the Bermans live in a country full of possibilities, but lack the financial means to enjoy the abundance that Canada offers. At the conclusion of the

story, Sergei tears Mark's shirt while trying to bait him into a push-up contest. The display of wealth that he gives Mark is destroyed by his own hand, just as Sergei's reputation is destroyed after placing second in the competition.

4.4 Language and the Trans-Lingual Performative Identity

As a major component of the performative process, language is a key indication of self-presentation[75]. As extensions of the body, speech, or in this case, language choice, makes clear how the individual desires to be seen, as Dino Felluga notes in his discussion of Butler's definition of performative speech:

> Butler takes this formulation further by exploring the ways that linguistic constructions create our reality *in general* through the speech acts we participate in every day. By endlessly citing the conventions and ideologies of the social world around us, we enact that reality; in the performative act of speaking, we "incorporate" that reality by enacting it with our bodies, but that "reality" nonetheless remains a social construction. ("Modules on Butler: On Performativity," emphasis in original)

Language presents itself prominently in the works of all seven authors discussed here. The complexities of these identities are predicated on the emergence of additional layers of cultural identity. Revisiting the discussion of postcolonial discourse in Chapter One, we can see that the dependence of identity on language is irrefutable:

> The subject always contains something of the Other, that otherness is reinscribed in the 'I' / Eye. Self-consciousness is always related to an other consciousness a schema which destroys the colonial notion of territoriality and possessiveness. (Kubayanda 33)

Kubayanda links identity with language, a connection that is supported by David Macey, who notes on Frantz Fanon's distaste for the Eurocentric dominion assumed by French culture: "Those who came back so convinced of their superiority that they refused to

[75] Trans-lingual analysis is a major focus for Adrian Wanner. However, his work more closely examines the linguistic choices made by authors, while my attention is specifically directed to the characters within the narratives.

speak Creole were soon put in their place" (Macey 113). This refers to people raised in Martinique who, after traveling to France, would return home only to have adopted the 'colonizer' attitude of their once-oppressors. For Russian-Jewish émigrés, different language dynamics are established. However, as Karen Barad counters in "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," the analysis of acts of language is not without complication: "Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing' – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other from of cultural representation" (801). Nevertheless, for a literary analysis, the importance placed on the substance and implications of language use positions itself prominently in self-representation.

In his analysis of Wladimir Kaminer's writing, Sander Gilman draws a connection between the authorial choice of language and the perception of identity. Gilman, who categorizes Kaminer's work as being more Russian and more German than Jewish, references language use as the initial deciding factor for how a post-immigration work will be received:

> "Religious" identity defines the Jew, but the ability of the "Jew" to be understood as part of "German" culture remains an older and still valid association. For the "Jew" must speak German. Unlike writers such as Sokhrina,[76] who write for a Russian-language readership in the former USSR, and the Russian cultural Diaspora, to have a claim on a Jewish identity in Germany, one must write in German. For in Germany, as in the United States, the role of the non-native writer writing about the Diaspora experience in their indigenous language is always suspect. ("Becoming a Jew" 20)

Kaminer, as Gilman suggests, is regarded as a German writer purely because he writes in German. In reality, many of his publications are more specifically geared toward a

[76] Anna Sokhrina (1958-) is a Russian-language author living in Germany. She was born in Leningrad and, despite living in Germany for decades, continues to write almost exclusively in Russian.

German-as-a-second-language readership. This is especially true of his vignette "The Language Test":

> A big wave of naturalization is about to break. Soon, if the newspapers are to be believed, large numbers of foreigners will have become members of the club known as Germany. Many of my own compatriots too, are toying with the idea of exchanging their passport to become regular German citizens. The rules governing admission to the club are familiar: you fill in a few forms, you supply certificates – but beware! As with any big club, hidden traps and ambiguities await you. (*Russian Disco* 166)

Kaminer's comparison of German citizenship with a club is both simple and accurate. Often, the initial test for membership within any group is based on language, and this is true of Kaminer's immigrant community as well: "The wily Russians have figured out what it is that plays the deciding role in the naturalization process: the new, mysterious language test for foreigners, which is currently being introduced in Berlin. With the aid of this test, the powers that be will determine who shall be a German, and who shall not" (*Russian Disco* 166-67). Kaminer's narrator describes the plight of Russian-speaking Jewish émigrés such as his father, who after eight years, is very keen to be accepted as German. The desire for belonging is understandable; although the narrator's father has been accepted by the Russian-speaking immigrant community of Berlin, he seeks to add to this a national identity that will theoretically find him belonging on a greater scale. Kaminer's narrator speculates that the language test is "not so much about the grasp of the language as about the attitudes to life of the perspective German citizen" (167). Because the test is in German, the applicant must first be linguistically competent. However, the underlying test of compatibility within the German value system indicates to the character a need for conformity: "The results are used to draw up a psychological profile of the candidate" (167). The narrator describes helping his father navigate the

hidden obstacles, but despite being more integrated into German society himself, he too finds himself questioning his ability to think like a German:

> All evening I tried to interpret the third example. I even consulted my friend Helmut, considered by my family to be an expert in matters German. But even he could not figure the text out. I am beginning to have a premonition that my father will fail the language test. (168)

Despite his father being competent in German, the narrator anticipates that his father will still think as a Soviet Jew. The narrator himself wonders if he can truly think like a German. The multifaceted nature of his identity cannot be compartmentalized. Therefore, the narrator realizes that he has assimilated into German society, but will always question whether this performed identity is being subconsciously informed by his additional Soviet, Russian, and Jewish identities.

Unlike Kaminer, Ulitskaia, Reyn and Shteyngart find accented English to be the most significant handicap of post-immigration integration. Reyn's Anna K. echoes this sentiment:

> "Your accent, slight but it's still there. Where are you from?" she was asked repeatedly, then and later. Always a reminder that she was from anywhere but here, as if yanked out of a lineup of pretenders – her performance the least convincing. "From Russia," she would be forced to answer, "From Moscow. From the former Soviet Union." But she was only trying to order a spinach salad, rent a pair of bowling shoes; why even in those innocuous situations did she have to be from somewhere? (45-46)

Encounters such as this one serve to distance and alienate the émigré, even decades after relocation. The reminder of being "from somewhere" after a life spent away from a country she barely remembers is jarring for Anna K., but not unfamiliar.

Unlike Reyn's Anna K., Bezmozgis's Mark Berman, or Shteyngart's narrator, Ulitskaia does not acknowledge this liminal space of language consciousness. She repeatedly draws a connection between cultural identity and language, almost assigning

no discernable distinction between the two. Like Shteyngart, who does not write in Russian, Ulitskaia also seems to regard the acquisition of language as an essential indication of cultural identity assimilation. For Ulitskaia's American-born character Maika, Russian is strange and completely foreign. She still experiences the stigma of being the child of a Russian immigrant, but is incapable of identifying herself as anything other than American. She has never lived in Russia, does not speak the language even with her mother, and goes to an English-speaking school in New York. This discord between her immigrant label and her own conceptualization of herself causes her to mistrust adults. After a childhood spent with immigrants, Maika is acutely aware of the labels assigned to those around her, and to her, this is immaterial. After spending an evening by Alik's bedside, Maika departs, aghast at the circus atmosphere created by the adults camped out and taking pictures with the bedridden man:

> She didn't want to be photographed with him, she knew that. Going down to the Hudson River she made for the ferry pier and thought about the one normal adult who as though to spite her was now about to die, leaving her alone with the innumerable idiots – Russian, Jews, Americans – who had surrounded her since the day she was born. (16)

Maika's frustration stems from being caught between conflicting worlds with conflicting values. She lacks the language to communicate with those around her, and because of this, the actions of Alik's entourage seem strange and inappropriate. Having not experienced the Soviet Union first-hand, she sees the people around her as foreign. After Alik dies, and Irina reveals to Maika that Alik was her father, Maika suddenly announces to her mother that she wants to visit Russia. Perhaps this is out of a need to connect with her biological father even after his death, or perhaps it is out of a sense of tenderness and sympathy for her mother:

> "You know what, let's go to Russia," Maika moved aside, making room for her mother on the mattress. […] Now Irina lay down beside her and arranged her bones more comfortably on the bed. "I thought about that too, yes, we'll go, definitely, only let's wait for them to get sorted a bit first." "Get what sorted?" "You know, wait for things to settle down a bit, whatever." "But Alik said if things settle down it wouldn't be the same country any more." "Don't worry, things will never really settle down there…" (153-54)

Maika wants to connect with Alik, even after his death. With him gone, her only means of accomplishing this lies in her ability to connect with his culture, which she sees as Russian and not Jewish. In a sense, Maika is experiencing nostalgia for a place and time she herself does not know, and for the first time in her young life, she feels regret that she does not speak Russian.

For the narrator of Shteyngart's *Little Failure,* language – both Russian and English – is a tricky matter. Soon after his arrival in New York, the narrator recalls thinking, "How will I ever learn to speak English the way they do, in a way so normal and direct, but with the words circling the air like homing pigeons" (*Little Failure* 96); he also notes that it took him well into his teenage years to lose his thick Russian accent. Conversely, while visiting Saint Petersburg for the first time since his family's emigration, the narrator observes:

> "Welcome," I say for some reason in English. And then in Russian: "Are you tired?" And as soon as the first words of Russian – *Vy ustali?* – get an exit visa out of my mouth I recoil from myself, shocked by hearing my own goofy adolescent bass around my parents. Granted, with my ever-growing American accent, I do not sound entirely native when I *govoryu po-russki* with cabdrivers, hotel clerks, or even my good Petersburg friends. But right now I sound like a child just getting his mouth around his first Russian words. (*Little Failure* 325-26)

This mirroring of accented language both in English and in Russian is interesting. When first coming to America, and for many years thereafter, the narrator spoke with an accent. But as an adult, having spent decades away from Russia, his native language becomes

punctuated by a lifetime in America. As this is the first time the narrator has returned to Saint Petersburg, his experience is more that of a tourist than of a native. However, just as the narrator has changed because of American influence, so has Saint Petersburg: "On Nevsky, chicken is fried in the Kentucky manner, and stores like H&M and Zara will, if given a chance, clothe a newly middle-class person from the *shapka* on her head to her galoshes. St. Petersburg is a sad place" (*Little Failure* 328).

While at a family gathering, the narrator describes his younger cousin's awkward relationship with the Russian language. Although his cousin has also grown up in a Russian-speaking environment, he was raised completely in the United States, learning Russian within a post-immigration space:

> My cousin, her son, who is always about to go to law school (as I was always about to go to law school at his age), whom I actually *like* and also worry about, is talking excitedly about the prospects of libertarian candidate Ron Paul in perfect English and confusing Russian. (*Little Failure* 28)

The narrator's command of Russian is good enough for him to identify the non-native qualities of his cousin's speech, while he himself feels a shift in his dominant language from Russian to English. As Yasha Klots observes "Unlike his literary predecessors who wrote in Russian and often proved speechless in idiomatic English, Shteyngart has developed a keen ear towards the peculiar New York accent and speech manner" (48).

Bezmozgis's Mark Berman speaks Russian with his family, but does not feel confident in Russian, even though it is his native tongue. The character switches between English and Russian when speaking to his parents, and when spoken to, answers in English more often than not. When the character goes to pick up his recently-immigrated new cousin Natasha at her apartment, he is reminded of his limitations in his native language:

> I could see behind her into the room. There was a small bed and a table. On one wall was an old poster of Michael Jackson circa *Thriller*. In bold red letters a phonetic approximation of Michael Jackson's name was written in Cyrillic. I read the name slowly, letter by letter since effectively illiterate. (*Natasha* 87-88)

He is surrounded daily by Russian speakers, but lacks the ability to read. This will forever distinguish him as somewhere in between a native speaker and a foreigner. David Bezmozgis shares a similar relationship to the Russian language as his character Mark Berman; for example, he says of Dovlatov: "I have read all of his books available in English translation" ("P.S.: Features, Interviews and Ideas" 15). Like his protagonist, David Bezmozgis implies a certain discomfort with reading in Russian.

In the final story of the cycle "Minyan," Mark Berman is attempting to help change a lightbulb at the apartment of Herschel and Itzik: "Herschel spoke to me in English. Itzik, when he spoke, spoke, spoke to me in Russian. They spoke Yiddish to each other" (*Natasha* 136). Bezmozgis's description of this cacophony of languages is meant humorously as each character endeavours to make himself understood. However, beyond the initial confusion of different languages being spoken to different people, this brief passage serves to illustrate the cultural multilayering of the three characters. The specificity of language directed at each character is indicative of how the speaker self-identifies with that particular person.

For Rubina's protagonist, Zakhar, the concept of trans-lingual identity is presented as less innate. Zakhar detaches from moments of language-based manifestations of complex identity construction:

> Everyone spoke in broken Russian, with a soft 'T' and singing exhaling 'Kh'. Sometimes they would even switch to a foreign but not Spanish language: -- on the highest note of the conversation suddenly a switch would flip, and everyone

> would start squinting and yell to each other "Vuss?! Vuss ost di gezukht?!"[77] And the weirdest thing, that dad, like a werewolf from a fairytale instantaneously transformed into one of them; he would yell happily, "Khekal" and switch to that guttural, language twined like a garland and called – as he explained to his daughter – "Yiddish."[78] (*White Dove of Cordova* 79-80; my translation)

Although, as this passage demonstrates, trans-lingual identity is not foreign to Zakhar, he himself regards Yiddish as some kind of ethereal ideal, both intangible and fantastical. After his immigration to Israel and his assimilation of the Hebrew language, he regards the Yiddish he saw and heard in his pre-immigration life with a newfound respect and longing. He regrets not being able to appreciate what to him are foreign indecipherable scribbles, and in this way, he demonstrates the effect of a lack of Jewish consciousness in his pre-immigration life. Both his longing for a Jewish identity and his lack of awareness are combined in the recurring presentation of the silver goblet:

> "So what's written here?" asked Zhuka with intrigue. She had just read *The Count's Ruins* by Guidar and was delirious with adventure, secrets and spies. "I wish I knew," – the father sighed. "It's not Yiddish, it's a whole different language…"[79] (*White Dove of Cordova* 92; my translation)

Zakhar's father tries to impress upon his son the importance of the goblet, even though he himself does not fully comprehend its significance. The goblet itself remains a constant – despite Zakhar pawning it – symbolizing the Jewish identity both realized and

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[77] This Yiddish phrase has been directly transliterated from the Russian text as it appeared in Cyrillic font. It translates as "What? What were you looking for?!"

[78] Все говорили на неправильном русском языке, с мягким "Т" и певучим выдохом-хеканьем. А то и вовсе переходили на какой-то иностранный, но не испанский язык - на самой высокой ноте разговора вдруг словно переключался рубильник, и все принимались щурить глаза и кричать друг другу: *"Вус?! Вус ост ди гезухт?!"* И самое странное, что папа, как тот оборотень из сказки, мгновенно превращался в одного из них: тоже весело кричал, "хэкал" и переходил на этот гортанный, гирляндами вьющийся язык, под названием - пояснил он дочери - "идиш"

[79] - А что здесь написано? - заинтригованно спросила Жука. Она только что прочитала "Графские Развалины" Гайдара и бредила приключениями, тайнами и шпионами. - Если бы я знал, - вздохнул отец. - Это не идиш, совсем другой язык…

unconscious. The repeated references to the foreignness of the writing on the goblet act as literary signposts to highlight the gradual development of Zakhar's Jewish awareness and the realization of his multilayered identity. For Rubina, trans-lingualism is an indicator of how far her characters travel in their cultural transformation; she uses the presentation of language both as a unifying force and a dividing one.

4.5 A Covenant with God: Reclaiming Jewishness

In the Torah (Genesis 17:10-14), Abraham was willed by God to undergo circumcision, which became the Jewish Covenant with God. Therefore, on the eighth day of a newborn Jewish male's life, a *Brit Milah*[80] is performed by a *mohel.*[81] However, the practice was quite different in the Soviet Union. During the Holocaust, the easiest way to identify male Jews was by examining their anatomy, and circumcision became widely regarded as a non-disguisable marker of Jewishness. This was no different in the Soviet Union, and most people chose to spare their sons the brand of "Jew" to avoid harassment and discrimination. However, this also meant that, as ethnic Jews poured out of the Soviet Union, escaping prejudice on the basis of being Jewish, they would no longer be able to claim that their lack of a foreskin was to avoid ridicule. One such example occurs in Gary Shteyngart's *Little Failure*:

> The next year I got the present every boy wants. A circumcision. At Solomon Schechter I have been given an appropriately sacrificial Hebrew name; Yitzhak or Issac. And so the knife is drawn at Coney Island Hospital, Orthodox men davening out a blessing in the adjoining room, a sedation mask placed over my mouth (perfect for an asthmatic boy with an anxiety disorder), and then the public hospital walls – green on green on green on green – disappeared to be replaced by

[80] Brit Milah (בְּרִית מִילָה) is the ceremony performed on the eighth day of a newborn Jewish male's life. In contemporary practice, many Reform Jews choose to have a naming ceremony instead, and often opt to forgo circumcision.

[81] A mohel (מוֹהֵל) is the religious figure in traditional Judaism who performs circumcisions.

> a dream where the horrible things lovingly perpetuated upon Emmanuelle in a Hong Kong brothel are done to me by the men in black hats. (*Little Failure* 117-18)

Although Shteyngart makes his narrator's experience with circumcision comical, this is in fact a pivotal milestone in the narrator's post-immigration journey. As they have immigrated on the basis of a Jewish identity, it is vital that the family somehow claim this identity for themselves. When the newly immigrated school-boy narrator undergoes his circumcision, this ritual does in fact usher him into a Covenant with God. Whether the character believes in this Covenant or not is immaterial to its symbolic significance within the narrative. The *Brit Milah* is celebrated on the eighth day of the child's life; before this point, he has yet to receive a name. The naming of the newborn is a way in which the Jewish community recognizes the child for the first time; it is by this name that he will be called to read the Torah scroll following his *Bar Mitzvah*. For Soviet Jews, the *Brit Milah* undertaken post-immigration is a physical and psychological transformation. The eight day span of time from birth to *Brith* represents a liminal stage in the Jewish life cycle:

> The Jewishness of the Soviet emigrants to Germany was for the most part secular and, as Kaminer implies, in some cases fraudulent. He treats with ridicule the efforts of the local German Jewish community to help the newly arrived Jews regain the faith of their forefathers. (Wanner, "Wladimir Kaminer" 592)

For local communities, Soviet Jews, having no point of reference for Jewishness other than a handful of propagandistic stereotypes, were regarded as long-lost family members needing to be brought back into the fold. For men, circumcision was a crucial piece of the Jewish identity puzzle:

> Predictably, the issue of circumcision is used to salacious comical effect. Kaminer reports that only one of his colleagues consented to this operation, which is performed with the help of laser beams. When he publicly displays the results

> of the sergury to the assembled community of fellow émigré Jews, they are unimpressed and advise him to stay away from Judaism. (Wanner, "Wladimir Kaminer" 592)

Both Shteyngart and Kaminer are fascinated by circumcision as a new and bizarre oddity. However, as Kaminer notes, post-immigration Soviet Jews felt enormous pressure to identify as Jewish, which meant an adherence to ritual and tradition:

> Once you enter into a relationship of that kind sooner or later you are asked to give something in return. So on Saturdays I stayed in the home, roasting chestnuts in the gas oven and playing cards with the pensioners. My two friends, however, kept going to the community gatherings and delighted in the presents they were given. They became friends with the principal and lunched at his home one several occasions. One day he said to them, "You have shown yourselves to be good Jews, so now you have only to be circumcised and everything will be perfect." (*Russian Disco* 18)

Kaminer presents the relationship of the established Jewish population and the Soviet newcomers with slightly parasitic undertones. He and his friends enjoy the hospitality and generosity of the German-Jewish community, as they themselves have little or nothing. However, Kaminer's narrator correctly suspects an ulterior motive. Although he is not suggesting that circumcision is what the host community is after, there is a wry cynicism attached to the ritual being performed under such unbalanced circumstances. The ultimate goal of the established Jews is to reintegrate the lost Jews of Soviet oppression:

> He was tormented by his conscience on account of the cash he had accepted and the friendship of the principal, so now it was he who atoned for all our sins in the Jewish hospital in Berlin. Later he told us it hadn't hurt at all and even claimed it had heightened his sexual prowess. For two weeks he was going about with a little tube peeping out of a surgical dressing. At the end of the third week half the male residents in the home assembled in the washroom, hardly able to contain their curiosity. (Kaminer, *Russian Disco* 18)

None of the gawkers is fooled by the man's protests that the procedure was painless. After a complete account of his experiences, his friends remain unmoved: "They had

expected something more, and their advice to Mischa was to let this Jewish business alone, advice he subsequently took" (Kaminer, *Russian Disco* 18).

4.6 Putting on a Show: The Post-Immigration Performance

According to Anthony Kubiak, "Performance is more a showing than a becoming. The forces at work in performativity are more insidious, hidden, concealed and self-concealing" (91). Although the individuals' or characters' awareness of post-immigration identity performance may vary, the fact remains that at the forefront of any post-immigration narrative is the presentation of self: "It is significant that since the end of the Cold War a group of writers has emerged that is not always critiquing Russian culture or American culture as such. Rather they are engaging with both cultures simultaneously allowing the intersection to reveal substantial differences as well as unexpected similarities" (Glaser 17). Within the post-immigration space, individuals encounter and create multiple cultural identities, performing appropriately within ever-diversifying circumstances:

> Immigrants always perceive themselves onstage, their lives resembling a mediocre fiction with occasional romantic outbursts and gray dailiness. Sometimes they see themselves as heroes of a novel, but such ironic realizations do not stop them from suffering through each and every novelistic collision of their own lives. (Boym, "On Diasporic Intimacy" 502)

The post-immigration performance invariably is one of cultural display, and as Adrian Wanner comments in "Wladimir Kaminer: A Russian Picaro Conquers Germany," "The question of Kaminer's popularity is intertwined with his national identity. As the title of his first book indicates, the topic of "Russianness" looms large in his literary self-fashioning and public persona" (591). In the final vignette of *Russian Disco*, "Why I Still

Haven't Applied For German Citizenship," Kaminer grapples with how to identify himself, both to German naturalization officials, and within his own psyche:

> There was a medium-sized box in which I was supposed to enter my reasons for immigrating into Germany. I racked my brains, but I couldn't think of a single reason. That evening I asked my wife, who knows the reasons for everything. "Why on earth did we move to Germany back then?" She claimed we moved to Germany for the fun of it, to see what it was like. But putting it like that wasn't going to help with the matter in hand. The official would think we were applying for German citizenship just for the fun of it too, and not because… (*Russian Disco* 170)

Later, Kaminer opts to answer the question with "curiosity," but he realizes that this answer is not the right one either. He recognizes that he is overanalyzing the application's meaning, but in reality it is the application that has inspired him to ask questions of his own identity; as David Laitin points out, "Social identities are distinct from personal identities, and they are built from available categories that both divide and unite people in a society" (16). The casual reader might ask why Kaminer's narrator is excessively and unnecessarily complicating matters for himself. However, as Laitin notes, the performance of self in an official context is not the same as the definition of self in the private sphere. Thus, Kaminer's seemingly humorous exaggerations of the immigration process become highly meaningful indications of his own consciousness of his multifaceted cultural identity.

In the vignette "Business Camouflage," Kaminer speaks directly to the post-immigration identity performance, and more specifically, to the manipulation of identity. Although the subjects he observes are neither Russian nor Jewish, the pageantry of identity within the post-immigration context is universal:

> "Do the Turks always listen to Bulgarian music at night?" I asked Kitup, who studied anthropology in Moscow and is thoroughly familiar with the ways of these people. He got into a conversation with the two men at the counter. "They

> aren't Turks, they're Bulgarians pretending to be Turks," explained Kitup, who had a little Bulgarian blood in his own veins too. "It's probably their business camouflage." (*Russian Disco* 88)

The narrator discusses how one can project an exoticized identity for personal gain. This is very similar to the exoticizing roles that Vapnyar's and Reyn's characters perform in order to entice their American lovers. In this case, however, the 'foreigner' image is being used in order to market the restaurant to a clientele that will not perceive the difference between Turks and Bulgarians:

> "There's no point in complicating the situation unnecessarily. The customer is used to being served by Turks at a Turkish snack bar, even if they're really Bulgarians." The very next day I went to a Bulgarian restaurant I had recently discovered. I had a notion that the Bulgarians there were really Turks, but they turned out to be the genuine Bulgarian article. (*Russian Disco* 88-89)

This raises the question of the myth of cultural 'authenticity'. 'Authenticity' in fact is nothing more than a construct of perception that is entirely dependent on the interpretation by the receiver. In other words, cultural 'authenticity' is just as abstract and constructed as any other performance open to varied interpretations. But, as Kaminer observes, there is a particular quality and flavour that society attributes to individual cultures, and the absence or presence of these details will determine if the cultural presentation is perceived as 'authentic':

> The Italians in the Italian restaurant next door, however, proved to be Greek. They had taken over the restaurant, and then signed on for evening classes in Italian, they told me. When you go to an Italian restaurant you at least expect the staff to talk a bit of Italian to you. A little later I went to a Greek restaurant. My instinct was spot on: the staff turned out to be Arabs. (*Russian Disco* 89)

Such a candid discussion of identity performance demystifies the borders that society projects as divisions between cultures. By suggesting that identity is a matter of

performance, and subsequently of the perception of that performance, Kaminer rejects the idea of cultural 'authenticity' completely:

> I remained on the trail and continued my investigations. Every day I learned more. The Chinese at the snack bar across from my house are Vietnamese. The Indian in Rykestrasse is in reality a Tunisian of conviction, from Carthage. And the man who runs the Afro-American bar with all the voodoo stuff on the walls is – a Belgian. Even those last bulwarks of authenticity, the Vietnamese cigarette vendors, are little more than a cliché created by television series and police crackdowns. But still, everyone involved maintains the illusion, even though every policeman knows that most of these so-called Vietnamese are from Inner Mongolia. (*Russian Disco* 89-91)

If cultural 'authenticity' is nothing more than a socially-accepted stereotype to which the majority of the masses adhere, then this too raises the question of what cultural identity is. I postulate that the guise which we regard as cultural identity is nothing less than a masterful performance, based on personal experiences, appropriate to the given social situation.

In "The Professor," Kaminer describes a man who had been an academic in Russia and who found himself out of work after the fall of the Soviet Union. Looking for new prospects, he immigrates to Berlin, having found a job as a childcare provider in a Russian-speaking kindergarten. The professor in fact does not experience the economic hardships of relocation, and it is for this reason that Kaminer finds him of particular interest:

> When the professor came to Germany he had a good deal more money than the average immigrant. He never even considered a life on welfare. On the contrary, the professor bought himself a Ford Scorpio right away, and in no time at all, with the help of an estate agent, he had bought a large, light flat in Knaackstrasse. (*Russian Disco* 104)

The irony, as Kaminer points out, is that the professor was a scholar of socialism, but it was this very profession that enabled him to have a comfortable life once he relocated to

staunchly capitalist surroundings. This contrasts with the experiences of his friend, a former archaeologist turned tailor: "In the evenings he went round to his neighbour, a tailor who also came from Russia and was in fact an archaeologist by training. Not until he arrived in Germany, where there was not so much to be dug up, did he retrain" (*Russian Disco* 105-06). Nevertheless, both former academics have had their careers redirected by their immigration experiences, facilitating the development of new layers of identity.

Adrian Wanner notes in "The Russian Immigrant Narrative as Metafiction" that within the ongoing sexual power dialogue, many of Vapnyar's female characters feel it necessary to perform hyper-exoticized identities for their American lovers. For example, the Czech female protagonist of "Slicing Sautéed Spinach" "can only shrug over her American lover's fascination with her 'magnificent' Eastern European accent" ("Russian Immigrant Narrative" 63), highlighting the orientalized relationship in which she finds herself. It is the protagonist's Czech identity – her foreignness – that is the driving force behind the American man's lust for her. Katya, the protagonist of "Puffed Rice and Meatballs," feels that she must exaggerate her Russianness in an overly articulated display to captivate and titillate her partner, almost making her a caricature of the Russian-immigrant female stereotype.

In *Memoirs of a Muse,* Tanya is overwhelmed by the pressure to reinvent herself upon her initial arrival. Like the professor and the archaeologist, she must set aside her academic degrees in favour of immediate practicality. She is inundated by advice, but ultimately ignores all of it:

> "Now listen, Tanya," Dena said, "You can forget about history." "Yes, forget about history," Maya added. "Mother, don't interrupt! So, Tanya, you learn

> computer programming. Though it won't be easy, and it won't be quick." "Not necessarily. She can find a two-month crash course," Igor said. "She's smart, she'll learn in no time," Igor's mother added. "It wasn't easy for me, and it won't be easy for her. You'll have to study a lot. While you're studying, take a part-time job. It will pay your rent. Now after you finish your studies – it will take you at least six months…" (*Memoirs* 75)

Becoming a computer programmer, a profession that is cited frequently throughout Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature, is a label and vocational identity commonly attributed to newly arrived Russian Jews, mostly by the social pressure of their own peers. Vapnyar's incorporation of this cliché of the Russian-Jewish immigrant computer programmer hopeful serves to metaphorically institutionalize the relocation and resettlement experience. When in reality, Tanya has no intention of adhering to any such stereotypes, Dena's regimented formula for resettlement in fact highlights how far Tanya will stray from her family's plans for her:

> The rewards seemed to come according to a schedule. A nice job within two to four months, a clean, well-paid, respectable one with 'Americans' – "I work with 'Americans,' there are hardly any Russians there." The first vacation in Europe within two years. Your own house in a nice, but not particularly nice suburb within four. Skiing, tennis lessons, vacations in three- then four-star resorts. Within ten years, a better, bigger house in a better neighborhood, the best feature of the neighborhood, being of course, the absence of immigrants. (*Memoirs* 87-88)

The protagonist regards her family's presentation of the ideal immigrant scenario with cynical disdain. She is only partially sarcastic when she states that the neighbourhood absent of immigrants is preferable. Just as Dena rejects reminders of her Russianness, the presence of other immigrants – Russian or not – is an unwelcome reminder of a self-imposed social hierarchy subscribed to and perpetuated by the Russian-Jewish immigrant community. Dena also covets a workplace absent of Russians in order to feed her delusions of having climbed the ladder of American society. She nevertheless harbours a

less-than-favourable preconceived idea of Americans as well, as made evident during her visit to Tanya and Mark's Manhattan apartment. Later, when she visits Tanya, Dena is simultaneously envious of, critical of and pleased with the status that she perceives Tanya to have attained:

> Dena started her visit by marching to the center of the living room and taking a quick look around. Then she said, "Just what I thought. Now, watch me. With my eyes closed, I will tell you what he's got. There is Prozac in the bathroom cabinet, vitamins, and soy milk in the fridge, Plato on the upper book shelf, Derrida on eye level, and an unfinished mystery novel by the toilet." She was right on all counts, except one. There wasn't any mystery novel by the toilet, but instead a colorful brochure from the recently opened health-food store. I couldn't say what it was that was so annoying about the accuracy of her guesses, but they upset me more than anything Dena had said before. (*Memoirs* 150)

When her aunt and uncle visit, they depart saying, "What can I tell you, Tanya? You've done very well for yourself" (*Memoirs* 150). All of the members of the family agree that Tanya has made a success of her immigration experience. However, the reality is that she is neither happy nor at ease within her surroundings. The entire existence she shares with Mark is based upon performance. After deciding that she will be Mark's muse, this title becomes a role in which Tanya is imprisoned as the basis of their relationship:

> He didn't mind my presence anymore, even when he was in his worst mood. "It's astonishing how little your presence bugs me," he would say. He was testing me in the beginning, trying me on. Now he'd become certain that I fit. I should have been happy and relieved, but instead, his ease around me, his contentment made me feel alarmed. Something was very wrong with our relationship, and I couldn't quite put my finger on it. One thing that bothered me immensely was how little Mark seemed to want to know me. (*Memoirs* 167-68)

Tanya becomes disillusioned with the role of muse; she is also made aware that it is her identity as a foreigner that intrigues Mark. He is attracted to his fantasy construct of Russianness, and uses Tanya to fulfill his desires. This creates a further necessity for Tanya to maintain and perform her role. Even during their sexual encounters, should

Tanya deviate from how Mark envisions her role, he instructs her as to what she should say and how she should behave in order to satiate his expectations. Vapnyar has said of Tanya's perceived subservience to Mark:

> First of all, Tanya has a very idealistic view of a role of muse. She doesn't think that a muse is subservient to an artist, but that both the muse and the artist serve Art as equals. The inspiration that a muse provides is just as important as what the artist does with it. She would never have consciously agreed to be subservient to a man, and, later in the novel, she is horrified when she realizes that this is exactly what has happened. ("Interview with Lara Vapnyar")

Adrian Wanner finds an obvious similarity between Vapnyar's Tanya and Reyn's Anna. The pageantry of their existences with their American secular-Jewish lovers perfectly illustrates the conscious performance of a cultural identity. However, these characters can also be compared to Ulitskaia's Irina, who finds herself performing an image for her devout Jewish partner. Although she herself is Russian, without any Jewish heritage, Irina lives the life of an Orthodox Jew in order to maintain the cultural identity she portrays in order to please her husband. This cultural subservience in the performance of identity should not be read as weakness, but rather as symptomatic of the post-immigration search to redefine the presentation of self.

Alik, though dying, is host to many performed identities. A true bohemian, he acts as an unofficial patriarch of the Russian-speaking community. As a Jew, he questions identity from the perspective of a doomed man, wondering not what it means to be a Jew, but what it means to die a Jew. He has never assumed the identity of Jewishness, but his impending death causes him to question this choice. Alik is a serial adulterer, but his performance of eccentricities and indiscriminate benevolence allow him to enchant everyone around him with what Ulitskaia reveals to be an affable and jovial nature:

> Since the day he was born women had always adored Alik. At kindergarten he was his teacher's pet. Later, at school, all the girls would invite him to their birthday parties and would fall in love with him, along with their grandmothers and their grandmother's dogs. In his teenage years, when people are driven crazy with impatience for adult life to begin, and good little girls and boys rush into ridiculous adventure, Alik was indispensable: he listened to his friends' confessions and was able to laugh at them and make them laugh at themselves. But his most rare and precious quality was his confidence that life would begin next Monday and that yesterday could be erased, especially if it hadn't been totally successful. (27)

As he realizes that tomorrow may not come again, he becomes most concerned with his death. His wife, Nina, tries to convince him to undergo a baptism; as a believer, she is convinced that this will bring him salvation: "'Get baptized and everything will be all right. The medicine will work.' She took his weak hand in both of hers and gently kissed his freckled fingers. 'And you won't be afraid'" (25). Alik, as an atheist, considers whether or not to play this role to satisfy his wife. Like Irina, he could perform this cultural identity to appease his partner, but he ultimately chooses not to.

Ulitskaia very subtly poses the question of Jewishness as a religious or ethnic identity as opposed to a cultural one. Alik clearly struggles with the quandary of whether he is a believer or not: "Nina, I have no objection to your Jesus. I quite like him in fact, although his sense of humour isn't all it could be. The thing is, I'm a clever Jew myself. There's something silly about these sacraments. It's theatre, and I don't like theatre. I prefer the cinema" (25). He is contemptuous of religion as a practice, but also cannot be certain of what will happen to his soul after death, if he in fact believes in such a thing as a soul. The non-believer might undergo such a ritual for the sake of pacifying his wife, but Ulitskaia shows how her protagonist feels more connected to his previously unperformed Jewishness as he faces death. He is not a believer, and simultaneously not a non-believer either. As a 'Jew,' he essentially carries the same identity he has had

ascribed to him without any real connection, but a baptism would mark a shift in identity, one that ultimately might not save his soul, as his wife maintains. Nina baptizes her husband herself while he is unconscious:

> Nina propped the icon against the bowl, gazed at Alik and thought for a moment. Something troubled her – his name. His name was a problem: although people always called him Alik, he had been registered as Abraham in honour of his dead grandfather. […] "Alik," she cried. "Please don't be angry or offended, I'm going to baptize you." (114)

The name *Abraham* carries with it a Jewish identity, but Nina baptizes her husband as Andrei in order to fully construct a Russian Orthodox character for him to assume in his final days.

The subdivisions within the post-immigrant community of Ulitskaia's world are particularly striking. The characters are all seen as Russians by the Americans around them, and though they may not have ever associated with one another in their pre-immigration lives, they are bound together by the shared qualities of the identities they bear and the roles they play. But as Alik's forced baptism illustrates, there are still cultural identities beneath the immigrant exterior that the characters perform: "Even though hybridity works on both levels of syncretic cultural production and ambivalence of mimicry and menace, its double nature is manifested in different cultural contexts to different extents, depending on the existing power relations" (Gershenson, "Lure and Threat" 120). In one particular scene, Alik clearly chooses to assume and project his Jewishness, or what he personally considers Jewishness, in order to relate better to Rabbi Menashe:

> They went on, throwing out questions and not getting answers as in a Jewish story, understanding each other better perhaps than in reality they should have. They had nothing in common, their upbringing and experiences had been quite different; they ate different food, spoke different languages, read different books.

> Both were educated people, but the spheres of their education barely intersected. (56)

Both men are performing the parts that they must in order to find common ground. Alik asks, "Can't a Jew seek advice before death from a rabbi?" (66). He reveals that he is considering baptism, not because of any ideological reasons, but out of pity for his wife. He questions whether this would in fact simply be a performance for her benefit, but he is discouraged by Rabbi Menashe, who tells him:

> If a Jewish child fell into captivity and was deprived of the Torah, the Jewish way of life, education and upbringing, he was not guilty for this misfortune, nor was he perhaps even capable of understanding it as such. But the Jewish world must take responsibility for the care of these orphans, even those in their advanced years. Here in America, I see a whole world consisting entirely of captive children. Millions of Jews living in captivity with the heathens. Never in the history of the Jews has there been anything like it. There have always been apostates, and those who are forcibly baptized – the captive children weren't only in the times of Babylon. But now in the twentieth century there are more captive children than actual Jews. (57-58)

Alik is compared to a captive child by the rabbi in hopes that he will begin to see baptism as more than a gesture to placate his wife. His questions about death are, more accurately, questions about how he lived his life. The final struggle over Alik's Jewishness has as much to do with posthumous reflection as with his death.

Ulitskaia's Irina exemplifies the co-existence of several performed identities in the same individual when crossing the imaginary borders of separate cultural spaces. Irina approaches cultural acclimatization as a completely immersive process: she does not create her post-immigration space, but lets her post-immigration space dictate and mould her identity. Unlike many of the other characters discussed here, Irina cultivates her post-immigration surrounding without markers of Russian identity. Within all the past cultural contexts Ulitskaia describes, Irina never associates with her *zemliaki* and alternatively

dives entirely into her new linguistic and social environment. Irina does not personify the language struggles of her immigrant counterparts, but moves almost seamlessly from one cultural identity to the next:

> She had little contact with émigré circles in Los Angeles, and she spoke American with a slightly English accent, on which she still had some work to do; it was rather chic in fact, but people who understand these things know that it is easier to lose one's Russian accent altogether than to replace an English with an American one. She also expediently changed her uncomplicated Russian surname when applying for her American papers. (34)

Not only does Ulitskaia create a sort of cultural chameleon character, but she also ultimately brings Irina back to the post-immigration cultural space surrounded by fellow émigrés. Irina, although drawn back to the immigrant community, moves between the two worlds, performing the appropriate cultural image for each surrounding.

Irina herself is not Jewish, but this too is a cultural mask she adopts at one stage. While married to a Jewish man, she reaches to yet another cultural extreme:

> Irina told people she had backed every horse, including the Jewish one. The Jewish one was large black-bearded Leva Gottlieb, who had pushed Russian Irina into Judaism. Not bits and pieces of Judaism either but virtually the full programme, with Sabbath candles, the ritual bath and the head-gear, which happened to suit her very well. She was a Jew for two years; Maika was sent to a religious girls' school, of which she still had fond memories, and Irina studied Hebrew. She was an able student, and it came easily to her. She went to synagogue and enjoyed family life. (33)

This new identity is also associated with a new language, even if the language is purely for liturgical purposes.

Post-immigration Irina gains success as an attorney. Having not had the same professional status while still in Moscow, she ascends the professional ranks. However, like so many Jews who were displaced from the Soviet Union Alik's friend Fima finds himself assuming a role and status he is not familiar with:

> He carried with him his grandfather's old medical bag, which he had brought over from Kharkov in the Ukraine. Fima was a third-generation doctor, an educated and original man, but somehow things hadn't worked out for him; he still hadn't managed to pass his exams in this country, and for the past five years had had a temporary job as a kind of qualified lab assistant in an expensive private clinic. He came to see Alik every day in the hope that he might strike lucky and be able to help him. (5-6)

Fima attends to Alik much as a doctor would pay a house call. There is an inherent sadness in his inability to pass his American medical exams, and he has suffered a clear loss of social status. He carries the medical bag, but there is little he can do. His post-immigration identity does not include the social privilege of being a 'doctor' and his caring for Alik proves a bitter-sweet reminder of his past identity.

For Gary Shteyngart, cultural performance takes the form of weekly visits to an orthodox synagogue for Sabbath services, as described in *Little Failure*:

> I guess this is what people mean when they say 'community.' The next Shabbat, and almost every Friday thereafter, I am brought into the tiny yellow building of Young Israel, where I can rock and sway along with the cheaply attired but kind men (the women are sent to a balcony above us) who seem to accept me and don't think I'm crazy when I accidentally spit out something in Russian, or casually molest the English language with my tongue. (*Little Failure* 108)

Shteyngart's narrator feels compelled to perform religious devotion in exchange for a sense of belonging and "community." Because he had emigrated from the Soviet Union as a child, any ritual in which he participated would have been purely performative, arising from the necessity to feel connected and from the more present need for help. The family is given much-needed financial support simply from identifying themselves with the synagogue: "It is the Sabbath, and handling money is verboten, but making sure a Jew has enough to eat takes precedence" (*Little Failure* 108). However, as Shteyngart indicates, there are persistent reminders of the family's otherness, which creates an ongoing unhomeliness within the Jewish identity:

> My mother's half Jewishness often raises a pause among literary interviewers from Israel and American Jewish publications. "And," they ask, "Jewish on which side?" The subtext here is that Judaism is a matrilineal religion; hence, if my mother's mother were to be a gentile, I would be a "Jewish writer" in name only. I like to dawdle for a bit, to allow the worst to cross (quite literally) the minds of my Hebraic interlocutors, before revealing, to everyone's relief that it was my grandfather who was the big gentile and my mother's mother was of Jewish stock. (*Little Failure* 67-68)

In the Soviet Union, anti-Jewish prejudice would be directed at anyone with a Jewish grandparent, regardless of which one it was; however, Shteyngart's narrator highlights the importance of this distinction for his post-immigration cultural identity. His mother's in-betweenness is an unhomely reality for him, but one with which he can be playful. The narrator's glib treatment of matrilineal legitimacy is a source of entertainment for him, and he regards the reactions of his interviewers as archaic and unnecessarily dramatic.

These initial attempts at simulating belonging are parallel to Shteyngart's memories of faking assimilation in college. Whether or not he was indeed a cultural outsider is irrelevant here; rather, it is his self-perception and self-portrayal in the role of other that mark these experiences as significant points in his journey. The roles that he does take on are those of the Russian partier and token foreigner:

> In the next year I will drink and smoke, smoke and drink, trip and fall, fall and trip, until my endless alcoholic and narcotic exploits earn me my Oberlin moniker; Scary Gary. As night falls on Oberlin, Scary Gary and the Beaver dim their lights. The Beav exhausted from thinking and learning, snores up a storm from the get-go, but scary Gary is scared shitless of a certain college peculiarity. (*Little Failure* 251-52)

Even decades after his immigration, Shteyngart is unable to shake the role of the other. Within his college setting, he paints himself as the honorary Russian, tolerated for his strangeness. He even perpetuates the stereotype of the heavy-drinking Russian in order

to cultivate this foreign exoticism that has found him some semblance of sociocultural acceptance. Nevertheless, this identity is very much a performance, of which he seems aware: "It takes me but a few weeks to realize the frightening new prospect before me" (*Little Failure* 253). In retrospect, he reflects on his long existence as the other as a time of profound observation (262).

The performance of identity is very much at the core of any post-immigration narrative. Bezmozgis's text is especially ripe with examples of cultural identity performance from various angles. The narrator's parents feel a necessity to affiliate themselves with the Jewish community to further their lives within their new country. Upon the advice of other Russian-Jews Mark Berman's father Roman insists his son accompany him on a visit to a local rabbi: "The rabbi was supposed to be particularly sympathetic to the plight of the Russian Jews. To improve his chances my father brought me along. To make me presentable to the rabbi, my mother ironed a pair of pants and put me into a clean golf shirt. My father and I wore yarmulkes and walked hand in hand to the synagogue not far from his office" (*Natasha* 24-25). Father and son attempt to project Jewishness by wearing yarmulkes, hoping that the rabbi will recommend Roman's business within the community: "He also told him about Hebrew school and what a good student I was. He encouraged the rabbi to speak to me to see how well I'd learned the language. Slightly uncomfortable, the rabbi engaged me in a conversation in rudimentary Hebrew" (*Natasha* 25). By attempting to prove how well this son speaks Hebrew, Roman believes he will be able to convince the rabbi that they are observant Jews. This example of post-immigration performance comes from a place of desperation, and Roman sets aside his pride in order to demonstrate his family's Jewishness:

> My father, who could not follow the conversation, interrupted and told the rabbi that I could also sing Hebrew songs. The rabbi didn't seem particularly interested, but my father encouraged me out of my chair. In the middle of the rabbi's office I stood and sang "Jerusalem of Gold." Halfway through the song I noticed the rabbi's attention flagging and I responded by trying to bring the song to a premature conclusion. The rabbi, visibly relieved, started to bring his hands together to create the first clap only to be reassured by my father that I was capable of singing more. To prove his point, my father poked me in the back, and I picked up the song where I'd happily abandoned it. The rabbi leaned forward, seemingly much more interested in my performance the second time around. When I was finally done, the rabbi gave me a five-dollar bill. (*Natasha* 26)

The narrator, Mark Berman, is used as a cultural conduit through which Roman wishes to gain the rabbi's favour. However, in the process Mark is forced into the role of performer and spectacle. Performances such as this show how the post-immigration protagonist is pressured to affiliate with one cultural identity at a time, that of the dominant group within the given situation. For instance, when the Berman family attends dinner at the Kornblum residence, they strive to project an air of confidence and sophistication. When Mark Berman joins the weekly *minyan* at his grandfather's retirement home, it is devotion that characterizes his self-presentation. What makes Bezmozgis's cycle of short stories demonstrative of different instances of cultural pageantry is that the narrative focuses on seven different stages in Mark's life after arriving in Toronto. For example, Mark describes the walk to the Kornblums' home as follows:

> We were a sophisticated family – professional people with their straight-A-student son, future doctor or lawyer. With feigned confidence we strode up the Kornblums' nicely trimmed walk: three refugees and a warm apple cake. (*Natasha* 31)

Because the family believes that Dr. Kornblum will be their salvation, they are desperate to project an image that they think will be well received. In fact, Dr. Kornblum is more fascinated with the Bermans because they are refugees. While the Bermans try their best

to conceal their refugee image, it is precisely this downtrodden image that appeals to Dr. Kornblum. It is unclear whether or not Dr. Kornblum has a perverse obsession with stories of hardship, or if he sincerely sympathizes with the plight of newly-arrived immigrants. Regardless, the Berman family is expected to sing for their supper, and what their hosts crave most are stories of the harshness of Soviet oppression and the struggles of immigration. This relationship is not created solely by Dr. Kornblum. Although he assumes a position of power and casts the Bermans as the subaltern, the Berman family is equally culpable in perpetuating this power dynamic. Although they are exoticized, the Bermans themselves regard Dr. Kornblum as a rich and influential figure who has the power to save them.

Bezmozgis describes how Mark and his family adopt Jewishness after leaving Latvia. It is suggested that, unlike some of their counterparts already discussed, the Berman family did posess a consciousness of being Jewish prior to their departure, though it is not certain to what extent. However, the narrator does assert that after arriving in Toronto, the family began to fully embrace Jewishness as an identity, and as a practice:

> My mother was categorically against me leaving Hebrew school. This was partly out of deference to my grandfather, but also out of a deep personal conviction. There were reasons why we had left the Soviet Union. She believed that in Canada I should get what I could never have gotten in Latvia, as far as she was concerned, I wasn't leaving Hebrew school until I learned what it was to be a Jew. (*Natasha* 69)

Because Mark's mother was deprived of her cultural identity as a Jew during her pre-immigration life, she finds it profoundly important to develop this identity in her son. In some respects, she cannot give her son this sense of identity herself since she lacks the experiences and knowledge to do so. However, by insisting that he go to Hebrew school,

she is able to give him the Jewish rearing that she herself is unable to provide. Mark's mother is willing to sacrifice in order to guarantee the fostering of a Jewish sense of belonging in her son, while his father does not share her staunch determination:

> I saw the irritation on his face every time I started complaining about school. "He knows the language. He can read the prayers. If he wants to leave, maybe we should let him leave already?" "Take the money from my salary." "I didn't say it was the money." "Take the money from my salary." "You want to redo the kitchen. That's also from your salary." "If that's my choice I can live without the kitchen." My mother was resolute. Nothing I said helped my case. (*Natasha* 69)

While Mark rebels against the Jewishness his parents were deprived of, his mother is willing to sacrifice in hope that the sense of cultural belonging will take hold. Although renovating a kitchen may seem like a trivial thing, for any immigrant family that is still trying to build a new life, such an expenditure can symbolize not only a monetary sum, but also a step in attaining their dream of a new life: "This family quarrel exemplifies the conflicts which arise when new immigrants must find their place, adjusting to, and yet at the same time separating themselves from the dominant, assimilated and well-off group of earlier immigrants" (Hofmann 105). Unlike Tanya's family in *Memoirs of a Muse*, the Bermans wish to sincerely embrace Jewishness. Tanya, on the other hand, notices her uncle's yarmulke and assumes that he wears it only when going to the Jewish community centre to accept their charity. However, the narrator does not describe a sense of Jewish belonging at Hebrew school, but rather an experience of being ostracized for being Russian:

> Though I never heard dirty Jew, dirty Russian tended to come up. Particularly at Hebrew school. Not very often, but often enough that I felt justified in using it as an excuse when I tried to convince my parents to let me transfer to a normal school. (*Natasha* 68)

It is noteworthy that the narrator refers to a secular school as "normal." The concept of normality for the adolescent Mark Berman does not include a connection to a Jewish identity. He loathes being lumped into the category of "dirty Russian," but does not choose to align himself with being Jewish either. Mark comments on his own performance of self: "After our move into the new neighborhood I had begun to affect a hoodlum persona. At school I kept myself to glowering in the hallways, and with the right kind of provocation, punched people in the face" (*Natasha* 70). In his novel *The Betrayers* (2014), Bezmozgis demonstrates how foreign one's origins can seem after an extended absence:

> Svetlana gave her full name, complete with patronymic, and Kotler and Leora provided their former Russian names, omitting their last names; thus, for the first time since his release from prison, Kotler presented himself as Boris Solomonovich, and for the first time since she was a Moscow kindergarten student, Leora introduced herself as Lena Isaacovna. If only for the purposes of reaching back in time the use of his old name seemed appropriate. Not until he said it did he realize the extent to which simply identifying himself as Boris evoked a former self. (*The Betrayers* 13)

Just as young Mark Berman adopted a persona for survival, the characters of *The Betrayers* demonstrate the importance of donning metaphorical masks. Kotler and Leora have purposefully moved themselves farther away from their Russian affiliations, just as the Berman family tries to disassociate themselves from the immigrant label.

Performativity is a major presence in Rubina's prose. As Anna P. Ronell indicates, this focus on performance is inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the carnival:

> Dina Rubina emerges as a follower of Bakhtinian theories of the carnivalesque, the subversive, and particularly of his writings on *smekhovaya kultura* (the culture of laughter). In her own words, she is the admirer of the Carnival, and the aficionado of the Mask. Rubina is known for her complex dialogic imagination – that is, she incorporates and interweaves various voices to create an image of

> ongoing theatrical performance that represents an all-encompassing mode of existence in Israel. (198-99)

Although Ronell references Rubina's fondness for Bakhtinian theory in regards to her earlier works, Rubina continues to invoke the motif of the symbolic mask; in Zakhar's case, it takes the form of different performances of identity. Zakhar is fully conscious of the performativity of his identity performance, but does not grasp the severity of its repercussions until several years after his immigration to Israel. Bakhtin explains the carnivalesque as follows:

> In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.... Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. (*Rabelais and His World* 7)

According to this model, Zakhar is both actor and spectator, simultaneously presenting himself and interpreting his own performance. In the pursuit of the presentation of himself as successful, he pawns the *Kiddush* cup for money to buy an art book. Part of his desire is to impress his new Russian acquaintance, but his motivation is also colored by a desire to subconsciously separate himself from his Jewish heritage. What is unique about Zakhar's example is that he has not yet relocated, but feels cultural displacement nonetheless, necessitating his performance. This act is not for the consumption of a foreign audience, but for another Russian-speaker, much like Clark Kent's compartmentalizing of self and the alter ego. As a forger and seller of forgeries, Zakhar must play a role, as demonstrated when he feels the need to pawn the silver goblet in order to project an image of position and wealth:

> "Young man, pardon me, but are you buying the Plautus book?" Yes: it was an amazing edition in two volumes of Plautus, Academia Publishing. The scene – a famous book store frequented by writers on Nevskii; time – the middle of freshman year, I think? What Plautus are you talking about, God help me to scrounge enough for a pirozhok at the cafeteria… "Of course I'm buying it," – he said without turning around. "And I don't like when someone tries to pinch a book from under my nose." In a second, he came up with an idea – a way to find money. Simply bring that old silver cup to the pawn shop on Liteinyi. This junk shoved in the far corner of the china cabinet. Anyway, nobody needs it: Zhuka never drinks anything from it.[82] (*White Dove of Cordova* 133; my translation)

When he pawns the silver goblet, he is essentially selling his Jewishness in the performance of an identity that he desperately wishes to exude. He is fully conscious of this presentation, perhaps even more so than some other Russian-Jewish post-immigration protagonists, as, unlike these other figures, Zakhar's performance of self is also his livelihood. While Zakhar attempts to cheat a newly-made Russian billionaire, Rubina describes how profoundly her protagonist is self-aware and calculated:

> Now, when the overture had played all the main themes of the symphony called "The Birth of the New Venus From the Foam of the Sea," you could have moved on to improvisation. He liked those sudden switches in direction into miscellaneous urban legends, gossip about the great, moral anecdotes that happened to someone…[83] (*White Dove of Cordova* 45; my translation)

His process is both practiced and refined, and the satisfaction he takes from his deception is palpable. For Zakhar, the performance of identity is all a matter of deception. This is what makes his inability to create his own original works all the more significant. His

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[82] Молодой человек, извините ради бога... так вы Плавта покупаете? Да: то было изумительное издание двухтомника Плавта, издательства "Академия". Место действия - знаменитая Лавка писателей на Невском, время - середина первого курса, кажется? Какой там Плавт, тут на пирожок в закусочной дай бог наскрести двугривенный... - Разумеется покупаю, - не оборачиваясь проговорил он. - И не люблю когда у меня из-под носа пытаются увести книгу. В минуту он вдруг придумал - где добыть деньги: элементарно сдать в антикварную скупку на Литейном тот старый серебряный кубок, барахло, задвинутое в дальный уголок серванта. Все равно он никому не нужен: Жука никогда из него не пьет.

[83] Сейчас, когда была сыграна увертюра, когда прозвучали все главные темы симфонии под названием "Рождение новой Венеры из пены морской", можно перейти к свободным вариациям. Он любил такие внезапные переходы к вроде бы незначимым байкам, сплетням о великих, к поучительным историям, с кем то произошедшим...

commitment to deception has penetrated him so deeply that he no longer has an idea of who he is beneath the performance. He signs his work with the white dove seemingly in order to disguise his identity as a forger, but on an unconscious level, he cannot commit to his forgeries because they are a reminder of his conflicted personal identity:

> And when the motorcycle roared behind and a sudden bang rang, he was hit in the back, by the look on her face – by the way she covered her lips with her palm – he understood, that he had been killed. Slowly collapsing to his knees, thudding to the ground he could still see, how a feather fluttered by: not one of those double-edged, sharp, silky blades of a white wing, but a down feather from its breast, weightless as the last breath; like the gurgling of a cooing dove…[84] (*White Dove of Cordova* 521; my translation)

It is important to note that Zakhar does not see the bird from which the feather falls; it is only the single feather that indicates the presence of a white dove. Zakhar is dying, and the last image that flashes before his eyes is a feather from a place close to the creature's heart. The fact that this feather falls to the ground in a descent synchronized with Zakhar's death indicates that, along with Rubina's protagonist, the image of the dove as a representation of self is dying as well.

Cultural performance as a social construct is the connecting tissue that unifies not only Russian-Jewish post-immigration fiction, but numerous other types of narratives within world literature. The characters discussed in this study are descendants of the Wandering Jew with the distinction that, with the exception of Zakhar, their physical wanderings have ceased. Accompanying physical permanence, their personal searches for belonging begin. Identity presentation and the performance of self, as this study shows, are the means by which culturally displaced characters begin to reorient

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[84] И когда сзади взревел мотоцикл и сразу хлопнуло и ударило в спину, он по лицу ее - по тому, как молча перехватила она ладонью губы, - понял что убит. Медленно опустился на колени, опрокинулся навзничь и успел еще увидеть, как спланировало рядом перышко: не из тех обоюдоострых атласных лезвий белого крыла, а грудное, пуховое, невесомое, как последний вздох; как само воркование голубиного горла...

themselves into positions of cultural and social belonging. As the diversification of these post-immigration identities continues, these performances become a kaleidoscope of actively and unconsciously performed cultural influences. This ongoing cultural diversification does not serve to isolate the characters of Russian-Jewish post-immigration fiction from their fellow culturally-dislocated peers, but makes the prerequisites for belonging within this group all the more compelling.

Conclusions

> What I am emphasizing here is the view that the remaking of subjectivities across and beyond the Americas, in these flights of modernity, are productive not just of an ongoing cultural difference but more of an unmanageable presencing of *subject* bodies, their places, hi/stories, and imagined identities. These sorts of transformations of space occurred as those who were violently, patriarchally and paternalistically re/mapped engage in both their everyday, yet extra-ordinary, and more spectacular (though often tragic) practices of making place in hopes of recalibrating and transfiguring mappings of the present. Indeed they do so in the hope for a "place on the map" and a "place in history" albeit through a re-imagined, and re-calibrated time.
>
> (Crichlow 133, emphasis in original)

Stories of the Russian-Jewish post-immigration experience take numerous forms, and are told by different voices, while at their core, unravelling the same story of unhomeliness and determination: "This reiteration of a shared Jewish past not only transcends the physical boundaries of discreet nations, but uses the condition of homelessness to solidify relations between groups of people across space and time" (Jablonsky 4). The reconfiguration of the multilayered post-immigration identity takes place both as an internal evolution and an outward cultural remapping. As this study has shown, Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature is composed of highly specific themes, tropes and motifs arising from this unique diaspora of former Soviets. These include descriptions of the unhomely and the search for cultural belonging, discussions of othering and identity negotiation, and themes of displacement, mobility and liminality. These works cannot be regarded in narrow terms such as Russian-American, Russian-Israeli, Jewish-American, Russian-German, or Jewish-German literature. Russian-Jewish post-immigration literary studies is a definable subset of the greater discipline of diaspora and immigration identity

studies. The simplification of the literary personas of authors such as Shteyngart, Reyn and Vapnyar by calling them 'Russian-American' authors is erroneous. Likewise, Kaminer cannot be called only a 'Russian-German' author, as such a generalization would negate the complexities of his Jewish heritage, long silenced by Communism.

For the protagonists of the works discussed in this study, immigration takes centre stage as both muse and obstacle. The trials and tribulations of resettlement are universally life-altering: barriers such as learning a new language, finding employment and affiliating with a community are of particular significance in the formation of the post-immigration character. When one is perpetually the other, the individual's identity will reflect this unhomeliness. When one approaches the Soviet Union as having been a colonial power, it is easy to see how Soviet Jews (along with other minorities) were cast in the role of subaltern. For example, as Liudmila Ulitskaia stated in an interview with *Pen America*, "I would say that xenophobia is at the root of all problems. People dislike outsiders, are wary of them, sometimes hate them, and all these negative emotions are based on a lack of understanding" ("Interview: Liudmila Ulitskaia"). The literature of the Russian-Jewish diaspora demonstrates how displacement adds further dimensions to pre-existing feelings of unhomelieness. The characters and authors of Russian-Jewish post-immigration fiction will always feel associated with more than one cultural identity, and find unity in this shared diversity. Diversification is the main driving force in the multilayering of post-immigration identities. The characters, situations and themes portrayed in these works demonstrate an ongoing post-immigration dialog between various cultural influences. In a 2008 interview, Irina Reyn explained the appeal of immigration as a natural theme for her writing:

> For *Anna K.*, immigration was a crucial event and I was interested in exploring not only its tangible consequences but its enduring role as a life narrative. In other words, how does a major incident in our past allow us to read and interpret our lives? What license does it allow? For Tolstoy's Anna, her doom is partially caused by her own mind and particular disposition. The same is true of my Anna K. ("Kevin Kinsella Interviews Irina Reyn")

The first chapter of this project used a postcolonial model to conceptualize and interpret post-Soviet, Russian-Jewish, post-immigration scenarios and to apply concepts such as unhomeliness and othering to the literature discussed in this study. This chapter provided a justification for utilizing an apparatus that was influenced by postcolonial theories outside of the traditional paradigm, as supported by Stefănescu, among others:

> I posit there is evidence that Eastern Europe has become the spectacularly unique site for a confluence of at least three types of colonization: the 'wilful' Western (self)colonization, the forcible Soviet colonization, and a tacit conceptual colonization. The latter type is a form of voiding Eastern European cultures of any relevant status within the framework within the imperial/colonial relation – they are neither colonizer nor colonized. The conceptual voiding of Eastern Europe, a protracted process in modern history, is apparent today in the critical disregard for the question of Soviet colonization. The indifference of postcolonial critics from the first and third world alike, which renders the postcommunist second world void of colonial meaning is doubled by the awkward silence on the question of Soviet colonization. At best Soviet colonial imperialism is relegated to a derivative, atypical, or marginal status in mainstream criticism. (Stefănescu 108)

The second chapter used the narrative of the Wandering Jew to demonstrate how Russian-Jewish post-immigration fiction employs components of this historical character type. The evolution of the Wandering Jew was explored in order to investigate the tradition of unhomeliness in Russian-Jewish portrayals, and to show how this caricature was reconceptualized by Jewish authors. I related characteristics of the Wandering Jew and unhomeliness to discussions of mobility in order to illustrate the ways in which post-immigration characters also embody aspects of the *geroi khudozhnik* while endeavouring to sculpt and recreate their lives. The third chapter discussed symbolic spaces as they

apply to the post-immigration environment. Because nostalgia plays a prominent role in the cultivation of post-immigration spaces, this chapter focused on the search for belonging and how these environments are indicative of the Russian-Jewish post-immigration identity. The final chapter dealt with the concept of performativity as applied to the outward projection of cultural acts. This study regarded cultural identity performativity as conscious outward displays, much like the roles played by actors.

The age of Russian-Jewish post-immigration literature marks a new phase in Russian-Jewish literary studies, notably from outside the former Soviet space. The archetypal mythology of the Wandering Jew has been appropriated by Jewish authors who maintain the tradition of mobility, while eliminating the anti-Semitic undertones previously associated with Jewish characterizations. The character has left the confines of the Eastern European *shtetl* and escaped the oppression of Soviet domination to become an upwardly mobile transnational entity. The post-Soviet Russian-Jewish protagonist has crossed borders and oceans, assuming the form of the consummate intellectual, the artist, the perpetual observer and interpreter of reality. All the authors discussed in this study were the products of a society that fostered anti-Semitic antagonism, resulting in a culture of silence. As these authors depict their protagonists grappling with the fundamental need for self-definition and cultural belonging, the aftermath of the Soviet Union's effect on its sizable Jewish population has begun to emerge, taking the form of a post-Soviet Jewish renaissance following immigration. All of the narratives discussed depict characters connecting with their Jewishness for the first time while also adapting to a new home in a new country. Each of the protagonists, to varying degrees, comes to accept the inherently complex nature of his/her cultural

identities, realizing that his/her self-representation will continue to be more multidimensional than that of those who were the product of homogeny. Adam Rovner articulates this point in his discussion of post-immigration writers in America:

> Today the discovery of Russian Jewish "hopes and surviving pain" may really be an attempt to claim a vicarious Jewish distinctiveness that only underscores the successful acculturation of earlier generations of Jews into the American mainstream. Contemporary American-Jewish-Russian writers offer readers a *new* immigrant chic, their multiply hyphenated identities nestling like *matryoshka* dolls. (317)

Rovner's analogy of the multilayered cultural identity as a nesting doll is not only apt but elegant. If the centre doll is regarded as the primary identity, the possibility of adding more cultural layers, or dolls, is endless. Although the larger dolls are layered on top of their predecessors, the dolls closer to the core nevertheless remain the substance and foundation of the composition as a whole. The inner layers cannot be seen from the outside, but without them, there would be nothing on which to continue layering.

As the literature of Russian-Jewish post-immigration experiences begins to feature more prominently in the social consciousness of western society and world literature, it becomes undeniable that this is a cultural group with voices that are growing ever stronger. There are many more names associated with this literature than those presented here, and these authors are also engaged with the personal narration of the post-immigration search for belongin, directing the scholarly gaze further. For this analysis, I wanted to narrow the scope of material in order to provide a balanced yet diverse portrait of Russian-Jewish post-immigration fiction. Further research may include the prose of Vladimir Kunin (1927-2011) and Efraim Sevela (1928-2010), building upon my work on this and similar topics.

In Canada, there is a rising population of former-Soviet Russian-speaking Israelis who have chosen to emigrate for a second time. According to the Israeli documentarist Smadar Peled,[85] about 20% of the 1990s *Aliyah* has since opted to pack up their lives and emigrate again. These are people who attended school in Israel and completed their obligatory military service, and who had established themselves, but who, nevertheless, felt rejected by Israeli society, continuing their feelings of unhomeliness established first in the Soviet Union. To date, there are only early indications of a developing literary culture originating from this group. In many ways, the only thing that ties these individuals to the former Soviet Union is their shared Russian mother tongue, while the bulk of their adult lives were spent in Israel. However, as Dina Rubina demonstrates, the addition of Hebrew results in a very specific use of spoken Russian, one that is not necessarily clear to Russian speakers in the former Soviet space. I believe the narratives that would depict these further diversified identities after a second immigration would add a fascninating layer to the Russian-Jewish post-immigration story. As Anna P. Ronell explains, "But when Jews leave Israel it conflicts with the story that Israel is the Jewish homeland. In other words, the emigration of Jews from Israel raises questions concerning identity for Diaspora Jewry as well as for Israeli Jews in Israel" (13). The fiction produced by Russian-speaking ethnic Jews who have experienced multiple immigrations, I believe, will become more prolific in years to come.

The Soviet Union's treatment of its ethnically Jewish population is but one dark stain on the history of this totalitarian regime. The plight of Soviet-born Jewry was not remedied by emigration, but merely transformed. Authors such as Dina Rubina,

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[85] Smadar Peled's four-part documentary series *Conditional Israelis*, based on the research of Daniel Bashakh, aired on Israeli television in April 2016.

Liudmila Ulitskaia, Irina Reyn, Lara Vapnyar, Gary Shteyngart, Wladimir Kaminer and David Bezmozgis give readers rich perspectives into the post-immigration struggle for acceptance and the determination to rebuild that characterizes these narratives. Their prose both entertains and enlightens while giving insight into a major development in contemporary Jewish culture, one that even now is changing and constantly developing:

> Caught up in the cross-currents of escape, return, and redefinition, Russian Jews have passed through multiple stages of identity. What happened in life happened also in literature – not only because literature distills and focuses the problems of real life, but also because in Russian tradition, it is the central place for any kind of spiritual exploration. (Nakhimovsky, *Russian Jewish Literature* x)

The Russian-Jewish post-immigration literary movement is temporally finite, as these narratives depend on their authors having a shared history. Within another generation, there will be new voices in the Russian-Jewish diaspora, and along with those voices, literature that reflects new struggles and experiences. The Russian-Jewish post-immigration writers who were a part of the mass exodus from the former Soviet space represent that final generation of Soviet-born Jewry with a collective memory of the multilayered Russian, Jewish, Soviet and adopted identities during this pivotal transitional period. Because of their lack of belonging in any one of many homogeneous group contexts, the experiential memory of multiple identities becomes a chronicle of contemporary cultural identity studies.

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