Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

The New Immigrant Whiteness

Race, Neoliberalism, and Post-Soviet Migration to the United States

Claudia Sadowski-Smith

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
New York

Introduction

Presumed White: Race, Neoliberalism, and Modes of Migration in the Post-Soviet Diaspora

Over 1 million people identified as having been born in the former USSR or its successor nations in the 2010 US census.[1] They ranked as the ninth largest immigrant group after those from South Korea and before the much more widely studied group of immigrants from the Dominican Republic who are often considered in scholarship on Latina/o migration.[2] The 2010–2014 American Community Survey (ACS) estimated that 1.17 million post-Soviet immigrants now reside in the United States, outnumbering the 1.16 million from Korea. Post-Soviet migrants have arrived more recently than the largest contemporary groups from Asia and Latin America who benefited from the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Even though small numbers of political dissidents and Jewish refugees were able to leave the Soviet Union in the 1970s, only the demise of the socialist East Bloc and the triumph of neoliberalism in the late 1980s initiated large-scale emigration from the former USSR.[3]

An ideology, collection of policies, and mode of governance, neoliberalism entered former East Bloc countries at a time when it had already been dominant in the United States and across Western Europe for about a decade. Neoliberalism promotes the idea that self-regulating markets best allow individuals to pursue the acquisition of wealth. While they took different forms in the United States and several Western European countries, depending on each nation's historical legacies and institutional structures (Hall and Soskice 2001), neoliberal policies have included the deregulation of markets, the liberalization of trade, the privatization of public sectors, the dismantling of social services and welfare programs, and the promotion of the financial sector over other economic activity (Harvey 2007).[4]

The Cold War constrained capitalism's tendency to gravitate toward growing inequalities until the fall of state socialism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe allowed global corporate and political elites to more intensely promote neoliberal ideologies and practices in order to build consensus for the further upward redistribution of wealth and power (Piketty 2014; Duggan 2014). The subsequent dramatic widening of inequalities between individuals and communities in the United States, as measured in the 2000 Census (Steger and Roy 2010, 60), pushed this issue to the top of Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders's political agenda in the 2016 presidential election. Neoliberal transformations in the United States have been accompanied by the emergence of a "security state" apparatus (Hyatt 2011), which employs increasingly antidemocratic forms of governance to contain the growing dissent that accompanies increases in inequality. Differences among populations, such as those constituted by race or legal status, are further mobilized to justify increasingly segmented access to wealth and citizenship rights. While restrictions to legal entry and social rights, the rise in state-sponsored anti-immigrant sentiment, and tightened immigration enforcement are directed at all noncitizens, they have targeted the largest groups of immigrants from Mexico and Central America, and are also extended to those from Muslim nations. The overrepresentation of Latina/os and African Americans in prisons, the spate of police shootings of unarmed black men and children that have received increased public scrutiny since 2014, and the profiling of "Arab/Muslims" through "anti-terrorist" security measures further exemplify how racial profiling works to justify the deepening unequal treatment of various US populations.

Capitalism and its neoliberal variant were exported beyond the United States and Western Europe through free trade agreements, structural adjustment programs, and so-called shock therapy approaches to economic reform (Steger and Roy 2010, 10). Shock therapies serve to rapidly advance neoliberal policies that promote the liberalization of price and currency controls, the withdrawal of state benefits, and the large-scale privatization of public assets. First implemented in Chile in the 1970s, since the late 1980s these policies helped abolish socialist property regimes in Eastern Europe where they created some of the largest increases in social inequality *ever* (Harvey 2007, 17). Shock therapies found their deepest expression in the Soviet Union. They led to the country's dissolution in 1991 and the

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

emergence of twelve successor states and three Baltic nations, which claim continuity with the pre–World War II states that existed prior to their annexation by the Soviet Union. The most rapid neoliberal transformations took place in Russia, the officially-recognized heir of the Soviet Union. As they occurred without financial mitigation or concern for the large-scale suffering of the populace, these processes led to years of severe economic stagnation, high unemployment, widespread impoverishment, and the rise of a small but powerful class of oligarchs who reaped most of the benefits of the transition (Klein 2007). Surging global commodity markets helped improve Russia's economy between the late 1990s and early 2000s, but after the global drop in oil prices and the imposition of international sanctions in response to its 2014 intervention in Ukraine, Russia has found itself in a period of prolonged economic stagnation.[5] While Ukraine, the second largest Soviet successor nation, was not subjected to the same level of shock therapy after it declared its independence in 1991, the country experienced a deeper crisis than other post-Soviet nations until its economy stabilized in the late 1990s. In 2008 Ukraine's economy slowed, and it lapsed into a second recession in 2013.

The massive social upheavals in post-Soviet countries have largely been attributed to the lingering effects of state socialism, such as corruption, authoritarianism, and the inability to commit to ethnic pluralism (Suchland 2015, 2011). But scholars of postsocialism have shown that developments in the former East Bloc, including the USSR and successor nations, also exemplify the delirious effects of neoliberalism (Keough 2006).[6] *The New Immigrant Whiteness* examines representations of migration from the former USSR and successor nations to the United States—in TV shows, memoirs, fiction, and interviews—as equally important responses to the extension of neoliberalism, which has reshaped the causes and forms of migration to the United States as well as the ways in which immigrants are received and in which they adapt and maintain connections to their regions of origin. Transformations in the USSR and successor nations propelled significant diasporic outmigration to the United States, Western Europe, and Israel throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.[7] Ukraine has experienced an especially large population decline, partially as a result of emigration. The country's population has decreased every year since its peak of 53 million in 1993 to 45 million in 2016 (World Bank 2017). In 2007

Ukraine ranked third among top labor exporting countries in the world (Tolstokorova 2010a, 84–85).

Post-Soviet migrants employ virtually *all* forms of human movement available under current US migration law, which in turn afford them differentiated access to segmented citizenship rights. They have arrived as political and religious refugees, and as highly skilled, temporary labor, marriage, and adoptive migrants. Some also overstay nonimmigrant visitor or work visas. The majority of the early Soviet migrants were admitted as refugees from socialism (Logan and Rivera 2011, 30; Solari, 2010, 217). Large numbers also benefited from US legislation that established presumptive eligibility for asylum from religious persecution primarily for Jewish migrants, but also for Evangelical Christians and Ukrainian Catholics, who had sponsors in the United States (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia 2012, 328; Hardwick 2008, 38).[8] Between 1993 and 2000, close to 400,000 immigrants arrived annually from the former Soviet Union, a majority of whom came as Jewish refugees (Kasatkina 2010, 200). By the early 2000s, when it had become more difficult to receive refugee status, the proportion of Jewish migrants in the post-USSR migration decreased significantly (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia 2012, 328).[9] Throughout the 1990s, post-Soviet migrants became the second largest group of US marriage migrants and transnational adoptees (D'Aoust 2009, 7; H. Jacobson 2008). In addition, post-USSR migrants have participated in highly skilled migration in significant numbers.

Post-Soviet immigrants who overstay their nonimmigrant tourist, student, or work visas to become undocumented are placed in a position similar to that of other migrants who do not meet the increasingly restrictive requirements for legal entry or cannot endure the long processing times for visas or status adjustments, and thus arrive unauthorized at US borders.[10] Undocumented immigrants are not only denied the legal right to enter, reside, or work in the United States, but they are also excluded from access to most welfare rights. Available statistics on undocumented migration collapse arrivals from Europe and Canada. Their combined number surpasses migrants from the Caribbean and approximates those of migrants from South America (Passel and Cohn 2014).[11]

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

In addition to participating in all forms of migration to the United States, the post-Soviet diaspora is ethnically diverse, though the concept of ethnicity is defined differently in post-USSR nations and in the United States. In the former Soviet Union, major ethnic groups were often assigned their own republics (which have now become independent nations) and were considered "nationalities," while minorities residing within such administrative units were regarded as "ethnic." Substantial internal migration also led to the development of ethnicized identities where migrants lived in one Soviet republic but identified with another nationality (as ethnically Russian in Kazakhstan, for example), and where the descendants of a relatively high percentage of interethnic marriages may have identified with the national or ethnic origin of only one of their parents (Kolossov 2005).

Migration to the United States from Russia decreased after the country's economy doubled in size between 1998 and 2008 (Kotkin 2015), while the percentage of migrants from other Soviet successor nations increased.[12] In the 2000 Census, those who were born in Russia made up nearly 40 percent of the diaspora, followed by 31 percent from Ukraine, 7 percent from Armenia, and smaller numbers from Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Uzbekistan, Moldavia, and Azerbaijan. In the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), the percentages of Russians, Ukrainians, and Armenians had changed to 35 percent, 27 percent, and 7 percent, respectively. The remainder of the diaspora had become more diverse, with Belarusians, Uzbeks, Moldavians, Lithuanians, Kazakhs, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, and Latvians making up between 2 and 5 percent of the population.

The ethnic and "national" identities that evolved in the former USSR continue to be assigned differential value in post-Soviet nations. So-called ethnic "Slavs" (Russians, Belarusians, or Ukrainians) rank higher than individuals residing in or with ties to Asian countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan as well as those from the Caucasus region, which spans today's Russia, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, and whose residents are called "Caucasian" and are often considered "black." Immigrants may self-identify with their nationality or ethnicity—rather than as Russian—even if they hold a Russian passport (Kasinitz 2013), and those with backgrounds in Asia or the Caucasus may not identify as

white or be racialized as such in the United States. For example, in the 2006–2010 ACS, 4.3 percent of Kazakh migrants identified as "Other Asian or Pacific Islander," 7 percent of Kazakhs and 2.5 percent of Uzbeks as members of "two races," and 1.4 percent of Georgians saw themselves as "black."

An analysis of the legal and ethnic diversity of the post-Soviet diaspora complicates the emphasis in immigration studies on the significance of the *collective* characteristics of immigrant groups for their adaptation and transnationalism. These features include the human and cultural capital with which members arrive, such as their education, language and workplace skills, as well as their racialization into US specific ethnic and racial categories. Members of the post-Soviet diaspora share features that render them distinct from other contemporary arrivals. Both men and women generally arrive with high levels of education and work experience (Logan and Rivera 2011; Kasinitz 2013).[13] Despite their internal ethnic diversity, members of the diaspora are also collectively racialized as white in the United States. The diaspora is associated with views of the East Bloc as a monoracially white intolerant "other" that emerged during the Cold War (Atanasoski 2013) and with notions of a pan-European whiteness that is supposedly shared by all those of European descent in the United States and that consolidated after World War II.

The New Immigrant Whiteness examines the emergence of representations that not only associate the post-Soviet diaspora with these general ideas of a pan-European whiteness, but more specifically characterize its members as successors of turn of the twentieth century European immigrants who became fully incorporated into whiteness by the 1940s. These representations are especially visible in US reality TV shows, a genre that, like the post-Soviet diaspora itself, emerged in the context of global neoliberal transformations. In the early 1990s, demands for lower program production and airtime cost led the TV industry to adopt new techniques and genres that resulted in the development of reality TV shows (Friedman 2002; Dubrofsky 2006). In these shows, the new immigrants are uniquely associated with mythologized accounts of turn of the twentieth century European immigrant adaptation and upward mobility, which describe how immigrants lifted themselves up by their bootstraps to achieve the American Dream. This portrayal keeps alive

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

the exceptionalist mythology of the United States as an immigrant nation. At a time of rapid national and global transformations that are characterized by increasingly segmented access to scarce resources, this narrative of exceptionalism ascribes to members of the post-Soviet diaspora the ability to access the same post–World War II regime of US citizenship rights that have linked a white racialized identity to upward mobility.

Their association with this narrative renders members of the new diaspora significantly different from other contemporary arrivals who are collectively racialized as nonwhite. In fact, just as the pan-European whiteness of turn of the century immigrants emerged in direct opposition to the "blackness" of African American populations and as immigrant descendants consolidated their white ethnic identities in reaction to the 1960s civil rights movement, representations of the post-USSR diaspora as white are explicitly contrasted with immigrant groups racialized as nonwhite. But rather than opposing the whiteness of the post-Soviet diaspora to notions of "blackness," it is most often contrasted with the "brownness" of Latina/os who have become the focus of anti-immigrant rhetoric and politics.

The extension of a historically constituted pan-European white identity and its association with a larger network of privileges to post-Soviet migrants assumes that whiteness has remained unchanged since World War II when it was consolidated through US federal policies in the context of a relatively well-functioning capitalist economy. While an ascribed white racial identity continues to shield individuals from systematic and institutionalized privilege and racialized violence that manifests itself, among other things, in the profiling and unequal treatment of diverse groups, such as the association of African Americans with crime, Latina/os with migrant illegality, and "Arabs/Muslims" with terrorism, other US citizenship rights, which were more readily available to immigrants racialized as white, have undergone significant transformations. Access to education, unemployment, retirement, and social security, which brought modest prosperity and security to an earlier European immigrant working class and its children, and ensured them fuller entry into the labor market, has markedly declined. Noncitizens have increasingly been excluded from what Linda Bosniak has called "internal citizenship rights," such as free choice of employment as well as access to

public services, welfare benefits, and jobs in the public sector (Bosniak 2006, 34, 49). In addition, while European immigrants and their descendants benefited from discriminatory hiring in the industrial labor force when the working class was built, that labor market has largely disappeared in the context of a neoliberal economy. Unlike US-born whites, post-Soviet migrants also generally do not have access to intergenerational savings, which George Lipsitz (1998) identified as a decisive factor in the consolidation of white post–World War II privilege.

Through interviews with marriage migrants and the analysis of parental adoption memoirs that have proliferated as part of a boom in nonfiction since the 1990s, *The New Immigrant Whiteness* examines the extension of these mythologized and US-specific notions of whiteness to residents of the former East Bloc. The emphasis on family unification in US migration law has enabled the expansion of transnational marriage and adoptive migration—and the development of neoliberal migration markets—to the former USSR, in which post-Soviet immigrants are constituted as white even *before* they leave their countries of origin. In contrast, turn of the twentieth century Europeans were, in historian Thomas Guglielmo's words, only considered "white on arrival" (2003). While nineteenth-century immigrant men brought marriage partners from their countries of origin, today predominantly European-identified US citizens sponsor the migration of children or women from the former USSR so that they can create what they perceive as monoracial families. Older notions of a shared familial culture that is based on a common national or ethnic background have thus been replaced by the belief in a globalized form of US whiteness that signifies a shared racial identity. The attribution of this concept to residents of the former USSR or its successor nations transforms them into neoliberal commodities whose presumptive white racial identities increase their desirability and afford them preferred legal admission to the United States through sponsorship as wives and children.

The transnational expansion of US whiteness racializes the new immigrants as white even before their arrival in the United States, while their supposed turn of the twentieth century European immigrant predecessors often oscillated between efforts to assimilate into whiteness and to maintain their national, religious, ethnic, or cultural differences. Turn of the century European immigrants struggled to keep their cultural distinctiveness and group ties, and Jewish immigrants in particular resented assimilation pressures because they interfered with their efforts to assert a distinct racial identity (Goldstein 2006). Even though their ascribed white identities provide post-Soviet immigrants with immediate racialized privilege, the neoliberal value assigned to these identities exposes marriage and adoptive migrants to heightened expectations of their fast-track assimilation to a middle-class whiteness. This pressure obscures the neoliberal conditions occasioning post-Soviet migration and erases migrants' national, cultural, and linguistic differences, thus also impeding the maintenance or creation of bicultural or transnational identities. To differing degrees and with the exception of those who construct their identities exclusively in terms of their "nationality" or ethnicity, post-Soviet migrants are currently developing a "Russian" cultural identity through shared media, language, cultural institutions, and consumption patterns (Gold 2013; Kasinitz et al. 2004; Kasinitz et al. 2008, Kasinitz 2013). While this Russian identity can encompass Soviet Jewish immigrants, a minority of whom exclusively identify as Jewish (Kasinitz 2013), the emerging "Russiannenss" cannot simply expand upon an existing American Jewish identity that evolved from earlier immigration. The turn of the twentieth-century immigrants who largely came from the Russian empire, the geographical predecessor of the USSR, and often spoke Yiddish, assimilated to a Jewish American identity that had evolved from mid-nineteenth century central European Jewish immigration, has had a rather complex relationship to US notions of whiteness, and is simply not available to all post-Soviet migrants.

Through interviews and the study of an emerging body of fiction by first- and 1.5-generation (post-)Soviet writers, *The New Immigrant Whiteness* moves beyond histories of the consolidation of immigrant whiteness and the association of this racialized identity with the post-USSR diaspora toward examinations of contemporary immigrants who are racialized as white but differently positioned in their access to segmented citizenship rights based on their legal status. The book establishes a comparative perspective through which to study undocumented migration from the former Soviet Union, explores post-USSR immigrants' attitudes toward immigration from Mexico and Central America, and analyzes parallels between post-USSR and Asian immigrants who are similarly associated with the American immigrant dream of upward

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

mobility. Such a focus renders members of the post-Soviet diaspora less exceptional from other contemporary arrivals and creates an agenda for further comparative work in a context where changes in the US economy and a declining welfare state are reshaping the US ethnoracial hierarchy. Even though race continues to function as a euphemism for geographical origin, ancestry, and culture, in the neoliberal context the concept also works to normalize deepening differential access to wealth (Melamed 2011, 44). Or as Ramón Saldívar has put it, while essentialist notions of race have given way to more complex understandings of multiethnic racial formations, structures of inequality continue to divide populations based on their perceived physical and behavioral characteristics within the larger context of white supremacy (Saldívar 2013, 2).

The New Immigrant Whiteness adds a focus on the importance of differential legal status on arrival (which moves beyond the familiar distinction between legal and undocumented status) to the emphasis on the significance of collective characteristics, such as racialization and educational achievements, for immigrant adaptation and transnationalism. Differential legal status or the lack thereof shapes migrant access to segmented citizenship rights. Post-Soviet migrants of Jewish descent who benefited from refugee policies in the 1980s and 1990s generally came with their families, were able to naturalize quickly, received assistance from Jewish organizations, and had access to welfare benefits, housing, as well as language and employment training. While they benefited from early eligibility for public assistance and a fast track to citizenship, these immigrants work in occupations with lower prestige and earnings when compared to immigrants from Western Europe and Canada who are also considered white (Logan and Rivera 2011, 29, 39). Migrants admitted on highly skilled visas tend to be inserted into temporary and flexible positions that illustrate how highly skilled jobs have become associated with conditions of precarity. At least initially, these migrants tend to earn less than US-born workers and have fewer employment opportunities because their visas are dependent on their employers and because the adjustment of their legal status generally takes a long time (Banerjee 2006).

For those who arrive with nonimmigrant work or visitor visas and overstay them, even higher levels of education, improved language skills, or longer stays in the United States usually do not translate into higher

wages, and their upward mobility is severely restricted. Like other post-Soviet women migrants, marriage migrants who are incorporated into the middle-class lives of their US husbands often experience a loss of occupational status, although they are legally able to work in the United States and are generally well-educated. Post-Soviet immigrant women frequently end up working in the lower-skilled jobs that dominate the postindustrial US economy and that tend to be held by immigrants (Logan and Rivera 2011, 27).

Pan-European Whiteness

The field of whiteness studies, which consolidated in the late 1980s and 1990s in history, legal, and cultural studies, and later in sociology (Doane 2003), has emphasized the centrality of institutionalized white privilege and its link to white supremacy for any understanding of a white identity in the United States.[14] In its origins, this work rarely considered distinctions between native-born and immigrant populations. Historians have filled in the gap by exploring the emergence of a pan-European whiteness through a focus on the large numbers of so-called "new" immigrants who came to the United States between 1840 and 1920, primarily from Italy and the Russian empire. The size of this immigration far surpassed the Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians who had arrived primarily in the mid-nineteenth century.[15] While eastern Europeans came from diverse regions, including Romania and the Austro-Hungarian empire, most were Jewish and arrived from the Pale of Settlement in the Russian empire (Gold 1999, 115). Its borders largely correspond to the historical boundaries of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that included much of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia. Because the Russian empire controlled emigration by granting exit permits predominantly to ethnic minorities such as Jews, ethnic Poles, Lithuanians, Finns, and ethnic Germans, these groups were disproportionally represented among US migrants (Schneider 2013, 37).[16]

Whiteness historians have focused on the place of these "new" European immigrants in the US "color" hierarchy, which divided native-born/established immigrant Europeans from nonwhite populations, particularly African Americans and the smaller population of Chinese

immigrants who had been arriving in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. The black-white dichotomy, which originated in seventeenth-century African chattel slavery, informed legal definitions of US citizenship as limited to "free, white men." As this binary was extended to new arrivals, Asian migrants were excluded from naturalization until 1943 and Mexican migrants were treated as members of a nonwhite, persecuted minority in the Southwest at the turn of the twentieth century.[17]

Because they were ascribed a white *racial* identity despite their origins in different European countries, however, immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and the Russian empire had access to naturalization and to better jobs than African Americans or Asian immigrants who worked almost exclusively in their own communities or in domestic/personal service (T. Guglielmo 2003, 29). The new European immigrants were also largely exempt from the kind of systemic, institutionalized racial violence that was directed at African Americans, Chinese, and Mexican immigrants as well as Mexican Americans (Fox and Guglielmo 2012). Noel Ignatiev's work (1995) on the role of Irish immigrants as leaders in the crusade for Chinese Exclusion has shaped the view that European immigrants' efforts to access all facets of whiteness required their embrace of white supremacy, particularly hostility toward their nonwhite contemporaries (Satzewich 2000). The scholarship cites Irish immigrant support of slavery and of the 1917 Literacy Act, the participation of Irish immigrants in conflicts with indigenous people and Mexicans in the war with Mexico, as well as efforts by some Italian and Jewish immigrants to prevent the influx of larger numbers of African Americans into their neighborhoods in the early twentieth century (Guterl 2001; MacDonald 1998, 301; Garner 2006, 260; T. Guglielmo 2003, 146; Goldstein 2006).

The experiences of Jewish immigrants in particular question the notion that their efforts to enter the privileged echelon of the US racial hierarchy also necessitated their full support of white supremacy. Because they saw themselves as members of a racially and religiously distinct group that had been persecuted in several multinational empires, were exposed to revolutionary ideas about working-class unity, possessed skills that qualified them for occupations where they did not compete with African Americans, received coreligionist support that provided

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

them with an avenue for economic mobility not available to other immigrant groups, and faced social exclusion, Jewish Americans tended to withhold strong support for white supremacy, especially state-sponsored racial violence or exclusion (Goldstein 2006, 59, 75–76).[18] Jewish newspapers and organizations systemically opposed Chinese Exclusion and the 1917 Literacy Act (Roediger 2005, 15; Barrett and Roediger 1997; Goldstein 2006, 31).

In addition, despite their acceptance as racially white which enabled them to naturalize, the new European arrivals were considered not "quite white" as they faced social stigma, including occasional exclusions from schools, public accommodations, labor unions, and institutions of elite society; and Italians in particular experienced some racialized violence and lynchings (J. Guglielmo 2003, 11). With the exception of eastern European Jewish immigrants who often worked as peddlers or in the Jewish-dominated garment industry, immigrants were also confined to unskilled occupations where they earned less than native-born whites (Schreuder 1989, 133; Garner 2006, 265). They tended to concentrate in ethnic ghettos (Goldstein 2006; Ignatiev 1995) and were selectively excluded from admission to the United States through 1920s Quota Laws that were based on pseudo-scientific racial theories of differences among European national origins. These laws created a system of annual quotas that allowed greater numbers of arrivals from northern Europe while restricting immigration from southern and eastern Europe and completing barring Asian immigration, thus anticipating the biopolitical racialization of contemporary immigrants from Latin America (Roediger 2008, 159).

Most of the new immigrants could only claim full inclusion into whiteness after World War II when they had achieved socioeconomic mobility from urban ethnic ghettos to suburbs, and had acquired educational and workplace skills (Alba and Waters 2011).[19] At this time, European immigrants, and particularly their descendants, began to disproportionally benefit from expanded social rights under New Deal legislation that built the postwar middle class and provided European immigrants with a path toward socioeconomic mobility not available to African Americans. These welfare rights included subsidized mortgage loans, unemployment, Social Security retirement funds, and GI Bill benefits as well as job protections. In fact, European immigrants became

the greatest beneficiaries of FHA loans, having achieved higher rates of home ownership than native-born populations by 1940 (T. Guglielmo 2003, 147–148), and they were more likely than native-born whites to work in occupations covered by Social Security and nearing retirement when the program was instituted (T. Guglielmo 2015).

While the unequal distribution of welfare policies enabled immigrants who had come from different countries and regions of Europe with divergent migratory goals, skills, and human capital to achieve similar outcomes three generations later (Alba 2009), it also led to the kind of residential and educational segregation that still characterizes much of the United States (Roediger 2005; Alba 2009; Lipsitz 1998). George Lipsitz has also emphasized the important role that the intergenerational transfer of inherited wealth to succeeding generations has played in helping to solidify white economic privilege into the contemporary moment (Lipsitz 1998). The scholarly emphasis on the fact that opportunities for upward mobility were selectively provided to those racialized as white emerged in response to the ethnic revival of the 1960s. Descendants of immigrants consolidated what Mary Waters has called "symbolic" ethnicities by selectively borrowing elements from disparate European immigrant backgrounds at a time when these cultural and national distinctions had only a minimal impact on their daily lives (Waters 1990). Some white ethnics employed these identities to disavow their white privilege by arguing that the hardships experienced by their turn of the twentieth century immigrant ancestors were comparable to the treatment of contemporary nonwhite groups (M. Jacobson 1998, 2006; J. Guglielmo 2003).

The Chapters

This book brings together a variety of scholarly fields and perspectives to complicate the extension of a historically constituted pan-European white identity, and its association with an entire network of privileges, to post-Soviet migrants. A study of post-USSR migrants' participation in various forms of human movement bridges existing scholarship on refugee, highly skilled, marriage, adoptive, and irregular migration, which have largely been examined in isolation from one another and with an

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

emphasis on the groups that dominate each type. As a result, separate bodies of work have emerged to explore refugee streams from various Third World countries, highly skilled migration from East and South Asia, low-skilled and often undocumented labor migration from south of the Mexico-US border, "mail-order brides" from the Philippines, and transnational adoptions from China and Korea.

Each chapter focuses on one such form of human movement in which members of the post-Soviet diaspora participate, and places it in dialogue with developments in the fields of American, media, whiteness, immigration, adoption, and Jewish studies, from which an analysis of this migration has largely been excluded. Historians and migration scholars have examined turn of the twentieth century migration from the Russian empire, predominantly by Jewish migrants from the Pale of Settlement, but have rarely explored post-1980s migration from geographies in Europe and Asia that made up the USSR. Some work in Slavic studies is emerging to examine historical outmigration from the former Russian empire to the United States—including the Russian colonization of Alaska as well as migrations after the 1917 revolution, World War II, and in the 1970s and 1980s—but, like US immigration scholarship more generally, the field has paid little attention to immigration since the late 1980s.[20]

Two separate forms of scholarship analyze the gendered movement of women who have migrated to the United States from the Global South and from the former East Bloc in the context of global economic restructuring (Suchland 2015, 6). The post-Soviet, Central European, and Eastern European women who have entered the intimate economy of sex work and marriage through migration tend to be examined from the perspective of human trafficking. They are treated as victims of criminal organizations, failed political systems, and corrupt political elites in former East Bloc countries. In contrast, migration from the Global South is considered in the context of the systemic structural exploitation of women under neoliberal conditions (Suchland 2015, 10).

A small body of scholarship in Jewish studies has focused on Soviet and post-Soviet migrants who came as religious refugees, by emphasizing their similarities to migration from the Pale of Settlement in the Russian empire (e.g., Gold 1999), or at times by including this group

in studies of second-generation immigrants to New York City (Kasinitz et al. 2004; Kasinitz et al.2008; Waters et al. 2010). The latter work has found that while Soviet Jews who came in the early years of the diaspora were able to benefit from the help of coreligionists and Jewish assistance organizations, many are participating in the creation of a new ethnic "Russian" identity. However, some construct their identities by using Soviet and post-Soviet notions of national origin or ethnicity, which includes more specific considerations as Ukrainian or Russian Jews, with only a minority seeing themselves as exclusively Jewish (Kasinitz 2013). Some scholarship has also examined the role of religion in slowing the acculturation of Protestant post-Soviet immigrants who came as refugees (Hardwick 2008). Having arrived as entire congregations and settled in West Coast localities with preexisting religious networks, these groups do not seem to have acculturated well, and many migrants have suffered from a loss of occupational status or unemployment (Hardwick 2002, 269).

In the virtual absence of an established body of scholarly research on post-Soviet migration, this book employs analytical tools and theoretical frameworks from a variety of disciplines. My search for portrayals of post-USSR migrants led me to the medium of reality television, where some programs have turned their attention to the rise in global migration. I engage perspectives from media scholarship, including work on the development of the genre and the use of format adaptation, to understand how US reality TV represents post-Soviet immigrants as inheritors of the mythologized European immigrant dream in ways that diverge from their more established media portrayals as communists, terrorists, or villains.

In my search for alternative representations of the post-Soviet diaspora, I had to create my own "archive" of materials, using the methodologies of several scholarly fields. One of those is the interview method, which is integral to much scholarship in the social sciences. While scholars have explored Soviet Jewish immigrants on the East Coast, I focus on the smaller numbers of post-USSR migrants in the US Southwest and examine their migration experiences and return considerations as well as their attitudes toward anti-immigration policies that have targeted Latina/os and, so far, have taken their most visible form in Arizona's 2010 Senate Bill 1070. I also analyze the turn of the twenty-first century

surge in memoirs by US parents who adopted children from Russia and Ukraine. Finally, I use my training as a literary scholar to examine fiction by first- and 1.5-generation immigrant writers, which places Soviet and post-Soviet migration into comparative frameworks with other forms of contemporary human movement to the United States. The medium of fiction allows authors to articulate alternative views of the present and of a speculative future that do not need to be based on empirical evidence. The use of fiction also enables writers to highlight connections between issues that have not yet been brought together in academic scholarship or popular discourses.

The first chapter, "The Post-Soviet Diaspora on Transnational Reality TV," examines Lifetime's short-lived series *Russian Dolls* and ABC's *Dancing with the Stars*, a widely watched US reality TV show. Both shows exemplify the emergence of new narratives that associate the post-Soviet diaspora with idealized accounts of turn of the twentieth century European immigrant adaptation and upward mobility. While they focus on 1.5-generation immigrant participants who came to the United States as young children or teenagers, most likely as religious refugees who initially dominated the diaspora, the two shows consistently downplay the Jewish identities of their cast members. As they give representational shape to the ongoing construction of a collective "Russian" identity, *Russian Dolls* and *DWTS* characterize this identity as another ethnicized version of pan-European whiteness. Post-Soviet migrant cast members are portrayed as following in the footsteps of idealized early European migrants, and they are set in firm opposition to Latina/os. The chapter also examines media commentary surrounding the two shows as well as interviews with participants, their own use of social media, and their participation in a Ukrainian TV show in order to highlight issues left unrepresented on *DWTS* and *Russian Dolls*, particularly post-Soviet migrants' engagement with growing anti-immigration sentiment and their efforts to establish transnational and diasporic identities. This approach opens up perspectives that render post-USSR migrants less exceptional from other contemporary US arrivals.

Chapter 2, "Highly Skilled and Marriage Migrants in Arizona," discusses the results of my interviews with post-USSR immigrants in Phoenix, Arizona, in order to place the post-Soviet diaspora in the context of US scholarship on adaptation and return migration. The ma-

jority of my interviewees participated in two highly gendered forms of movement—they either arrived on male-dominated highly skilled or female-dominated marriage migration. These migratory forms have been spurred by the interests of US men in creating monoracial families and by the neoliberalization of US academic institutions that has enabled the hiring of large numbers of academics in contingent and precarious positions. Their differential legal status upon arrival provides marriage and highly skilled migrants with diverging access to economic, social, and cultural forms of US citizenship, community building, and opportunities for return. Highly skilled migrants live middle-class lives, appear less interested in participating in a coethnic community, and maintain limited physical transnational connections. In contrast, marriage migrants experience downward mobility and dependency on their husbands, encounter greater difficulties connecting to post-Soviet migrants who arrived on other legal categories, and consider return more often. While they are immediately provided with temporary green cards and membership in their husbands' middle-class lives, the globalized form of US whiteness that the women were assigned even before they left their countries of origin also creates heightened expectations of their complete assimilation to a middle-class whiteness at the cost of their and often their children's bicultural and transnational identities.

Chapter 3, "The Desire for Adoptive Invisibility," explores the surge in US parental memoirs of adoption from Russia and Ukraine in the 1990s and early 2000s to complement scholarship on transnational adoption that has focused on questions of race when examining the largest and earliest forms of adoption from China and Korea. The chapter explores three of the most influential parental memoirs of adoption from the former Soviet Union—Margaret L. Schwartz's *The Pumpkin Patch* (2005), Theresa Reid's *Two Little Girls* (2007), and Brooks Hansen's *The Brotherhood of Joseph* (2008)—in order to highlight the centrality of race for adoptions from the former USSR. Like many other memoirs that have been produced since the boom of this genre, these three works propagate affective structures of neoliberalism that obscure growing domestic and global inequities (Gilmore 2010; Thoma 2014).

In these memoirs, parents explicitly eschew the traditional humanitarian narrative of adoption and portray themselves as neoliberal consumers who have the right to select healthy white children from an

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

international adoption market in order to forge families whose members look as though they could be biologically related. The authors' belief that they share a preexisting white racial identity with post-Soviet children confers immense and immediate privilege onto adoptees. But this notion also reaffirms old-fashioned assumptions about immigrant adaptation. Because they are considered white like their parents, post-Soviet adoptees are expected to quickly and completely adapt to the middle- and upper-middle-class cultures of their new US families in ways that ignore their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, the reasons for their relinquishment, and the many challenges associated with their status as adoptees. The belief that US adoptive parents share a racial identity with children in the former East Bloc not only turns them into preferred commodities but also renders them particularly vulnerable to rejections or adoption disruptions, which may help explain the significant numbers of abuse and death cases of post-Soviet adoptees at the hands of their US parents.

Chapter 4, "Fictions of Irregular Post-Soviet Migration," explores Sana Krasikov's short story collection *One More Year* (2008) and Anya Ulinich's novel *Petropolis* (2007) to develop a comparative approach to representations of contemporary irregular and unauthorized migration, a form of movement that has been largely associated with migrants from Mexico and Central America. The fiction by Krasikov and Ulinich represents ethnically and racially diverse protagonists from Russia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan who arrive in the United States on nonimmigrant visas and become undocumented migrants. Even though they are often associated with the tradition of American Jewish literature, these two works clearly move beyond the themes of assimilation and family migration that dominated twentieth-century cultural productions by eastern European immigrants of Jewish descent such as Mary Antin, Abraham Cahan, and Anzia Yezierska. Their work laid the foundation for a literature of assimilation to a middle-class white US racial identity that only became fully available to European immigrants by the mid-twentieth century. Rather than continuing the traditions of earlier Jewish American writing, the fiction by Krasikov and Ulinich emphasizes their post-Soviet characters' experiences of diminished access to the US labor market, residency, and citizenship rights, and thus places this fictional work in the larger context of contemporary US immigrant writing.

Chapter 5, "The Post-Soviet Diaspora in Comparative Perspective," analyzes additional data from my interviews with post-Soviet immigrants and Gary Shteyngart's novel *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) to outline other areas of cross-ethnic comparative research. In the interviews, post-Soviet migrants largely stressed their ambivalence toward laws targeting undocumented migration like Arizona's 2010 Senate Bill 1070 from which they expected exemption because of their differential modes of entry as documented or highly skilled migrants (but rarely their ascribed whiteness). They also empathized with Mexican immigrants as the group most targeted by the law based on their shared status as immigrants or their experiences with state surveillance in the former USSR or in today's Russia. Their views are reminiscent of the ways in which turn of the twentieth century European immigrants insisted on differences from their nonwhite contemporaries who were targeted by institutionalized racial discrimination. But the attitudes of post-Soviet immigrants also recall how eastern European Jewish immigrants expressed overwhelming ambivalence toward or rejected expressions of white supremacy through empathy with African Americans, which was often based on comparisons with their own marginalization in the Russian empire (Goldstein 2006). The ambivalent or empathetic attitudes of many of my post-Soviet interviewees, most of whom are not Jewish, do not serve to shore up their racial identities but largely underscore their social distance from Latina/os.

Set in a near-future, dystopian United States that is undergoing similar shock therapies as the former Soviet Union, Shteyngart's novel speculatively explores the position of second-generation Russian Jewish immigrants in the US neoliberal racial hierarchy through comparisons with Asian Americans. Shteyngart arrived in the United States in the late 1970s, before the immense growth in post-Soviet migration, but his novel addresses how second-generation Korean and Russian Jewish immigrants are similarly linked to the myth of upward mobility while Latina/os and African Americans are marginalized as losers of neoliberalism.

The New Immigrant Whiteness calls for comparative studies of immigrant whiteness that set it alongside other racial formations through examinations of contemporary immigrants who are racialized as white but are differently positioned in their access to segmented citizenship rights

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

based on legal status. Such an approach addresses the growing discrepancy between the ability of whiteness to deliver on many of its promises to newcomers racialized as white, such as social acceptance and upward mobility through cultural assimilation on the one hand, and its ideological function as a means of pressuring immigrants to assimilate to racialized power structures that benefit an increasingly smaller elite, on the other. Eric Goldstein has argued that early European immigrants' assimilation to whiteness was already less a matter of individual choice than the result of systemic pressures. While whiteness provided immigrants with significant economic and social privileges and largely exempted them from institutionalized racism and racial violence, the strongest pressures on immigrants to assimilate emanated from native-born elites who employed the black-white binary to obscure other fissures in US society and project an optimistic view of the US nation (Goldstein 2006, 3, 6). US elites have relied on this binary to gain the allegiance of the white underclass in order to retain their affluence and political power since the institution of chattel slavery (Morgan 1975). Anti-immigrant discourses and politics also served the interests of employers who promoted the belief that certain groups genetically fit specific jobs in order to undermine labor unity, depress wages, and spur competition (Barrett and Roediger 1997, 16–17). The extension of whiteness to new US arrivals and to populations who reside in countries of the former Second World that are portrayed as monoracially white provides them with even less of a choice over their own racialization and upholds the ideological dominance of a now globalized whiteness that obscures growing economic, social, and racial inequities among and within nations.

In its focus on the importance of differential legal status on arrival, *The New Immigrant Whiteness* points toward comparative approaches to whiteness that move beyond the currently prevailing emphasis on groups of migrants of the same geographical and national origins. This focus threatens to reaffirm narratives of stark historical and contemporary divisions between differently racialized immigrant groups, in part through an emphasis on the importance of shared group characteristics. While acknowledging the continued centrality of whiteness as a racial category to which many members of the post-Soviet diaspora have differential access, this book explores the participation of post-USSR migrants in various migratory forms in order to call for work that outlines

similarities between individual segments of the diaspora and other contemporary migrants in their encounters with increased socioeconomic inequality, tightened immigration restrictions, segmented access to diminished citizenship rights, the growth in anti-immigrant sentiment, and the challenges of establishing new collective immigrant identities with transnational and diasporic dimensions.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 The 2010 10% Census data is a combined dataset of the 2006–2010 American Community Survey (ACS). Figures from the 2011 annual American Community Survey (ACS) estimate the numbers of those born in the former Soviet Union to be at 1.2 million. The ACS is based on a 5 percent sample and is considered less accurate than the Census, which after 2010 no longer enumerated foreign-born populations.

2 Between 1995 and 1996, Soviet successor nations were the top senders of immigrants to New York City. The more than 20,000 immigrants who came annually outnumbered immigrants from the Dominican Republic, which had been the primary sending country prior to 1995 (Liu 2000, 171). The estimated number of 1.2 million post-USSR migrants in the 2011 ACS surpasses the 1.1 million Korean immigrants (overwhelmingly from South Korea) or close to 3 percent of the 41.3 million foreign-born population that lived in the United States in 2013 (Zong and Batalova 2014) and thus moves post-Soviet immigrants ahead of the Korean diaspora to the place of eighth-largest immigrant group in the United States. The 2011 and 2015 annual ACS did not show significant increases in the numbers of the two immigrant groups.

3 In 1990, the former Soviet Union was the eighth-largest source country of immigration to the United States; its mostly Jewish immigrants were the largest refugee group to enter the United States, numbering about 30,000 per year (Gold 1998, 115). Between 1990 and 2006, the largest successor nation, the Russian Federation, made it into the top immigrant-sending countries to the United States almost each year (Robila 2010, 27).

4 I capitalize the terms Eastern and Western Europe when referring to the Cold War–and post–Cold War division of Europe, but use small letters when referencing the geographical pre–Cold War precursors of what, after World War II, roughly became the First and Second World.

5 Differences between Ukraine's major social groups who identify ethnically as Russian or Ukrainian, were mobilized to the point of military conflict after Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union in 2013. The subsequent Euromaidan protests in Kiev led to the election of a new Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, in 2014. Russia used the political chaos of the transitional government to annex the Crimean Peninsula,

and pro-Russian separatists occupied eastern Ukrainian cities to demand greater regional self-control and Ukrainian federalization. The intrusion of the new Russia into Ukraine has expanded upon Soviet imperialism toward its former republics and various Eastern European nations, which has been theorized through the lens of postcolonial theory.

6 The term postsocialism (rather than postcommunism) is used to denote the common, yet heterogeneous histories of state socialism and its aftermath in the unevenly aligned (or non-aligned) countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the USSR (Suchland 2011, 837). The term postcommunism has been employed to primarily focus on the transitions of formerly socialist nations to capitalism.

7 Diasporic forms of migration are particularly characteristic for those of Jewish descent because Israeli and German immigration law favored their entry based on their ethnic descent. The Law of Return in Israel qualifies new arrivals for citizenship if they have one Jewish grandparent, and it also enables the entry of non-Jewish relatives. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union with one Jewish parent are similarly allowed to enter Germany along with their immediate family, even though requirements have been tightened since 2005.

8 In 1990, 92.3 percent of all post-Soviet migrants came as refugees. In 1999, that percentage had declined to 43.9, and a quarter of the arriving post-USSR migrants came as family members of US citizens, some of whom had earlier arrived as refugees (Logan and Rivera 2011, 30).

9 Approximately 160,000 Soviet Jews were granted refugee visas for the United States between 1970 and 1989 (Cohen et al. 2011, 9). Researchers who incorporate arrivals since 1989 estimate that the number of Soviet Jews who came to the United States is between 300,000 and 750,000 (Berger 2011). Approximately half of Soviet Jewish immigrants in the United States have immigrated since 1990 (Zeltzer-Zubida and Kasinitz, 2005, 194). After 1989, most post-Soviet immigrants to the United States had to rely on family reunification to obtain visas, and only 50,000 persons annually have been allowed to enter as refugees from the former Soviet Union, most of them of Jewish descent (Cohen et al. 2011, 8, 10). Priority was given to applicants with sponsorship in the United States (Clymer 2013).

10 Unauthorized immigrants constituted 26.3 percent of the overall US foreign-born population in 2012, while naturalized immigrants made up 73.7 percent, legal permanent residents 27.4 percent, and temporary legal residents 4.5 percent (Passel and Cohn 2014). According to the Department of Homeland Security, of the more than 41 million foreign-born people living in the United States in 2013, about 30 million were naturalized citizens, permanent residents, and legal residents.

11 The Pew Research Center estimated that 600,000 undocumented immigrants from Canada and Europe lived in the United States in 2012. That number is larger than populations from the Caribbean (550,000), from "the Middle East, Africa, and Other" (400,000), and close to the number of migrants from South America (700,000) (Passel and Cohn 2014).

Journal of Transnational American Studies 9.1 (2018)

12 Dissidents of Vladimir Putin's increasingly undemocratic regime and LGBTQ migrants seeking asylum continue to come (Armitage 2014; Krupkin 2015). Russia's recent economic downturn following the drop in oil prices and armed conflicts in Ukraine may spur more out-migration.

13 Despite their high rates of education and participation in a wide variety of occupations, Soviet women were discriminated against in terms of pay and promotion and were expected to take on domestic and care giving responsibilities in addition to their full-time jobs (Logan and Rivera 2011, 26).

14 The literature of "white confession" by writers like Peggy McIntosh (2004) and Ruth Frankenberg (1993) represents the earliest forms of whiteness scholarship. This work argued that white feminists had overlooked the importance of race in connection with gender inequality because they were largely unaware of their own privileges as white (largely middle-class) women.

15 In comparison to the over 3 million immigrants from Ireland who arrived between 1840 and 1890, 18 million immigrants from eastern and southern Europe came between 1890 and 1920 (Barrett and Roediger 1997, 3).

16 Between 1908 and 1909, 10,455 ethnic Russian immigrants also came to the United States but many returned to Russia. Among the prerevolutionary immigrant peasants were Carpatho-Rusyns from the Austro-Hungarian empire who spoke a dialect of Great Russian and considered themselves Russian. The Russian Orthodox Church converted many of them away from the Greek Catholic Church (Manchester 2015).

17 The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the admission of new arrivals on the basis of their geographical origin and biological descent, which made them ineligible for naturalization. The extension of this law to immigrants from other parts of Asia in 1923 led to the determination that Indian immigrants were nonwhite and thus ineligible for US citizenship because their origin in Asia overrode their "Caucasian racial ancestry" (Koshy 2012). The identification of whiteness with European origin was also used to initially deny legalization to some immigrants from present-day Syria until the 1915 Supreme Court decision *Dow v. United States* that "inhabitants of a portion of Asia, including Syria, were to be classed as white persons."

18 Migrants from the Pale largely came with urban, commercial, craft, and manufacturing skills (Brodkin Sacks 2010), and the women were accomplished needle workers (Glenn 1990, 5, 9). They and other eastern European Jews received substantial support from their more established central European coreligionsts who provided newcomers with an avenue for economic mobility that was not available to any other immigrant group. Central European Jews had arrived in the 1840s and 1850s, mainly from Germany. Unlike their contemporaries, the Irish immigrants, they had been a small group who acculturated quickly (Gold 1999, 124–125), and by the time eastern Europeans arrived, they owned most of the garment industry on the East Coast. Because central European Jews considered themselves racially similar to the new arrivals from eastern Europe, they provided

them with economic support, hired them in their factories, and mobilized against the passage of immigration restrictions, while also engaging in attempts at Americanizing the new arrivals (Gold 1998, 26). Unlike Italians or non-Jewish eastern Europeans who tended to occupy positions in between their fellow black workers and white (often Irish or German) supervisors or union leaders, eastern European Jewish women labored alongside the smaller numbers of Italian women in the largely Jewish-owned garment industry or in apartment-based sweatshops, and the men worked as petty tradesmen and peddlers (Goldstein 2006; Diner 2015). They either did not live in the same neighborhoods as African Americans or resided there as merchants or peddlers rather than as fellow tenants (Diner 2015, 78). In the rural South, peddlers sold their wares on plantations and contributed to the emergence of an autonomous economy among slaves (Diner 2015, 102). Jewish peddlers were compared to their Yankee predecessors, while Irish and Italian immigrants tended to be depicted as similar to African Americans (Diner 2015, 77).

19 However, throughout the 1960s discrimination persisted toward Jewish Americans. Restrictive covenant clauses in real estate titles that limited the sale or transfer of property to members of certain groups were intended to bar Jews from some of New York City's most desirable suburban neighborhoods. They were prohibited from joining social and athletic clubs; excluded from white collar and professional jobs in law, insurance, and accounting; and they also suffered discrimination in employment as well as quota systems on admission to private colleges, universities, and medical schools (Foner 2005, 17–19; Gold 1998, 122–23).

20 Russians first came to Alaska, where they engaged in the fur trade, converted indigenous people to Orthodoxy, and transliterated indigenous languages. After the acquisition of Alaska in 1867 by the United States, some Russians went to California. All Slavic peoples within Czarist Russia were seen as "Russians" (Satzewich 288).

1