

FINDING STABILITY: POST-SOVIET RUSSIAN
IMMIGRANTS IN PORTLAND, OR

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of RACHEL L. UTHMANN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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Abstract

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The United States has a long history of receiving immigrants from Russia and the Soviet Union. While the majority of these immigrants who arrived in large numbers have been ethnically Jewish, a unique, Protestant segment of Soviet and former-Soviet immigrants have settled throughout the West Coast of the United States. Largely because it is a regional and relatively recent historical phenomenon, these communities of Evangelical and other religious minority groups have not figured prominently in the academic immigration literature.

For this thesis project, the author conducted a series of oral history interviews with post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants in the Portland metropolitan area. The purpose was to better understand the changing composition of post-Soviet arrivals to the Russian-speaking immigrant communities in Portland and thereby to shed light on the other urban Russian-speaking groups in the Pacific Northwest.

The post-Soviet immigrants who arrived in Portland in the 1990s and early part of the 2000s represent a more complex and diverse stream of immigration than the Russian-speakers who immigrated prior to 1991. Many of them were participants in a chain migration pattern.

However, others immigrated in search of better educational or economic opportunities. All of them came in search of stability – whether social, economic, or civic.

After settling in the Portland area, many of the post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants have maintained and modified their networks of support. Although the traditional extended-family structure of Soviet homes has had a significant influence on the former-Soviet immigrants in this study, these post-Soviet immigrants have adapted their living decisions to take advantage of the availability of housing choices in the Portland area.

Also, this thesis addresses the complexity of identities borne by these former-Soviet immigrants. The categories of national, ethnic, and religious identity employed by the immigrants in this study are the result of Soviet ethnic policies and the dissolution of their country. Portland-area former-Soviets reported viewing each other as bound together by their common past experience as Soviet citizens. This finding leads to the conclusion that it is more reliable to speak of characteristics and experiences of former-Soviets and Russian-speakers, rather than Ukrainians or Russians as national categories.

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PREFACE

Growing up, my dear father had a fascination with rocks. His collection was (and is) immense and puzzling to the average observer. Some might say he hoarded these pieces of earth indiscriminately, but we knew this hobby, loosely connected to his profession, had purpose and direction for him. His rock collecting habit would only rarely intersect with my daily experience as a child, but I do carry a handful of memories from family vacations when we would stop somewhere off the beaten path to dig a bit. Dad would pull his pick and water bottle out from under the car seat, and we'd venture out into the artificial canyon of a rock quarry to see what could be found.

In my memories these quarries were usually rather bland – nothing much to it, actually, just dust and a lot of gravel. But my father knew what he was looking for, or at least, he would know something of value when he saw it. Occasionally he'd crouch down and chip off a piece of something or other, dust it off and spray it down to reveal the beauty. Before we knew it, the small treasure would make its way back into our car to join the rock museum that was our garage.

The process of research for this thesis has felt a lot like Dad's rock quarry expeditions. The quizzical expressions on the faces of others as I stopped to "dig" in some certain spot.... The hunting process, when even I wasn't sure what I would find or what value it would have in the end. And then there were the piles of rocks, some ordinary and some fascinating, which had to be sifted through with care.

I began with the profile of an "ideal candidate" for my oral history interviews, and I went through great pains to find the perfect matches. Along the way, I had to sort through a lot of other things – unsolicited stories, introductory meetings, and obligatory social events. Other than

the historian's interest in the inherent value of all sources, I kept to my task. However, my attention was captured by the voices of my interview subjects and the narratives of complex identities and personal change they related. Early on, these voices began to displace some key assumptions in my mind, and soon I realized that my thesis was changing.

The following pages reflect this journey through my figurative quarry. In it I have learned a little more what it means to dig as my father does – carefully, frequently, and attentively. While the products are still rough and quite unfinished, I believe they reveal themes of significance for our understanding of the unique Russian-speaking immigrant community that has (and is) formed in Portland and the surrounding areas.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking immigrants have made their home in the Pacific Northwest during the last decades of the 20th century. However, little historical research has been dedicated to understanding the unique context and nature of this immigrant stream. Where they do appear in the literature, post-Soviet Russian immigrants on the West Coast of the United States (US) have been declared or assumed to be a continuation of the late-1980s Protestant immigrants who were fleeing religious persecution. Nationally, post-Soviet immigrants are often classified as primarily Jewish immigrants -- part of the long-standing flow of Soviet Jews who have immigrated to the US since the late 1960s. However, this thesis will demonstrate that the Russian-speaking immigrants who arrived in Portland after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 are more diverse in religious affiliation and the circumstances of their immigration than previously understood.

This study focuses on the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area as exemplary of the Russian-speaking immigrant population on the West Coast and particularly in the Pacific Northwest. The major centers of settlement for these immigrants during the last 15 years have been urban centers with significant preexisting populations of Russian speakers, such as Sacramento, San Francisco, and Portland. While the size of the populations in Northern California and the Pacific Northwest vary, the general patterns and characteristics are shared. Using a series of oral history interviews to provide new evidence, this study will shed light on the profile of these post-Soviet immigrants and contrast this with the Soviet-era refugees who settled in the same geographic areas. Also, these interviews help to clarify the place of the

extended family structure and the development of social networks within the post-Soviet immigrants' lives in the US.

This introductory chapter will establish a brief outline of the modern migrations of Russians to the United States, examine the existing research on Russian immigrants, and introduce the foci of study for this project. The second chapter of this thesis will outline more specifically what information is known or assumed about the history of Russian-speaking immigrants who have settled in the state of Oregon and introduce the participants in the interviews for this project. In Chapter Three, the immigrants speak for themselves about the decision to emigrate and the conditions of their homeland at departure. Then Chapter Four examines the immigrants' reasons for choosing Portland as their destination, the family structure of Portland-area Russian-speaking immigrants and outsiders' views on the religious Russian-speaking community in Portland. Chapter Five focuses on categories of identity employed by these immigrants -- a theme of interest that emerged from the oral history interviews. Finally, Chapter Six offers a summary of analysis and interpretations from the information gathered for this study.

The History of Russians in America

Periodization

The United States has a long history of welcoming Russian immigrants to its shores, though the faces of these immigrants have changed significantly over time. The history of Russian immigration is often described by a series of distinct movements of people from East to West across the Atlantic, but there is no consensus over which periodization to employ. The first movement of Russians to the United States *en masse* was an influx of primarily Russian Jews

who were part of the record-breaking migrations of Europeans to the US from the 1880s until the second decade of the 20th century. Following World War I and new restrictive immigration policy in the United States, the stream of Russian immigrants continued, though on a much smaller scale.

In the introduction to a book by Dennis Shasha and Marina Shron, Steven Gold outlines three periods or “waves” in the history of Russian immigration to the US since World War I. The first wave was the flight of White Army members and other dissidents after the 1917 revolution. The second was the post-WWII emigration of "several hundred thousand" fleeing Stalin's brutal Soviet regime. Gold, a sociology professor at Michigan State University, classified post-Soviet Russian immigrants as a continuation of the "third wave", which started in the late 1970s with the relaxation of Soviet emigration restrictions and the United States' acceptance of Soviet Jews, Ukrainian Catholics, and Evangelical Christians as refugees.¹

Looking more broadly at Russian emigration without regard for the destinations, Anatoli Vishnevsky and Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya offer an alternate paradigm of four waves of emigration since World War I. The first was the exodus of 4-5.5 million people between 1917 and 1938, who fled the Russian Revolution and the tightening grip of Soviet authority. The second wave was the emigration of 5-10 million from the Soviet Union during and surrounding WWII.

The third wave in Vishnevsky and Zayonchkovskaya's paradigm encompasses the period 1948-1990. They distinguish this group of emigrants as the first voluntary, but smaller, group of departures. An estimated 1.1 million people left the Soviet Union during these years in a slow stream, with a maximum net outflow of 30,000 to 45,000 during any given year. Only in 1988

¹ Dennis Shasha and Marina Shron, *Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Russian Immigrants* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 2002), vii-viii.

do the authors recognize the start of a shift in the pattern, as the freedom to emigrate was offered nearly unimpeded to Jews, Germans, Greeks, and those with special invitations from the West. The result of this change was 108,000 emigrants leaving the USSR in 1988, as opposed to only 39,000 the year before. The figure doubled again in 1989 and again in 1990. The largest source republics of "third wave" migrants from the Soviet Union were Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.

Publishing their remarks in 1994, Vishnevsky and Zayonchkovskaya sketched a profile of the then emerging "fourth wave". They anticipated that the leading causes of migration from the former-Soviet countries would be economic and political, rather than ethnic or religious. Some early groups of fourth-wave migrants were already fleeing the effects of years of Stalinist and communist party ethnic policies in the Soviet Union. These migrants were identified as repatriating "post-colonial" migrants of major ethnic groups, returning to ethnic homelands within other states of the former USSR and undoing forced displacements of the 20th century. Also, Vishnevsky and Zayonchkovskaya anticipated rising classes of economic migrants in two profiles -- a 'brain drain' from Russia due to economic decline and labor migrants leaving the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union because of few job opportunities and increasing population pressures. Vishnevsky and Zayonchkovskaya also cited the possibility of refugees leaving to escape acute political or ecological crises.²

As these two different analyses reveal, scholars often have constructed contradictory explanations for the waves of Russian immigrants to the United States. There is debate particularly as to the periodization of the third wave, the emigration of large numbers of primarily Jewish Soviets. Some see continuity from the Soviet Jewish refugees of the 1970s to

² Anatoli Vishnevsky and Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya, "Emigration from the Former Soviet Union: The Fourth Wave," in *European Migration in the Late Twentieth Century: Historical Patterns, Actual Trends, and Social Implications*, eds. Heinz Fassmann and Rainer Munz (Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar Publishing Co., 1994), 239-243.

the flow of former-Soviet religious minorities and others arriving in the 1990s and early 2000s. Others differentiate between the Soviet Jewish arrivals and the post-Soviet influx, as the two groups are somewhat demographically divergent. Each published overview of the refugee or immigrant flows in the last 40 years offers its own model and date structure to demarcate significant changes in the nature of Soviet and post-Soviet immigration. It appears that no single paradigm of periodization has gained the majority support of the academic community to date. Despite this debate, the general facts about the Russian immigration following World War II are apparent. As in the late 19th century, the majority of arrivals were ethnic Jews who settled on the East Coast of the US.

Cold War Years: Soviet Jews

Since the 1960s, Soviet Jews have emigrated in large numbers to Israel, Western Europe, and the United States. Beginning at that time a small stream of emigrants from the Soviet Union was allowed to leave, as long as those leaving renounced their Soviet citizenship. Jews in particular agitated for the ability to leave, and many quickly took the opportunity presented. From 1968 to 1973, about 34,000 Jews per year left the Soviet Union. Prior to this about 2,000 a year emigrated; following 1973, it fell again, but then peaked in 1979, when 67,000 people moved abroad. During the 1970s and early 1980s, about 300,000 were estimated to have emigrated in total. The émigrés were primarily Jews, "Volga" Germans, and Armenians.³

During this period, the Soviet government did not make it easy to leave, even when some emigration was permitted. For example, the process of renouncing citizenship came at a fee -- about 50 rubles for someone emigrating to a socialist location, but 500 rubles for someone going

³ Mervyn Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993), 37-39.

to a capitalist country. (In 1970, a worker's pay was officially 122 rubles a month.) Also, starting in 1972, those who had received higher education in the Soviet Union were taxed upon departure for the privilege of the free education. The costs ran from 4,000 to 25,000 rubles. This was clearly impossible without significant help from abroad. After the protests of the public and pressure from the US Congress, the payments were first modified and then abandoned in March of 1973.⁴

While many Jews fled the persecutions and pressures of life in the Soviet Union, they did not act without support. During the Cold War some in the international community, in addition to Jewish organizations abroad, encouraged the departure of refugees from Communist-dominated countries as a means of political protest. Bill Frelick described this perspective on refugees held by many recipient countries:

Refugees from Communist-dominated countries, at the least, could win propaganda points by having 'voted with their feet.' Often, they served foreign policy goals of host countries more directly, for example, by continuing to actively destabilize their home countries, seen as enemies by the host governments and their patrons.⁵

In the beginning, American Jews absorbed many of the expenses for the new arrivals, but in 1979, the United States Congress set aside \$20 million to aid in the resettlement of "Soviet

⁴ *Ibid.* In response to the 1972 imposition of the "education tax" in the Soviet Union, US Senators "Scoop" Jackson and Charles Vanik promoted an amendment to the 1974 Trade Act to promote free emigration from the Soviet Union, particularly for Soviet Jews. Alan P. Larson, *Terminating the Application of Jackson-Vanik Legislation to Russia*, testimony before the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Trade, 11 April 2002, <http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rm/2002/9310.htm>.

⁵ Bill Frelick, "Hardening the Heart: The Global Refugee Problem in the 1990s," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: a Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 373.

and other refugees not currently covered by existing federal refugee programs." (Prior to this, there were separate government refugee programs for Southeast Asian and Cuban refugees, but other refugees were only resettled by private agencies of philanthropic donors.⁶) The funds were dispersed to sponsoring "voluntary agencies" in the amount of \$1,000 per refugee, contingent on the agency's matching contribution. This provision was known as the Voluntary Agency Matching Grant Program.⁷

As American Jewish organizations seized an opportunity to "save Soviet Jewry", the Soviet Jews were eager to escape the harsh discrimination they experienced in the Soviet Union. Discrimination against Jews has a long and sordid history in Russia, but direct threats and mistreatment increased again in the 1970s. Following the Arab-Israeli War in 1967, the Soviet state sanctioned more direct anti-Semitism within its own borders. Specifically, Ukraine was the location of some of the most blatant prejudice in the 1970s. In the following decades, when the Soviet Union was crumbling and freedom of expression was growing, Jews were subject to even more threats as anti-Semitic sentiments were more freely expressed and ultra-nationalism gained a strong political following. The peaks of Soviet Jewish immigration to the United States were in 1979 (28,794 arrivals) and 1992 (45,888), reflecting these social upheavals.⁸

Jewish refugees were allowed to exit the Soviet Union because of the Soviet "law of return". Their passports did not record the state of their birth, like other Soviet nationals, but just the label of "Jew". This designation allowed them to "return" to Israel after its establishment,

⁶ Roger Winter, *The History of the Matching Grant Program*, Office of Refugee Resettlement (19 December 2002), <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/programs/matchgh.htm>.

⁷ Philip A. Holman, "Refugee Resettlement in the United States," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: a Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 12.

⁸ Steven J. Gold, "Soviet Jews," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: a Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 280-281.

then recognized by the Soviet government as an ancestral homeland. Beginning in the mid 1970s, however, many would choose to abandon their route to Israel in favor of applying for US refugee status. Reasons cited by refugees for choosing the US over Israel included: more economic opportunities, no military draft, more political stability, and a more comparable size to their previous country. Many also felt more comfortable in the secular society of the US as opposed to the highly religious state of Israel.⁹ Beginning in 1989 they were able to apply for refugee status directly from the US Embassy in Moscow (rather than in a transit country on the way to Israel, as had been the case). Thus, by the end of the 1980s, the large majority of Soviet Jews were coming to the US directly. By 1995, 325,000 such refugees had resettled in the United States.¹⁰

These refugees were highly educated and generally unfamiliar with Jewish religious practice prior to arrival, especially when compared with other Jewish immigrant groups.¹¹ Gold writes:

The presence of one third of a million émigrés is the result of enormous efforts expended by the American Jewish community over the last 25 years and, accordingly, represents the successful culmination of a campaign to save Soviet Jewry. However, despite their status as religious refugees and the generous support they have received from American co-ethnics, Jews from the former

⁹ *Ibid.*, 281-283.

¹⁰ David W. Haines, "Patterns in Refugee Resettlement and Adaptation," in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: a Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 34.

¹¹ Gold, "Soviet Jews," 279-280. See also James O. Finckenauer and Elin J. Waring, *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 65.

Soviet Union have been less religious and more Russian in their style of adaptation to the United States than was expected by the host community.¹²

This tendency to identify with Russian culture was true of Jewish immigrants throughout the 20th century. While Jewish immigrants had a truly unique and difficult experience in the Soviet Union because of the Jewish label forced on them, the immigrants' lack of connection with religious Judaism left them with cultural characteristics much like other non-Jewish former-Soviets. This difficulty with categories of identity for former-Soviet Jews will be further discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Demographically, the largest share of Soviet Jews entering the US between 1980 and May 1993 came from Ukraine (42%), while the second highest population was from Russia (24%). Soviet Jews were also the oldest refugee group entering the US in the early 90s. In 1991, 34% of new former-Soviet Jewish refugees were over the age of 50, while only 18% were minors. In the same year, the average age of all new immigrants to the US was 29.¹³

¹² Gold, "Soviet Jews," 279-280.

¹³ This relatively aged profile had many effects on the group's assimilation patterns. Elderly refugees generally have a harder time with successful acculturation and often rely more heavily on public assistance programs, but at the same time, they tend to reinforce the structure of an ethnic community as they interact with one another in their neighborhoods. Also, as most elderly immigrants do not seek or find employment, they are free to continue the long tradition of multigenerational child-care within families. Gold, "Soviet Jews," 283-286; similar observations were made about the newly arriving Soviet Jewish population in the 1970s. Taft, North, and Ford that analyzed refugee demographics in 1975 and concluded that Soviet refugees, then the third largest arriving group, were on average 31 years old – two years older than the median age of US residents at the time. Also, the Soviet refugees tended to have fewer children upon arrival. From an employment perspective, more than two-thirds of the workers from this group had been in white-collar jobs in their home country; more than a third of Soviet workers had been employed in technical and professional sectors. Haines, "Patterns in Refugee Resettlement," 29-31.

The Soviet Jewish community also had unusually high rates of married couples and of multigenerational families residing together. This created a more stable, supportive family structure that helped the immigrants in their adaptation to a new country. Steven Gold attributed the arrival of intact, extended families and the small number of children per household to the scarcity of housing and other amenities the refugees endured in the Soviet Union. Also, Gold noted that the egalitarian nature of communism and the matriarchal Soviet society prepared former-Soviet women with extensive previous work experience, education, and a stubborn pragmatism to 'make do' with what little resources or jobs that might be available.¹⁴ This extended family structure is a pattern that is also more Soviet than Jewish, and the same assessment could be made of the former-Soviet immigrants in this study. The impact of these close multigenerational ties will be further explored in Chapter Four.

Changing Refugee and Immigration Policies

While the United States had made allowance for this flow of Soviet refugees, the systems for refugee admissions were generally not well defined, and the processes were not standardized. By 1980, the US government sought to regularize the admission and treatment of refugees entering the country. The Refugee Act, passed on March 17, 1980, officially classified refugees using the United Nations' definition: someone who is “unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of [their home country] because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.” Also, Title I of the Refugee Act referred to refugees of “special humanitarian concern,” which was interpreted in light of the reality of the previous 35 years of refugee treatment in the US. Generally, the US government's refugee policies had reflected its own

¹⁴ Shasha and Shron, *Red Blues*, viii-ix.

foreign policy concerns -- almost exclusively focusing on the acceptance of refugees fleeing Communist governments. The Refugee Act now widened the provisions to include refugees who fit the UN definition, regardless of their national origin.¹⁵

In 1980, over 207,000 refugees entered the United States under the provisions of this new legislation. From 1983 to 1987, the number of newly arriving refugees dropped to between 61,000 and 71,000, as fewer Southeast Asians were seeking refuge and fewer Soviet citizens were being allowed to leave. Beginning in 1988, the numbers increased again, and almost 70% of the refugees that year were Soviet Jews.¹⁶ This increase was due in large part to Soviet relaxation of emigration restriction. Since 1987, Soviet citizens were allowed to get exit and re-entry visas for personal and family reasons if they had a formal invitation, and in 1988, the processes for exit visas were simplified, opening the door to more emigration.¹⁷

Many of the first Pentecostal refugees benefited from the paths of Soviet Jews who had emigrated before. Some Israeli immigrant organizations provided invitations for persecuted Pentecostal families in order to get them out of the country. Then mid-stream, usually in Vienna or Rome, the refugees would request protection from the United States. Many of the Portland-area immigrants took this path, spending two or three months in Austria or Italy before being given refugee status in the US. During this window, which was open for only two years (1987-1989), refugees' applications were still being processed by a special center in Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ Holman, "Refugee Resettlement," 13.

¹⁶ Winter, *History of the Matching Grant Program*.

¹⁷ Matthews, *Passport Society*, 86.

In September of 1989, that center was closed, and from that time forward all applications for refugee status in the United States had to originate in Moscow.¹⁸

Between 1989 and 1993, there were no less than 100,000 refugees entering the US annually. This trend of growth reflected mainly an influx of former Soviet people -- primarily Soviet Jews who numbered from 38,000 to 61,000 annually in that period -- a distinct change from the earlier predominance of Southeast Asian refugees.¹⁹

As for non-refugee admissions, the Foreign Operations Act was passed on November 21, 1989; this bill relaxed the requirements for asylum applicants from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union.²⁰ Then in 1990, The Immigration Act was passed into law adding a complex system of limits for immigration and extra considerations for family relationships in immigration numbers. At this point, family-sponsored and employer-sponsored immigration fell under separate regulations.²¹ Many of the Portland-area immigrants in this study entered the US under family-sponsored immigrant visas, while the remainder had refugee or parole status.

As the Soviet Union crumbled and the borders opened, refugee policies in the US continued to change, widening the scope of immigrants accepted by the US. The maximum number of former-Soviet refugees admitted to the US had been set at 50,000, and after 1995, the priority for this annual quota was given to applicants who were “likely targets of persecution” as

¹⁸ Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) Employees, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 4 August 2005.

¹⁹ Holman, “Refugee Resettlement,” 15-16; Between 1983 and 2001, refugees from the former Soviet Union have comprised 26% of all US refugee arrivals. This is slightly more than the Vietnamese refugees, who represent 25% of refugee arrivals in that period. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Annual Report to Congress - 2001* (5 January 2004).

²⁰ Linda W. Gordon, “The Origins and Initial Resettlement Patterns of Refugees in the United States,” in *Refugees in America in the 1990s: a Reference Handbook*, ed. David W. Haines (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 346.

²¹ Candace G. Johnston, *Perception and Action: An Analysis of Communication Between US Sponsorship and Russian Speaking Immigrants* (master’s thesis, Oregon State University, August 1993), 85-86.

redefined annually by the US Congress. Examples of these refugees include: Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics, Jews, and members of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Within these vulnerable religious minority groups, those with close relatives who were legal US residents were given the first priority. (Anyone with an immediate family member who is a US citizen is not eligible for refugee status, but must apply to enter as an immigrant.²²)

A New Era: Failed Predictions in the West

Despite the large numbers of immigrants taking refuge in the United States during the early 1990s, the literature reflects anticipation that the arrival of immigrants would be even greater. As the decade unfolded, the international community was bewildered as the predicted mass departures of Soviet peoples for western countries did not materialize. Nicholas Van Hear summarized the global situation that gave birth to these forecasts following the end of the Cold War in his 1998 book, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*. In the 1990s, social and economic pressures that traditionally fueled mass migrations coincided with an increasing ease of travel (for people and information) around the world. Also, the disintegration of former-Soviet countries left some 450 million people to potentially enter the migration streams for the first time after the loss of stringent emigration restrictions. Many were expected to flee “ethnic, religious, and nationalist... tensions” then filling the vacuums of power left in the wake of the crumbled nation-states, aided by the “rights revolution” in the West, which proliferated lobby and assistance groups for ethnic migrants and refugee populations.²³

²² Gold, “Soviet Jews,” 283.

²³ Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas: The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 1-3.

Mass migrations of former Soviets did happen, even if not in the manner predicted by western observers. As Van Hear reported in 1998, the majority of migrants were changing location within the former Soviet states rather than emigrating out of the region.²⁴ Around nine million people migrated or were displaced as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Many of these internal migrants were reversing Soviet-era dislocations caused by labor migration, the establishment of colonial outposts, and deportations of groups or individuals that had fallen out of favor with the regimes of the time. Many of the formerly dominant ethnic groups, namely Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians, began repatriation to their "home" regions after becoming strangers in their countries of residence overnight. It is estimated that three to four million members of these dominant groups migrated in the 1990s, leaving mainly from Central Asia or the Caucasus.²⁵

The research of Pilkington, Van Hear, and others revealed the tumultuous nature of life in the former Soviet Union and the migration patterns that followed its demise. While the massive

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-26. Also published in 1998, Hilary Pilkington's work focuses on this internal migration to Russia of Russian-speaking people who had been living in the former Soviet republics during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Her research revealed the somewhat chaotic shuffle of people following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The results of Pilkington's survey betray her subjects' general lack of foreknowledge about their new destinations, and she concludes that they left their homes without a precise destination in mind. It is also clear that inter-ethnic conflicts were the primary "push" factor, or at least one of the top considerations, for those leaving the former Soviet republics for more ethnically homogenous areas within Russia. Pilkington writes, "The majority, while not 'fleeing' from homes under threats to their lives, felt forced to move and were willing to accept any opportunity which allowed them to 'get out' rather than planning economically or socially advantageous moves." Hilary Pilkington, *Migration, Displacement, and Identity in Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 124-125, 128.

exodus to the West in the 1990s did not match the forecasts, millions of people were on the move internally – seeking stability and returning to areas where their ethnic and religious compatriots were in the majority. In light of this, the academic literature includes little about the minority of migrants who did make the journey to Western Europe or the United States. Sociological research on the cultural adaptation of immigrant communities forms the body of what has been published about post-Soviet immigrants to the US, and these often lack the rich historical context for their subjects' migrations.

Post-Soviet Immigrant Research

While less than expected, over one million former Soviets had immigrated to the US by the end of the 1990s, according to unofficial estimates. Despite these large numbers, Russian immigrants have attracted little social or historical research because of their generally low profile. According to Vera Kishinevsky, this immigrant group tends to adjust quickly in language and economics, and they are not known for political activism.

The vast majority of research published on former-Soviet immigrants has been sponsored by Jewish community organizations and interest groups. These studies tend to focus on Jewish former-Soviets almost exclusively.²⁶ Some sociological research has been done with a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, usually set in the New York area where the Jewish community remains the dominant component of the former-Soviet immigrant community.

For example, Vera Kishinevsky used a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish sample to study three generations of female Russian immigrants to the US and their experiences with

²⁶ Vera Kishinevsky, *Russian Immigrants to the United States: Adapting to American Culture* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2004), 5.

acculturation into American ideals of feminine beauty. She posits that the female gender role in Russian culture is centered on the provision and consumption of food, while American femininity is fixated on extreme slenderness.²⁷ Kishinevsky writes, “My original interest was in the changes in their attitudes to their bodies and to food as they acculturated in the United States. I wanted to explore the influence of American obsession with thinness on their lifestyle and to learn how they responded to its pressures.”²⁸ Her conclusions are posed in themes about subjects' views of family, work, self-care, food habits, and perceived gains or losses in emigration.²⁹ While Kishinevsky’s work reflects the typically sociological concern for the extrapolation of generalized patterns, it includes excellent narrative portraits of former-Soviet immigrant experiences.³⁰

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-10, 139.

³⁰ Interestingly, Kishinevsky writes about the challenge of defining her research subjects as a group. The women were from various regions of the former Soviet Union and represented varying ethnic and religious groups. In light of this, she rejected the label of "Russians" but chose only to refer to them as former-Soviet immigrants. These challenges – earning the trust of former-Soviet immigrants and defining them as a group – were also present in the process of this thesis. The question of national, linguistic, ethnic, and religious identities emerged as a significant theme and is featured in Chapter Five below. Also, Kishinevsky noted that her initial recruitment strategy – posting leaflets near appropriate cultural and business centers – was challenging because the mothers and daughters who responded were all unable to recruit the involvement of the grandmothers. Kishinevsky recounts that she realized the skepticism and fear of the older former Soviets could only be overcome by her direct, personal invitation and absolute assurance of anonymity. "Their attitude, paranoid by mainstream American standards, had its roots in the period of Stalin's terror when a flippant remark or a stray written word could cost a person a long prison sentence or life." *Ibid.*, 4-5. Hardwick also cites the difficulty in gaining trust with Russian immigrants whose skepticism and fear carries over from generations of persecution and political informing by neighbors and strangers alike. After

While the Soviet Jewish refugee movement is documented by general surveys of late-20th century refugee and immigrant groups, the immigration of non-Jewish immigrants remain largely untouched. As established above, the existing research on former-Soviet immigrants is largely focused on Jewish Soviets, primarily on the East Coast of the United States. Yet when looking at the West Coast or specifically at non-Jewish former-Soviets, the field of existing research grows even smaller. With the exception of some research focused on the 1960s and 1970s settlements of “Old Believers” and other Orthodox splinter groups residing in the Pacific Northwest, Susan Wiley Hardwick, a professor of geography at the University of Oregon, has published the only comprehensive academic study of non-Jewish, former-Soviet immigrants.

In 1993, Hardwick published *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim*, a work that emerged from her dissertation research on ethnic Russians living in Sacramento. She profiles the Russian immigrants who settled on the West Coast of the United States and Canada throughout the last century, organized by their religious minority affiliations (for example, Dukhobors, Old Believer, Molokans, Pentecostals, and Baptists). Hardwick observed that non-Jewish Russian immigrants were distinctive when compared with Jewish immigrants and other European immigrant groups because they first settled on the West Coast instead of the East Coast.³¹

written questionnaires were not well received by the immigrants, one of Hardwick’s interviewees related, “It was OK to talk to people in Soviet Union, but we never, ever put anything in writing.” Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 10-13. Also see Helen Kopnina, *East to West Migration* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, in press), 10-11.

³¹ Hardwick, *Russian Refuge*, 5.

While Hardwick's work represents a tremendous and unique contribution to understanding the settlement of Russian immigrants in the western United States, *Russian Refuge* only covers the period through the end of the 1980s. Also, her efforts lack sufficient grounding in professional historical research. When outlining the history of Russians in the US, she relies on a meager assortment of secondary sources and makes some significant speculative jumps when piecing those sources together.³²

Like Hardwick, a few master's students have focused on aspects of recent Russian-speaking immigrants in the Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, they also stop short of satisfying explanations for the concentration of former-Soviet immigrants living on the West Coast. For example, Mary Catherine Neuburger wrote her thesis for the Department of Geography at the University of Washington. Neuburger answered the "Why the West?" question by noting the strong presence of a chain migration pattern. However, her only attempt to date this chain of migration is a perfunctory reference to established communities of Russian Pentecostals living in California during the Soviet era.³³

Hardwick also looked to the immigrants' social networks to explain the continued flow of immigrants to the West Coast. She wrote, "Almost all choose to relocate to Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, and towns and cities in between, based on hearing encouraging news about these places passed along to migrants through the network."³⁴ Hardwick also added narrative

³² See Thaddeus C. Radzilowski, review of *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration, and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim*, by Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Slavic Review* 54, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 818; Mark Bassin, review of *Russian Refuge: Religion, Migration and Settlement on the North American Pacific Rim*, by Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Russian Review* 54, no. 4 (Oct. 1995): 640.

³³ Mary Catherine Neuburger, *Exodus to Oregon: The Emigration of Russo-Ukrainian Pentecostals to the American West, 1988-1993* (master's thesis, University of Washington, 1993), 48.

³⁴ Susan Wiley Hardwick, "Migration, Embedded Networks and Social Capital: Towards Theorising North American Ethnic Geography," *International Journal of Population Geography* 9 (2003): 177.

evidence for an environmental attraction to the Pacific Northwest. For example, she quotes one recent Ukrainian refugee living in Vancouver, Washington, as saying, “The forests, river climate, and agriculture here: This is like *our* country.”³⁵ While an attractive idea, the few Russians interviewed in this study who mentioned the Pacific Northwest’s climate did so only as an afterthought, not a motivation for choosing this location. Rather, the connections to family and religious groups were commonly cited factors in choosing a location for immigration. Moreover, the interviewees commented on the significant Russian-speaking presence and business community in Portland as a significant attraction and benefit.

Candace G. Johnston, in a 1993 master’s thesis for Oregon State University, also connected the choice of Woodburn, Oregon, as a destination for immigrating Pentecostals to the preexisting community of Old Believers. However, she offered little explanation for the particular attraction to the Old Believer community, and she failed to note that this was a secondary migration from the San Francisco area. Rather, based on a 1993 article in *The Oregonian*, Johnston anchors the current community to the establishment of the Russian Gospel Church by Pastor Ben Shevchenko in 1974.³⁶ Clearly there are many unanswered questions about the large concentration of Russian-speakers on the West Coast, and this study will offer more insight on this issue in Chapter Three and Chapter Four.

However, Hardwick’s contribution is ongoing. In her *curriculum vitae* published online, Hardwick lists a forthcoming book titled, *Slavic Dreams: The Post-Soviet Refugee Diaspora to the Pacific Northwest*. In a 2003 article published in *International Journal of Population*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁶ Johnston, *Perception and Action*, 49.

Geography, she gave a preview of her research for this yet unpublished work.³⁷ While the emphasis of Hardwick's recent work appears to be the integration of her research with sociological theory, she does include the fruits of her ongoing inquiries with the newest Russian-speaking arrivals. Hardwick asserts that the most recent newcomers are products of the same religious and ethnic networks that brought the immigrants of the 1980s to the West Coast, but she also observes that the place the new refugees encounter upon arrival today is much different from that of previous decades. During the 1990s, the job market shifted towards high technology sectors, reducing opportunities for workers with little English capacity. Responsive to this trend, Hardwick cites the expansion of "non-religious networks of opportunity," like social service agencies that help immigrants navigate the employment market.³⁸ Even so, essentially Hardwick classified post-Soviet migrants as a continuation of the same stream of religious-minority refugees. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, this analysis is too simplistic and does not represent the heterogeneous nature of the Russian-speaking community in the Pacific Northwest.

Further research is needed to understand the impetus for the ongoing arrival of post-Soviet immigrants in the Pacific Northwest and to place these migration streams within a well-grounded historical frame of reference. Given the significant changes in the former Soviet Union from the 1980s to the 1990s, it is unlikely that the profile of the Russian-speaking immigrants on the West Coast have remained the same. Rather, I propose in this thesis that the post-Soviet stream of immigration is more complex and diverse in religious adherence and reasons for emigration than Hardwick describes.

³⁷ Hardwick, "Migration, Embedded Networks and Social Capital," 165.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 173-174.

Furthermore, the post-Soviet immigrants are not a minority among Russian-speakers in the Portland area. *Census 2000* revealed 31 million foreign-born persons living in the United States, or roughly 11% of the national population. More than 40% of these foreign-born individuals arrived sometime since 1990. The same census revealed that 13% of Portland's residents were foreign-born immigrants, and this represents a doubling of the immigrant population in Portland since 1990. To put it another way, over 54% of Portland's foreign-born in 2000 entered the United States during the preceding decade.³⁹ As the stream of migrants from the former-Soviet countries continues, analysis based on the 1980s immigrants is increasingly insufficient for our understanding of this unique community.

The migratory patterns and experiences of former-Soviet immigrants to the Pacific Northwest clearly invite further study. Some of the unanswered questions include the following: Are these new arrivals to the Pacific Northwest truly a continuation of the 1980s religious dissident groups, arriving with "refugee" status as in Hardwick's study? To what extent do they reflect a "chain of migration" – relatives of earlier religious minority immigrants? Or do they represent yet another period of post-Soviet immigration, reflecting a different set of migratory motivations and demographics? Are the majority of the 1990s and early 2000s immigrants still arriving from Ukraine? How do they view and divide their own community – in terms of religion, nationalism, ethnicity, or another basis?

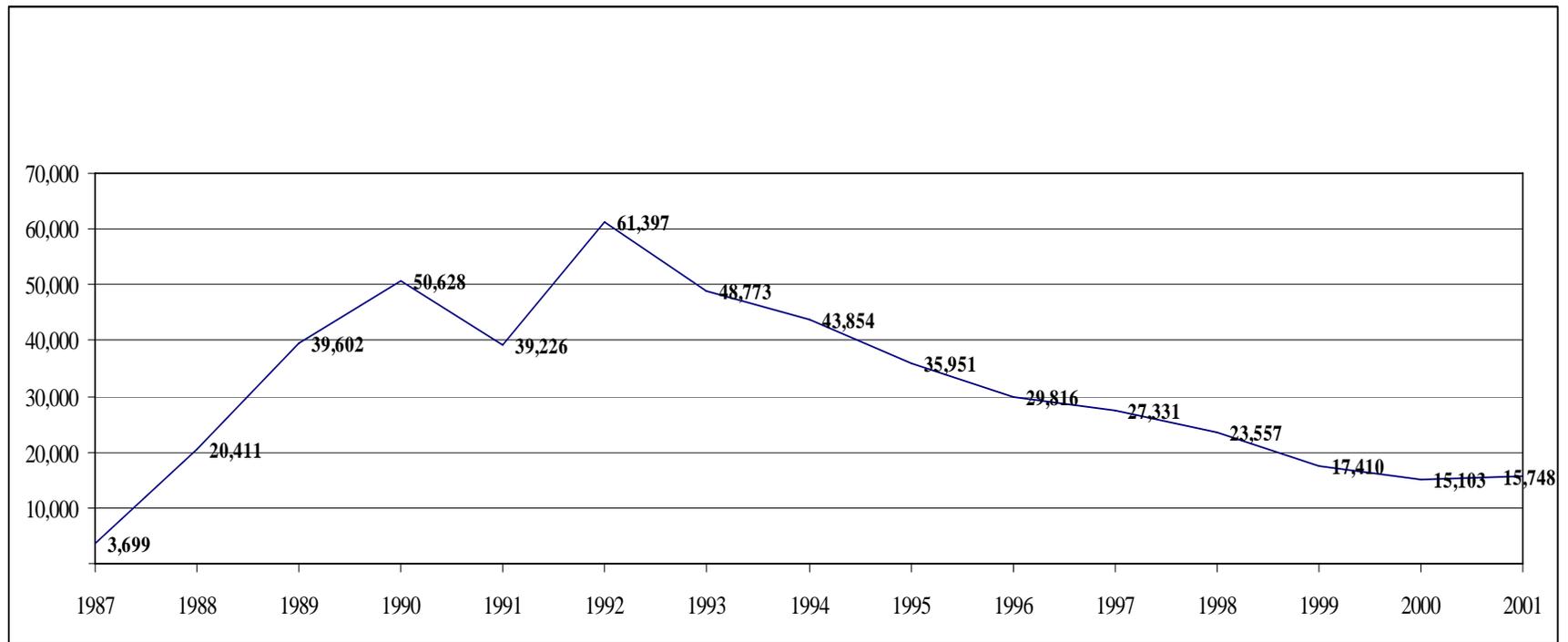
On a more intimate level, the arrival of intact, extended families has been often cited as a distinctive dynamic in the resettlement of Russian-speaking refugees. In light of this and given the typical role of grandmothers (and grandfathers, to a lesser extent) as authority figures in child

³⁹ Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and Living Cities: The National Community Development Initiative, *Portland in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000*, <http://www.brookings.edu/urban/census> (accessed April 21, 2005).

rearing in the extended Russian family, how do members of the eldest generation promote emigration within their own family? How much influence did they have in the decisions about how, when, and where to immigrate? How does the tradition of close-knit family influence decisions of immigration? Is this extended family structure maintained after the immigrants arrive in the US?

These questions will be addressed in the following chapters. This study employs oral history interviews to better understand the diversity of Russian-speaking immigrants in the greater Portland metropolitan area (including Southwest Washington) who have arrived since the fall of the Soviet Union. Comparisons with other regions of the United States are limited because of the unique concentration of Protestant refugees in the western United States. However, Portland's former-Soviet immigrant community is in many ways representative of the former-Soviet immigrants in the Pacific Northwest and much of the West Coast of the US.

Table 1: ANNUAL ADMISSIONS OF SOVIET REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES



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⁴⁰ Data from Administration for Children and Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement, “Annual Report to Congress – 2001.”

CHAPTER TWO

RUSSIANS IN OREGON

The history of Russian-speakers in the Pacific Northwest dates back to the explorations and early arrivals of the Russian explorers in Alaska and San Francisco. Individuals and small trading parties, missionaries and Russian entrepreneurs settled in the western part of North America from the time of these first contacts in the 18th century. However, the early 20th century brought the first arrivals of Russian immigrants looking for refuge on the West Coast. The purpose of this chapter is to outline what is known about the history of Russian settlements in the Pacific Northwest, and Oregon in particular, in order to provide a context for the discussions of post-Soviet immigrants in Portland.

While European (including Russian) immigrants were continuing to land *en masse* on the East Coast in the early 20th century, a few groups and families upset by the political and social turbulence of the Russian Civil War landed on the Pacific coast. Typically, these families had moved east through Manchuria or the far reaches of Siberia, and they arrived only a few at a time. Seeking financial prosperity and social stability, most of these early 20th century immigrants chose San Francisco or Sacramento as their destination, sometimes after having moved through intermediate points in the Pacific. For example, Hardwick documents a small stream of migrants from far eastern Russian settlements who were first lured to Hawaii to work in the sugarcane fields, only to later make the move to California.⁴¹ Coming through a number of different routes, some of these early migrants joined the small Orthodox congregation in San Francisco that had been established in the 19th century by Russian explorers, missionaries, and

⁴¹ Hardwick, *Russian Refuge*, 79-80.

merchants. Together, this accumulation of Russian immigrants formed the seedbed of a Russian cultural network on the West Coast.

According to a handwritten note in the Oregon Historical Society's collections, by 1928 there was enough of a community in Portland to support an active Russian and Serbian Orthodox church. The author of this document, who remains unknown, described a forthcoming dedication of the Slavic church that was to take place on June 10, 1928:

Although the Russian-Serbian community is very small still it found ways and means after bordering with self denial to establish their religious center. At first they had only a small place where they could gather, but recently they took over the Church edifice on 763 Mallory Ave. East. No. formerly belonging to Evangelistic Congregational Brothers Church, and redecorated it in accordance with Russian custom.⁴²

While the number of people of Slavic origin in Portland at that time is unknown, the author of the above document suggests that the community was hesitant to maintain their cultural and religious customs in a public manner. Perhaps this was due to their small size and a concern about being identified by Americans as associated with the emergent communist regime in the USSR.

However, in the following decades these small congregations up and down the West Coast were reinforced by new groups of Russian-speaking immigrants. Many Russian immigrants fled Kharbin and other Chinese settlements as the communist revolution in China gained control in the late 1940s. Some who fled at this time arrived in the US directly. According to Hardwick, "tens of thousands" of Russians joined the West Coast Russian

⁴² Ethnology – misc., MSS 1521, Oregon Historical Society, 1928.

communities during the period immediately following the revolution in China. However, others would only settle in the United States after 15 years or more of intermediate migrations.⁴³

In the 1960s, hundreds of Old Believers who had fled China also settled in Woodburn, Oregon.⁴⁴ International groups, such as the World Council of Churches, had taken notice of the Old Believers' struggle in China, and they received assistance to emigrate. The Old Believers who left China at that time were dispersed widely, but a large community was resettled on land donated by the Brazilian government. Unfortunately, problems with agriculture and economic restrictions forced the Old Believers in Brazil to look for other options within a period of 15 years. So in the mid 1960s, most of that community immigrated to the United States with the assistance of the Tolstoy Foundation and the sponsorship of existing Russian immigrants. According to Hardwick, they chose to settle in Woodburn, Oregon, after having heard good

⁴³ Hardwick, *Russian Refuge*, 112

⁴⁴ This religious group has its roots in the 17th century schism of the Russian Orthodox Church when they refused to accept a series of minor modifications and reforms to the liturgy of the church. From that time, Old Believers have been subject to violent discriminations in Russia, and many communities of Old Believers have made multiple migrations over the centuries in search of peace and the opportunity to practice what they view as the only true Orthodoxy. Within the Old Believers there are significant differences of belief on issues related to the priesthood, and so various segments of Old Believers split ways and migrated in different directions. While persecuted and marginalized in Russia since the schism, Old Believers' difficulties only increased during the Russification under Alexander III (1881-1894) and then again during the collectivization process following the Russian Revolution. Many Old Believers who had already been pushed east into Siberia then took the opportunity to settle in China, joining other émigrés who had settled in Kharbin or open agricultural areas. By 1949, communist policies in China provoked a second battle with collectivization and some forced repatriation to the Soviet Union. *Ibid.*, 22-24; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, sixth edition (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197-201, 391-394.

reports of the fertile Willamette Valley from earlier immigrants. During the same period, a group of about 60 Old Believer families who had previously settled in Turkey moved to Oregon, also with the help of the Tolstoy Foundation. Three separate Old Believer communities settled in the Willamette Valley after having followed separate migration routes. However, by the 1990s, their communities had formed significant connections and unification.⁴⁵

By 1991, about 5,000 Old Believers were living in the Woodburn area.⁴⁶ At the same time, about 500 Russian Pentecostals were already living in Woodburn. Originally, the Russian Pentecostal Church was an outgrowth of the birth of Pentecostalism in the US around the beginning of the 20th century. After the Pentecostal movement spread to Russia, many members fled in the face of the 1917 revolution to China only to come to the US later. Many Russian Pentecostals in Oregon were originally members of the large Russian Pentecostal Church in San Francisco. In 1974, they left that familiar place in search of a less-urban lifestyle and came to Woodburn, Oregon. Oregon was a desirable destination for their secondary migration because of the pre-existing Russian communities of Old Believers and *Molokans*, another Orthodox splinter group.⁴⁷

Protestant groups like the Pentecostal church in Woodburn then became the bridge for late 1980s Protestant refugees. Many of the early sponsorships can be traced back to existing Russian-speaking churches. In an article by Susan Hardwick that focuses on these immigrants in Northern California, she discussed the role of the existing Protestant Russian-speakers in bringing others here. According to Hardwick, churches in the Central Valley of California have

⁴⁵ Hardwick, *Russian Refuge*, 114-123.

⁴⁶ Other Old Believers have since moved on to settle in rural areas of Alaska and Canada. *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Richard A. Morris, *Old Russian Ways: Cultural Variations among Three Russian Groups in Oregon* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1991), 3-5.

sponsored new immigrants throughout the 1990s. Also, Russian Evangelical outreach programs, based in the Sacramento area, were key in getting the word out about the existing religious communities of the West Coast through radio programs. These radio messages had been broadcast into Russia since the 1970s, and they were also popular at the processing centers in Rome and Vienna where the first immigrants waited to receive their US refugee status.⁴⁸

An article from *The Oregonian* in 1988 outlines this pattern of immigrant sponsorship by Russian-Americans during the first years of the large Protestant resettlement in Oregon:

‘So far, almost all the Russian Pentecostals settling in Oregon have been sponsored by the Russian Gospel Church,’ Longaker said. More refugees want to take the leap if sponsors can be found. The Lutheran Family Service's refugee program also is looking for sponsors, and both groups say there is an incentive to move quickly while the door is open.⁴⁹

Initially Russian-speaking Evangelical churches acted as sponsors for the new refugees. According to an article published in the *Portland Tribune*, Pastor Ben Shevchenko⁵⁰ claimed that the Russian Gospel Church was the only Russian Evangelical church in all of Oregon in 1988 when the first Russian Evangelicals were able to emigrate. Shevchenko says that in the beginning all of the new arrivals came through his church.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Susan Wiley Hardwick, “California’s Emerging Russian Homeland,” in *Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place across America*, ed. Richard L. Nostrand and Lawrence E. Estaville (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 218.

⁴⁹ Cheryl Martinis, “Russians Flock to Pray Freely in Woodburn,” *The Oregonian*, 31 July 1988, C:1-2.

⁵⁰ The pastor of the Russian Gospel Church in Woodburn, Oregon, Ben Shevchenko, was mentioned (see Chapter One) in a master’s thesis as the original host of Protestant Russian immigrants in Oregon.

⁵¹ Ben Jackett, “American Dream Turns Nightmare,” *The Portland Tribune*, March 21, 2003,

<http://www.portlandtribune.com/archview.cgi?id=17147> (accessed 30 April 2005). Similarly, a growing Romanian

As mentioned in *The Oregonian* article above, many other agencies beyond the churches quickly became involved in the resettlement of these early Pentecostal refugees. As another example, some Ukrainian Pentecostals who left during the openness of *glasnost* received assistance with their migrations through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The IOM helped new refugees with low-cost loans to buy plane tickets. The first refugees settled in the Woodburn area until their numbers forced a move toward urban centers with more employment and housing options.⁵²

The influx widened to include significant numbers of Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists, as well as Pentecostal refugees. In 1998, ten years after this Protestant migrant stream began, an article in *The Oregonian* by Brian Willoughby described the population of Russian-speaking immigrants as concentrated in Sacramento and then Portland. Victoria Libov of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) estimated that 10,000 Russian refugees were living in Vancouver and 40,000 in Portland in 1998. A second wave, now a chain-migration of refugees' relatives was arriving – many of whom were generally less connected to the churches. Willoughby cited 10 Russian refugee-founded churches in Vancouver (five Pentecostal and five Baptist) and 13 in Portland, of varying Evangelical denominations.⁵³

As of *Census 2000*, the ten largest countries of origin for foreign-born residents in Portland were: Mexico (19% -- 12,943), Vietnam (14% -- 9,595), Ukraine (6% -- 4,429), Canada

immigrant community traces its history to one church and its pastor, Neculai “Nicky” Pop. Pop is the pastor of the Romanian Pentecostal Church, and he estimates that he has sponsored or facilitated sponsorship of around 15,000 Romanian immigrants. Gosia Wozniacka, “Pastor Builds a Bridge from Romania,” *The Oregonian* (24 October 2005), A-1.

⁵² Johnston, *Perception and Action*, 50.

⁵³ Brian Willoughby, “True Believers,” *The Oregonian* (3 May 1998), A-7.

(5% -- 3,330), China (4% -- 2,941), Russia (4% -- 2,621), Laos (3% -- 2,340), Philippines (3% -- 2,013), Romania (3% -- 1,943), and Korea (3% -- 1,738).⁵⁴ The 2000 census also reported that 22,000 people in the Portland-Vancouver area speak Russian or Ukrainian at home.⁵⁵ This number is significantly lower than all estimates offered by social service agencies or others familiar with the immigrant community. Perhaps this is another example of the under-representation of ethnic minorities in census data.

There is a general lack of data regarding the most recent, post-Soviet immigrants in the Portland area, and so social service agencies are the most reliable sources for estimating a profile of these newcomers. Recently, a representative of IRCO estimated there to be 70,000 to 80,000 Russian-speakers in Oregon today.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, an employee of Russian Oregon Social Services (ROSS) estimated around 100,000 Russian-speakers live in Oregon and Southwest Washington.⁵⁷ However, other workers in social service agencies in Portland have estimated that from 60,000 to 120,000 Russian-speakers live in the Portland metropolitan area, and by all assessments the number of immigrants from former Soviet states continues to grow.⁵⁸

These same social service agency representatives unanimously estimated the portion of the Russian-speakers who are conservative Protestant believers to be around 85%, with more than half of these coming from Ukraine. The other 15% are comprised of former Soviets who came with business, student, or spouse visas; perhaps 3,000 are Jewish Russian-speakers, many

⁵⁴ Hardwick, "Migration, Embedded Networks and Social Capital," 173-174.

⁵⁵ Ben Jacklet, "American Dream".

⁵⁶ IRCO Employees, interview.

⁵⁷ Tatsiana Taran, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 4 August 2005..

⁵⁸ Werner Bittner, "Between Two Worlds," *The Oregonian*, 27 February 2000, A-15.; Emilie Boyles, East County Caring Community minutes, Portland, Oregon, 3 March 2005.

of whom came with refugee status. Russian-speaking churches, which form the social nucleus for the religious immigrants, now number about 35 in the greater Portland area.⁵⁹

The conservative Evangelical groups have a reputation for having a generally low level of education, primarily because their dissident status in the Soviet Union prevented advancement. Many remain in working-class, manufacturing, service industry, and construction jobs in the United States.⁶⁰ Tatsiana Taran of ROSS said the typical Russian-speaking immigrant in Portland remains in a relatively similar economic class: “Most immigrants who came here because of their religious reasons – refugee or parole status – they continue the same style of life here.” Many of the most conservative religious refugees have large families and only one parent employed outside of the home, and they often do not change their relative economic status once in the United States.⁶¹

Conversely, Jewish immigrants have earned a reputation as highly educated and socially mobile, despite the discrimination they experienced. Sonya, an Evangelical interview participant who comes from a very highly educated family, offered her perspective on the typical educational disparity between the two groups:

It’s just a culture thing. ...Because believers were also a lot persecuted for education, but they decided, ‘We don’t need it’. But for Jewish people, it was very, very main point to get education. It doesn’t matter where, and how much I should pay, or what I need to do, but I will get this education. This is not the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ For more on Russian immigrants in the construction industry, see Jeanette Steele, “Building a Better Life,” *The Columbian* (21 September 1997), E-1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

same for Christians.... ‘They don’t let us, we don’t want it.’⁶²

The cultural and economic gap between the Evangelical and Jewish immigrants in Portland is noteworthy, as it was in the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, Russians have been living in Oregon in significant numbers since the early 20th century. Although the earliest Russian settlers on the West Coast migrated to Alaska and California, by 1928 there was enough of a concentration of Slavic immigrants to support a growing church in Portland. In the following decades, this community was reinforced by Russian immigrants making a secondary migration from China and other Pacific locations, particularly in the years surrounding World War II.

In the latter half of the century, the arrival of large groups of Old Believers and other splinter Orthodox groups to Woodburn solidified the Russian-speaking community in Oregon. This in turn attracted secondary migrants to the Woodburn area from Northern California, namely the Pentecostal church led by Ben Shevchenko. As restrictions on emigration were eased for certain religious minority groups during *glasnost*, Shevchenko’s church and many non-profit groups provided invitations and resettlement assistance to the new generation of immigrants. This late-1980s influx of Evangelical refugees quickly integrated into the urban centers, especially in Portland. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, these immigrants then became the base for the next generation of arrivals, many of whom were relatives or fellow church members. While Oregon has historically been a place of refuge for Russian immigrants seeking religious freedom, the diversity of the Russian-speaking population in Oregon has grown throughout the 1990s and early 2000 to include family members of previous immigrants, economic immigrants, students, and members of the business community.

⁶² Sonya Grishkevich, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 18 August 2005.

Immigrant Profiles

The immigrants interviewed for this study represented the wide range of social situations noted above. Formal oral history interviews were conducted with 14 former-Soviet immigrants. Interviews were also completed with numerous Americans who by virtue of their employment with social service agencies or volunteerism in the religious community are well-informed about the Russian-speaking immigrants in Portland. In addition, approximately six additional immigrants were interviewed that did not fit the parameters of this study (usually because they were Soviet-era arrivals) but who provided valuable insight and context for the current immigrant stream – often sharing their perspectives as insiders of the broader Russian-speaking community in Portland.

Below are brief profiles of 11 key informants from the first, in-depth group of interviews, who figure most significantly in this thesis, sorted by year of arrival (see Table 2). Among these, dates of immigration range from 1994 to 2005. Their ages vary from early 20s to 75 years old, with most being in their mid-30s. Eight of them are female. All except two (a Ukrainian couple) speak Russian exclusively at home, and most were citizens of the Russian Federation at departure. Four of the interviewees arrived with refugee status, three came as students, two came on parole,⁶³ and one each came on a spouse visa and after winning the green card lottery.

⁶³ Parole status is granted to aliens “on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit.” This category is used for a number of purposes, but since 1991 special legislation has allowed former Soviets and Southeast Asians with parole status to apply for Legal Permanent Resident status after one year in the United States. Between 1989 and 1999, 41,100 persons from the former Soviet Union were paroled. L.W. Gordon, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Report to Congress: Use of the Attorney General’s Parole Authority under the Immigration and Nationality 1999*, 1999.

Contrary to the accepted understanding of the community's composition, approximately half are actively part of the Evangelical Christian community in Portland; the others have no or only nominal religious affiliation. In part, it was intentional to include the largest diversity of immigrants in the study. However, it does provide a basis to question the long-standing assumptions that all of the Russian-speakers in Portland are conservative Protestants who arrived under refugee status.

Most of the participants came directly to the US and did not embark upon a secondary migration once within the United States. Those who did make a second move were women who moved because of marriage or students looking for work after graduation. All either followed or began chain migration patterns, except three of the participants who came as students; most came to join family members, but some were the first to leave and were quickly followed by family.

In order to draw upon the breadth of the Russian-speaking immigrant community, these interviews were solicited through the social networks of a local church, two social service agencies, a non-religious cultural group, and personal referrals and acquaintances of the researcher. With their permission, the interviewees' first names are used in the narrative portion of this thesis; these are not pseudonyms.⁶⁴ Their full names are included in the corresponding footnotes. A wide range of English fluency was represented by the immigrants in this project. While each participant was given the option of completing the interview in Russian, only two chose to do so; others who were not very fluent in English were adamant about interviewing in English so as to practice their language skills. Often clarifications and small exchanges between interviewee and researcher took place in Russian to the side.

⁶⁴ In one case, a pseudonym is used for a surname; this is cited in the corresponding note and bibliographic entry.

Table 2: PROFILES OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Arrival</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Region/City</u>	<u>Other Ethnic Affiliation</u>	<u>Original Status</u>	<u>Religion</u>	<u>Secondary Migration?</u>	<u>Chain Migration?</u>
Alexei	male	36	1994	Russia	Nizhni Novgorod	half-Muslim	parole	none	no	no (family followed)
Sonya	female	33	1995	Russia	Moscow	none	religious refugee	Evangelical Christian (Baptist)	no	yes (extended family)
Larisa	female	35	1995	Russia	Volgograd	none	student	Evangelical Christian (Baptist)	yes (California)	no
Alex	male	30s	1996	Ukraine	Rivne (W. Ukraine)	Ukrainian	religious refugee	Evangelical Christian (Baptist)	no	yes (extended family)
Nadia	female	30s	1996	Ukraine	Rivne (W. Ukraine)	Ukrainian	religious refugee	Evangelical Christian (Baptist)	no	yes (extended family)
Natalia	female	35	2001	Russia	Mari-El	none	spouse visa	none	yes (Mexico)	yes (husband and family)
Tatiana	female	20s	2001	Russia	Krasnoyarsk	none	student	none	yes (Eugene, OR)	no
Hanna	female	28	2001	Ukraine	near Black Sea	Ukrainian	student	Evangelical Christian (Baptist)	yes (Texas)	no
Alexandra	female	34	2002	Russia	Kaliningrad	Jewish	green card (lottery)	nominal Jew	no	yes (sister-in-law and family)
Eugenia	female	75	2003	Russia	St. Petersburg	half-Jewish	parole	nominal Jew	no	yes (daughter and family)
Gregoriy	male	58	2005	Russia	Kaliningrad	Jewish	religious refugee	nominal Jew	no	yes (daughter and family)

Alexei

Alexei is a 36-year-old Russian man, originally from Nizhni Novgorod, who immigrated to Portland in 1994 with his father, his father's wife, and their daughters with parole status. Because the family's paperwork was initiated before Alexei married his wife, Natalia (see below), he became separated from his wife and son upon immigration.

Larisa

Larisa is a 35-year-old Russian woman who first came to the United States in 1995 on a student visa. She studied in Monterey, California, at the Monterey Institute of International Studies. Now married to a US citizen, Larisa has permanent resident status. She enjoys the community of both an American (English-speaking) and a Russian Evangelical church in Portland.

Sonya

Sonya and her husband arrived in 1995 as refugees from Russia. Originating from Moscow, she and her husband both finished medical school in Russia before they emigrated. Now that Sonya's husband has received his medical license in the US, they give back to the Russian-speaking community through free medical clinics, partnering with their Evangelical church connections.

Alex & Nadia

Alex and Nadia are a Ukrainian couple who came to Portland in 1996 from western Ukraine with religious refugee status. They settled in Portland in order to join Alex's family

members who had previously immigrated; now his extended family in Portland has over 50 people. Both Alex and Nadia actively participate in a Russian-speaking Evangelical church in Portland.

Hanna

Hanna is a Ukrainian woman who came as a student in 2001 to study at a Texas university. Recently Hanna married a Russian man who came in the 1990s as a religious refugee (brother of Sonya, see above), but who has now received US citizenship. They met years ago in the former Soviet Union, and now they are living in the Portland area to be near her husband's family.

Tatiana

Tatiana is young Russian woman who also came as a student to the US in 2001. While she initially came to Eugene, Oregon, for school, she is in Portland on a work visa. Tatiana now plans to return to Europe pending the completion of her boyfriend's studies.

Natalia

Natalia is a Russian woman who immigrated in 2001 with her son. They were able to join her husband, Alexei (see profile above), who had immigrated seven years earlier only after tremendous difficulty in obtaining a visa. During that process, Natalia and her son took up temporary residence in Mexico in order to facilitate cross-border visits from her husband.

Alexandra

Alexandra is a 34-year-old Russian Jewish woman who immigrated to the United States in 2002. She, her husband, and her twin sons knew they wanted to leave Russia, but they chose the US for their destination after winning the “green card lottery”.

Eugenia

Eugenia is a 75-year-old Russian woman from St. Petersburg who described herself as “half-Jewish”. She came to Portland join her daughter, who had immigrated years before, after the death of her husband. Eugenia arrived in 2003.

Gregoriy

Gregoriy is the father of Alexandra (see above). He is a 58-year-old Russian Jewish man from Kaliningrad who arrived in September of 2005 as a refugee. Gregoriy’s interview was conducted in Russian, ten days after his arrival.

CHAPTER THREE

AN UNPREDICTABLE COUNTRY

The post-Soviet generation of immigrants in Portland is distinguished from the late 1980s immigrants by their diversity. Contrasted with the earlier, homogenous immigrants who were refugees fleeing religious persecution, the Russian-speaking immigrants who arrived in the 1990s and early 2000s represent a wide range of motivations for immigration. However, several common themes emerge to enlighten their reasons for leaving their homeland. While the religious persecution of Protestant Russian-speakers is a dominating factor for many Portland newcomers, other social and political conditions played a significant role for most all of the interview participants in their decision to leave the former Soviet Union.

Crowded and Trapped

The desire to escape cramped living quarters and dead-end employment was a common theme in the immigrant interviews. For example Alexandra, a non-religious Jewish Russian, described the conditions that led to the decision she and her husband made to emigrate as a lack of prospects for their economic and political futures. Despite both having achieved a high level of education (master's degrees) and professional employment, they felt their family's material prospects were very limited. She said, "We didn't have any perspective for development of our kids, because we had understood that we don't have enough money for this, although that we both had again good job, very good job, and we had a very good education – both of us." Particularly, Alexandra and her husband felt confined by the shortage of available and affordable

housing.⁶⁵ They were sharing a two-bedroom apartment with her husband's parents until they were able to find a way out. In order to have their own place, Alexandra related, "We had to wait when our parents will die – it's so terrible to hear, but in this way had lived a lot of people now in Russia."⁶⁶

Sonya's story was similar to Alexandra's, despite her initial status as a refugee and her membership in the religious minority community in Russia. Both Sonya and her husband had recently finished medical school in Moscow, and in their first year of marriage they had to share a small apartment with her parents. She described the situation in this way,

Even if you're nice, since your parents are nice, but you don't have your own family. So it was for us, like, opportunity to start something new for us -- our own family, our own plans. Plus, when you live together, everybody wants to know, 'What's going on?' 'What's your next step?' 'Are your going to do this, or where are you going?' It's some kind of ...annoying ...living with this every day from the morning to the night.

Sonya said she and her husband saw immigration as a fresh start, and they have never wanted to return to Russia.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ This theme was prominent in the interviews not only as a factor that motivated them to leave, but also as one of the two most common "first impressions" or surprises about American culture. Several, like Sonya, likened the US style of urban planning to a "huge village." Alexandra said, "I had stereotype that America is just huge, huge buildings like in downtown. And I discovered for myself that America is a one floor apartment. ...One floor houses, one level houses. ...It's like a village." Alexandra Kichatova, interview by author, digital audio recording, Beaverton, Or., 18 August 2005.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Grishkevich, interview.

Alexandra and Sonya's stories reflect the desire of many to escape the immovable systems and perceived determinism of the former Soviet Union's systems. Whether the barrier is described in terms of professional opportunities or the relative cost of living, many of the immigrants in this study were "pushed out" by the circumstances of their daily lives.

Lured by Education

Another factor that motivated these informants to leave their home country was accessible educational opportunities in the US. Three of the interviewees initially came to the United States as students. Larisa, who arrived in 1995, came to study Public Administration and International Management at the Monterey Institute of International Studies at the invitation of the American Council of Teachers of Russian. All expenses were covered for Larisa under the agreement that she would return to Russia to use her new knowledge for at least two years following the completion of her program. Although Larisa has now married an American citizen and has immigrated permanently, that was not the intention of her program or her original intention.

Tatiana came to study in the University of Oregon's Community Planning Program, using her own financial resources. She also did not intend to immigrate permanently. Now here on a work permit, Tatiana still plans to return to Russia. "I'll go back one day. ... No, I never intended to stay. I might get a green card, but I'm not sure about that. It takes so long. My – I want to go back to Europe. I don't want to stay here forever ...temporary thing." She is waiting to leave until her boyfriend finishes school. By coming to the United States, Tatiana hoped to "just to get an education from a different country... and to be fluent in a language."⁶⁸ In this way, Tatiana is representative of a minority of the Russian-speakers in Portland who are

⁶⁸ Tatiana Galina, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 15 August 2005.

upwardly mobile and living from their own financial resources. Some of these temporary immigrants will return home.

Hanna is the third participant who moved to the US for academic purposes. She originally came to study at a private university in Texas. Hanna completed an M.A. program related to administration in higher education, and she was working on a Ph.D. with the same emphasis at the time of her interview. Again, she did not intend to immigrate, but like Larisa, after marrying in the United States she has become a permanent resident.

Interestingly, Hanna conceded that she would have been likely to immigrate anyway, after completing her program, because of the incompatibility she perceives between herself as an American-trained educational administrator and the academic systems of her native Ukraine. In addition to her relational ties to the US, Hanna stayed because of cultural and philosophical differences with the Ukrainian academic world. She explained her concerns in this way:

I will try to get a job, and get working and adjusted and then get a green card. And it's not because I like the luxury of living here or having a car. It's because of, I don't know, I guess how free it is, for my mind, especially if you go to graduate school in the United States. People will only understand if they've been there, done that. And they won't understand; it's different than undergraduate work. You get done and you roll and you fly... because you think and you study more. ... And I'm able to think critically, and that's never been appreciated in Ukraine. And it never will be. I mean, at least not in the future.

My major professor in Ukraine was the president, the vice-president of the university I went to – very good friends and very influential – big figure. And he said, 'They will never accept you. They will chew you up ...because of how much

you know’ – not intelligence-wise or knowledge based on the subject matter. They’re very intelligent there, but it’s how things are done and how you teach, you know, and how you hold material, how resourceful you can be in providing all the references and links – all the sources for your students. ‘Go further, go further. Explore. Explore.’ Well, this does not work in Ukraine. ... Those are the inquirers – the inquiring mind. And those would emigrate. It would always happen. ... But here that is actually appreciated.

I know that I would not be able to achieve anything like that in Ukraine. I went... and I saw the graduate school there, and it definitely does not develop your brain or your thinking levels. You’re still thinking at the level of comprehension and recalling, not developing and synthesizing and connecting to what you know to other things. I would love to sort of break those boundaries of the students that I would teaching in Ukraine and tell them dig a little further...and connect to others. They don’t teach it that way. They just don’t.⁶⁹

Hanna cited a lack of intellectual freedom in Ukraine that would prevent her from advancing her career there. She perceived that all who challenge the academic system there, like herself, eventually leave because they are not allowed to pursue higher-order thinking.

When asked about the consequences of returning to influence the Ukrainian universities, Hanna was fatalistic. She explained that she could become a professor and implement her own teaching methods in the classroom, but she would never have the opportunity to be an administrator, in line with her current training:

If I got a degree here in higher education, I would like to be an administrator there and that would not happen. Cause here you have to have education and,

⁶⁹ Hanna Hults, interview by author, digital audio recording, Clackamas, Or., 22 October 2005.

whatever, credentials. There, those things are based on your experience and who you know. ...Well, things are different here. If you deserve it, you will get it. And it doesn't hurt if you know somebody – especially in the educational community! But definitely, at least you have a chance, and you're not stuck.⁷⁰

Hanna's words reflect her perspective on the university system as immovable.

Much like Alexandra and Sonya, above, the dearth of opportunity for advancement keeps Hanna here in the United States. These student-migrants represent one part of the diversity of Russian immigration in the Portland area. Not all immigrants intend or become permanent residents, and some stay because of new relational ties – usually marriage to an American citizen or other permanent resident.

Fleeing Instability

A central theme woven through these interviews is the fear of political and social instability. A clear summary of this sentiment came from Larisa: “Russia is an unpredictable country. We are trying ...to build a law[ful] society, but it strictly depends on the individual who is in power – whatever this individual will do.”⁷¹ While evaluations of recent political history vary widely, Larisa's words echo the descriptions of uncertainty given by most all of the interviewees. Social and political instability was the primary driving motivation for many immigrants' decisions to migrate.

Most of the interviewees agreed that this fear of social instability has been pervasive and remains significant as a reason for former-Soviet emigration. For example, a group of seven employees of IRCO was interviewed for this project. All of the participants were former-Soviet

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ IRCO Employees, interview.

immigrants themselves, although they came to the US at various times, ranging from the late 1970s to 1995. (Larisa, who also completed an individual interview, participated in this meeting and was the one who had arrived most recently.) The discussion covered a wide range of topics that included their own experiences, but the reference point for the majority of the conversation was their daily interactions with newly arrived refugees and immigrants from the former Soviet Union. While they had divergent opinions in several areas, consensus was quickly reached as to why recent arrivals are still claiming refugee status: instability. Interestingly, none of them questioned the validity of the “refugee” designation given to the majority of their clients despite the democratic reforms in Russia and Ukraine. The reality of instability in the private, economic, and government sectors were cited as more than enough justification to leave, and still these are ongoing concerns that prevent return migration. The rich nature of this conversation requires the length of the edited excerpt reproduced here.

Luba: They do have a fear of the government and power and authority. You know they can say, “Okay -- you have freedom, everything.” But you don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow.

Lydia: Absolutely. It’s not stability. During my trip, I met one girl from Krasnodar.... She is a lawyer, and she work as a waiter in Sheraton Hotel in London, by airport. And my question was, “Why?” And she said, “You know, I’d better work here as a waiter, than there as a lawyer.” I said, “Why, what the reason?” And she said she’s here in London three years already. Three years ago, she went back to her city, to her family. She said – drugs, alcohol, and she was scared. She was scared to be there – to work there as a lawyer. So she just...

Luba: Yeah, this is true.

Larisa: I mean, that -- part of the reason, I think, why people are leaving is that people's lives doesn't cost anything. You can be killed, just because...

Luba: For money...

Larisa: Yeah, or for nothing at all. Especially if you're a lawyer, you're very....

Yeah, I know example from my own city [Volgograd]. Like, one of the most prominent lawyers was killed – just in front of his own house. They just came with the rifle, and just killed him there.

The participants were concerned about corruption and physical violence from private citizens, mafia members, and the like. However, the theme of political instability was primary. Despite even positive changes and hopeful, democratic movements, the interviewees emphasized the instability of the future in the former Soviet states.

Volodya: ...still, he [*speaking of the new President of Ukraine*] didn't do anything good either! That's why we are waiting.

Lydia: The only one thing we can do is just be so sorry for people that are there.

We just so sorry for them because, you know, they are suffering.

Irina: They have no stability... no... future.

Clearly, economic instability was also a significant problem, especially for those who left during or immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union and the implementation of economic “shock therapy”. Many workers were without salaries, although they continued to work in hopes of repayment.

Luba: ...You get paid in shoes or clothes or something.

Irina: ...They were living without salary. [*others agreeing*] We were wondering, ‘Why? Why are you putting up with this? Why are you coping with this? Why

don't you quit the job?' But what good will this be -- they were hoping, maybe that next month, next year they will pay us something....

Volodya: Or at least, there is some record of the employment, so that they might get the pension.

The abrupt departure from government subsidized goods and industry left many citizens to create income for themselves through creative means, such as reselling accessible goods at local outdoor markets for a small profit.

Larisa: It's like the Russia was an industrialized country. There was a lot of factories everywhere, like Volgograd, for example, and they were all subsidized by government...

Irina: ...Some socialistic economy crashed – subsidizing or buying the company's stuff. The company, in a capitalistic environment, couldn't exist anymore because everything was supposed to be for profit. So, many, many industries crashed because of that....

Larisa: Imagine all this huge conglomerates, huge companies -- and people just losing jobs, and all they can do is to operate this machinery in the textile company and that's pretty much their only company they will work their whole life.... So what they can do, after that? Yeah, so it was a big tragedy for a lot of people. And that's how they ended up on the markets – on the street markets, selling produce – like vegetables, fruits, and re-selling like clothes... buying clothes, like in Moscow, and bringing them to Volgograd and re-selling them. And the trades - trade is like the main industry, and services, too. ...but the thing is, it was extremely difficult for people to readjust, but some of them readjusted pretty well,

I think. But most of these people who readjusted pretty well is the younger generation.

Volodya: ...and former communist leaders.

Larisa: Because, I mean, they might earn good money, but I don't know how they pay taxes. There are not so many benefits in Russia right now – like pension... and other stuff. Social services which we had before – I don't think they exist right now.⁷²

The interview participants agreed that some in the former Soviet Union made the adjustment to capitalism successfully. Those who have succeeded are often young, entrepreneurial people or, as Volodya added sarcastically, former communist leaders who inherited tremendous wealth during rapid privatization of government industries. Crime, violence, corruption, mistrust of government, economic changes, disruption in social services, and unrealistic taxation requirements were all cited as contributors to the unstable and unsafe conditions of the former Soviet Union that prompted emigration. The sum of these factors is anxiety about the future. One day the situation (the government, employment, safety issues) is good, but tomorrow who knows!

Perhaps some of these examples, like being paid in goods instead of cash, are more representative of the circumstances and motivations of the earlier, late-1980s immigrants, but the impressions of these participants are also informed by the stories of the new refugees and immigrants they serve. This conversation is useful to establish the ongoing apprehension of former Soviet immigrants in relationship to their homeland despite the last decade's

⁷² *Ibid.*

democratizing trends. The “wait and see” mentality demonstrated in this group interview was corroborated by the individual voices of most all of the others who shared their stories.

During her individual interview, Larisa talked about the Russia she left in 1995 with many of the same descriptions. Uncertainty marked the social scene, even though this was not the reason that prompted her to leave.

When I left Russia, it was the time when the Russia was transitioning from Soviet Union to kind of a new country. It was already independent Russia. It was a democratic state, but there was so many processes going on – the economic transition, the political transition, a lot of uncertainties – a lot of uncertainties for the future of this country. It was not an easy time – for Russia at that time when I left it. And since that, so many dramatic changes happened there....⁷³

Alexei, who arrived in Portland in 1994 with parole status, talked specifically about crime in Russia, supporting the descriptions of corruption offered by the IRCO employees. Before he left St. Petersburg, Alexei and a friend tried to start a small theater business, showing popular films in a student hostel for an entrance fee. After gaining the appropriate permission from the building’s manager, the pair went to check out the room. Within 20 minutes, members of a mafia group arrived and told them what they would charge. Alexei reported,

So we backed out of it right away, because we won’t be able to support any of that. And later on, my buddy – because he used to live in this hostel – saw that the office lady who we got the permission, with these guys. So after she give us

⁷³ Larisa Felty, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 8 August 2005.

permission, she call these guys and say, ‘Hey, you’ve got new customers.’ This is a mild case. This is a mild case.⁷⁴

Alexei and his wife Natalia explained that the amount the mafia representatives required of them was enough to undermine any profits they would make from the business. Yet, the mafia promised benefits for their “services”:

Natalia: But they’re not charging you money just for nothing. They’re telling you that they’re providing you, like, roof against other groups.

Alexei: Anytime you socialize, try to associate with any of those people, you get yourself into deeper trouble.

Natalia: They’re actually providing you with services, protecting you from other groups – mafia. That’s what the point is. You know, if you don’t pay us, somebody will get over you....

Alexei: You’ll pay somebody.

Natalia: You’ll pay somebody else. Not to pay many of them, you have to pay somebody. Otherwise you’ll end up paying everybody....⁷⁵

Unless you buy the protection of the mafia group who offered it to you, others would demand payments as well. So, they explained, it was necessary to pay handsome extortion prices when they were requested, in order to keep other mafia groups at bay.

Natalia and Alexei also related the story of a Portland-area Russian store owner who immigrated after failing in business back home. His businesses were overwhelmed by a combination of the generally poor economic situation, mafia overhead, and government taxes

⁷⁴ Alexei Synkov, interview by author, digital audio recording, Tigard, Or., 30 October 2005.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and fees – to the extent that he had to “drop everything” and start over when he got the opportunity to move to the US.

Hanna, one of the students, also emphasized the instability of life in the former Soviet Union. From her perspective, in the US if you are willing to work you can be guaranteed some financial security; this stands opposed to life in Ukraine, where uncertainty marks each day:

And I feel more stable here knowing that I’m a hard worker, and I worked two jobs, you know, before, and I supported my mom and dad when they were still working. And I would always tell them, ‘Never worry, don’t worry about it.’ And I could actually guarantee that. Not in Ukraine. One day you go, and another day everything went wrong.⁷⁶

Likewise, Alexandra talked about the insecurity she feels in light of the political and economic realities of Russia. The end result, she said, is that “you don’t know what will be tomorrow.”⁷⁷

While talking about the Russia she left in 2003, Alexandra gave the most dramatic description:

Any democracy was cancelled, and it has begin.... The Russia at that time had begin to look like Stalin’s Russia -- no political freedom, no any freedom. People who had became rich, they start to suffer because the new political and economical regime didn’t allow to develop their businesses. So, it is so terrible political situation.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Hults, interview.

⁷⁷ Kichatova, interview.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Yet Sonya, who left Moscow in 1995, disclosed that for her the political situation had not been unbearable:

In general, I think it's just the feeling that you just want to change the whole situation. We're used to be with our government being a very unstable government. I can't say that we need to go to the States because it was so difficult for us to be there. And a lot of people are still missing this, their country. They understand that it's much better here for living... much more comfortable... space, place for each family.⁷⁹

Sonya made an interesting point – for her and potentially many others, instability is nothing new and by itself would not be sufficient motivation to leave. Instead, she returned to the housing shortage to explain her perspective on the need to make a change. Political instability was not sufficient for migration, but insecurity about the future combined with housing shortages or other economic problems to motivate many to emigrate.

Alex, a Ukrainian whose family had a history of persecution for religious reasons, offered a different perspective. He saw the government as problematic precisely because it *has not* changed. He gave this explanation:

Basically, system has not really changed. Yes, like changed name, but not really changed, and people see they cannot stay like where same in that system anyway. Because for example, some chiefs was in government, they don't move from that position. Basically, that was changed, it was kind of like under Soviet Union and like under communist system, that was changed, looks like independent country, but people whose same position, they didn't change position. They stay. So

⁷⁹ Grishkevich, interview.

basically, that's people not changed. They have own opinion about what's was going on before, so. And we now would like to protect our kids, because we was kind of adapted to that system. But kids still not. So we just – we care, for example, we can live there, but that because lots of problem in future. So we just decide that was opportunity to move.⁸⁰

Ironically, Alex cited his primary motivation to leave as the unchanging faces in positions of power that limited the development of democracy; he wanted something different for his children.

The perspectives offered by the interviewees were varied and complex when it came to politics, and this, perhaps, is the area that separates the circumstances of Ukraine from Russia most distinctly. Volodya, one of the IRCO staff members, said that previously the Ukrainian situation was not a problem of a dictatorial leader, but sanctioned corruption. “You know, bribes was almost kind of like [*chuckling*] – I don't know, maybe there was only one step left to make it official or something. Maybe it's exaggerated, but everything was so much corrupted.”⁸¹ As evidence of this fact, he mentioned the sale of the biggest state steel mill:

There were a few investors from Russia, from western European countries, and also some Ukrainian investors who wanted to buy it, and the special condition that was created to define what would qualify those investors made the whole bunch of rules just to make only one investor fit, who was the son-in-law of Ukrainian president.⁸²

⁸⁰ Alex and Nadia Klibanov [pseud.], interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 13 October 2005.

⁸¹ IRCO Employees, interview.

⁸² *Ibid.*

As for the current situation, the Ukrainian government is new enough that the jury of public judgment is still out. On this subject Volodya demonstrated cautious optimism:

So far, you know, people are watching it, and I don't think they did anything wrong so far [*laughing*] you know as far as making any anti-democratic moves, in any way. And they actually – the head of security services of Ukraine, which is former KGB, he is a Baptist banker... which was unheard of before.⁸³

Yet in Russian politics, immigrants voiced much stronger opinions. Volodya gave a negative evaluation (like Alexandra, above), "...In Russia, Putin, he has the tendencies of taking control over whatever he can. And there are a lot of jokes about this, like in the year of 2010, he's going to be called 'Your Majesty Vladimir Putin'... and other things like that."⁸⁴

Yet Alexei, the only non-religious Russian who offered his opinion about Putin's government, had many specific positive things to say:

Well, with Putin it has been getting a lot better. He paid all the Russian debts. He started paying the salary to teachers, to the veterans. He's actually putting the criminals back to jails. So, compared to the many years before that – it was kind of falling apart, different pieces, which was – he's trying to put it back together, but he's only got what – three years to go, and I am afraid of what happens next. Right now, it's definitely a big improvement.⁸⁵

Although Alexei was positive about Putin's reconstruction, he still cited corruption in other government positions. He described a popular singer who recently became the president of the

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Synkov, interview.

small “Jewish Autonomic Republic”, saying, “It’s way, way, way in the middle of nowhere, but he can find a place where he can be king, just because he’s got money!” In summary Alexei, like many others, still perceives life in Russia as uncertain and “dangerous” – enough so that he has no desire to live there again.⁸⁶

Lingering Persecution

The fear of persecution is central to the definition of refugee, and yet despite the newfound freedoms in the former Soviet Union, many in the last fifteen years have claimed this status. The common understanding of the IRCO staff was described by Larisa,

They said you will be a refugee if you belong to a certain religious group, if you belong to the church before collapse of the Soviet Union – before ’91 – and if you can prove... that you were persecuted before, or that you have a fear of persecution in the future. And so, I mean, the fear of persecution in the future that all these people have. Because nobody knows for sure how... it will go.⁸⁷

Since 1989, former Soviets have been admitted as refugees if they assert membership in one of these historically persecuted groups: Jews, Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics, and Ukrainian Orthodox. The documentation requirement for a former-Soviet’s “fear of persecution” employs a more liberal standard than the general refugee definition, thus privileging former-Soviet religious minorities with special protection.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ *Ibid*

⁸⁷ IRCO Employees, interview.

⁸⁸ U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1997 – Russia*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=home&id=3ae6a8b30>, 1997.

Many of those interviewed for this project who came with refugee status had memories of Soviet-era persecution (usually as children) or the heritage of such stories, passed down by their parents and grandparents. Sonya, who came as a refugee in 1995, recalled the whole family – parents, adult children and their spouses – going to the American embassy for an interview. Her mother-in-law was the primary candidate, but once refugee status was granted it applied to the whole family. Sonya described, “Not everybody was asking some questions, no. We just goes – went like kids. So everybody got this status.”⁸⁹ This was common among the Protestant refugees interviewed in Portland – many of them were not personally or overtly persecuted, but they had family members who experienced significant discrimination or physical suffering.

For example, Alex’s father and grandfather both spent time in jail in the former Soviet Union because of their role in the local Evangelical church. When asked about the conditions in 1996, the year that Alex and Nadia left as refugees, Alex said,

Yes, some was stay in the jail, because they was some, for example, for religious purpose. They was like get jail before. Like, independence thats changes, and some was like has freedom, like how that’s called, I don’t know, in English, am.... amnistia. [amnesty]. Some get that, and another one not. I don’t know what was depending. Yeah, but some was basically -- somebody was lucky and another one not.⁹⁰

In Alex’s mind, the persecution of religious minority groups is still real today, though perhaps less acute.

⁸⁹ Grishkevich, interview.

⁹⁰ Klibanov, interview.

By contrast, Hanna had a more optimistic view than Alex of religious freedoms following the collapse of the Soviet Union: “After 1991, there were no questions asked. You believe whatever you want to. We received freedom of speech. You could go to any school you want to.” However, this perspective was not shared by any of the other Protestant immigrants or the many human rights groups who have warned about residual problems in the former Soviet Union.⁹¹

Despite constitutional protection of religious freedom in Russia, new legislation was enacted in the late 1990s that has been touted by many international groups and foreign governments as promotion of “religious intolerance.” In 1997, restrictive legislation replaced the liberal 1990 law in the Russian Federation and became “the focus of serious concern about the state of religious freedom in the country,” according to the US State Department. The law required all religious groups to register simultaneously with local and federal authorities in order to legally rent or buy facilities, proselytize, or publish materials. However, registration was only granted to groups that could prove they had existed in Russia for at least 15 years, and the registration process was ambiguous and contradicted local laws in many situations. The end

⁹¹ In a 2000 report, the US Department of State alleged that religious freedom in Russia was still problematic: “Human rights activists have claimed in the past that only 15 percent of actual violations of religious freedom are reported, and it still appears that only a small percentage of actual incidents are reported to authorities or independent media.” Russian citizens are still skeptical about the protection of their religious freedoms and fear retaliation if they were to report an abuse of human rights. U.S. Department of State, *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 2000 – Russia*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=home&id=3ae6a89f0>.

result was increased vulnerability to abuse for religious minority groups, fueled by majority religions and popular discriminatory attitudes.⁹²

Nevertheless, Hanna even warned that claims of persecution in the last fifteen years lacked all credibility:

We're a new generation – none of us were. If they tell you they were, they're lying. Parents will probably be the last generation that could be persecuted.

Although I will doubt it still because my father-in-law, he was born in 1930. He's almost like my grandfather. So he's actually two generations back, if you look at the history.⁹³

Perhaps Hanna's age of 28 affects her experience of difficulties in the former Soviet Union, as well as the fact that her family of origin was not actively involved in prohibited religious groups. In this way her perspective differs greatly from Alex's.

Nevertheless, Hanna agreed that some older former Soviets could be legitimately granted refugee status based upon their history as persecuted "outsiders" in the former Soviet Union, although it was not necessarily religiously-based discrimination. Hanna suggested that it was a

⁹² *Ibid.*; Also, the 1997 law reportedly prevented the registration of groups that are known for certain practices like "hypnotism." Some Russian authorities have labeled Pentecostal practice of "speaking in tongues" as hypnotism, thereby endangering their legitimate status. Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, *Russia: The Pentecostal community; including its hierarchy; in Barnaul: the name of the church and the pastor, the size of the community, its treatment, and whether there were any incidents of abuse of members in 1996 and 1997 (January 1996 – January 1999)*, <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/openssl.htm?tbl=RSDCOI&page=home&id=3ae6ad8a17>.

⁹³ Hults, interview.

cultural norm to have your career sabotaged by resentful coworkers, regardless of your religious affiliation.

Some could be persecuted, but it's really hard to prove these days. But I can see that happening. My father-in-law, for example, was fired from the medical academy where he was the major professor and the major figure – just because people... I don't know, they were jealous. It's an unwritten Slavic culture, Slavic war that they have. He was a Baptist, all his life. Slavic people, if they are Christians, they are Orthodox. They don't like the whole Evangelical movement – they don't understand it.⁹⁴

While Hanna's father-in-law was able to achieve professional prominence in Moscow in the 1990s, he was eventually fired on a technicality. The family filed a lawsuit, only to withdraw it shortly before their emigration, on the condition of his employment record being cleared.

He's never done anything wrong. But it still did happen. And if he tells his whole life story, how he was studying – expelled and enrolled, expelled and enrolled, humiliated and all that – he could get a refugee status, you know. So there's still cases like that. But you think that it's because of your Christian beliefs, and it may be the truth. But it's really hard to prove these days, but he could by looking at the sequence of events.... And other beliefs – other than religious – political could get a refugee status.⁹⁵

Volodya, a participant in the group interview of IRCO staff members, gave legislative insight on the continuing protected status for former-Soviet religious minorities. He had a friend

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

who gives reports at regular intervals to the United States Congress about the ongoing persecution of Pentecostal and Baptist Christians in the former Soviet Union. This man recounted to Volodya a story from a congressional visit he made in 2004:

Someone from Congress wanted to raise the question to maybe consider stopping immigration from Ukraine. And the biggest reason this question did not go through was because, like, he convinced the other congressmen on his example – for example, how many years it took for the Congress to adopt this law and to start implementing this law, to set up the system to define refugees, and to direct them and bring them over – so if let's say for right now we're going to stop it... and what if, let's say, a few months down the road situation changes, then it's going to take a few years to come back to the system again, so they decided not to touch it here.⁹⁶

Volodya explained the difference between the persecutions of the 1980s compared with more recent problems as one of source. Under Soviet rule, the communist doctrine of atheism led to the persecution of the religious practitioners. In recent years, the discrimination has originated in the majority Orthodox population and the Orthodox Church's leadership, who openly disdain Evangelicalism. The resulting fear is based again in the instability of the future, and this is why many Protestants have continued to arrive as refugees in the 1990s and beyond.

There is a lot of uncertainty still because you never know where it is going to go.

Who knows what ...in 50 years down the road, communists will come again, like

⁹⁶ IRCO Employees, interview.

Zudanov in Russia, or there will be some other form of dictatorship not based on the communist ideology but on something else.⁹⁷

Volodya's concerns are substantiated by the legislative history in Russia following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The 1997 law, mentioned above, resulted in a sort of "Orthodox-dominated selective pluralism." This appeared to be a step backward from the religious freedoms granted just years earlier. Religious groups that were deemed "traditional" were sanctioned in an attempt to regulate and diminish the presence of "sects" and Western religious influences.⁹⁸

Larisa shared a similar sentiment. In recent parliamentary elections in Russia, only the parties in direct support of Putin received a majority of votes.

And in Russian news, it was shown like a great success – the cooperation of the president and the Parliament, just working together and with each other – it's so great. But here in the news, it was ...looked like from a completely different perspective. There is no voice against the president! Like we are going back to the period when there was one man who was doing everything, and everybody was, like, raising the hands and saying, 'Yes, we agree!' So, that's kind of scary thing. What if Putin today supports going to the church and supports all these different religions, but then he changed his mind or somebody else will come to power, and it will be completely different.⁹⁹

Volodya warned that it is difficult for Americans to understand this residual fear, which is rooted in the past:

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Alexander Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gifts: Religious and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Societal Fabric," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 3 (May 2001): 481.

⁹⁹ IRCO Employees, interview.

This is why it is hard to judge from the perspective of, you know, when you were born here, and you have your American culture – it’s hard for you to understand, maybe, how people over there, they are more emotional, and when it comes to emotions, it is not only love, but hate, too. So that is why when people here – they are much more tolerant in every sphere, in customer service, in communicating with the neighbors. Over there people are much more intolerant, in every sphere of life. ...The country is Orthodox. It means that all the other ones, you know, should be hated. It’s like, ‘If you’re not with you, then you’re against us.’ So, that’s why... and still a number of generations were taught not to like evangelical Christians. And only 15 years does not really cure that. There is still a lot of people from older generations who just... you know, it’s just going to go with them. When there will be a few more new generations, then... maybe then it will be changed. But not in the near future.¹⁰⁰

In Volodya’s assessment, religious minority groups are still persecuted in Russia in the beginning of the 21st century.

Luba, a Ukrainian immigrant in the IRCO staff interview, was also concerned that the American perspective on issues in the former Soviet Union was not accurate. She suggested that the media’s reports have been misleading, but that she and other immigrants who have personal ties in Russia have a clearer picture. “We know them and hear what they’re talking, and when you call relatives in Russia, they will tell you the truth – which you wouldn’t know, if you don’t

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

know anybody there. You can read the newspaper, but the newspaper will never tell you what is going on.”¹⁰¹

Luba also pointed out that while persecutions of Evangelicals in the former Soviet Union may be decreasing there are other religious minority groups that are now facing persecution. For example, she cited the recent influx of ethnic Turks from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia. Others in the room agreed with Luba that there is ongoing persecution of ethnic and national minority groups, now often inflicted by formerly peaceful neighbors. Likewise Tatsiana, who immigrated from Belarus in 2000 and now works at ROSS, asserted that while conditions are not as bad for Evangelicals as they were in the Soviet times, persecution still occurs in Russia and the Central Asian republics.

Alexandra and her father Gregoriy both spoke of the persecution of Jewish people, as an ethnic or national minority group that is divorced from religion. Alexandra suggested that anti-Semitism increased in the 1990s, and she was ashamed to acknowledge her Jewish heritage when she left Kaliningrad only two years ago:

Because now there is anti-Semitism, and it is just start to bloom. I don't know how to say exactly -- because of Putin's regime, the laws provoke and provide anti-Semitism. Every rich Jewish people are sitting in the prison now – is sitting in the prison now, and it was shame to say that I'm Jewish. Everybody start to think that I steal a lot of money from, from the state. It just terrible to explain.¹⁰²

Her father, Gregoriy, had only arrived ten days before his interview, having received refugee status as a Jew. He described his experience in colorful language,

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Kichatova, interview.

Happened to human being to be born as a Jew. Here nobody hides this, but there they pinch you from birth. For example, they didn't take me for the military school, although I was a good student and a sportsman – a candidate in master sport, exercised in light athletics and now I think I'm in good shape – but they didn't take me, and that's it. When I was young, I wasn't ashamed of this, as in other cases. Any person who is Jewish by nationality take this easy – some people indignant, some humble. Here I can't change anything – only to say, 'thank you' to mom and dad. Then there were a few other situations that hurt my feelings badly, although I'm not ashamed of my native land.¹⁰³

Gregoriy's experience of persecution was most tangibly expressed in the missed opportunities for career advancement and personal accomplishments.

Eugenia, a 75-year-old woman from St. Petersburg who had one Jewish parent, expressed the difficulty her daughter had in obtaining a university education because she had been identified as a Jew. In the 1990s, Eugenia's daughter came to the United States as a refugee, and she is now a lawyer practicing immigration law.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Alexandra spoke of the difficulty she encountered in education because of her Jewish identity. She recalled being eager to take her husband's name when they married because he is Russian, and she was in the process of writing her dissertation. She said, "And it was a lot of problem to change my last name at this time, but I did it because I understood that if I will change my last name from Jewish last name to Russian

¹⁰³ Gregoriy Vishinevskiy, interview by author, digital audio recording, Beaverton, Or., 29 September 2005.

¹⁰⁴ Eugenia Shablina, interview by author, digital audio recording, Beaverton, Or., 18 August 2005.

last name, I will have more opportunities to do my job.”¹⁰⁵ All of the Jewish participants reported being denied educational or career opportunities by virtue of their ethnicity.

According to many of the interviewees in this project, especially those connected to historically mistreated segments, persecution has continued to be a significant problem for minority groups in Russia throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Hanna and others like her who had no significant religious or ethnic minority experience under the Soviet Union doubted the validity of these contemporary claims. Yet the problems remain very real in the minds of those who are connected to one of these disenfranchised groups, and their perspective is supported by the reports of foreign governments and independent observers.

Transnational Connections

Some immigrants knew others who had emigrated from their home communities before they themselves decided to leave. In addition to family members with whom they would someday be reunited, tales of migrations provided information, interest, and a significant draw for the interviewees.

Gregoriy’s mom (also Alexandra’s grandmother) had previously immigrated to Israel, primarily to get a medical operation that was not offered in Russia. Although she was living in Russia again at the time of the interview, she and Gregoiry’s brother had become Israeli citizens. Also, Gregoriy knew other Russians who had immigrated to Germany, the United States, Canada, and Spain. He said, “I talked a lot with people, and they were saying that the first

¹⁰⁵ Kichatova, interview.

impression of course is delight, rapture, beauty, and so on... [until] they had to start to learn the language.”¹⁰⁶

Alexei also knew of others who emigrated elsewhere. In his case, two of his university colleagues moved to Norway. This fact is alarming to Alexei because it represents a “brain drain” of young educated professionals, away from Russia. Ironically, by his emigration, Alexei has participated in this phenomenon he holds in contempt. He is an example of an educated young adult who left Russia in search of better professional and economic opportunity.

On the other hand, some immigrants met others from their hometowns only after moving abroad themselves. Larisa, for example, discovered that one of her co-workers is from the same city. Also, she has met some people through her church who are from the Volgograd region. However, when she left, Larisa did not know anyone personally who lived abroad, and she herself did not intend to immigrate permanently. Larisa’s experience is common to many upwardly mobile immigrants, but it is not typical of the Protestant immigrants in Portland’s Russian-speaking community.

Given the grim picture drawn by these interviewees of instability, political corruption, and ongoing persecution, in addition to the pull of relatives and friends already abroad, one might wonder why some choose to stay. When this question was posed to immigrants in Portland, several offered helpful answers. For example, Gregoriy suggested that some are “patriots, who even in life is very hard, wouldn’t leave.” But also, he gave a cynical perspective of the “new Russians”, beneficiaries of industrial privatization:

Some people have money in Russia. Some have land. Some have mineral oil or the gas business. You know, Russia has a lot of raw materials. They have all

¹⁰⁶ Vishinevskiy, interview.

Mendeleyev's list [*table of elements*], and therefore somebody has the coal business, some gold. Why should they go – for them it's good enough to live there, stealing!¹⁰⁷

Larisa added another idea about why some stay behind – the successful economic adaptation of young adults in Russia. “Because they think there are a lot of opportunities there. So they are learning as they go. And they can earn money there, if they're smart, if they know how to organize the business. ...They can build their life there, their careers. And some of them become very successful.”¹⁰⁸

Also, many people undoubtedly stay because of a lack of opportunity to emigrate, or because of connections to family, community, and a love of their native land. Gregoriy exemplified this connection to place in his interview, “I was born there, and I see it in my dreams at night: my mom, brother, land, trees that I planted, river that I was fishing in – it's impossible to be ashamed of your homeland.”¹⁰⁹ Despite this longing, Gregoriy's love of Russia was not enough to keep him there in the face of ethnic discrimination and the opportunity for family reunification in the US. Likewise, Eugenia was nostalgic about the homeland she left behind. While she was glad to join her daughter in the US, she missed her friends and colleagues and referred frequently to “my Leningrad” and the large windows of the city-center flat she still owns there.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Felty, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Vishinevskiy, interview.

¹¹⁰ Shablina, interview.

In conclusion, these immigrants' words lend insight into the nature of decision-making in the Russian-speaking immigrant community. The reasons they have come are as diverse as the individual voices, but a few common themes emerge. Post-Soviet immigrants were pushed out of their homeland by a general sense of social and political instability, continuing persecution and discrimination of minority groups, and a shortage of opportunities for economic or professional improvement. Also, they were pulled to come to the US by the presence of just such opportunities – in education and economics – and by their relational ties to earlier migrant groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

CREATING COMMUNITY AND OPPORTUNITY

The post-Soviet Russian immigrants were drawn to Portland primarily by family networks, and they maintained these structures after arrival in the US through the adaptation of a traditional Soviet-era family structure and close-knit religious communities. As seen above, the immigrants who arrived in Portland following the fall of the Soviet Union were more diverse than their predecessors, yet most are participants in the conservative Protestant churches that dominate the Russian-speaking community. This chapter will summarize the role of the immigrant churches and the views of the non-Christian minority “outsiders” on the Protestant Russian immigrants in Portland.

Other than two immigrants, the participants chose the United States as their only potential destination after deciding to emigrate.¹¹¹ Four of the participants immigrated initially to other locations, but the remainder arrived directly in Portland. Sonya explained the concentration of Russian-speaking immigrants in the Pacific Northwest by the presence of willing sponsors when immigration picked up speed in the late 1980s. The particular location was not the decision of

¹¹¹ Only two of the interview participants considered a country other than the United States once they had decided to emigrate. Interestingly, both of these thought about immigrating to Germany. Hanna considered going to Germany to continue her education, but she decided in favor of the United States because she was more fluent in English than German. Alexandra and her family considered a couple different options. They had been playing the green card lottery for several years, while simultaneously applying for refugee status in Germany and getting paperwork to immigrate to Israel. Because of her Jewish heritage, they easily got a permit for Israel, and they began studying Hebrew. At that time, they received notice they had been awarded a green card. Kichatova, interview.

the first Russian immigrants, but was determined by availability of sponsors. Sonya said that the ongoing arrival of Russian-speaking immigrants to the Pacific Northwest is a matter of chain migration.¹¹²

In support of Sonya's theory, Alexei's family came to the US in 1994 on parole status after locating a sponsor through a religious service. Alexei was unclear about the details of how this arrangement was made, but he does recall his sponsors taking them to Lutheran Family Social Services after their arrival in order to receive some cultural orientation. It is interesting that Alexei was unclear about his parents' religious commitment. So when asked why they chose Portland, Alexei replied: "I think that's where the sponsor was. ...In the very beginning, again, I wasn't very involved in this process, so I think that was the cause. They were also looking for the future job possibilities for the parents. And because it's close to the water, there is some building of the ships.... Maybe that was a factor, but I think most of it was the -- just because we found a sponsor here."¹¹³

Many families like Alexei's were sponsored by strangers, usually former immigrants already residing in the US. In *Old Russian Ways*, a 1991 cultural study of the Old Believers, Molokans, and Pentecostal Russians living in Oregon, Richard A. Morris references non-religious families like Alexei's who were assisted by Russian-speaking churches in their resettlement:

Additionally, the church frequently sponsors refugees and legal immigrants from the Soviet Union. These people are not necessarily Pentecostals or believers in general, but have been referred for help and assistance to the church by other

¹¹² Grishkevich, interview.

¹¹³ Synkov, interview.

religious organizations in the world. Upon arrival they are invited to attend services and are introduced to the American concept of freedom of religion. They are also assisted materially in housing, finding a job, and basically in getting satisfactorily established in the United States. They are not pressured into joining the church or attending the church, although, as with all others, they are invited and made to feel welcome to participate to the extent they choose.¹¹⁴

In this way, the many Russian-speaking churches in the Pacific Northwest have become anchors for a system of chain migrations that are not exclusively based in religion.¹¹⁵

Since not all of the immigrants required sponsors, that is only one aspect of choosing Portland as a place to settle. Other factors, including personal preferences and the general knowledge of a large Russian-speaking population, influenced decision making. For example, Tatiana initially moved to Eugene, Oregon, in order to attend the University of Oregon. Following her graduation, Tatiana chose to live in Portland because it is a “bigger town and more job opportunities, and just, bigger Russian community.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Morris, *Old Russian Ways*, 299.

¹¹⁵ However, Alexei’s father, his father’s wife, and two daughters, moved to the East Coast after four years. According to Natalia, Alexei’s wife, his family had no desire to stay in Portland. “They were saying that it’s very... that the life is on the East Coast -- New York, and Boston -- the cultural life and history.... They still trying to convince us to move to the East Coast, because they saying only there will you find the best colleges, the best universities, the best theaters, the best job, and the best place to live. So that was the impression – they never – I think it was from the beginning they thought that they won’t stay in Portland. The state is like province -- province area, so that’s what they say.” Natalia Synkova, interview by author, digital audio recording, Portland, Or., 6 October 2005.

¹¹⁶ Galina, interview.

However, the majority of the immigrants (seven of the 11 key informants) were following family who had settled in the Portland area earlier. The exceptions include Alexei (discussed above) and the three who came initially on student visas. As a classic example, Alexandra and her family chose Portland because her husband's sister had immigrated to Portland in 1998 with her family as Jewish refugees. They offered a lot of practical support, like initial housing, to Alexandra and her husband. This was the primary motivation for choosing Portland, "because it is just one family."¹¹⁷ In turn, this brought Gregoriy to the Portland area. He said, "The decision was about 70% from Sasha's [*diminutive form of Alexandra*] influence. She had seen that people here live pretty good, plus I am a grandpa for her kids. I have to help her."¹¹⁸ Likewise, Eugenia chose Portland because of her daughter, who had arrived as a student in the late 1980s, then stayed to work and eventually became a US citizen.

Alex and Nadia also followed family to the Pacific Northwest. Both of their extended families came to the US within a very short period of time. Nadia's family had immigrated to Santa Barbara, California, three months before they arrived. They were the third family unit from Alex's side to arrive in Portland. They chose Portland because of his family members who had already immigrated to Oregon. Now everyone of their generation is here, and altogether there are 53 family members from Alex's side in Portland. Nadia's extended family has settled in California; they have about 30 members living in the Santa Barbara region.¹¹⁹

Sonya and her husband also moved as part of a large extended family network. She said, "We have a lot of relatives already here, so that's why we moved to Portland. It was a lot of

¹¹⁷ Kichatova, interview.

¹¹⁸ Vishinevskiy, interview.

¹¹⁹ Klibanov, interview.

people like uncle and aunts and cousins.”¹²⁰ In addition, Sonya knew a lot of people from among her friends and acquaintances, other than family, who immigrated to the Portland area: “Almost all of them from my church in Moscow or from my medical school. It just happens that a lot of people from my medical school came here to get some job in hospital like a doctors’. So we have friends from medical school here.”¹²¹ Although family was the primary decision-making factor for Sonya, the level of connections between her Portland and Moscow communities indicates a more complex transnational network.

Family: The Ties that Bind

One of the initial purposes of this study was to understand the influence of the Russian-speaking community’s high number of extended families that arrive and remain together during the process of immigration and resettlement. This family structure has been ascribed to an adaptive mode of living that developed in the midst of the housing shortages in the former Soviet Union¹²². Also, it has served as a strategy for family survival in a society where both parents were expected to work and childcare institutions were not readily available. As a result, “It is a well-known fact that Soviet children were often closer to their grandparents than to their parents.”¹²³ Now firmly ingrained in the cultural traditions of many former-Soviets, they maintain this family structure and close-knit relationships, albeit in adapted forms, after immigrating to the United States.

¹²⁰ Grishkevich, interview.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Shasha and Shron, *Red Blues*, viii-ix. See also *Recent Social Trends in Russia, 1960-1995*, eds. Irene A. Boutenko and Kirill E. Razlogov (Buffalo, NY: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997).

¹²³ Sergei Kukhterin, “Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist and Post-Communist Russia,” in *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Sarah Ashwin (New York: Routledge, 2000), 81.

Alexandra noted the family advantages inherent in having her father join her in the United States, yet she did not see this assistance as an automatic obligation:

I hope that when my father will come here, he will help me a lot. Because I will have to work on Friday, and kids will have school up to twelve. He will help. ...It is not their duty, you know, that you have to help me. ...But if they live close to you or in the same room, the same place, it is so natural that they share with you your duties, help with your kids. And it is fun, I think.¹²⁴

But her father's perspective is different. He does view his role as a grandparent, assisting his daughter in childrearing, as a duty:

I have to help her. We were born to help our kids. It's even better if we help our grandchildren. Do you know why grandpas and grandmas love their grandkids so much? Because we are grandpas and grandmas, and they need us for a very short time in life. When they turn 11 or 13, they don't need us anymore. We have different interests. I don't have money to give them. We are not an authority for them anymore then, but mom and dad they will love for all their lives.¹²⁵

Likewise, Nadia explained the obligation as one of reciprocation, "We understand that when we were growing [up], [our] parents gave for us all attention, all money, everything – and right now when they are older – my parents or his parents – we supposed to pay back."¹²⁶ Parents care for children, and in this system have the right to expect care from their children in their old age.

Eugenia came to the United States in 2003 at her daughter's invitation. She realized she was aging, widowed, and without any family in St. Petersburg. Nevertheless, she wanted to live

¹²⁴ Kichatova, interview.

¹²⁵ Vishinevskiy, interview.

¹²⁶ Klibanov, interview.

on her own once she was in Portland. Eugenia lives in a small apartment in a senior community, despite her daughter's protests that it is like a prison because of its lack of windows. Yet Eugenia insisted on maintaining her independence.¹²⁷

Hanna, who would prefer to live in a more multi-cultural community, conceded that she moved to Portland for her parents' sake. Her husband's parents benefit now, as she expects her parents will if they immigrate someday, from the large Russian-speaking community and many resources that Portland offers.

[My husband's] father is 75, so we want to be somewhere close, somewhere near. And when my parents come – they visited us. If they come here, they have a lot of Russian-speaking people. I'm not sure if I'm a big fan of that, but.... It's good living in Portland if I want to serve his parents and my parents. Then I can survive.¹²⁸

Hanna described it as her duty to support her parents and make choices that would benefit them. She recalled that living with her parents as a young adult back in Ukraine was not only financially necessary, but it was the expected behavior of a respectable person:

It's very good living with your parents before you have a family of your own. I don't know why, but first of all, you can't rent your own apartment – work and rent an apartment. You could be making \$200 a month and your rent could be \$180 a month and so everybody owns places. If I wanted to separate, my parents would buy me an apartment. But it was too much money for us. So, I lived with my parents, which meant going to school I was dressed, I was fed, and I had a nice family. That's what it meant to live with your parents. And all my friends –

¹²⁷ Shablina, interview.

¹²⁸ Hults, interview.

guys would try to date me and it was a good factor that I lived with my parents. And we pretty much think the same of guys. You pretty much serve your parents. You want to get out, but you abide by the rules, help around the house, carry things for your mother, and I don't know, you do things that... so that I would think the same thing of the men, too.¹²⁹

Not only was living with parents a financial necessity, it was the norm and a sign of good character.

Having only recently moved to Portland with her new husband, Hanna lives in her husband's parents' home. Although they plan to buy their own home once they are both employed, she conceded that they might end up staying there indefinitely. "...We're still our own family. The house is big, so we have our own section. So we still want to feel independent, you know." She is now four months' pregnant, so they will soon need childcare. Hanna intended to work after her baby is born, and she said her mother-in-law would be offended if she hired a babysitter for the child. She said,

We do not refuse their help. I know a lot of young couples who say, 'Get away, get away. We need to live on our own.' We've lived on our own. I lived on my own. He lived on his own. We can handle that – but can we handle something else? If I lived with my parents, we don't know how much time they have left. You want to give them the best of experience. My mom always told me, 'Oh, you're getting married, I always dreamed you would live with us until we die.'

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

They want that. That's very culturally different. I do not see many American moms and dads with their kids like that.... Yeah, I don't know why.¹³⁰

The expectations run deep in Hanna's narrative. She felt obligated to live with and serve her parents as a young adult. In adulthood, she felt obligated to live near her husband's parents, but she was happy to continue the traditions of the Soviet family style by depending on them for childcare.

Much like Nadia above, Larisa described this relationship as a reciprocal giving process, in which any sense of obligation is surpassed by a desire to maintain close ties. She compared her relationship with her parents to that of her American-born husband:

My husband here was raised completely differently. I can see how much more freedom he had, and was given, and my situation was a little bit different because I have very close ties with my parents. So, for him it doesn't matter so much. They live there. They can meet like once or twice a year, and that's enough – so, keep it this way. They didn't put so much energy into him like my parents put into me, and that's why now I feel more.... I don't know. I'm just talking about my husband. But I feel like it's not only the obligation, but in my heart....¹³¹

Many participants like Larisa expressed surprise and some concern about what they have observed in American family culture.

Larisa planned to invite her parents to immigrate permanently, as soon as she receives US citizenship. Nevertheless, Larisa would like to maintain closeness with her parents while living separately from them.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Felty, interview.

But I think, in the long run – and we kind of all agree with this – we need to have separate places. Because... I don't know – it's better, I think when children and parents live separately. ...Actually, a lot of people live separately here. They just want to be close – like driving distance – the same city, the same town – but I think it's better to live separately, but very close to each other.¹³²

While this “close, but not too close” description was an ideal for Larisa, she tied the origin of this family structure back again to the Soviet housing shortage and the need to provide for the care of elderly and very young family members:

It gets more complicated, if the person lives by himself or herself in apartment, because then you need to come there, and to help the person.... Because the homes like retirement homes did not exist in Soviet Union. ...Plus, if you have children, in Russia people think it's better if the grandma sits with the child than to put the child in day care. And that's why if there was such an opportunity, people would prefer grandparents to take care of grandchildren. And, when they get older, that's children's responsibility to take care of their parents. But here, everybody's kind of more independent, I think. But parents – Russian parents, they're different. I think, they just want to be more involved, and to help and they just have this bond, this strong bond with their children.¹³³

In the IRCO group interview, all of the participants agreed that the closeness of the parent-child relationship was a matter of the heart. Luba described her own experience:

For my kids, they came here when oldest was seven – I have nine kids. Four youngest was born here. Still, even oldest, she wants to live close to me.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ *Ibid.*

‘Mom, we found apartment here closer to us.’ ...They all want to live closer. We raised the family – we teach them to be like one family – respect each other, honor each other, help each other. My sister have some problem, I’m going to her to help.... It’s not like, ‘I don’t care. You call me back when it’s done.’ If you or somebody have problem in the family, everybody’s worried about it – you know. What you given to kids – you get it back. We are fortunate. My boy – I was very worried about him. You know, we live in a society with drugs, alcohol... and he was young. And I was always worried -- less worry about girls than about him. And everything I put in him, I see right now. He’s almost 19 years old. He’s a very nice boy. He’s a leader in church, and he’s always come to kiss me, ‘Momma, I love you.’ But he said, ‘I’m a big boy, momma. I’m a man.’ ...But he’s respecting himself like the man – not like a ‘momma’s boy’. Even [though] I raise him like that! ...So they respect you.¹³⁴

While this family relationship may include a lot of obligations, the crux of it is a desire for intimate caring and interdependence that pervades the broader kin system. Luba wanted to be clear that the closeness she enjoys with her family is voluntary for all parties involved.

No one in these interviews was able or willing to make distinctions in who of their extended family had primary decision-making power in matters of immigration. Most respondents, like Irina, equivocated:

It’s just the heart, you know. People want to be with their families. And if part of the family decide to go, everybody will go. ...Someone said, ‘I’ve decided – we’re going to go there.’ It’s not this way. It’s because they wanted to be with

¹³⁴ IRCO Employees, interview.

their family. I went to the United States, but my parents didn't want to go. But then two years later, they said, 'We need you. We want to see you. We want to live with you.' And they decided... [to come].¹³⁵

Tatsiana, of Russian Oregon Social Services, had a similar perspective. While she cited all the same benefits to the traditional living arrangement, Tatsiana said the decision-making power is shared by "both sides," parents and grandparents.¹³⁶ Sonya agreed,

Usually this is decision of the whole family. It's like family sitting around the table, so it's everybody.... Sometimes the moving started from just one – from husband and wife. Then they invited parents. Everybody wants to invite someone. You know, it's like tradition. 'We need to be together.' It's very difficult to move to different state. ...Every huge family has a lot of families inside. And every family can decide, but in most cases, the whole family decided to move.¹³⁷

Once again, this mutual dependence and solidarity is voluntary. And Sonya supported the consensus about the roots of this tradition. She reported:

[In the Soviet Union] we didn't have the opportunity to live separately. A lot of families lived together from the beginning of family. It was very difficult to get your own apartment. It was like a present from the government. There was a special line, and you could be in this line your whole life for this apartment.

...And it's almost impossible to live alone there [for older generation], because

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Taran, interview.

¹³⁷ Grishkevich, interview.

our grandparents are very poor, there. So kids need to help them. They become [dependent on] their kids. Their money is very, very low – their income is low... just for food, probably.¹³⁸

Carrying on this pattern in a modified way, she and her husband have chosen a home in Portland very close to his parents' home. Sonya said a half hour's drive would be too great a distance to live from their parents. Yet the cramped housing was the primary reason Sonya gave for needing to emigrate from the Soviet Union. Like Larisa, she outlines an ideal of close, yet separate, living. In this way many post-Soviet immigrant families are adapting the historical family structure.

Religious Profiles

In addition to the maintenance of traditional family structures, many Russian-speaking immigrants in Portland continue and rely upon religious networks. An important way that the post-Soviet immigrants differ from the earlier, Soviet migrants is the diversity of religious beliefs and identities they represent. While half of the key participants in this project were Evangelicals and represented chain migration extending from Soviet immigrants, the rest represented a combination of divergent religious profiles.

Religious practice was uncharted territory for the Jewish interviewees. For example, Eugenia and Gregoriy both expressed interest in attending a synagogue, if they had transportation and knew where to go. Neither of them has had direct experience practicing a religion, yet both were open to participation.

Gregoriy's daughter, Alexandra, described the Soviet history of religious repression:

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

It is so difficult question about religion for us. I don't know because – because in Russia we didn't have and now we don't have in Russia any Jewish religion organization. We couldn't, keep our religion, exactly to be Jewish. Judaism in Russia it is not a religion as it is in any country. It is just nationality. Just a phrase, just a blood that's all. Because 70 years ago they killed any religion in Russia, especially Judaism. They just forbid it and in Kalingrad region, there is... I don't know, nobody -- religion, Jewish organization, no.¹³⁹

Despite her entire lack of exposure to religious Judaism and her husband's atheistic conviction, Alexandra said she has a lot of respect for religion and thinks that perhaps she believes in God “inside me, very deeply.” However, Alexandra also deeply mistrusts the institution of Orthodox Christianity in Russia because of its historic ties to the KGB and its successors.

My friends always, I don't know, joke about this: that Russian ambassador and the Russian church – it's the same place almost, they're neighbors. And he jokes that it is just like a job. After somebody came to [confession]...after this, [the priest] just came to the ambassador and says, ‘What about his conversation? The conversation was...?’ You know. It is terrible, still terrible. It was a lot of lies, a lot of lies.¹⁴⁰

Despite this suspicion, in 1991, she decided to try attending an Orthodox church in Kaliningrad, but she was dissuaded when she was asked to pay a hefty cash fee for participation. This solidified her doubts about the revival of Orthodox zeal in Russia following the revolution.

¹³⁹ Kichatova, interview.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

It is like another institution, like a Soviet part – I don't know – like a Soviet community in Russia. ...I cannot believe that they start to believe suddenly in God. It is impossible. It's impossible. I think it's just... government craziness, because they decided that they have to show freedom in Russia, religion freedom in Russian.¹⁴¹

In Alexandra's mind, perhaps this Orthodox revival was another gimmick on the part of the Russian government to reinforce a positive image abroad.¹⁴²

For the Protestant groups represented by half of the interviewees, the question of religious involvement in the United States was more straightforward. For Evangelical Russian immigrants in Portland, church is often a continuation of religious practice and even communities that originated in the homeland. They use these networks to continue their religious faith, cultural heritage, and relational structures, and as in many immigrant communities, churches are generally the center of social activity and networking for Russian immigrants. For example, the local church plays a significant role in helping Alex and Nadia maintain their cultural ties back home. Russian classes are offered at their church, and for their

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² For information on the revival of Orthodox practice, see James H. Billington, "Orthodox Christianity and the Russian Transformation," in *Proselytism and Orthodoxy in Russia: The New War for Souls*, eds. John Witte Jr. and Michael Bourdeaux (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 56. Billington wrote, "The Russian Orthodox Church had an extraordinary revival as the Soviet Union was imploding. The number of churches, monasteries, seminaries, and parishes increased geometrically. Russia and Ukraine have been the site of one of the largest mass conversions to Christianity of the twentieth century. ...in many ways, fulfilling the ideological void left by the collapse of communism. ...The number of functioning churches alone rose from 50 to 250 between 1988 and 1993."

youngest child this has been instrumental for learning Russian. Nadia now helps teach other students Russian through those church classes.¹⁴³

Hanna and her husband attend church with her husband's parents, at the First Slavic Baptist Church. She reported that it's part of the Southern Baptist denomination, and that the denominational leadership has been very supportive and helped the immigrant church financially. Nevertheless, the church is not instrumental in meeting her social needs because she feels like an outsider. Hanna believes people in this church might look down on her because she participated in a nontraditional Evangelical church in Ukraine that was viewed as "liberal".

Yet Sonya, Hanna's sister-in-law, paints a peaceful portrait of fellowship across denominational lines in the US: "We are just separated by our thinking about our vision of Bible. We can communicate with each other. Especially Pentecostal and Baptist churches – we are very close, and we have a lot of friends from the Pentecostal church. It doesn't matter."¹⁴⁴

Although Larisa, too, is a practicing Evangelical, her story is different. She did not regularly attend church in Russia, but her family talked about God sometimes at home. Since her arrival in the United States, Larisa has embraced the Baptist denomination, and she usually attends an English-speaking, American Baptist church. When her mother is in town, though, Larisa attends a Russian-speaking congregation so that her mother will be able to understand the service.¹⁴⁵

By contrast, a couple of the immigrants interviewed here had no religious connections. Natalia and her husband, Alexei, are both examples of non-religious Russian immigrants.

¹⁴³ Klibanov, interview.

¹⁴⁴ Grishkevich, interview.

¹⁴⁵ Felty, interview.

Natalia explained that her husband feels strongly that religion is damaging because he grew up in a home with a Muslim mother and a Christian father. Alexei's early family life was full of conflicts and eventually his parents divorced. Alexei attributed his lack of religious conviction mostly to his education: "Back then, when I was growing up, it wasn't encouraged. I don't think it was suppressed, but it was – in school, it was all the atheistic school – the atheistic education."¹⁴⁶

Portland's Protestant Immigrant Community

While post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants represent a diversity of religious and non-religious affiliations, the dominant group of Russian immigrants in Portland attends Evangelical churches. For most of these immigrants, their connection to the church pervades their social ties, morality, and weekly schedules. Alex and Nadia (see above) were exemplary of this Protestant majority. Alex was concerned to point out the depth of their faith commitment: "We basically look on the world through the Bible. ...I just take that very serious[ly], not because I'm so [religious]. Just, that's like our point of life." He contrasted their church experience with others he has known who attend church services out of obligation, a desire to maintain social status, or to fulfill family expectations.¹⁴⁷

Hanna had a lot to say about the Russian-speaking religious community in Portland as a relative newcomer. She had a unique perspective because of her more "liberal" church experience of the past (see above) and her relative assimilation to American culture while living in Texas. Having moved from Dallas to Portland only two months earlier, Hanna felt smothered by the Russianness of the sub-culture in which she and her husband live. Her husband embraces

¹⁴⁶ Synkov, interview.

¹⁴⁷ Klibanov, interview.

this life and prefers to work and socialize with Russians only. Hanna cited a loss of language skills and knowledge of American popular culture because of her recent re-immersion into a world of “Russian only”: “Sometimes, like I say, you just don’t have an opportunity. You just don’t have a choice – you have Russians around you – all the time, 24/7, and you have Russian channels, and yeah... you end up speaking Russian all the time.”¹⁴⁸ Then, to illustrate the inbred nature of the conservative Russian community around her, Hanna related her family’s surprise (and pride) when she and her husband were invited to an American’s house for dinner in SW Portland. “And so we went to visit her in the southwest area – not the southeast area. And it’s funny how the family perceives us having an American friend. ‘They’re going to *southwest* Portland, to visit their *American* friends!’ They’re so proud of us!”¹⁴⁹

Her other experience with such reactions was at their wedding when she had American guests. Though the number was only four Americans, out of 200 in attendance, she sensed this brought her some prestige in the eyes of her new family and the Russian-speaking guests. Her friendships with Americans were unusual for the tight-knit Baptist immigrant community. This is a big change from the Russian immigrants Hanna encountered in Dallas:

Yeah, it’s like 3,000 versus 100,000...and they’re all living in like nice suburbs that are far from downtown Dallas, for example. ...I lived up town, in Dallas, and didn’t do suburbs. So I had some Russian friends, but not that many... and most of them, they were of Jewish origin, that was Jewish immigration. We did not have Christian immigration like it is here, pretty much. I don’t know. Pretty much everyone I know here, actually, came because they reunited with the family,

¹⁴⁸ Hults, interview.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

and the family originally came because of their Christian beliefs. And I don't know anyone else [in Portland] with other than this factor.

In Texas, I chose when I wanted to be with my Ukrainian, Russian friends. That was my choice. Here I don't have a choice. ...[My husband] likes to live the Russian lifestyle in America. I like to assimilate and make my Ukrainian traditions unique on top... but not the top, and those are bad [*indicating American ways*]. You know what I'm saying? It's just a little different approach. But again, I did not have any problems with the language. So I never chose the friends, "Oh, she's Russian. She speaks Russian, so that's good. She can be my friend." That didn't matter to me. So, if a person is worthy – you know, trustworthy and nice – it didn't matter to me. I had friends who were immigrants from other countries.¹⁵⁰

Contrasted with other regions in the US, the concentration of Protestant Russian immigrants in Portland and the Pacific Northwest lends itself to a very close community and potentially slows the assimilation or adaptation of its members.

The non-religious and Jewish immigrants also had a lot to say about the conservative religious Russian-speaking immigrants in town. For example, Alexandra does not presently interact much or desire to interact with the religious Russian-speaking community in Portland. Like Hanna described, her focus is learning English and assimilating to American culture. Alexandra said, "I came here to study this culture.... I have to teach my kids the goodwill of American culture, too. I have to have an encyclopedia's knowledge." Alexandra described what

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

she sees as her responsibility to know and pass on “general culture” as a “person of the world”. Her desire is to always learn and grow in her understanding of the world’s history.¹⁵¹

Natalia was surprised by the religious diversity of the Russian-speaking immigrants in Portland. She was unaware of the Protestant groups while living in Russia, and it wasn’t until she started working as a Russian-English interpreter in Portland that she was confronted with their traditions.

When I lived in Russia, I didn’t know anything about religion groups in Russia. That we have a different religion – different religion. And, the people would say, why don’t you wear the skirt, or you know, a scarf for your head. And they just.... ‘Do I have to?’, or ‘Why?’ So, I learned about this refugees being here in the United States. I had no idea that we have refugees in Russia. But they mostly from Ukraine, I must say. I must say that they mostly from Ukraine. And, yeah, I was surprised. And the [Woodburn] area, also, is very old – Old Believers. And many of them haven’t been to Russia. So it was interesting to learn about those religion groups that are from Russia. And, the perspectives, probably, that American people see that we all refugees, here.¹⁵²

On the other hand, Alexei had heard some reports about religious dissident groups while living in the former Soviet Union.

So in the bigger city, there wasn’t that much issues with people who were believe in God. There were still some active churches. Later on, when it start becoming more popular, then maybe you start seeing some abuse of that. I think it was

¹⁵¹ Kichatova, interview.

¹⁵² Synkova, interview.

more – yeah... I guess when there wasn't too many people doing that, nobody really knew about it and cared about it. When it was more people start coming open with that, that's when it start becoming a problem. Just because it was so much population was educated in the non-religious way.¹⁵³

Through her employment as an interpreter, Natalia has developed some negative impressions of the religious immigrants as closed and unfriendly. Also, she has witnessed many religious Russian immigrants taking advantage of the social services available to them and then complaining about their circumstances.

When I started working as an interpreter, the first probably, four, five months, I work only with Hispanic, only – I speak Spanish – so I do Spanish interpretation. ...And then finally, my agency decided to add Russian to my schedule. And I started working – and I found it depressing working with Russians. Because – they don't like – they don't like the lifestyle here, and I just, 'Who made them to move?' 'Who keeps them here?' So, some of them, they do – they're very happy living here. But some of them, I may say 40 percent – yeah, and especially, probably, people who moved twelve, or before, or at the time that *perestroika* happened. They had better life – they knew better life in Russia. And here they have to struggle, you know, get the insurance, and there it was everything for free – you know, the medical care, the schools, and the living was all government subsidized. And here you have to find the way to pay.

They blame it – they just don't like meat, food, doctors, medicine. I just [think], 'Who keeps you here?' It was very depressing to work with Russians! Not with everybody, but I found with that there are some – and was a little bit

¹⁵³ Synkov, interview.

frustrating that people, without knowing any English, sometimes know how to abuse system. So this is my observation working with Hispanics. But my husband tells me that, you have to consider, and keep in mind that the culturally and the country are very different. That people from south, from Hispan– Latin America, they have a different experience living in the country. And that Russian – they do have – and they, yeah, they’re very educated sometimes, you know, have a lot of education. And, they come in here and they have to start from zero.¹⁵⁴

Alexei had his own complaints about immigrants with refugee status taking advantage of the opportunities given to them. While Alexei worked for six years to get Natalia into the country legally as his wife, a religious refugee acquaintance of theirs made several moves back and forth from Russia to the United States, trying to decide where he really wanted to live. At each re-entry to the US, Alexei said that this refugee was able to bring in a few more relatives. Meanwhile, Natalia and their son lived in Mexico for several years, waiting for their visas to be approved.

The religious Russian-immigrant community remains distinct and relatively closed to others, as most of their cultural and relational supports are offered in the context of conservative religious practices. This reality can be troublesome to both those who feel trapped by it, like Hanna, and those who interact with them as outsiders, like Natalia. As Natalia assumed, the hazard of being a Russian immigrant in Portland is that many Americans assume that all Russian-speakers are refugees and members of this dominant, tight-knit, Protestant community.

¹⁵⁴ Synkova, interview.

The large majority of those interviewed for this project came to Portland because of relational ties. They are participants in a pattern of chain migration. However, this was not true of all of them. One family was drawn to Portland, in particular, because of the presence of a willing sponsor family. Also, several came to the United States first as students, later developing relational ties which keep them here.

Regardless of why they came, many of these immigrant families reinforce the general notion that Soviet (and post-Soviet) immigrants maintained close family bonds in the United States. While many in this group did not immigrate together with extended family, their parents or grandparents often arrived within a short time. Not surprisingly, the immigrants place high value on the traditional Soviet style of family – often relying upon parents to watch their children – but they are eager to do this in a slightly more independent manner. Most of the immigrants in this study prefer to live very close to, but not *with*, their extended family members.

Religiously speaking, about half of the interviewees were members of an Evangelical church, while the other half are divided between nominal Judaism and no religious affiliation. The perspective of the nominal or non-religious immigrants on the Christian immigrant community was diverse. Like upwardly mobile immigrants from other nations, they are generally content with remaining outside of this conservative community, with the hopes of faster adaptation to Portland's cosmopolitan society. Once again, this illustrates the diversity of the post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrants in the greater Portland area.

CHAPTER FIVE

IDENTITIES

The interview participants described here represent a diverse range of social, religious, ethnic, and age groups. At first it appeared the common bond between them was the Russian language, with the exception of one family whose home language was Ukrainian. Even so, perhaps the stronger common bond is the recent Soviet history that they share.¹⁵⁵ Regardless, the categorization applied here is at some point artificial. The crux of identity, as it interests this study, is self-identification.

Identities are categories that we use to orient ourselves in the world and to each other. They are powerful and value-laden; they inform our behavior and our relationships. We connect and divide ourselves from the outside world in terms of ethnicity, gender, religion, class, affinity groups, and more. These identities are constructed by us and for us. They change with time, circumstance, or choice – they are fluid. Identity structures are multiple, complex, and often conflict with each other.

As George Breslauer, a political scientist at University of California, Berkeley, writes, “Notice also that most identities are claims, not immutable conditions. A Jew who rejects his Jewishness, or who is somehow entirely unaware of his background, may be a Jew according to

¹⁵⁵ Apparently, this is the viewpoint of the US government agencies who track refugee and immigrant arrivals. Still in 2005, “former Soviets” are lumped together for statistical purposes, instead of categorizing them by country of origin as most other immigrants are identified.

rabbinical law but does not possess a Jewish identity.”¹⁵⁶ Also, categories of identity are relative and thus change with circumstances. The Soviet Jews again provide a good example – they often describe themselves as Russian while in the United States, even though they were explicitly not considered Russian when living in the former Soviet Union.¹⁵⁷

In an article published in the *European Journal of Sociology*, David Laitin offers a new framework for considering identity issues in the context of the 1990s former Soviet Union. Laitin argues that a “Russian-speaking nationality” is operational, based upon language and shared Soviet experience, as opposed to an ethnic “Russian” national identity. This new Russian-speaking nationality is defined as follows: “Diasporic without a homeland, non-titular, Russian-speaking, secular and Soviet are the elements of the Russian-speaking nationality now in formation.”¹⁵⁸ They are without a homeland simply because the Soviet Union, the basis of their shared experience, no longer exists. Likewise, Zevelev cites Hilary Pilkington's surveys of former Soviet migrants to the Russian Federation, in which two-thirds of those participating did not consider their move a return “home” since their homeland, the Soviet Union, had been “disembodied.”¹⁵⁹ This concept of a new Russian-speaking nationality, rooted in the Soviet past is supported throughout the interviews cited here.

To the same end, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere cited a post-Soviet survey asking ethnic Russians in the former Soviet Union to identify their *rodina* or homeland. In 1995, only 41% claimed the Russian Federation as their *rodina*. Those who did not choose Russia “chose the

¹⁵⁶ George Breslauer, “Identities in Transition: An Introduction,” in *Identities in Transition: Eastern Europe and Russia after the Collapse of Communism*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell (Berkeley, CA: Center for Slavic and East European Studies, 1996), 1-3.

¹⁵⁷ Igor Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Press Press, 2001), 32.

¹⁵⁸ David D. Laitin, “Identity in Formation: the Russian-Speaking Nationality in the Post-Soviet Diaspora,” *European Journal of Sociology* 36 (1995): 284.

¹⁵⁹ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 123.

former Soviet Union (primarily older respondents) or their local republic or region (mostly younger age groups).” Some have cited this latter trend as a return to “localism” in identity, but Rancour-Laferriere argues that it co-exists with nationalistic feelings. By way of illustration, he refers to Kathleen Parte's argument that local geographic regions are sometimes seen by individual Russians to represent Russia as a whole.¹⁶⁰ A dual local and national identity was also evident in this study’s interviewees. They were eager and proud to tell about the beauty of their home region, but this did not preclude strong identification with a unified Russian people.

How the interviewees defined Russianness is another question, however. No one defined it outright with objective terms, but it was assumed that they could identify who is Russian and who is not intuitively. While the criteria were not clear, to be Russian clearly did not mean to be a citizen of the Russian Federation. Interview participants were observed to often equate “Russian” with being “former-Soviet” on the broadest scale, but some mentioned ethnic or linguistic limits to inclusion as a Russian.

Classification based upon shared historical experience is a Marxist concept. In place of nations, Marx believed classes were to be the “foundation of a future nation-less society.”¹⁶¹ Like capitalism, Marx believed that nationalism was a necessary step on the way to true internationalist, socialist utopia. Indeed, nationalism could be viewed as a sign of progress.¹⁶² According to Marxism, the national problem was bound to disappear after the advent of socialism, revealing a “proletarian universal state” with a common history.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel Rancour-Laferriere, *Russian Nationalism from an Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 30.

¹⁶¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

¹⁶² Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 4-5.

The policies that gave feet to these ideals changed dramatically through the Soviet period, but for many decades the Soviet government officially encouraged limited expression of nationalist feelings, expecting that this would eventually lead to the utopian state. Alternately, ethnic minorities were despised and deported to remote hinterlands during the World War II years under Stalin's reign. At the 20th Congress in 1956, Khrushchev famously denounced Stalin's mistakes – including his crimes against non-Russians through mass deportations. His call for a policy reversal, even if not supported by corrective action, was seen as an open invitation for the growth of nationalism.¹⁶³ Then in 1961, Khrushchev announced the arrival of communism, the successful unification of all Soviet people, and the purely nostalgic benefit of national distinctions. He claimed that the Soviet Union had realized the fruit of Lenin's internationalist groundwork with the fusion of the “entire people.”¹⁶⁴

Soviet citizens were repeatedly asked for their nationality on every form, for every transaction, and the answer given was never neutral. Changing “affirmative action” policies made it good or bad, a crucial advantage or distinctly a disadvantage. A particular nationality might earn preferential treatment when it came to jobs, education, living space, and freedom to travel. Soviet nationalities policy succeeded in the promotion of all nations and ethnic groups, but it failed to achieve the second phase – the elimination of national differences and fusion as the one “Soviet people”.¹⁶⁵ This was demonstrated by the nationalistic and independence movements that drove the collapse of the Soviet Union. Full sovereignty was the logical outcome of the Soviet policies to encourage the cultural advancement of non-Russians in their

¹⁶³ Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *The Nationality Question in the Soviet Union and Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), 31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶⁵ Helene Carrere d'Encausse, *Decline of an Empire: The Soviet Socialist Republics in Revolt*, trans. Martin Sokolinsky and Henry A. La Farge (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 265.

own territories.¹⁶⁶ By granting the “forms” of nationhood to the multitude of ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, the communists had hoped the primacy of nationalist urges would be assuaged and then replaced by supra-national class identities. However, the encouragement of national “forms” had the opposite effect: national cries for independence flourished, and the fabric of the Soviet Union grew progressively weaker. Despite this 1980s rise of nationalistic movements, the participants in these interviews most commonly chose a “Soviet” label of identification over a nationalistic one.

Before discussing the evidence of identity structures found in these interviews, it is important to note again that these immigrant participants were not statistically representative of the Russian community in Portland. According to the most reliable estimates (see Chapter Two), if this were a statistical sample there should have been a proportionately larger number of Evangelical Christians. Nevertheless, these immigrant interviews were representative of the diversity of types of immigrants who have arrived in the Portland area in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is interesting that many of these immigrants did not view themselves as “typical” of the majority of Russian-speakers in the city. Those who warned outright that they could not be taken as classic examples gave a variety of reasons.

Hanna, for example, reported her husband’s dismay at her participation, “I told Sasha that I was volunteering with you, and he said, ‘You’re not even a regular immigrant. You immigrated because of me. You tell them about our family... You are like an accidental immigrant.’”¹⁶⁷ This perspective was rooted in Hanna’s original arrival as a graduate student, not intending to immigrate permanently at first, compared with her husband’s family who all

¹⁶⁶ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 155.

¹⁶⁷ Hults, interview.

arrived together in the mid-1990s as religious refugees. Also Larisa, another student, worried that her story was not representative. She said, “I don’t know if I’m a typical example. Why I say that – like I’m not a typical case – because I came here in ’95, and I came here to study....”¹⁶⁸ Natalia’s husband also thinks of her as atypical, but in this case it was based only upon her individual opinions and personality: “So sometimes we do have arguments with my husband. And he thinks that, ‘Did you live in Russia, really?’ [*laughing*] So you know, the comprehensions of the things may be different. ...Yeah, so he says, ‘Oh, it looks like you’re not coming from Russia. Just where did you grow up?’”¹⁶⁹ Regardless of these immigrants’ hesitations about themselves as typical examples, they do represent the various categories of Russian immigrants who have arrived in Portland since the fall of the Soviet Union. They, like many outside observers, have come to believe that the vast majority of post-Soviet immigrants are Evangelical refugees, but as demonstrated in Chapter Three, the circumstances of recent immigration have been much more diverse.

“We Were All One People”

The first decision many immigrants are forced to make when identifying themselves to those outside their community is the choice between the Soviet (or “former-Soviet”) label or a national one. The choice that is made varies from person to person, and it is influenced by a number of factors.

Zevelev documents a common trend among Russians who identify themselves more as Soviets than a member of one of the surviving states. He cites interviews with migrants within

¹⁶⁸ IRCO Employees, interview.

¹⁶⁹ Synkova, interview.

the former Soviet Union who have difficulty naming their identity because of their self-described 'mixed blood.' One interviewee said, "Who am I? My mom is a Ukrainian, my dad is a Russian. I was born and raised in Kyrgyzia and married a Tartar. Who are our kids? What is their nationality?"¹⁷⁰

This was clearly the case for most of the interviewees for this project. Many interview participants had one or several relatives who were born in a different republic from themselves. Also, several married across national boundaries or are the products of such marriages. For example, Tatsiana is a recent immigrant from Belarus, who married a Russian immigrant once she arrived in the US. Also, Gregoriy pointed out that his father was from Siberia, and his mother was from Belarus. On the other hand, Alexei's mother came from a Muslim family in Central Asia, but his father was Russian. Beyond these examples, intermarriage was most common between Ukrainians and Russians in the interviewees' experience. Because of this, the Ukrainian and Russian connection is the best context for further examination of Soviet versus national identities in this immigrant group.

When this project began, the intent was to interview only "Russians" – those who emigrated from within the boundaries of the Russian Federation. This was intended to clarify findings, by limiting the study to one ethnic segment. The assumption was that the Russian nationals and the Ukrainians (who, according to many, form the majority of Russian-speakers in Portland) arrived from very different contexts. However, it quickly emerged that it is not easy to distinguish between the Ukrainians and Russians in the Russian-speaking Portland community, as they generally do not distinguish between themselves. Religious groups, social networks, and social service agency clientele encountered during the interview phase of this project were all comprised of a blended group of Russians, Ukrainians, and other former Soviet peoples.

¹⁷⁰ Zevelev, *Russia and its New Diasporas*, 122.

This first became apparent during a group interview with seven staff members of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization in Portland (IRCO). The participants were a mix of Ukrainians and Russians, yet they all agreed without hesitation that they do not distinguish between the nationalities with each other at work or on the street with acquaintances. One of the staff members, Luba, commented after a series of questions about the differences between nationalities, “We are all one country – from the former Soviet Union.”¹⁷¹ Many others in this group interview shared that sentiment and voiced it in different words. However, it should be noted that most, but not all, of these were refugees who began their emigration before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is also difficult to say if the opinion was truly dominant, or if more recent immigrants in the interview (who were younger in age and job position) would have felt freedom to disagree. However, this sense of unity as former-Soviets did pervade most of the other, individual interviews. No participants who would be generally classified as Russian (nationally, ethnically, or linguistically) admitted any distinction between themselves and Ukrainians or any other former republic. So it seems important to listen carefully to the Ukrainian voices, to see if they made strong distinctions in this area.

For example, of all the interviewees in this project Alex and Nadia had the strongest linguistic ties to Ukraine and as such might be expected to have the strongest identification with Ukrainian nationalism. They speak Ukrainian in their home, and they came from western Ukraine – traditionally the most nationalistic region of the country. However, Alex and Nadia did not communicate strong views differentiating themselves from other groups, and they understood some unity with all Russians. At the beginning of their interview, which was done as a couple, Nadia was quick to distinguish that they were Ukrainian, not Russian. She asked if

¹⁷¹ IRCO Employees, interview.

they would still qualify for this study on “Russian” immigrants. Then Alex explained directly to Nadia and the researcher that Russian just means “Soviet”, and it was not a question in his mind that they fit the project’s focus. When asked if they actively distinguish in their social contexts between Russians and Ukrainians, Alex replied, “No. We don’t think like that, because we all people same.” Nadia agreed and then pointed out that her sister-in-law is Russian, as is Alex’s sister-in-law.¹⁷² Once again, this illustrates the frequent intermarriage between Russians and Ukrainians. In general, Alex and Nadia did not make much of a distinction between Ukrainians and Russians.

By contrast, Hanna was the interviewee who drew the biggest distinctions between Ukrainian and Russian people. She identified herself as a Ukrainian immigrant who married a Russian immigrant after arriving in the United States to study. She came from the southern coast of Ukraine, but she speaks Russian exclusively. Hanna linked her pride in being Ukrainian to the superiority and capacities of the nation.

It’s being from Texas and moving to New York, that’s how it is. Just to make a comparison, if you are from -- not even Dallas, Texas, because Dallas is not even southern, it’s metropolitan -- but if we talk about Amarillo, Texas, and New York – they don’t give a shit what’s going on in New York, and so don’t we. In Ukraine, you know, how fabulous Moscow is – ‘Who gives [*a care*]?’ I mean, that’s pretty much our attitude. We think like Texans do. We think that Ukraine could supply on her own all this life, because we have all the resources. At some point we had gas, and it’s the bread basket of the world, with the best soil, fertile. And we’re very proud of being Ukrainian. We have... I don’t know, a unique nationality. Like if you talk to Georgians or people from Moldova or Belarus,

¹⁷² Klibanov, interview.

they say they're from Russia and I'm like, 'Uh-uh, uh-uh – Belarus. Different. Nothing there, nothing pretty – nothing.' We say that we're from Ukraine – we're so proud. We have the Black Sea. We have the mountains. We have the prettiest women in the Soviet Union, you know? There are books written about it. ...People who didn't understand being of Ukrainian origin, they never mention that they are of Ukrainian origin. They say, 'I'm from Russia.' And again, same things happen to people who are from Belarus, Moldova.... 'I am from Russia.' But I am from Ukraine. ...Yeah, because I pretty much know everything about it. I wish it was an independent country a long time ago.¹⁷³

From this text, it is clear that Hanna did not see other former Soviet republics on the same level as Ukraine, but from her perspective Ukraine is distinguished because of the beauty, rich soil, and reputation for beautiful people. Her comparison of the gap between Ukraine and Russia being like Amarillo and New York is to say that the two locations are worlds apart culturally, and she perceived a very low level of interconnectedness.

Ironically, Hanna was born in Germany (while her father performed military service for the Soviet Union) and her father's parents were both born in Russia. She reports that both of her parents fled as children to Ukraine during a period of food shortages: "My parents fled from Russia to Ukraine. They were losing kids in their family since they were dying of starvation – that was Russia. ...Because you get a piece of land, you throw a seed, and it grows. You have food on your table."¹⁷⁴ Despite all of these regional connections, Hanna sees herself as exclusively Ukrainian.

¹⁷³ Hulst, interview.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

Moreover, Hanna acknowledged that she is from a relatively Russified section of Ukraine:

But there are people from the western side of Ukraine that are very nationalistic. We're different, from the south of Ukraine. We speak Russian. Historically, Catherine II, she brought Russian people to that region, after a couple of ...urban [sic] wars that took place there. So our southern region is all Russian.¹⁷⁵

So Hanna does not distinguish Ukrainians from Russians based upon language, like many have attempted to do.

Roman Szporluk's work in *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* supports her perspective. Szporluk argues that language is simply not an accurate dividing line for Ukrainian identity. Moscow did make attempts in past decades to remove Ukrainian as a language from public use, but the language is simply a symbol of a greater struggle to maintain distinction as Ukrainians. If language were the true division, Szporluk argues, then it does not make sense that the Russian-speaking Ukrainians failed to rise up and demand their own independent state or unification with Russia in the early 1990s. He suggests that the Chernobyl tragedy in 1986 may have played a part in solidifying a modern "civic or territorial national" consciousness that is inclusive of diverse languages, ethnicities, and religious affiliations.¹⁷⁶

Then again in line with these interviews, Szporluk points out that those who are too young to remember the pre-Gorbachev days have a much stronger differentiation between the former Soviet states: "This differentiation is reflected especially in the outlook of the younger generation, for whom the pre-Gorbachev, pre-*glasnost* era of monolithic 'Soviet people' is

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Roman Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), xxxi, 340-341.

rapidly becoming a distant memory, while the post-1991 conditions, with the newly independent states in place, seem normal.”¹⁷⁷ Hanna’s interview could be viewed as evidence to support Szporluk’s theory. She was 14 years old when Ukraine gained its independence – old enough to remember some things about life as a Soviet, but young enough to have lived half of her life, including her formative young adult years, as a Ukrainian.

Alexei, who was raised in Nizhni Novgorod, disparaged any Ukrainian nationalist feelings. In reference to Ukrainian nationalists he said, “I wonder where they are taking all these people and brainwashing them?” He told stories of many people he knows with cross-national ties through marriage or migration. Also, he likened Ukraine to Hawaii, saying it was a prestigious place to vacation during the Soviet era. Alexei continued, “We were all one people. It was just like different states, but now they want to make a big deal of these lines and stuff.”¹⁷⁸ So Alexei acknowledged the beauty and attractiveness of Ukraine, but like Hawaii is just an attractive part of the US as a nation, he viewed Ukraine as lacking any independence or real, qualitative difference from other parts of the former Soviet Union.

Alexei’s wife, Natalia, then told a story of a recent Ukrainian immigrant who blamed the Russian government for sabotaging a high-profile event in Ukraine. She thought the accusation was incredulous, but suggests that Russia does charge Ukraine more for natural gas as retribution for claiming the entire Soviet Black Sea fleet at independence. In Natalia’s mind, the problem isn’t one of ethnic conflict, though. Rather, the infrastructure simply was not present in each country to make a smooth transition to independence. She said it would be like making Oregon an independent country tomorrow. On a practical level, it would be full of problems:

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 337-338.

¹⁷⁸ Synkov, interview.

Alexei: That's what all these politicians – when they're trying to separate the countries, they don't realize what they're getting into.

Natalia: They do realize. They do. But the power probably is taking over the real thoughts about the situation. They think they can survive and manage it.¹⁷⁹

Perhaps the state versus nation analogy that Alexei and Natalia used to describe the relationships between the former Soviet states is useful in another way. For most of the interview subjects (except Hanna), their primary identification is former-Soviet, especially when speaking to people from another country. This is much like Americans today: when speaking to someone from France, an Oregonian would likely identify himself or herself as a US citizen. However, when speaking to a Californian, that same person would be likely to claim Oregon as their place of reference. So perhaps the audience, as much as the speaker, affects which categories of identity are employed. Yet the discussion of nationalism remains complex.

The dynamics of ethnic, religious, and national identification in the former Soviet Union has played itself out in inter-state relations of that region. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation has been campaigning to protect the rights of "the 25 million Russians" in the Near Abroad (the former Soviet region) – claiming to speak not only for the citizens of the Russian Federation, but all 'ethnic' Russians in the Near Abroad. By pressuring the former-Soviet states to define themselves ethnically and protect the ethnic Russians as a special category, Moscow undermines the territorial and national integrity of these states. From Szporluk:

The real meaning of the 'Russian rights' issue – 'the plight of the 25 million Russians' – is to deprive the successor states of the USSR of the right to define

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

themselves in a territorial or civic sense. Instead, it proposes their ethnicization. This position... assumes that the Russian state represents not only the citizens of the Russian Federation but also speaks for ethnic Russians abroad – even when these people are not represented in Russia's Parliament and have not authorized the government of Russia to represent them. ...Is the Russian Parliament – instead of the Ukrainian Parliament – the rightful representative of the '12 million Russians' of Ukraine?¹⁸⁰

These are very important questions. As seen in these interviews, perspectives surrounding the rather arbitrary definitions of ethnicity are far from simple or unanimous.

Religious Identities

If the boundaries of ethnicity and national identity are blurred, they become more complex when paired with the religious labels employed by former-Soviet immigrants. In a survey about religious identities published in 2000, 75% of the Russian participants living in the former Soviet Union identified themselves as Russian Orthodox, while only 59% said that they "believed in God." Alexander Agadjanian concludes from this information that Orthodoxy was tied to ethnic self-identification for many of those surveyed. Thus, "it becomes remarkably clear what exactly 'Orthodox' can mean in such a mosaic identity: it is in most cases a marker of ethnic consciousness."¹⁸¹ This is an example of how religious terms can be used to communicate non-religious (ethnic or national) meaning or identify membership in a non-religious group.

¹⁸⁰ Szporluk, *Russia, Ukraine, and the Breakup*, 339-340.

¹⁸¹ Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gifts," 481.

The same dynamic applies to other religious groups who generally did not have the opportunity to practice their religion during the Soviet era. For example, Alexei described his mother as “100% Muslim” because his grandparents were from Tatarstan and Bashkirstan, respectively, and practiced Islam throughout the Soviet years to the extent they were able. Yet Alexei determined that his mother, now deceased, was ethnically Caucasian: “My mom spoke the Tatarin – the Tatar language. She is... you can look at her pictures. She is a blond person, completely blond. She has facial features like the... any white person – like a Caucasian.” When asked if his mother practiced Islam, Alexei replied, “No. ...That’s – I guess that’s what a lot people don’t realize, when they’re talking about Muslim people. In Russia, it is about half the population would have some Muslim blood in them.”¹⁸² This demonstrates Alexei’s association of the label “Muslim” with an ethnic group (despite the fact that he classified his mother as simultaneously “100% Muslim” and “Caucasian”).

Alexei is now in frequent contact with his grandparents who still live in Nizhni Novgorod. He said they are now able to practice Islam more openly, and concurrently, his grandfather is becoming overt about distinguishing himself as a Muslim. When asked if his grandfather approves that he is “not Muslim,” Alexei replied, “I think it bothers him that Natalia isn’t Muslim!” By excluding himself in the answer, it appears that Alexei perceives his half-Muslim parentage as a sufficiently Muslim pedigree to please his grandfather.

For [my grandfather] it’s ethnic. They still have close ties with religion, but, again, when spending so much time in the country – most of their lives – it wasn’t as popular, so you didn’t really practice it. I mean, if you really want to get

¹⁸² Synkov, interview.

close.... It's like everything, you don't practice it, you eventually forget it. So, I think for him, it's more ethnic.¹⁸³

A similar paradox occurs for former-Soviets of Jewish heritage. Alexandra, one of the Jewish interview participants, rejects the identity of Soviet in favor of being Jewish. She experienced discrimination in education and general society for her Jewish roots, and she said her Jewish ethnicity can be a problem by association for her Russian husband. When asked what role religion plays in her life today, Alexandra answered:

It is so difficult question about religion for us. I don't know because – because in Russia we didn't have and now we don't have in Russia any Jewish religion organization. We couldn't, keep our religion, exactly to be Jewish. Judaism in Russia it is not a religion as it is in any country. It is just nationality. Just a phrase, just a blood that's all, because 70 years ago they killed any religion in Russia, especially Judaism.¹⁸⁴

For Alexandra, it seems that being a Jew is primarily, if not exclusively, ethnic. She does not currently practice any religion, but she has been historically open to exploring Christianity. However, when responding to the same question in a separate interview her father (who is also young enough to have never practiced Judaism as a religion) had a different view:

I'd gladly participate in this religious life – naturally the synagogue. I have nothing to do in any other church – concede in the midst of Muslims, but in the synagogue, if somebody will take me there – sure, I don't know yet where to go –

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Kichatova, interview.

I will go. I even have a yarmulke. ...Every person has to believe in something.¹⁸⁵

For Gregoriy, his strong sense of Jewish heritage precludes him from considering a different religion, even though he has no personal experience in religious Judaism.

In a 2002 article, University of Michigan Comparative Politics professor Zvi Gitelman acknowledged the weakness of active Jewish cultural participation and the frequency of inter-marriage in the Soviet Union. Yet Gitelman wrote, “One should not underestimate the power of ethnic identity even where ethnic culture is weak or non-existent.” The Soviet practice of registering individuals by nationality marked off Jews as a distinct and often excluded group. The experiences of anti-Semitism and discrimination helped to maintain Jewish-ness as a distinct identity for people in the Soviet Union. “As Stephen Cornell argues, ethnicity is defined not only by cultural content but also by boundaries.”¹⁸⁶

This seems true in the lives of Alexandra and Gregoriy – the experience of being distinguished and “boxed in” by the label of “Jew” solidified that as the primary term of self-identification. However they have a dearth of Jewish cultural content. As a result, Alexandra identifies with a Russian heritage centered on pre-Soviet cultural accomplishments. She said,

We tried to keep our culture, because it is not Soviet culture. It is a great literature. It is a great – everything – language in Russia. So we speak Russian at home and our kids speak Russian at home, too. They keep Russian, and we read a

¹⁸⁵ Vishinevskiy, interview.

¹⁸⁶ Zvi Gitelman, “Becoming Jewish in Russia and Ukraine,” in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*, eds. Zvi Gitelman, Barry Kosmin, and Andras Kovacs (New York: Central European University Press, 2002), 111.

lot. We have a lot of children's Russian book, and we have a lot of adults'

Russian book. And we still buy it and read it a lot, both of us.¹⁸⁷

As the conversation continued, Alexandra, like her father later, held up 19th century literary figures as exemplary of "Russian" culture. Reflecting a changing identity following immigration, Alexandra aspires to become a global citizen: "...not Americans, not Russian, just the person of the world. I believe in this. It is a world history and we have to know and we have to translate this knowledge to our kids."¹⁸⁸

Categories of identity are complex for the immigrants who participated in these interviews. Ethnic consciousness varied between individuals, and national distinction was made difficult by years of inter-marriage and migration between the former-Soviet states. Likewise, religious terms were used to simultaneously refer to religious faith or an ethnic identity. While not without issue, the idea of a new Russian-speaking identity, promoted by Laitin, Rancour-Laferriere, and others, is an intriguing way to conceptualize identity for former-Soviets. In the least, it is more accurate than a simple nationalistic viewpoint. Weight should also be given to Roman Szporluk's theory that a former-Soviet identity is insufficient for the young adults and emerging generations of today, due to their lack of experience under the Soviet Union. Perhaps the date of departure from the former Soviet Union affects immigrant identities in a similar way. Those who left before the collapse of the Soviet Union, might be prone to adopt a "former Soviet" label over a more nationalistic one.

¹⁸⁷ Kichatova, interview.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Post-Soviet Russian immigrants to the Portland area are a diverse group of people. Some of them were participants in chain migration, connected by family or faith to the late 1980s Soviet-era immigrants. Yet others represented new streams of immigration to the Pacific Northwest, the result of changing circumstances in their countries of origin. This post-Soviet immigrant group was not nearly as homogeneous as the Soviet-era refugees in terms of government status, religion, ethnicity, or family structure, yet they held in common the desire for a more stable life in the United States.

Returning to the question of periodization and the divergent paradigms of immigrant “waves” addressed in the introduction, the Soviet and former-Soviet immigrants to the US appear to have become more diverse with the progression of time. Over time the majority population has gradually shifted from Soviet Jews to the post-Soviet, broader spectrum of immigrants, and so it is difficult to chronologically segment the migratory streams. It is apparent, however, that the large numbers of Soviet immigrants in the 1970s were primarily Jewish. During and following this period, a way was made for other dissident groups to leave – including Germans, Armenians, Greeks, Autocephalous Orthodox members, and eventually Protestant Christians. After the fall of the Soviet Union, these minority groups still comprised the majority of immigrants, but others without claim to religious or ethnic minority status participated as well.

This group of Portland immigrants is representative of the diversity of reasons former Soviets have immigrated to the US in the past fifteen years. While half of them fit the late 1980s

profile of Evangelical Christians seeking refuge in the Pacific Northwest, the other half arrived under a variety of other means – marriage, schooling, and economic opportunity. Certainly the concentration of Evangelicals is specific to the Pacific Northwest or the West Coast of the United States, but it appears that the trend of diversification is consistent throughout the United States.

The Portland-area immigrants' motivations for emigrating are diverse and complex. For some of the immigrants, the primary impetus for migration was to join family already in the United States. Yet most (including those who were coming for family reunification) interviewees highlighted various forms of social instability that caused them to leave, or at least prevented them from returning. For some, it was the continuation of religiously or ethnically motivated persecutions. For others, it was the economic decline and lack of certainty about their country's political future. Housing shortages, corruption, mafia pressures, religious and ethnic intolerance all played a role in pushing the former-Soviet immigrants out of their homeland. In turn, most have adopted a "wait and see" skepticism regarding the future of personal freedoms and civil rights in the former Soviet states.

One of the original goals of this research project was to examine the extended family structure that is frequently linked to recent Russian-speaking immigrants in the US. This form of extended family inter-dependence is a result of years of housing shortages in the Soviet Union and societal expectations that both parents would work outside the home. As a result, grandparents often took a prominent role in child-rearing. From what is evident in these interviews, the Portland-area immigrants have retained this family structure to a significant degree. Many spoke about obligations they have to provide reciprocal care to parents in their old age, but others insisted that maintaining this family structure is a voluntary choice for all

involved. The tradition of a close-knit family has had a tremendous impact on decisions of where and when to immigrate. While social instability was the common theme in former-Soviet immigrants' decision to leave home, family relations were the primary factor in choosing a destination. All except four, three of whom were students, participated in chain migration in this way.

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, the current group of Russian immigrants has modified the typical Soviet-era family structure in two ways. Perhaps because the threats they are fleeing are not as immediate as for their 1980s predecessors, it appears that more nuclear family units are often immigrating without the accompaniment of grandparents. Typically the grandparents are soon to follow, but this still marks a change from the vast majority of earlier immigrants who arrived with intact extended family groups.

There was a lack of evidence about the grandparents' role in decision making, due to the reluctance of grandparents to participate in recorded interviews. Thus, no distinguishable pattern emerged for the direct influence of the elders' generation in making family decisions related to immigration. Nevertheless, all the immigrants admitted the tradition of living with or close to multiple generations of family figured significantly in their choices of location in particular. Even for some adult immigrants whose parents are not living in the US, the Portland-area was chosen as a settlement destination because of the potential benefits inherent in this location for their parents who might follow (e.g., the large Russian-speaking community and services available).

Also, many families have chosen to live in separate housing units in close proximity to the extended family, rather than all together in one space. While they desire to enjoy the benefits and feel committed to the duties of close kinship ties – namely, assistance with childrearing and

caring for elderly members in-home – many post-Soviet immigrants see value in the independence and privacy of separate housing. Adaptively, such young adult immigrants seek to strike a delicate balance between maintaining a daily bond with parents (grandparents) and having their own space. Only two of the interviewed immigrants are currently living with extended family members, and both of those view the arrangement as temporary.

The diversity of the post-Soviet immigrant community is only surpassed by the complexity of their categories of identity. The categories of national, ethnic, and religious identity employed by the immigrants in this study are the products of years of Soviet ethnic policies and the dissolution of their country. Portland-area former-Soviets have not developed a community divided by national labels, but rather reported viewing each other as bound together by their common past experience as Soviet citizens. This finding leads to the conclusion that it is more reliable to speak of characteristics and experiences of former-Soviets and Russian-speakers, rather than Ukrainians or Russians as national categories.

The ways that immigrants describe and distinguish themselves from one another are complex and change in relation to surrounding circumstances. David Laitin's conceptualization of a Russian-speaking nationality is most useful in the context of former-Soviets. This important theory was well supported by the interviews conducted for this study. The strongest common bond shared by the former-Soviet immigrants in Portland was their experience as Soviet citizens. However, for those who emigrated as children or young adults and have experienced much of their lives after the fall of the Soviet Union, nationalistic labels may be preferred. Nevertheless, the majority of the interview participants strongly rejected nationalistic distinctions and emphasized the inter-marriage and internal migrations of the Soviet-era that have made former-Soviets "all one people".

Religious identities add another layer of complexity for Russian-speaking immigrants. For some in the dominant Protestant religious community, religion may be a more significant identifier than ethnicity. However, for Jewish immigrants, a lack of experience and opportunity to practice religious Judaism meant that their primary identification was not religious at all, but “former Soviet”. After having settled in the United States, the categories immigrants’ use to talk about identity continue to change.

In conclusion, the post-Soviet Russian-speaking immigrant community in Portland is a diverse and growing population. While the predominant immigrant group is still Protestant Christian, similar to the 1980s-era refugees, the religious profiles represented in these interviews demonstrate the growing diversification of the Russian-speaking community. Also, their reasons for emigration are more diverse than the earlier, Soviet influx of religious refugees. Many immigrants have been arriving in the Portland area in the 1990s and early 2000s because of ongoing social instability and a well-established pattern of chain migration. Primarily through family reunification, the Russian-speaking population in Portland and the Pacific Northwest continues to develop and broaden in the first decade of the 21st century.

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