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Troubling Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish Whiteness:

Queer Immigrant Contestations and Imaginations

By

Sophia Sobko

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

in

Education

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Glynda Hull, Co-Chair
Professor Zeus Leonardo, Co-Chair
Professor Santiago Slabodsky
Professor Stephanie Syjuco

Spring 2022

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Abstract

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Doctor in Philosophy in Education

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This dissertation narrates and challenges the white racialized assimilation of a group of 1.5 and 2nd generation queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants to the U.S., from the 1980s to the present. Just as critical literature on the racialization of immigrants in the U.S. post-1950 has overlooked the major Cold War migration of Soviet Jews, most existing scholarship on this group has not attended to the roles of race, colonialism, and imperialism in their migration and assimilation (Aviv & Shneer, 2005; Gitelman, 2016). In this study, I draw on decolonial, anti-imperialist, intersectional feminist, and critical race frameworks to demonstrate that Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants are not unproblematically white, but rather, problematically white(ned). Employing feminist, queer, critical pedagogical and participatory approaches to qualitative research, I designed and co-created a live, virtual group study (Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, the Blue Railcar Collective) that engaged participants who shared Soviet Jewish histories and social locations in a collective process of deconstructing and contesting their assimilation into U.S. white supremacy and settler colonialism. I drew on the group's pedagogical and cultural production (including recorded group sessions, a curriculum, multimodal publication, and set of virtual performances) along with insights from modified life histories / dialogic interviews with seven core "collaborators" to document the ways these immigrants and children of immigrants individually and collectively negotiated and responded to the weaponization of their histories. This study was designed to illuminate the conditions that facilitated both this group's whitening and their critical racial consciousness, document the consequences, and *intervene* into these processes.

The findings of this study suggest that whereas the shaming of difference (e.g., immigrant, queer, Soviet, Jewish, poor) alongside white racial interpellation facilitated assimilation into American whiteness at an early age, the collective, critically-oriented processing of internalized, intersectional shame (as afforded by the Kolektiv) conversely helped participants strengthen critical orientations to racialized structures of power. In adulthood, socialization into white womanhood produced liberal white guilt and saviorist identities among some of my

collaborators, while critical reflexivity around whiteness in the context of Black Lives Matter protests led them to later question their own immigrant whitening as a fraught process, rather than a given. Correspondingly, my study found that whereas some white antiracist affinity groups assumed whiteness as pre-existing and failed to account for intersectional experiences of whiteness (via, e.g., ethnic immigrant identity, queerness, gender, class), the Kolektiv, as a "historicized affinity group," offered participants the chance to draw on shared familial and ancestral histories and complex subject positions to contest whiteness as an ongoing process. Relational processes of developing collective critical consciousness, working through shared intergenerational trauma, and creatively articulating political commitments emerged as critical aspects of this broader project of imagining and pursuing de-assimilation in ongoing colonial contexts.

This study contributes empirical research on contemporary white(ned) immigrants, extending the study of 19th and 20th immigrant whiteness through present day and complicating the literature on Cold War immigrant racialization, which has heretofore focused on immigrants of color with few exceptions (Sadowski-Smith, 2018). By demonstrating white racialization as a colonial structure and ongoing process in the era of neoliberal multiculturalism, my study also opens space for contestations of new immigrant whiteness, however fraught this goal in the context of ongoing racialization. Finally, my discussion of the Kolektiv serves as a blueprint for the *collective* pursuit of such a project among assimilable immigrants, groups invested in or proximate to whiteness, and those whose histories have been weaponized by the state, contributing a liberatory pedagogical approach that centers relationships among people of shared histories and subject positions

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Acknowledgements

I approach this page as a space for благодарность, gratitude. I am grateful to my parents, Nadya Gurin and Gregory Sobko for raising, loving, and supporting me. I am grateful to my бабушки и дедушки (Софа, Миша, Валя, Илюша) for my rich inheritances and for childhood memories of супчик, чай, чёрной хлеб, грибы, ягоды, берёзы, и прогулки. I am grateful to Salomeya Sobko, who has been by my side through the joys and troubles of the last many years, including being my primary writing support through countless hours of revision and editing. My deepest gratitude goes to Sonya for being by my side through the rollercoaster of emotions, celebrating me, and being a source of joy, inspiration, and love.

I am grateful to my dissertation committee for the countless hours they spent advising me and responding to my work. Thank you, Professor Glynda Hull, for modeling integrity, being a steady source of wisdom, creativity, and support, and always coming through for me. Thank you, Professor Zeus Leonardo, for informing this project with your scholarship, teaching, and critical feedback. Thank you, Professor Santiago Slabodsky, for being not just an incredible scholar but a real person, and for valuing my work enough to both celebrate and push it. Thank you, Professor Stephanie Syjuco, for generously sharing resources and reminding me that I am indeed an artist. I will also be forever grateful to Professor Michael J. Dumas for transforming my thinking in a way that eventually led me to this life project.

I am grateful to the Indigenous Ohlone stewards of the land where I conducted this project, and to the group of friends and extended community that met a context of scarcity with an abundance of love and support. Elizabeth Hunter, you were here for all of it: in-the-cry, filling my water glass, texting from the next room. Thank you to both you and my sister-friends Sara Chase Merrick and Derrika Hunt for trusting me and loving me in ways that helped me love myself. Thank you to Devanshi Unadkat and Bryce Becker for being my emotional and practical supports from beginning to end; it's impossible to imagine making it through without your friendship. I am grateful to Juliet Kunkel, Alice Taylor and Danièle Fogel for the many walks, talks, treats, and writing sessions, and to Tiffani Marie for that IRB protocol. Thank you to my professors, my own students and so many of my colleagues for being my teachers. Thank you Dr. Penny Rosenwasser, my unofficial committee member, for continuously leading me back to the "still small voice." Thank you, Aravah, for your generous and colorful friendship. To so many people who I cannot name here individually (in the Bay Area, San Diego, L.A., and beyond), thank you for the Shabbat dinners, phone calls, texts, organizing meetings and marches, redwood hikes, and art events that filled me with life energy and nourished my spirit.

I offer my deepest благодарность to my предки for leading me to this project, and to my dear друзья for being here with open arms when the time came for us to finally meet. Thank you to everyone who helped form Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon and who keeps our community going. The brilliance you shared with me is embedded in the pages of this project. To my collaborators, Irina, Luba, Masha, Rebecca, Rivka, Sasha, and Stepha, you are my forever семья. Thank you for your courageous vulnerability and your dedication to this project, to the Kolektiv, and to our friendships. There would be no dissertation without you, nor would I be who I am today. I can't wait to continue becoming more myself with you. I'll see you at our дачя!

Chapter 1: Introduction

What is at Stake

As I put the finishing touches on my dissertation, the Russian government, the regime of the land where I was born, began a brutal invasion of Ukraine, the birthplace of my three Jewish бабушки и дедушки (babushki i dedushki, grandparents) and burial site of my предки (predki, ancestors). I struggled to maintain my concentration as I toggled anxiously between the Google Doc where I was writing and a GoFundMe fundraiser that my friend Luba and I started after she couldn't reach her elderly great uncle, her only relative who had stayed in Odesa after the rest of her family had left 30 years before. Overnight, our fundraiser reached $10,000, doubling our goal. However, this pleasant surprise was quickly tempered by posts that began to pop up on my social media feeds criticizing the selective outpouring of support for people who were described by mainstream media as "European," "white," and "just like us." I spent the following days terrified for Luba's uncle, who was hiding in the basement of his Soviet-era building, and unsettled by the truths that were being shared. As the invasion raged on, Luba and I decided to distribute half of the funds that continued to be raised to war relief efforts in the Global South, including in occupied Palestine. Some praised the decision as one of integrity, while others derided what they saw as a mere "equality clause."

The cacophony that flooded my devices as Russian missiles flew over Ukraine reflects the political, moral, and spiritual conflicts that drive this dissertation project. These dilemmas transcend theory, reverberating in my body. They permeate my relationships with friends who are racialized as "other" against my own ascribed whiteness and trouble my connection with my Soviet Jewish immigrant family, my homeland, and the meaning I make of my own immigration. They unsettle not only the present, but also the past and future. As my mom calls me to say that she hopes I now understand why she left Moscow back in 1991, I am forced to recognize that, had my parents not moved our family to the U.S., I would have likely been fleeing Russia alongside tens of thousands of others who were now creating makeshift lives in Istanbul, Tbilisi, and Yerevan. But speaking from the heart of empire, I also know that this Russian aggression echoes centuries of terror that the United States has inflicted on innocent people, both within this country and in the so-called Middle East and Global South. I also cannot ignore my own entanglements with settler colonialism, including that my presence on occupied Indigenous land is the result of Israeli and American campaigns that promoted Soviet emigration for the purpose of displacing Palestinians (as will be further discussed in Chapter 2).

Considered together, these contradictions both heighten the compassion I feel toward my immigrant parents and compel me to consider how my own life, like those of many other Soviet Jewish refugee-immigrants, has been deemed "grievable" (Butler, 2010) against the lives of others. In this politicized context, the personal inquiry that motivated this dissertation project—*What is my social location? What are my commitments? What are my contributions?*—expanded to encompass likeminded and similarly-positioned others. As I gathered other queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jewish immigrants who were the first in their families to be raised in the United States and Canada to join in collective inquiry, the questions thus became: *What is our social location, as white(ned) queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi*[1] *Jewish*

[1] As an empire, the Soviet Union held dominion over lands where many groups of Jews lived: Ashkenazi Jews (of European decent, whose ancestors had been confined to the Pale of Settlement) who lived in the West and some of whom were displaced to the east during the Great Patriotic War (WWII); Kavkazi Jews (of the Caucasus region); Georgian Jews; Bukharan Jews; Crimean Karaites; Crimean Krymchaks; and others. These are distinct groups with

immigrants to the United States? Correspondingly, what are our commitments and contributions?

While the invasion of Ukraine and the hypocrisies exposed by its exceptionalization lend these questions a certain public immediacy, their relevance extends far beyond the present moment. As white(ned) immigrants, my study collaborators[2] and I left behind our families' negative Jewish racialization in the Soviet Union through transnational migration to the United States, where we were given the protections of refugee status and whiteness. As a result, we learned whiteness from a young age and have been preoccupied with ethical questions of white racialization for the last many years. Of course, these questions are not only relevant to white(ned) immigrants like us, but to all other white people (including white Jews), to other immigrants and descendants of immigrants deemed "assimilable," and to all groups who reap some advantages from imperialist, settler colonial, and antiblack systems. Indeed, the question of how familial and ancestral histories inform commitments and contributions to others is pertinent to anyone whose care for life collides with their own entanglements in interlocking systems of domination.

"What is at stake" in this project encompasses both collective well-being and the legacy of our Soviet and Jewish предки (predki, ancestors), grandparents, and parents, who survived and sacrificed much for us be free. And yet, Audre Lorde (2012) famously wrote, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (p. 132-133). Her words remind us that in the context of global colonialism, our histories are entangled and our freedom inseparable. As this dissertation will demonstrate, my collaborators and I strive to honor our ancestors' lives by imagining and pursuing a future where all people can pursue their livelihoods. Taking Lorde's words as a call to action, I developed this project not just as a documentation of history, but also as a pedagogical intervention. My objectives were to both critique assimilation and to imagine another way forward. In this way, this study itself constitutes a "pedagogy of re-existence": a reconfiguration of ways to exist and not just resist that calls forth the "agency, action and praxis of the otherwise" (Adolfo Albán, as referenced in Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 95). Mignolo and Walsh offer that "decolonial re-existence in the circumstances of the present times requires creative pedagogies-methodologies of struggle" (p. 96), where pedagogies are defined as "the struggles, practices, processes, and wagers for life" (p. 95). In other words, decolonial reconfigures that seek not only to tear down but also to build, require creative struggles, practices and processes.

Hupa scholar Sara Chase Merrick (2020) orients such projects to be grounded in particular histories and struggles. She puts out "a call for readers to engage deeply in their own specific histories and ongoing struggles to see how we might all envision an otherwise that does not replicate these struggles" (p. 14). My project is best understood as a response to Mignolo, Walsh, and Merrick—an attempt at creating a pedagogy-methodology of liberation from my own historical subject position, in solidarity with others. In this project, shared histories, identities, and positionalities of Soviet Ashkenazi Jews who are read as white in their new contexts become a site for collective study and critical imagining beyond the prescriptions of racialized assimilation. While this is *my* particular area of study and struggle, like Merrick, I call on others–

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distinct languages and cultural and religious practices. In this dissertation, I write specifically about Soviet Ashkenazi Jews because this is the group most directly racialized as white in the U.S. context, on account of our phenotypic reading, and because my collaborators and I all identify as Ashkenazi.

[2] In a discussion of my collaborative research methods in Chapter 3, I will explain my intentional use of "collaborators" rather than "research subjects."

–fellow Soviet Jewish immigrants, other white(ned) people and those in proximity to whiteness, other immigrants deemed assimilable or praised as model minorities, and everyone who yearns for justice and collective liberation—to rigorously engage their own histories and work together to continue building a world where all beings are free.

Background and Positionality

In her book *Just Research in Contentious Times*, Michelle Fine (2018) asks researchers, educators, and activists to "trace the biography of our research questions" (p. 6). My research questions trace back to my own moral anxieties, the result of my lived experience navigating my Jewish family's migration from the imperial Soviet Union to the imperial and settler colonial United States. With this move, I became the first in my familial lineage to be considered "white"—a designation that comes from the way my body is read in the context of American "white body supremacy" (Menakem, 2017). Prior to this, with the exception of my maternal grandmother's Slavic line, my ancestors, grandparents, and parents were regarded as Jews, an internally colonized group and ethnic "other" in relation to Russian Slavs (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012). For hundreds of years, they lived under Slavic domination, first in the Russian Empire, where they were legally confined to the Pale of Settlement and suffered periodic pogroms, and later in the Soviet Union, where they experienced both liberalization and continued antisemitism, alongside Soviet state violence. As an internally colonized group, my relatives and предки (predki, ancestors) also navigated two waves of assimilation: Russification and Sovietization. Each wave offered much needed economic opportunities at the expense of Jewish spiritual and cultural practices, including the Yiddish language and Judaism. These liberalizing policies, along with pogroms and war, drove my Jewish predki from the местечки (mestechki, shtetls) of the Pale of Settlement to larger cities. Eventually, my maternal and paternal lineages converged in Moscow—where I was born in 1985. In April 1991, just six years later and six months before the fall of the Soviet Union, I left with my family for the United States.

Although I now understand my life as the unlikely outcome of this long history of survival, and politically identify specifically as a white(ned) queer Soviet Jewish immigrant (in the U.S.), just six years ago, I navigated the world primarily as "white" and as a "Russian immigrant." My own immigrant assimilation into whiteness and my sense of racial privilege in comparison to people of color and Black people in my life led me to confront my complicity in white supremacy. At the same time, my Russian-speaking immigrant background alienated me from white people who were long assimilated or descended from settlers, though this difference between us was not outwardly apparently. Meanwhile, while I knew I was Jewish, my Jewishness was rarely a site of introspection (aside from my childhood draw to Jewish Holocaust memoirs), and I had very little historical knowledge of Jews in the Soviet Union.

My fixation on white complicity through my twenties was bolstered by my uncritical acceptance of American racial hierarchies as universal and self-evident, an assumption that was first challenged on a family trip to Moscow in 2015. At a large gathering of my ethnic Russian (Slavic, non-Jewish) grandmother's family, my great uncle leaned over and asked my grandmother if one of the guests was "наша" (nasha, ours/one of us). Confused, I turned to my mom and asked what he meant. She explained that he was referring to ethnic Russians, Slavs, the "real Russians." The rest of us were Jews—perpetual foreigners (as other "nationalities" like Kazakhs, Armenians, and Roma were also considered). Until this moment, I had not considered that I could be considered anything other than "white" (i.e., racially privilege) in my lifetime. And yet, to this man, I was neither white nor Russian, but Jewish. This experience revealed to

me the contextual nature of race and racialization, exposing the limitations of the socialized U.S.-centrism I had internalized.

Still, it was not until I simultaneously felt the limits of my antiracist efforts and came into my queer identity that I began to ask questions that located my own complex racialized story in its transnational sociohistorical context. In 2016, these changes were brewing in the context of the Movement for Black Lives, Donald Trump's presidential campaign and subsequent presidency, and an emboldening of white nationalism. Although I had been involved in racial justice work for many years, primarily through teaching, the amplification of antiblack police terror demanded greater action against white supremacy from non-Black people and white progressives. Like others, I began to question my participation in racial justice more deeply. I also contemplated the ways I was engaging my parents and Soviet Jewish elders, many of whom supported Trump, overtly perpetuated antiblackness and xenophobia, and denied the rightful existence of Palestine. As I asked myself "What is my work to do?" with increased rigor, it became clear that I had to answer it not just with any other white people, but with those who shared my *queer, Soviet Jewish immigrant history and experiences*. To do so, I first needed to see if such people existed, and to bring them together.

Conceptual Framing

Jewish Barbarism and the Weaponization of Jewish Whiteness

While my site of inquiry—post-Soviet Jewish American whiteness—is quite specific, I situate my work as a contribution to a much longer history of reckoning with Jewish identity and experience. Jewish lesbian feminist Melanie Kaye-Kantrowitz (1996) once wrote that to be a Jew is to tangle with history. The decolonial analytic of "barbarism," as offered by Slabodsky (2014), provides an especially useful framework for untangling the dynamics of this history. Slabodsky locates the shifting construction of Jews within the colonial matrix of power over the last 500 years "from Renaissance to Colonialism to Enlightenment to Fascism" (Mignolo, 2012; Slabodsky, 2014, p. 60), toward invigorating Jewish decolonial projects. He discusses "barbarism" as the inverse of civilization, tracing the way this construction was utilized throughout Europe from the 16th to the 20th centuries to oppress Indigenous people, people of "the Orient," Africans, Muslims, and Jews. He locates the emergence of modern barbarism in the 16th century, when European coloniality promoted liberal notions of European (later, white) man as the embodiment of civilization, order, and scientific progress against "incorrigible" groups, including Africans and people Indigenous to the Americas.

For most of the modern period, this European, Christian discourse negatively racialized Jews as non-Western (Slabodsky, 2014, p. 4). For example, whereas in medieval Catholic Spain, Jews and Muslims were considered redeemable through religious conversion, following the colonization of the Americas, the *Pureza de Sangre* [Blood Purity] laws traced their Jewish and Muslim ancestry, affecting their access to residency and social advancement (Grosfoguel, 2013; Slabodsky, 2014, p. 28). Similarly, in the centuries that followed in England and France, "Jews as a race were seen as incapable of shedding their barbarism and persistently involved in conspiracies to overturn European dominance and destroy empires, nations, and/or civilization itself" (Slabodsky, 2014, p. 29). In the Russian Empire, this paranoia fueled the circulation of propaganda, such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion,[3] a forgery that emboldened anti-Jewish

[3] Later, in the United States, Henry Ford promoted the circulation of the text, which is still widely available today (Woeste, 2004).

violence by suggesting that Jews were plotting global domination. In the 18th century and beyond, Orientalist ideologies reinforced the civilization-barbarism binary through the framing of the imagined Orient as "sub-human, despotic and backward" (p. 52). Khazzoom (2003) affirms, Jews "were not simply constructed as being backward but as backward because they were Oriental, Eastern, or Asian" (p. 491, citing Said, 1978). In this context, it was precisely Jews' perceived Eastern-ness that rendered them barbaric and thus unassimilable.

Taking this long view, Jewish complicity in whiteness and settler colonialism is relatively recent. Slabodsky traces that "the construction of Jewish barbarism . . . deteriorated following the Holocaust and during the formal postcolonial period" (p. 4). Especially in the 20th century, some Jews were increasingly extended civil rights, privileges, and/or positions "as intermediaries between colonizers and colonized" (p. 4). Consequently, the majority of global Jewry in the United States, Europe, and occupied Palestine/Israel have been portrayed by European and American powers as integral members of Western civilization (p. 5). Western responses to the Holocaust portray Jews as "*the* quintessential victim of history disattached from other experiences of racialization," reinforcing the West "as the protector and liberator of the now-civilized Jews" (p. 7). In the United States, many Jews have been gradually brought into the fold of white settlerhood via antiblack policies, even as they remained non-white in the eyes of white supremacists. In Europe, Jewish exceptionalism has been constructed against immigrants and minorities deemed non-assimilable. And, in occupied Palestine, Jewish settlers continue to be celebrated for championing "democracy" and "civilization" in the Middle East in alliance with Western powers, even as this political status is forged through Palestinian oppression and white Ashkenazi supremacy (p. 5). The relatively recent inclusion of some Jews into colonial "civilizing" projects the world over suggests that Jewish historical entanglements necessitate a reckoning not only with the past but also with the ethics of the present.

Promises of safety have driven many Jews in Europe, the United States, and Israel to invest in whiteness and Zionism, however conditional the protections. Houria Bouteldja and James Baldwin both understood this as a fearful and self-protective reaction to ascribed barbarism. A French Algerian Muslim, Bouteldja (2016) addresses French Jews as "both familiar and strange to me": "Familiar because of your insoluble non-whiteness within anti-Semitic whiteness, but strange because you are whitened,[4] integrated into a superior echelon of the racial hierarchy" (p. 67). Even as whiteness makes room for some Jews, she recognizes the incongruity of ethnic antisemitism and whiteness, signaling the conditionality or partiality of Jewish racial inclusion. Baldwin (1948/1998b) too, understands Jewish investment in whiteness in the context of this tenuousness:

> Jews, like Negroes, must use every possible weapon in order to be accepted, and must try to cover their vulnerability by a frenzied adoption of the customs of the country; and the nation's treatment of Negroes is unquestionably a custom. (p. 51)

He sees the [light-skinned, Ashkenazi] Jewish adoption of whiteness and antiblackness as a protective strategy. Ultimately, however, both Bouteldja and Baldwin are left with the consequences of this weaponization: racial power, at the expense of colonized people of color.

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[4] I interpret Bouteldja and Baldwin to mean Jews who are racialized as white. I take this as an assumption in this section, and do not meant to discount the existence and experiences of Black Jews, Indigenous Jews and Jews of color who are not given the option to be white.

Tragically, Jewish complicity in whiteness and Zionism only reinforce white Christian domination, as it aligns Jews with colonial oppressors and compromises solidarity with colonized people of color (Bouteldja et al., 2016; Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, 2017; Kaye-Kantrowitz, 1996). For example, Baldwin (1948/1998b) writes that through the weaponization of white(ned) Jews against Black people, "the American white Gentile has two legends serving him at once: he has divided these minorities and he rules" (p. 51). While grounded in the French context, Bouteldja argues that white(ned) Jews around the world ought to be angry for being used in this way. She follows Baldwin in explaining that their tenuously protected "in-between" or not-quite-white status (within antisemitic white supremacy) is the result of a buffer that agents of white Christian hegemony have erected between themselves and colonized people of color. She discusses the ways Jews are used both via the post-Holocaust discourse of antisemitism and through the Israeli state to facilitate ongoing Western domination:

> In fact, it's true, you were really chosen by the West. For three cardinal missions: to solve the white world's moral legitimacy crisis, which resulted from the Nazi genocide, to outsource republican racism, and finally to be the weaponized wing of Western imperialism in the Arab world. (p. 55)

In her words, Jews are used to perpetuate and legitimize Western white supremacy, though they are only tenuous beneficiaries. Antisemitism and the Jewish Holocaust are exceptionalized not only by Jews themselves, but also by politicians, the media, and in school curricula, where Jewish suffering is highlighted over that of other groups. The result is that connections between antisemitism, modernity, and European colonialism are obscured, when these could otherwise foster decolonial alliances. Meanwhile, the Israeli state is framed by the West as the legitimate answer to an eternally constructed antisemitism, supporting European and American imperialist interests in the "Middle East" in the name of philosemitism and against Palestinians. This positioning hypervisibilizes and exaggerates Jewish power and *blames any influence on Jewishness rather than on whiteness*[5]. It is violent toward colonized people, and it is harmful to Jews around the world.

These precarious entanglements suggest that, wherever possible, Jewish identity, safety, and wellbeing must be pursued not through white supremacy and Zionism but in resistance to them. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) has called for recognition of "the intolerably high cost and inevitable slippage of any safety based on 'whiteness'" (p. 134). That is, any protection offered from the hand of the powerful and at the expense of the oppressed is destined to eventually crumble and must be resisted. Similarly, for Bouteldja, white Jews' moral reckoning with whiteness must be forged through confrontations of Zionism and "the indictment of the nation-state" (p. 58)—a refusal of protections that ultimately threaten both Jewish safety and the well-being of colonized people of color. The resolve to reclaim their identities from the co-optation of Western Christian "civilizing" projects restores some agency to Jewish people. Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) writes,

> Jews, like all other people, make political choices. With whose interests will we identify and stake our future? . . . What happens if, instead, I assert my right to choose and not suffer for it. To say, I choose my lesbianism and my jewishness. Choose to come out, be visible, embrace both. (p. 127)

[5] Gratitude to Dr. Penny Rosenwasser for this articulation [personal communication, 2019].

For her personally, this means refusing to make herself smaller or less Jewish by keeping her "Jewish" nose and last name, both of which expose her as a Jew. It also means doing antiracist, anticapitalist, and decolonial work *as a Jew*, rather than merely as a white person, lesbian, or other identifier. A Jewish decolonial reclamation of "barbarism" as offered by Slabodsky historicizes and invigorates this political project. It draws on extant histories of Jewish oppression under European Christian hegemony to denaturalize the most recent favorable inclusion of some Jews into the modern colonial system. It turns the tables, exposing modern "civilization" as a degenerate, violent system and rejecting it as an undesirable project. Finally, and most importantly, it opens up an avenue for historically grounded coalition building with other "barbaric" groups, toward a future based not on violent assimilation but on collectivity.

Racial Justice Work as Spiritual, Embodied, Intersectional, and Relational

What work must white people, including white Jews, do in order to participate in such coalitions? Racial justice work among white(ned) people in the U.S. context requires ongoing unlearning of internalized power, the redistribution of material resources, and a deeper spiritual reckoning and transformation of personal shame and embodied trauma. Prior to 2015, my own liberal white socialization had taught me to pursue racial justice by teaching students of color, while attempting to "change the hearts and minds" of racist white people (Dumas, 2013, p. 533). As I became increasingly radicalized in the Bay Area in the era of Black Lives Matter and Trumpism, I rejected these liberal approaches and instead turned militantly toward punishing my own white complicity. Yet, neither the former liberal saviorist approach nor the latter radical martyr approach required me to interrogate who I was, where I had come from, and how I had gotten to where I was. The only allowed me to virtue signal, while hiding from myself. As a result, while they both endeavored to challenge whiteness, they largely reified it.

Baldwin, Thandeka, and Menakem disrupt such saviorist and martyr-oriented approaches to racial justice by identifying white people's shame, pain, and trauma as sites for compulsory spiritual and healing work. James Baldwin (1972/1998) squarely identifies whiteness as a spiritual and moral disease:

> [It] has made of them criminals and monsters and it is destroying them . . . as social and moral and political and sexual entities, white Americans are probably the sickest and certainly the most dangerous people, of any color, to be found in the world today. (p. 386)

To address this, Baldwin (1962) argues,

> America and all the Western nations will be forced to reexamine themselves and release themselves from many things that are now taken to be sacred, and to discard nearly all the assumptions that have been used to justify their lives and their anguish and their crimes [for] so long. (unmarked page)

He is referring specifically to the ideologies of superiority that white(ned) people have inherited and adopted to justify their domination. As he implies, entitlement belies the shame of not being worthy of this power. Thandeka (2000) further explains that whiteness is not just a homogeneous category that oppositionally constructs Blackness, but rather is governed by its own internal

hierarchies that instill shame in whites themselves via differences of class, ethnicity, and so on. For her, investments in whiteness reflect "a more original damage to the core sense of self" (p. 83). Thus, any intervention toward racial justice among whites must "identify and name the actual feelings of self-contempt engendered in persons who are forced to act 'white' in order to survive in their own communities" (p. 133). The praxis of racial justice, then, involves not only addressing white people's historical, material, and libidinal relationship to people racialized as "other" but also their relationships to their own communities, families, and senses of self.

As a somatic therapist, Menakem (2017) locates this work in the body. He explains that all people carry the legacy of their ancestors' repetitive and cumulative protective responses to danger in their nervous systems. This intergenerational trauma manifests in the nervous system. Participation in racialized societies, whether through receiving racial harm or inflicting it, only causes further trauma. Given that white supremacy circulates in people's bodies (and not only in ideologies and socioeconomic structures), he argues that political actions "need to be part of a larger strategy of healing, justice, and creating room for growth in traumatized flesh-and-blood bodies" (Menakem, 2017, p. ix). Thus, "look[ing] to the body—and to the embodied experience of trauma" is a crucial part of challenging white supremacy (p. 25). This involves both rewiring the nervous system's responses to perceived threats and "creat[ing] new expressions of culture that identify, reject, and undermine white-body supremacy" (p. 251).

While these discussions of whiteness as spiritual, psychological, and embodied afflictions necessarily expand the scope and depth of racial justice work, some of them are limited by their assumptions of whiteness as self-evident and their compartmentalization of it from other social structures (including gender, sexuality, class, and immigration). For example, Menakem's instruction for white people to join together to address shared experiences of white-body supremacy disregards the heterogeneity of inherited and lived experiences of trauma and desire *among* members of a group who supposedly share experiences of whiteness. As it concerns my subject group—queer, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants of the 1.5 and second generations—American whiteness is not self-evident or inherited through generations but rather a construction that they are *actively negotiating* as the first in their families to be racialized in this way. Moreover, their family members and recent ancestors were on the receiving end of racial oppression, just in a different context. Finally, because concepts like trauma, shame, and desire are experienced in the body holistically, the work of challenging white supremacy must also address multiple, intersecting systems of power—across historical and geographic contexts. That is, racial trauma cannot be compartmentalized but is felt through and alongside the wounds and desires of gender, sexuality, immigration, religion, and more. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 3 and 7, this complexity merits a collective unpacking among a group who share as much history and positionality with one another as possible.

Such relational work holds particular healing affordances for immigrant and queer white(ned) people, who fall on the peripheries of whiteness and tend to already be alienated from their host contexts. Sara Ahmed (2000) has written that the dual estrangement immigrants face from both their home contexts and their host societies constitutes a condition of possibility for connection with similarly alienated others. She writes, "The process of estrangement is the condition for the emergence of a contested community, a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the 'out-of-place- ness' of other migrant bodies" (p. 94). That is, the sharing of experience fosters a sense of connection or even community, however contested. The potential for connection is amplified when pursued by those who are doubly estranged from their immigrant communities due to homophobia and transphobia. Eng (2010) offers the notion of

"queer diaspora" to name the relational and kinship structures that queer people construct to survive. Similarly, Puar (2017) calls such queer formations "self-crafted kinship, erotic and affectionate networks or lines of affiliation, rather than filiation" (p. 171). These communities are woven through shared experiences, dreams, and political orientations. As explored in Chapters 6, immigrant and queer orientations are not inherently radicalizing, but they do offer conditions of possibility for leftist politicization, as embodied experiences of alienation become the motivation for imagining new worlds. In this way, the convergence of white(ned), queer, and immigrant identities offered a particularly potent site for exploring the possibilities of spiritual and embodied work toward collective liberation, among white(ned) people.

Social Movements and Civic Participation Online

The internet, and social media in particular, has facilitated meaningful virtual and hybrid connections for groups of people with shared histories and political orientations, who may be geographically scattered, not readily recognizable to one another, or otherwise not physically able to meet. For Soviet Jewish immigrants, Facebook groups such as "Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants," "Pozor Anonymous," and "the soviet jews r queer," all of which were started by queer Soviet Jewish immigrants after the election of Donald Trump, have enabled people who are in conflict with their Soviet communities on account of their politics and/or gender and sexual identities the opportunity to build relationships with similarly minded others (Shokin, 2017). Indeed, social media platforms and digital tools have made "collectively constructing counternarratives and reimagining group identities" possible, especially among those excluded and misrepresented by mainstream media (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 6; Hull & Nelson, 2009). While the Facebook groups named above do not themselves ensure a radical politic, they nevertheless function counter-hegemonically by facilitating justice-oriented Soviet Jewish immigrant identities against both conservative/reactionary Soviet Jewish prescriptions and liberal American (Jewish) ones.

Beyond the affordances of asynchronous social media, live video conferencing makes more intimate and embodied connections and relationships possible. When I began theorizing this project, I yearned to meet other queer Soviet Jewish immigrants who were doing racial justice work, face to face and in real time, rather than over a message board. Serendipitously, a Queer Personals Instagram post appeared in my feed, written by Stepha, a queer, Soviet Jew in Wisconsin who was looking for other Russian-speaking Jewish "radicals." This post sparked connections with both Stepha and Aravah that quickly transitioned from the screen to lively walks around Lake Merritt and dreamy trips to upstate New York. From there, I began connecting with other queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jewish 1.5 and second generation immigrants, all people in their 20s and 30s who were critically grappling with whiteness and immigrant queerness in the era of Trump and Black Lives Matter, and Palestinian solidarity. Having taught synchronous classes online, I was excited to use Zoom video conferencing to bring these people together in a structured live, virtual space to pursue the work that I intuitively needed, and which the leaders of Black Lives Matter and writers like Bouteldja, Baldwin, Thandeka, and Menakem seemed to be calling for.

Purpose and Guiding Questions

This project centers a group of seven queer and gender-marginalized[6] white Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish 1.5 and second generation immigrants whom I call my "collaborators" as they negotiate their racial assimilation both individually and through the live, virtual group. As the first in their families to undergo the "whitening" process, their lived experiences of transnational racialization (as shared through long-form interviews) denaturalize whiteness and reveal its neoliberal manifestations. In addition, their collective work in the virtual group that I designed and that we co-facilitated offers and interrogates an approach to challenging white supremacy from white(ned) historical subject positions. Thus, my project is as much a critical theoretical articulation as a praxis-oriented approach to pursuing "an otherwise" that challenges the prescriptions of racialized assimilation. It is both a critical intellectual project and a tangible attempt to create a legacy for our lineages that reaches toward justice.

Through the analysis of modified life histories / dialogic interviews with seven collaborators and the group's co-created curriculum and cultural production, I addressed the following questions:

1. How do 1.5 and second generational queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants understand their racialized assimilation into American white supremacy and whiteness, from the 1980s to the present?
2. What conditions inhibit and facilitate the development of critical racial consciousness among members of this group?
3. What roles do collectivity, criticality, and creativity play in contesting the hegemonic prescriptions of racial assimilation?

I approached these questions with attention to structural, affective, and embodied experiences, both in the design of the virtual group and in my collaborators' interviews. The questions were my guides in understanding how my collaborators' embodied experiences, including fear, desire, and shame, interacted with structures of domination to both reify and challenge racialized relations of power.

Notes on Language

My approach to this dissertation as an ethically oriented political project extends to choices I make around language, both around my use of English and Russia, and with select racial terms. First, I wrote this dissertation entirely in academic English, not in the Russian language of my parents and grandparents, nor the Yiddish of grandparents and older ancestors upon whom Russian was later imposed. In the United States today, "standard American English" is relatively unquestioned in academic circles (with the exception of critical race scholarship) and Yiddish is revered in Ashkenazi diasporic circles, while Russian is vilified as the language of the eternal Cold War enemy. Still, throughout this process, it was Russian—the language of my parents—that I yearned to use to высказаться (vyskazat'sia, to speak one's mind). But, I lacked the skills to do so.

English is the only form of academic language I know. Because it is the globally accepted language of academia, I am privileged in my command of it. At the same time, writing in English, I speak through my own assimilation.[7] English does not reflect the sounds, words, and syntax I heard growing up, nor encompass the ways ideas were framed and expressed in my

[6] I defined this to encompass all genders other than cis-gender men, as they are (differently) marginalized under cisheteropatriarchy.

[7] Still, I remind myself that, just as my relatives infused themselves into the Russian language, I am also somehow informing English as I write.

family. It is not the language through which I *feel* most deeply. I share the politics of language with my readers to communicate that just as I am *in* but not *of* the university (Harney & Moten, 2013; Kelley, 2016) so, too, do I *use* English, but I am not fully *of* English. Throughout the dissertation, I use Russian words that I either heard growing up or that convey ideas English does not express as adequately or poetically. My collaborators also pepper Russian words into their responses, their translingual moves most often signaling words their parents and grandparents used at home. Imagining an English-speaking audience while maintaining my history, I first write these words in Cyrillic and then offer transliterated English using the American Library Association and Library of Congress Romanization system, as well as the English translation. There is one exception: according to this system, Коллектив Голубой Вагон should be transliterated as Kollektiv Goluboĭ Vagon, but I keep the spelling Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, which is how the group named itself.

Within my general use of English, there are several words and grammatical forms that I employ intentionally toward liberatory objectives. When I discuss "collective liberation," I am referencing the work of (queer) Black feminist scholars and activists. In their 1977 statement, the Combahee River Collective wrote, "We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (unmarked page). Patricia Hill Collins articulated these mutually reinforcing systems as the "matrix of domination" (1990/2000). Later, bell hooks (2006) announced,

> until we are all able to accept the interlocking, interdependent nature of systems of domination and recognize specific ways each system is maintained, we will continue to act in ways that undermine our individual quest for freedom and collective liberation struggle. (p. 244)

To the extent that these "interlocking, interdependent" systems create the conditions of oppression, the destruction of these systems will make possible "collective liberation"—the freedom of all people to pursue their livelihoods. Because these systems and struggles are intimately connected, the liberation of all people is also bound together. Furthermore, Indigenous ways of knowing that are grounded in the interdependence of all living beings expand "collective liberation" to encompass the entire animate world, both human and non-human (Antoine et al., 2018; Kimmerer, 2013; Merrick, 2020). In this way, my collective liberation reflects an ethos of dignity and respect for every living being, and a praxis that works toward this vision.

Toward this goal of collective liberation, in my dissertation I follow several other scholars to employ grammar with intention, especially in regard to racial terms: *Black*, *Indigenous*, *white*, *white(ned)*, and *antisemitism*, in a colonial context. First, I follow Michael Dumas (2016) to capitalize *Black*, while leaving *white*, *whiteness*, and *antiblackness* lower case. Dumas explains:

> In my work, I have decided to capitalize Black when referencing Black people, organizations, and cultural products. Here, Black is understood as a self determined name of a racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships. Black is a synonym (however imperfect) of African American and replaces previous terms like Negro and Colored, which were also eventually capitalized, after years of struggle against media that resisted recognition of

> Black people as an actual political group within civil society (Tharps, 2014, November 18). (pp. 12–13)

For similar reasons, I capitalize the words *Indigenous* and *Native* to encompass a heterogeneous group of peoples who have been constructed as Indigenous through European colonization. Like Dumas's notion of "Black," I understand Indigenous peoples, who have been on this land since time immemorial, to be a "racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships," even as great intergroup diversity remains.

In contrast, the lower-case use of *white* and *white(ned)* signal that whiteness is a historical construct of domination that does not merit capitalization. Again, Dumas (2016) explains,

> White is not capitalized in my work because it is nothing but a social construct, and does not describe a group with a sense of common experiences or kinship outside of acts of colonization and terror. Thus, white is employed almost solely as a negation of others—it is, as David Roediger (1994) insisted, nothing but false and oppressive. Thus, although European or French are rightly capitalized, I see no reason to capitalize white. (p.13)

I build on Dumas's intentionality by introducing the term *white(ned)* to signal whiteness as a contextually determined historical construction. There is no way to avoid using the term *white* (as whiteness does function materially in society), and yet, every time it is used, it is further reified and naturalized. Here, I take inspiration from Bouteldja (2016), a French Algerian Muslim who writes of herself, "I am not exactly white. I am whitened. I am here because I was thrown up by History" (pp. 29–30). She also refers to (French) Jews as "whitened, integrated into a superior echelon of the racial hierarchy" (p. 67). The adjective *whitened* refers back to a verb describing the historical process of whitening. I further place *(ned)* in parenthesis, creating the word *white(ned)* to encompass the dual agentive and subjectifying experiences of whiteness. A person may *be whitened* by society in a particular sociohistorical context, and may also *be white* to the extent that they internalize and/or perpetuate whiteness and white supremacy. In this way, when I write that I am a white(ned), Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish person, I both acknowledge my complicity in white supremacy and denaturalize whiteness itself.

I follow Dumas (2016) and Atalia Omer (2019) in my intentional lowercase and de-hyphenated spelling of *antiblackness, antisemitism*, and *antiracism*, constructs that refer back to racial and white supremacist constructions. Dumas explains, "I write blackness and antiblackness in lower-case, because they refer not to Black people per se, but to a social construction of racial meaning, much as whiteness does" (p. 12). Similarly, Omer explains, "I chose to spell antisemitism and antisemitic without hyphen or capitalization in order to delegitimize 'Semitism,' a pseudo-scientific category central to race theories" (unmarked page). Throughout my dissertation, *antiblackness*, *antisemitism*, *orientalism*, *whiteness*, *white supremacy*, and related racial terms will be written in the lower case.

Finally, I follow Hupa scholar Sara Chase Merrick (2020) in using the word *collaborators* to name the people who would otherwise traditionally be referred to as the "participants" or "research subjects" of this project. Grounding in Indigenous research approaches that promote interdependence and collectivity over extraction and individuals, she explains,

> I am not creating the knowledge, just as I am not creating the acorns, or wood or plants. They are part of a much larger project of creation. Rather I am just gathering what is already out there to create something for all of us, this dissertation. (p. 54)

Her reframing of "data" as knowledge parallels her relationship to the Hupa people she worked with in her own dissertation project as "collaborators," rather than subjects. This word signals her approach to the research process as a relational exchange of knowledge and ideas among knowledgeable people, which she then gathers in the dissertation, rather than a positivist extraction by a single "expert" researcher. Similarly, the collaborators in my study all live and theorize their experiences as queer, Soviet Jewish immigrants and white-identified people. bell hooks (1994) discusses theorizing as making sense of what is happening and traced her own childhood theorizations to her "wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within [her]," especially in relation to hurt (p. 59). In this way, I understand my collaborators to be insightful theorists of their own lives and of white, queer, Soviet Jewish immigrant positionalities. They have made meaning of their pain and their joys and have generously shared this with me. This dissertation is the result of my collaboration with them, both through our conversational interviews and through the co-design and co-facilitation of the virtual group, which saw them as collaborators in an even more direct sense.

Roadmap of Chapters

In the next chapter (Chapter 2), I travel across the Atlantic and back two hundred years to trace (pre-)Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish history and racialization from the Russian Empire through Soviet migration to the United States. I utilize global decolonial, settler colonial and critical race frameworks to understand and trouble the history of white racial assimilation in the U.S., focusing specifically on European Jews. I then review the literature on Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S., making the case that uncritical approaches to the study of this group have obscured the role of Israel in transnational migration and reified American whiteness, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. Finally, I raise the question of agency and (dis-)identification, introducing a new radical queer, Soviet Jewish re-diasporism as a historically grounded approach toward collective liberation.

In Chapter 3, I share the methodology and methods of my study. I explain how decolonial and feminist methodologies informed my collaborative qualitative case study design, including the way I understood my own positionality in relation to my collaborators and participants. In addition to discussing my dialogic interview process, I explain how I drew on pedagogical and research methods including critical pedagogy, Collaborative Inquiry, and elements of Participatory Action Research to develop a collaborative method that I term a "semi-structured, historicized affinity group." Lastly, I describe how this group went on to become Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, generating artifacts and curricula that informed this project.

In Chapter 4, I politicize dominant narratives of Soviet Jewish migration to demonstrate how my collaborators' parents took advantage of opportunities that were structurally afforded to them as desirable racialized commodities and imagined settlers. Through an analysis of their immigration and resettlement histories, I show how they benefited materially from their proximity to whiteness and connections to white(ned) assimilated American Jews, even as their racial interpellation also carried negative consequences. Within this context, parents' racialized decisions around housing and schooling offered material benefits and physical safety but also

facilitated their assimilation, eroding their connections to Soviet Jewish history, epistemology, and culture.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the ways that my collaborators, all either young immigrants or the first to be born in the U.S., experienced white racialization within the context of U.S. settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Approaching Thandeka's (2000) concept of "white shame" through the additional lenses of orientalism, migration, gender, and sexuality, I address the role of shame in the formation of my collaborators' intersecting immigrant, white, Jewish, and queer identities. I demonstrate the ways shame mediates the process of white racial assimilation, especially through what I call the "invisibilized immigrant difference," even as whiteness itself remains contested.

In Chapter 6, I trace patterns in the development of my collaborators' white racial identities as well as their critical consciousness around racism and white supremacy, within the context of their leftist politicization. I demonstrate the ways my collaborators' white immigrant shame alternately manifested as white racial ignorance, over-identification with people of color, and the adoption of white gendered saviorism. Next, I show how confrontations of "benevolent whiteness" inspired critical reflection and learning but also resulted in a self-punishing focus on white complicity that obscured collaborators' Soviet Jewish histories. I further demonstrate the limits of my collaborators' work in white American antiracist spaces, as their specific, intersectional experiences vis a vis hegemonic whiteness and corresponding shame went unaddressed. As a result, I advocate for approaching whiteness through decolonial, anti-imperialist, and intersectional frameworks and for attending to the psychological and spiritual aspects of work against whiteness.

Chapter 7 turns to my collaborators' collective transformations of shame and contestations of racialized assimilation in the virtual and hybrid collective, Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. First, I share the group's origin story and structure as a "semi-structured historicized affinity group" across three seasons of programming. I explain how mirroring among participants of shared histories and positionalities helped them forge a sense of home out of shared alienation, even as the community remained contested by internal differences. Next, I demonstrate how the group's collective and creative work, guided by a "politicized ethic of care," facilitated the release of intergenerational trauma, built collective critical consciousness, and mobilized shared histories toward collective liberation. I demonstrate that these cultural-political efforts constitute a new queer, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish culture that challenged the prescriptions of racial assimilation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review, Historical Background and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

From the mid 1980s to mid 1990s, Soviet immigrants were the largest nationality to enter the United States (Gold, 1995, p. x), most of them Jews entering on refugee visas. Existing scholarship on this "new Jewish diaspora" has contributed important demographic information (Gitelman, 2016; Tolts, 2004) narrated the varied interests and political moves that enabled immigration, and described acculturation among new arrivals (Gitelman, 2016; Lazin, 2009; Peretz, 2020; Rosenberg, 2003). A portion of this scholarship takes a critical bend, articulating the geopolitical interests of Israel and the U.S. in Soviet migration and questioning hegemonic American perceptions of Soviet Jewry (Aviv & Shneer, 2005; Gold, 1994). However, just as critical scholarship on American whiteness does not yet include empirical work on 20th century Soviet Jewish immigrants, the living history of this group has yet to be rigorously considered through decolonial and critical race lenses.

While Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish assimilation in the United States is my particular site of study in this dissertation, this is only the latest chapter of a much longer history of this lineage's negotiations of survival and identity in host societies (e.g., Polish, Russian, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Soviet) that have been alternately hostile and hospitable. Just traveling back one hundred years, the duration of three or four generations, reveals two prior waves of Ashkenazi Jewish assimilation: Russification during the Russian Empire and Sovietization in the Soviet Union. A critical analysis of the racialized context that Soviet Ashkenazi Jews left, the one to which they arrived, and the connections between them, informs why many Soviet Jews immigrated, how this happened, and what the consequences have been. Decolonial orientations especially inform this history, as they expose the ways that Marxist historical materialist analyses in both contexts place Native organization of life at the lowest level of development for the sake of industrial "progress" (Coulthard, 2014; Estes et al., 2020; Sahni, 1997). They also propose alternative futures of sovereignty and collectivity that are not predicated on extraction.

Toward this greater goal, in this chapter I offer a (necessarily partial) anti-imperialist, decolonial and critical race history of the historical contexts bookending this migration: the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, and the United States. I follow this decolonial historical overview with a survey of existing literature on immigration and whiteness and on Soviet Jewish immigration in the U.S. context. Specifically, I review critical whiteness scholarship through a decolonial perspective, suggesting that "abolishing whiteness" necessarily involves the abolition of colonial structures more broadly. Toward this goal, I make a case for the decolonial and critical race study of Soviet Ashkenazi[8] Jewish immigrants as a case study for mobilizing white(ned) immigrant histories and positionalities toward justice and liberation.

Decolonial History of the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and United States

The story of Soviet Jewish immigration to the United States and the subsequent transformation of this group's racialization is a conversation between multiple imperial/colonial projects. Whereas most studies of American whiteness have stayed within its geographic borders, understanding racialized assimilation as a process and set of negotiations necessitates a

[8] As explained previously, I focus specifically on the history of Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe, as they are my direct ancestors and those of my collaborators. Ashkenazi Jews are one of many Jewish groups living in territories that were colonized by the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, including Kavkazi Jews of the Caucasus, Georgian Jews of the Caucasus, Bukharan Jews of Central Asia, and Keraites and Krymchak Jews of Crimea.

transnational and transhistorical perspective. For example, the racialization of Ashkenazi Jews in the Russian Empire and Soviet Union directly informs the family histories and political negotiations of my collaborators. Similarly, the American historical construction of whiteness against Indigeneity, Blackness, and other racializations (e.g., Asian, Latinx, Middle Eastern) influences their racial identity formation and pursuit of collective liberation (Gold, 1995, p. x). Tlostanova & Mignolo (2012, p. 213) refer this as the "ethnoracial pentagon," with the five sides representing the colonial history of Native Americans, African slaves, European Protestant whites, largely Catholic and Jewish European immigrants, and finally the extensive immigration form the Third World since 1970. Where might white(ned) Soviet immigrants be located in such a framework, and how are they responding to this racialization? These questions require critical engagement with the histories of the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and United States, and their relationships to European and global domination. While the historical background I offer is both large in scope and necessarily incomplete, it provides the contextual information necessary for making sense of the stories told in Chapters 4-7.

The Russian Empire

Race, Orientalism and the Second-Rate Empire. While few scholars consider European, Russian, and American imperialism together, Tlostanova and Mignolo's *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (2012) discusses the Russian Empire and Soviet Union as "second rate" in relation to European and American empires. These powers share the imperial logics of accumulation via extraction and human hierarchy, but they differ by way of their social and economic systems and the degree of their global influence. Along these metrics, Western European and American regimes with origins in the "matrix of coloniality/modernity" reign supreme. Tlostanova and Mignolo use this term to discuss the specific imperial/colonial relations, ideologies and constructs that originated in the Atlantic world in the 1500s, and more specifically the Spanish Catholic colonization of the Americas (p. 39).

In contrast to other empires (e.g., Russian, Ottoman), the matrix is characterized by the merging and global expansion of Christianity and capitalism, under the rule of the empires of Spain, England, France, and, most recently, the United States. 'Modernity' names the celebrated European and American wealth accumulation and scientific and technological advancements of this era, but coloniality reveals the exploitation of land and human labor that enabled it. Since the 15th-16th century, this structural violence has enabled these few nations to hold global economic, social, and epistemological influence over four central, interconnected spheres of life, including economic control, authority and political organization, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and subjectivity (p. 45). While the 16th-19th centuries were dominated by European powers, the 20th and 21st centuries, especially after World War II, have been governed by U.S. global imperialism,[9] under the projects of modernization and capitalist development. Most recently, in the latter half of the 20th century, racial neoliberalism emerged as the ruling philosophy, ensuring the continued domination of global elites (Melamed, 2006). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, this is the global context of power in which Soviet Jewish migration was negotiated. And as Chapters 5-6 will show, these enduring imperial and colonial structures are the water in which

[9] Tuck & Yang (2012) articulate the connection between U.S. settler colonialism and imperialist expansion: "Settler colonialism fuels imperialism all around the globe. Oil is the motor and motive for war and so was salt, so will be water. Settler sovereignty over these very pieces of earth, air, and water is what makes possible these imperialisms" (p. 31).

Soviet Jewish immigrants to the U.S. negotiated their white(ned) identities and political commitments.

Although the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union were empires in their own right, Western powers regarded them as the barbaric, "not-quite-European" neighbors of the East (Sahni, 1997; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, pp. 33, 42). Cedric Robinson (Robinson, 2000) chronicled in *Black Marxism*, medieval pre-colonial European racial hierarchies constructed Slavs and other Eastern peoples as inferior and not-quite human, justifying slave labor in the Mediterranean. He writes, "Race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation, and/or murder of non-"Europeans" (including Slavs and Jews) (p. 27). He further explains that the differentiation of Jews and Slavs in part helped form the basis of capitalist class emergence. While Robinson names such hierarchies as explicitly racial, some scholars of coloniality argue that it was not until the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas that such older European proto-racisms, some of which were based on religion with a possibility of conversion, transformed into a racialized system that questioned that very humanity of those who are not European Christian men (Grosfoguel, 2013; Wolfe, 2016). The connection between European "proto-racisms" and modern, colonial racial hierarchies surpassed ideology: Jewish and Muslim wealth seized during the Spanish Inquisition was used to finance the Columbian expeditions, with "coversos" (converted Jews) assuming intermediary/financier positions (G. Cohen, 1924; Hunter, 2012).

Later, in the 17–19th centuries, "mythical" Anglo-Saxonism and the notion of a heroic German race "explained the inevitability and the naturalness of the domination of some Europeans by other Europeans" (Robinson, 2000, p. 27). European racial hierarchies constructed Russians as barbaric Easterners, "a double-faced combination of Asian and Germanic characteristics, where the aggressive and despotic demonized elements of Orient prevailed over the exotic and eroticized ones" (Tlostanova, 2008, p. 2). These Eurocentric ideologies spread through publications written by ambassadors and travelers who described Russians as "uncouth, indecent, depraved, and the most barbarous people 'in their nature and manner of life" characterized by "laziness, crudity and savagery, oriental despotism and oriental cruelty" (Sahni, 1997, p. 14). Contemporary American readers will not be surprised by these logics, which undergirded 20th century Cold War rhetoric. Today, "Russians" continue to be culturally constructed as crude and barbaric in comparison to the "civilized" West.

Meanwhile, the Russian Empire was subject to its own internal racializing logics, the terms of which have passionately debated (Avrutin, 2007; Sahni, 1997; Weinerman, 1994). As debates of "ethnic" versus "racial" grouping continue, I want to eschew the purist search for evidence of racism (as the construction of embodied, immutable characteristics that render a group non-human, as opposed to, say, religious choice) to instead attend to the complex ways that "racializing assemblages" (Weheliye, 2014) undoubtedly circulated in imperial Russia. I utilize Weheliye's (2014) term here to refer to "ongoing sets of political relations" that were mobilized to "produce regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference" (p. 3). Rather than conceptualize race as biological or cultural, racializing assemblages approach it as a set of sociopolitical processes that dictate human worth. In 19th century Imperial Russia, these sets of relations both overlapped and diverged from those of Western European empires, as Avrutin (2007) discusses in detail:

> In late imperial Russia, race had two broad meanings that could—but did not always—overlap. The first signified color and designated "races" as white, yellow, red, dark, and

> black. The second, more ambiguous meaning categorized groups such as Slavs, Semites, Caucasians, Greco-Romans, and Turko-Tatars as well as "smaller" ones such as Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, and Jews as distinct "races" (rasy), "types" (tipy), or "ethnicities" (narody) based on highly elaborate and often contradictory physical categories and ethnographic descriptions. While Jews could not be distinguished from Germans or Slavs by skin color, they could be identified as "Jews" by physical characteristics and ethno-cultural descriptions. In other words, as ethnicity (narodnost´ and natsional´nost´) began to acquire popular and administrative scholastic currency to classify peoples by a combination of factors such as language, cultural practices, and religion, so did the belief that these differences were racially fixed—that is, intrinsic, unchangeable, and permanent. (p. 15)

As this explanation suggests, the racializing assemblages of imperial Russia encompassed multiple forms of classification, including races, ethnicities, and "types." Rather than distinguish between race and ethnicity, Avrutin goes on to explain that "The tsarist regime may not have established a racial order based explicitly on biological theories of human development, but it did promote racial consciousness (the awareness of ethno-cultural differences based on religion, customs, and ancestry) and racist attitudes (institutional and popular discriminations based on essential and ultimately unbridgeable differences)" (p. 18). Like the racializing logics that emerged through the Spanish colonization of the Americas to render certain groups incorrigible, Russian imperial hierarchies ultimately reflected the notion that differences from the "great Russian people" were shared among particular groups and were 'intrinsic, unchangeable, and permanent.'

Some of the racializing logics that circulated in the Russian Empire while under German rule in the 18th and 19th centuries explicitly reflected the Russian internalization of German, French and English Orientalist attitudes (Sahni, 1997). One manifestation of this was an escalation of Russian distancing from their own "Eastern" influences. Sahni explains that modern "ethnic Russians" are the descendants of Slavs, Finno-Ugrians, Turkic people, and Mongols, groups that for centuries lived in cross-cultural assimilation and transference "of dress, food, living habits and language" (p. 5). There were always Mongolian, Turkic, Persian, Caucasian (and I would add, Jewish) influences on Russian identity and culture. However, the adoption of Christianity and the imposition of a mono-culture as early as the 1st century C.E. catalyzed a "cultural distancing" of Russia from its own Eastern and Southern influences (Sahni, p. 8). This process only escalated across the 18th and 19th centuries. Sahni explains, "The ready-made Oriental discourse, fast expanding with the colonization process, reiterated European racial and cultural superiority, and was reinforced by officials recruited from Germany, France, and England (p. 12). For example, social codes for European gentry were introduced in Russia, discouraging Russian customs, which were equated with lower classes, and instead promoting German decorum (p. 9). Thus, while Central and Western European nations characterized Russia as barbaric to justify the expansion of their own "civilization," Russian powers in turn subjugated all that was "barbaric" within themselves (Tlostanova, 2008, p.1). Although hundreds of years have passed since Russia's first conquests, this history surfaces in my collaborators' earliest exposure to race. As Chapter 5 will illustrate, while Soviet caregivers certainly praised ethnic Russian cultural production, they also exalted Europe while omitting, appropriating, and denigrating the East.

The relegation of the Russian Empire to "the margins of European modernity and the emerging logic of coloniality" in turn motivated Russia's own imperial expansion through parts of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucuses throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 53). This "secondary orientalism" justified the violent imperial turn against the Caucasus and Central Asia. Through the 17th-19th centuries, the Russian Empire employed the very rhetoric used against them on those they conquered, romanticizing the conquests in art, memoir, and fiction. In this way, "The Mongols and Turkic people, with whom the Russian Princes had close ties for centuries, now suddenly became the crude, barbaric Mongol-Tatars who brought to a halt Russia's development" (p. 17). As the Russians expanded their empire across the South and East, they displaced and exterminated entire populations, depopulated cultivable lands, resettled lands with ethnic Russians, and established systems of forced labor, destroying entire foodways, languages, knowledges, and cosmologies in the process (p. 80). To Indigenous and internally colonized populations, including my collaborators' ancestors, this "second rate" empire was every bit as cruel as those of the West.

Jews as Internally Colonized / Russification. Although Jews and Roma are largely overlooked in Tlostanova and Mignolo's discussions, various Jewish groups were internally colonized in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Jews were present around the Black Sea as early as the beginning of the Common Era and in Kievan Rus from the tenth century, and had been alternately excluded and exiled from Russia due to Christian Judeophobia, which perpetuated the false belief that Jews had killed Christ (Gitelman, 2001, p. xii). In the 18th and 19th centuries, imperial conquests brought vast and diverse populations of Jews under Russian Imperial and later Soviet rule, including half a million Ashkenazi (European) Jews, Georgian Jews, Bukharan (Central Asian) Jews, and Kavkazi (Caucus) Jews, among others (Gitelman, 2001, p. 196). The large Ashkenazi Jewish population that was brought under Russian rule through the partition of Poland in 1772-1779 was forcefully contained in the Pale of Settlement, a geographic region of 1 million square kilometers in the Ukrainian, Belorussian and Lithuanian provinces. By 1897, all but 300,000 of 5.2 million Jews in the Russian Empire lived in the Pale (Gitelman, 2001, p. 28). Among them were many of my collaborators' прабабушки и прадедушки (prababushki i pradedushki, great grandparents), as well as great grandparents. Their lives were characterized by social and economic exclusion and periodic terror, but also by a thriving Yiddish culture and Jewish religious observance (Gitelman, 2001, p. xii, p. 196; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012).

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Jews in the Russian Empire, as in much of Europe, were racialized as "the quintessential outsiders and scapegoats" (Avrutin, 2007, p. 22). While Judaeophobia had certainly circulated in much of the Christian world for centuries, this particularly *modern* form of antisemitism was a product of European racialization, a colonial grammar supported by racist pseudosciences, such as craniometry (Avrutin, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2013; Slabodsky, 2014; Wolfe, 2016). Avrutin argues that, while Russian attitudes toward Jews oscillated between repulsion and romanticization in the 18th and early 19th centuries, the second half of the 19th century brought "scientific credibility to earlier stereotypes, prejudices, and observations" that emerged in particularly anxious and financially difficult times (p. 24). Modernist race science that purported to measure fixed human differences lent credibility to anti-Jewish ideologies, constructing "a powerful and lasting image of Jews as 'outsiders' to the administrative and social system" (p. 24). The work of Russian anthropologists, heavily influenced by Darwin's principle of natural selection, presented Jews as a biologically distinct

race. Racialized anti-Jewish depictions rapidly circulated throughout the Russian Empire, "becoming a universal feature of governmental policy, public opinion, and the popular imagination toward the end of the 19th century" (p. 32). This only intensified anti-Jewish fear, violence, and exclusion.

In this 19th century context, Jewish life in the western Russian Empire was characterized by "cycles of repression and relaxation," including annihilation, exclusion and Russification (Gitelman, 2001, p. 2). Their periodic scapegoating (blame for attempts to overthrow the government) and accusations of blood libel (killing Christian babies for the use of blood in Jewish ritual) emboldened ethnic Russians to carry out violent pogroms in which they destroyed Jewish villages and massacred entire populations. Families and communities were further torn apart as Jewish boys were conscripted into the military for lifelong service. As the state continued to regard Jews as political scapegoats, some fled the empire while others stayed, trying to assimilate or otherwise resisting. Blamed for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, Jews were subjected to violent pogroms, the May Laws of 1882 restricting residency and economics, and harsh educational quotas. As a result of this violence, from 1891 to 1910, one million left for the United States, with tens of thousands of others immigrating to other nations (Gitelman, 2001, p. 12). Many of the American Ashkenazi Jews with whom my collaborators interface with today are the descendants of these refugees. Those who stayed, including my collaborators' ancestors, continued to be both persecuted and increasingly Russified. Today, as Chapters 5-7 will demonstrate, this violence reverberates in the genes and nervous systems of their descendants.

Alongside ongoing physical terror, the Tsarist government addressed "the Jewish problem" through periodic liberal reforms. Beginning in the 1820s, the Russian government began a slow and inconsistent policy of Russification, attempting to integrate these provinces and provincials into the cultural, social, and linguistic orbit of "Russianness."

> The Jews were encouraged to enter Russian-language schools and universities, to serve in the army; to learn to speak, read, write and think in Russian; to 'enlighten' Judaism and Jewish culture in line with the dictates of modern, and especially Russian, society; and to retool themselves economically as farmers or craftsmen, or even as professionals, rather than as small-time merchants and traders. (Stanislawski, 1995, p. 17)

The goal of these programs was to "level the distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, to destroy the autonomy of the Jewish community, to draft the Jews into the Russian army, to weaken the hold of traditional Judaism, the Jewish school system, the Yiddish language…" (Stanislawski, 1995, p. 17). In short, they were coercive tactics aimed at assimilating a population that was deemed undesirable. On their end, many desperate Jews took advantage of these opportunities: "significant numbers of Jewish parents began to realize that the acquisition of the Russian language and a Russian education might ease their children's lives, improve their economic status, allow them to move out of conditions of constriction and poverty" (p. 17). While these changes may have extended Jewish survival, they also came at a significant cultural cost, causing intergenerational rifts as family members left home, younger generations became increasingly secularized, and Russian replaced Yiddish as the primary language of Ashkenazi Jews. In my own family, for example, my great grandparents were the last to practice Judaism. In Chapter 7, I explore the ways that my collaborators and other Kolektiv participants are now reclaiming these

cultural and religious practices as their rightful inheritances, even as they reinterpret them in their re-diasporized contexts.

Amidst the pressures of assimilation, the antiassimilationist efforts of some Soviet Jews who stayed must not be discounted. Among the various groups organizing in the early 1900s, the Bund, an organization representing the Jewish proletariat that demanded national-cultural autonomy, represented an alternative to Russification and Zionism. Although a longer discussion is not possible here, the organization advocated for rights and championed Yiddish cultural activity. "It organized musical, literary, and dramatic societies, expanded its press, planned for secular Yiddish schools, encouraged Yiddish writers, and tried to create for its adherents a vibrant cultural life" (Gitelman, 2001, p. 17). Nevertheless, owing to the enormous pressures and idealized promises of assimilation, on the eve of the revolution, Ashkenazi Jews of the Russian Empire, especially those of the younger generation, were increasingly Russified, primed for a second wave of assimilation that was about to hit.

The Soviet Empire

Decolonial scholars of Russian and Soviet history have argued that the Soviet Union did not offer a break from imperial rule, but rather was a continuation of Russian Imperial expansion, extraction, and domination. Given that my collaborators were all raised by Soviet caregivers, it is crucial to understand the Soviet structures and ideologies that governed their own socialization. While promising the liberation of the proletariat, the Russian Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) ushered in new justifications for the continued extraction of resources. The Russian Empire's "earlier moral justification of Christianity and Russia's messianic role as the carrier of culture and civilization" were replaced by Marxist social theory (historical materialism) to the same extractive ends (Sahni, 1997, p. 193). Racial hierarchization also continued as an organizing logic of this new system: "The immediate and central construction of a hierarchy of nations and peoples within the revolutionary process provided a core mechanism for the reproduction of elements of racial and ethnic hierarchies from both inside imperial Russia and from contemporaneous external colonial and imperial forms of governance, although, officially, backwardness was not due to innate racial or biological characteristics" (Law & Zakharov, 2019, p. 117)

Under this new mask of egalitarianism, Soviet leaders sought to consolidate power at any cost (p. 139). The new centralized industrialized state (with unified economy, education, media and language) was forged through irreversible extraction and the destruction of local cultures and ways of life, as well as mass starvation (p. 180). To Soviet powers, this was not a great tragedy, but rather a natural part of the developmental process of historical materialism, in which so-called "primitive" (i.e., barbaric) ways of life and economic relations had to give way to industrialized socialism. Thus, the Orientalist hierarchies, Eurocentrism and racism that the Russian Empire passed down to Bolsheviks were only reinforced by Marxist historical materialism, justifying immense violence for the goals of consolidated power and industrialized production (p. 155, p. 194).

While the Soviet government announced the formation of an empire of raceless, classless Soviet-identifying workers, it nonetheless maintained racialized hierarchies that promoted ethnic Russian hegemony (Law & Sakharov, 2019). Not only was "Racism was not seen as encompassing anti-Semitism," but "with ethnic and racial identities being actively discouraged under communist rule, where there are no races, there can be no racism" (p. 118). In truth, antisemitism was foundational to Russian and Soviet culture and "the Soviet division of labor

was also based on a racial hierarchy with a seemingly lacking idea of race (it was replaced with the specifically understood "nation"), but with a developed racial politics" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 47). Racialized ideologies were disguised under the Soviet euphemism of национальность (22abushka'nost' or "nationhood"), a logic under which Kazaks, Koreans, Georgians, Jews and Russians, among dozens of others, were not officially "races," but individual "nations" (народы, narody, people) distinguished by supposedly distinct cultures, languages, land claims, and immutable characteristic. For example, diverse Jews of Ashkenazi, Bukharan, Kavkazi lineages, spread out across the Soviet Union, were now officially both Soviet citizens and a single Jewish ethno-racial group, albeit a landless one (Gitelman, 2001; Weitz, 2002). While "22abushka'nost" was purported to maintain cultural autonomy, it homogenized diverse populations and maintained the hegemony of ethnic Russians. "Of overriding importance was the fact that both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union were multinational states, dominated demographically and politically by the Russians, but always with a clear distinction between the Russian nation and its underlings: Jews, Georgians, Lithuanians, Uzbeks, etc." (Stanislawski, 1995, p. 16). This 'underling' status was documented on the fifth line of Soviet passports, пятый пункт (piatyĭ punkt, fifth line). For example, in 1991, my father's Soviet passport identified his nationality as "Jewish" while my mother, half ethnic Jew and half ethnic Russian, was able to choose "Russian" for her nationality to avoid discrimination.

Although official (mis)recognition helped some peoples maintain their pre-Soviet ethnic consciousness, with time, genuine pluralism was attacked in favor of a centralized, homogenous Soviet culture. In the 1920s and 30s, Stalin encouraged and mobilized cultural production among Soviet national minorities to glorify the Soviet state. For example, the 1924 nativization or коренизациа (korenizatsia, indigenizing) campaign "strived to establish cultural and political institutions in the national republics in native languages" (Shternshis, 2006, p. xv). These nefarious state-sponsored projects leveraged non-Russian cultures and languages toward the Sovietization of diverse groups. In fact, Soviet state nationalism was only promoted to the extent that it would co-opt mobilization (Martin, 2001).When the project was deemed complete, members of non-Russian "nations" were persecuted for investing in their cultural identities. As I will discuss below, Jews were a prime target of this terror.

Sovietization of Ashkenazi Jews. For Ashkenazi Jews, Sovietization (or assimilation into a new, Russian-dominant Soviet culture) extended new economic rights while eroding cultural and religious practices and maintaining antisemitism. The abolition of the Pale of Settlement in 1915 following massive post-WW1 displacement and the revolutions of 1917 saw both the emancipation of Ashkenazi Jews and new forms of repression under Soviet rule (Gitelman, 2001, p. 57). Shternshis (2006) explains "Jews were probably the only group within the Soviet population that actually benefited from the revolution, as all tsarist restrictions (education, employment, and places of residence) were no longer valid…" (p. 3). Owing to liberalized government policies and internal modernization, the 1920s saw the urbanization of Jews and mass migration from small towns to larger cities in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (Stanislwaski, 1995, p. 22), alongside rapid industrialization and a change of occupations that brought new economic opportunities (Shternshis, 2006). Having been excluded from Russian institutions for decades, Jewish children, like my collaborators' grandparents and great grandparents, "rushed into universities and other educational institutions at rates unparalleled either in Soviet society at large or in the West" (Stanislawski 1995, p. 22) and Jews began to enter white-collar professions newly established for the functioning of a vast bureaucracy. In this

way, “Due to forces beyond their control or design, Soviet Jews became the most upwardly mobile, most educated, and most professionally successful minority in the country” (p. 23).

Alongside this economic mobility, Ashkenazi Jews— like other minorities— were increasingly coerced into adopting Soviet and Russian culture as their own (Gitelman, 2016, p. 171). “In 1918, soon after the Bolsheviks came to power, organizations designed to ‘Sovietize’ the Jews economically and culturally were established” (Stanislawski, 1995, p. xv.). Led by Evsektsii, Jewish sections of the Communist party, these policies utilized Yiddish popular culture to promote anti-religious ideology, “speed[ing[up the modernization and Sovietization of the Jewish population” Shternshis, 2006, p. xv). Across just a few generations, Jews became “avid followers of Russian theater, devotees of classical music, voracious readers of literature— in Russian primarily, but also in Ukrainian and Belorussian” (Gitelman, 2001, p. 109). At the same time, they became contributors to this new culture. Shternshis confirms that “As Jews became more assimilated in the 1930s, Russian became their primary language, and they developed into attentive recipients of literature and arts created in Russian that dealt with Jewish culture” (Shternshis, 2006, xxi). While Ashkenazi Jews continued to participate in Soviet cultural production, and were indeed some of the most well-known Soviet writers, artists and filmmakers, their own Jewishness was rarely overt in this work. Indeed, as I will highlight in Chapter 5, my collaborators were raised in Jewish and mixed families where the Russian language and knowledge of Russian literature were great sources of pride. In fact, many grew up describing themselves as “Russian” (not Soviet, Jewish, Ukrainian, Georgian, or otherwise) both because of their families’ identification with the language and culture, and because others identified them this way. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, learning this imperial history complicates my collaborators’ relationships to the Russian language, but it does not compromise the importance of their mother tongue as their connection to their parents and grandparents.

Amidst the ongoing Sovietization of the 20th century, war and state violence decimated the Soviet Jewish population. In the Great Patriotic War (World War II, as it is called in the Soviet Union), my grandfathers were drafted to the front lines while my grandmothers were displaced to the Far East, stories that were echoed in my collaborators’ families. In 1941, Nazi troops and German killing squads invaded what is now Ukraine and Belarus (the region of the former Pale of Settlement), murdering Jews by the tens of thousands directly in their hometowns with the assistance of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian militias (Gitelman, 2001, p. 121). Some of our relatives managed to escape, while others were murdered. At Babi Yar, in Ukraine, over 30,000 Jews were massacred in a span of two days, in part due to the collusion of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians against Jews. By the end of the war, “Jews had suffered more than any other Soviet nationality [proportionately]… About one and a half million Jews had been killed, not including those who had died in combat” (p. 143). Another 200,000 had lost their lives fighting against the Germans (my grandfathers were two of the miraculous survivors). These tragedies went largely unmentioned and untaught in Soviet schools. Memorial sites were scant, and where they did exist, they honored “Soviet citizens,” rather than Jews. These erasures not only obscured Jewish heroism and resistance, but they also left antisemitism out of official Soviet narratives. While these Soviet Jewish stories were taught in neither Soviet nor American schools, my collaborators grew up hearing them from their own бабушки и дедушки (babushki i dedushki, grandmothers and grandfathers), who were themselves the miraculous survivors of war, displacement, and starvation. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, these compounded traumas were passed down in families, manifesting in the nervous systems of my collaborators and other

Kolektiv members. This recent history separated them from many other white American Jews and other white Americans, and informed their political commitments

In addition to claiming millions of lives, the violence of the latter half of the 20th century further eroded Yiddish-based Jewish culture, while maintaining Jewish ethnic consciousness. The war "destroyed the majority of the Yiddish-speaking community of the Soviet Union, and most Yiddish cultural institutions were never restored" (Shternshis, 2006, p. xvi). Even after this time, the early Soviet investment in Yiddish culture (however nefarious) and the appointment of some Jews to government posts were followed by waves of murder (e.g., 1950s Night of the Poets) and a plan for the mass deportation and murder of Jews. As Stalin's paranoia grew, Yiddish cultural figures including poets, writers, playwrights, and scholars who had been previously celebrated were accused of "nationalistic tendencies" and "bourgeois nationalism" and were arrested or murdered (Gitelman, 2001, p. 107). Luba, one of my collaborators, grew up haunted by stories of the murder of her great-grandfather, who had been a Yiddish writer. While at least two of my grandparents spoke Yiddish, I did not learn this until after they passed. As antisemitism persisted in the Soviet Union, so, too, did Jewish ethnic and racial consciousness. Regardless of the extent to which Ashkenazi Jews coercively adopted Russian culture, they would never be Русские (Russkie, Russian) by "nationality."

Even after Stalin's death, ethic/racial hierarchies rendered Jews a "tolerated marginal group, excluded from much of the mainstream and best relegated to sectors where they could make some particular contribution and not harm the overall Soviet cause" (Gitelman, 2001, p. 173). They are also small in number, constituting only about 1% of the Soviet population or little over 2 million people in 1970 (Tolts, 2016). Although by the late 1980s, the majority of Ashkenazi Jews in the USSR were "vastly more educated than any other Soviet nationality, including the Russians" (Perkovich, 1988, p. 442), they were still subject to university quotas and professional exclusion. Gold (1995) confirms, "the most common experience of prejudice was in the realm of career advancement. Soviet Jews who sought high status positions confronted institutional anti-Semitism" (p. 15). Antisemitism kept Jews out of government, police, diplomacy, and military sectors, funneling them into the fields of science and technology, retail, and service. Chapter 4 will demonstrate the effects of this exclusion on my collaborators' caregivers, including both their decision to leave the USSR and their subsequent decisions and political leanings in the U.S.

Persisting exclusion, alongside Russian/Slavic hegemony, contributed to a Jewish sense of difference.

> Even the most Russified Jews understood (as they do today) that they were not Russians, nor could they ever become Russians. They were Jews, however one defined that term. Even as they adopted Russian as their mother tongue, abandoned the traditional practices of the Jewish religion, replaced the Bible and Talmud and Jewish folk culture with Pushkin and Turgenev and Gogol and the talk of the street, they could become bearers of Russian culture, creators of Russian and Soviet culture, and even proud and loyal citizens of Russia and the Soviet Union— but not Russians, i.e., Russians by nationality. (Stanislawski, 1995, p. 16)

In other words, amidst unofficial but ongoing antisemitism, no amount of Soviet cultural assimilation could eliminate Soviet Jewish consciousness. To the extent that ethnic Russians failed to see Jews as equals, so, too, Jews continued to see themselves as Jews. Ultimately, the

generations-long experience of exclusion and instability motivated hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews to trade one empire for another.

Soviet Jewish Exodus. The 1970s saw the beginning of a major exodus of Soviet Jews through the otherwise impenetrable Iron Curtain. In total, between 1970 – 2009, nearly two million Jewish emigres left the region, roughly the same amount that left the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century (Gitelman, 2016, p. 5; see also Tolts in same book).[10] These emigres constituted the latest mass migration of Jews from the region, leaving behind only 300,000-400,000. For decades, strict emigration bans had confined Jews, like all other Soviet citizens, to the former Soviet Union. However, beginning slowly in the 1970s and increasingly through the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews were selectively permitted to emigrate for purposes of "family reunification," in exchange for increased trade and financial connections with the West (Gold, 1994). Immigrants were primarily absorbed by Israel, Germany, and the United States. The United States, for its part, offered refugee status only to select groups, including Jews and small numbers of Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics, and followers of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Gold, 1994). Most other ethnic and religious groups across the Soviet Union, including Muslims, were not eligible for emigration or entry into these countries (Peretz, 2020).

The chronology of Soviet Jewish migration is complex and inconsistent, with ebbs and flows in the magnitude and direction of migration according to "relations between the USSR and the West" (Gitelman, 2016, p. 10). Still, historians have documented two major waves of emigration. In the first wave of the 1970s, following the 1967 Naksa or Six Day War, about 220,000 Jews emigrated, many of them the now–famous "refuseniks" who petitioned to leave the USSR but were initially refused, and were often punished for their disloyalty (Altshuler, 1988). The vast majority of these immigrants went to Israel, or occupied Palestine. By 1973, following another violent annexation of Palestinian land, hopeful emigrants "dropped out" of Israeli immigration, hoping to come to the United States, causing a great debate among the American Jewish establishment (Lazin, 2009; Lissak & Leshem, 1995). Between 1981 and 1986, emigration to the U.S. slowed to a trickle, owing to deteriorated relations following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Gitelman, 2016, p.10). Through the 1980s, there were years in which less than 1,000 were allowed to emigrate. Still, several of my collaborators' parents managed to come to the U.S. during this time, including Rivka's father in 1980, and Stepha's father and Rebecca's family in 1981 (more information on this in Chapters 3 and 4).

In the second wave from 1987-1991, more than 300,000 left the Soviet Union. To the chagrin of the Israeli government and some American Zionists, the second wave was characterized less by a pull to Israel than by the desire to leave the USSR and seek political, cultural and economic freedom, especially in the United States. Furthermore, Israel was increasingly seen as an unstable and undesirable destination (Gitelman, 2016, p. 16; Tolts, 2016, p. 12). This wave saw the migration of Luba's family in 1987, Rivka's and Stepha's moms in 1988, and mine and Irina's families in 1991. I will discuss this period in greater detail in a section below entitled "Anti-Imperialist, Decolonial and Critical Race Takes on Soviet Jewish Migration," as well as in Chapters 3 and 4.

[10] Interestingly, over the course of the 20th century, the Jewish populations of the Russian/Soviet empires and the United States had completely inverted, in 1890, there were 5 million Jews in the Russian Empire, and around 400,000 in the U.S. A century later, only 300,000- 400,000 Jews were left in the USSR, while Jews in the U.S. number over 5 million (Gitelman, 2016).

The United States

Settler Colonialism and White Supremacy. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews who sought to escape Soviet instability and antisemitism were absorbed into the United States, a global power with its own colonial and imperial history of domination, exploitation and extraction. Long touted as a "nation of immigrants," the United States is more accurately described as an active settler colony (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2022; O'Brien, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2016). While Indigenous peoples have stewarded this land since "time immemorial," from the 1500s on, European settlers and their descendants annihilated Indigenous peoples to clear the land, extracted resources, and exploited the labor of Indigenous people, enslaved Africans, and immigrants in order to satisfy their need for the accumulation of wealth and private property. Settlers justified the subsequent physical and cultural genocides with ideologies of religion (Christianity), "civilization", capitalist modernity, and racial hierarchy (Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2016). While such regimes of difference, and perhaps even race, predate the European and American empires as we know them, decolonial scholars maintain that the emergence of race as a modern colonial technology marked a shift from alterity based on religion and color, to the "consolidation of race as the 'organizing grammar' of the nineteenth century colonial system" (Wolfe, 2016, p. 8).

Within U.S. settler colonialism, racialization was employed strategically to enable and justify the seizure of native land and the exploitation and genocide of Native American and African-descended people. Specifically, the one-drop rule and anti-miscegenation laws socially ensured the dehumanization and ongoing production of Black people as valuable commodities, while blood quantum facilitated the erasure of Native people (Harris, 1993; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This grammar was bolstered by the invention and legal codification of "whiteness"[11] as a desirable property in and of itself, claimed by European settlers to maintain their superiority and ensure their livelihoods at the expense of Black and Native people, and, later, some negatively racialized immigrant groups (Harris 1993; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe 2016). Thus, white supremacy and antiblackness emerged as "colonialism speaking," the ideological justification for accumulation, dispossession, and racialized violence (Wolfe, 2016, p. 5). In the centuries that passed, Indigenous people have been alternately constructed "outside of time" and offered symbolic recognition (Coulthard, 2014; O'Brien, 2010), while Black people are rendered "surplus" and a hyper-visible threat to white accumulation and safety (Gilmore, 2007; Glenn, 2015, p. 70). Meanwhile, whiteness has been constructed as synonymous with human, serving as an entitlement for whites to claim material resources, seek protection, and harm racialized others.

Five hundred years after the establishment of race as the grammar of colonial domination, generations of immigrants have been absorbed into the enduring system of racial capitalism. While the formative racial triad of whiteness, (anti)blackness, and (anti)indigeneity has persisted, racializing processes have grown more complex in response to the import of immigrants used to

[11] While the settler elite of the early British colonies relied on the labor of both European indentured servants and enslaved African people, by the 17th century they increasingly worried about alliances between these two economically oppressed groups (Harris, 1993; Robinson, 2000). For the most part these groups were thought of as European and African, though also already indentured and enslaved, respectively. In the wake of Bacon's Rebellion (1676), when Europeans and Africans allied against Native tribes, fearful land-owning settlers began to distinguish between "white" European indentured servants and "Black" enslaved Africans, establishing and sanctifying emergent racial constructs and hierarchies (Harris, 1993). The Virginia Slave Codes of 1705 made the symbolic property of race tangible, endowing European indentured servants- now deemed "white" with certain privileges that were denied to enslaved Africans, now deemed "Black", and further justifying antiblack violence.

satisfy the state's desire for cheap labor (Glenn, 2015; Roediger, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). In particular, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese, Mexican and European immigrants, "arrivants" into the native-settler-slave triads, were differentially absorbed into U.S. racial capitalism in continuation of the settler colonial project. Glenn (2015), drawing on Veracini (2010), contrasts the formation of Chinese and Mexican immigrants as "undesirable" or "irredeemable" exogenous others who are exploited or otherwise eliminated with the historical formation of Europeans as racially assimilable by virtue of their skin color, features, and proximity to Europe. As discussed below, across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the contours of whiteness shifted to alternately accommodate and exclude various immigrant groups, via their proximity to or distance from an imagined white ideal (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006; Ignatiev, 1997; Roediger, 2018). Kim (1999) further complicates this model, offering the term "racial triangulation" to discuss the ways some East Asian groups are used to perpetuate antiblackness and whiteness within a binary racial system (e.g., via model minority myths), benefiting them materially even as they remain characterized as "perpetual foreigners." Most recently, many Latinx, Arab and Muslim people have been racially regarded as "undesirable exogenous others", while many Soviet immigrants were absorbed into a terrain of whiteness that had already made room for them as Europeans (Sadowski-Smith, 2018). With some historical context established, I will now turn to the scholarly literature on whiteness, immigration, and assimilation.

The Literature on Immigrant Whiteness in the U.S.

Among a larger body of scholarship on whiteness, assimilation, and immigrant, a robust set of work deals specifically with European Jewish assimilation into whiteness, especially across the early 20th century (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006). This literature contributes important critical race perspectives on racial assimilation and the making of whiteness, revealing the primacy of antiblackness to this project while engaging the complexity of racialization and assimilation as fraught *processes*. At the same time, much of the work overlooks the persisting injustice of immigrant inclusion into the extractive settler colonial structure, naturalizing settler colonialism in the process. After providing a historical overview of American Jewish whiteness through this literature, I explain how my dissertation will engage decolonial and critical race perspectives together to complicate existing binary discussions of white Jewish "in-betweenness" and ambivalence, while contributing critical scholarship on a group that still remains largely unstudied.

By the time Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants arrived to the U.S. in the 1970s-90s, most people of Eastern European Jewish descent had been considered "white" for decades. This was the result of a lengthy and fraught process of racial assimilation in which new immigrants and their descendants traded their cultural practices and ethical commitments for the perceived protections and material benefits of whiteness (Baldwin, 1984). Established whites did not immediately welcome all new European immigrants into their racial club, instead regarding "borderline Europeans" as inferior: "white people with a question mark" (Mills, 1997, p. 78). Brodkin (1998) writes, "Jews, Puerto Ricans, Irish, and African Americans appeared as different constructions on a rainbow of state-sanctioned not-whitenesses" (p. 85). Acting accordingly, white Christian elites excluded many European immigrants from social clubs and universities and, by 1924, limited their immigration. This was especially true of the dispossessed Southern and Eastern European (Jewish) immigrants who arrived at the turn of the century. Brodkin (1998, p. 54) contrasts the fraught racialization of poor Eastern and Southern European immigrants of

the early 20th century with earlier, more-affluent European arrivals. She explains that the new wave of Southern and Eastern European immigrants were not favored on account of their large demographics, non-Protestant religions, leftist political leanings and concentration in the working class as industrial laborers. Even Central European Jews acculturated to white, Protestant culture "tended to look down on the new immigrants, harboring a mixture of embarrassment and charitable benevolence toward them" (p. 108), exhibiting a version of what Khazzoom (2003) has termed "the great chain of orientalism." In this order, sub-groups distance themselves from an East rendered inferior, thereby aligning themselves with the West. New "Eastern" immigrants were often described in racialized terms, alternately sexualized and emasculated, and regarded as dirty, immoral and carrying disease (Brodkin, 1996; Goldstein, 2006). Their construction as both foreign to the "American race" and assimilable to made them the target of intensive Americanization (whitening) policies and programs, such as those of the Ford school, which coerced Southern and Eastern European immigrants into adopting white, middle class ways of life (Goldstein, 2006; Roediger, 2005, p. 19).

Many scholars have demonstrated that although the terms of whiteness changed over time, they were always negotiated in relation to persisting antiblackness and anti-indigeneity. While European immigrants may not have always been socially considered "white" by white settlers, the Naturalization Act of 1790 nevertheless entitled them to enter the United States and obtain citizenship, which was limited to "free white person[s] … of good character", to the exclusion of Native Americans, free Blacks, slaves, and indentured servants (and later, Asians). Meanwhile, Native Americans were only extended citizenship rights in 1924. European immigrants were also able to obtain employment and participate in certain labor unions to the exclusion of Black Americans. In this way, "the amalgamation of various European strains into an American identity was facilitated by an oppositional definition of Black as 'other'" (Harris, 1993, p. 1742; Morrison, 1993). Even as new racialized terms emerged to describe non-European immigrants, including "Latinx," "Asian" and "Muslim," antiblackness persisted as an ideology and structure. Furthermore, although it has not been as explicit in the literature on whiteness, any inclusion into "American identity" only reified the existing settler colonial structure (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). That is, immigrants from the world over were given a chance to participate in and benefit from the ongoing displacement of Indigenous people and extraction of their lands.

Ultimately, new European immigrants were able to claim "white rights" and social status through their participation in antiblack, anti-indigenous and racist structures (López, 2006; Roediger, 2005). Indeed, the maintenance of these systems and of whiteness itself required the "possessive investment" of new European arrivants, who numbered in the millions (Lipsitz, 2006). For example, Ignatiev (2009) explains that white workers, including new Irish immigrants who were initially deemed undesirable, unionized to exclude African Americans from their places of work in the industrialized North. Jews, too, were often excluded from trades like carpentry, painting, and building by craft unions run by whitened Irish, British and Germans (Brodkin, 1998, p. 63), but were often able to find work in the garment industry. Although the working conditions were harsh and the pay meager, Steinberg (2001) explains how these factory and small business jobs facilitated their upward mobility across two to three generations, especially as college tuition was free. While Goldstein details that Jewish immigrants did not compete with African-Americans for jobs in the garment industry (p.76), Steinberg argues that their eventual assimilation into middle class whiteness nevertheless happened "on the backs of Blacks" (Morrison, 1993).

The centrality of antiblackness to the consolidation of whiteness was revealed later in the 20th century through a series of racist state-funded initiatives (Brodkin, 1998; Harris, 1993; Rothstein, 2017). In the 1930s New Deal policy consolidated whiteness by drawing harsh divisions along black/white colorline, thus blurring the boundaries of European ethnicity. Social Security was established, but it excluded agricultural and domestic workers who tended to be Black and people of color, while aid to Dependent Children left people of color entirely. Importantly, Federal Housing Administration loans were exclusively offered to white families, thus promoting the dispossession of Black neighborhoods toward the creation of white suburbs. In the 1930s, the practice of redlining sanctioned this new spatial racism. The Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) developed a neighborhood rating system that placed the highest value on all-white middle class neighborhoods, and lowest on nonwhite or mixed working class neighborhoods (red). The red color signaled a low property value and thus high risk—a bad investment. Redlining effectively warned banks not to lend there and the FHA to not insure mortgages, thus denying African Americans funds for home improvement (Rothstein, 2017).

In 1944, the GI Bill – dubbed "the most massive (white, male) affirmative action program in American history" by Brodkin (1998) – facilitated the first large-class mobility among white Jewish men and families. The GI Bill offered preferential hiring, small business loans, low-interest home loans, and educational benefits (tuition and living expenses) to veterans, but excluded women and Black people by either not informing them or denying them access. By 1920 university quotas on Jews and other Euro-ethnics had ended, and thus white Jewish veterans were able to take advantage of the legislation. Similarly, Before WW2, racial covenants forbade sales to Jews, Catholics, and African-Americans, but by the 1950s and 60s, Jews were largely considered white. Thus, many were able to take advantage of the FHA white suburbanization programs, run by representatives of the real estate and banking industries, which subsidized their home purchases through low-down payment, low-interest, long-term loans (Rothstein, 2017).

The whitening project was not only economic, but also cultural. From the 1900s to the 1930s, intentional assimilation projects brought European Jews into the white American "melting pot," sometimes literally, as in the Melting Pot ceremony of the Henry Ford English school (Goldstein, 2006). The acculturation process involved Jewish families changing their names and otherwise distancing themselves from "the old country" in order to fit in. As they took on white Protestant middle class values, ceremonies and pageants celebrated white immigrants, folding them into the country's colonial history. Later, by the 1940s, "not only did economic and social barriers to Jewish aspirations fall away but the United States, perhaps in part from guilt about having barred Jews fleeing the Nazis […] became philo-Semitic in its embrace of Jewish culture" (Brodkin, 1998, p. 141). This insincere investment in Jews as an exceptional "modern minority" perpetuated cultural racism against Black people, while obscuring the structural factors that had facilitated European Jewish class ascent in the first place. In the end, the cultural and economic shifts of whiteness resulted in the inclusion of even the most despised European immigrants, maintaining antiblackness and settler colonialism in the process.

While it may be tempting to reduce European Jewish assimilation into whiteness to an inevitability, its has been described as a fraught *negotiation* of cultural identity, where material gains come up against cultural, psychic and emotional losses (Goldstein, 2006). James Baldwin (1984), who wrote extensively on Jewish whiteness, famously argued:

> It is probable that it is the Jewish community or more accurately, perhaps, its remnants—that in America has paid the highest and most extraordinary price for becoming white. For the Jews came here from countries where they were not white, and they came here, in part, because they were not white; and incontestably in the eyes of the Black American (and not only in those eyes) American Jews have opted to become white, and this is how they operate (p. 178).

What is this 'high and extraordinary price'? Perhaps Baldwin is referring to the cultural ties new immigrants gave up for the protections of American whiteness. Or perhaps he is referring to the spiritual costs of complicity, that madness of knowing persecution first-hand, and yet inflicting it on others. Thandeka (Thandeka, 1999), following Du Bois and Roediger, terms such costs "the wages *for* whiteness" (Thandeka's italics). All people identified as white pay the price of compromised morality, while those who are not wealthy WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) pay in shame for their difference from this hegemonic white ideal. Thus, when whiteness is understood not only along a Black/ white binary, but "as a self-degrading system of identity formation" with an "ethnic pecking order," whitened Jewish immigrants exemplify white ethnic shame (Thandeka, 1999, p. 28). In order to sustain class privilege as a right of race (p. 37), whitened Jews conformed to the WASP social contract, "forgetting their prewhited selves" and suppressing their difference. This happened through a process of alienation: from Jewish culture, language, religion, family, and history. Roediger (2000) confirms that as probationary whites, Jews' conditional acceptance into whiteness has been predicated on *not* signaling one's Jewishness, and thus denying at least a part of one's true self. The result is self-hatred, internalized antisemitism, shame, rage, denial and despair (Rosenwasser, 2013; Thandeka, 2000, p. 33).

With few exceptions,[12] critical discussions of European immigrant assimilation into whiteness (and Ashkenazi Jewish assimilation specifically) are bound by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Perhaps because it is assumed that racial assimilation is complete, the discussion tapers off prior to the rise of neoliberal multiculturalism and decades before the large wave of Soviet migration. As a case study of contemporary whiteness, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants thus provide an important opportunity to revive the empirical study of white racialization and trouble whiteness as an ongoing process. This is all the more interesting because they left a context in which their families were racially othered, and arrived at one in which whiteness was already consolidated to welcome them. Unlike turn-of-the-century Eastern European immigrants who have been negotiating whiteness over multiple generations (especially from the late 1800s through the 1950s), contemporary light-skinned Soviet Ashkenazi immigrants arrived to a racial terrain in which whiteness was consolidated enough so that their children (my collaborators) were readily considered white. Put simply, in the neighborhoods where they grew up in the 1990s, from Palo Alto to Denver to Chicago, their Jewishness did not exempt them from whiteness. As Chapters 4-6 will demonstrate, this has only hastened my collaborators' racial assimilation.

Approaching this phenomenon through both critical race and decolonial analytics, where the goal is not only racial justice but also native sovereignty and stewardship, complicates discussions of white Jewish ambivalence and "in-betweenness" within the Black-white binary. This is a chance to locate white(ned) Jewish immigrants within broader colonial and imperial

[12] Sadowski-Smith's (2018) The New Immigrant Whiteness: Race, Neoliberalism, and Post-Soviet Migration to the United States is a notable exception.

matrices of domination, and be specific about the racialized ways they are expected to reify the existing settler colonial project. At the same time, it is a chance to resist these prescriptions, and mobilize Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish histories against the expectations of the state.

The Literature on Soviet Jewish Immigrants in the U.S.

Naturalized Whiteness

The lack of critical literature on Soviet (Ashkenazi) Jews in the United States is partially explained by the group's depoliticized white racialization in the American context. Kathy Friedman (Friedman, 2007) attributes the scholarly "lacuna" of this group in social science research to their "characterization by both sociologists and Jewish American institutions as unproblematically white, European, modern in religious practice, highly-educated, highly-skilled and family-centered" (p. 238). Unlike many immigrants of color, Soviet Jews are not perceived as a racial or economic burden, and are thus not spotlighted **(**Kasinitz et al., 2009). From a decolonial and critical race perspective, however, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants are not 'unproblematically white,' but *problematically* so. Just as the experiences of groups racialized as other in the U.S. merit study, so, too, the white racialization of Soviet Jews, in combination with their class and education status, require unpacking. The study of Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish relationships to U.S. whiteness offer abundant opportunity to continue theorizing how colonial whiteness is historically constructed, and how social actors, including new immigrants, come to participate in it, reify it, and transform it in the contemporary political context.

Several scholars who question Zionist and U.S.-centric assumptions pave the way for a more rigorous decolonial and critical race analysis of Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigration. For example, Aviv and Shneer (2005) challenge American Jewish hegemonic perspectives on Soviet Jewry with asset-based approaches. Specifically, they challenge the American and Zionist tendencies to reduce Eastern Europe to a symbolic homeland and ancestral graveyard. They write, "Although many lament the 'lack of Jewishness' among Russian Jewish immigrants […], we seldom hear or read about the new forms of Jewishness these immigrants bring with them" (p. xiv). Aviv and Shneer affirm Soviet Jewish immigrants as carriers of Jewish culture, however unrecognizable this culture may be to American audiences. Still, their celebration of inclusive post-diasporism (that is, Jewish life outside of Israel) lacks a critical engagement with the ethics of white(ned) Jewish existence within American white, imperialist, settler colonialism. Their limitations invite us to critically interrogate the ethical and political consequences of Soviet Jewish home-making as the latest instance of a much longer history of racialized occupation of native land.

A few scholars have more explicitly named Soviet Jewish immigrant relationships to American whiteness, suggesting this as an important site for the contemporary study of racialization (Friedman, 2007; Sadowski-Smith, 2018). For example, Kathy Friedman (2007) has problematized assumptions of easeful assimilation among white(ned) immigrants, explaining:

> the children of former Soviet Jews do not simply assimilate, or incorporate into one or another preexisting segment of multicultural America. They are uncomfortable and wary of the available options- mainstream Jewish American, Israeli, Russian, Soviet Jewish like their parents, white American- all mutually exclusive identities. Their identities are multilayered. Their in-betweenness in their own families and coethnic communities, and their status as a rediasporized transnational minority encourages them to become cultural bridge builders. (p. 255)

The discomfort and wariness Friedman describes hint at the fraught relations of power between the Soviet Union, the U.S., and Israel, as well as hierarchies of race and Jewishness, as they are navigated by this group across multiple contexts. However, the complexity of her analysis is thwarted by her articulation of "in-betweenness," a binary analytic quite common in (white) Jewish Studies (see Goldstein, 2006). Leaning into the discomfort and wariness she describes, decolonial and intersectional critical race frameworks can dislodge binary conceptions in favor of more multidimensional analyses that the phenomenon of transnational racialized assimilation necessitates.

Sadowski-Smith's (2018) recent work on "new immigrant whiteness" makes a significant contribution to this project by bringing analyses of American whiteness and global neoliberalism to the study of contemporary post-Soviet migration. She argues that white Americans apply "mythologized and US-specific notions of whiteness" to residents of the former Eastern Bloc (p. 8), considering them heirs of an imagined European whiteness and designating them as white *prior to* their emigration. She explains,

> Despite their internal ethnic diversity, members of the [Soviet] 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. (p. 6)

The American notion of pan-European whiteness brings some (post) Soviet subjects into the fold of whiteness, albeit a second-rate whiteness that further facilitates their neoliberal commodification. Specifically, Sadowski-Smith's analysis focuses on the white American construction of (post) Soviets as desirable "potential kin" for transnational marriage and adoption. As she acknowledges, this American racial construction disregards Soviet and post-Soviet hierarchies of ethnic and "national" identity, which position ethnic Slavs at the top against colonized Central Asians (who are often called "Black" in the post-Soviet context) and racialized others, including Jews. It is in this way that Ashkenazi Jews, who were racially othered in the Soviet Union, are rendered white in the U.S. context (against negatively racialized others, including Black, Latinx and Muslim people). Beyond the important reminder that racialization is contextual, Sadowski- Smith's work demonstrates that neoliberal commodification is not limited to immigrants of color, articulating (post)Soviet immigrant whiteness as a site of critical study.

Anti-imperialist, Decolonial and Critical Race Takes on Soviet Jewish Migration

The privileging of decolonial and critical race analytics requires that many existing narrations of Soviet Jewish migration be revised to foreground the influences of colonial, imperialist, and white racial power on immigration and resettlement. Some existing scholarship has rightly discussed the absorption of Soviet Jews as a Cold War geopolitical strategy that reinforced American capitalist global domination, questioning the selective conference of refugee status to Soviet Jews and others fleeing Communist regimes (Gitelman, 2016; Rosenberg, 2003; Teitelbaum, 1984). For example, Gitelman (2016, p. 9) explains that the United States favored Jewish emigration from the USSR because it aligned with several aims shared by politicians and publics: "1) it would weaken the Soviet image because mass migration

raised doubts about the perfection of Soviet society[...]; 2) it served the cause of human rights [...]; 3) it pleased Israel, many Western countries and a broad domestic constituency, as Jewish Americans had succeeded in linking the cause of Soviet emigration to that of civil and human rights." Indeed, as Gitelman, Teitelbaum (1984) and others have argued, within the Cold War context, offering "refuge" from Communist regimes offered the U.S. the means to establish moral and economic dominance, legitimizing American global capitalism through a facade of humanitarianism. Thus, Soviet immigrants joined others from Communist countries as a geopolitical bargaining chip. With the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment (1974), the U.S. applied trade sanctions against the Soviet Union for restricting Jewish emigration, later easing the sanctions when the Soviet Union allowed the exit of "refuseniks." Later, the Lautenberg Agreement (1990) established the preemptive presumption of several Soviet religious groups to be "targets of persecution in the Soviet Union on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 433-434). Put simply, with the Agreement, Soviet Jews joined members of 24 Southeast Asian groups from Communist regimes in securing refugee status without having to demonstrate evidence of potential oppression.

Some scholars have further challenged Soviet Jewish exceptionalism by demonstrating that needy citizens of other nations, especially where the U.S. had supported abusive regimes, were excluded from such benefits. While "refugee outflows serve to embarrass and discredit adversary nations" such as the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Vietnam, other groups were restricted from refugee status, because their recognition "would serve to embarrass governments with which the United States has close political ties and would also encourage domestic opposition to these ties" - as in the case of El Salvador (Teitelbaum, 1984, p. 439). For example, Salvadoran citizens fleeing human rights abuses at the hands of the government were considered to be merely "economic migrants," while Haitian refugees were routinely denied protection. Meanwhile, some scholars critically show that even in the 1980s, when antisemitism had decreased, Soviet Jews were still proclaimed to be "refugees" fleeing antisemitic persecution, often regardless of their actual lived experiences. Indeed, only a handful of legislators publicly challenged the presumption of refugee status for Soviet Jews (Rosenberg (2003, p. 443). This led Rosenberg to conclude that Soviet Jewish immigration was facilitated not only by advocacy, but also by "the lack of passionate objection to it" (p. 448).

While scholars have critiqued the U.S. government's geopolitical interest in Soviet Jewry in the Cold War context, less critical attention has been paid to the *colonial motivations and racial justifications* behind Soviet Jewish emigration among the Israeli settler colonial government, American politicians, and American Jewish advocates. A significant body of work has focused on the role of American Jewish institutions and grassroots organizations in the movement to "Save the Soviet Jewry," which promoted the Soviet Jewish right to emigrate from the 1960s through the early 90s (Beckerman, 2011; Gitelman, 2016; Wiesel, 1987). Most accounts highlight the work of American activists alongside early Soviet dissidents (refuseniks), narrating the organization of mass demonstrations, fundraising, political education, and government lobbying. While valuable, the tendency of this scholarship to glorify American Jewish advocacy and totalize Soviet oppression simplifies the complex motivations of hopeful emigrants, especially those of the 1980s and early 90s. Furthermore, it obscures the "international dimension of the American mobilization" (Peretz, 2015, p. 2).

Few American Jewish scholars discuss the extent of Israel's influence on Soviet Jewish emigration, but some do trace the "Save the Soviet Jews" campaign to the Israeli government,

which saw Soviet emigration as a way to ensure the import of Ashkenazi settlers into occupied Palestine (Lazin, 2009; Peretz, 2015). The movement was initially established by the Israeli agency Nativ (Liaison Bureau) in 1959 to foster the immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, as a racist reaction to Jewish migration from Arab lands. After the 1967 Naksa (Six-Day War), Israel further targeted Soviet Jews to populate newly occupied territories in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, to ensure an Ashkenazi Jewish settler demographic majority. While Lazin's own aims may not be decolonial, he nevertheless writes plainly that "Israeli government operatives mobilized American Jewish organizations to influence American government policies on behalf of Soviet Jewry and the State of Israel" (p. 8). Meanwhile, the U.S. government and American Jewish establishment had their own motivations to support the state of Israel as "a proxy for U.S. power in the Middle East" (Finkelstein, 2015). This is an argument I have not encountered in scholarly discussions of Soviet Jewry, but one that is absolutely critical for understanding the roles of Israeli settler colonialism and American global imperialism in Soviet Jewish migration to the United States. Certainly, decolonial political projects among Soviet Jewish immigrants (like this dissertation) must begin with an understanding of this history.

The literature has also overlooked the roles of American settler colonialism and whiteness among American politicians and American Jewish activists, both in terms of how they imagined Soviet Jews and how they mobilized resources to support their resettlement. While U.S. immigration policy has long been tied to labor, aside from brief mentions of Soviet Jewish immigrant technical expertise (Gold, 1994, p. 124; Sadowski-Smith, 2018), I was unable to find literature analyzing them as desirable commodities in the eyes of the government. Still, my own review of Congressional records suggests that these immigrants were championed for their potential to contribute to colonial and capitalist notions of modern "progress" (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2016). For example, in a Congressional hearing on reinstating the presumption of persecution to Soviet Jews, some representatives employed this rhetoric of modernity in support of Soviet Jewish migration. Responding to push-back on the policy, one representative said, "We are saying to those who have suffered for seeking freedom that we cannot absorb them. We cannot absorb refugees from the Soviet Union who have been among our greatest scientists, our business leaders, communications people, artists, pianists, violinists, contributing to the progress of American engineering, science, mathematics, and culture. [...] Most Soviet immigrants who come into this country are literate, productive, and contribute to our economy" (p. 14668).[13] While the word "white" did not appear in these Congressional records, colonial whiteness nevertheless appeared, coded through the language of scientific advancement, technology, business, and literacy. Moreover, the comments presented a racially loaded concept of "culture", their references to 'artists, pianists, and violinists', eliciting associations to classical music and elite Western European culture. Although Soviet Ashkenazi Jews may have been seen as "barbaric" via their Eastern-ness and relationship to Communism, this proximity to an imagined European whiteness racialized them as desirable, or at least assimilable into an existing white middle-class.

Finally, more critical attention must be directed to the racialized ways white, assimilated American Jews imagined Soviet immigrants and mobilized resources on their behalf. Some scholars have suggested that the advocacy of many Jewish Americans fulfilled tribalist affinities and assuaged post-Holocaust survivors' guilt (Beckerman, 2011; Finkelstein, 2015;

[13] "HR 2022: Providing Relief for Certain Soviet and Indochinese Refugees" Congressional Record 135 (1990) p. 14620-14695. (Text from: Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection); Accessed: October, 2020.

Lazin, 2009). Others have discussed the misguided assumptions and assimilatory aims of some American Jewish activists, especially toward later immigrants of the 1980s and 90s, who tended to pursue economic stability, rather than religious freedom. Gold (in Gitelman, 2016) reflects:

> Primed by decades of anti-Soviet/Russian propaganda and having heard numerous tales about Soviet Jewish *refuseniks* from the Soviet Jewry movement seeking religious freedom, American Jews generally assumed that Russian speakers came to the United States to reestablish their religious identities, would graciously accept instructions on how to become American Jews, and would rapidly repudiate their linguistic, cultural, and sentimental attachments to the FSU. (p. 113)

While these assumptions were eventually challenged in Soviet-American encounters, they have yet to be critically deconstructed in scholarship.

An obvious start would be a critical discursive analysis of the movement's very name "Save the Soviet Jewry," as well as its cultural production, ranging from Eli Wiesel's book "The Jews of Silence"[14] (Wiesel, 1987) to the "Soviet Jewry Haggadah" (1980), a ritual text for Passover created by NFTY (The Reform Jewish Youth Movement).

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: I am being suffocated. I cannot see what is strangling me. Is it the bad air in this room? I breathe as hard as I can, desperately. But no healthy air enters my lungs. I cannot leave the room. The iron door is heavily bolted. There are no windows. It is really very strange when you think about it. I am being quietly killed by something I cannot see.

-6-

THE FOUR CHILDREN OF THE SOVIET UNION

Reader: The first child is wise. S/he asks who s/he is and of his/her background. Learning about his/her heritage is an obsession for him/her. S/he wants to be a Jew.

Reader: The second child is evil. S/he asks: What good is being Jewish to me? S/he totally rejects his/her religion for the sake of complacency and an easier life.

Reader: The third child is simple. S/he knows there is something s/he wants to learn but s/he is afraid to ask.

Reader: The fourth child is the one who does not know how to ask. It is s/he whom we must secretly tell the whole story of the Passover.

CAPTION Image 1: The "Soviet Jewry Haggadah" (1980), a ritual text for Passover created by NFTY (The Reform Jewish Youth Movement)

As the image illustrates, the Haggadah places the listener in the place of the Soviet Jew, as rendered by the American Jewish imagination: trapped behind the Iron Curtain, suffocating, blinded, on the verge of death. Soviet Jews are afforded no agency, dignity, or creativity in this description. Likened to "children"—wise, evil, simple, and ignorant—they are infantilized and shamed as victims of assimilation. By this measure, Soviet Jews are denied their Jewishness,

[14] Lazin (2009) fascinatingly explains that the Israeli Liaison Bureau was behind Wiesel's trip to the Soviet Union and the publishing of his book, which became "the definitive statement on Soviet Jews and their plight" (p.15).

even as their Jewish identities are salient due to their ongoing ethnic othering in the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, religious American Jews are suggested to possess authentic Jewishness, obscuring their own cultural assimilation into whiteness across the 20th century (Goldstein, 2006). This liberal-saviorist orientation is important because it inevitably influenced the ways some Jewish American activists and institutions have related to Soviet Jews since their arrival, reifying American exceptionalism, orientalism, and whiteness.

While much has been written on American Jewish advocacy for Soviet Jews (Beckerman, 2011; Rosenberg, 2003), the racialized origins of the financial resources that were mobilized have yet to be articulated. Rosenberg (2003) maintains that the influence of American Jewish lobbying on American politicians is difficult to assess and was not the deciding factor for Soviet Jewish refugee status (p. 448), but it is undeniable that the financial investment of American Jewish organizations in both advocacy and Soviet Jewish resettlement significantly helped the cause. For example, in the context of the neoliberal turn toward the private financing of government responsibilities, Jewish advocacy organizations like the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Jewish Federation, and HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) subsidized Soviet Jewish resettlement. While this support has been documented, often in celebratory ways, it has yet to be written that, in the context of racial capitalism, these financial resources were the product of Ashkenazi Jewish assimilation into whiteness across the 20th century. Put another way, it was not *Jewish* money that funded Soviet Jewish immigration, but *white* money. Like the analysis of Israeli involvement in the campaign, tracing political and economic influence is crucial for understanding the ways Soviet Jewish migration is inevitably a product of interlocking systems of domination, including racial capitalism (which encompasses white supremacy and antiblackness), settler colonialism, and imperialism. So, too, it is critical knowledge for this project, which looks to mobilize Soviet Jewish immigrant histories toward antiracist and decolonial ends.

A Decolonial, Intersectional Approach to Abolishing Whiteness

The predominantly historical literature on whiteness and immigration leaves several compelling questions unanswered: Is the process of white racial assimilation coerced, tacit, or agentive? Can it be resisted, and if so, how? These questions merit the type of empirical study that Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish whiteness, as a recent and ongoing phenomenon, uniquely makes possible. As a historian of Jewish whiteness, Goldstein (2006) challenges what he sees as an exaggeration of immigrant agency in the literature, arguing that "the story of racial assimilation in the United States cannot be reduced to a simple morality tale" narrated through individuals "choosing" to be white (p. 5). Rather than decry individual complicity, he emphasizes immigrant negotiation of racializing structures, highlighting the ways that they were "pushed toward whiteness by the needs of the larger white society" (p. 5). He goes on to say that "Given such pressures from above, those who wished to enter the mainstream of American life were left with few alternatives" (p. 5). While Goldstein's point necessarily challenges the self-punishing tendency among white liberals, it does little to inspire alternate commitments and radical imaginations beyond whiteness.

In my empirical work, I am interested in Soviet Jewish immigrant takes on what is being done and what *can* be done with the "growing disaffection… from the lures of a white identity" (p. 236) that Goldstein observes among (white) American Jews. How can new white inductees create alternatives to 'entering the mainstream' that may not already exist? If Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants forego loyalty to American whiteness, racial capitalism, and

colonialism, what new commitments can they/we cultivate? Charles Mills (1997) and Stuart Hall (Hall, 1996) inform my goal of locating agency within the racializing process. Mills (1997) argues that just as domination of whites over non-whites requires the explicit or tacit consent of white people to the racial order, so, too, this consent can be disrupted:

> There *is* a real choice for whites, though admittedly a difficult one. The rejection of the Racial Contract and the normed inequities of the white polity does not require to leave the country but to speak out and struggle against the terms of the Contract. …. By unquestioning 'going along with things,' by accepting all the privileges of whiteness with concomitant complicity in the system of white supremacy, one can be said to have consented to Whiteness. (p. 107)

The answer then, is to challenge tacit consent by questioning the unearned privileges, redistributing the unearned power and resources, and struggling (internally and externally) against the very terms of whiteness, which suggest that white-bodied people are inherently more worthy than Black people and people of color. Following Hall (1996), identity, as a relational process of investment, can be the site of both the praxis and study of white racialization. Hall discusses identity as a dynamic, relational process of negotiating subjectification and subjecthood via discursive practices: a process of hailing, relational comparison between self and other, and investment. In my study of white immigrant identity, I interrogate my collaborators' investments in whiteness (including the influences of libidinal forces like shame, fear, and desire), as well as the potential for divestment from the 'Racial Contract.'

While much of the "reconstructionist" literature concerned with the futurity of whiteness attempts to cultivate "positive" "antiracist" white identities (Alcoff, 1998; H. Giroux, 1997; Helms, 1990; Howard, 2016; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998), some scholars have proposed that the very terms of whiteness need to be challenged, or else abolished. Abolitionist approaches, sharing the assumption that a racial contract is fundamentally untenable, offer further insight into how white-identified people may participate in eradicating whiteness (Ignatiev, 1997; Leonardo, 2009; Roediger, 2005). This work argues that, because whiteness and white supremacy are historical constructions of power, so, too, they can and must be destroyed. Abolitionists root in James Baldwin's theorization of whiteness as a spiritual and moral dilemma among people who "believe [they] are white" (Baldwin, 1984) and David Roediger's assertion that whiteness is "nothing but oppressive and false" (Roediger, 1994).

The abolitionist answer to white racial consent is to "break the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity"—that is, to become a race traitor (Ignatiev, 1997). In praxis,

> It would mean responding to every manifestation of white supremacy as if it were directed against them. On the individual level, it would mean, for instance, responding to an anti-black remark by asking, What makes you think I'm white? On the collective level, it would mean confronting the institutions that reproduce race.

Abolition requires white-identified people to both continuously unlearn the "myths of whiteness" (Hambel, 2005) and "to stop participating in racist practices" (Leonardo, 2016, p. 9) – that is, to continuously divest from the very ideologies and systems that benefit us materially, even as the benefits persist. This approach acknowledges that whiteness "is by definition racist" and thus

does not seek to transform whiteness into something positive (Leonardo, 2009, p. 133). Rather, it seeks to abolish the very terms of whiteness to "signal the end of Whites as we know them."

Although the abolition of whiteness is as compelling as it is provocative, especially insofar as it moves beyond the co-opted discourse of "antiracism," Ignatiev's externally-oriented approach does not seriously attend to the internal work that this project requires, nor to the alternative forms of connection and belonging that must be fostered toward abolition. Thandeka's (1999) theorization of *white shame* as the phenomenon underlying investments in whiteness is promising for the ways I want to attend to the libidinal, emotional and psychological aspects of whiteness within an abolitionist project. As Thandeka suggests, attending to the shame resulting from hierarchies that are *internal* to whiteness (including those of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, immigration, ability, etc.) is a crucial prerequisite to more external racial justice work. Similarly, I understand the work of abolition to involve a psychological, spiritual, and embodied interrogation of my own internalized supremacy, antisemitism, colonialism, and other interlocking systems of power.

Leonardo's (2009) neo-abolitionist approach is also promising for a more holistic abolitionist project, as it proposes leveraging elements of reconstruction, such as addressing the material complicity and emotional afflictions of whiteness, toward depriving whiteness of meaning altogether. Specifically, Leonardo suggests that, along with an honest grappling with white racial power, the reconstructionist interest in identity-based belonging beyond race may aid abolitionist efforts. Of course, such pursuits must be more critical and nuanced than white people's simple return to essentialized, imagined version of their own "indigenous" ethnicities (Howard, 2016). I admit that my collaborators have some advantage here, as they are still connected to a set of cultural practices and epistemologies that preceded American whiteness, via their families. At the same time, their presence as Jews was already troubled in the former Soviet Union and their new status as Americans only further complicates their relationship to the land their parents left. Thus, for them, like for any white-identified people, belonging (whether via ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, or interest) can never fully exist outside of power.

Ultimately, whiteness (and race) in the U.S. must be studied and challenged in relation to other axes of power, within broader transnational colonial and imperialist contexts. Among many such frameworks, I am particularly informed by Mignolo's conceptualization of the "colonial matrix of power" or "modernity/coloniality" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012) from Global South decolonial theory (as discussed earlier in this chapter), and the Black feminist analytics of Collins's "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990/2000) and Crenshaw's "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1990). Following Quijano's notion of "coloniality of power," wherein Western domination circulates through the domains of economy, authority, gender/sexuality and knowledge, Mignolo's "colonial matrix of power"[15] refers to "a specific set of imperial/colonial relations that emerged in the Atlantic world in the sixteenth century and brought imperialism and capitalism together" and has since expanded globally (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 39). This concept explains how power functions in the "modern/colonial world and the imperial/colonial expansion of Christian, Western, and Capitalist empires," including the United States. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, this concept is particularly useful for helping me interpret how the relationships between the U.S., the Soviet Union and Israel in the

[15] The authors further define the colonial matrix of power as "a tetragon, consisting of the modern/ colonial state, the imperial/colonial market, the civil colonial society formed by European migrants, and the political society emerging out of the imperial/ colonial history in which these four domains are the sites of struggle for control, domination, and liberation." (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 21).

post-Holocaust and Cold War contexts facilitated my collaborators' immigration and subsequent assimilation in white settlerhood.

This framework is equally helpful for its decolonial visions. Decoloniality, as the response to the violences of modernity/coloniality, imply "the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity," in favor of dignity, self-determination and reciprocal relationship with land (Tlostanova & Mignolo, 2012, p. 17). Not only does such a vision necessarily encompass the abolition of whiteness (as one such violent colonial structure), but it is also compatible with decolonization projects, as articulated by Indigenous leaders in the U.S. and Canada. Decolonization, as the re-establishment of native sovereignty, return of occupied land to native stewardship, and upending of Euro/white ontology, epistemology, and related structures in favor of interdependence and reciprocity is a capacious and creative goal, that would certainly also encompass white abolition (Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). To the extent that colonialism grows into imperialism to enable further accumulation (via global racialized dispossession), so, too, this vision of justice must require the abolition of empires. These orientations encompass the destruction of white supremacy and whiteness, but they do not stop there. They not only divest from power, but invest in life. As indigenizing projects suggest, this involves a complete reimagining of all relationships, not just among humans but between humans, the land, and all living beings, toward collective well-being. And, it requires intentional participation in more just and reciprocal value systems and ways of being.

While global and decolonial frameworks reveal the broader structures of power within which more localized racial grammars take form, Black feminist theorists contribute frameworks for attending to particular experiences of oppression as they emerge from intersecting axes of power. The Combahee River Collective (1977), as well as writers like Audre Lorde and bell hooks drew on the long lineage of Black women's radical thought in discussing the convergences between heteropatriarchy, white supremacy and U.S. imperialism. Later, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) named the "matrix of domination" to conceptualize race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, or axes of power. Rejecting "additive approaches to oppression," in this framework Collins offers that Black feminist thought recognizes that particular systems of oppression comprise an overarching system of domination, with each needing the other to function. Beyond the "big three," Collins acknowledges that other groups may encounter different dimensions of the matrix, such as social class, age, gender, religion, and sexual orientation (p. 286). Ultimately, each axis of oppression is also a potential site of resistance. Leveraging such attention to how systems of oppression "interconnect," Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) offered the analytic of "intersectionality" to denote "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (p.1244). Writing in the context of legal studies, Crenshaw articulated the specific ways Black women were oppressed as *both* Black *and* women (interactionally, not additively), in ways that differed from the experiences of both white women and Black men. This framework has since been used to attend to the many ways that multiple structures of power (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, immigration status) intersect to both oppress and privilege different groups in particular ways.

Considered together, these frameworks enable me to attend to the particular ways that my collaborators occupy both superordinate and subordinate subject positions of power, across global transnational contexts (in particular, the Soviet Union and the United States). Indeed,

Collins suggests that her framework is also applicable to dominant subject positions: "this inclusive model provides the conceptual space needed for each individual to see that she or he is *both* a member of multiple dominant groups *and* a member of multiple subordinate groups" (p. 559). In Chapters 4-7, I discuss my collaborators' social positions (and subsequent identity formation) in relation to multiple axes of power within a colonial and imperial matrix of domination. I attend to the axes of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and religion, while also accounting for particular systems of power like Eurocentrism, orientalism, and antisemitism. This enables me to discuss with complexity the ways their superordinate subject positions (e.g., as white in the U.S., documented, formally educated, and middle-class) interact with their subordinate positions (e.g., Soviet, Jewish, immigrant, queer). I also unpack such complexity within particular identifying categories. For example, in dominant American Jewish contexts, my collaborators are generally privileged by virtue of being white and Ashkenazi (over Sephardic and Jews Mizrahi and Jews of color), but they are also marginalized in relation to white, assimilated American Jews by their perceived Soviet/Russian barbarism, including their lack of religious knowledge, which questions the validity of their Jewishness.

In this study, I thus approach the abolition of whiteness as part of a broader decolonial project. As I engage my collaborators and participants, I imagine this project to involve the reclamation and imagination of what it means to be queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jewish immigrants, in relation to our own histories, the land we find ourselves on, and the people around us. As discussed in Chapter 1 (Introduction), the reclamation of barbarism is one place to start (Slabodsky, 2014). Soviet Jewish immigrants, like other Jews, model minorities and assimilable immigrants, can disidentify (Muñoz, 1999) with the violent "civilizations" that seek to claim them, and instead leverage their own histories of ascribed "barbarism" (e.g., as Soviet, Russian- speaking, queer, Jewish) toward solidarity with oppressed groups and the co-creation of a more just and peaceful world.

Conclusion

Despite the rapid shift in racialization of Soviet Ashkenazi Jews as a result of their transnational migration to the U.S., with few exceptions, critical race scholarship has yet to include study of this group. Likewise, the literature on Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S. does not engage with settler colonialism, racial capitalism and whiteness, nor account for the ways that the assimilated white American perspectives of the scholars themselves limit this work. These shortcomings provide ample opportunity for new, critically-oriented empirical work *by* Soviet Jewish immigrants themselves. Whereas this group has been described as carriers of a disappearing "thin" Jewish culture (Gitelman, 2016) who are uninterested in the study of identity (Aviv & Shneer, 2005), even by sympathetic scholars of our history, Soviet Jewish immigrants can now speak for themselves. We can use our critical orientations to denaturalize structures of domination that have previously gone unnamed and document culture as it persists, rather than dies out. And, we can do this with an urgency and passion that comes from racialized assimilation being not merely theorized, but experienced in our own white(ned) immigrant bodies.

While literature from decolonial and critical whiteness studies has informed my imagination of this project, the next chapter will demonstrate how Education scholarship guided me to design a way for people who share a historical subject position to pursue this project. In the upcoming Methods chapter, I share how Freirean critical pedagogy informs my empirical study, from dialogic interviews to the design and study of a collaborative working group, in

which the core collaborators and participants of my study joined in *collective* pursuit of these ideals.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

In this chapter I present my methodological approach to this project, sharing the intentions behind my research design and explaining how I went about answering my research questions. I begin by reiterating my stake in this work, articulating how I understand knowledge production, and addressing how I relate to others I brought into the project. I identify existing research approaches and illustrate how they inspired my own research design. In the rest of the chapter, I describe the research procedure in greater detail, introducing my collaborators and participants and describing the ways knowledge was both "gathered" (Merrick, 2020) and collectively generated. Here, I discuss my research activities, including the formation and facilitation of a live, virtual praxis group and interviews/structured conversations with group participants and my core "collaborators." I conclude by sharing the ways I made meaning from this abundance of information in order to tell a story and reflecting on the limitations of the study design.

Reiterating the Stakes

While it is my hope that this dissertation will contribute to scholarly fields, including Jewish Studies, Critical Whiteness Studies, Critical Literacy, Queer Migration, and others, this project is, first and foremost, a personal and political one. bell hooks wrote that she came to theory from hurting. So, too, this study is a response to the wounds of my immigration and my resulting assimilation into settler colonial whiteness. Ohlone elder and organizer Corrina Gould often explains that less than two hundred years ago foodways and waterways were abundant and clean here on Lisjan Ohlone land (in the San Francisco East Bay); no one was unhoused or went hungry. Today, people are crowded in tents just down the street from me, while once-pristine waters and skies pose health dangers to many poor people of color.

As Houria Bouteldja (2016) has suggested, geography and geopolitics may distance some of us from these crimes, such as the distance between the laptop on which I am typing and the places where raw materials are extracted by "disposable populations" to make my writing possible. In other cases, the distance shrinks, as when my neighbor in the San Francisco Bay Area, who is Black, tells me that he was recently profiled and arrested by Berkeley police on the very streets where he was raised. Still, so long as I navigate this world with both the comforts of middle-class white modernity and the knowledge of its harmful consequences, the distance never fully collapses. First and foremost, this project is driven by the desire to address these crimes that "have been committed in [my] name or with [my] complicity" (p. 41). I am not motivated by guilt, but by responsibility.

My complicity in American white settler colonialism is complicated by my history as a Soviet Jewish immigrant. Alongside internalized white-body supremacy, my nervous system carries the legacies of Jewish racial subordination as experienced by my relatives in the Soviet Union and Russian Empire. In this project, I attempt to transform my ongoing relationship to the crimes of settler colonialism, white supremacy and racial capitalism in part by working through this history alongside others with similar inheritances. Amidst the incommensurabilities of doing decolonial racial justice work as an immigrant-settler with racial privilege, this project is an attempt to weave myself, and other queer, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, "into the fabric of history" as ethically as possible.

Drawing on insights from different methodological traditions including autoethnography, collaborative inquiry, and participatory action research, I developed a *collaborative qualitative*

case study that involved other queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants not only as informants/ interviewees, but also as collaborators in the design and co-facilitation of a live, virtual group study. Sociologist Kathie Friedman (2007) writes, "Because international migration directly exposes and challenges presumed categories of social and political identification, it offers a window to explore how individuals perceive and construct their identities" (p. 241). Indeed, because some 1.5 and 2nd generation queer, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants are actively negotiating white racial assimilation today, they serve as a case for the empirical study of this phenomenon. Together with long-form interviews, collaborative qualitative methods enable me to investigate whitened immigrants' racial and political identity formation and to probe the potential of intentionally designed virtual spaces for nurturing critical orientations to whiteness. The resulting study thus includes (1) curricula, artifacts, and interviews emerging from a co-facilitated synchronous, virtual group involving 23 "participants" from October 2019 - May 2021, and (2) dialogic interviews / modified oral histories with seven core participants from this group.

My research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants of the 1.5 and 2nd generations (those who immigrated as children or were the first to be born in the U.S.) understand their racialized assimilation into American white supremacy and settler colonialism, from the 1980s to the present?
2. What conditions have inhibited and facilitated the development of critical racial consciousness among members of this group?
3. What roles do collectivity, criticality, and creativity play in contesting the prescriptions of racial assimilation?

These questions elicited individual and collective meaning making from people who share this positionality and the experiences that come with it. They were also autoethnographic, necessitating my own reflexivity as I made personal and collective meaning together with these other storytellers.

Research Methodology

This project is heavily informed by decolonial and critical race scholars, whose work has challenged me to interrogate my role in liberatory movement work, including antiracist scholarship and activism. Tuck & Yang (2012) propose a "politic of refusal" toward justice-oriented research on groups racialized as "other," especially when conducted by white settler scholars. They call on researchers to "... resist the urge to study people (and their 'social problems') and to study instead institutions and power" (p. 815). This critical reframe echoes recent calls from Black Lives Matter activists, racial justice practitioners, and art critics for white people to "do their work" and "get their people"— that is, to join other white people in learning their histories and challenging their own participation in white supremacy. Refusal, then, is part of liberatory political work, "not just a no" but "a performance of that no, and thus an artistic form" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 814). These critiques inspired me to consider my own decade of teaching work in dispossessed communities to which I did not belong: what had driven my entitlement to intervene there? Such critical reflection led me to "study power" by engaging deeply with my own history and positionality and creating ways for others to join.

Following decolonial and feminist scholars, the experiences, feelings, and knowledges of people who navigate colonial structures of power from subordinate and liminal subject positions offer crucial insights into these phenomena (Collins, 1990/2000, 1990/2000; Harding, 2004;

hooks, 1992b; Lorde, 2012; Rich, 1984). Alongside my autoethnographic immigrant, Jewish and queer explorations, this study centers the voices of others from the margins of whiteness who share this positionality. As Hupa scholar Sara L. Chase Merrick (2020) articulates, this lived experience is not merely raw data awaiting analysis, but constitutes knowledge even prior to its scholarly interpretation:

> I am not creating the knowledge, just as I am not creating the acorns, or wood or plants. They are part of a much larger project of creation. Rather I am just gathering what is already out there to create something for all of us, this dissertation. This does not make me an expert but a gatherer and a creator. In this role I now have a responsibility to actually use and create from what collaborators offer to me. This is the contract I enter into when gathering something. I also must give an offering. (p. 53-54)

Merrick's approach challenges researcher expertise and by positioning participants as insightful collaborators in a larger process of knowledge gathering. Whereas collecting raw data is a solitary endeavor, the process of gathering existing knowledge "comes with rules, accountability, responsibility" (54). That is, it is grounded in relationships. Similarly, I understand the seven core participants in my study to be "collaborators," co-teacher/learners, and co-conspirators in the meaning-making I have done through this project. The responsibility and care I feel toward them is present when I ask for their consent, respect their emotional needs (e.g., by not recording intimate breakout rooms during synchronous virtual sessions), and share my writing, including by soliciting their feedback on work-in-progress.

In my study, the knowledge gathering process also involved creating the conditions for collective sharing and learning, both through dialogue and artistic production. I term the approach that I developed for this a "semi-structured, historicized affinity group." Following sociocultural approaches to literacy and learning and Freirean critical pedagogy, I approached meaning making as a relational, participatory and collective endeavor. Paulo Freire's (1968/2000) work on "conscientizacao" (critical consciousness) and Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984/1994) discussions of "ideological becoming" construct learning and identity formation as *relational* processes forged among actors in particular socio-historic contexts. Both theorists describe the ways people come together through dialogue to consider, respond to, and alter existing discourses. Through collective processes grounded in lived experiences, people not only "read the word and the world" to develop analyses of power, but they also intervene into existing structures (Freire, 2005).

As a practitioner of Freirean critical pedagogy, I privileged relationality and collective learning in my research design, choosing to create and study a structured community, rather than work only with individuals. Furthermore, as an artist, I knew symbolic creativity and artistic production could play a powerful role in collective theorization (Greene, 2011; Hull & Nelson, 2009). Tuck & Yang (2014) write, "... we often turn toward art to give language to the intuitive. Using art to think/feel through theory—to decode power and uncode communities— trains our intuition" (p. 814). Hull & Nelson (2009) similarly describe art as "a meeting ground at which multiple life experiences may be better understood and reconciled" (p. 207). And, where reconciliation is not feasible or desirable, art certainly provides a way to explore and express complexity. Framing the group study as a space for both dialogue and artistic production thus opened the potential to access embodied and intuitive knowledges that are integral to understanding the complexities of racial assimilation.

My design of the collaborative backbone of the study— the "historicized affinity group" —was also informed by participatory methodologies including Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Collaborative Inquiry. While my study was not an official PAR project, as participants did not collectively develop and investigate research questions, it nevertheless shares aspects of the participatory methodology, including a "collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem" and "a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation" (McIntyre, 2008; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). In the group, participants committed to attend at least six, 2-hour sessions to collectively investigate queer, Soviet Jewish immigrant relationships to whiteness and settler colonialism. In volunteering their time, they also acted on their desire to reflect both individually and with others who shared this history and positionality. As the researcher, to some extent I built "alliances [with] participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process" (McIntyre, 2008, p. 1; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008) involving them in co-planning and facilitating the group. However, in this first three-month iteration of the group, which I came to call "Season 1," I ultimately made all major decisions about the group study and the broader research project.

The group also followed select tenets of Collaborative Inquiry, an experience-based and action-oriented inquiry methodology intended to produce knowledge that is drawn systematically from the life experiences of participants who share questions or concerns (Bray et al., 2000; Kasl & Yorks, 2002). This methodology draws on the feminist standpoint epistemology discussed earlier, but relies on bringing multiple standpoints (within a group positionality) together for dialogical meaning-making around shared experiences, concerns, and questions. Procedurally, participants engage in a systematic examination of data and lived experience through open dialogue, taking care to address threats to validity. Bray et al. (2000) write that "in collaborative inquiry, the distinction between researcher and subject is eliminated. The goal in getting started is establishing a group of co-researchers/co-subjects who share a burning desire for new knowledge and a willingness to work with others to pursue new avenues of meaning" (p. 51). While participants for the most part shared my excitement to pursue new relationships and knowledge, and I created many avenues for them to co-create the group, I certainly did not eliminate the distinctions between us. Instead, I remained vigilant of my multiple roles as the group initiator, researcher, and co-participant.

Context

In order to study the collective meaning-making of this community, I first had to create it. By announcing the "live virtual group study and art studio [...] for women, trans + nonbinary-identifying Jewish immigrants/settlers from the former Soviet Union to the U.S." in a post on social media (Appendix A), I named and gathered a group that thus far seemed to only exist virtually in a private Facebook group. Social media became the primary context through which I developed connections with the core participants or "collaborators" that I later interviewed for this study. As the August 2019 Call for Participants (Appendix B) announced, this would be:

> a co-facilitated, virtual group that meets online regularly to: discuss, learn together, and respond to issues of U.S. white supremacy, settler colonialism, and racialized capitalism, from our particular subject positions; use art to (re)build and record collective memory– lived, familial, ancestral (no art experience necessary); connect and form relationships.

This first iteration of the group ("Season 1") asked participants to commit to meeting twice a month for two hours at a time via Zoom video conferencing, from November 2019 through January 2020 (six meetings total). As stated in the call, the group followed a co-facilitation model in which I invited participants to brainstorm the guiding questions that would inform the group curriculum and co-plan and co-facilitate individual sessions.

During Season 1's sessions, 23 participants engaged in small group and whole-group dialogue, co-learning and artifact sharing (e.g., art, poetry, photographs, music), guided by questions around immigration, identity, race, class, gender, sexuality, and power. They also shared experiences, such as watching Soviet cartoons, drinking чаи (chai, tea) together, and participating in guided meditations. In between these structured sessions, I hosted weekly informal gatherings during which participants were invited to just hang out on Zoom. After Season 1, participants contributed to a collective zine or samizdat, which was published and distributed publicly. In Season 2, this group—which now called itself Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon (Blue Railcar Collective, a reference to the iconic Soviet cartoon Cheburashka)—grew to 26. Structured virtual sessions continued, alongside new one-off events like holiday celebrations, film screenings, and topical discussions. In Season 3, it expanded to 46 people, including "season participants" who co-planned and attended live sessions, and "general members" who subscribed to the mailing list and attended one-off events (e.g., holiday celebrations). Between Season 2 and Season 3, a group of six participants volunteered to form a stewarding committee for the group, dubbed Domik Druzei (House of Friends). From that point on, they joined me in organizing the group, facilitating ongoing relationship building, and onboarding new members.

I developed the group using a participatory architecture that I had developed through years of teaching (including online) and participatory arts facilitation. I have always thrived off of collective energy and co-learning, and, as an educator and socially engaged artist, I knew that we could create something richer together than any individual could do alone. When I introduced the project, I was transparent about my own interests as an activist and doctoral student, but also created opportunities for everyone to collectively build the group, according to their capacities and desires. For example, after introducing the group's general themes (as seen in Appendix B), I asked participants to discuss their own motivations for joining the group, and directed them to add their interests and questions into a shared GoogleDoc. From there, I "coded" or organized the responses into six sessions, forming a curriculum or learning arc for our time together. Participants were invited, but not required, to co-plan and co-facilitate these sessions.

The values of relationality and collaboration extended through the rest of the group structure, including the attention to relationship building via one-on-one onboarding conversations, chevruta (partner, in Hebrew) pairings, the interactive structure of the structured sessions themselves, the group community agreements living document, and the group zine/samizdat publication that followed the first reason. Nearly three quarters of the participants co-planned at least one session, and, after Season 2, six members volunteered to co-steward the group with me. That being said, not everyone could or wanted to invest the time necessary to co-facilitate sessions or serve on the Domik Druzei/stewarding committee, which required 10–15 hours per week of volunteer work, for personal and structural reasons. Nonetheless, the stewarding committee and I made sure to offer numerous opportunities for informing the structure and content of the group, with varying degrees of time investment, including brainstorming sessions, shared curriculum documents, feedback sessions, and written surveys.

I documented all stages of the project through written memos and audio and video recordings. Structured sessions were video and audio recorded (except from intimate breakout

rooms), while curriculum planning meetings and Domik meetings were documented via written notes. I also collected digitized artifacts, including shared documents, writing, and artwork (zines, performances) that were both shared in sessions and produced collectively outside of sessions. Finally, after Season 1, I conducted one participant survey and on set of interviews with eleven participants about their experiences in the group. After this season, as explained below, I conducted dialogic interviews / modified life histories with seven core participants, or "collaborators." I interviewed each collaborator three times to more deeply understand their experiences of immigration, assimilation, and racialization.

Participants

The 23 participants who answered the call and came to form the group all identified as queer and gender-marginalized, ethnically Jewish people living in the U.S. or Canada, who either were born in the former Soviet Union and/or had been raised by a Soviet caregiver (i.e., 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants). They all identified as white and were all in their 20s and 30s. Aside from these commonalities, participants differed from one another in terms of gender, sexuality, class, neurodiversity and ability, religion, immigration story, etc. Some had been born in the former Soviet Union, while others were the first in their families to be born in the United States or Canada. Most who immigrated had done so as children. While there are certainly older Soviet Jewish immigrants (including my participants' parents), it is likely that the politicized language in the call for participants as well as the social media platforms I used to promote the project spoke to this younger generation. Unlike older generations of immigrants, this group shared the particular experience of being primarily raised in the U.S. and Canada, speaking dominant American/ Canadian-accented English, and thus mostly being read as white Americans/ Canadians. They were thus more educated on American/ Canadian racial histories and more removed from Soviet experience than older generations. These shared characteristics were affordances for my research questions.

The choice to limit the space (and this study) to people self-identifying as queer and gender-marginalized was grounded in several intentions. While I did not define "queerness" to the group nor police its bounds, this self-identification signaled to me both marginal experiences of gender and sexuality and the potential for a shared radical politic. First, I wanted to create a space where participants could share the joys and difficulties they were living as queer and trans people in Soviet Jewish immigrant families that often favored sexual/gender conformity for protection. Even as many forms of white queerness become palatable and sometimes celebrated in the mainstream U.S. and Canada, homophobia, and the fear of deviance in Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish families put some participants in a precarious position: by living authentically, they risked the rupture of the very relationships that separated them from hegemonic American whiteness. I also understood queerness to extend beyond gender and sexuality, especially challenging the traditional gay and lesbian politics of recognition to encompass a political orientation of radical transformation (Cohen, 1997; Muñoz, 2019). Although participants were super-ordinately racialized as white, the contradictions of their queer orientations and cultural and spiritual loss alongside their racial/settler complicity served as conditions of possibility for imagining counter-hegemonic commitments.

Among the group's 23 original participants, I selected seven with whom I conducted long-form interviews, in which I asked them about their individual experiences of immigration, assimilation, race, class, gender, and sexuality. While all 23 group participants (and later, 26 and 46) greatly informed my thinking around my research questions, these seven core "collaborators"

contributed most heavily to the analyses articulated in this dissertation. I selected them to be interviewed in greater depth because they were already very active in the group, sharing deep insights in the sessions, co-facilitating activities, and reaching out to me to discuss the group outside of our formal time together. In addition, six of the seven were members of the stewarding committee, or Domik Druzei. I call them "collaborators" both to distinguish them from the more general group participants, and to name the profound ways they have informed my thinking and praxis, as related to my research questions. In the chapters that follow, I highlight the voices of these seven people as they discuss their own life-long negotiations of identity, migration and power in relation to the work of the Kolektiv.

Below, I include short demographic descriptions of these seven core "collaborators." They have all chosen to use their actual names, rather than pseudonyms. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to them using the pronouns listed below. For those who use both "she/her" and "they/them" pronouns, I alternate between the two. In Chapters 4–7, I present general themes by weaving together the voices of these seven collaborators. For ease, I suggest that readers return to the short descriptions that follow to keep track of them as individuals. To construct these descriptions, I invited my collaborators to describe themselves in 1–2 sentences, and added demographic information relevant to the project:

> Rebecca (she/her), 31, is "a design-researcher and stained glass artist." She is a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Rebecca's Ashkenazi Jewish grandparents and parents immigrated from Gomel, Belarus, USSR and Tbilisi, Georgia, USSR to San Francisco in 1981, via Vienna and Italy. She was born in 1990 in San Francisco. I first met Rebecca when they enrolled in the live, virtual group study in Summer 2019.
>
> Rivka (they/them), 25, is "a cultural organizer, writer, and co-founder of *Hooligan Magazine.*" They are a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Their father immigrated with his family in 1980 from Minsk, Belarus, USSR to Rogers Park, Chicago, via Italy. Their mother and grandmother immigrated in 1988 also to Rogers Park, Chicago from Dushanbe, Tajikistan, USSR, via Italy. Rivka was born eight years later, in 1996, in Chicago, IL. Rivka has three Ashkenazi Jewish grandparents. I first met them when they enrolled in the live, virtual group study in Summer 2019, though by then I had already joined their Facebook group 'the soviet jews r queer.'
>
> Stepha (she/they), 33, is "a disabled educator, writer, and cartographer living and dreaming on occupied Ho Chunk land (Madison, Wisconsin)." They are a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Stepha's father, an Ashkenazi Jew, immigrated from Leningrad (St.Petersburg) to New York City in 1981, via Palestine and Italy. Their mother, who is ethnically Russian with ancestry in western Russia and Belarus, immigrated from Leningrad to New York City in 1988. Stepha was born in Palo Alto, CA in 1989. I first met them in August 2018 when they posed a Queer Personals ad on Instagram with their ex-partner looking for 'radical Russians and crypto-Jews.' A few months later, we met for a walk around Lake Merritt in Oakland, CA.

Luba (she/her), 35, "spends her time nostalgically reclaiming Soviet and immigrant family traditions, researching her and others' ancestry, storytelling in all forms, cultivating and learning to listen to her intuition, and finding joy, connection, and laughter amidst all of life's easiest and more difficult moments." She is based in Oakland, CA and is a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Luba was born in 1987 in Odessa, Ukraine, Soviet Union. Of her four grandparents, three are Jewish. While her maternal grandmother was raised thinking she was part Jewish and part Cossack, but learned later in life that she was not ethnically Jewish at all. In 1988, when Luba was 1 year and 7 days old, she moved from Odessa to San Francisco with her parents and maternal grandparents, who helped raise her. I first met Luba at the White Horse bar in Oakland, CA at a queer, Soviet Jewish meet-up organized via the Facebook group Bay Area Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants in September 2018.

Sasha (she/her), 33, "lives on Ohlone land in Oakland, CA." She was born in 1988 in Rostov-na-Donu, Russia, Soviet Union. In 1992, at 3.5 years old, she moved from Rostov-na-Donu to Phoenix, AZ with her parents, sister, maternal grandmother, and uncle. Both of Sasha's parents are Ashkenazi Jews. I first met Luba at the White Horse bar in Oakland, CA at queer, Soviet Jewish meet-up organized via the Facebook group Bay Area Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants in September 2018.

Irina (she/they), 37, is "an artist, educator and cultural organizer living on the occupied lands of the Three Fires Confederacy: Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi; and also the Myaamia, Inoka, Ho-Chunk, and Menominee, also known as Chicago, IL." They are a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, and a co-founding member of the art collective Krivoy Kolektiv. Irina was born in Minsk, Belarus, Soviet Union in 1984 to Ashkenazi Jewish parents. In 1991, at seven years old, they immigrated to Los Angeles with their mother, father, brother and maternal grandparents. I first met Irina when they enrolled in the live, virtual group study in Summer 2019.

Masha (they/she), 35, is "a somatic psychotherapist, the administrator of a home health agency serving post-Soviet immigrants, and a burnt-out organizer." They are a member of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Masha was born in Kyiv/Kiev in 1986 and immigrated to Chicago with her parents and brother via Austria and Italy in 1988, at two years old. Masha's paternal grandparents were both Jewish, while her maternal grandmother was Jewish and her maternal grandfather was Cossack**.** I first met Masha when they enrolled in the live, virtual group study in Summer 2019.

Research role

Like the people I involve in my study, I too live the phenomena that I am studying and relate to the research questions through my daily lived experience. This is not incidental to my project, but foundational. My positionality as a queer, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant enables me to draw on my love for and knowledge of my community to challenge existing scholarly depictions of Soviet Jews as non-agentive or in need of "saving," blanketly conservative, on-the-verge of extinction, or homogenous (i.e.,, erasing leftist queers). At the

same time, this "insider" role necessitates an interrogation of my subjectivity as a researcher (Pillow, 2003). Despite sharing a niche positionality with my collaborators and participants, I do not share all of their lived experiences or subject positions. Furthermore, I hold several dominant positionalities both within the study (middle class, cis gender, and mostly able bodied and neurotypical) and beyond it (white immigrant–settler, Ashkenazi in relation to many other Sephardic and Mizrahi Soviet Jewish groups).

Because I facilitate and "gather knowledge" from a standpoint that both converges with and diverges from the people I involve in this study, practices of critical self-awareness helped me remain cognizant of how my own biases were influencing my data collection and analysis. Such "reflexivity" involves "an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research in order to produce more accurate analyses of our research" (Pillow, 2003, p. 178). For example, there were times that my interviews flooded me with childhood memories, clouding my ability to stay present with the stories my collaborators were sharing. In these moments, I practiced mindfulness, noticing what was happening and taking breaks through the interviews. I also worked to suspend assumptions and ask follow-up questions, reminding myself that just because I shared some of my collaborators' experiences, did not mean that I understood them. At times (and especially when asked), I shared my own experiences rather than pretend that they did not exist.

After each dialogic interview or разговор (razgovor, conversation), I wrote reflexive memos. Sometimes these were simply necessary because my emotions and reactions were so intense. In the analysis and writing process, I remained vigilant not to extrapolate my own experiences onto those of others. In my writing, there are moments where I explicitly name experiences that differed from mine and/or overlapped with my own, while still attempting to foreground my collaborators' stories. Finally, I shared my preliminary analyses and finalized chapters with my collaborators to generate feedback on my own assumptions.

Research Methods: Knowledge Co-creation and Gathering

From October 2019 through May 2021, I co-generated and gathered knowledge across two phases. The first phase (October 2019–August 2020) saw the most intensive documentation of the live, virtual group study or Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon (through Seasons 1 and 2 of the group) and the first two rounds of dialogic interviews with my seven core collaborators. The second phase (September 2020–May 2021) saw continued documentation of the Kolektiv and the second and third rounds of dialogic interviews with collaborators (Table 1). In total, I collected over fourteen hours of video recordings and 40–50 hours of interviews. This manifested in hundreds of pages of transcripts.

Table 1

Phases of Knowledge Co-generation and Gathering

Phase 1: Oct. 2019 – Aug. 2020	**Phase 2: Sept. 2020 - May 2021**
Live, virtual group study (Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, "semi-structured, historicized affinity group")	
Group Recordings and Artifacts – 12 video-recorded group structured sessions (24 hours) – Notes from session planning meetings and	*Group Recordings and Artifacts* – Notes from monthly stewarding committee meetings – Group documents and slides

<table>
<tr><td>informal sessions (15 documents)
– Group documents and slides
– Artifact: 76-page zine publication
– Video: zine launch performance (May 2020)
– Memos (12 documents)

Surveys and Dialogic Interviews
– Application with 30 respondents and Enrollment survey with 23 respondents (Sept 2019)
– Post-Season 1 survey with Kolektiv participants with 17 respondents (January 2020)
– 11 one-hour interviews with Kolektiv participants, following Season 1 (Feb 2020 - May 2020)</td><td>– Video: ancestral healing performance (October 2020)
– Memos

Surveys
– Jewish holidays survey (Jan 2021) (20 respondents)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Dialogic interviews with seven core collaborators</td></tr>
<tr><td>July 2020: Rounds 1 and 2 of 1.5-hour dialogic interviews with seven collaborators (21 hours)</td><td>August 2020 - May 2021: Rounds 2 and 3 of 1.5-hour dialogic interviews with seven collaborators (11 hours)</td></tr>
</table>

Live, Virtual Group Study or Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon

While the live, virtual group study (or "semi-structured, historicized affinity group") that went on to be named Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon during Season 1 is not discussed explicitly until Chapter 7, it is nonetheless the context from which all other methods and knowledge emerge. Only in convening this project did I meet four out of seven of my core collaborators (I met the other three through Instagram and Facebook before I started the group). Furthermore, the work we did in the group together with many other participants beginning in October 2019 inevitably informed both the questions I later asked in my dialogic interviews and the responses my collaborators gave. Because the group is the first of my methods chronologically, I will address it first.

While Chapter 7 discusses the development of the group in much greater detail, it is important to share here that across the last two and a half years of its existence, the group has been characterized by dynamism and hybridity in terms of formal/informal connections, online/face-to-face interactions, and responsiveness to the ever-shifting political-historical context. In this research project, I gathered knowledge from two phases of the group. Phase 1 (Oct 2019 - Aug 2020) encompassed the founding of the group, Seasons 1 and 2 of programming, and intensive relationship-building. Phase 2 (Sept 2020–May 2021) encompassed Season 3 of the group, including the founding of the Domik Druzei stewarding committee, the growth of the group in size and transition to a model of tiered participation (full season participants vs. general members, who do not attend live structured sessions). Season 4 began after the study properly ended, and is not discussed here.

The tumultuous time that spanned the first three seasons saw the Black Lives Matter protests, Trump presidency, California fires, attacks on Gaza, the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-trans legislation, and most recently the Russian attack on Ukraine, not to mention countless other personal and structural tragedies, as well as life changes and celebrations. The group was fluid

and flexible in response to the needs of the particular political moment, the evolving desires of the members, and the shifting capacities of the organizers and stewards. No two seasons were the same, and the group's leadership did their best to apply the learnings from each season to the design of the subsequent one, even as the terrain under our feet continued to shift.

In addition to the structured learning, shared experiences and dialogic reflection that occurred in synchronous 2-hour Zoom sessions of 23 people, the group catalyzed an abundance of organic and emergent processing and collaborations, especially as personal and creative relationships blossomed. While many of these connective moments were documented in video recordings, written notes, and group artifacts, others went unrecorded (especially in countless Kolektiv email chains, group text threads, and in-person meet ups). Ultimately, the knowledge I co-generated through the group and gathered encompassed 12 video-recorded group sessions, notes from session planning meetings and informal sessions, group documents and slides (included co-created GoogleDocs and GoogleSlides), and personal memos. As discussed in the next section, I also gathered multiple artistic artifacts and conducted two surveys and eleven semi-structured interviews.

Artifacts

The group co-generated multiple digital artifacts that I discuss in Chapter 7, including hand-drawn and digitized illustrations, multimodal GoogleDocs and GoogleSlides from Seasons 1-3, the 76 page, print and digitized zine/samizdat (or self-published document), collectively produced at the end of Season 1, and two video-recorded Zoom performances. As discussed in Chapter 7, this includes written documents such as Community Agreements (an iterative, living document), collectively- generated lists (e.g. ,"our inheritances"), and contributions to shared spreadsheets (e.g., queer post-Soviet Jews ritual library). It also encompasses multimodal documents that were produced synchronously in sessions and during holiday celebrations, including a collective garden imagining our lives in 2040, drawings that represent individuals' practices of "rooting" into their identities and "radiating" via action. Three core artifacts include a 76 page collaboratively produced magazine and two public virtual performances (the launch of the zine and a creative performance related to ancestral healing).

Surveys and Semi-structured Interviews

From the group, I gathered four surveys and conducted 11 semi-structured interviews via Zoom. The first surveys, conducted via GoogleForms, served as the application and enrollment forms for the group and received 30 and 23 responses, respectively (Appendix C and D). This included all of the people who went on to form the group. The third, a feedback survey administered to all 23 Season 1 participants in January 2020, received 17 responses (Appendix D). The responses from this survey informed the semi-structured interviews that I conducted with select Kolektiv participants following Season 1, from February 2020-May 2020. The fourth survey was developed in Season 3 by Rebecca and a team of co-facilitators who were specifically interested in learning more about Kolektiv participants' relationships to Judaism.

I selected 11 participants (out of 23) to be interviewed about their experience in the Kolektiv, based on their completion of the post-Season 1 survey and the insights they expressed there. I included a range of participants, including both those who had been heavily involved and quite affirming through Season 1 and participants who had been less involved or who had expressed criticism or concerns, both in their survey responses and in personal communication. While I used an interview protocol (Appendix E), I also structured the interviews by sharing

participants' survey answers with them and asking them to elaborate. I recorded the interviews via audio and video and took written notes. The third survey, created by Rebecca in Season 3, specifically asked participants about their experience with Jewishness and Judaism and their interest in participating Jewish holiday observance; it received 20 responses (Appendix F).

Dialogic Interviews

While Chapter 7 focuses on the collaborative work of the Kolektiv, Chapters 4-6 weave the stories of my seven core collaborators, as shared in a series of interviews that may be described as dialogical, semi-structured or modified oral histories (Creswell, 2017; Thompson 2012; Way et al., 2015; Denzin, 2001). Conducted as three separate 1.5-2 hour sessions with each collaborator, they offered individuals the space to narrate their own life histories as they related specifically to questions of immigration, ethnic and racial identity, queerness and politicization (Table 2). The interviews were chronologically structured, with the first focusing on immigration and childhood/adolescent socialization and the second on racial consciousness and politicization through adolescence and adulthood. In the third interview, I covered any relevant topics I had not been able to ask about in the first two interviews, and asked questions about my collaborator's current imaginations and related work. While I had initially planned to conduct all of my interviews in person via an intentional чайпитея (chaĭpiteia or tea drinking) ritual, the COVID–19 pandemic relegated most of my interviews to Zoom video conferencing. The interviews of two Bay Area collaborators were an exception to this, conducted in person under the trees in a local park and in their backyards.

Table 2

Foci of Dialogic Interviews with Collaborators

Interview 1 (1.5-2 hours) Focus on Childhood and Adolescence	Interview 2 (1.5-2 hours) Focus on Adolescence and Adulthood	Interview 3 (1.5-2 hours) Focus on Adulthood
– Identity / Self-Definition – Immigration and Arrival – Housing and Schooling – Cultural Assimilation – Jewishness and Antisemitism	– Racial and Class Consciousness and Identity – Gender and Sexuality – Politicization – Settler Colonialism in U.S. and Palestine	– Queer, post-Soviet Jewish Identity Today – Political Beliefs and Visions

My collaborators were not strangers to me, nor was I a stranger to the content of the interview questions. By the time of the interviews, we had been discussing these topics together both informally and through our co-facilitation of the Kolektiv. While I prepared three "interview protocols" to guide our conversations (Appendix G), I did not position myself as a rigid or neutral listener in them. Instead, I acknowledged my own lived experience of these questions and phenomena and incorporated it where relevant or when asked, as a way to facilitate an authentic dialogue or разговор (razgovor, conversation) and encourage further sharing. Still, as a researcher or "knowledge gatherer," I remained vigilant to maintain the focus on my collaborator and to grant them as much space as possible to share their stories and perceptions.

This approach challenges traditional qualitative interview techniques that assume some objectivity on the part of the interviewer, and are corroborated by reflexive and dialogic interview methods (Denzin, 2001; L. Harvey, 2015). The dialogic or semi-structured approach enabled me to follow the interest of each collaborator, asking follow up questions and making decisions to cut particular questions as I kept my broader goals and research questions in mind. When I felt we had reached a point of emotional or somatic saturation, I stopped the interview. Several collaborators shared that the interviews were beneficial, helping them crystalize certain insights, consider certain questions for the first time, and recognize their knowledge gaps in their own immigration stories. Others described them as emotionally intense, provoking buried insights and memories.

Meaning-Making / Analysis

Between the abundance of gathered knowledge and the meta-stories that I crafted to address my research questions lies the process of identifying themes and patterns, known in most qualitative research literature as "thematic coding" (Miles et al., 2020). In addition, I approached the digitized artifacts as rich expressions of participants' meaning–making and conducted visual and multimodal analyses to relate their potential meanings to my research questions (Gubrium & Harper, 2013; Hull & Katz, 2006). I also utilized image elicitation techniques in my interviews, offering the artists themselves a chance to share their intentions and the meanings they hoped to convey in their work (Gubrium & Harper, 2013). The meaning-making procedure I followed to address my research questions is represented below in Table 3.

Table 3

Meaning–Making / Analysis Procedure

Research Question	Knowledge Sources & Measures	Meaning–Making Methods
How do 1.5 and 2nd generation queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants understand their racialized assimilation into American white supremacy and whiteness, from the 1980s to the present?	– Dialogic interviews with core collaborators – Kolektiv session recording – Kolektiv artifacts – Notes and memos on the group	– Thematic identification – Artifact analysis
What conditions inhibit and facilitate the development of critical racial consciousness among members of this group?	– Dialogic interviews with core collaborators – Kolektiv session recordings – Kolektiv artifacts – Kolektiv surveys and interviews – Notes and memos on the group	– Thematic identification – Artifact analysis
What roles do collectivity, criticality, and creativity play in contesting the prescriptions of racial assimilation?	– Kolektiv session recordings – Kolektiv artifacts – Kolektiv surveys and interviews – Notes and memos on the group	– Thematic identification – Artifact analysis

Before thematically analyzing the knowledge I had gathered, I transcribed both the dialogic interviews and semi-structured interviews, using transcription software and cleaning up

the transcripts when necessary (such as when participants spoke Russian). I intentionally left the Kolektiv session video/audio recordings untranscribed to honor the anonymity of Kolektiv participants, preferring to review those instead via session planning notes, slide decks, memos and surveys. Working deductively from my research questions, I generated broad deductive themes (or codes) related to assimilation, ethno-racial identity, gender/sexuality, stages of racial consciousness, structures of racial capitalism, reifications of power, and challenges to power. At the same time, I re-read the materials I had gathered multiple times, including interview transcripts, survey results, documents related to group sessions, and artifacts. Working inductively, I labeled particular quotes and sections of the documents with themes that I recognized, such as caregiver racism, white interpellation, immigrant shame, gender shame, white saviorism, white martyrdom, etc. I considered how these individual themes could be combined into increasingly conceptual categories and arguments that reflected the complexity of the case, while also considering relevance to broader theory.

While I did consider the interview responses and artistic production of each of my collaborators holistically, my approach was more directed toward generating broad themes across the seven individuals. Once I recognized a broad pattern, I compared the experiences of collaborators on that topic, conducting a "cross-case analysis" (Creswell, 2013). For example, it emerged early on that class mobility had led to many of their families moving from more urban, low-income neighborhoods where their families had initially settled, to more suburban, middle-class and whiter neighborhoods. In some cases, this move was accompanied by the fracturing of intergenerational ties, as grandparents were not invited to move with the nuclear family. At the same time, given the small sample size, I explicitly looked out for irregularities and exceptions to seeming patterns. For example, the two participants whose families lived in San Francisco did not experience this pattern of suburbanization. Furthermore, one participant spent more time with her grandparents than her parents. Finally, I used emergent patterns and inconsistencies to develop thematic generalizations that responded to my research questions. As I generalized the themes, I compared them to existing literature on relevant topics, including literature on whiteness and identity, race and immigration, and critically–oriented online pedagogy.

A final step of my procedure involved sharing my findings with my core collaborators, or "member checking" (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Before writing my findings chapters, I created a memo of findings as a GoogleDoc and solicited the group's feedback. They were able to make important recommendations, including highlighting points I had overlooked or experiences I had forgotten about. After drafting my chapters, I again shared them with my seven core collaborators. I asked them to review the accuracy of my claims and consider their preferences regarding confidentiality. To keep the writing process manageable, I chose not to share my work-in-progress with people from the larger Kolektiv who were not directly mentioned or named in the findings. I realize there is a limitation to this choice, as they may have contested particular interpretations I make (particularly in Chapter 7) or offered additional insights I did not articulate. I take responsibility for this choice and identify the analyses that I include in Chapters 4–7 as my own, even as they have also been heavily informed by Kolektiv participants.

Chapter 4: Negotiating Racialized Assimilation as New Arrivals

> *[In third grade, we moved] into our first house in North Phoenix, which is really suburby. We had our own pool. And it was track homes. They had made three versions of houses, you know. There's a one-level house, a two-level house, and then a three car garage, one-level house. . . . My parents bought that house all cash because they didn't understand credit. . . . I remember as soon as we moved in, my mom walked around asking the neighbors what the good schools were. And then I remember, second grade going into third grade, we went and checked out both of the schools and one of them was in a Latino neighborhood. And my mom was like, not this one. This is in a bad neighborhood. And the one that was in a more white suburby neighborhood, she was like, oh, yeah, this one's the good school*. —Sasha

In this description, Sasha narrates her Soviet Jewish immigrant family's first years in the U.S. As she speaks, it is almost as if she reverts to her eight-year-old self, visualizing the neat rows of track homes and the glistening swimming pool that were a material upgrade, albeit a conformist one, after the series of Phoenix apartments her family had moved through in the years prior. At the same time, this return to childhood drudges up less-rosy memories, raising complex questions for the racially conscious immigrant adult self. Given that Sasha's parents came to the U.S. only a few years earlier without intergenerational wealth, how were they able to purchase a house with cash? And after only four years in the country, how did Sasha's mother conclude that Latino neighborhoods and schools were "bad," while white ones were "good"? As a Soviet Jewish immigrant, what did the coded words *good* and *bad* mean to her in this racialized capitalist context? And, finally, how did these choices affect Sasha herself? Sasha's story captures many of the questions and tensions that guide this chapter's focus on new immigrants' negotiations of housing and schooling. My collaborators, who lived their parents' choices as children but now espouse critical racial consciousness, contextualize decisions around housing and schooling both in family histories of scarcity and antisemitic exclusion *and* in the advantages of whiteness and Jewishness. The legacies of these familial "investments" continue to impact them as they negotiate both their material benefits and personal and social harms.

Grounded in the critical historical context offered in Chapter 2, in this chapter I politicize dominant narratives of Soviet Jewish migration and demonstrate how my collaborators' parents took advantage of opportunities that were structurally afforded to them as desirable racialized commodities and imagined settlers. Through an analysis of my collaborators' immigration and resettlement histories, I show how they benefited materially from their proximity to whiteness, even as this racial assimilation also came with negative consequences. Specifically, I demonstrate how my collaborators' families were assimilated into U.S. racial capitalism through the transfer of "whiteness as property" (Harris, 1993), the transfer of white wealth accumulated in a racial capitalist system, especially via housing and schooling. Moved by fears of precarity and dreams of their children's financial security that were grounded in their own Soviet Jewish histories, my collaborators' immigrant parents pursued home ownership and education as private goods within the context of American racial neoliberalism. I show that the resulting proximity to middle class whiteness facilitated my collaborators' assimilation into the formally educated, white (upper) middle class, offering them material benefits and physical safety but also eroding their connections to Soviet Jewish history, epistemology, and culture.

Emigration

I begin this chapter by sharing the motivators behind my collaborators' families' migrations, identifying financial desire and imagined relief from antisemitism, along with various personal factors, as core motivators among families who were often in internal disagreement. I also document the difficulties these families faced in securing permission to emigrate and in their actual journeys to the United States. My goal is to provide necessary context for the parental decisions related to housing and schooling that are to come. I also begin this way to offer complexity, nuance, and compassion for migration stories that I will largely tell through a focus on the ways my collaborators' families navigated racialized structures.

Complicating Motivations for Migration

If Soviet Ashkenazi Jews in the 1970s through early 90s by and large had access to education, employment, and housing and were generally safe from violent attacks (as chronicled in Chapter 2), then why did my collaborators' families, like so many other Soviet Jewish families, emigrate when they were offered the chance? While narratives propagated by American politicians and the American Jewish establishment tend to assume that Soviet Jews were fleeing political repression or religious persecution, my collaborators' stories challenge these assumptions, foregrounding economic desire, imagined freedom from antisemitism, and various personal factors as motivators, and suggesting intra-family contestation. While each of their elders may offer their own narrations of why they left, those who emigrated as children or were the first to be born in the U.S. weave together what they've been told over the years to make their own meaning of their families' migration stories:

> Irina (37 years old, immigrated from Minsk, Belarus, USSR in 1991, at age 7): I mean, I was told it was because of me and me being sick. My dad says it was for my grandma, so she could take vacations in Mexico. This is his тёща (tёshcha, mother-in-law). I know my dad really didn't want to go, and my parents almost got divorced because of it. He really believed in the socialist Soviet dream, and he didn't want to go to this capitalist country. I think my mom would probably say it's for better opportunities. I think my grandparents would probably say antisemitism.
>
> Sasha (33 years old, immigrated from Rostov-na-Danu, Russia, USSR in 1992, at age 3.5): It was definitely economic, like more opportunity, за нас (za nas), yeah, for the kids. . . . I think my family was okay. I think we always had what we needed . . . but we didn't always have what we wanted, you know. That sort of thing.
>
> Luba (35 years old, immigrated from Odessa in 1988, at age 1 year, 7 days): My бабушка (babushka, grandmother) is the one that was really pushing for us to leave. My great grandfather was a Yiddish writer taken by the KGB for some texts he wrote. And in 73...72...74… one of those years, somebody came to my great grandparents' door—and it was someone that was in prison with my great grandfather—who kind of told them the story of what happened to him . . . and he never had a trial. And he ended up bringing his jaw to the door, which is crazy. After that, my babushka started being like, "We have to leave. This is really messed up. There's nothing good left for us here." My family was trying to leave for more than 10 years. My dad really didn't want to go because he was a

> veterinarian, and he was making a lot of money on the black market. And my mom . . . it was her family, so I can't imagine that she would have stayed."
>
> Masha (35 years old, immigrated from Kiev in 1988, at age 2 years, 3 months): My dad was really into Western culture. He was hustling really hard on the black market and had a lot of illegal music. I mean, I think he just saw the U.S. as blue jeans and rock n' roll. . . . My parents almost talked about our immigration story like they were gaming the system. Like we didn't have it as bad as those others, but we saw an opportunity. We were like, cool, let's just take it.
>
> Rebecca (31 years old, born in the U.S., parents immigrated from Gomel, Belarus, and Tbilisi, Georgia): The story that I was told or that I'm always told by my grandma is that Jews weren't treated well. They were discriminated against. The Soviet Union sucked [laughs]. It was hard to have any material success or even material variety, even with food. And yeah, that America just was a place of prosperity and success and individual growth, and all of that sounded vastly appealing, in contrast to the Soviet Union, which was oppressive and uniform and everybody had to be equal, but it was so corrupt, so there wasn't a trust behind that equality.

These narratives suggest that for my collaborators' families, the Soviet Union represented economic insecurity, cultural and ethnic oppression, and political mistrust, while the United States offered the promise of economic opportunity and prosperity alongside cultural and ethnic/racial freedom. As Irina, Sasha, Masha, and Rebecca suggest, some of their parents were economically driven. This was less a question of basic needs than of seeking more material opportunity and even cultural variety in a place that would not exclude them as Jews. While they "had what they needed," to use Sasha's phrase, parental desires for professional opportunity and economic prosperity (either for themselves or their kids) seemed to exceed what was available in the Soviet Union, whether on account of the communist regime or because they were subjected to certain social exclusion (from some universities and professions) as Jews. For example, Rebecca's babushka routinely talked about discrimination against Jews and shared stories like going to a school and pleading with them to reconsider accepting her uncle (who had "perfect" grades). Her babushka chalked up his rejection to antisemitism. Perhaps families like Luba's and Rebecca's knew that in the United States they might not be excluded for being Jews as they had been in the Soviet Union. From this vantage point, the U.S. promised clichés like "opportunity," "prosperity," "success," and "individual growth."

While antisemitism did limit professional opportunities, by and large, these immigration narratives were not driven by financial desperation, fear of physical harm, or religious persecution, as has been assumed by American master-narratives of Soviet Jewish migration, but rather, by dreams of stability and prosperity[16]. In the Soviet Union, my collaborators' parents and grandparents were engineers, veterinarians, nurses, pianists, geographical surveyors, and were financially comfortable. In fact, Luba's father did not want to leave "because he was a veterinarian, and he was making a lot of money on the black market." Furthermore, while my

[16] My collaborators' stories challenge the false American narrative that Soviet Jews were fleeing religious persecution and poverty. They are corroborated by Steven Gold's scholarship, which states that by the 1970s–90s, many Jews in the western Soviet Union were secular and had "very high levels of education, often in technical and professional fields" (Gold, as cited in Gitelman, 2016, p. 109).

collaborators' elders were indeed seeking some sort of economic and/or political liberalism and stability, as well as an escape from ethnic or racial antisemitism, they were not religiously motivated. Owing to Russification, antisemitism, and Soviet-enforced secularism, by the 1970–90s, most Soviet Ashkenazi Jews were long estranged from Judaism and had developed Soviet and *ethnic* Jewish identities, not religious ones. For example, Luba's grandmother was desperate to leave the Soviet Union on account of the antisemitic ethic/racial violence her family suffered, but she was not seeking to pursue a religious Jewish identity.

At the same time, the violence of Soviet history and the general financial austerity and political instability of the USSR in the 1980s and early 90s drove many parents to feel their children's (or future children's) professional and financial opportunities may be limited, and to seize the chance to leave when it was offered. Without having formally interviewed my collaborators' elders, simply reflecting on how the historical traumas of the last hundred years manifested in their families, as well as my own, informs my understanding of these migrations. Whether via Soviet and Nazi antisemitism or on account of general Soviet state violence, all of our relatives were somehow persecuted, displaced, imprisoned, or killed. Several of our (Jewish and non-Jewish) great grandfathers were sent to gulags, while many of our grandparents fought against the Nazis or were displaced during the war and forced to work in labor camps. It is because of these recent traumas that my mother repeated throughout my childhood that she did not trust the Soviet and Russian governments, which she saw as ruthless. Now, the invasion of Ukraine has only confirmed her suspicions.

Any meta-narrative that may be emerging, however alternative, is complicated by contention within families themselves and by personal and idiosyncratic motivators for migration. For example, Irina's father did not want to immigrate for ideological reasons, while Luba's was coveting his financial stability in the Soviet Union. In some families, one or both parents wanted to emigrate, while grandparents followed reluctantly. In others, like Luba's, maternal grandparents drove the migration, while their children and grandchildren followed. Likewise, my own family's migration can't be told in a single story, and the economic and ethnic reasons for migration are tangled together with interpersonal conflict. My mother says we left because of political instability, while my father shares stories of antisemitism and hopes for more professional opportunity. Over time, I learned yet another story: living space in Moscow was scarce, and after a family argument over a квартира (kvartira, apartment), there just wasn't enough room for everyone to live in peace. My father wanted to leave (and was invited by his cousin to help with a professional opportunity), and my mother agreed, preferring to move across the world rather than to fight for space in her own living room.

The Costs of Leaving

Even as my collaborators' families were offered structural advantages, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, they also faced tremendous adversity just for attempting emigration. Applying to leave the Soviet Union carried professional repercussions and social ostracism, for both parents and grandparents. For some families, these threats caused internal family conflicts, delayed the immigration process by decades, and resulted in the loss of livelihood. Masha says,

> They had all of their paperwork and everything ready in the 70s. And they got spooked because they didn't want— their bosses had to give them разрешения (razresheniia, permission). And they got spooked. And so it didn't work out for them to do it. And there

> was other stuff going on, because I think parents also had to give them permission. I think my mom's mom was very reluctant to give permission.

Regardless of age, all adults who were seeking to emigrate before the fall of the Soviet Union had to receive official permission from their employers and from their own parents. People with a high level clearance, with access to classified data, would not be able to leave. Luba shares,

> When they put in the papers, both my grandparents lost their jobs. My babushka was an architect. I think my dedushka was an engineer too, but they lost their jobs. My grandpa went into a huge depression. My babushka became a seamstress. The family pulled money together to purchase a sewing machine, which was really expensive at the time. She started making bras.

Family members granting their children permission had to quit their jobs and formally leave the Communist party, whether they themselves were emigrating or not; they were considered traitors. In this way, while many immigrants have to give up their professions in their new countries, some of my collaborators' elders had to do so before leaving.

For others, the migration journey itself was challenging, as they had to spend months in transit in Vienna or Rome, awaiting immigration interviews and legal papers. The conditions of immigration depended on the year and the particular policies that were in place between the Soviet Union, the U.S., and Israel at any given time. Masha's family went through Italy and Vienna, where she still remembers her older brother selling jewelry boxes on the street. "I know that they had a bunch of шкатулки (shkatulki, jewelry boxes) with them that they were selling. One of the bags of luggage was just шкатулки, the pearlescent kind." Some families, like Luba's, were already in transit but still did not know whether they would end up going to Israel or the United States:

> We left when I was eight or nine months old. I was a baby. And then we were there for a couple of months waiting for papers because we were supposed to go to Israel. Everything was getting figured out. My grandpa always said that it wasn't even clear if we were coming to the U.S. when we were there.

Unlike Masha and Luba's families, mine and Irina's were fortunate enough to immigrate directly to the U.S. through family sponsors. Still, on the eve of emigration, my parents had airplane tickets to both Israel and the U.S. We ended up leaving on an Israeli exit visa but actually arriving in the U.S.

All of this says nothing of the costs of leaving behind family members, friends, traditional foods, language, culture, and familiar childhood places. Recently, my dad told me that immigrating felt like dying and being born into a new life. He shared this over the phone, but I heard the tears in his eyes. When my parents left the Soviet Union, they ruptured connections with family members and lifelong friends, who would have otherwise been involved in raising me and my sister. They left the places that held their childhood memories and the memories of their parents and grandparents. When my grandfather unexpectedly passed away in Moscow, the U.S. government denied my mother the visa she needed to attend his funeral. She closed the door to her bedroom for several days, and never talked to us about it. Considered together, these experiences of immigration have certainly been traumatic, regardless of our parents' material

advantages or their resilience. This trauma has been passed to my collaborators, even if it is still too recent and painful to discuss in words.

Resettlement

Refugee Status and American Jewish Organizations: Bridges to Middle-Class Whiteness

Dreaming of a more stable and prosperous livelihood in the U.S., in some cases for a decade or longer, my collaborators' parents instead arrived to a neoliberal context characterized by privatization and an eroded social safety net (Melamed, 2006). Public goods like healthcare, housing, and schooling had become commodities that were sold in a marketplace governed by racial capitalism and were only growing increasingly precarious with the neoliberal turn. Cedric Robinson articulated racial capitalism as "the tendency of European civilization through capitalism […] not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones" (1983, p. 26). Following Robinson, as well as David Harvey's (2011) discussion of capitalist "accumulation by dispossession," Kelley (2017) further explains racial capitalism as the dependence of capital accumulation on racialized systems, including slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Melamed (Melamed, 2006) states it bluntly: "capitalism *is* racial capitalism." Similarly, neoliberalism, as an exaggerated form of capitalism that privileges the privatization of public goods and deregulation of financial markets, is also already racialized.

While my collaborators' Soviet parents brought little money and now assets with them, in this precarious racial neoliberal environment, their official status as "refugees" and their connection to (white) American Jews proved to be invaluable resources. Like some others arriving from Communist regimes in the 1980s–90s, including from Cuba, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia, my collaborators' parents came to the U.S. on refugee visas. This entitled them to a slew of benefits not extended to other (non-refugee) immigrants, including "permanent residency status, the right to work in the U.S., . . . public assistance, and a variety of resettlement services" such as relocation support and cash assistance (Gold, 1995, p. 3). These services were administered by American Jewish agencies[17] that were

> highly centralized, integrated, long established, well funded, and few in number. Due to their access to matching grants, they enjoy a level of government and private funding per refugee which is considerably greater than that allocated for most other groups. (p. 131)

Although these organizations were financed by the government and by Jewish American donors, it was not the donors' Jewishness, but rather their gradual inclusion into *whiteness*, that enabled their philanthropy. Though organizations like HIAS and JFCS have since gone on to support non-Jewish refugees, in the 1980s and 90s, my collaborators were the beneficiaries of such inter-Jewish support transfers of white wealth.

They arrived only as young children, but most of my collaborators shared some memory of receiving this kind of institutional support. For example, Luba recalls that her family was initially supported by government subsidies welfare, a Jewish employment program, and "*a lot* of help from Jewish Family and Children's Services." Her parents attended school and worked,

[17] Rebecca also shared, "The post-Soviet immigrant community now has its own philanthropic arms, likely due to these kinds of privileges afforded through earlier waves of immigration. I remember a catering gig at this JFCS [Jewish Family and Children's Services] emigre fundraiser and hearing FSU folks tell their stories" (personal communication, April 2022).

while her grandparents received benefits including social security, affordable housing, in-home support services (IHSS), paratransit, and access to a day center—services that her babushka accesses to this day. In addition to the citizenship pathway offered by refugee status, such governmental financial support made it possible for my collaborators' parents to secure employment, attend school, and care for aging parents.

Jewish organizations like Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and Jewish Family Services also provided my collaborators' families with fast naturalization, access to welfare services, financial support, material goods, and small comforts. Irina says, "We came through HIAS. And then it's hard [to say]. We did definitely have help. I remember moving. We had an apartment. We had a car. We had furniture." Resettlement was certainly not easy for any of my collaborators' families, but such basic resources, which were not afforded to all refugees or immigrants, were crucial for their establishment in the country. Beyond such basics, nearly all of my collaborators have memories of receiving stuffed animals and dolls from Jewish organizations. Sasha recalls Jewish American volunteers greeting her family at the Phoenix airport with stuffed teddy bears in hand. I still remember a stuffed platypus gifted to me by a Jewish Family Services employee; it was my first American toy.

While most stories told of American Jewish support for Soviet Jews are decidedly colorblind, this intra-Jewish solidarity must also be acknowledged as a transfer of resources from one predominantly white group to my collaborators' families, who were also now to be seen as white.

White American Jews as Bridges to Assimilation

Material and Cultural Resettlement Support. White American Jews (and sometimes non-Jews) who felt affinity for my collaborators' families offered them material support and American cultural knowledge, further aiding their assimilation into the white middle class, for better and for worse. Whether they were out to "Save the Soviet Jewry," were motivated by a more general American do-good-ism, saw us as bridges to their own estranged family lineages, or were simply curious, in my collaborators' childhood memories, American Jews sought out the new arrivals, rather than the other way around. Somehow, they just appeared one day. Masha remembers one American Jewish family friend "who really just connected with us because he wanted help with translating documents that he had discovered from his family. You know, some sort of archival lineage family tree shit." He saw in Masha's Russian-speaking parents a chance to connect with his own Eastern European Jewish lineage, from which he was presumably more estranged than her own immigrant family.

Sometimes these early connections blossomed into relationships and sponsorships that offered sustained material and cultural support. Sasha reflects on one American couple's help:

> A.P. taught my dad how to drive . . . who my parents are still friends with and who came to my sister's wedding. My dad was used to manual or something. She had to keep slapping his leg to get him to stop trying to push on both at once. They helped my parents get a car, an old Cadillac, after they won it through a Jewish organization. They hooked us up with an apartment. I think they helped us get on food stamps.

While this may sound banal, such basic resources are integral to securing employment, especially in the Phoenix suburbs, where Sasha's family resettled. Gold (1995) confirms that

> Jews from the former Soviet Union have another advantage that most recent immigrant groups lack: access to established—and prosperous—communities in the U.S. By virtue of their connections to American Jews (who have worked to bring them here), Soviet Jews have well connected sponsors when they arrive. (p. xiii)

While nearly all immigrant groups form networks with those who came before them, not all have access to relationships with "established" and "prosperous" communities, the way my collaborators' families did. The "wages of whiteness" (Roediger, 2000)—or material benefits of whiteness— that many white(ned) American Jews had collected throughout the 20th century were now being passed on to the new arrivals, and with them, an image of how white American middle class-ness ought to look and feel.

Beyond providing material and practical aid, these relationships with established middle-class white American Jews also exposed my collaborators to white American (upper) middle class lifestyles, culture, and values. Sasha recalls two "really nice and helpful" American woman taking her to a Renaissance Faire for the first time, certainly a place her family would not have visited on their own, not only for financial reasons but also because it would be completely outside of their cultural imagination. Remembering the event transports her back to childhood: "I remember the wax hands and everything being a lot of money, but this volunteer I loved got me and my sister face painting." In the commonsense understanding, Renaissance Faires are entertaining carnivals that "bring history to life," but they are also ideological and pedagogical sites of socialization. While Sasha was certainly not aware of it as a child, she was being invited into the dominant (white) American celebration of Western European culture and modernity, a theme that would continue throughout my collaborators' assimilatory socialization and education. Just as this special event was pedagogical in its socializing effects, so too were invitations to the homes and social engagements of American Jews. Masha remembers accompanying her parents' American Jewish friend, who was gay, to a lake house in the "Jewish Hamptons" of Michigan with "a ton of white Jewish community." There, she was exposed to the way one group of affluent white Americans spoke, acted, and related to one another—something that was simply not available in her immigrant family and broader Soviet community. She was also exposed to homosexuality. Given that her own parents were homophobic (and she would eventually identify as queer), it was powerful for her to witness and connect with a gay person, especially one her parents approved of. At the same time, she witnessed a particular version of American homosexuality that was also white and moneyed.

Reflecting on my own childhood, I remember the secular Jewish Americans that befriended my family with fondness and curiosity. They bought me my first Halloween costume (a leopard I pronounced *leo-pard*) and invited us to our first Thanksgiving—and our first Christmas. As my collaborators gradually assimilated into the white middle class, along with Новый Год (Novyĭ God, New Year), the most important Soviet holiday, many adopted Thanksgiving (and some even Christmas) as their own family rituals. These experiences, some of the earliest and most vivid outside of the immigrant home, suggest that American Jewry served as a bridge to a broader Americanization that was Eurocentric and colonial, secular yet Christian, and perhaps inclusive of sexual minorities in its promise of white, middle-class prosperity. In this way, day trips, vacations, and holidays served as pedagogical sites for what being an American, Jewish American, and white American is and ought to be.

Transfers of Property. My collaborators' parents' proximate relationships to Jewish American "whiteness as property," or inherited material white entitlements, often resulted in a transfer of resources that aided their own immigrant aspirations. Several of my collaborators shared that, in their early years of resettlement, their parents or grandparents were employed as care workers for middle-class or wealthy Jewish families, caring for both the young and the elderly. This work not only offered an immediate infusion of cash but also facilitated a greater transfer of symbolic and material "property"—such as connections to well-resourced schools. For example, Luba's mom was nannying for a family who encouraged her to enroll Luba in an expensive private school. While Luba's mom fell into a much lower income bracket than the other families, she nevertheless was able to pay highly subsidized tuition and access this education for her daughter, which was otherwise being enjoyed by "super white, very privileged families." Luba's mom's proximity to white resources, via her employment, offered her a way to divest from a system that she saw as undesirable (in no small part because of the presence of Black children) and to locate her daughter in proximity to an affluent white community.

Sasha's family's story of purchasing their first home offers an even more direct example of the transfer of whiteness as property. She recounts,

> My mom was taking care of these elderly sisters. It was one of her side hustles and they were very wealthy. And one passed and left her some money, and then the other passed and left her some money. Yeah. And I don't know how much . . . but yeah . . . . She was definitely connected through the Jewish contacts because they were Jewish. There's no other way she would have met them.

As a result of this connection, her parents were able to purchase a house within seven years of immigrating to Phoenix. While an anomaly, this anecdote embodies the entanglement of white Jewish Americans and Soviet Ashkenazi Jews in the figurative and material whiteness as property. In this case, the inheritance helped Sasha's family purchase their own home, transferring the baton of white property ownership (itself the result of racial capitalism) from the long-established Ashkenazi Jewish Americans to the *new* or soon-to-be (Soviet) Jewish Americans.

These stories suggest that these moneyed Jewish Americans felt some affinity for my collaborators' parents, relating to them not only as commodities to be exploited for their labor but also as relatable human beings worthy of investment. Similarly, Masha's American Jewish family friend had felt an affinity for her family on account of their shared ancestral histories in the Pale of Settlement and saw her as worthy to invite on exclusive trips. These anecdotes diverged from earlier accounts of assimilated Jewish Americans who distanced themselves from new arrivals whom they perceived to be strictly barbaric, as in the case of established German Jews' attitudes toward large populations of Eastern Europeans immigrating at the turn of the 20th century (Goldstein, 2006). By the late 20th century, post-war Jewish whiteness had consolidated sufficiently (and perhaps the number of Soviet Jewish immigrants was also low enough) that my collaborators' families were sometimes considered to be needy but legitimate inheritors, rather than threats to Jewish Americans' own status.

Ideologies of Assimilation. The asymmetrical relationships between my collaborators' families and established (white) American Jews often manifested in the patronizing and assimilationist approaches that American Jews took to these new arrivals, especially in religious

contexts. Sasha shares a photograph (Image 2) with me from her earliest days in the U.S., in which she is posed by an American Jewish volunteer to show off a Star of David necklace that she was gifted upon arrival. She explains,

> My earliest memories are from when we already arrived here, with the Jewish volunteers . . . like our Save the Soviet Jews campaign poster: i.e.,, the early photos of my family's arrival have me with . . . I showed you those photos. The Jewish star on my hand is like . . . literally we had just arrived and we were at a volunteer's house, and I'm sure one of them set that up. Well, one of them was a photographer. He probably posed me. No kid would do that. I hadn't learned to smile yet. Because in America, we smile for photos.

CAPTION Image 2: Sasha is posed with a gifted Star of David necklace on her first day in the U.S. Photo taken by an American Jewish volunteer.

The photo is an artifact of the assimilation process. In it, Sasha looks at the camera directly, not-yet American. At the same time, she is adorned, posed, and documented to satisfy an American Jewish cultural prescription of pride in her Jewishness. Despite this interpellation, her characteristically Soviet expression queers the expectations of the photographer and of the dominant American gaze; she has not yet learned to smile. So too, the reality of her secular ethnic Soviet Jewishness challenges the religious expectations that are physically projected onto her by the volunteer and by the broader campaign to Save the Soviet Jewry, which was largely out of touch with secular Soviet immigrant realities by the time of Sasha's arrival. Sasha further contests these condescending prescriptions in her own description of the photo when she sarcastically discusses it is a campaign poster for the movement. Decades after the image was taken, her critical analysis pushes back against its assimilationist aims.

My collaborators' families' economic and professional interests further converged with assimilationist goals of American Jewish religious institutions through subsidized enrollment and scholarships. While religious schools and camps offered some of my collaborators free educational and financial resources, they were also sites of exclusion and shame. Sasha felt this disconnect most acutely at an Orthodox Chabad day camp that she attended as a child:

> That was definitely a place of some dissociation because my Soviet parents were wearing shorts and t-shirts in the summer because it's 120 degrees, picking me up. Meanwhile everyone has, you know, elbows and knees covered. [I remember] getting there and them being like, "You don't have to daven if you already davened in the morning," and me being like "Uhhhh, what? I didn't daven in the morning." They're like, "Okay then go daven." And, you know, I learned how to do all those things. But it was so clear that my household didn't do that. They didn't follow the rules. And everyone there followed the rules. . . . Definitely in Chabad I felt like we were bad. Like we weren't following the right rules. I felt some shame, family shame.

Sasha was at Chabad day camp not because her family was religious or was seeking religion but because it served as free childcare for her parents, who both worked. Her experience was characterized by the dissonance between her secular Soviet family (not being covered up, not knowing how to pray) and the Orthodox religious expectations that governed the space. Although Sasha quickly learned how to assimilate and "pass," if only for the hours she spent at camp, the experience instigated a sense of shame that her family was bad on account of "not following the rules." It was a shared feeling among my collaborators that persisted into adulthood.

Despite the emotional consequences for my collaborators, both their immigrant families and these established institutions utilized one another to advance their respective interests. In Sasha's case, Chabad day school was presumably hoping to gain a new follower and her parents were securing free childcare for the summer. They also enrolled Sasha for free in a private Jewish reform preschool and later an affluent reform sleepaway camp, leaving each of these when they were eventually asked to pay. Like Sasha's parents, Luba took advantage of Jewish educational and financial resources when she enrolled herself in a well-resourced private pluralistic Jewish high school at the age of fourteen. She was not necessarily seeking a Jewish education but rather had struggled in large public schools and perceived that, coming from San Francisco, private school was the only way to get into a good college. While prayer was not mandatory at school, Luba also remembers feeling alienated from the majority of American Jews, who attended synagogues with their families and camps in the summer. Furthermore, the school used her as a kind of poster child: a deprived Soviet Jew finally gaining access to a Jewish education and building a Jewish identity.

Even as a high school student, Luba was aware of the school's investment in Americanizing her Soviet Jewish identity, and she capitalized on it to gain funding. (This recalls Masha's initial comment on her parents approaching emigration as "gaming the system.") In addition to free tuition, laptops, and books, the school offered funded travel opportunities. She remembers,

> I wrote a letter to [the school funders] about how much school changed my Jewish identity, and I want to give back, and she donated to my trip and to my friend's trip [to Uruguay]. It was crazy. And my school was like, "Can we tell your story?" you know? And I totally played on it. I was like, "Yes." So, she ended up funding me. Like, she gave me $10,000 to go to Israel.

While Luba secured the funding subversively and was genuinely excited for the trip, she was not yet fully aware that the school was also suggesting that a proper Jewish identity involved

unequivocal support for the Israeli state. Such critical reflection on both the economic and ideological assimilatory effects of schooling would come much later.

Navigating Schooling in U.S. Racial Capitalism

In Part 3 of this chapter, I locate my collaborators' parents' investments in schooling as a means of financial prosperity in their own Soviet Jewish histories, as well as in the context of U.S. racial capitalism. I demonstrate how the racialized search for high quality schooling drove residential movements, as parents gained upward class mobility. I document the way these racialized negotiations granted my collaborators access to material resources.

Parental Investments in Education and Schooling

For my collaborators' parents, higher education and professionalization seemed to promise the financial security and status that had motivated them to leave their lives in the Soviet Union. Sasha says her parents' desire for financial security, and the corresponding professional dreams they had for her, were rooted in their own experiences and fears:

> . . . what you were saying is making me think of how much труд (trud, labor) . . . and like, как жизнь была проклята (kak zhizn′ byla prokliata, how life was cursed). To sort of glibly say that my parents wanted me to go into "business school" [uses Russian accent] . . . it wasn't *about* business school. It was about the famine, you know, the lack of security and the displacement. And like, what they wanted to give . . . was stability and security because, yeah, I don't think our ancestors ever really had that.

Here, Sasha ties a thread between the academic pressures she experienced as a young person and her Soviet Jewish family's adverse experiences: displacement, exclusion, hunger, migration. These are not abstract references to a faraway time and place but rather recent memories that live in her parents' bodies and nervous systems, seeking comfort in financial prosperity. She distinguishes between a valuing of business school that is driven by greed or vanity and her family's motivations, which are informed by this history of scarcity.

For some, the emphasis on schooling and career was their own response to inherited intergenerational trauma and their own professional dreams thwarted by antisemitic institutional quotas. For example, Sasha says her mom "always wanted to be a nurse. And I think it was because of being a Jew, she couldn't. Maybe there were quotas. But she didn't feel like that was possible for her, even though she was a really good student." Luba's grandparents passed on similar lessons:

> My grandpa would tell me a lot of stories around how horrible the war was and the suffering and antisemitism in Ukraine. And how they treated us like garbage because we were Jewish. And how you couldn't be a doctor, and you couldn't be a lawyer. And how I needed to be a doctor or a lawyer here and how they fought for us to come here, so I had opportunity. That we were like . . . humanized here.

The structural and social limitations that Luba's grandfather and other caregivers faced directly informed their fears of scarcity and their dreams of abundance and status for the younger generation. Luba's grandfather recounts his own lived experiences of antisemitic exclusion, but his story carries centuries of inherited family trauma. As explained in Chapter 2, when Russian

restrictions on Jewish education eased in the USSR, many pursued secular formal education as a path toward economic advancement. By the late 1980s, the majority of Jews in the USSR were urbanized and "vastly more educated than any other Soviet nationality, including the Russians," holding "disproportionately high numbers of positions in science, music, literature, journalism, and medicine" (Perkovich, 1988). Still, Jewish people like Sasha, Luba, and Rebecca's elders were subject to academic quotas and professional exclusion based on their status as a national minority. Many of my collaborators reported that they grew up hearing that Jews had to be 10 times as good as ethnic Slavs to be accepted into competitive universities and to enter certain professions. Luba's grandfather ultimately chose to come to a place where his family's "humanization" could lead to material well-being. Here, they could finally be "just people," rather than Jews, as they were identified by phenotype, last name, and passport in the Soviet Union. Of course, in the U.S. context, this humanization was afforded to them by whiteness and happened at the expense of other groups who were negatively racialized.

Because my collaborators' parents did not possess intergenerational wealth, their investments in schooling and professionalization were likely also driven by observations of financial precarity in their new context. Those collaborators who immigrated as children shared memories of their parents working multiple jobs, going to night school, and struggling to pay the bills in their first years in the U.S. For Luba's grandparents, given embodied experience and perpetual fear of poverty, "looking rich was not a priority but being successful was, and being independent." Similarly, for Irina's parents, "professional status was desired, but financial security was foundational." Financial prosperity was so important in Stepha's home that she remembers dinner conversations revolving almost exclusively around work and the stock market. Her mom, who is not Jewish, was especially clear that she expected Stepha to financially support her in her old age. This suggests that the pursuit of financial independence was likely not only a response to Soviet struggles, but also to precarity in the U.S. While my collaborators' parents hoped to leave economic instability behind, they arrived in a country characterized by privatization and the lack of a social safety net.

Ultimately, the particular Soviet and Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant histories that motivated my collaborators' parents came to interact with the white-dominated neoliberal structures of housing and schooling in the U.S. In this way, while nearly all of my collaborators' parents were racialized as Jewish in the U.S.S.R, not as "white," their decisions around where to live and where to send their kids to school (or perhaps where to send their kids to school, and thus, where to live) were made in the context of ongoing American white supremacy, benefiting my collaborators, who would be read as white in this new context.

Inheriting Racialized Legacies of Suburbanization and Schooling

Moving to the Suburbs. The residential moves, suburban home purchases, and schooling decisions that my collaborators' parents made both were facilitated by and reified structural white supremacy. When these new immigrants moved to the U.S. in the 70s, 80s and early 90s, they settled in and around cities (San Diego, Los Angeles, Phoenix, San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago) whose demographic makeup reflected histories of racial injustice via white accumulation and Black dispossession (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 2006; Rothstein, 2017). Either alone or with young children, they lived wherever their family sponsors resided or where resettlement agencies placed them. Many moved into apartments in low-income urban or semi-urban areas, settling in ethnic enclaves and in proximity to other working-class and poor immigrants (Latinx, Asian, Soviet) and Black people. (My case is an exception in that we moved

to a working-class white suburb of San Diego). However, as they learned English, pursued professional certifications, secured white-collar jobs, and started businesses, most left these neighborhoods for more affluent and whiter parts of the city or for the suburbs. Their salaries enabled many of them to purchase homes, and their whiteness ensured that banks and realtors would not get in the way.

Within a decade, most of my collaborators' families bought houses in middle- and upper middle-class suburbs, making moves that reflected the earlier white (and Ashkenazi Jewish) suburbanization of the 1940s and 50s. Of the seven families, five bought homes in the suburbs (of Denver, Phoenix, Palo Alto, and Chicago) and placed their children in well-resourced (and whiter) neighborhood public schools, while two stayed in San Francisco, enrolling in private school (San Francisco). Stepha and Rivka, born in the U.S., grew up in the first homes purchased by their parents, who had arrived in the early 1980s. Others who moved to the U.S. as young children lived through this class and geographic mobility. Masha says, "We moved a lot. We went from this apartment to a slightly nicer place, like a townhouse, to my parents buying an old house and knocking it down and building their own house in a wealthier town." As my collaborators' parents transitioned from the immigrant working class—"busboys," "maids," pizza deliverers, and nannies (as in the case of Sasha, Masha, and Luba)—to the middle class–business owners, realtors, nurses, and engineers—they left the racialized working-class neighborhoods where they had originally settled, further contributing to the racialized dispossession that characterized the post-war era.

While it had taken the earlier generation of European Jewish immigrants several decades to move into these resourced suburban spaces, it took my collaborators' families less than a decade. This was in no small part thanks to the higher education they brought with them, and then refugee benefits, Jewish institutional support, and interpellated whiteness granted to them. By the time I was about to enter the seventh grade in San Diego, my own family left the poor, white suburb of Santee (nicknamed "Klan-tee") for the wealthier white and Asian immigrant (Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese) suburb of Rancho Peñasquitos. Although my parents worked incredibly hard for those six years, the relative swiftness of this transition was not only the result of the advantages of formal education and white-collar work in the USSR and governmental and Jewish American assistance in the U.S., but also of the broader racialized system of commodified housing and schooling.

Schooling as a Commodity. The pursuit of "high-quality" schooling was most often the driver behind housing decisions. My collaborators relate that their parents perceived schooling as a valuable commodity or accessible investment that offered the promise of a professional career and financial stability. As Irina says,

> We moved to the suburbs and it was very intentional. My parents moved and bought a house in the neighborhood that was part of the best school district. My parents are very open about it. They're like, "We bought this house so you could go to this school." And then when my brother and I graduated, they left.

In an economic context in which school funding is directly dependent on property taxes, Irina's parents purchased her education through the purchase of their house. Once they no longer needed the resources of the school, they also left the neighborhood. The underlying assumption and

value was that a high-quality education would transfer to a comfortable life. Interrogating her parents' decision to buy a house in the Denver suburbs, Irina says,

> I think it was probably the ratings [that my parents were after]. I mean, it's kind of known. It's like, "This is the best school district in the state. So we want to live here." It's not like it was different in the Soviet Union. My mom would tell me, like when she was giving birth, she wanted to go to the best hospital, and my grandpa could get her in. Yeah, so there's always "the best."

Irina suggests that in both the communist Soviet Union and in the capitalist U.S., access to high-quality public goods like healthcare and education is anything but equal. While in the Soviet context this assertion may seem ironic to some, in reality, individuals were still positioned as "consumers" (through bribes and connections, like Irina's grandfather's connection to the Communist Party). Thus, she suggests that, for her family, securing a quality hospital was not too different from accessing a quality school.

Indeed, within American racial capitalism and now racial neoliberalism, schooling is less a public good than a racialized private commodity subject to purchase, often through housing for those who are able (e.g., via property taxes, PTA fundraising efforts) (H. A. Giroux, 1999; Labaree, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lipman, 2011). Settler colonial and antiblack housing policies, including redlining and federal loan subsidy programs, dispossessed Indigenous and Black communities of financial resources, while consolidating white wealth in the suburbs and using the resulting property taxes to resource public schools. Generations of such white racial accumulation via Black and Indigenous dispossession has resulted in "educational debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) among communities of color and, conversely, an abundance of resources within suburban white public schools.

Without the security of intergenerational wealth or much historical knowledge of the U.S., my immigrant collaborators' parents nevertheless seemed to glean that, in the racial neoliberal era, the path to well-paying jobs would be eased through well-resourced schools. This recalls Sasha's earlier explanation that her parents wanted to give "stability and security," a dream that many parents surely share. Unlike those who've accumulated educational debt, especially poor people of color and Black and Indigenous people, within a few years in the U.S., my collaborators' parents secured the ability to purchase this important commodity. Along with their formal education from the USSR and the new subsidized training they accessed in the U.S., whiteness granted my collaborators' parents the social and geographic mobility to divest from under-resourced public schools in dispossessed neighborhoods, whether by moving or by enrolling in private school.

Growing up in San Francisco, Rebecca and Luba are exceptions to the phenomenon of suburban relocation. Rather, they both leveraged their Jewish affiliations to procure scholarships to an affluent Jewish high school. As Luba reports, the school, funded by several wealthy families and housed in a 20-million-dollar building, was abundant with resources. (For the 2020–2021 academic year, the tuition for this elite school was $49,725.) By high school, her parents were relatively disengaged from her schooling. Seeking a more intimate and supportive learning environment, she did her own search and applied to enter the school's first class. Upon being accepted, resources began to flow in:

> Before school started, all the kids got entire Judaica sets delivered to their houses for free. Your full Torah, your Gemara, your Tanach, all the books just delivered. So you have them at home. . . . Oh my God, we were so spoiled! I had textbooks at home and at school. And we had laptops and all this shit.

Just as some of my collaborators accessed free Jewish day school decades earlier, Rebecca and Luba's Jewishness qualified them for a well-resourced education. Although the school was pluralistic and prayer was not required, Luba and Rebecca still learned to read Hebrew and received some religious education in addition to a secular education. They benefited from the small class sizes, close relationships with teachers, materials, international trips, and proximity to affluent Americans. As will be discussed in later chapters, the experience of being the first Soviet immigrant student, a scholarship kid, and a secular Jew was also difficult—a price to pay for the "private good" she was able to secure.

Racialized Schooling, White Benefits. Although Luba established her own high school enrollment, most of my collaborators' moves to private schools and suburban public schools were motivated by parental desires to secure high-quality education for their children and informed by racist perceptions, within the broader contexts of white supremacy and racial capitalism. My collaborators suggest that their parents had a keen understanding that housing and schooling were both interconnected and highly racialized. When I pressed Irina to explain what "the best" might have meant to her parents, she answered bluntly: "I mean, obviously, it was very white. The people there had the most resources, you know." As she understands it, the primary draw of her new white suburban neighborhood was its resources, which translated—via property taxes—into an imagined high-quality education. Her parents had not grown up in the U.S., but they still had some experiential understanding of how "whiteness as property" functioned. For Irina, this connection between whiteness and capital is "obvious" or commonsensical.

In some cases, parental perceptions of American neighborhoods and schools were more explicitly undergirded by antiblack and anti-Latinx racism. Masha, Sasha, Luba, and Rebecca all shared childhood memories of these connections:

> Masha: In 1988/89, we settled in what is like the uptown neighborhood of Chicago. And we were only there for a little while because my brother was 15, and so he would have had to go to high school. And this is another thing I just learned very recently . . . that they moved very quickly because they did not want my brother going to that high school, probably for racist reasons.

> Sasha: [In third grade we moved] into our first house in North Phoenix, which is really suburby. We had our own pool. And it was track homes. I remember as soon as we moved in, my mom walked around asking the neighbors what the good schools were. And then I remember, second grade going into third grade, we went and checked out both of the schools, and one of them was in a Latino neighborhood. And my mom was like, "Not this one. This is in a bad neighborhood." And the one that was in a more white suburby neighborhood, she was like, "Oh, yeah, this one's the good school."

> Luba: I think my mom was really concerned because my older cousin Igor went to the public high school that I would have gone to that was part of the same school system. And he was in football and friends with all these Black kids, and she just did not like how he was being educated or you know, raised, and she did not want me doing that. So there was definitely a race component. . . . They wanted me to go to a school that didn't have a lot of Black kids in it because it meant I would be more successful. And that is so messed up.
>
> Rebecca: I went to public school K–8th grade, but when applying to high school, San Francisco was "diversifying" the student populations, and I was assigned to go to Mission High School. Besides the logistical inconvenience of needing to take two buses to get to school (over 40 minutes commute each way), my parents did not want me to be in a majority Black and Latinx school. This is why I ended up at JCHS [Jewish Community High School].

It may be impossible to know the racial perceptions of their parents immediately upon arrival, but these comments attest that, within a few years, my collaborators' parents related proximity to Black and Latinx people to lower-quality education. Masha and Sasha's parents, for example, seemed to be aware of the connections between race, class, housing, and neighborhood schools. Masha simply says her parents "did not want" her brother to have Black classmates. As Sasha narrates it, from her mom's perspective, a Latino neighborhood either suggested poverty (meaning students would receive fewer resources), or else that Latino students would themselves bring the quality of the education down. Conversely, proximity to whiteness suggested a "good" school, as in Irina's family.

These racialized perceptions were powerful enough to motivate both residential moves and divestments from public school entirely. Masha understands her family's move to a whiter suburb of Chicago as a move explicitly away from Black people, who would have become her brother's classmates at the neighborhood school. She describes this as a "quick" move, as if her family was fleeing proximity to Blackness. Similarly, Luba understands her mother's perceptions of schooling to be decidedly antiblack, although her narration is fairly indirect: she did not like how Luba's cousin, who had Black friends from school "was being educated" or "raised." Ultimately, Luba is clear that this was not a question of material resources, but that her mother perceived proximity to Black people as a negative socializing and academic influence. Similarly, Rebecca's parents chose to divest from the public school to which she was assigned, on account of the presence of Black and Latinx students, and to instead secure her a scholarship to a private Jewish high school (that both she and Luba ended up attending).

While egregiously antiblack and false, the assumption that proximity to Blackness results in inferior learning reflects both dominant white American attitudes[18] and the reality that

[18] While my collaborators' stories may not speak to the origin of their parents' racialized perceptions of schooling, they suggest an alignment with dominant white American ideologies. For Toni Morrison (1993), such racism (and antiblackness, specifically) is constitutive of the immigrant assimilation process. She comments on "this most enduring and efficient rite of passage into American culture: negative appraisals of the native-born black population. Only when the lesson of racial estrangement is learned is assimilation complete" (unmarked page). Indeed, one study speaks directly to the effects of American antiblackness in the racialized assimilation of Soviet Jewish immigrants (called "Russians" in the study) (Goldenberg & Saxe, 1996). They document, "Immigrants' pro-Black sentiments were too abstract and too weak to resist the acquisition of what they perceived as predominant [white American] racial attitudes. Among those Russians who had an opinion about Blacks before immigration, 72%

communities of color receive far fewer resources than white ones (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). By the time of Soviet Jewish arrival, public schools in more affluent suburbs enjoyed abundant resources, while public schools in urban areas populated by people of color, and especially Black people, lacked safe facilities and basic materials (Dumas, 2014, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). These suburban schools continued to be predominantly white, but not exclusively so, at least in California, where Stepha says there were significant populations of immigrants from the Asian diaspora (as well as Middle Easterners and some Mexican immigrants) who could also afford to buy houses and attend suburban schools. In the end, like many white people and aspiring, middle-class immigrants, my collaborators parents positioned themselves advantageously in relation to white supremacist systems, ultimately divesting from already dispossessed Black and Latinx neighborhoods and schools and investing in white, East Asian, and South Asian schools.

Attending well-resourced schools with significant white populations afforded my collaborators a curriculum that was more likely to be engaging, creative, and challenging, although not necessarily more critical (Anyon, 1981). Without interviewing Irina's parents, it's difficult to know what "the best" really meant for them. Still, their ability to make this choice granted Irina the opportunity to receive a creative and experiential education. Reflecting on her schooling, she explains,

> I went to school before there was a lot of standardized testing, but I remember in elementary school, we would have these like . . . this is so problematic, but we would have a [Davy] Crockett Day and you would wear a little fur trader trappers hat. And then we'd do orienteering where you would get a compass and a map and go to the backwoods or we would have a day where everybody got to bring in their sleeping bags and just read all day. Read-ins, you know, stuff like that. Whereas, now especially, Black and brown kids, they just sit and take tests all the time. But we had all this creative stuff.

As Irina is aware, the creative and analytical education she received contrasts with the "basic skills" curricula and high-stakes standardized testing that many poor kids of color are subjected to (Anyon, 1981; Dumas, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In this way, Irina's schooling offered her not only a socioeconomic advantage but also an epistemological one, in certain creative and analytical respects. At the same time, as will be discussed later, this education did not foster any criticality about this system itself; for example, Irina's selective recollection of Davy Crockett, "King of the Wild Frontier," reflects her school's uncritical romanticization of American settler colonialism. More than anything, these schools were mechanisms for socializing my collaborators into the American, white middle and upper middle classes, and so, into the corresponding system of settler colonial racial capitalism.

Ultimately, the educational experiences of my collaborators were varied: some enjoyed school, while others didn't. Hardly anyone felt they had received a critical education or even one that was honest about American history, but they felt academically prepared for higher education, and nearly all have pursued graduate school. I say this not because higher education is inherently virtuous, but because it has offered them jobs that have paid the rent and, in some

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changed their opinions in a negative direction." (p. 429–430). The authors further suggest that immigrants acquire their new country's attitudes through learning to identify and conform with mainstream society. The stories shared above do certainly conform to racist white American discourse on schooling.

cases, the opportunity to pursue creative and professional dreams. The ability to attend a public school in a well-resourced district or else to obtain specialized scholarships for private education, as my collaborators and I did, is simply not available to many Indigenous, Black, and Latinx parents and many poor and rural parents. Furthermore, when middle- or upper middle-class Black people do secure housing in more affluent areas, these moves come with great consequences for their children, who have to navigate overwhelmingly white schools (Dumas, 2011).

Of course, white, Soviet Jewish immigrants are unfortunately not unique among non-Black people in their devaluation, fear, and hatred of Blackness, and the inverse desire for proximity to whiteness. Still, we are perhaps the latest major group deemed white and one of the main immigrant groups of the last 30 years to participate in racial capitalism from a position of relative power. For this reason, the ways that we collude with or, alternately, defy this system matter.

Adverse Consequences

Although Part 2 demonstrated that most of my collaborators' families experienced significant upward mobility within U.S. racial capitalism, especially when compared with many dispossessed populations who were already living in the U.S., as well as many other immigrants, this is not the entirety of the story. Just as my collaborators' families faced adversity in an otherwise supported emigration, some also struggled upon arrival. Furthermore, in the decades the followed, access to affluent, white public schools came with the accompanying harms of assimilation, including fractured connections to culture and elders, academic pressure, and internalized white supremacy.

The Costs of Migration to Parents

For many, coming to the U.S. resulted in professional losses that my collaborators associate with their parents' humiliation and heartbreak. While these immigrants had high levels of formal education and experience in white-collar professions, they arrived with little knowledge of English, and their degrees did not always formally transfer. In the Soviet Union, Luba's dad had worked as a veterinarian, Masha's mom as a doctor, and Rebecca's mom as a pianist, jobs some were not able to continue in the U.S. In their early years in the country, they cleaned houses, took care of the young and elderly, and worked as cashiers, while learning English and taking care of their young children. Masha recalls a traumatizing experience that happened to her dad during this time, when he was thrown on the hood of his car by police while delivering pizzas in a gated community. She says,

> I can't even imagine. . . . as if the immigration wasn't enough of a humiliation, you know. Just because a lot of his life was shaped around personal humiliation. Like, that's how he framed his experiences to me. And so this really stood out as a moment of just such humiliation especially because both my parents kind of see, slash saw, themselves as kind of elite.

Indeed, as discussed previously, in the Soviet Union, many Jews were both "elite" by way of their education and white-collar professionalization and also stifled on account of being Jewish in an antisemitic state. My dad has also narrated his life as a series of humiliations, most of them

on account of antisemitism. In this way, the loss of status that Masha describes caused further humiliation and heartbreak.

While some of the parents eventually pursued further education in the U.S., becoming engineers, nurses, and business owners, others had to settle for jobs with working conditions inferior to those they experienced previously. Sasha's dad had worked as a geographical surveyor, "getting to kind of run [his] own thing." Now, Sasha says, "he works in a factory where he isn't allowed to take a bathroom break, you know. So that really breaks my heart for him." Rebecca also laments her family's professional losses:

> They basically went from like, what seems like some status, as much as you can get in the Soviet Union, like my grandpa was a dentist and my grandma was a high school teacher of geography. And my mom was a professional pianist . . . and they had to give up their identities and be thrown into a totally different world.

While my collaborators perceive these as traumatic and heartbreaking losses, "extraordinarily jarring and unsettling, not comfortable and not convenient," Rebecca says her parents and grandparents "still paint it in this light of the opportunities and the greatness of that experience" of immigrating. I recognize this narrative as the particular way our parents' immigrant optimism and resilience seems to exacerbate their already tough, sometimes repressed Soviet mentalities. I have observed that my own mom doesn't give herself the option of looking back. Perhaps this is the necessary attitude to hold one's world together and to justify a decision as tremendous and potentially painful as the one to permanently leave everything you know.

As a child, I lived the aftershocks of my parents' difficult transition. In the Soviet Union, my grandmother and aunt had helped raise me and my cousin; in the U.S., our family of four was alone. Both of my parents worked multiple jobs, while my mom also attended night school. Sometimes I didn't see her for days on end. At the same time, my parents tried their best to treat us, with occasional trips to the beach or lake, or donut holes from Yum Donuts. Still, I babysat my sister from the age of eight, when she was only three years old. In the summers, we watched *The Price is Right* and *Jenny Jones* in front of the air conditioner and hid when strange men knocked on the door of our apartment, asking to use our bathroom. When I asked my mom how she knew I wouldn't burn the house down, she says, "You were a good kid." When I ask her how she could have left us alone when we were so young, she says, "What other choice did we have?"

The Costs of Schooling

Fractured Connections. While certainly materially advantageous, the socialization into middle-class whiteness that schooling facilitated came with adverse personal, familial, and cultural consequences. For most of my collaborators, moving to a single-family home in the suburbs meant leaving grandparents behind. In the U.S.S.R., it had been common for multiple generations to live together, and grandparents played important roles in raising grandchildren while parents worked outside the home, a structure that continued in families' earliest years in the United States. It was customary for families to be resettled (by Jewish organizations or relatives) into low-income apartment complexes together. At first, extended family members like grandparents, aunts, and uncles often joined their children:

> Irina: I lived with my grandparents pretty much my whole life. So I lived with my mom's parents in Minsk and then Los Angeles. They lived down the street, and then when my

> grandparents—my dad's parents—came, they lived with us when I was in middle school. And I always loved them, and we hung out. My grandpa would make bows and arrows for us, and we would go on adventures. And my grandma would cook for us. And yeah, it was really nice.
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> Sasha: We were all in an apartment building together, which was really nice. My grandma basically was raising us because my parents worked so much. They would take the bus and get us and have food ready. I mean, they did everything—my grandma Maya really did everything. And yeah, just being around all the cousins and stuff.

For many of my collaborators, these intergenerational relationships were critical sites of unconditional love and connection to Russian language and culture. Both Irina and Sasha reference their grandparents preparing traditional food for them after school, when parents were at work. Irina's relationship with her grandpa was also a site of play and relaxation.

Stepha, who had a difficult relationship with her parents and faced intense academic pressure at home, savored this intergenerational connective time:

> I finished my homework. I'd have some food with my babushka. And then it was the most sacred moments when we would just hang out and watch TV together. And it [was] like an hour or an hour 15 minutes or like 45 minutes with my babushka . . . my nervous system was just so restored.

Whereas Stepha's parents related to her through the lens of achievement, her babushka was present to simply love her during afternoons watching ice skating and making лимонник (limonnik, lemon bars). Stepha was born in the U.S. to parents who had already purchased a home and was thus able to remain near her grandparents through her childhood. Others who experienced moves from the cities to the suburbs, however, often moved further away from their grandparents. This fractured loving relationships that had been important lifelines to the Russian language. As Irina grew up, she spent more time on her extracurricular activities and less time with her grandparents, who also lived farther away. She now regrets putting her academics before these connections. Similarly, Sasha reflects,

> I remember moving into a house was a big deal. It was a really big deal. But it meant that I moved away from my grandma—from both of them. . . . We moved kind of far, like 25 minutes in a car away to the suburbs. . . . And I remember these games my babushka would play with me that were like word games. And she'd be like, "You answer in Russian, and I'll answer in English, and then it'll help both of us." I miss my babushka! [Laughs sadly.]

Sasha's babushka offered connection to both ancestral foods and Sasha's own first language, Russian. When they lived together, this was much more easily accessible. The pursuit of the "American Dream," however, reduced hers and Irina's Jewish extended families to the white American heteronormative nucleus of two parents and two children. After the move, Sasha saw her grandparents much less often and consequently had less access to the Russian language, as well as Soviet Jewish history, knowledge, and ways of being. Through the pursuit of commodified schooling and housing, our babushki and dedushki became a form of surplus,

disposable in the capitalist economy. As my collaborators, now adults, share these stories, their eyes and voices tremble with regret and grief over these fractured connections.

Language and Curriculum. For most of their schooling, my collaborators were exposed to a school curriculum that was taught exclusively in English and that centered European and white American history, perpetuated colorblind meritocratic myths, and mandated English. The major exception to this was limited to some of my collaborators' first years of schooling, when they lived in majority Russian-speaking immigrant communities. For example, in first grade, Rebecca was in an ESL public school classroom in San Francisco with a post-Soviet teacher and Russian-speaking classmates. Similarly, Luba in San Francisco and Irina in Los Angeles remembered having Russian-speaking friends and classmates at school. Still, while my collaborators all entered school with Russian as their first language, most did not have memories of using it in the classroom beyond these earliest years. Instead, they quickly learned English, in large part because it was required, but also because this allowed them to "pass" as white Americans—something I will discuss at length in the next chapter on assimilation and identity. Luba says,

> I remember this one girl in first grade, Katya. I remember feeling better than her because I already knew English. I don't know how I learned English so fast. I spoke Russian at home. It must have been in preschool that I learned English.

Like Luba, all of my collaborators learned English at a very young age and eventually came to adopt American accents (although for some, like Luba, this did not happen until age 11). Once American English replaced Russian-accented English, it was most often only their names that revealed them as something other than white Americans. Those who were required to exclusively speak Russian in the home or who were enrolled in Russian-language theater, arts, or language lessons (meaning they lived in proximity to Russian-speaking communities) maintained their Russian skills, while others were not able to keep a fluent grasp of their mother tongue. Today, they try to retrieve what was lost.

The exclusive use of English in most classrooms was just one component of a broader miseducation that reinforced hegemonic power structures and privileged white American mythologies. In the era of colorblind multiculturalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) in particular, critical discussions of power, race, and poverty did not happen in my collaborators' classrooms. Irina recalls with legitimate indignation,

> I had friends of color, but they learned all the same stuff! We were in AP European history together, learning about St. Francis, whatever . . . and these other histories never ever came up. I had no race consciousness because everything around me was white. Like the entire canon that I read. I mean, I can name, on one hand, the books I read by people of color, you know. . . . And I never had a teacher of color until grad school, then 20 years of education in this country without any [non-white] perspectives. And certainly never learned any histories from non-European, non-Western countries.

Like most students in the U.S., Irina received an egregiously Eurocentric and U.S.-centric curriculum. Like most children in public schools, she was exclusively taught by white teachers. After being exposed to critical race theory in graduate school many years later, she says, "I just

remember thinking like nothing that I had ever been taught before was true. And like colonization, and imperialism, I never heard about any of these things. All I learned about was European histories and wars. Protestant Reformation." Of course, other histories were always present in the room, but they were silenced and dormant, steamrolled by the official curriculum. Irina concludes, "It's not until now that I talk to those friends from middle school that other narratives come out." Two glimmers of exposure to critical education came from Rivka and Stepha, although neither of them explicitly involved class or race in the U.S. Rivka was exposed to feminist theory when their high school philosophy teacher offered them a Simone de Beauvoir book, while Stepha began to think critically about being a bystander to injustice in a Facing History class, a lesson that stayed with her through her life.

While the horrors of American atrocities including slavery and colonial genocide were minimized in the curriculum, the Jewish Holocaust was highlighted in units on World War II to extol the virtues of the U.S. and construct the uniqueness of Jewish suffering (Finkelstein, 2015). In this story, where Jews were unique victims and Americans were liberators, Jewish and Soviet resistance, in which our own families had participated, was omitted. Sasha explains,

> I remember learning about WWII. And I remember coming home and basically [saying] something like how the Russians just had to wait and winter basically took care of the Nazis or something [smiles]. And I remember both of my parents freaking the fuck out and being like, "What do they teach you in that school?! That's not at all what happened! Twenty million lives lost!" you know, just going into full history mode. And me just being like . . . I was just here for a snack, you guys. I don't think I cared really. It just seemed like a historical event and not connected to me. But I remember how upset they got and how mad at my school they got. But they wouldn't go and talk to the teacher, the way that [white, upper middle-class] American parents feel like they can, and do.

While Sasha's parents felt powerless to intervene at school, they reminded her that for Soviet families, and Soviet Jewish families in particular, the war was not an abstraction. My collaborators' grandparents either served in the war or were otherwise displaced to the far east of the Soviet Union (Alma-Ata, Samarkand, Dushanbe, Omsk) as the Nazis approached from the West. Rebecca's grandmothers' father and brother both died in the war. Mine and Stepha's grandfathers wrote memoirs of their experiences as soldiers, in part to counter antisemitic Soviet stereotypes that Jews had not fought in the war. These stories challenged the dominant American narratives of World War II and the Holocaust, which focused on a mythical American liberation of the Jews of Central Europe, erasing both Soviet Jewish soldiers and civilians who were either displaced or murdered. Ultimately, school curricula inculcated my collaborators with a narrative of the U.S. as innocent domestically, and a moral authority and savior abroad.

Tracking, Academics, and the Pressure to Perform. By and large, my collaborators recall schooling as a time of academic and social pressure. Within their Soviet Jewish immigrant families, academic performance (and later, professional achievement) was expected and highly valued. Within society more generally, education was commodified as a private good to be traded for high-status employment and a salary in a competitive, scarcity-based economy. After moving into well-resourced suburban school districts, they were further socialized through the system of academic tracking, the "ability"-based grouping of students into academic, vocational, and remedial tracks (Anyon, 1981; Dumas, 2014; Oakes, 2005). While offering promises of elite

universities and prestigious jobs to those who secured spots in the upper academic tracks, tracking reified race- and class-based inequalities, according to a white, upper-middle-class standard. Sasha and Stepha recall the pressures of being academically tracked into "gifted," honors, and Advanced Placement (AP) classes:

> Sasha: In high school, I was in the IB [International Baccalaureate] program. I had to take a test in middle school. And I was so nervous because my sister was in the program, and my parents were like, "Your sister is in the program. She got a scholarship. You're gonna be in the program and get a scholarship." As I was taking the test, I threw up, and I was sent home. Because there's too much pressure. And then I had to go in on a makeup day, but they wouldn't let me touch any of the sections I had started. And then I got waitlisted, and I was so ashamed.
>
> Stepha: My parents pushed me to go into those classes. The issue for me is I never wanted to be in the Honors and AP class. I really didn't. I wanted to just be in the fucking regular classes with other regular kids. . . . For the most part, I was like, I don't need this hard ass math. I actually would rather spend my time watching *Hey, Arnold!* with my babushka than doing this ding dang homework. Yeah, I mean, a lot of the folks in my honors and AP classes were like . . . overachieving rich kids.

This debilitating stress was the consequence of the Soviet and/or Soviet Jewish expectation to be an отличница (otlichnitsa*,* excellent student, *fem.*) being applied within a white supremacist and capitalist American system that measured "potential" through standardized testing and rewarded it with a scarce spot in a high academic track. Just as my collaborators' Soviet (and Soviet Jewish) parents had to be "the best" in order to secure desirable opportunities in the Soviet system, within American neoliberalism, they perceived that their children needed to secure scarce spots in the highest academic levels of their schools: honors, IB, and AP. The pressure was great enough to cause Sasha to vomit and to carry shame. Meanwhile, the harm of this experience lingers in Stepha's body, as evidenced by her tone. Rather than be subjected to the anxiety of the AP track, she preferred to "just be in the fucking regular classes" and to relax with her grandparents. For her parents, however, this was not an option.

Beyond personal harms, my collaborators' inclusion into honors and AP tracks reified existing racial and class inequalities. Stepha remembers,

> My classes were very stratified. So and again, because we're talking Bay Area, not all white by any means of the word. . . . But in terms of Black and Latinx students, they really weren't represented in the honors and AP classes, though I didn't see that [at the time].

In suburban Palo Alto and Denver, where Stepha and Irina grew up respectively, the predominantly white and Asian students who placed into the highest tracks were expected to attend prestigious universities and secure well-paying professional jobs. Indeed, in American public schools, tracking has long been shown to reify and exacerbate existing racial and economic inequalities by sorting students into groups of varying expectations and opportunities, according to a hegemonic white, middle-class standard (Anyon, 1981; Dumas, 2014; Oakes, 1985). As early as elementary school, Irina remembers,

> they would do our classes in a trailer: the gifted and talented trailer out back. And I remember in this class, we would learn how to use a checkbook, and we would play the stock market. Which they didn't teach the other kids, you know.

While Irina's parents immigrated from a communist context and had no intergenerational or inherited wealth, her suburban public school education, via the high academic track, was explicitly facilitating wealth-building. Stepha elaborates the connection between academic tracking and the stock market, implying she, too, is a commodity within American capitalism. She recalls her packed academic and extracurricular schedule:

> Stepha: It was really traumatic. Like, it was just so bad. It was so bad. My time was never my time except for those very fleeting moments. And then, as I would play piano, my parents would cook dinner and then during dinner they would talk about the fucking стоки. Куда рынок идёт, куда рынок идёт? Он пошёл в верх или в низ? и как Дау? А что у тебя на работе происходит? [stoki. Kuda rynok idët, kuda rynok idët? On poshël v verkh ili v niz? i kak Dau? A chto u tebia na rabote proiskhodit?; stocks. Where's the market going? It went up or down? And how's the DOW? What's going on at work?]. They would just fucking ask me for performance reports, like, «я знаю у тебя был экзамен сегодня...?» [ia znaiu u tebia byl ėkzamen segodnia..?; I know you had an exam today…?].
>
> Sophia: Like you were a stock.
>
> Stepha: Yeah, I was yet another fucking stock that was like growing, right? And my mom also talked to me like that. She was like, «когда я буду старая, как бы ты меня должна будешь содержать» (kogda ia budu staraia, kak by ty menia dolzhna budesh' soderzhat'; when I'm old, you will need to somehow support me). So, it was very like clear she wants me to do good in school because she wants me to help pay for her life.

Stepha's Soviet parents seemed to have fully embraced American capitalism, or at least seemed to have understood that, without intergenerational wealth, investing may offer a chance at security. In the metaphor of the stock, Stepha is herself the investment, expected to provide adequate returns by the time her mom can no longer work. Schooling and the marketplace were completely fused as the repository for the hopes of Soviet immigrant parents. For Stepha, on the other hand, this investment brought hopeless and debilitating stress, something she now identifies as trauma. Recalling an anecdote she shared earlier, this pressure was only relieved by Stepha's babushka, whose softness and sweet idleness were a healing balm for the reductive expectations of the academic stock exchange.

Beyond Stepha's particular case, it may be said more broadly that my collaborators' parents indeed "invested" in them, with disparate consequences. First by moving to the capitalist U.S. and later by purchasing homes in neighborhoods with well-funded schools and funneling them into academic tracks, parents offered their children opportunities to compete for jobs that could financially sustain them, at least in theory. It may have been an investment they never asked for, but for many of my collaborators, it has in some respects "paid off" in the form of access to higher education and job opportunities, but not without significant costs. In some cases,

these selective investments were inadvertently accompanied by divestments: from poor communities of color, from relationships across race and class, from connection with grandparents, from the Russian language, from creativity, and from rest.

Becoming White Saviors. As my collaborators entered high school, the competition for acceptance into a prestigious university converged with compulsory "community service" activities that encouraged suburban, middle-class (often white and Asian) students to intervene in poor Black and brown communities. When I was in high school, this "volunteer work" was paradoxically presented as being both necessary for college applications and a selfless way to use one's time. Irina, too, shares this experience:

> At some point, the kind of the school I went to was so focused on my college and my extracurriculars, and I would volunteer at the Boys & Girls Club. I remember this . . . my dad would always say—because I was like, "Oh, I need to do stuff for my college application. I'm going to volunteer with the Big Sisters thing," working with the Black and brown kids. And he was like, "If you want to volunteer, why don't you spend time with your grandparents and teach them English?" And I was like, "No, that doesn't look good for college." Which is terrible. I think that's also part of assimilation. And capitalism. Of like, everything can only be measured in terms of its output for your quote unquote success. I should have spent more time with my grandparents, but I was out there being the "good white," you know, tutoring these little Black and brown kids with my other immigrant friends who are trying to get into the best college.

As a teenager, Irina was already implicated in the nefarious relationship between capitalism, white supremacy, and Christianity as it played out in institutions like schools, universities, and non-profit organizations (Bauer, 2021). Her parents expected her to succeed academically, and her white, affluent, college-preparatory public schools had taught her that she needed to amass a certain amount of extracurricular "service" work to be a competitive applicant. Although she did not have personal connections with Black and brown communities, there was a host of non-profit organizations—Boys & Girls Club, Big Brothers, Big Sisters—encouraging her to socialize poor Black and brown youth into the very systems she, too, had been brought into. Those of us who intervened in these seemingly innocuous programs will never really know the harm that we caused.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Movement to Save the Soviet Jewry of the 1970s–early 90s had positioned Soviet Jewish immigrants as the beneficiaries of a Jewish flavor of a "new heroic form of liberal whiteness" (Melamed, 2006, p. 7), "rescued" by civilized Americans from a Communist regime and redeemed from their own barbarism. The condescension embedded in this movement's logics reduced our humanity and agency and expanded the distance between Americans and Soviet Jews. Just a decade later, both Irina and I, now assimilated white women ourselves, took on the role of aspiring savior—to poor youth of color. Facing social pressures to perform both academics and benevolent white womanhood, Irina invested her time in tutoring, rather than spend time with her grandparents, who did not possess value within this capitalist system. Similarly, I rejected my own grandparents but spent time doing "community service" that I thought was righteous and important. Interestingly, Irina's dad, who immigrated as an adult and was not subject to the same American socialization as she was, disregarded the American industry of "volunteering," which had no social relevance to him.

Despite our learned righteousness, these activities created a patronizing distance between ourselves and our supposed beneficiaries, reifying our own feelings of racialized, white superiority. Any harmful effects, however, were obscured to us behind the discourse of a benevolent liberal, feminized, and Christianized whiteness: helping, volunteering, service, charity. The phenomenon of white saviorism (in Education and related fields) as a liberal affliction of whiteness masquerading as "love" and "care" is well-documented and appropriately critiqued (Bauer, 2021; Cole, 2012; Matias, 2016; Matias E. & Allen, 2013; Vera & Gordon, 2003). While it is easy, and important, for me to judge this phenomenon, I also want to understand it in its structural social and psychological context—especially because it did *not* come from our Soviet families, but was socialized into us in the U.S. As I will explore further in the next chapter, the injury of migration was part of this socialization. Nursing this injury with whiteness as our disposal, my collaborators and I were at particular risk of becoming "the bullied bully" (Leonardo, 2015) or else the victimized benevolent oppressor.

Conclusion

From the initial period of emigration and resettlement through navigations of schooling, my collaborators' families benefited materially from their European proximity, Ashkenazi Jewishness, and interpellated whiteness. These markers offered them refugee status and connection with predominantly white American Jewish institutions and individuals, who offered a transfer of financial and cultural resources. As my collaborators came of age in the U.S., the ongoing hoarding of resources in affluent, predominantly white (and sometimes East and South Asian) neighborhoods, schools, and elite academic tracks selectively exposed them to the narratives, values, and people that upheld the dominant order. Whether in Phoenix, San Francisco, Denver, or Chicago, both public and private were sites of assimilation into the white middle class, including the white Jewish middle class.

While this inclusion certainly granted them access to economic and professional opportunities at the expense of poor children of color, it also rendered them complicit in structural violence, disconnected them from oppressed groups, and eroded ties with their native language, culture, and family members. For some, white racialization, upward mobility, and acculturation even facilitated a transition from saved "other" to the savior of perceived others, a phenomenon I will discuss further in the next two chapters. Having charted the structural-material terrain on which whitening was forged, in the next chapter, I probe the psychosocial process of assimilation, articulating connections between immigration, whiteness, queerness, and shame in the childhood and adolescent years.

Chapter 5: The Role of Shame in White Racialized Assimilation

Introduction

When Irina was in elementary school in a predominantly white suburb of Denver, she was tasked with creating a life-size replica of her immigrant ancestor. Under the watchful eye of her teacher, she traced a body on a large piece of white butcher paper. Imagining how this ancestor, who had never actually existed, may have looked, she carefully drew a косынка (kosynka, headscarf) on their head. Of course, Irina didn't have an immigrant ancestor, at least not one who had come to the United States. Having moved to the U.S. just a few years earlier, *she herself* was the immigrant. Still, Irina says, "I made mine, even though I knew that I'm me." She elaborates, "I wore a tracksuit when I immigrated. But, because I wanted to blend in with all the other children, I put on the little косынка (headscarf) for my life-size immigrant [laughs]." Irina had learned quickly that being a white American was desirable, and that she could pass this way, if only she left herself out of the picture. Just a child at the time, she took the deal. She reflects,

> Isn't it messed up? I created this other version that fit in with all the other children's immigrant stories. . . . . I assimilated to the point of lying about my own immigration story. I mean, it was me, but I also made it look like it was my grandma. Except my own grandma doesn't dress like that. I made it look like some деревенская бабушка [derevenskaia babushka, village grandmother].

The chance to be included in this hegemonic story of the nation, denied to native and Black students, was extended to Irina on the condition that she deny her own history and identity. Ultimately, as white-identified immigrants, my collaborators assimilated into the classroom, and the nation-state, by learning to dissociate from their own experiences and to identify instead with white American mythologies. Even the косынка that Irina drew reinforced a romanticized white American imagination of "the old country," an invention distant from the major city she had left just a few years earlier when her family emigrated from Minsk. As Irina drew her own history and alterity out of existence over and over again, she filled the resulting void with shame. Like my other collaborators, it would take many years for her to return to this picture, and to reclaim what had once been erased as a way to pursue a more ethically-oriented existence.

Irina's story is emblematic of the ways that my collaborators, all either young immigrants or the first to be born in the U.S., experienced racialized assimilation in childhood and adolescence. Like Irina, they were interpellated into whiteness through American others, including teachers and classmates, who read them as phenotypically white within the American racial hierarchy. As their stories will attest, this process was further facilitated by the intersecting forces of cis-heteropatriarchy, orientalism, xenophobia, Christian hegemony, and antisemitism, all of which "othered" my collaborators, even as they simultaneously benefited from proximity to whiteness. In this chapter, I move beneath reason-based analyses of whiteness to the level of the libidinal to address the role of shame in this formation of my collaborators' racial and white identities. I employ and expand Thandeka's (1999) concept of "white shame," including "white ethnic shame" and "poor white shame" through the additional lenses of migration, gender and sexuality, discussing the ways racism in the home and hegemonic white American interpellation at school collided with my collaborators' intersecting immigrant, Jewish and queer identities.

Socialized Whiteness and Shame

In this chapter, I approach whiteness as the learned internalization and expression of racialized power within the contexts of white supremacy and European colonialism. As Frankenberg (1993, p. 1) defines it, "Whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'Whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed." In her conception, whiteness encompasses both structural power and cultural practices, as they are internalized and expressed by white-identified people.
When whiteness is further understood as the outcome of white supremacy, a historical, relational system of domination (Collins, 1990/2000; Leonardo, 2004), it is revealed as "nothing but oppressive and false" (Roediger, 1994, p. 13). As James Baldwin (1984) argues, there may be Italian-American people, Irish-American people, and Eastern European Jewish Americans, but there are really no white people outside of them *thinking they are white.* In this way, whiteness is a delusion that is used to justify entitlement to power and property (Harris, 1993). Furthermore, this invention is not based on any real supremacy, but rather is born of and masks a crisis of inadequacy (Baldwin, 1984; Thandeka, 1999).

Because whiteness is a social construct, people are not born white, but rather *become* white through racialized socialization. Such socialization is most potent in the vulnerable contexts of childhood and assimilation. According to Thandeka (1999), white racialization is a "self-degrading system of identity formation" mediated by alienation and shame due to one's difference from both their racist family and from dominant forms of whiteness (p. 28). Thandeka follows Susan Miller to define shame "an act of self-protection by someone whose core sense of self is repeatedly attacked" (p. 70). The first instance arises when young not-yet-racialized children become aware of their white caregivers' racism, especially as parents disapprove of their children's relationships with people of color. The result is the shameful understanding that the parents' love is conditional on the child complying with unspoken racist expectations. The second instance includes white ethnic shame and poor white shame—the "fear of appearing different from their upper-class assailants" (p. 128). This describes the shame that results from denying those parts of oneself that do not conform to the terms of whiteness, which is ruled by an affluent, able-bodied Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) ideal.

Racial shame compromises self-love and "wholeness" (p. 87) and perpetuates the violences of whiteness, as shamed white people seek protection in its promises and project their hurt onto less-powerful racialized others. Residing in the private realm of the subconscious, shame remains unchallenged and further contributes to the insidiousness of whiteness (p. 117). Thandeka concludes that white people merely learning about white supremacy will never be sufficient for them to upend it. To do so, they must first "identify and name the actual feelings of self-contempt" (p.133) to address how whiteness has hurt them, "heal their broken spirits", and stake their own claim in combating white supremacy. Her conclusions follow Baldwin's theorization that whites' assumed superiority requires a spiritual and moral reckoning (1984). They are further bolstered by Resmaa Menakem's (2017) assertion that because white supremacy lives in the body, it must be confronted on the somatic level, rather than through merely cognitive or intellectual means.

I analyze my collaborators' experiences of racialized becoming in the context of their families and their assimilation into the American racialized "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990/2000). While I begin with Thandeka's framework of familial and ethnic shame, my

collaborators' experiences demand that I consider shame not only through race, class and ethnicity, but also through intersecting systems including colonialism, cis-heteropatriarchy antisemitism, and Christian hegemony. I suggest that while the assimilatory force of whiteness undoubtedly dominated my collaborators' racial formation in childhood and adolescence, the shame that it engendered eventually became the source for their later contestations of whiteness.

Racism and White Shame in the Family

Whiteness By Another Name: Soviet Orientalism, Anti-Indigeneity and Eurocentrism

The family is most white people's first context for learning whiteness and white domination. While my collaborators were raised in Soviet Jewish immigrant families by caregivers who did not identify as "white," but rather as ethnic/racial Jews as they had been regarded in the Soviet Union (in relation to ethnic Slavs, who topped the Soviet racial hierarchy), they were still exposed to white supremacist ideologies, via their parents' internalized Soviet orientalism, anti-indigeneity, and selective reverence of Western European and Russian cultural production. Many of my collaborators remembered hearing Indigenous peoples, whether Kazakh, Arab or African, described as primitive and "wasteful" of the land they were on. Luba recalls, "When my dad thought about Kazakhs, he just thought about them riding horses with their fur hats and swords. Like they're not civilized, they're nomadic." Like Luba, other collaborators heard this dehumanizing conflation of nomadism and barbarism in regard to Eastern Soviet people and Arabs used casually in their childhoods. This is the Soviet ideology that my collaborators' parents were socialized under in school and consumed in Soviet and Western European media.[19] It aligned Indigenous food gathering and nomadism with barbarism, and promoted European agriculture and cultural production as civilization.

Thus, even before my collaborators attended American schools, this Eurocentric proxy for "whiteness" permeated their childhoods. Stepha and I both recalled singing a children's song in Russian that painted the African continent as a lawless place devoid of people and overrun by dangerous wild animals:

> Маленькие дети! / Ни за что на свете / Не ходите в Африку, / В Африку гулять!
> [Malen'kie deti! / Ni za chto na svete / Ne khodite v Afriku, / V Afriku guliat'!
> Little children, no matter what, do not go to Africa / to Africa, for a walk!]

This song, based on Chukovsky's well-known children's story *Barmaley* (1925), was a Soviet adaptation of British colonialist rhetoric. Eurocentrism also manifested in a selective reverence for Russian and European cultural production. Rivka spoke to their parents' "obsession with culture, kultura" and the drive to "make sure that I'm 'cultured' and that I'm 'high art.'" The 'high' in high art, of course, referred to the Western European and Russian canon. Along with Pushkin and a few other revered Russian artists and musicians, household names in my collaborators' families were French, British, and sometimes German. For Stepha's family, French culture was "the epitome of civilization"— art, language, literature, cuisine, music. During her interview, I learned that we had played the same car game in childhood: guessing the

[19] While Soviet anti-indigeneity is often overlooked in Marxist literature, Sahni (1997) writes that "Marxist theory relegates human societies to different levels on the basis of material production… And because Marxism also links consciousness and culture to material production, a simplistic reductionism of human society occurs (p. 196).

composer playing on the classical radio station—who was most certainly either European or Russian.

Irina identifies these internalized racist, colonial values as products of their historical context. She explains,

> in [our parents'] time, empire wasn't a bad word. You know, «Пионеры» [Pionery, Pioneers], the whole colonialist project.. Europe was like, "this is how we dominated the world." It was seen as good. It was like… "look at us, we have an empire!" I mean, look at the Soviet project... it's the same thing.

Irina locates Soviet imperialism alongside European imperial and colonial expansion. By this account, European and Soviet domination are inherently virtuous civilizing projects that promote development as "progress," even as it is forged through domination and extraction.
And yet, as Jews, my collaborators' parents were *themselves* an internally colonized group, whose own parents and grandparents had suffered cultural assimilation and ethnic exclusion for the price of economic advancement, losing the Yiddish language within a generation. Still, as Irina's analysis suggests, their Sovietization led them to identify with European and Soviet colonial discourse and thus perpetuate racism in their families. This was "whiteness" by another name.

Antiblackness

Migration to the settler colonial United States transposed these racialized colonial ideologies onto a racial landscape that was characterized by antiblackness and anti-indigeneity themselves the legacy of European colonialism. As my collaborators' stories attest, this resulted in the adoption of antiblack attitudes among many of their parents. While I am choosing not to include most evidence of parental antiblackness that I have gathered out of care not to reproduce antiblack violence, it was unfortunately nearly ubiquitous among these immigrant families' meaning making around race and wealth. Echoing the Raegan-era antiblack rhetoric and cultural racism, Rebecca recalls "a lot of comments about Black people mooching off of welfare and being lazy and not having manners or being able to speak English." Similarly, Luba remembers her parents saying that Black people "don't want to work, they just get welfare... even though we were on welfare too." Comments like these implied that financial success was the result of hard work and perseverance, while poverty was a personal, cultural or biological fault. This demonization Black people alongside the framing of their own reliance on government subsidies as warranted reflected the simultaneous ignorance or denial of systemic racism in the U.S. and a disregard of their own privileges.

Racist and meritocratic ideologies reinforced one another. In Sasha's family, the immigration narrative was that "we came here with nothing and everything is a product of hard work." This meritocratic meaning-making also explains Rebecca's family's fixation on Black urban poverty. She says, "My parents think it's because people don't work hard enough. Period. They're like, look at us. Look at what we did with our hard work, we worked multiple jobs." Over and over, my collaborators' parents emphasize the virtues of their own toil, which they understood to fully explain their own upward class mobility. Luba's mom applies similar logics to undocumented people, who she criminalizes in contrast to her own supposedly law-abiding family. Luba grew up hearing,

> They didn't come here legally. We came here legally. We had to wait ten years to get our papers and do it by the law. My mom always will be like: they checked us in Europe. We had interviews and they checked all of us. They're not checking those people.

Luba's family hardly had an easy journey to the U.S.: her parents experienced antisemitic racism in the Soviet Union, were forced to wait more than a decade to immigrate, spent several months in transit with a baby, and worked low-wage jobs to survive once they arrived. At the same time, her mom's derision toward undocumented people overlooks the fact that she was eventually given a visa and pathway to citizenship, something many other non-European immigrants will never access.

Such racist discourse assumed an even playing field, while denying my collaborators' families' own privileges. Luba says, "My parents think that racism is over, that slavery is over. That they should get over it. We suffered. Look at what we did." While Luba's family indeed faced great adversity, their resettlement was also aided by her parents' higher education, professional experience, and the support of resourced Jewish institutions, not to mention phenotypes that were read as white, or at least not as Black. These realities also challenge family mythologies such as the story that Sasha's family 'came here with nothing.' Still, as long as these advantages go unnamed, the implication stands that if financial success was possible for new immigrants, then others are poor due to their innate qualities, or else by choice.

Whether parental antiblackness was brought over or adopted in the U.S., associations with Black people came to be seen as a threat to my collaborators' social and economic well-being. As explained in Chapter 4, new immigrant parents went to great lengths to secure housing and schooling in affluent, white-proximate neighborhoods. Sasha, Masha, Irina, Stepha, Rivka and I all grew up in suburbs without large Black populations. Where residential distance from Black people was not an option, as in San Francisco public housing, Rebecca and Luba were discouraged from associating with Black people altogether.

> Luba: My mom said I was out of control and bad. She wanted me to be civilized and more European. So she would say, «Ты должна быть культурной девочкой. Ты должна быть культурной.» [Ty dolzhna byt′ kul′turnoĭ devochkoĭ. Ty dolzhna byt′ kul′turnoĭ; You need to be a cultured girl. You need to be cultured.]" And associating with Black people, even watching them on TV, would make me not «культурная.» So they were not cultured. They weren't white. They weren't educated. They didn't have good jobs. They didn't have the nuclear family. They're out of control. . . . I remember I went to college in Oregon, and it was a super white place and my parents were like, thank God, at least it's a white place. Maybe she'll be civilized. Literally, that was said.

Through her mother's criticism, Luba perceived that blackness was fundamentally wild, bad, non-European, and uncultured—barbaric. In contrast, whiteness (although unnamed), was synonymous with goodness, control, Europeanness, and culture—civilization. Her mom justified this with cultural racism, associating Black people exclusively with poverty, unemployment, and non-nuclear family structures. This messaging communicated to Luba that she needed to associate with white people and distance herself from Black people. Her anecdote is reflective of an age-old immigrant rite of passage, as articulated by Toni Morrison (Morrison, 1993). As Morrison writes, new immigrants could point to Black Americans and "could all say, 'I am not that.' So in that sense, becoming an American is based on an attitude: an exclusion of me. It

wasn't negative to them — it was unifying." Luba's mother understood that her daughter's assimilation into the white middle class was predicated on her distance from Black people and blackness; her exclusion of Black friends from Luba's life. Perhaps this was a personal opportunity to finally be at the top of the hierarchy after a long familial history of racial "othering."

Socializing White Racial Shame in the Immigrant Family

The dissonance between my collaborators' own desires for interracial connection and their parents' antiblackness catalyzed personal shame. Growing up in San Francisco, Rebecca's Soviet Jewish family friends shared an apartment building with Black neighbors. She remembers her family's message that "Black people are scary" coming up against her internal voice that said "this is also our family friends' homes, so our family friends must have good neighbors." Ultimately, she says, "something didn't fit." This incongruous feeling continued through her childhood as she defied her parents' racialized expectations by kissing a Black classmate. Rebecca adds, "I also had a lot of shame around my first kiss, being with a Black person and knowing, oh, I could never tell my parents this." Rebecca's parents' antiblackness alienated her from them, and ultimately from her own desires. Even though she was true to herself in pursuing her romantic connection with her Black classmate, her connection with her parents was compromised, as she knew she could not share this news without being chastised. Following Thandeka, such a conflict between Rebecca's "forbidden desires" and her parents' disapproval suggested that she was doing something wrong, catalyzing an internal split and a sense of personal shame. While she may not have thought it consciously, Rebecca understood that her parents' love was conditional, and that she must somehow flawed. Indeed, Rebecca reflects that her family has always seen her as "some bizarre black sheep," as if the problem lies within her, rather than in her socializing environment.

This shaming alienated my collaborators' from their own internal morals, self-respect and self-love, and compromised their connection to their Soviet Jewish caregivers. While Luba's grandparents conspired in letting her watch shows with all-Black casts, like *Family Matters* and *Gullah Island*, her mother perceived any association with Black people as a threat to the family's aspiring middle-class white status. One day, having learned that Luba was playing with a Black girl at her grandparents' affordable housing complex, Luba's mother prohibited her from seeing the girl again.

> She said I wasn't allowed to do that anymore. They had a whole conversation, she and my babushka, and she said, 'you can't play with her because she—она чёрная (ona chërnaia, she's Black)'. And «мы не хотим, чтобы ты общалась с такими людьми» ["my ne khotim chtoby ty obshchalas' s takimi liud'mi; "we don't want you to associate with such people"].

It's telling that Luba switches from English to Russian to share these phrases, almost as if she is traveling back to her childhood home (this is true almost any time my collaborators shifted to Russian). These phrases have been burned into her memory. Like Rebecca's parents, Luba's mom challenged her child's desires on account of her own antiblack racism. In Thandeka's terms, she was policing the "nonwhite zone," or the Black zone to be more specific. As a child not yet cognizant of race, Luba "didn't realize what it really meant," so she naively shared her mother's message with her friend.

> I went to her, and I was like, well, I can't play with you because you're Black. And I remember her face. Like, I remember. I remember her face. I'm never gonna forget it. We were holding chocolate milk. And I said it to her and then I left. I don't know how much after, she and I crossed paths and I had to ignore her in the elevator. It was really sad. I remember being really upset about it. And she was like, can you come say hi or talk to my grandma? And I was like, sure. I told my babushka. She was like, 'okay'. So, my babushka didn't give a shit. That's when I went into her grandma's apartment. And her grandma was like, what color am I? and I was like, black. And she lifted up her shirt and her breast was like… her skin was light. It wasn't black. And she was like, what color is my chest? And I was like, white. She gave me a lecture: You don't know what color I am, so stop making judgments. How dare you? I can't remember the whole thing, but that's when I realized what race was. That's when I realized that there was a problem here, and I stopped telling my family who I was around.

In this moment, Luba consciously learned that her friend was "Black" and that she was not, but *not* that she herself was "white"—a realization that would come much later. She also absorbed that being Black was undesirable, and that non-blackness must be protected from blackness. It is important to note that Luba's profound learning about race was forged at the expense of Black people. At the same time, Thandeka would generously argue that Luba was also a victim, a young child who merely wanted two ultimately incongruous things: to play with her friend and to be accepted unconditionally by her mother.

For Luba, this step in white racial consciousness catalyzed several fractures: first, with the friend, who she was no longer allowed to see; second, with her mother, with whom she learned to no longer share certain details of her life; and third, with her own morality and feelings of worthiness. She reflects,

> I felt ashamed. Deep shame. I didn't see my friend again. Because I was scared of my mom. And I think my grandparents were kind of scared of her and I was little... I was like eight. I think I always felt her love was conditional. And she was crazy. And also now all these memories are coming up of her. Like, knowing that I was getting hit.

By complying with her mother's demand, Luba also began to align herself with whiteness, although she was hardly aware of this at the time. In addition to the fear of her mother's disapproval, the real threat of physical harm meant that she had little agency in the matter. The residue was shame and the fracturing of the whole self—what Thandeka calls "the quiet breakup of their core sense of themselves as different from their own community's racial ideals" (1999, p. 20). Indeed, this event marked Luba's estrangement from her mother, and from her own self. As her parents made antiblack remarks throughout her childhood, Luba remembers "compartmentalizing and being like, 'Oh, I can't talk about that…' like, nodding. It's kind of like I do now. Like nod and just get through it." Just like Rebecca did not share her first kiss with her parents, Luba went on to form close friendships with Black people but "stopped talking about all my friends to [my parents]. They were like secret friends." Luba preserved a part of her own humanity by not sharing her parents' views and continuing to have cross-racial friendships. At the same time, her silence in the face of her parents' racism, a tactic to avoid exile from the family, nevertheless meant reinforcing her alignment with whiteness, however unwillingly.

Furthermore, to preserve her integrity, Luba, like Rebecca, learned not to share important parts of herself with her parents, further broadening the rift.

While the potential break from racist family and community is surely fraught for anyone, for my collaborators, this distance has also meant losing ties to their Soviet Jewish heritage. To the extent that Soviet Jewish caregivers are the primarily link to family history, knowledge, and cultural practices, by confronting their parents' racism, my collaborators face the additional threat of rupture with their non-white and non-American lineage. This dynamic exploded in recent years, as my collaborators became more vocal in support of Palestinian sovereignty and the Movement for Black Lives. Often, intense arguments were followed by months of estrangement. While parents sometimes exhibited micro-shifts toward greater tolerance or understanding, other times they seemed to listen, only to later repeat the same arguments made on Fox News and RTV (Russian state media). In these times, the recent relationships that my collaborators and have built with one another have been invaluable for preserving some Soviet Jewish cultural practices, language, and histories— connections that themselves push against the assimilatory force of whiteness.

Intersectional Notions of White Shame: Immigrant, Jewish, Queer

The stories that my collaborators shared with me suggest that their "white shame" is best understood through intersecting structures of domination, including not just race, ethnicity and class, but also migration, gender, and sexuality. As they were being shamed for inter-racial friendships, some experienced shame on account of their own divergence from hegemonic standards of worth, both in their families and at school. The system of whiteness against which they and others were evaluated was internally hierarchical and "self-degrading," governed by the "class status, sexual and social mores, manners, and middle-class respectability" of straight, white, moneyed Anglo-Saxon Protestants (Thandeka, 1999, p. 43). Thus, most of my collaborators were both read as "white" via their phenotypes, *and* alienated on account of their intersecting ethnic immigrant difference, class difference, gender and sexuality. While being identified as white undoubtedly offered my collaborators structural advantages over people of color, the internal hierarchies of whiteness that regulated their inclusion also disciplined them into repressing their immigrant, Jewish, poor and queer differences, alchemizing these into shame in the service of racial assimilation.

The (Invisibilized) Immigrant Difference

Passing as White. Among my collaborators' multiple sources of alterity, what I call the "invisiblized immigrant difference" played a key role in shaping their sense of difference from dominant American culture and existing forms of whiteness. Although my collaborators were usually read as white Americans and were not included in the public imagination of "new immigrants" of the 1980s and 90s, which was dominated by migration from the Global South, they nevertheless primarily experienced themselves as immigrants. Reflecting on her childhood, Irina explains,

> I think at that time period I saw myself more as an immigrant than anything else. . . . In my household, the way that my parents and my grandparents would talk about the other people would be like: Американци ["Americantzi", "Americans"]. So it was like, нашы [nashi, us/ours], i Amerikantzi [and Americans].

It is understandable that for Irina's parents and grandparents, who navigated dominant American culture as foreigners, immigrant identity was most salient. The primary line of difference was not racial, but cultural and national, "us" (whether this was Soviets, Soviet Jews, Belorussian Jews, Ukrainian Jews, or another identification), and "them"—simply, the Americans. For Stepha, who grew up in an anti-assimilation household, Soviet identity was omnipresent: "It's the way I move, the way I eat. It's so fundamental." For Sasha, this was not only an "ethnic" identity characterized by food and language, but also an immigrant difference, defined by the specific struggles of migration and adaptation. She shares,

> The way that I grew up was really specific, you know, like, only having home-cooked Russian food. That experience of class, of struggling, being the translator. And different values, some that I think are great, you know, like, being frugal. [...] And, the family stories and the people in my family.

In Sasha's home, culture and the experiences of migration intersected in relationships to food and family that were both completely natural, and at the same time 'very specific' or different from the dominant culture. The contrasting culture outside seemed to be more affluent with less struggle, speaking English, and eating restaurant-prepared food.

Because my collaborators for the most part fit contemporary American phenotypic imaginations of whiteness, this ethnic immigrant complexity was largely invisibilized outside of Soviet immigrant contexts. While a few mentioned being exposed by their Russian-sounding names or childhood accents, or else having their ethnicity questioned on account of "darker" features (this will be discussed later), for the most part, my collaborators were read as white Americans. Irina says, "Because I'm white, people don't ask me, 'where are you from?' or like, 'who are your people?' or whatever." As a white-identified person, she is not subjected to racist interrogations of where she's "*really* from." At the same time, because my collaborators are not imagined to be immigrants, they are also not prompted to share their lineages or migration experiences. Unless they volunteer this information, their Soviet Jewish family histories and immigrant experiences remain obscured. Stepha reflects, "I guess there were little moments where I figured out that people couldn't tell I was [Soviet] Jewish just by looking at me. Which means then, by proxy, they would assume that I was a white American." This is a privilege, but it comes with a cost. They recall,

> feeling just infuriated at how like, yeah, I'm not fucking one of you. Like, I am not one of you… My clothes don't look like yours. My language doesn't fucking sound like yours, that you are making no effort to fucking include me. We are not the same.

While the advantages of assumed whiteness are undeniable, not being seen also carried negative consequences. This constant misidentification erases the 'specific' experience Sasha shared earlier, including both the asymmetrical differences of class and language. Thus, Stepha's anger and frustration can be considered a small resistance against the erasures of racialized assimilation.

Early on, my collaborators absorbed that their differences from the forms of whiteness they encountered were undesirable and should be hidden or distanced from. Although Luba, Rebecca, and Irina spent the earliest years of their schooling in cities where they attended school with many other Russian-speaking immigrants, within a few years nearly all of my collaborators

were in schools where their Soviet Jewish cultural practices and life experiences were disregarded. As Irina says, "It was just separated. It was like my school life. And then my family life." This split constituted the everyday erasure of assimilation, a mundane kind of shaming by misrecognition. Of course, this was facilitated by my collaborators' ability to blend in with white Americans, as exemplified by Irina's of drawing her imagined "immigrant ancestor" in school (when *she* herself was the immigrant). Now an adult, she reflects, "I created this other version that fit in with all the other children's immigrant stories. Isn't that fucked up? I assimilated to the point of lying about my own immigration story." Similarly, I recall telling my elementary school class that I had been born in the U.S., when I had actually been born in Moscow. At the time, no one said anything, but more than twenty years later, I still feel the burn of shame on my face.

Anti- "Russian" Discourse. Sometimes immigrant ethnic identity was not ignored, but rather was explicitly stigmatized. As Russian-speaking immigrants and children of Soviet Jews attending school in the wake of the Cold War, some of the bullying my collaborators and I experienced was specifically anti-"Russian." Other children did not understand that we were Jews in the context of the Soviet Union; to them, through the lens of American media, we were simply "Russian" and were thus associated with barbarism: communism, corruption, alcoholism, poverty, craziness. Growing up in Phoenix, Arizona, Sasha remembers,

> This mean bully who bullied a bunch of people used to call me a Russian rat…. Yeah, hurt my feelings. Yeah, made me feel gross. I felt bad. I had, you know, smelly food. It was homemade for a while, but then I remember really pushing to buy the $1.25 gross cheese, bread, milk, you know, from my stupid cafeteria. So I would buy lunch a lot. And yeah, I do feel like I had food shame.

By associating Sasha with vermin, her classmate implied that being Russian (or Russian-speaking) was dirty and diseased. She immediately grew ashamed of the healthy, homecooked food that she otherwise loved but that was now deemed "smelly." The food shame translated to a broader shame toward her heritage and family, and pushed her to eat the school lunch, which was less healthy but much more assimilated.

For Stepha, being Russian was much more negative than being Jewish, because it could not be associated with a positive American identity. Stepha says that, growing up in Palo Alto, CA, "If I say I'm Jewish people are like, "Oh, that's really cool. Yeah. Like, I went to a friend's mitzvah once, right? If I say I'm Russian, it's like, oh wow, do your parents drink vodka, you know?" As Stepha illustrates in an entry in the Kolektiv zine/samizdat (Image 3), she grew up being asked repeatedly about vodka, bears, potatoes, the mafia, mail order brides, and so on.

CAPTION Image 3: Stepha's submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat, illustrating anti-Russian stereotypes

These American anti-Russian stereotypes have been visually reproduced in American media, from the Cold War through contemporary Instagram accounts such as @lookatthistrussian, which is run by a white American with 1.2 million followers, and features short videos of people from the former Soviet Union engaging in "crazy" behavior. Reflecting on her childhood, Rebecca confirms that there was indeed "some cultural stereotype of crazy Russians or intense Russians… being projected onto me." The implication of these microaggressions and stereotypical representations is that Russians, and by extension all Russian-speaking immigrants, are brutish, barbaric, and criminal, in contrast to civilized white Americans.

Unavoidably, my collaborators have both internalized and distanced themselves from these barbarized representations. Rebecca contrasted her childhood perceptions of the "peaceful, well-rounded, financially stable, healthy white people" she saw in TV shows like *7th Heaven* with the more familiar Russian-speaking immigrant families, who seemed "snarky," "nagging" and loud. Masha internalized anti-Russian stereotypes to the extent that when asked if she was Russian she would snap, "do you have a problem with that?" She locates these feelings in lingering Cold War anti-Communism: "to this day, Russians are always the sort of existential threat in the media, like just these absurd bullshit villains. And so I think I was kind of like... 'yeah, but no*t that* Russian' or something, you know. For a lot of years, and especially since our group [the Kolektiv], I have really strongly just been like, oh my God, I'm so sick of this fake Russian accent portrayal of these Russian immigrants. Don't get me started on Season 3 of Stranger Things…" Growing up, these derogatory comments caused some of my collaborators to further disassociate from their immigrant identities and recede into whiteness, or conversely,

resist identification with American culture and non-Soviet Americans, as in Stepha's case. As Masha implies (and as will be discussed in a later chapter), finding others who shared her experience has enabled her to confront this early shame, transform it into anger and iteratively release it.

Immigrant Class Difference. The difference from dominant forms of whiteness also felt through class, as it intersected with immigrant experience, particularly in childhood and early adolescence. As discussed in Chapter 4, my collaborators' parents came to the U.S. with formal education but without intergenerational wealth, savings, or property. While they worked working class jobs as cashiers, drivers, and caregivers, Jewish institutions also put them in relationship with more affluent, established white American Jews. As my collaborators' parents completed training programs and saved money, they strived to purchase homes in upper middle class areas. Even when this was not possible, they found ways to enroll their children in resourced Jewish schools and summer camps. As a result, my collaborators often found themselves to be the least financially resourced among wealthy peers. In these contexts, name-brand clothes served as symbols of status, belonging, and worth. Growing up in a wealthy suburban Palo Alto neighborhood, Stepha remembers longing for a Jansport backpack and Adidas. For Sasha, it was Abercrombie at the Jewish summer camp that she attended on scholarship. While other children wore name brand clothes and received care packages of treats, Sasha borrowed clothes and, aside from letters from her babushka, only received one package in her entire ten years at camp— rain boots. While my collaborators all unequivocally had their basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing met, many nevertheless experienced an immigrant version of what Thandeka (1999) calls "poor white shame." This internalized sense of inferiority was the result of comparing their own immigrant families to more affluent, non-immigrant whites, at once feeling estranged from them and wanting to be like them.

Such visible disparities in accrued wealth exacerbated the negative sense of difference my collaborators already felt as immigrants. The excesses of American capitalist consumerism contrasted with familial austerity, the likely result of immigrant necessity, communist sensibilities, and inherited scarcity, contrasted with. In this way, the rain boots and borrowed clothes are burned into Sasha's memory as symbols of her class difference from the other campers, who received less-utilitarian gifts. Similarly, reflecting on attending a wealthy private high school, Luba says,

> I felt like I was poor compared to what was going on in my high school. I slept on the couch a lot at my grandparents' house. I remember going to people's big houses, mansions. . . . I have many memories of running out of money and not being able to take my second bus to school. And my дедушка [dedushka, grandfather] was getting bags of free food, government food. I felt like we were poor.

Even though Luba's basic needs were met, the feeling of being a scholarship kid in such a wealthy environment brought estrangement and shame, especially when this difference was made public. Luba remembers feeling ashamed after her teacher repeatedly asked her for her fee for a school trip in front of the whole class. She says, "I was the poor one that needed scholarships. And I was perceived that way and everyone knew that. So I was known for needing some help. Which sucked." Within the context of hegemonic wealthy whiteness, 'needing some help"' implied inferiority and weakness, an external perception that Luba internalized.

This childhood immigrant class shame encouraged my collaborators' assimilation and reinforced feelings of scarcity that continue to mediate their current relationships to money. As some experienced an upward class shift, their unaddressed adoption of "poor white shame" further facilitated their absorption into whiteness. Stepha reflects, "I think I took it for granted that assimilation could be an option as soon as I could, you know, start buying my own clothes and like, learn more about the culture." She says, with her typical sardonic humor,

> Middle School was an amazing time of assimilation…I got the fucking Adidas! The fucking blue stripes. With the colorful purple star shoelaces. I had a fully American best friend named Kristen. . . I finally got signed up for hot lunch. Everyone got pizza, and I got pizza. You know, just the same.

Once their parents' financial upward mobility allowed it, my adolescent collaborators immediately acquired the items that would make them 'the same' as the most affluent kids (who were often, but not always, also white), thereby securing their social status. Class mobility facilitated assimilation to the extent that it distanced my collaborators from the food and clothing their parents had selected from them, and brought them one closer to the hegemonic white ideal.

Of course, the comforts of assimilation did nothing to transform the calcified class shame of earlier years. Looking back, Luba recognizes that her own poor white (immigrant) shame instilled a mindset of economic scarcity that she continues to try to combat to this day. Today, she deliberately trains herself to acknowledge her access and resources, to decouple security from financial wealth, and to practice financial redistribution. As discussed further in the next chapter, my collaborators understand this work as part of the practice of de-assimilating from whiteness within the broader structure of racial capitalism.

Immigrant Disidentifications. One of the most painful consequences of my collaborators' childhood shame was their own disidentification from their Soviet Jewish backgrounds, a desire for acceptance that was made possible by phenotypic whiteness. During my collaborators' childhoods, shame lurked behind everything that risked revealing the immigrant difference: food, language, parents, and other Russian-speaking immigrants. I still remember keeping a distance from my parents in the supermarket, especially when they spoke "too loud" in Russian, lest it be discovered that I, too, was foreign, and not just a white American. Reflecting on similar experiences, Irina acknowledges that

> there was a lot of shame about not wanting my parents to come to school or not wanting my friends at my house. I really didn't have any post-Soviet friends growing up, intentionally. I could have, you know, there were people around.

As she articulates it, our childhood investments in assimilation engendered two kinds of shame: the initial shame that our parents were different from (white) American, and the secondary, self-conscious shame that we were embarrassed of the people who were raising us. Sasha explains,

> That thing about being ashamed of your parents… I wasn't the kind of person that was like, "mom, dad, can you help me with my homework?" I was like, "they don't know," you know? And so I didn't think that they had the best opinions on stuff, I think because I had to be the translator or, like, they didn't get stuff. Obviously, I feel bad. I feel a lot of

> shame about how rude that is. How hard they're working and to feel less respect for them because they were just trying their best. You know, that teenage bullshit.

Like many children of immigrants, Sasha had a better command of English than her parents, and didn't feel able to ask them for help. At the same time, memories of her childhood resentment of her immigrant parents now make her feel that she was bad, an ungrateful child to parents who were 'just trying their best.'

Disassociating from other Russian-speaking immigrants, especially those who were visibly foreign, was another way to secure the status of white American. This was of critical importance at school, as Irina explains:

> At first I was the only one. But then a year later this other Soviet immigrant came. And I intentionally stayed away from her. I didn't want anything to do with her. People would always be like "oh you should be her friend," and I'm like, "No, I don't want to be her friend." I guess I just thought the other Soviet Jewish people were uncool and I didn't want to be like that. So, there's that. Always trying to elevate my status.

Proximity to more recent (post-) Soviet immigrants threatened our own ability to "pass", compromising our status in the hierarchy of American whiteness. Echoing Irina's experiences, I remember hiding in the supermarket from my seventh-grade teacher because I was terrified that she was going to ask me to befriend the new Russian- speaking boy in school. Stepha affirms, "there's those of us who, like, a teacher tried to get us to hang out with or help someone who was not assimilated. And we were like, oh, hell no! And our own shame... Yeah. The shame in that moment... and also, like, the shame now." As my collaborators and I recall these experiences, we uncover and free ourselves from new layers of residual shame.

Assimilation was not only an external performance, but an internal process that fractured my collaborators' relationship to their native language and facilitated their white racial formation. The pressure to learn English and adopt a hegemonic American accent was great. Irina says, "After I got into school I think there was a very clear feeling for me of like, I need to learn English and get rid of my accent and be like these other kids." While many young immigrants face the stigma of being English language learners in a xenophobic society, my collaborators did not have to face the additional challenge of racism. Rather, besides their names, their accents and language skills were often the most overt barrier to them being indistinguishable from the other (white) kids. Thus, the Russian language was at once the umbilical cord to Soviet Jewish identity and family, and a threatening obstacle to acceptance and status, especially at school. Stepha directly connects her experiences of language with her white identity formation.

> It was like, not knowing English to knowing English but having an accent, to knowing English and not having an accent. I can remember when people stopped asking me where I'm from. I would say probably for the first ten years [being Jewish from the USSR] was a very big part of my identity but also one that I was trying to probably minimize to some extent.

As her English improved and her Russian accent faded, others began reading her as a white American. This supported the desire to minimize her Soviet Jewish identity publicly, even as it

remained important to her, privately. While Stepha exclusively spoke Russian in the home, those of us who did not maintain our Russian language are facing the consequences of disidentifying from our Soviet Jewish identities to the extent of nearly losing them to American whiteness. For Sasha, rejecting Russian to assimilated has carried painful, near-irreversible effects:

> The tragedy has this other layer where it was me kind of running away from it. Like, I didn't want to speak at home, didn't want to read with my grandma... like read Pushkin and everything. And then, you know, them speaking to me in Russian, me responding in English, and rolling my eyes when I was told to respond in Russian. And then, yeah, of course, I lost the ability. And then trying to come back to it and it being such an uphill battle. And just feeling like it's gone... because... I know I was a kid, but because of that drive to get away from it…

Sasha and I, both having grown up stubbornly answering our parents in English, often commiserate about our struggles with Russian. We understand the language well but can't express ourselves with ease. Sasha understands that she was just a child at this time of deep assimilation, but still grieves her young 'drive to get away' from her familial inheritances. Now, as adults, we attempt to retrieve those pieces of ourselves that we once abdicated so eagerly.

Some of my collaborators' parents, presumably driven by their own grief and shame, participated in their children's assimilation, even as they have also criticized it. Unable to "blend in" to American whiteness as easily as their children, some publicly distanced themselves from other Russians-speaking immigrants. This made Irina question her own pride in her heritage:

> I think that's the hardest part about this stuff. It's a lot easier to connect to your own identity and culture when other people affirm it. And it's weird... My parents aren't proud of where they're from. They don't want to talk about it. It's not like I got this from nowhere. When we're out in the world and we see other Russian speakers, my parents don't go up to them. When people ask them where they're from, they say they're from Colorado. It's not like they're ashamed, but they don't want to be visible in that way. And even though all their friends are post-Soviet Jewish and everything they read and think about is from there, it's like they don't want to be visible. They don't want to be marked and they don't want to be stigmatized and they don't want to be fetishized or tokenized.

Unlike my collaborators, who pass as American-born whites, their parents *do* have the experience of being asked "where they are from" on account of their accents. For some, then, obfuscating their own immigrant difference in public, or to Americans, may be an agentive response to fetishization, tokenization, or xenophobia. At the same time, for the child witness, this apparent rejection of heritage instills feelings of shame, making it all the more undesirable for them to identify publicly with their Soviet Jewish identity and culture.

In some families, caregivers explicitly denied their children's claim to their heritage. Rivka explains,

> Something my mom always used to gaslight me about is being like, 'No, no, no, ты «Американка Amerikanka» ["ty Amerikanka," "you're an American, *fem.*"], and I'm like, okay, but like, I grew up in a culture, I grew up in a family that wasn't. So, you have to understand that I just did not have the same experience as my American counterparts.

> And telling me that I'm this American isn't helping me in understanding my identity. And so for a long time, you know, you're confused.

This conflict is common for the children of immigrants, who are often read fully as American in their native countries and by their own families. It's understandable that our parents and grandparents, who spent their formative years in the Soviet Union and do not pass as white Americans as easily as their children, we are American. In other words, to the immigrant parent who feels deeply *not* American, the ease with which their children navigate American culture and the English language classifies the children as American, something only reinforced by the children's distance from Soviet culture. At the same time, as our caregivers are the primary link to everything that makes us not *only* American, their rejection of our claims to Soviet Jewishness denies our reality, and threatens to further erode our connection with our ancestry and culture. During childhood, this denial only furthered my collaborators' assimilation into American whiteness.

While the Russian language was a deep source of pride and some parents enforced learning it, some also shamed their children's command of the language. Rivka's father was adamant about speaking to them in English and wanted them to learn to speak English without an accent. Their mother and grandmother spoke to them in Russian, but with constant criticism:

> My whole life, my mom would criticize my Russian. I would try to speak Russian. And I would be speaking Russian to everyone in my family, and they would all relatively understand me. . . . We'd have a conversation. It was fine. But as I was speaking, ... my mom would make fun of my words. She'd make fun of my pronunciation. I'd be like, "Mom, . . . you want me to speak, right? Isn't it called practice to keep..?" It's just so funny, because it's like, what fuckin' parents make fun of their kid for speaking the language they want them to speak? Instead of just being like, "it's actually pronounced like this" or, you know, "say it like this." It's just so crazy because it's like, blaming your child. Now my бабушка [babushka, grandmother] is making fun of how I speak. And I'm like, whose fault is that?
>
> It wasn't just that I was insecure about speaking in public, it was that I was insecure *speaking* [Rivka's emphasis]. Because they made me think that I was terrible at speaking Russian. And I was like, why would I ever speak this language that you're insulting me to speak?

Although Rivka, who was born in the United States, made efforts to practice Russian, the ongoing criticism they received made them self-conscious and was profoundly discouraging. Approaching with curiosity and compassion, I interpret this shaming as a reflection of parental grief at the ruptures of immigration, their own alienation in their host society, and their estrangement from their Americanized children, who cannot command the language with ease. Still, rather than supporting them to maintain the language, it has fomented an additional barrier of shame and aversion that some are still working to overcome are they reclaim Russian for themselves.

Antisemitism, Christian Hegemony and Jewish Difference

Antisemitism at School. Beyond migration experience and class, my collaborators' Jewishness was yet another site of their difference from the hegemonic WASP ideal. Given their inaccurate labeling as "Russian" immigrants, their Jewishness was not always apparent in American gentile contexts. Still, under antisemitic and Christian-dominant forms of whiteness, some were derided for being Jewish, either on account of their bodies or their assumed religion. On the west coast, where ethnic Jewishness did not figure as prominently in dominant racial consciousness as further east, Rebecca was subjected to Christian antisemitism. Around the time that Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ was released, she remembers her Asian Christian friends telling her, "we can't be friends with you because your people killed Jesus Christ." Unsure if they were correct or not, she felt confused, and genuinely questioned whether she should be sorry. Although she tried to talk to her parents about the situation, it still felt unresolved, leaving feelings of 'otherness and outsiderness and shame.'

For Rivka, who grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, Jewishness was vilified as an embodied *racial* marker, especially by "friends" who were more proximate to the white ideal. They describe the ways their body was attacked:

> I had dark hair and I've always had really dark hair on my arms and my legs and everything. And through middle school I was called, you know, "big nose, big butt, big boob," everything, everything, big, big. People would call me these names. And it was interesting because I felt really alien. I just remember feeling so alien from elementary school to middle school. . . . My best friend growing up was Italian and German. The other one was Ukrainian, but American and blonde. There was that alienation for me. They would call me "big nose," "Jew," all these different things that were specific to my identity. And so it was this really interesting experience of actually experiencing antisemitism and actually experiencing this othering by my friends and the people around me. . . . I was very aware of the difference between me and them.

As Rivka speaks, they refer multiple times to feeling 'alien' and othered. In their experience, a white gentile racial gaze racialized their Jewishness, essentializing it and marking it undesirable: too big, too curvy, too hairy, and too dark in comparison to the white norm. Rivka remembers another Jewish classmate who was more proximate to idealized whiteness, being spared from this identification: "She was tall, blonde, had a bat mitzvah, was rich as fuck, had a pool, and was Jewish! And she didn't get called Jew, but I did!" While the classmate's religious Jewishness did not negatively mark her as a Jew in the eyes of white gentile classrooms, Rivka's own curvy body and darker features were negatively racialized as Jewish. Reflecting on the source of this white and antisemitic body shaming, Stepha offers Resmaa Menakem's (2017) term "white body supremacy" as "your corporeal, actual, three-dimensional form, being the subject of evaluation, projection, aberration, aspiration." Rivka and Rebecca's bodies were indeed the subject of this evaluation, being at once white and yet not white enough. Furthermore, Rivka says it was people who were "whiter" than them who "acknowledge[d] me as this ethnic person." In this social context, white gentiles, including white ethnics like German, Italians and Ukrainians, were the arbiters enforcing the boundaries.

The suggestion that my collaborators' Jewish bodies were somehow too much compared to a white gentile norm both hypersexualized and desexualized them, causing further estrangement. Rebecca shares,

> I felt very othered even by my own friends, because I hit puberty very early. I got my period in fifth grade. I just felt so much alienation from literally everyone, even those girls who were calling me out for being Jewish. I was getting a training bra and all of that stuff much earlier. My boobs were coming in. So there are just many levels of not sameness.

Just as Rivka was bullied for having a 'big butt' and 'big boobs.' Rebecca was self-conscious of her own developing body, as compared to a hegemonic white or gentile norm. Rivka came to understand the body shaming and bullying they experienced in relation to media they were consuming, in which Jewish women were often the de-sexualized, comedic sidekick to a desirable white, gentile protagonist. "I literally saw myself as an ogre-monster because of the way they positioned me to be this 'funny butt of the joke.' I'm the funny best friend. I'm the funny person who's desexualized. No boy can like me. They can like being around me, but they can never like me." The hegemonic white gaze rendered Rivka's phenotypic difference from a thin, blonde, hairless, white "feminine" standard undesirable and even non-human (other, alien, ogre- monster). In this system, even bodies like that Rivka's and Rebecca's that were broadly considered "white" or deemed white specifically in relation to blackness, were denigrated for their deviations from the narrow white ideal.

Internalized Antisemitism in the Family. Unfortunately, antisemitic shame was not limited to schooling, as my collaborators were also exposed to their parents' own internalized antisemitism. Overall, my collaborators' life histories suggested that their Soviet families had very complex relationships to Jewishness; this identification and identity carried contradictory pride, shame, and fear. Among the mixed messages my collaborators received about their own Jewishness, some were taught by both their Jewish and non-Jewish parents that their Jewish bodies were undesirable. For example, multiple people shared memories of their Jewish family members telling stories of holding up their noses in hopes that the горбинка (gorbinka, bump/crook) would dissolve, turning their nose upward. The stereotypical "Jewish nose" was a much-discussed facial feature in the family. Rebecca shares,

> I remember being told I had a big nose. Yeah. [turns in profile and traces nose]. Actually, my mom even made comments often like, "Oh, you got your dad's nose, you got that горбинка." That felt very ingrained in me too, like… oh, everyone can tell because I have this big nose.

Similarly, Stepha remembers "my [non-Jewish] mom told me when I was young that if I got my dad's nose— and my dad's nose is this shape (makes bump with fingers)—she would pay for my nose job." While Ashkenazi Jewish women's self-hating relationships to their noses has been much discussed within the context of U.S. whiteness, this internalized white Eurocentrism and antisemitism clearly also functioned in my collaborators' Soviet families. Rebecca's family's discussion of her nose made her self-conscious that 'everyone can tell' that she is Jewish. Given the context of Soviet antisemitism, it is unclear whether her family understood this to be inherently undesirable, or rather a mark that could expose one to danger. Regardless, these stories have the effect of directing the site of necessary change away from societal antisemitism

to my collaborators' Jewish bodies, which—as Stepha's mom implies—must be violently altered to better fit a Slavic, European or white standard.

In some families, internalized antisemitism resulted in distancing not only from one's own body but also from other Soviet Jews. Masha says squarely,

> my parents were antisemitic. Like, они не жили «в этой среде» . . . они не жили «вокруг этих жыдовских людей.» [Oni ne zhili "v ėtoĭ srede" . . . oni ne zhili "vokrug ėtikh zhydovskikh liudeĭ", They did not live "in this milieu," they didn't live "among these Yids (Jews, derogatory connotation)"] . . . it was internalized shit.

Having immigrated to Chicago, Masha's parents prided themselves on never having lived on Devon Street, where many other new Soviet Jewish lived. She remembers hearing her parents making fun of accents that marked people as Jews from Odesa and describing Jews through antisemitic stereotypes: «жадные . . . нудные . .. и завистливое» (zhadnye . . . nudnye . .. i zavistlivoe"; greedy… annoying…and envious). While today Masha understands these comments as her parents' own internalized antisemitism, over time, the shame this caused disconnecting her from her own Jewish identity, something she is only recently beginning to reclaim. Thandeka (1999) would likely identify these stories as instances of "white ethnic shame," the self-hate that results from one's difference from the white hegemonic ideal— or, in the Soviet context, the hegemonic Slavic ideal. This racialized shame was transferred from parents to my collaborators themselves, as some of them, too, came to believe that being Jewish was undesirable, and that this meant there was something inherently wrong with them.

Cis-heteropatriarchy and Queer Difference

Queerness and gender non-conformity constitute a final axis on which my collaborators experienced alienation from hegemonic, cis-heteropatriarchal whiteness. Although many forms of white queerness are increasingly accepted (and sometimes even celebrated) in dominant American society, several of my collaborators nevertheless experienced childhood and adolescent shame due to their chided deviations from narrow gender expectations. Furthermore, American cultures aside, queerness was and continues to be negatively perceived in most of my collaborators' families, owing to Soviet homophobia[20] and the persistent fear of deviance. Even as Soviet Jewish gender norms do not perfectly map onto white American norms (e.g., in the role of women in the family), many of my collaborators were still evaluated in their families by heteronormative and narrowly gendered standards of worth. Nearly all of my collaborators said that their Soviet Jewish mothers violated American notions of femininity by their outspokenness, assertiveness and independence. Rivka said "no one in my family is extremely feminine," while Irina shared that her mother outfitted her with outfits and haircuts that would be read in the U.S. today as "genderqueer." Still, others, like Luba and Rebecca, recalled being adorned in dresses and large бантики (bantiki, bows) on top of their heads.

[20]In one study of early Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S., many respondents "described homosexuals as deviant, dangerous and mentally incompetent people, whose impact on the rest of society should be restricted as much as possible." (Goldenberg & Saxe, 1996, p. 427). Rather than the result of any individual moral failure, these bigoted views were likely a Soviet response to "rigorous laws, suppressed of any information potentially favorable to this 'sexual perversion,' and strong public opinion against this form of behavior (Sanjian, 1991)" (p. 423). Perhaps with the exception of insular artist and gay communities, attitudes toward gay people in the Soviet Union were negatively "intense", "extreme", and "consensually agreed on" (p. 423).

Ultimately, aside from Stepha (whose mother seemed to question the relevance of binary gender even for herself, going by a masculine nickname), my collaborators told stories of being disciplined into heterosexual Eurocentric "femininity" once they were in the U.S. Luba was repeatedly told by her mother she needed to be a «культурная девочка» (culturnaya devochka, cultured girl). When I ask her how this might look, she paints quite a detailed picture:

> If I was straight and wore dresses. If I was straight and 100 pounds and wore like, you know, what is that brand my mom liked? She liked to wear Bebe and Cache. If I wore those things and had a husband. If I bore children and was a doctor that made $300,000. And, like, also knew my French classical musical artists. And, you know, wore my hair down... and painted my nails and stuff.

This overwhelming description reinforced the way Luba's mom called on mutually reinforcing structures in the Eurocentric matrix of domination—heterosexuality, narrow conceptions of gender, wealth, Western European epistemology—to discipline and shame. Luba did not live up to any of the items in her mother's checklist, falling short of being "kulturnaya" (meaning civilized, good, desirable), and so she did not merit mother's full love and approval. This resulted in not feeling inherently worthy. She explains, "I always felt like I wasn't girly enough. My parents, or my mom and Babushka, tried to make me more feminine all the time. Бантики and always the clothes and the haircut. It just felt like I never cared enough, either." On account of these layered hegemonic expectations, Luba's embodiment, gender, and sexuality became sites of distance from her mother's love and acceptance.

The gendered disciplining of my collaborators' bodies resulted in internalized shame. In addition to bullying at school, many collaborators shared how normalized it was for their parents, grandparents, and even Soviet Jewish family friends to comment on their bodies. This was especially true around weight. Rivka shares,

> It's incredible how much of my body was attacked growing up, you know? And not just by those girls [at school], but by my mom... by my own mother, you know? And not about my nose or anything— it wasn't like that— but about my weight. Now, looking back, she's like, "you weren't even fat." And I'm like, okay, well during that time, you were making me feel like I was a monster-ogre, you know? So I tell her, I'm like, "mom, when I see myself, I see a monster. I feel like a monster." She's like, «я не понимаю почему ты так говоришь» [ia ne ponimaiu pochemu ty tak govorish'; I don't understand why you say that]. And I'm like, "you said terrible things to me." She's like, "you need to forget that, you need to forget that." I'm like, "how do you just forget that? That's ingrained in your brain. Developmental trauma is how you remember your life."

While Rivka was already facing antisemitic and homophobic bullying at school, their mother's fatphobic comments were especially harmful. Although the thin, European ideal against which they were measured was completely arbitrary, the persistent criticism led them to see themselves as grotesque, even as non-human: 'a monster-ogre,' Furthermore, when Rivka externalized the shame in an attempt to release it, their mom did not take responsibility but rather instructed them to turn their feelings inward. Despite this tendency among many parents, a likely response to their own trauma and Soviet socialization, Rivka knows they have already internalized this external shaming—it is how they '[remember [their] life.'

As my collaborators came more fully into their queer sexuality and non-normative gender identities, their parents' homophobia fed ongoing alienation and shame. Some remember their parents' homophobia before they came into their own queerness: Rebecca recalls her dad grumbling homophobic remarks when he got stuck in traffic amidst a gay pride parade in the Castro. Luba remembers her dad's wife saying "the most homophobic things, transphobic things, really horrible things." At the same time, in Luba's family, the actual possibility of being gay was not talked about. "It was always extra pressure to find a husband, find a husband. You can't be successful without a husband. You didn't come to America to not have a husband." Without having interviewed the parents directly, the sources of their attitudes are speculative. Irina attributes them to the Soviet characterization of gay people as "deviants" disrupting the normal order, as well as to her parents' own fears that sexual deviance begets catastrophe.

Given this context, perhaps it is not surprising that a group that is racially othered would respond to the prospect of further alterity with trepidation. Of her mother, Irina says, "She doesn't know any gay people, or any queer people or any trans people. And even though I've had queer and trans friends for a very long time, she just still sees it as something else and not in our family. So I know that she's ashamed or scared." Similarly, Rivka says her parents' homophobia is rooted in "survival." They say, "my mom used to tell me to take 'they/them' off my Facebook, like when I did a poetry event. She'd be like, 'take it off right now. You're not gonna get a job.'" (They responded by explaining to their mom that sometimes being queer *benefits* them professionally). Irina affirms that normativity offers her parents a "sense of safety." She says, "they want me to have a normal life [...] it's what they think is right. They think deviance is dangerous, and that's what they've been taught by the state and by their own families." Informed by unprocessed trauma and fueled by good intentions, this position continues to cause great pain for those children who simply cannot conform to such a definition of "normalcy."

When my collaborators shared with their parents that they were queer or gay, nearly all were met with negative responses. Luba says that as she came into her sexuality, "I knew they were homophobic. I knew it would not be okay," and so for many years she resolved to never tell her parents. Stepha's parents were exceptions: her mother reacted "neutrally" while her dad was calm. (My mom, for her part, said she would prefer for me to be straight, but acknowledged this was her problem). Although Sasha's mother later came around, she initially "had every possible negative reaction," asking whether it was her fault and if it was because she hadn't been around, and then completely stopped asking Sasha questions. When Rivka told their parents they were in love with a trans person, their father pulled their hand away from them, while their mother stopped talking to them for three months and cut them off financially. (It was after this that they founded the Facebook group "the soviet jews r queer" for support). Later, Rivka wrote in a submission to the Kolektiv's zine/samizdat about seeking comfort in their babushka/grandmother "…when my mother periodically decides that she is not my mother because my 'queerness is ruining her life'..." **(**Image 4).

CAPTION Image 4: Rivka's submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat on queer shame

When Irina shared her queerness with her mother, the response was, «не говори это твоему папе, он расстроится» [ne govori ėto tvoemu pape, on rasstroitsia; don't tell your dad, he will get upset.]" When Luba finally told her mother she was gay, her mother responded that the news would kill her babushka. Three years later, Luba says "we don't talk about it. And I still have to hide my partner. My mom knows I live with them, but I can't mention it." Similarly, Masha's mother "literally never asked a follow up question about my partner", even after their five years together. Once in a while, Luba and Masha's mothers will send care packages with enough food or sweets for two— a glimmer of hope that they may one day accept their children as they are. For now, Sasha's parents have become supportive, while Rivka and Luba take consolation in their бабушки (babushki, grandmothers), who have offered greater acceptance and unconditional love, but not without the occasional prod to find a husband.

Despite the variance in their situations, nearly all of my collaborators have had to make concessions on account of their families' homophobia. While Irina reports delaying pursuit of her most free and full queer self to maintain her connection with her parents, Luba, Rivka and Masha live their personal lives as they want to, but compromise the ability to be fully honest and open with their families. Even as Luba has had to give up a relationship with her father (and thus any possible inheritance), she continues to live a queer life, despite all the risks. "Part of it is because I think I don't fit in as a straight person. Like, I just couldn't even fake it, you know. It's just impossible to fake. I'd rather not live than do that." Still, pursuing queerness has come with

costs. Masha says that although "for at least the last twelve years I have been super fucking militantly queer", she feels painfully "closeted" in her parents' Soviet Jewish communities. Both she and Luba expressed the dreadful anticipation of events where they would be assumed to be straight and asked about their romantic lives. They grieved not being able to talk freely and honestly about their relationships or bring their partners with them to family events. Rivka says,

> if I could tell my family every single detail about me, I would. That's the kind of person I am. I would tell them literally everything, from my polyamory to… I don't want to have any secrets. They just can't handle it. So, they made me into a kind of a liar. That's also an upsetting thing, because I'm like... I'm a liar. I don't like to lie. But I learned to lie because they just can't handle it.

For Rivka, not being able to share a part of themselves feels like lying, reflecting the internal split that shaming creates. Shame is often the byproduct as my collaborators negotiate the drive to live openly as their full selves alongside the desire to maintain ties with their families, Soviet Jewish cultures, and mother tongues. For now, Rivka turns their attention to heed their babushka's advice and "live as [they] want" because, as they write in the zine, "in a continuous strife for healing, that is all [they] can do" (Image 4, above). Luba also continues her queer relationship while hiding it from her mother, in order to maintain her relationship with her babushka, who is in fragile health. This means she does not mention her partner, even as they celebrate major anniversaries or go through difficult life events together. As she contemplates telling her mother more about the relationship to feel a bit more whole, she says, "my mom will turn it against me, which is horrible, you know? And if something happened to my бабушка I would not be able to live with myself." Luba worries that her mother will again use her queerness to separate her from her own grandmother. This deeply loving relationship and precious lifeline to her Soviet Jewish heritage is simply too much to risk giving up, so she continues to stay silent and suffer the price of shame.

Conclusion

Given the homogenizing pressures of family and hegemonic white American culture, the invisibilization and derision of Soviet Jewish immigranthood and queerness came to be a source of childhood and adolescent alienation for my collaborators. Whiteness offered them protection, either by way of status or just relative invisibility. Still, while some differences from the hegemonic norm were externally hidden, the internal abandonment of instinctual love for their parents, the cadence of their first language, and the taste and smell of childhood foods came less easily. Similarly, my collaborators' instincts of self-preservation and self-love, including the embodiment of gender and sexuality, endured hegemonic pressions.

Thus, while white shame pushed these instincts below the surface, it did not destroy them. As the next chapter will show, as my collaborators came into critical white consciousness, the intersection of their Soviet immigrant, Jewish and queer alterity emerged as a *condition of possibility* for seeking alternative sources of affirmation and identification, including sources outside of whiteness. Decades after Irina drew herself out of existence to conform to hegemonic white prescriptions, she is working on a new and more liberating assignment. It involves transforming childhood shame and rooting into her own past in order to imagine a more ethically oriented existence beyond the homogenizing and violent prescriptions of whiteness. In this way,

she is drafting a more honest and complex image of her immigration ancestor, a picture still in progress.

Chapter 6: Immigrant Negotiations of Whiteness: Ignorance, Saviorism, Critical Consciousness

Introduction

In 2007 and 2009, a decade before I first met Irina, she and I both respectively delivered lessons inspired by the book *Man's Search for Meaning*, written by Jewish Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl, to groups of Black and brown students. Irina was in a graduate program in community arts education, and was placed at Cabrini Green, a Black public housing site in Chicago. I was then pursuing my teaching credential in UC Berkeley's MUSE (Multicultural Urban Secondary English) program, and was a student teacher in an English class at Oakland High School, a Title I school. What were we doing in these communities, so demographically and culturally different from our own, and how did we get there? Furthermore, what had compelled us to develop a Holocaust-based curriculum for Black students?

For those who have seen the 1995 film *Dangerous Minds,* the answer is not a mystery. In the film, actress Michelle Pfeiffer embodies the colonial, Christian, gendered trope of the white woman entering the "nonwhite zone" (Thandeka, 2000) to "civilize" students of color who are deemed simultaneously incorrigible and in need of saving (Aronson, 2017; Bauer, 2021; Cammarota, 2011; Leonardo & Boas, 2013). It is a modern adaptation of John Gast's painting American Progress (1872), in which an imposing white female figure floats above the land, wielding a schoolbook as she brings "progress" —and actual light—westward, over Indigenous lands. Given that Irina and I were immigrants raised in Soviet Jewish families, and had ourselves once been the recipients of American saviorism, it is interesting—although perhaps not shocking that we also came to embody this hegemonic trope. After all, we were primarily socialized in the U.S., where we studied Gast's painting in our history classes, and watched *Dangerous Minds* on cable television after school. In this way, our racialized and gendered mis-education, which omitted any analysis of structural oppression, white supremacy or colonialism, eventually led us to intervene in communities we did not know, in neighborhoods where we did not belong.

When Irina and I first made this connection between our experiences, I was struck that we had used the very same book to inspire our curriculum. In my own classroom, I had taped a colorful sign announcing the title and guiding question of our unit: "Choice, Voice and Social Justice", "How do people act in the face of oppression?" Today, I realize that rather than use texts that were culturally relevant to the students, I privileged narratives from the Jewish Holocaust that were familiar to me (even though I had been exposed to them through American schooling, not even in my family). Furthermore, as evident in the guiding question, I explicitly foregrounded individual *responses* to oppression, rather than its systemic causes. Similarly, Irina had assumed that like Holocaust survivors, "poor Black children, too, can find meaning in their experiences." In this way, we were more like Erin Gruell in the film *The Freedom Writers*, when she turned to the Nazi Holocaust to teach students about racism and "gang violence."

These experiences reflect the extent to which Irina and I, after less than two decades in this country, had become white. We oriented to poor children of color exclusively through the lens of "oppression" with no attention to their joy and desire, and were intent on *helping* them "make meaning" of experiences that we did not share. Like Gruell, we interpreted their suffering through our own group's suffering (and even more specifically, that of Central European Jews, who were not our relatives but who we had learned about in American schools). Furthermore, we did so without any understanding of the root causes of systemic oppression, or of how we were implicated in it. Understanding what drove us to this place, and how we became conscious of it, necessitates not only a critical analysis of the politics of white womanhood in Education (Bauer,

2021; Leonardo & Boas, 2013), but also a deeper scrutiny of the psychology of trauma around diaspora, immigration and assimilation. Today, Irina suspects that she was "really connecting to these kids based on [her] own experiences", projecting personal feelings of estrangement related to immigration that she had long repressed, something I will return to later in this chapter. Despite any good intentions, like in *Dangerous Minds*, her unprocessed pain made her, not her students, the protagonist of her interventions. Indeed, from our arrival in this country, our inherited and lived experiences of Soviet Jewish history and migration, including the resulting shame I discussed in the last chapter, were mobilized in concert with the ideologies and structures of white supremacy. Although our resulting assimilation into whiteness may have been inevitable, it has not been without contradictions. Understanding how we came to be white in the first place can help reveal where we may go from here.

In this chapter, I identify patterns in the ongoing development of my collaborators' white racial identities, alongside their growing, and at times vacillating, critical consciousness around racism and white supremacy, within the context of their leftist politicization. I first demonstrate the ways that venturing into the "nonwhite zone" moved my collaborators from a state of white racial ignorance toward the adoption of gendered white saviorism, often at the expense of people of color. In this process, white immigrant shame, which manifested in harmful projection and over-identification with people of color, continued to limit my collaborators' efforts toward racial justice. Next, I show how confrontations of this "benevolent whiteness" by colonized and negatively racialized people catalyzed my collaborators' negotiations of their own racialized power. Lastly, I show that while my collaborators have been able to interrogate their white complicity in white American antiracist spaces, their own differences from dominant forms of whiteness, including resulting internalized shame, have been largely ignored, limiting their efforts to combat white supremacy. Through my collaborators' experiences, I show evidence that approaches whiteness through broader decolonial and anti-imperialist frameworks and attends to the psychological and spiritual aspects of anti-whiteness work. As will be illustrated in the final data chapter, I suggest that collective processes of addressing and transforming white shame is crucial for forging identities and alliances beyond whiteness, which I understand to be nothing more than power.

Coming into Critical Consciousness Around Whiteness

Radicalizing Critical Models of White Racial Consciousness

The experiences described in the last chapter expose racial whitening as a fraught process, defined as much by being subsumed into prescribed, hegemonic values as by the contesting of them. Following Thandeka, Morrison and Baldwin, my data suggest that white racialization is both a structural-material process, and a psychological and spiritual one. Furthermore, as my own interpretations reveal, negotiations of whiteness are informed not only by ethnic identity and class, as Thandeka has demonstrated, but also by migration, gender, sexuality, and religion, within a larger matrix of global imperial and colonial power. Thus, critical orientations to whiteness must be approached through a decolonial analysis, involving interrogation of these broader, intersecting structures of power (Bauer, 2021; Glenn, 2015; Grande, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Existing models that trace the development of critical orientations to whiteness have provided some helpful schema but have fallen short of attending to this complexity. Janet Helms's (Helms, 1990, 1995) well-cited model of "white racial identity development", despite its name, articulates the sequential pursuit of a "healthy" antiracist white identity. Whereas the

"challenge" of racial identity development for people of color is "surmounting internalized racism," for white people it is the "abandonment of [the] entitlement" to power and resources that white supremacy has instilled in them (1995, p. 184). In Helms's sequence of egoic "statuses", white people move from obliviousness and an outright denial of their racial identity toward recognition of racism and their role in it, a negotiation of guilt and shame, and ultimately a reconciliation of their white identification and their antiracist ideals. Helms's model aligns with antiracist educator Tema Okun's "ladder of empowerment for white people", which chronicles the stages of awareness of white people's relationship to racism toward the forging of a "positive, antiracist white identity" (Okun, 2006, p. 1). White people move up (and slip down) the ladder through nine rungs: innocence/ignorance through denial /defensiveness, guilt/shame, liberal acknowledgement of racism, responsibility and self-righteousness, and finally, participation in collective action.

Given my interest in how my collaborators have come to form and negotiate critical orientations to their own whiteness, I turn to these models for their identification of broad patterns in white racial consciousness such as ignorance, guilt, saviorism, critical awareness, and political action. Beyond this basic skeleton, in the analysis that follows, I choose to explore emergent themes, rather than stages of development. More specifically, I interrogate how politicization (including what is both offered and left out of various leftist analyses), racialized and gendered socialization, and personal shame relate to white racial consciousness. Throughout, I focus on the generative potentials of the anxieties and questions that characterize these themes.

I share with these racial identity development model an interest in how whiteness functions psychologically, especially in relation to its social construction and material functioning. Rather than taking race for granted as a social structure or assuming whiteness to be self-evident, as psychological models of identity development tend to do, I approach racialization and whiteness as theoretical, historical and learned constructs. As described in greater detail in Chapter 2, theoretically and historically, I locate racialization in its colonial history as the 'organizing grammar' of the 19th century colonial system (Wolfe, 2016, p. 8; see also Grosfoguel, 2013). Furthermore, I approach my analysis with a historical understanding of the formation of whiteness in the U.S. context, including immigrant assimilation into whiteness (Roediger, 2005; Ignatiev, 1997; Goldstein, 2006). I also foreground the spiritual and psychological aspects of white racial consciousness, including the moral-ethical consequences of whiteness (Baldwin, 1984), negotiations of white shame (Thandeka, 2000), and the recovery of outsider identities—not as an absolution from white complicity, but toward identifying a rooted, personal stake in anti-whiteness work.

My analysis also radically departs from existing models of white racial identity development and white racial consciousness in its imagination of what is possible and desirable. As the root cause of colonialism goes unnamed in these models, decolonial imaginations also are not entertained by them. Furthermore, these models, along with the literature on whiteness from a "reconstructionist" perspective, are oriented toward the salvaging of antiracist white identities---an incomplete and potentially harmful imagination (Leonardo, 2009). In contrast, I follow abolitionist approaches to whiteness (á la Roediger, Ignatiev) which understand it to be "nothing but oppressive and false" and, thus, irredeemable (Roediger, 2005). "White antiracism" thus becomes an impossibility, as investing in a white identity cannot be reconciled with challenging white supremacy. If whiteness is considered as nothing but oppression, as abolitionists of whiteness discuss, then the development of critical orientations to whiteness among white people must also involve its dismantling, culminating in sustained anti-colonial and anti-white political

work from identities that are marginalized by hegemonic whiteness[21], including immigrant, queer, and disabled." Perhaps, then, such an approach is best understood not just as critical, but as *radical*—that is, getting to the root of the problem. In this chapter, I analyze my collaborators' critical white development alongside their politicization, to the point when they personally experience the limits of white American antiracism. This is the very experience that leads them to find one another.

White Obliviousness and Disidentification

The earliest stages of my collaborators' white racial consciousness, informed by their experiences of immigrant, Jewish, class and queer otherness, were characterized by both hiding out in whiteness and "disidentiying" (Muñoz, 1999) from it, even as it concurrently shaped them. In the last chapter, I discussed the ways my collaborators "learned to be white" through the shaming of their ethnic immigrant experiences, bodies, and inter-racial friendships, long before they were conscious of this whiteness. Unsurprisingly, through these stories Irina and Luba shared that they were cognizant of racialized blackness years before they ever became self-aware of their whiteness. One of Irina's earliest memories in the U.S. was learning from other Soviet Jewish children that if she wanted to talk about Black kids she needed to use the word зелёные (zelënye, green), because they understood the Russian word чёрные (chërnye, black).

Meanwhile, no one ever said the word for "white." By constructing blackness as a negative racialization while leaving whiteness unnamed, the white gaze simultaneously renders Black people hyper-visible and naturalizes whiteness as the objective norm (hooks, 1992a). Even as they learned and performed whiteness, as children and adolescents my collaborators certainly neither understood whiteness as a category of political power, nor did they culturally *feel* white (Matias, 2016a). In predominantly white neighborhoods, as in white-dominated society more generally, whiteness was simply not named. Irina affirms, "I lived in a really homogenous place for a really long time. I had no race consciousness because everything around me was mostly white until I was in my early 20s. So, I think I knew I was white, but I don't really remember. It's not like anybody called me white." In terms of white racial consciousness, Tema Okun might name this the "I'm Normal" stage of white ignorance. This is when white people "don't really see ourselves as white because we are the norm and therefore don't need to be racially described." In Helms's terms, this is known as "obliviousness" to one's own white racialization.

However, my collaborators were not fully oblivious to whiteness. They sometimes recognized it as a club to which they explicitly did *not* belong: the culture and class of WASPs, like the family Rebecca described watching on the television show *7th Heaven*. Luba identified explicitly as "immigrant" and "refugee," designations she located outside of whiteness for most of her life. "That was my identity... immigrant. I'm not white. I'm *not* white. I'm a refugee, even." Of course, these types of "disidentifications" are also ways to opt out of whiteness, or at least to not claim responsibility for one's white complicity (as can also be the case with poor whites

[21] Lewis (2004) defines hegemonic whiteness as "a shifting configuration of practices and meanings that occupy the dominant position in a particular racial formation and that successfully manage to occupy the empty space of ''normality'' in our culture. Hughey (2010) defines "hegemonic whiteness" as "a two-pronged process: (1) through positioning those marked as 'white' as essentially different from and superior to those marked as 'non-white', and (2) through marginalizing practices of 'being white' that fail to exemplify dominant ideals" (p. 1306). While all whiteness is hegemonic in relation to people of color, within whiteness there are ways of looking and comporting oneself that set the white ideal (Thandeka, 1999 has written much on this). Miller (2022) argues that "A common trope of hegemonic whiteness is US politicians, most of whom are able-bodied, rich, straight, white men." Of course, it is possible for a white person to not embody hegemonic white ideals and still benefit from whiteness.

claiming poverty as a deflection from whiteness). Indeed, many of my collaborators described feeling a strong affinity with other immigrants who came from Asia, the Global South, the Middle East, and the Caribbean and who were negatively racialized as people of color. For my collaborators, this offered meaningful friendships, but also led to an over-identification with my immigrant friends of color and dis-identification from prescribed whiteness. In my own life, this manifested as me announcing to my Filipino high school friends that I was not white but "Eurasian." My personal shame aside, from this perspective, whiteness was reserved for those with U.S.-born parents, who had been here for several generations and spoke English as a first language. My collaborators, in contrast, functioned as "outsiders from within" whiteness (Collins, 1986). In this way, the identification with our ethnic alterity and the pain of estrangement eclipsed the simultaneous reality of white racial dominance, eschewing recognition of our privilege and complicity.

Of course, even as my collaborators disidentified from hegemonic whiteness, they were inevitably shaped by it. Externally, they were white to the extent that they were privileged by the way their features were read by others, including peers, teachers, and police. As explained in Chapter 4, they were also white to the extent that their parents were able to take advantage of racist housing, schooling, and employment opportunities. Internally, they were white(ned) to the extent that they themselves had internalized and perhaps enacted white supremacist, racist, and antiblack ideologies. Somewhere along the way, their "passing" as white had transformed into their "becoming" white.

Connecting Race, Class, and Power

The development of my collaborators' critical racial and white consciousness was not an inevitability, but rather, has been a gradual and recursive, ongoing process. Before they were able to identify and question their own whiteness, they worked through Helms's stage of white "disintegration", which involved making connections between race and power more broadly. While this stage of racial consciousness often involves interactions with racialized others, Masha first experienced it within her own white community. In high school, Masha was violently hazed as part of a sports team ritual by her peers, all of whom were white, upper-middle class, and either Jewish or Catholic. After the assault, she witnessed the young women buy their way out of any repercussions or consequences. In her words, these "gorgeous, blonde skinny girls" from "old money" families knew that they were "above the law", as their wealth "could buy [them] protection from anything that [they] did." As a teenager in a fairly homogenous white environment, Masha did not have the language or analysis at the time to identify explicitly what whiteness may have to do with the violence and entitlement she had witnessed. At the same time, through the incident, the differences she perceived between the perpetrators and her, became more pronounced. While she described the instigators of the violence as "perfect white girls" who had inherited wealth, Masha was a white-passing immigrant whose own family money was only a decade old. Although her parents had intentionally moved close to this community and Masha had originally wanted to fit in, the incident awakened her to a racialized and class-based violence from which she now wanted to disassociate.

While my collaborators' personal experiences of alterity from the white norm may have provided the conditions of possibility for future criticality, it was interactions across race and class differences, especially with Black people, that ignited their explicit critical learnings about racism. The stage of the "disintegration" of white ignorance is often prompted by such experiences, which Okun calls "First Contact' with people of color. As such, white racial

learning is often forged at the expense of people of color. Unlike many white people, most of my collaborators grew up with close friends of color, most of them also middle-class children of immigrants. In the Denver suburbs, Irina's friend group called themselves "the United Nations", while in the suburbs of San Diego, my best friends' families had immigrated from the Philippines, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. As I discussed earlier, this was both a genuine immigrant affinity *and* its own form of white consumption of people of color. While cross-racial, these friendships existed primarily in the context of middle-class, colorblind environments—white zones. Ideologies of neoliberal multiculturalism, which set the stage for color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), were promoted in the media and school curriculum, celebrating cultural differences, but shielded my collaborators from any racial consciousness beyond the whitened historical study of the Civil Rights movement. Given this hegemonic context, most of my collaborators' critical learning about race came when they left the "homogenous place" of white and Asian suburbs and entered dispossessed Black neighborhoods, either by invitation or entitlement. Describing this phenomenon, Thandeka (2000) argues that whites move into nonwhite zones to both atone for and reconcile the childhood shame that resulted from their forced alienation from "the other." Given the depoliticized, multicultural, colorblind contexts in which my collaborators were raised, moving into the "nonwhite zone" meant, more pointedly, going into neighborhoods that were primarily Black and poor.

These experiences often occurred through political work. As a college student, Masha joined a collective of anarchists who were working to stop the university from building a "hazardous Level 4 biology lab in a Black neighborhood" in Boston. She recalls,

> taking a walking tour of this neighborhood where I was really exposed to [witnessing] environmental racism, and how that shows up. And I was just like, oh, well, I've never thought about where the garbage goes. I've never thought about where the buses live. I've never thought about what blight is or what it looks like, or why it happens.

Although she had already witnessed the violence and protection of white entitlement firsthand through the high school sports hazing incident, she was just waking up to racialized dispossession. Afterward, she remembers returning home and getting in a fight with her high school friends.

> I was like, "Wait, do you guys really think that everybody in this country has the same opportunity?" And they were like, "yeah, obviously." I was like, "Wait, what?" And it was very uncomfortable. And I didn't know enough to defend myself or defend this position, but I was like, I just know you're wrong. I can't really explain why, but I know you're wrong.

Up to then, Masha and her friends had been socialized in their schools and families to believe the foundational American myth that everyone had equal opportunity. Their newfound skepticism of meritocracy, grounded in Masha's observations of the nonwhite zone, was an entry into rejecting hegemonic whiteness more broadly. It marked a budding ideological estrangement from her caregivers and peers and an aberration from racial capitalism, although not a complete divestment from whiteness by any means. In fact, this "field trip" experience quite likely also reified the harms of white supremacy, as it foregrounded Masha's learning against the dignity of the neighborhood's residents.

White racial learning also sometimes occurred at the expense of the wellbeing of Black friends, co-workers and students. Through a city arts program, Luba became friends with a Black peer who went to a dispossessed public school that served many students of color. At his graduation she witnessed "what a big deal [it was] for [the students] that they're even graduating high school." She remembers comparing, "Wow, at our school, it's like... what a big deal that everyone's going to *college* [her emphasis]." Used to feeling "poor" in comparison to her wealthy peers, Luba's experience made her recognize her own privilege. The racialized nature of the disparity became more obvious when she invited her friend to her own private Jewish high school graduation. There, a security guard at the door prohibited him from entering while allowing white guests to come in. "I found out right before we went on stage," she says. "I remember looking at the audience and it was all white, whether Ashkenazi or Mizrahi or whatever." She was also part of this sea of white faces. Afterward, when the school would not apologize to her friend for his mistreatment, she wrote a letter demanding justice. At her friend's expense, Luba learned that her own well-resourced community was a "white zone," and that he was considered a racial trespasser. This marked the beginning of critical *white* consciousness, the shift to recognizing whiteness as a root of racial oppression.

Questioning Power: Early Leftist Politicization

Learning, With Limits. These formative experiences around race, class, and immigrant identity challenged the meritocratic ideologies that my collaborators had learned in school, and that had been reinforced in their upwardly mobile immigrant families. I entered college opposing affirmative action, convinced that academic and financial success were solely determined by merit and hard work, as my immigrant parents had taught me and my school curriculum had confirmed. In my second year, I learned about systemic racism in housing and schooling and immediately shifted my position. Similarly, my collaborators' experiential and relational learnings about race occurred in concert with their exposure to critical political analyses that questioned power. Rivka remembers a high school Sociology teacher telling their class, "At a certain point, you have to unlearn everything you know, and start learning again." Although not a complete political framework, this statement revealed the construction of knowledge and introduced the imperative of interrogating power. Stepha credits her Facing History class as the catalyst for her own early politicization. There, Mr. Navarro brought to her attention the danger of being a bystander to violence, something she had not previously considered: "my values went from harm reduction, pre-Mr. Navarro, to intervening actively in systems of harm, post-Mr. Navarro." These early academic experiences offered a foundation on which more complex and situated analyses would later be built.

The first leftist political frameworks that my collaborators encountered and adopted were liberal and colorblind, promoting systems reform without addressing the root causes of white supremacy and colonialism. In this way, they were able to become politically active without interrogating their own roles in these systems. Stepha reflects with shame that they chose to work on "environmentalism" (without a racial lens) in their early college years, but they are hardly alone in becoming politicized while maintaining white "oblivion." In her search for queer community in college, Sasha ended up establishing a political home in what she calls a "white liberal feminist environment," a leftist liberal context ignorant to its own whiteness. Irina also says of her college years: "I was basically a white liberal. I was interested in feminism and anti-war activism. I never had an instance of being confronted about my own race." Without the

direct naming and directed interrogation of whiteness, Irina neither recognized her complicity in racial oppression, nor her stake in racial justice work.

The combination of leftist liberal politicization and white racial oblivion sometimes resulted in misguided interventions in communities of color. Called to action after reading Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and sociological studies of schooling inequality in my college Education class, I became involved in running a mentoring program for poor Latinx youth in Los Angeles, without any awareness of the effects of my own whiteness in that space. Like Irina, I had not been "confronted about my own race", and I thought it was the right(eous) thing to do. With similar shame, Sasha recalls passionately and "misguidedly" joining a "know your rights" campaign after the passing of SB1070, an anti-immigrant law that legalized racial profiling in Arizona:

> I was in Phoenix when all of those anti-immigration laws were passed. . . . I think I was sort of moderate or whatever before that, and even through high school. I think there was a wave of anti-immigration policies that were passed in high school that I thought was bad, but I wasn't actively against it. And then when I was in college, SB 1070 passed, and that was literally no cause for pulling someone over, making it impossible for people to just drive or register their kid for school or have a bank card. And that thought radicalized me.

Inspired to act, Sasha joined "know your rights" campaigns in Spanish-speaking communities of color but she didn't speak Spanish. After her group ended up "scaring a bunch of kids," she realized they "did something bad" and stopped. While her politicization and desire to "do something" was genuine, it was also incomplete. Without a full critical racial framework and awareness of her own whiteness, she became yet another liberal white person trespassing into a community of color.

As liberal white people, it was entirely possible for my collaborators to learn about racial justice generally, while remaining ignorant of the harms they themselves were causing. Irina explains that she had "no racial consciousness" partially because her school only offered a canonical white curriculum. However, Leonardo (2004) points out that "schools may teach white students to naturalize their unearned privileges, but they also willingly participate in such discourses, which maintains their sense of humanity" (p. 144). In other words, the automatic protection and superiority that whiteness afforded gave Irina and my other collaborators a reason not to recognize and contend with race. As he explains, students of color are subject to the same curricular erasures, but are more likely to develop this consciousness. While Irina had not engaged critically with her own white racialization, she was drawn to her Chicago graduate school for its general curricular orientation to "racial justice." She remembers the exhilaration of this early political awakening: "We're learning about Marxism, we're writing about antiracism. Everything just blew my mind. And I just remember thinking nothing that I had ever been taught before was true. And like colonization, and imperialism, I never heard about any of these things." I also remember feeling called to action by the words of Paulo Freire and bell hooks. But what kind of action could I imagine taking? As will be discussed in the next section, both Irina and I were supported by the institutions that politicized us to work in poor Black and Latinx communities, with minimal consciousness of our positionality. Like Sasha, we had immediately turned our attention to racialized people, without first looking critically at ourselves or at the systems in which we were implicated. In other words, our academic study had not directed us to

confront our own positionalities within the structures we were reading about, nor to reflect on our subconscious motivations or even the potential consequences of our interventions. As will be discussed later, this deeper reckoning has come primarily through praxis, again through the people on the other side of our "good intentions."

Historicized and Decolonial Analyses. While the critical analyses my collaborators were exposed to inspired them to some kind of action, they generally took a de-historicized approach to whiteness. As a result, they reifying whiteness as a self-evident category, rather than a modern colonial technology (Wolfe, 2016, p. 8; see also Grosfoguel, 2013). In this way, even as my collaborators began to develop critical racial consciousness, they were neither encouraged to deconstruct hegemonic whiteness nor to question the connections between white supremacy, settler colonialism, and capitalism. Following Leonardo (2009), via their whiteness, they also had an investment in not making these connections. In the two rare cases when my collaborators were exposed to more rigorous and historicized critiques of white supremacy and colonialism in ethnic studies classes, they were inspired to reflect more deeply on their own whiteness, as well as their presence on this land. Sasha's instructor distinguished ethnicity from race, helping her understand that, beyond being an immigrant, a salient cultural identity for her, she was also ethnically Jewish and racially white. Whereas ethnicity referred to groups that shared history and culture, race explicitly referred to a hierarchical designation of power that assigned value to groups based on bodily characteristics that were considered immutable, judging them on a spectrum from human to non-human (Grosfoguel, 2013; Robinson, 2000; Wolfe, 2016). She says, "I just remember that because it was just very clear: if you're white, you're white. You're also Jewish, but you're white. And if you're not white, but you are Jewish, you're not white." Before that, she says, "I knew I was white and I knew I was Jewish, but I didn't say it in those words." This naming of whiteness helped her begin to unpack it as a category of power, while holding the multiplicity of her identities. In the same class, she studied the historical formation of whiteness, learning that groups had been systematically folded into artificial racial hierarchies.

Similarly, Stepha got her "first dip into racial justice politics" through an Ethnic Studies class in which she was encouraged to learn about settler colonialism and white supremacy through her own complex positionality. She fondly recalls her instructor Angie Morell's teaching:

> She looked us all in the eye and she said, "we can all agree that we live in a fundamentally genocidal white supremacist, heteropatriarchal settler colonial state that is built on stolen land and stolen labor, yes?" And she stared all of us down. I was like, yes, for the love of God! I was just so relieved because . . . it feels really good to me when non-white folks don't tiptoe around my fragility, you know. It felt really good to have her set that boundary, right? Our first assignment was reflecting on where we're coming from. And I wrote about how my family was in the process of disowning me, because I was a post-Soviet immigrant and because they were pushing me really hard to go to med school and because I was making my own major instead, which was the beginning of my rift with my father, which only escalated over time. I know there were really powerful things that my classmates wrote, but it was really sweet. . . day two of class. . . to have her show up and say, "thank you all so much. I learned a lot about you from your assignments and I really appreciate your vulnerability." And again, having her look us each in the eye, myself included, and feel like wow, she values me being vulnerable and

> the barriers and the hurdles that I had in getting to this classroom. Again, they are very different. There is not the same level of structural violence and they can still be named and honored in this room, and that felt so fucking beautiful and so healing.

From the very start of class, Morrill unequivocally named that the U.S. was "stolen land, offering an analysis to which my other collaborators had not yet been exposed. Furthermore, rather than succumbing to a fear of relativism, Morrill pushed beyond hegemonic and non-intersectional discussions of whiteness, opening up space for Stepha to enter the conversation through her history and the intersections of her identity, as they related to whiteness. She offered "a container in which I can be like…. I'm not like other white kids. I'm a lot like them, but I'm also a little different." This approach involved Stepha in the serious work of racial justice, neither coddling her settler whiteness nor erasing her immigrant alterity. She says, "I think the combination of the two is like, you can bring your story but we actually don't have room in this classroom for white defensive fragility bullshit, or just ignorance." She met the opportunity by holding the complexity of embodying both racial dominance and other, mostly invisible forms of marginalization. Moreover, she joined a community of people committed to combating structural violence.

Overall, the historicized, complex reflections Stepha and Sasha engaged in in their Ethnic Studies classes were deviations from the brute socializing force of hegemonic whiteness, as well as the often-reductive approaches of antiracist education. Even with exposure to some racial justice analysis, absent such nuanced instruction or else direct confrontation, my participants continued to enact white supremacy in ways that could have been stopped sooner, or could simply never have happened. At the same time, whiteness is not merely a passive identifier, but an interaction between a system and an individual, who is both interpellated by the system and somehow invests in it or aligns oneself with it, however unconsciously. While some of us may have thought that we were superior to our conservative family members and peers, who aligned themselves overtly with hegemonic interests, we were in no way absolved from our own investments in whiteness, which remained shrouded by our good intentions.

Inheriting and Contesting Liberal-Saviorist Whiteness

"Benevolent Whiteness" and Gendered White Supremacy

As my collaborators and I came into critical consciousness, many of us rejected our families' trauma-driven investments in hegemonic power, only to perform another version of whiteness through the adoption of "feminized white saviorism" (Bauer, 2021; Leonardo & Boas, 2013). White saviorism, a hallmark of Christian and white supremacist colonialism, is the intervention of resourced white people into the lives of dispossessed others, who are often colonized and negatively racialized, under the benevolent guise of tropes like "caring", "helping", and "making a difference." Today, whether in American foreign policy, NGO work, or in domestic public schools, the ideology of white saviorism and its operation within the broader "white savior industrial complex" is based on the racist assumption that "we have to save them because they can't save themselves" (Cole, 2012). Many scholars have articulated the particular roles white *women* play both in saviorism and in reifying the white colonial nation-state more broadly. Reviewing a vast swarth of literature on white womanhood (Dyer, 1997; Lorde, 2012; Preston, 1993; Sleeter, 1995, 2011). Leonardo & Boas (2013) explain that "for centuries, as the 'caring gender,' White women have occupied a space different from White men within the enactment of racism" (p. 315). Their particular social location as both victims of white

heteropatriarchy and oppressors to people of color constitutes them as "injured injurers" (Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, 2019) whose own gendered injury drives their racial violence.

Owing to the historical relegation of white women to domestic and care work within white, Christian heteropatriarchy, white women's role in the white "racial army" (Leonardo & Boas) has also historically involved presiding as a "benevolent" socializing force over the domestic sphere, including the classroom as its extension. Making up the vast majority of the teaching force in public schools, white women represent the supposed virtue and benevolence of the nation-state. (Again, this recalls John Gast's painting *American Progress*, in which the oversized white female figure that floats above dark, Indigenous lands holds a schoolbook.) In reality, of course, schooling is both "a system that relies on the systematic failure of the majority to reproduce an expendable labor pool" (Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, p. 320) and a site of racialized disciplining (Dumas, 2014). Similarly, Bauer (2021) identifies the specific phenomenon of white women teaching students of color as "benevolent whiteness," defining it as "the self-imposed selfless service and heroic identity of white womanhood in relation to people of color through systematic schooling as the feminized arm of white supremacy" (p. 2). While some of my collaborators and I do not identify as "woman" or cisgender, or else not exclusively so, as people assigned the female gender at birth and raised primarily in the U.S., we nevertheless share the experience of being socialized into this particular intersection of race and gender. Outside of our Soviet Jewish influences, our assimilation into dominant American culture inevitably involved observing, absorbing, and sometimes contesting the values of white femininity, as we saw them in the media, in our teachers, and in society at large. Gendered and heteronormative white supremacy affirmed docility and caregiving in my collaborators, offering them opportunities and rewards for enacting these qualities in racialized contexts.

Within the "white savior industrial complex" (Cole, 2012), gendered "benevolent whiteness" encouraged and enabled my collaborators, who were once on the receiving end of American saviorism, in the role of the gendered savior. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the realm of education, where institutions placed middle-class white (and sometimes Asian American) mentors, tutors, teachers, and artists in dispossessed communities of color for the "benevolent" work of educating young people who were deemed lacking, not just in resources but in motivation, knowledge, and agency (Cammarota, 2011; Matias, 2016b). This ideological and material matrix shaped or played a significant role in the early volunteer and employment work of several of my collaborators (including Irina, Masha, Luba, and myself), whether in public schools, non-profit organizations, or arts programs. was critically conscious enough to critique the film—even as I was reproducing its relations in my own classroom. I had read Paulo Freire and was wary of false generosity—even as I was enacting it. Using the coded language of "empowerment", I righteously believed in teaching my students about systemic injustices and equipping them with skills I believed they needed for college.

Ultimately, gendered white saviorism, especially as it collided with systems of schooling and non-profit organizations, limited some of my collaborators' imagination of social justice efforts to intervening into the "symptom" of the problem, rather than addressing its root causes (which would necessarily involve confronting their own "benevolent whiteness." The only intervention some of us could imagine was direct service, rather than an overhaul of the system itself. In those years, many of us were praised by other liberal whites for our "selflessness." Interestingly, this white racialized sentiment was not shared by our Soviet Jewish communities, who were often bewildered by our choices.

From Saved to Savior

Like me, the majority of my collaborators had experiences from high school through adulthood of volunteering and working in poor communities of color. As chronicled in the second and third data chapters, white Americans had at one point identified my immigrant collaborators as part of those in need of "saving," on account of their critics' religious ignorance, their proximity to communism, their not-quite-Europeanness, or their relative poverty. Now, a decade or more after the end of the Movement to Save the Soviet Jewry, my collaborators had a chance to secure their assimilation by becoming "saviors" in relation to poor people of color, and thus enter the "White club" (Leonardo, 2009). Just as Toni Morrison (1993) describes racism against Black people as an "enduring and efficient rite of passage into American culture," so-called "community service" and "volunteer" work with negatively racialized groups may be a rite of passage for white and white-proximate suburban young people. For Irina, this began in high school as an extracurricular activity for her college application:

> The kind of school I went to was so focused on my college and my extracurriculars, and I would volunteer at the Boys & Girls Club. I remember my dad would always say...because I was like, "oh, I need to do stuff for my college application. I'm going to volunteer with The Big Sisters thing, working with the Black and brown kids." And he was like, "if you want to volunteer, why don't you spend time with your grandparents and teach them English?" And I was like, "no, that doesn't look good for college." Which is terrible. I think that's also part of assimilation. And capitalism. Of like, everything can only be measured in terms of its output for your "success." I should have spent more time with my grandparents, but I was like out there being the "good white," tutoring these little Black and brown kids with my other immigrant friends who are trying to get into the best college.

Irina was a product of her middle class, white suburban environment, which promoted the values of settler colonialism, Christianity, white supremacy, and racial capitalism. Furthermore, in the context of white womanhood, "volunteering"—organized as intervening into the lives of Black and brown youth—was not only a necessary component of being a competitive applicant for college, but also an inherently virtuous act. Ideologically, it was implied that Irina possessed middle-class knowledge, skills, and values that children at the Boys & Girls Club were lacking. This racialized ideology was fortified by a white Christian colonial infrastructure, including a government that dispossessed Black communities, competitive universities that required "volunteering" and "community service hours", and non-profit organizations like the Boys & Girls Club that employed volunteers like Irina (who were not from the immediate community) to fill a need created by the government's willful negligence.

As her non-American father pointed out, within this framework, service meant intervening in the lives of poor children of color, not helping one's grandparents. High school was only the start of this work, which was resourced and rewarded with modest financial compensation and abundant praise from other white people. After being discouraged by her parents from becoming a professional artist, Irina went on to pursue a career in community arts education. Her work embroiled her in the colonial and white supremacist politics of non-profit and museum work. After college, she returned to the Boys & Girls Club, this time as a paid employee in a Black neighborhood in San Francisco. She remembers witnessing a shooting just outside of the building and reflects, "I was so unprepared for that job. I didn't know what to do

with them. I was like… I don't think I should be here." Although she intuitively questioned her presence in the community, she wasn't critically aware of how she had gotten there, and wasn't yet sure she should leave.

Consuming Others' Suffering, Projecting Unprocessed Trauma

Following Helms's (1995) and Okun's (2006) models of white racial consciousness**,** these "well-intentioned" efforts to "help" poor people of color were driven by feelings of white guilt and a sense of responsibility born of a nascent racial consciousness. At the same time, they were likely reinforced by my collaborators' over-identification with people of color, a projection of their own repressed trauma around immigration and their alienation within U.S. whiteness, in addition to the unprocessed intergeneration trauma of antisemitism (see hooks, on her notion of "eating the other."). Today, reflecting on her experience teaching in Cabrini Green, Irina describes it as "problematic," "mortifying," and "fucked up." In retrospect, she believes that her own pains, combined with her racial and gender socialization, drove her intervention in this community. The high rises that were about to be demolished reminded her of her building in Belarus; the kids were being displaced and she also had to leave her home. She even created art that reflected these connections. One image shows her as a little child in the Soviet Union, overlaid on top of a photo of the neighborhood that she worked in. It says незнакомка (neznakomka, a stranger, *fem.*). Identifying with her injury as an immigrant stranger to the U.S., Irina did not also recognize herself as the (white) stranger or trespasser in the Black neighborhood. Instead, she projected her own Jewish and immigrant alienation onto the estrangement that she imagined (via her own white imagination) that her students were feeling in a society that oppressed them. Several years later, working at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, Irina again found herself over-identifying and under-prepared, directing a restorative and transformative justice program for Cambodian and Chicago-based youth. She reflects,

> Again, my connection to that work [was] through Jewish trauma and migration, but [I was] not necessarily making that visible, and then also causing harm by not really, really having the tools to deal with the harms and then the traumas that were produced and triggered in that space.

While Irina is hard on herself, her interventions reflect a broader pattern corroborated by some of my other collaborators, and by my own life experiences. Here, our unprocessed traumas of immigration and alienation collide with the entitlements of whiteness within a larger context of structural (and funded!) colonial white saviorism.

Today, Irina herself offers that as she was working out her own immigrant pains, she was also perpetuating the saviorism of white womanhood, commonly justified by the discourse of empathy. Within existing models of white racial identity development, the adoption of white saviorism marked a transition from the initial stage of white ignorance, naivete, and denial (Helms, 1995), to a later stage that is best articulated by Tema Okun (2006) as "Be Like Me." On this rung of Okun's ladder of antiracist "empowerment" for white people, subjects' sense of white privilege is decontextualized from a broader power analysis. Their misunderstanding of racism spurs guilt, but they don't yet understand themselves as part of the problem. Instead, they over-identify with people of color and make attempts to "assimilate" people of color into existing systems. Although Okun does not use the language of white saviorism or benevolent white

womanhood, the descriptions align. Ultimately, this work reified white supremacy. It was patronizing and perpetuated whiteness as a desirable standard, causing harm to people of color.

Navigating Critical Whiteness

Confronting Complicity

It often took the direct confrontation of communities negatively impacted by these "well-intentioned" efforts to catalyze a deeper and more honest engagement with the ongoing harms of colonial white saviorism. While Luba had begun to more consciously reckon with her own whiteness in high school through a friendship with a Black peer, she was not explicitly confronted with her own white positionality until after graduate school, when she went to the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan to do evaluation work for a non-profit organization. Interestingly, it was this experience so far from the highly racialized context of the U.S. that came to constitute "a really big turning point about race" in her life. With a command of both Russian and English, Luba returned to another former Soviet republic as a light-skinned and Europe-proximate American doing NGO development work. Although she did not realize it at the time, she represented the international arm of American imperialism and white saviorism. Ironically, once a target of an American saviorist campaign (Save the Soviet Jewry), Luba herself was now sent back by the U.S. to the former Soviet Union to intervene in the lives of people who had been colonized and negatively racialized. Once there, Luba's Kazakh co-workers and program participants would not share information with her or would give her wrong information, and talked about her in Russian, assuming that she didn't understand. "That's when the racial stuff really became salient for me," she explains, "because I was like... they perceive me as a white colonizer. These different ethnic groups are there. These people perceive me as a white person. I'm either American or I'm Russian, but I'm white. That was how they saw me." Given that she came through an organization that received U.S. funding and wore American clothes, but spoke fluent Russian, the locals were confused as to whether Luba was Russian or American. When she told them she was born in Ukraine, they responded that she's too dark to be Ukrainian.

Still, as she implies, the ethnic Kazakhs she encountered ultimately related to her as a colonizer, whether American or Russia*,* designations that Luba synonymized with whiteness. Of course, they did not know or understand that her family had also been internally colonized and negatively racialized in the Soviet Union, but this fact did not seem to matter because, relative to them, she wielded colonial/imperial power. She describes her internal process:

> I was like, I can't even do this job because they're perceiving me as the person that oppressed them. I shouldn't be doing that work because I'm not part of that community. I knew they perceived me as a colonizer because I felt it. I remember being like, I can't get as deep.

The feeling that she couldn't do her job helped Luba understand why she *shouldn't* do this job. She became aware that the savior *is* the colonizer, and is attempting to address the very damage they caused in the first place. Luba learned this important lesson because colonized people had refused to comply with an NGO that came to intervene in their context under the guise of "development." While this was a significant moment for Luba's critical consciousness, at the time Luba did not transpose this emergent decolonial analysis to the U.S. context. It would take more time, and a shift in national discourse, for this to happen.

Like Luba, Irina was also confronted by suspicions of her good intentions. As described in the introduction to this chapter, while in graduate school, she was given a student teaching placement in the Black community of Cabrini Green, one of the biggest public housing projects in Chicago that was being demolished at the time. “Chicago public schools are 90% students of color. [...] I had a lot of fondness for the kids, but also, I had a lot of insecurity. And I was like, I don't know how to relate to these kids. I don't know what their actual lives are like.” Still, she continued on, her persistence faltering only when she was directly confronted about her intentions by a community member:

> When the project was over, I met up with the kids afterwards to kind of have them “evaluate” me [uses fingers to show quotation marks]. And one of the pieces of feedback that they gave me is that another teacher in the school was like, "Oh, you know, she just looks like she's here to get her grade and then leave." And that was something that really made me pause and think about. Like, oh, what am I doing here? And how am I being exploitative, you know, of these young people and their lives? Because, you know, they opened up to me. We had a news reporter come in, they created these zines of their neighborhood, they took all these photos of their buildings being demolished. And, you know, my name and my face was very much attached to that. And it was like, you know, Michelle Pfeiffer in *Dangerous Minds*, this white woman coming in. Like I have the typical photo of me and all these little Black kids in the neighborhood. I think every white woman in America has this photo. I did that thing that all white women are taught to do in this country of like, yeah, go to these “tough” neighborhoods and be that good white woman and show these kids that you believe in them and you're gonna save them. And I very much followed that script. Because I didn't want to be a teacher, I wanted to be an artist. And the only reason I went to Education school was that my parents basically forbade me from going to art school.

bell hooks (1992a) asks what it would mean for white people to consider that Black people have their own imagination and subjecthood. Forced to do so, Irina realized that she *was* a (white) outsider, who was indeed meeting a course requirement, despite the genuine care and effort she invested into the curriculum. Similarly, in the program she later ran for Cambodian and Chicago youth, she was confronted by the harm her entitled presence caused: “Half of the young people in the group left, in a very dramatic way. People told me that they felt harmed, and I did not support them in the program.” The direct critical feedback Irina received from participants, something she never heard from the university faculty, made her pause and consider the effects of her intervention. She considered and questioned the potential harm of her well-intentioned interventions, reckoning more deeply with “race consciousness and positionality.”

Asking the question of “where do I (as a resourced white person) fit in?” oriented my collaborators toward understanding their own involvement in systemic racism and white supremacy. Masha felt this shift when she found herself contending with gentrification in St. Louis while both participating in a formal non-profit arts initiative and witnessing mutual aid programs developed by anarchist squatters. She says,

> I think that's really where I learned about gentrification. . . . I didn't really understand—being like a poor student—I didn't really understand what my role in that was. But once it was like, “Oh, I'm a poor student. Yes, but I am white. I am a member and representative

> of this massive, wealthy institution. And where I put roots down fucking matters. Really, it makes an impact."

Although Masha reports that she *learned about* gentrification, her explanation suggests that she was "unlearning" (Leonardo & Manning, 2017) some of her own white entitlement to entering spaces of color. Here, unlearning meant interrogating her own actions through a politicized lens and later shifting them, rather than abstractly learning "about" an issue. In this case, the experience of contending with the politics of her racialized presence in the neighborhood made Masha question what she was doing in the program, and how she participated in a racialized society more broadly. She says,

> I had such a hard time in that [fellowship program] because they were glorifying murals and public art with zero analysis around gentrification. Once I really started thinking about my role in combating gentrification that added, I think, an important layer about like, "Where do I fit in? How do I take up space? And how does me being in certain places impact that place?" I don't know exactly where I land on it, but it's become a very useful and very helpful lens to think about.

Similarly, Irina shares,

> I think after the Cambodia thing, I was like, "Oh, why was I in this role to do this work? Why did I think that I was compelled, like that I had the skills to take this on? Like, why was it me? Why was the other facilitator that I hired Black and not Khmer?"

This experience catalyzed the slow and recursive work of unlearning white entitlement.

This critical inquiry around positionality, racialized entitlement, and impact represented an important shift in the development of my collaborators' critical racial consciousness. Helms identifies that the "issue for whites is abandonment of entitlement" to power and resources, letting go of the compulsion to be the savior (p. 184). The life experiences discussed above catalyzed my collaborators to question their self-concept as benevolent or innocent, enabling them to consider that they, too, were implicated in white violence. They began to consider abandoning their entitlement to intervene, or at least to understand this was not an inherently virtuous act (Illich, 1968). While Okun names this (fifth) rung "Guilt and Shame," she explains that "this can also be a stage of profound personal transformation. This is the point at which many white people begin to understand that we must take responsibility for racism, even if we weren't personally involved in its historical foundations. We begin to understand that we are participants in racist institutions and a racist culture, that we do benefit from racism, and that we participate in perpetuating racism, even when that is not our intention." (p. 11). Indeed, Irina candidly acknowledges,

> I myself have been that person that's like, "Well, my, my ancestors aren't from here. We didn't do slavery. We didn't do this. My family doesn't own land." I did that. And it's like, actually that's bullshit. We're all accountable. And like, I want to move past that place of defensiveness and guilt and move into a place of joyful redistribution.

The simple question of "what is my role?", when pursued with responsibility and an open heart rather than fragility, can catalyze a dramatic transformation.

This shift in white racial development among some of my collaborators related to the leftist radicalization of their liberal politics. As Leonardo and Manning (2015) explain, "if white identities result from context-specific processes, then outcomes may change based on educators' understanding of cultural mediation (Cole 1996), or their recognition that they are simultaneously products and producers of race" (p. 3). Masha's reflections, for example, must be understood in the context of a broader critique of the liberal university's interventions that she was developing. She began to look back critically on her graduate education.

> The way that I was studying it in graduate school was very much through a deep institutional lens, like "we need these institutions to support these programs. We can't do this without institutions." And these communities that people say are 'blank slates' are not fucking blank slates. And so seeing all that, I was just like, this is not. . . no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. I know at one point I was attracted to these questions because I was like, "Oh, yeah, totally, totally. Like, there's nobody here doing anything." Yeah, I didn't see it."

Masha unpacked the underlying ideologies that justified the university programming: that poor, Black people are incapable of helping themselves, that they need help from a (white, resourced) outside group, that the community is characterized by deficits, rather than assets. The white supremacist ideologies, which she also had internalized and perpetuated, were finally starting to fracture[22], and with it, her sense of self. Rivka identifies this shift as a "radicalization" of "liberal politics": the move from believing the system is not working, to understanding that it is actually working the way it was designed—to benefit the people in power.

Wielding, Abdicating, and Negotiating Power

Part of my collaborators' learning and action has involved recognizing how they wield racialized power, and considering how to hold themselves and others accountable for abuses of power. For Stepha, this currently means discarding naïve assumptions that she could "do no harm" and instead making efforts to minimize harm while understanding some harm may be inevitable with any potential intervention. As a supervisor to an all person-of-color staff, Irina sees this impact directly:

> I've had people tell me, "you don't think you have power, but you have so much power over me." And part of it, in my mind, I was like, "well, I see us as peers." But of course it's not true. I'm your boss. It doesn't matter if we're friends. I am your boss. Of course I have power. So, I think that's the piece too of like, actually owning the power I have and not dissociating from it or being willing to be held accountable. I think I've gotten a lot better at hearing that stuff. And being able to snap back and be like, "you're right. Let's work through this." Whereas before it would crush me, and I would go into these guilt and shame spirals.

She describes directly confronting her "white fragility" (DiAngelo, 2018), guilt and shame to become more honest about the power that she does wield at her job. Given that she continues to

[22] In *Whiteness Fractured,* Levine-Rasky (2016) uses the term "fracture" to refer to both outward fractures in the concept of whiteness and corresponding literature (e.g., "intersectionality"), and to inner fractures of the psychic life of whiteness.

be in a leadership role to Black and brown staff, she is "figuring out how to hold myself and others accountable." This involves "figuring out what 'right size' accountability looks like", the distance between denial and over-apologizing.

> Oftentimes I would let people conduct themselves in harmful ways and not hold them accountable because they were people of color and I was afraid or not confident. And then sometimes I would overstep and either take credit when it wasn't mine, or take on too much accountability when it wasn't mine. So yeah, it's been a lot of learning. And I'm still learning.

Here, Irina identifies white guilt and over-compensation as another consequence of white supremacy. Ultimately, these reflections indicate that she does not see herself as having surmounted the difficulties of whiteness, as this would be impossible anyway. Rather, she pushes herself to be engaged in an ongoing practice of critical self-awareness and integrity.

My collaborators described their efforts to redistribute and/or abdicate power as aspirational practices fraught with persisting questions and anxieties. Stepha specifically chose to pursue their PhD in a geography department, rather than an Ethnic Studies program, explaining "I don't want to displace people or I don't want to take up those spots that way." Reflecting on future job prospects, they added, "I'm not going to go into the nonprofit system because my face is not the face that people need to be interfacing with." They try to remain honest with themselves about the access they enjoy as a white person, as they negotiate "taking up space" in various contexts and further profiting from this work. At the same time, this aspirational abdication of entitlement—the goal of critical white consciousness, according to Helms—leaves anxious questions around how to use one's power, and where.

Rivka grapples with similar questions in their role as a cultural organizer and co-founder of a magazine. Asking themselves "how did I get to this place?", they share their awareness that, beyond their work ethic and personal talents, their current work is also enabled by their parents' previous financial support, which allowed them to have internships while others were working for pay, as well as by their whiteness.

> We do benefit from [whiteness], absolutely. We don't benefit the same way WASP people do or people who are generationally wealthy do or [resourced white] people who, you know, have lived in America for many, many years. But, we do benefit on a base level of like... we walk through the street, we are white. . . . Even if our parents ridicule us and criticize us, they're still gonna take us in. Not everyone is like that. So, we are very lucky in that regard. I absolutely agree. And I think that's what allows us to do the work we do. Because we have that backup.

Rivka addresses that they "walk through the street" as a person read as white (at least in the U.S.,), but they also distinguish between the imagined benefits that they receive, as compared to white people with white people who may be additionally protected by inherited wealth, or proximity to WASP identity. Their suggestion that there may be "degrees" of white benefit is contested by the notion that whiteness is characterized by a universal protection afforded to white people, rather than by degrees of privilege (Leonardo & Gamez-Djokic, 2019, p. 320). For example, to the extent that whiteness is synonymized with humanity, white women benefit from whiteness over people of color just as much as white men, although differently. In this way,

whiteness would benefit new immigrants who are read as white, like my collaborators, just as much as white people who have been in the U.S. for generations[23].

Rivka has a conflicted relationship to the power these benefits invoke and represent, especially as they intersect with their Jewishness. On one hand, they insist that they and my other collaborators "are not hoarding" the power extended to them, but rather utilizing it to amplify the work of others.

> We are not hoarding that freedom. I think all of us are working to find a way to distribute that freedom in a way. . . . Our parents might have been like, "well, I made it. This is as good as it's gonna get," like, but we're like, actually, we can do a lot more…That's why the platforms that I have are created to provide voice, like to be platforms for those that are silenced to mainstream media.

Here, Rivka makes a distinction between the white saviorist discourse of "being the voice" for racialized others, and "providing voice"—that is, employing resources to offer others the opportunity to speak. At the same time, Rivka oscillates between the fear of "taking up too much space" and the fear of minimizing oneself to a fault. Like Irina, Rivka is working through discomfort with leadership and decision-making power in workspaces with many people of color. For them, this fear also reflects looming antisemitic tropes:

> I consistently say, I don't want to ever be in a place of power. I'm literally just facilitating and I'm creating organization, but like... if there's any point where you (people of color) feel like I'm controlling the space, I want us to acknowledge that. And so I'm as transparent as I can possibly be. And I always have been in every situation I've been in. But there's this moment.... As you know, I run independent media, and I'm a Jew. There's also this moment of like, "Oh my god, I'm controlling the media in this sense." And there's just tropes that are coming up that like, of course, I have a fucking magazine and am doing all this media stuff, and I host all these things... I'm in control. . . . In my head, I'm this evil monster who's like… gonna manipulate you.

As a result, Rivka says they find themselves asking their friends and collaborators of color whether or not they are taking up too much space or wielding too much power. They also combat this anxiety through transparency and trust building: "When we ignore those things, that feeds into white supremacy and power dynamics." So, they attempt to "set up a friendship where a person feels comfortable enough to create that boundary... that's the goal." Their explanation reflects a desire to consider the 'comfort' of the person of color in their relationship ahead of their own white "comfort" and "safety," although arguably even this consideration reinforces their own comfort in the relationship (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Despite the effort they invest in building trusting friendships with their Black and brown friends, there is still a residue of fear that they are either taking up too much space and/or being perceived as being a power-hungry

[23] A potential complication could be the suggestion that Jewish whiteness is "conditional" in the context of antisemitic white supremacy and white nationalism (Bouteldja, 2016; Schraub, 2019). For example, white nationalists who marched in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 chanting "the Jews will not replace us" would likely not consider most light-skinned Ashkenazi Jews to belong to the white "us," even as the general public currently does.

Jew, “because that's how Jewish tropes have been rolling, especially in like, the music industry, the film industry.” At the same time, Rivka worries that

> we work pretty hard to de-platform ourselves, almost to a fault. . . . And that's something that I think sometimes we, too much, say no, no, no, we don't deserve it. And that's actually also enabling white supremacist thinking.

In this way, white supremacy involves both holding disproportionate power, and minimizing one’s potential contributions (presumably due to guilt and shame). This minimization of power has in some cases manifested in a more general denial of the self—which has proved both personally unsatisfying and ultimately unhelpful to broader justice-oriented efforts.

Hegemonic Whiteness in White Antiracist Spaces

The fraught drive to forge more ethical—or perhaps less harmful—ways to exist and participate in racial justice movements led to my collaborators questioning their roles in racial and social justice work, *as white people*. As described in the previous section, Irina arrived at this status or stage after many years of “kind of floating through the world and not really stopping to identify what it means to be white”, but also “trying to do solidarity work with people of color and getting involved in activism and organizing and having to be accountable and having to question why am I in the spaces.” If whiteness was defined by power and violence, how could white-identified people meaningfully participate in racial justice movements? In Helms’s model, such questions likely belong in the status of “Immersion/Emersion”, which involves “actively seeking to redefine whiteness.” In Tema Okun’s framework, it corresponds to the stage of “Taking Responsibility/ Self Righteousness”—engaging with one’s whiteness in the service of antiracism (2006, p. 15).

White racial identity models identify this period as a time when white people come together *as white people* with a critical orientation to white supremacy. Perhaps in reaction to years of ignorance and denial, in this stage of Okun’s model, white people:

> claim our identity as a white person in a racist society and understand the importance of seeing ourselves as part of the white group, both in terms of the power and benefits we receive and in terms of the potential power to organize other white people to address racism. We begin to feel and see the importance of taking responsibility for working with other white people on racism and internalized white supremacy. (p. 15)

Indeed, Irina explains that in the wake of several police murders of young Black people in Chicago, including Rekia Boyd (22 years old) in 2012 and Laquan McDonald (17 years old) in 2014, and in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, which urged the naming of white supremacy and called on white people to take action, Irina turned her gaze toward her own whiteness. This involved “really stepping back from doing support work in Black-led movements to doing facilitation in white anti racial justice spaces.” Instead, she worked with the Chicago Freedom School’s White Folks and Racial Justice training, developing that curriculum and facilitating the sessions. Irina shifted the spotlight from people of color and the symptoms of white supremacy, to the causal framework of white supremacy, as the root cause of suffering. Furthermore, as explained in the previous section, she understood herself to be part of this problem, rather than outside of it.

For Rebecca, participating in a critical white affinity group with her white co-workers has been "life changing", offering her support to challenge "the inertia of white supremacy culture." In the group, she has been able to talk through racialized aspects of concrete work situations, challenging her own white fragility and perfectionism without "putting [the work of processing feelings] on to the Black equity consultant." She is especially excited by the praxis that's encouraged:

> It's the really the difference between a performative commitment to racial equity, and like, what does it mean to have your skin in the game and go to bat for people or for funding or the structural sort of components… and I don't think it would have sunk in and really happened if it hadn't been for this project.

Critical work in white antiracist spaces supported my collaborators to understand and challenge their complicity. Yet, even when racism was discussed as a systemic issue and even when "white supremacy" was named as a culprit, this work had its limits.

Despite their benefits, the critical or "antiracist" affinity spaces that brought white people together *as white people* also tended to reify whiteness, sometimes by reducing it. Even when directed toward racial justice, 'Claiming our identity as a white person' and 'seeing ourselves as part of the white group' (to use Okun's words) obscured important intra-group differences that were actually meaningful for a more rigorous analysis of power. My collaborators may not have had the language to articulate this at the time, but Stepha and Rebecca both observed that white American antiracist spaces often assumed shared middle class, non-immigrant, and often Christian (although sometimes also Jewish) identities, histories and experiences. As my collaborators doubled down on addressing their racial complicity with other white people, their alterity surfaced in ways that were not merely defensive, as had once been the case, but genuinely meaningful to the work at hand. Irina recalls "working with other white people around racial justice and then being like, oh, actually.... I'm not exactly like every other white person. I'm also Jewish and I'm also an immigrant and I'm also from the Soviet Union." Irina experienced U.S. whiteness through intersecting identities and experiences that carried marginalized ethnic and racialized histories including the specificity of being an Ashkenazi Jew against antisemitism and Christian hegemony (both in the USSR, Europe, and the U.S.) and of being a Soviet immigrant to the U.S. in the context of Cold War xenophobia. When these were not addressed in a white, anti-race space, her own self-reflexive work could only go so far.

Rebecca also has expressed feeling "sensitive" to any assumed shared experiences, as when people in white-only spaces say "*we,*" "*our* privilege" or "*our* blind spots" [her emphasis]. She shares that

> even amongst the white antiracism accountability group, I think I did feel this immense difference from them, because I think they had more access to wealth and other kinds of privilege and being sheltered and they really didn't know the extent of my upbringing.

While the relevance of these differences was unclear at the time, this sense of estrangement foreshadowed the importance of historicizing whiteness and explicitly interrogating it within contexts of colonialism and imperialism. It also hinted that the psychological and spiritual realms, where childhood experiences of shame reside, were deeply relevant to this work.

Engaging with alterity did not emerge as an absolution or "move to innocence" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) from white responsibility, but rather as a way to interrogate whiteness more fully.

Returning to Our Roots, Critically

As the reductive and de-historicized work of organized white antiracism met its limits, my collaborators returned to their Soviet Jewish immigrant roots as a way to approach the question of meaningful participation in justice work. Still, this process was fraught with anxiety. Stepha says,

> I had been studying settler colonialism and was thinking of myself as a white settler and was trying to figure out, what is a story that's a little bit more proximate? Why the fuck should I even do this work? Like, who needs me? What is unique about me? It took me a really long time, actually, it's kind of fucked up… Like, it took me a long time to be like, oh, being post-Soviet is kind of unique, I guess.

This was not a matter of discovering what was "special" or "different" about Stepha's whiteness as a way out, but rather a meaningful inquiry into how she had gotten here in the first place.

Coming to such questions requires facing white shame, addressing the self-flagellating and judgmental tendencies of white antiracism, and believing that existing as one's full self could be possible. Rebecca felt resigned, having "normalized how much people will never understand [her]"—non-immigrant people, to be exact. Furthermore, she says, "It rubs against me, but I don't tend to raise my hand like, 'actually, my family are immigrants…' Because it's like, well, whatever, we're here to talk about white supremacy culture, not Rebecca's life story." The relentless focus on white complicity within an assumed shared American whiteness had taught her that her life story was irrelevant to discussions of whiteness, rather than an integral part of them. In this context, bringing up experiences of migration or poverty could be read as nothing more than an attempt at absolution. Perhaps this explains why Rebecca was quick to say, "I don't have an agenda to prove to people how my whiteness is different." Irina confesses that when she initially thought of her difference from other whites, she *did* at first feel some relief, thinking "thankfully, that's not my family's narrative." Still, she soon moved on from this stage, deciding that "it really doesn't matter, because I still benefit from it just like any other white person."

My collaborators' family narratives don't matter, and at the same time, they very much do. As long as they take responsibility for their racial positioning, the *specificity* of their whiteness is absolutely relevant to the broader work of collective liberation. Leonardo & Boas (2013) concur with Haney López (2006) that while various "machinations of whiteness take shape in historically specific ways" . . . "differences within whiteness do not prevent it from converging in order to produce one overarching condition: White domination," and indeed lead to this project (p. 214- p. 215). This reality makes it all the more important for white people to understand the way their particular histories and intersectional subject positions are mobilized in support of this project, along with an interrogating of their own investments. For my collaborators, this means attending to the ways their own negatively racialized Jewish histories and Soviet positionalities were weaponized to reify colonial white supremacy, with their collusion.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, within the Kolektiv, as well as in other groups of Soviet Jewish immigrants with shared politics, my collaborators were able to interrogate the

specificity of their whiteness together, including within the broader contexts of American and global colonialism and imperialism. These are exceptional places where this specificity is foregrounded, as a way to better understand how we fit in to structures of power, and so, how we can mobilize our histories to more thoughtfully resist them. Rebecca admits that sharing information about her Soviet Jewish experience outside of these spaces can sometimes be relevant—"It's like, actually being able to explain what about my own upbringing motivates me to show up for social justice is helpful, but it's not always relevant. So, there's just a time and a place for it. It's not like I'm eager to shout it from the rooftops." Multi-racial organizing spaces, white antiracist spaces, a learning group for queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jews—each context calls for a different type of participation. The anxieties and nuances of Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish entry into whiteness that are raised in white American antiracist spaces raise rich questions: what can these histories *reveal* about whiteness, white supremacy, colonialism and imperialism beyond mere guilt or innocence? What does it take to surface these histories, when they have been shamed and silenced through whiteness? And, crucially, what kind of praxis and *action* can such work enable?

Conclusion

Just as this deeper historical, psychological and spiritual interrogation of whiteness is missing from much white antiracist curriculum, it is excluded from existing models of white racial identity development and white racial consciousness building. Whiteness is generally perceived as a given, not a construct that has been actively transposed onto children, as Thandeka theorizes, or white-identified immigrants, as I have shown. As such, the deepest psychological and spiritual processes of shame, desire, and fear that motivate white identification remain unaddressed, and, as offered by these models, the only recourse is to reclaim a "positive" white identity by committing oneself to antiracism. In Helms's final status of "Autonomy," the white person reconciles being both white and antiracist, committing to antiracist practice and ongoing self-examination. In Okun's model, the final stage of "Community Love and Resistance" moves from the level of individual, to the level of community, involving "living and working in strong antiracist organizations and communities, with all the complexities and challenges such a vision brings"—as a white person no longer plagued by a crisis of identity (p. 16).

While both visions are important, they are incomplete. For my collaborators, stopping at "claiming a positive anti-racist white identity" would inherently mean also succumbing to racialized assimilation and self-erasure, and accepting an enduring sense of alienation. It would mean accepting their whiteness as an inevitability, and resigning themselves to weaponizing this racialized power for good. In contestation of such visions, I understand my collaborators' alienation in American white spaces (including antiracist spaces and Jewish spaces) as wisdom hinting that comfort, affinity and identification should *not* be found within whiteness. Furthermore, approaches to whiteness that do not involve broader decolonial and anti-imperialist analyses or attend to psychological and spiritual questions are inherently incomplete. Indeed, as my collaborators pulled on that thread of their alterity—their own shamed difference from hegemonic whiteness—with equal parts political commitment and curiosity, they began to imagine beyond the limitations of white antiracist identity, toward the potential of both assuming political responsibility *and* mobilizing their histories for collective justice. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this was a collective process, in which mirroring and validation was the medicine for releasing shame and enabling a more ethical pursuit of justice.

Chapter 7: Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon: Mobilizing Queer Immigrant Histories, Virtually

Introduction

> *"[This project] really filled something that I didn't know was missing because I dared not dream . . . because when you don't see things in your community, then you don't know they're possible."*
>
> – *K.L., Kolektiv participant, after Season 1*

> *I never thought it was possible—to connect so deeply with humans that shared so many different parts of my identity. . . . I didn't think I needed it to be whole, but finding you has put me in greater alignment than I ever thought possible. You help me reverse the assimilation process. . . . We're remembering and redefining. And all of it, all of it, вместе (v'meste)—together, here, in this place—now. . . . Наши предки гордиться* [sic] *нами (nashi predki gorditsya nami - our ancestors are proud).*
>
> – *Luba, in "Finding My Компания (Companiya), My People," published in the* Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon zine/samizdat *(May 2020)*

In October 2019, some months before the COVID-19 pandemic relegated many of us to virtual spaces, 23 people across the U.S. and Canada entered a Zoom video conference by choice, rather than obligation. We were all there to meet other Soviet Jewish immigrants who identified as queer and gender-marginalized and who were interested in collectively interrogating and responding to questions of assimilation, race, and power. For many of us who had long felt isolated with this intersection of identities, this was not only a first but a seeming impossibility. As we sat through two hours of introductions that might have felt tedious in any other context, the virtual space buzzed with the possibility of stepping into an unexpected ancestral portal.

This group was both a surprise to me and a long time coming. While I was probably finding my way to these people my whole life, I had only met queer, leftist Soviet Jewish immigrants a year and a half earlier, thanks to Instagram, where Stepha (and her then-partner) had posted a Queer Personals ad from Madison, Wisconsin, looking for "radical Russians and crypo-Jews." Stepha told me about Facebook groups like Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants and Pozor Anonymous, through which I connected with others who lived within miles of me. I also learned about the soviet jews r queer Facebook group, which Rivka had started from Chicago just a few months earlier after their own coming out. Looking back, I realize that every text message and sporadic meet-up (e.g., when Stepha visited Oakland, when Aravah left me a letter in a tree on Vinalhaven, Maine), was a step toward building our community. The energy from these connections encouraged me to direct my time toward gathering more of us in an intentional and intensive way.

Dreaming up the "live virtual group study and participatory art studio" for months ahead of its eventual launch, I envisioned the space to be co-created and co-facilitated with whoever was willing to come (Appendix A). Although I had the organizing and pedagogical skills to structure such a project, it was impossible to predict what would happen or how. Over the next three months, 23 individuals who answered my call for participants (Appendix B) collectively developed curriculum and co-facilitated both structured and informal Zoom sessions that blended ritual, political education, whole and small group discussion, and the co-creation of documents

and artwork. Since that first "season" or iteration, the group that was informally dubbed FSUQJ (Former Soviet Union Queer Jews) has become Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon (Blue Railcar Collective, a reference to a beloved Soviet cartoon), a 43-member collective now in its fourth iterative season of programming and currently stewarded by a group of seven members, including myself.

In this chapter, I discuss the work of this group across its first three seasons of programming. I ask, what does this group make possible, both personally and politically, toward collective liberation? More specifically, how do collectivity and creativity figure into contesting assimilation and forging alternative (e.g., decolonial, Jewish, feminist, and queer) orientations and alliances? Through a discussion of the group's curriculum and cultural production, and survey responses and interviews from both my collaborators and other Kolektiv members (primarily pulled from the first season), I illustrate the ways this virtual group fostered connections that challenged internalized shame, nurtured the development of critical consciousness, and creatively narrated queer, post-Soviet Jewish immigrant identity against assimilatory prescriptions. I also discuss the challenges and limitations of the project, including the negotiation of internal differences of power and identity, competing participant priorities, and differing approaches to building collective power, especially as the group expanded. I demonstrate how the stewarding committee's responses to this contestation privileged an ethic of politicized care within interpersonal relationships as an immediate site for the Kolektiv's broader pursuit of justice.

From Live, Virtual Group Study to Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon

Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon is a cultural organizing project across the U.S. and Canada composed of 1.5 and second generation queer and gender-marginalized, post-Soviet Jewish immigrants. As articulated in the group's internal Vision and Community Agreements, a shared Google Doc, the group "*root[s]* in our ancestral Soviet Jewish histories and positionalities and *radiate[s]* through cultural production, transformative justice-oriented healing, and political education in the pursuit of collective liberation." This vision is pursued through a participatory structure and a politicized ethic of care that critically attends to power while prioritizing caring and respectful relationships. As the visioning document declares,

> *This is not just any radical, lefty space. Many of us are carrying familial and intergenerational wounds and this kolektiv is an opportunity to deeply show up for ourselves and each other in new ways. We show up with an intention to interrupt these historical patterns.*

The corresponding "Values & Practices" of the group include:

> Joyful relationship building & co-liberation, within our group and beyond; De-assimilation and radical diasporism (challenging imperialism and colonialism in all forms); Rooting in our cultures and hxstories & radiating queer post-Soviet Jewish aesthetics / rituals / practices; Collective learning, political education, cultural production; and, Ancestral and familial healing.

Since October 2019, when I first convened 23 participants in a "live virtual group study and art studio," the group has moved through multiple seasons of programming that saw a transition from intensive relationship-building and the creation of the group container to

increased learning, cultural production, and external education in a group of 43. The multifaceted work spanned four intersecting realms: familial, cultural, political, and spiritual, and included dialogue, relationship-building, political education, cultural organizing, and artistic expression. Seasons 1–3 each offered six or seven structured, synchronous sessions that were imagined and co-facilitated by small groups of participants, along with more informal synchronous and asynchronous offerings (Appendix H). Season 1 (fall 2019–spring 2020) involved building the container and community. We pursued this by sharing personal stories, developing community agreements, generating a list of topics to discuss, pursuing political education and articulating our political commitments, and speaking Russian and watching Soviet cartoons together. In this season, participants spontaneously wrote essays and created artwork that they shared with the group. At the end of the season, the group voted to name themselves "Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon" and released a 76-page zine/samizdat (self-published) publication entitled *Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon* (May 2020).

With the initial container built, the two seasons that followed were characterized by increased cultural production and political education among a growing group, but sometimes at the expense of intimacy. As COVID-19 spread, I checked in with group members and launched a mutual aid program. In Season 2 (spring 2020–summer 2020), mounting interest in articulating a more specific political position led the group to dive deeper into participant-led political education, particularly in response to the Black Lives Matter and the Palestinian liberation movements. As the group grew by a few members, we continued building relationships, working through inherited and familial trauma, and keeping our cultural practices alive in both structured "obed" (dinner) sessions and informal "chai" (tea) sessions. Toward the end of Season 2, several participants advocated for a stewarding committee to ensure the sustainability of the group. After a simple application process, all six applicants joined me to form the new Domik Druzei (house of friends, or stewarding committee). In the intermission, members of the Domik invited group participants to host special holidays for the group: Hanukkah and Novyĭ God (New Year). This kicked off a tradition of hosting Jewish holidays and Soviet New Year together, in our own way.

Season 3 (winter 2021–spring 2021) saw the greatest expansion of group membership and continued programming in the context of Zoom fatigue and pandemic burnout, leading the group to prioritize relationship-building. With the pressures of COVID-19, everyone was given the option of continuing as "season participants," attending synchronous sessions, or just having access to the email list and holidays as "general members." The existence of a dedicated stewarding committee made it possible to accept new members who had long been waiting to join, a move Kolektiv members supported. However, given that new members had not participated in co-creating the group, some lacked trust in the process and leadership, leading to a few relational conflicts between new members and the Domik. As will be discussed later, these difficulties led the Domik to foreground relationships and repair in the Community Agreements. Although programming continued, pandemic burnout made co-planning live, virtual sessions more difficult. Still, the group continued, hosting holidays and film screenings with artist Q&As, artistic projects, and collective writing initiatives. The season culminated with the first in-person meeting of the seven-person Domik, an important step for this small group who had been working together 20–40 hours per month. Currently, the group is in its fourth season.[24]

[24]As of Winter 2022, the project is in its fourth season, though, due to exhaustion brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom fatigue, and general organizing burnout, the stewarding committee has decided to structure the group through events and projects, rather than to convene regularly in synchronous sessions. At the time of writing, the group had 43 members: 31 of them general members and 12 of them core season participants. In the background,

The synchronous convergence of so many members of an otherwise scattered, niche group was made possible by the affordances of networked technology and digital tools, especially Zoom video conferencing and Google Suite (formerly known as G Suite). In their study of queer Soviet Jews in occupied Palestine, Adi Kuntsman (2009) writes that the virtual world "can provide many opportunities for home-making and home-imagining, especially for migrants and diasporic subjects" (p. 1). While Instagram and Facebook revealed to me that other queer Soviet Jews exist, digital tools that enabled synchronous communication, video, and sound amplified the possibilities of our connections. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic shifted many synchronous meetings online, Kolektiv members across the U.S. and Canada used Zoom to meet in interactive sessions, making use of the video and screen-sharing features, breakout rooms, and chat. Screen-sharing even made it possible for us to watch cartoons and listen to music together, while seeing one another's reactions. J.K. explained that while a queer Soviet Jewish Facebook group had not offered them a deep feeling of connection "except being in it and knowing it's there," the live, synchronous sessions enabled them to "feel people's energies." They added that although there is still some disconnect, there is also a lot of connection; "little rituals or catalyst moments, seeing faces, hearing voices" helped "break through the barriers" of virtual space.

While video conferencing provided the energetic connections, Google Suite made collaboration possible, as many people were able to add and respond to one another's idea both synchronously and asynchronously. We used Google Slides to structure our presentations and share visuals for our celebrations; Google Docs to brainstorm, find resonances, and plan sessions, both synchronously while on Zoom and asynchronously; Google Forms to solicit feedback; and Google Sheets to create group rosters and track mutual aid funds. These tools also created an archive of our work, with Zoom providing session recordings that were sent out to those who could not be there, and Google Drive keeping track of all session plans and slide decks. While a few participants already knew each other "in real life," and many others eventually began meeting in person, these platforms and tools enabled the large group, including people who were geographically isolated or could not otherwise leave their houses, to form connections that simply would not have otherwise been possible.

Forging a Contested Home out of Queer, Immigrant Alienation

As queer immigrants finding one another for the first time, Kolektiv members connected around the layered alienation of navigating white, cisheteronormative American and Canadian society as strangers among strangers—queers among white(ned) immigrants. That is to say, many arrived in this new virtual space having lived diasporic immigrant lives that notably lacked an abiding sense of home, or else having compartmentalized parts of themselves to get by. As Masha put it, "the wound was asking for this balm or salve." In a survey response after the first season, Irina reflected on "Knowing that even though we have different lived experiences, yet we share this cultural wound. We've all felt estranged, unknown, alienated, and wanting connection and understanding." K.L. echoed, "I had felt isolated for so long—from American Jewry, from

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the Domik has continued to meet and to invite other members to join in addressing issues as they arise, including pursuing interventions and repair processes with American Jewish publications and public figures as it concerns Soviet Jewish experience, writing public statements, and putting together a second zine, though this is currently on hold. The group also convened spontaneously around the Russian war in Ukraine to share resources and provide emotional support to one another. Together, all of these changes (introducing a stewarding committee, offering two kinds of membership, shifting to an event/project-based model) have offered flexibility and sustainability, allowing the group to continue at a time when more formal organizing feels strained.

the Russian/Russian Jewish communities, and from most of the queer community—that I had come to accept it as inevitable." While some people were in touch with other queer, Soviet Jewish immigrants via Facebook groups (e.g., Pozor Anonymous, Anti-Trump Soviet Immigrants, and Rivka's group, the soviet jews r queer), the "call for participation" caught others by surprise, challenging the inevitability of isolation.

As discussed in Chapter 6, some people came to the Kolektiv out of disillusionment with white antiracist and predominantly white Jewish organizing spaces where the relevance of their Soviet Jewish and immigrant experience was overlooked. Stepha explained that "a lot of white racial solidarity projects (including queer and disabled-led projects) feel unwelcoming" and "deeply entrenched in norming," sharing three specific critiques. In one program, where she was the only immigrant, the palpable difference she felt between others' experiences and her own family's recent stories of survival went unnamed. Furthermore, she was encouraged to agitate her family "during Thanksgiving dinner," an assumption that made cultural assumptions while disregarding her estrangement from her family, both aspects of her Soviet Jewish experience. Participants explained that they had responded to these constant erasures by hiding and compartmentalizing core parts of their identities, a privilege of passing as white American that also carried the pain of self-erasure. In an interview, one participant, A-T-L**,** specifically spoke to their experience of feeling "disconnected" and "out of place" in the American Jewish anti-Zionist organization IfNotNow, without realizing that the feeling of having "nothing to offer" was related to the invisibilization of A-T-L's Soviet Jewish background. In a written survey response after the first season, Rebecca shared, "There is some pain here because this group has helped me realize how much I've compartmentalized in my life, and I hope to celebrate *authenticity* more this year." Indeed, silencing oneself in a more dominant context can lead to calcifying or cutting off those parts. Also pursuing authenticity and wholeness, Stepha ultimately recognized that white antiracist spaces "did not bring up what [she] wanted to unpack"—that is, how her Soviet Jewish immigrant experience informed her relationships to race, class, colonialism, ability, and so on.

In response to this alienation, the Kolektiv came to constitute a contested "home" or "семья" (sem'ia, family) where invisibilized Soviet Jewish immigrant identities were foregrounded and centered, both for personal well-being and toward collective justice. As queers, immigrants, and Jews in a cisheteropatriarchal, xenophobic, and Christian society, the notion of "home" was not self-evident. First, as immigrants and children of immigrants, the very idea of home is untenable, as the original homeland is unfamiliar, while the adopted home, with its own dominant culture, is always strange (Ahmed, 2013). This is exemplified in a poem Rebecca published in the Kolektiv zine/samizdat at the end of the first season. Reflecting on her trip to Belarus, she writes, "I traveled to 'homelands' to pick up some / pieces only to be squeezed between / present-day amnesia / and commercialized nostalgia." She asks, "Tonight, where does my belonging sleep?" Rebecca's trip "back home" fell short of its promises of belonging. Jewish ways of life on that land have long been ruptured, families have left, the Soviet Union no longer exists, and neoliberal capitalism has rapidly altered traditional and Soviet culture. And today, travel is too violent and dangerous. Given this impossibility of return, Ahmed (2000) argues that, for the migrant, "Home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there), rather than the past that binds the subject to a given place" (p. 78). Home is thus transformed from a physical place to a relational state and future-oriented creative project. It is an active, emergent pursuit.

Kolektiv members must create home not only as immigrants, but as *queer* immigrants. Even as many forms of white queerness become palatable and even celebrated in mainstream U.S. and Canada, many of my collaborators and other members of the Kolektiv are estranged in their socially conservative Soviet Jewish communities by their queerness, gender non-conformity, and radical politics, and thus pursue alternative queer kinships. This idea shows up throughout the Kolektiv's zine/samizdat publication: in Rivka's submission that references "when my mother periodically decides she is no longer my mother because my 'queerness is ruining her life'" and in Anya T.'s visual declaration that "My queerness is not a Pozor [shame, disgrace]!" Some group participants must hide important parts of themselves from family and Soviet Jewish community to keep the peace, while others take distance to preserve their mental health or are estranged from their families entirely. This is further evidenced by the Kolektiv's policy of confidentiality as articulated in the Community Agreements: members have agreed not to disclose who is in the group without their permission because there may be negative repercussions. The precarity of these familial relationships threatens ties to Soviet Jewish history and culture and begs for alternative formations of kin—"self-crafted kinship, erotic and affectionate networks or lines of affiliation, rather than filiation" (Puar, 2017, p. 171) that could otherwise help maintain some connection to a history, culture, and epistemology that predated racial assimilation.

If holistic forms of connection are unlikely to be found in one's birthplace or birth family, then they must be created in relationship, both to oneself and to others. Reflecting on the group's first season, Masha L. (another Masha in our group) reported gaining the "feeling of home at the intersection of my various identities." They suggest that home is an affect, the phenomenology of showing up and being witnessed in the fullest expression of self. The sharing, mirroring, and validation of the group had helped them move toward greater self-acceptance, helping the self become its own home. As the participant, A-T-L who had discussed their alienation in the Jewish activist group IfNotNow, later shared in their interview,

> Just the fact that we've had these continuous community gatherings around these identities has helped me feel like all these things together are a core part of my identity . . . Because we were meeting, coming together all the time to talk about these things as very important parts of myself, it made it possible for me to be like, this actually is a huge part of my identity and what I present. I don't think I've actually given it enough credit.

The relational, interactive structure of the group made it possible for this person to integrate previously compartmentalized identities. A core part of this involved "coming into" their post-Soviet identity alongside others: to recognize it and to *feel* that it is important and relevant to their actions in the world. Just as they now describe themselves as post-Soviet, many other participants shared that they also shifted how they describe themselves, for example on Instagram or in professional bios, to foreground "queer, Soviet Jewish immigrant." This constitutes a reclaiming and public articulation of histories that are otherwise invisibilized by whiteness or subsumed into American Jewishness.

Just as the group helped some participants return home to themselves, for some, these interpersonal relationships became their own home. Rivka articulated their gains after the first season as "Community, семья [sem'ia, family], a sense of belonging, realizing I'm not alone, enriching stories and growth, embracing myself and my intersecting identities." Their response

reflects a dialectical relationship between embracing themselves and being embraced by others. Similarly, Rebecca ends her poem with these lines: "когда ты будешь дома? (when will you be home?) / A radical diaspora welcomes me with open arms." Rebecca suggests that she ultimately finds home not in Belarus, but in the "radical diaspora" of other queer, Soviet Jewish immigrants who share her values and commitments. Rebecca's journey toward belonging echoes Ahmed's (2000) theorization that "The process of estrangement is the condition for the emergence of a contested community, a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the 'out-of-place-ness' of other migrant bodies" (p. 94). The "bodies" of Kolektiv participants may alternately appear "in-place" or "out-of-place," depending on how they are read as white, Jewish, queer and trans, and so on. Still, the alienation of being immigrant-within-whiteness and queer-within-Soviet-Jewishness is certainly grounds for connection. Thus, the Kolektiv emerges as one such "contested community," forged through connections between people who have accessed safety under whiteness and settler colonialism at the high cost of alienation and estrangement.

Indeed, many participants used the word *community* to describe their experience of the first season, as shared in a written survey: "I gained an experience of a community that I didn't even know existed before our meeting, and one that I very much feel a part of. I am coming away from these sessions feeling a lot more connected in general." (Marina) / "It was truly an incredible experience. I felt a connection with community in a way I haven't felt before, and deepened my understanding of the complexities of our different identities" (Ari G.) / ". . . a sense of community, tools to place myself and my experiences in context, an urge to make more art, and many many moments of connection/shared emotion/healing" (Anya T.). This was not the predetermined community (e.g., Soviet Jewish immigrants, American Jews, white people) that had previously caused alienation but rather a chosen one in which participants could be understood as both Soviet Jewish immigrants and queers (and also as white(ned) people and settlers). In this chosen community, the connections participants describe are not limited to the sharing of losses and alienation but involve meaningful *connections to self and to context*. For example, gaining tools to locate oneself in a historical and political context—of colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism, as we did in the group—was itself connecting. This work builds on Ahmed's theorizations to show that connection was forged not only through estrangement and loss, but also through *desire* to understand oneself in the fabric of history and to participate in creating a more just society.

Although the words *home*, *community*, and *belonging* imply a sense of harmony, safety, and rest, these promises are qualified by ongoing contestation and discord among a heterogeneous group of people convening in a context of power. As Ahmed reminds us, the community is always *contested;* "there is already strangeness and movement" within it (p. 88). In the case of the Kolektiv, this strangeness encompassed a diversity of life experiences, positionalities, and personality types, as well as different expectations of the group. Whereas some participants were excited about co-creating an emergent project, one lamented that they were not sure what our "objective" was as a group, while another felt their capacity to connect was challenged by a "lack of shared purpose and trust that we're coming there for the same reason," as they had experience in previous political organizing spaces. Home-making (Ahmed, 2000) was also challenged by group members' significant inherited and lived trauma, as well by their diversity of gender and sexuality, class, ability, neurotypicality/neurodivergence, religion, language, relationships with family, connections to the Soviet Union, political affiliations, and lived experiences (of e.g., immigration, assimilation, antisemitism), among other things.

Despite the best intentions, the persistent yearning to feel connected was sometimes challenged by the reality that not all participants shared all experiences nor the same positionalities in relation to power. Knowing we may likely activate one another's pains, at the first session, I announced that the group was not necessarily a "safe space," but I hoped it would be a "caring, brave" space where we suspended assumptions, grounding in our own experiences, and all worked to minimize harm while holding one another accountable, with care. Still, at times, our assumptions caused hurt. For example, in Season 2, as participants discussed the ways whiteness offered them safety, one participant challenged these assumptions by sharing the ways they were targeted on the street as a trans and Jewish person. In Season 3, a new member expressed frustration that some participants were actively marginalized by their queerness, while others benefited from the community and status without facing external harm. These revelations helped the group develop a more rigorous shared power analysis, but with a cost to those who did not feel seen or represented. Some people felt more seen in specific connections than in the general group, such as one participant who felt most connected when interacting with other participants around neurodiversity and ableism. While this participant felt alienated at times from the general group due to the quick pace of the sessions, participation structure that relied on reading social cues, and the early emphasis on discussing whiteness, the group nevertheless offered them a unique chance to connect with others who also experienced the world as neuro-minoritized or neurodivergent, trans, Soviet, Jewish, and immigrant.

While belonging itself could not be promised, collectivity was negotiated within the group through tiers of participation. I established the initial culture of the group with an ethos and structure of collective participation, centering values of relationality and collaboration. These values were embedded into the group design, including the co-facilitation model, the interactive structure of sessions, the one-on-one onboarding conversations, the group community agreements, and the group zine/samizdat publication that followed the first season. I privileged collectivity because I have always thrived off of collective energy and co-learning, and, as an educator and socially engaged artist, I knew that we could create something richer than any individual could do alone. Being trained in critical pedagogy, I understood that power needed to be distributed among participants so we could learn from one another, and I knew how to make this happen in a virtual, group setting. When I introduced the project, I was transparent about my own interests as an activist and doctoral student but also created opportunities for everyone to collectively build the group, according to their capacities. That being said, not everyone could or wanted to invest the time necessary to co-facilitate sessions or serve on the Domik, which requires 10-15 hours per week of volunteer work, for personal and structural reasons. Nonetheless, we made sure to offer numerous opportunities to inform the structure and content of the group, with varying degrees of time investment, including brainstorming sessions, shared curriculum documents, feedback sessions, and surveys.

Healing Shame Through Connection

For some participants, experiencing oneself reflected in and affirmed by similar others brought healing to the alienation and shame they carried, informing broader justice work. This connection first came simply through convening: as one participant, K.L., described, "More than any tangible takeaway, I've gained some measure of healing just by sharing digital space and time and stories with this remarkable group of people." In her post-Season 1 survey, Irina reflected more specifically on why sharing space with these specific people was so potent:

> Prior to this series (prior to the last few months) I had never met anyone who shared these identities! I didn't even have the words to identify myself in this way. Being able to gather with so many people across varied geographical, political, and cultural experiences has been eye opening and healing. Now I have a whole new set of questions, curiosities, and inspiration to connect to our diaspora!

Indeed, our convergence was the first time many were face-to-face with others who shared their/our particular histories and positionalities altogether in one "place": queer and gender-marginalized, Soviet immigrant, Jewish, racialized as white in the United States or Canada. For J.K., just seeing all of these "eyes and smiles" on the screen was powerful: "I had moments of feeling reflected and mirrored. I thought, my face actually looks like them, we would've been from the same shtetl [village]. It felt like coming back into community again . . . so much healing." Beyond just seeing one's existence validated in the existence of another, this novel "mirroring" occurred through sharing stories and cultural practices, whole-group discussions, breakout rooms that were not recorded, micro-moments, and offline conversations among pairs and small groups. J.K. further reflected, the most memorable moments were often "small" ones: "sharing about our babushkas [grandmothers], hearing people say goodnight in Russian. Seeing myself in other people's faces, mannerisms, perspectives. Seeing people's childhood photos." Given the assimilatory context that most participants had been raised in, the experiences of reviving childhood memories in an affirming space brought great comfort. Whereas hiding these core aspects of oneself had engendered shame (as discussed in Chapter 5), sharing them with others in adulthood brought healing.

Ultimately, the group enabled many to feel less isolated with these complex and often painful inheritances, a medicine for the shamed self. Shame has been discussed as "the experience of self-in-relation when 'relation' is ruptured or disconnected" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 18) and "an act of self-protection by someone whose core sense of self is repeatedly attacked" (Thandeka, 1999, p. 70). Given that "shame thoughts are quintessentially alone thoughts" (DeYoung, 2015, p. 27), mirroring is a powerful antidote and healer that heals disconnect with connection and disintegration with wholeness. One participant, Aravah, explicitly named the metaphor of the mirror, writing that they gained:

> the feeling of validation that so many folks with shared identities are struggling with the same challenges and questions, and looking for answers, support systems, etc! A mirror is always a great thing to have in this world, especially when many of us didn't have that for much of our lives in the various complex identities we carry.

Among other challenges, group members shared the experiences of being raised by family members with Soviet Jewish and immigrant trauma, navigating queerness in homophobic communities, and working through the ways whiteness both eroded their culture and rendered them complicit in violence. Acting as mirrors, group members offered one another validation that these challenges and questions were valid, as well as a support system to address them. As Masha explained in her post-Season 1 survey, this mirror was powerful enough to shift shame and create greater internal capacity:

> It is able to shift feelings and energy in the body towards more openness, spaciousness, and grounding in an authentic sense of self. Of all the things that I gained by taking part

> in these meetings, the state of being that I am moving towards brought on by not feeling alone is the most impactful.

In this case, not feeling alone shifted this person's internal emotional and energetic state. Static energy was replaced with movement; space was created to take on new emotional tasks, including addressing the ways we are complicit in hurting others.

These reflections on healing foreshadow that, rather than serve as an end in and of itself, participants' personal healing work helped them "know themselves" and "shift energy" in ways that were integral to their participation in (racial) justice movements outside of the group. Masha reflected on how the group's work challenged the tendency of white activists to jump directly into leftist political work, prioritizing "action" over self-awareness. They shared in an interview,

> I feel like no one needs to be constantly critiquing and critical while avoiding doing our own work. I feel like so much of the organizing work I've done prior to burnout was around just critical thought and agitation and direct action, but I was a problematic fucking mess for so much of that. I think it's just really important to know yourself to show up for other people. Sometimes I feel like, who am I to take up space to do my own healing work? But you can't actually be showing up well if you're not right with yourself or don't know yourself . . . it's so fundamental to be grounded.

Navigating the anxieties of "taking up space" for personal healing amidst the urgency of stopping structural violence, Masha nevertheless concludes that "knowing yourself" is integral to most effectively "showing up for other people." This includes not only cognitive knowledge, such as one's familial historical relationships to race and power, but also one's relationship to their own pain. Another participant, J.K., offered a potent example by explaining that their own shame of being white, trans, and non-binary had made it more difficult to work critically on their white privilege. They recognized that they needed to work on the ways they perpetuated whiteness, but their own hurts were taking up space and closing them off. Conversely, processing this pain with others and finding validation in the group created greater internal capacity for them to address not only how power had hurt them, but how they were implicated in it hurting others.

The transformation of immigrant and queer shame afforded by the group manifested in individual and collective, discursive and creative articulations that complicated and challenged hegemonic whiteness. Most overtly, this was reflected by the self-identifying language participants came to use. As Irina shared in her survey, prior to joining the group, they "didn't event [sic] have the words to identify myself in this way," meaning as "Soviet Jewish." The isolation, shame, and lack of language that participants had described prior to finding one another had only furthered racial assimilation. In keeping their Soviet Jewishness covert, they were enabling others to read them as white Americans or Canadians. This not only erased the truth of their histories but also reified whiteness. Conversely, by collectively learning and articulating their histories to themselves, one another, and the public, participants leveraged their queer, Soviet Jewishness *against* racial assimilation.

Whereas before, many participants had been identifying the way they were identified by others—most often as white, and sometimes "Russian" immigrants, queer, and/or Jewish—after our work together, many went on to internally and publicly assume more complex and holistic, historically specific identities. One participant, A-T-L, shared, "When I think of how I identify

myself, in Google Forms for example, because of not feeling it was important enough, I would NOT have put post-Soviet immigrant. Now, if there's a two sentence thing I say post-Soviet and then queer, Jewish." For many of us, a significant change was identifying ourselves as immigrants and replacing the word *Russian* (which reflected Russo-centrism and was not accurate for those from e.g., Belarus, Ukraine) with *Soviet Jewish*, signaling ourselves as members of an internally colonized group (Jews) within a particular historical and geopolitical context (the Soviet Union). Rebecca shared that she learned from others in the group "emphasizing Soviet and not Russian as a counter-action to Russian hegemony," saying, "These can seem inconsequential linguistics to outsiders but I've realized how *deeply important* these nuances are!" In this way, the group's specific articulations serve as "counternarratives" to the prescriptions of both Russian imperialism and American whiteness, both of which efface and homogenize specific histories.

Transforming Painful Inheritances

The group afforded the collective processing of intergenerational trauma as a necessary component of personal work toward participation in broader racial and social justice movements. The feeling of alienation participants experienced in white antiracist spaces, where interrogations of whiteness bypassed their recent Soviet Jewish immigrant histories, suggested to them that this work was relevant and needed to be pursued with others of similar family history and ancestry. Research on intergenerational trauma demonstrates that people who survive traumatic events often develop adverse emotional or behavioral responses, which they pass on to their children both through socialization and genetically (Menakem, 2017; Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018). Too often, these adverse responses lead people to seek safety in power. Because Kolektiv participants all traced their recent history to the Soviet Union, and to Jewish experiences specifically, they were able to help one another stitch connections between the adverse experiences of their elders, the parenting styles they were raised under, and the effects on their own bodies, nervous systems, mental health, and action in the world. This collective work of naming the trauma was especially important because most participants had been raised in a context of familial silence and repression, a survival strategy that many of our immigrant parents seemed to rely on to move forward with their lives.

Together, participants challenged these silences and helped move shared familial trauma through dialogue, art, writing, intergenerational storytelling, and nervous system regulation. In the "Inheritances" shared Google Doc, participants listed what their elders "have carried with them as they've relocated," articulating the reverberations in their own lives: scarcity mentality, pessimism, extreme risk aversion, stress reactions to minor things, invalidation of emotions, pressure to succeed/extreme work ethic (Appendix I). Anxiety, digestive issues, and chronic illness all appeared as manifestations of trauma in the body (Menakem, 2017). The "+" symbols added by individuals next to each line illustrate the profound resonance of these themes among group members. These effects are the intergenerational consequences of a traumatizing century of Soviet history: among the group, most participants' grandparents had fought in World War II or were otherwise displaced to the far east of the Soviet Union, survived mass killings during the Holocaust, and lost family members. Our elders, and in some cases participants themselves, had experienced Soviet censorship and surveillance (Luba's great grandfather, a Yiddish writer, was killed; mine was sent to a gulag), forced secularization, hunger (some survived the blockade of Leningrad), antisemitism, environmental health disasters such as the Chernobyl nuclear explosion, and so on. In an illustration and essay later published in the zine/samizdat (Appendix

J), Judy connects the "crumbs" eaten by both the elder and younger generations of Soviet Jews. He writes,

> I made these illustrations in 2015 after ruminating about this habit my babushka and other older Russian people had. I'm still thinking about her generation's food trauma and its echoes and reverberations into my own. The weird, sad, not un-beautiful ballet that these traumas create in me and my family's smallest gestures and routines.

This series of artworks illustrates how food scarcity endures in the family, from the Soviet WWII context to the comforts of middle-class American whiteness, where the artist now finds himself. As the text implies, the body is often the site for the passage of these intergenerational inheritances.

As Judy's example shows, Kolektiv participants processed these traumatic inheritances in artwork and writing that they shared with one another. Harsh and abusive parenting and physical pain emerged as themes and consequences of intergenerational trauma. In the third session of Season 1, K.S., who was also co-facilitating the session on intergenerational trauma shared an artwork with the group entitled "Family Ties" (from their series of crochet fiber sculptures) (Appendix K). They told the group,

> [this artwork] started as an experiment in giving shape to feelings I was struggling with. Acknowledging and honoring their presence, while at the same time rendering them soft, light, and small enough to hold, helped me gain perspective. "Family ties" portrays intergenerational trauma and loss of vitality stemming from a legacy of abuse.

Their courageous sharing inspired others to tell stories of harm they had experienced in their families and to share coping strategies. During this session, Rivka shared an essay with the group titled "On Ancestral Healing," which they later published in the zine. Rivka writes, "The very existence of being a Kogan (my mother's maiden name) means that you will always experience illness. Some sort of unadulterated chronic pain. My mother said, *if you're not feeling pain, then you're not really living*." Unfortunately, for many participants' elders, Soviet Jewish and immigrant resilience were forged through the normalization of pain, emotional repression, and tendencies toward criticism and perfectionism. As Rivka's text implies, some participants' caregivers thus ignored or dismissed their children's physical and emotional pain, just as they did their own, rather than relating to it with compassion.

Rather than present themselves as victims of oppressive histories, Kolektiv members articulated their dedications to healing this trauma. In the same essay discussed earlier, Rivka writes, "I decided to confront this cycle with my hands outstretched pushing against whatever lightning bolt of pain poisoned my bloodline." "Confronting the cycle" meant studying history to identify the source of the pain, talking with family to trace "the poison" of trauma, and writing poetry to push against it. For Rebecca, trauma is carried in luggage that she must empty. She writes in her poem in the zine/samizdat: "Emptying luggage of inherited trauma / makes room for permission to be enough, / joyful even- / in light of disjointed family systems." Even as familial trauma continues to perpetuate harm, the ongoing individual and collective work of emptying the luggage creates new space for self-acceptance and joy. Of course, such healing is made possible for many Kolektiv members by their greater distance from immediate violence, by the advantages of class and racial privilege, and by the support of affirming others. Masha also

reflects on this tendency among specifically *queer* 1.5 and second generation immigrants as a "role and quest that so many of us seem to have accepted, to be the person in their family who is working to stop the cycles of intergenerational trauma." She writes,

> This so often is the role of the queer person in families, the one who holds the mirror up, the one who holds everyone's pain, who carries the emotional burden. I'm not sure where to go with this because it is so deeply painful for me and I imagine I am not alone . . . it might be that reclaiming the word "pozor" [disgrace] is what I need.

She suggests that queerness, the very quality that has been shunned in many homophobic families, is actually a vital source of intergenerational healing. Her theorization affirms Muñoz (2019), who understands queerness as the creative pursuit "that propels us forward," "the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). Masha and some other group members may be living queerly in a way that would have been far more dangerous for their elders. She suggests that by reclaiming queerness from pozor by actively living queerly, Kolektiv members may be feeling their relatives' shame and pain and perhaps even moving and healing some of it.

Importantly, this healing work did not merely distinguish participants from their elders but rather cultivated compassion for them and helped heal or strengthen some intergenerational bonds. Masha reflected that, since gaining confidence in their Soviet Jewish identity, seeing their mother and brother "feels so much more powerful." Similarly, Rivka shares in an interview that over the course of the first season their relationship to their family started changing: they found themselves wanting to be closer to them. They explain the effects of studying history and asking questions together:

> It's given me that empathy I thought I lost. It's perfect timing for me bc I spent a year healing my mom trauma. This just helps me grapple with it. The more I empathize with their trauma, the more I'm able to hold my own . . . I have to accept what they give me and mourn what they can't.

Rivka suggests that the work of healing intergenerational trauma involves understanding and having compassion for one's elders and for oneself. It means understanding adverse parenting styles, as Rivka explained in Chapter 5, as a response to oppression, but also holding with compassion that these survival strategies had harmful effects. Even though participants were most often unable to change their parents in ways they would have liked, the empathy, acceptance, and grief that they cultivated together by sharing and historically locating their family dynamics made it more possible for some to maintain these ties.

Because relationships with parents and grandparents were often the lifeline to a Soviet Jewish identity prior to American whiteness, intergenerational storytelling and collective archiving emerged as important tools for challenging the propensity to "forget" that immigrant trauma and assimilation promoted. In the first season, Stepha invited participants to collect the stories of their parents and grandparents in response to a prompt.[25] She then translated the

[25] Through a collective process, the group came up with several prompts for our elders regarding places that have "fallen into your soul"—"запали в душу" (zapali v dushu). We asked: "Were/are there places in the Soviet Union that you associate with feelings of sadness? Happiness? That you dream of? That you don't want to talk about? Is there a place you keep thinking about? Why? In Russian, the prompts were: Есть ли места в Советском Союзе,

memories into English and transposed onto the corresponding geographic locations across the Soviet Union. The result (Appendix L) was a poetic patchwork capturing a mixture of nostalgia, pain, and everyday life among our elders in the Soviet Union. For example, one section of the map illustrated the following anecdotes:

> After the Leningrad train, CRIMEA was the embodiment of heaven on earth. They fed us such crap (drian') . . . these little meatballs (if they even contained meat . . .) But even these could not ruin Crimea" and "KAPUSTIN YAR: We lived here until I was 14. Because of the nuclear research children couldn't stay past that age. It was a gorgeous town . . . but caused my father's death from exposure to radiation.

Such answers to the open prompt reflected both joy and terror; the beauty of the land and its cultures alongside the adversity of authoritarianism, antisemitism, surveillance, war, and so on.

This intergenerational storytelling uncovered stories buried due to trauma and the ruptures of migration, offering participants insight into their parents' meaning-making and strengthening their connection to their homelands. Judy shared, "The mapping was really potent for me. It gave me a mechanism through which to fill in gaps in my own story and interview relatives about sensitive subjects we don't often discuss." While it may have felt risky or awkward to simply ask these questions out of the blue, the "assignment" proposed by Stepha provided a reason and container to broach potentially sensitive subjects. Given that my own parents rarely talk about life in the Soviet Union, I was also nervous and skeptical to ask them such emotionally provocative questions. However, the vulnerability with which they responded surprised me and brought us closer together. Learning about their childhood traumas and joys filled me with compassion that I was not previously able to access and offered invaluable insights into some of our specific family dynamics. Similarly, one participant shared that "thinking of what my family has gone through with compassion" has transformed their family relationships. Through their work on intergenerational trauma in the group, they felt more able to maintain relationships with their parents, holding on to that lifeline to Soviet Jewish experience a little longer.

Somatic work directed at calming the nervous system emerged as a final aspect of collectively healing intergenerational trauma and addressing internalized white supremacy. Mental health, including anxiety and depression as they intersected with familial experiences, was a constant source of discussion in the Kolektiv. In the group, anxiety often intersected with white supremacy culture's tendencies toward urgency and perfectionism, manifesting in sessions that were attempting to accomplish far too much in a two-hour span. This was the most consistent critique participants offered in the post-Season 1 survey. At the same time, synchronous interaction offered participants opportunities for co-regulating their nervous systems, including watching Soviet cartoons and listening to music (live and recorded) together.

которые часто тебе вспоминаются? Или просто запали в душу/в память? Какие места в Советском Союзе для тебя ассоциируются с радостью или грустью? С важными жизненными или политическими событиями? Есть ли места, о которых не хочется думать или говорить? Есть ли места, которые тебе снятся? Есть ли места, которые больше не существуют, в которые хотелось бы вернуться? (Est′ li mesta v Sovetskom Soi͡uze kotorye chasto tebe vspominai͡utsi͡a? Ili prosto zapali v dushu/v pami͡at′? Kakie mesta v Sovetskom Soi͡uze dli͡a tebi͡a assotsiirui͡utsi͡a s radost′i͡u ili grust′i͡u? S vazhnymi zhiznennymi ili politicheskimi sobytii͡ami? Est′ li mesta, o kotorykh ne khochetsi͡a dumat′ ili govorit′? Est′ li mesta, kotorye tebe sni͡atsi͡a? Est′ li mesta, kotorye bol′she ne sushchestvui͡ut, v kotorye khotelos′ by vernut′si͡a?).

Although we were not in the same space, Stepha highlighted the affordances of Zoom for regulating our nervous systems by seeing each others' live spaces, seeing and imagining each other cuddling with our koshki/cats, drinking chai/tea together, and so on. J.K. appreciated the not "too heady" space, the "consistent checking in," and "just being aware of feelings in the space." There were also more structured opportunities for collectively soothing the nervous system. As a trained somatic therapist, Masha facilitated meditation and visualization sessions in which they guided us to be aware of our bodies and breath, often directing us to concentrate on an ancestral landscape (e.g., birch trees) or sound (the letter ш, shhh). Their submission to the zine shared information on nervous system regulation, something they understood other group members would benefit from. Collectively, these efforts affirmed Thandeka (1999) and Menakem's (2017) arguments that because racism and other traumas were stored in the body, justice work also needed to be pursued through the body. When participants laughed, cried, and intentionally breathed together, they released pain and soothed nerves, creating more space for connection.

Mobilizing Our Histories Against Hegemonic Prescriptions

Collective Critical Consciousness

The Kolektiv's work to transform shared inherited trauma and shame in the service of collective liberation was mediated by the cultivation of a "collective critical consciousness." In other words, participants helped one another understand the broader community's hegemonic alignment with colonial, racist, and capitalist regimes of power as a reaction to inherited and recent, unprocessed traumas of Soviet antisemitism, scarcity, and fear. The call for participants (Appendix B) attracted people who wanted to "discuss, learn together, and respond to issues of U.S. white supremacy, settler colonialism, and racialized capitalism, from our particular subject positions." Many had long felt estranged from Soviet Jewish immigrant communities who celebrated capitalism, supported the occupation of Palestine, adopted white American antiblackness, and, most recently, voted for Donald Trump. For Masha, who had been politicized in American anarchism, which contrasted with her conservative Soviet Jewish community, "it was very rad and important to connect with other post-Soviet queer Jews who have a critique of capitalism, who have a critique of the state." While participants seemed to share "some baseline leftiness beyond or more left of liberalness," to use Masha's articulation, they also arrived to the group with a range of learning experiences and orientations to the topics named in the call. While a few participants expressed frustration during sessions or one-on-one conversations that I had not dictated a more specific political analysis for the group, I was adamant that, beyond my general anti-oppressive framing, the analysis needed to be forged collectively. This would enable us all to learn from one another and would cultivate commitment to the group. Furthermore, as a critical pedagogue and organizer, I trusted that we would do this, knowing that our analysis would also always also be incomplete and dynamic.

The creation of a collective critical consciousness was forged primarily through co-facilitated synchronous, interactive political education sessions.[26] There, participants educated

[26] It is important to note that most of the work we have done together as a geographically scattered group that meets virtually has been pedagogical, discursive, and cultural, with one notable exception being the distribution of zines/samizdat proceeds to Black and Muslim decarceration organizations. Still, all along, various participants have been involved in more material justice-oriented organizing and activism outside of the Kolektiv on a range of issues, through a variety of means (and have shared this experience with the group). This involves challenging power

one another on their social positioning relative to power structures and created opportunities to reflect, feel, and respond. In the first session of Season 1, participants engaged in a Collaborative Inquiry process by synchronously contributing the questions and topics they were interested in discussing together to a joint GoogleDoc. Table 4 documents the questions and topics that related to power (right column), as organized by context (left column). The "+s" were placed by participants to signal that they shared this interest with the person who originally typed the line. For example, three people were interested in discussing the complexities of race, whiteness, and Jewishness in the U.S. context.

Table 4

Collectively Generated Topics of Interest, Related to Power

In the U.S.:	– What forces of domination and extraction are affecting the people and the land that we are on? Where is power concentrated? – Contradictions of former Soviet Union (FSU) queer Jewish positionality in relation to N. American power structures – Settler colonialism, immigration, assimilation – Immigration (hi)stories - why/how the F did we get to come here in the first place? – Race, whiteness, Jewishness - complicity and marginality ++ – Understanding antisemitism vs. white supremacy ++
In the former Soviet Union:	– Russian/Soviet cultural dominance and our identities within that – Being a "polovinka" — half "Russian" and half "Jewish"+
In relation to Israel / occupied Palestine:	– Zionism in the context of settler colonialism/Jewish diaspora, and use of Ashkenazi Jews from FSU to enable a (whitened, Jewish) demographic vision for Israeli state – Eastern European Jews in the context of orientalism
In relation to Jewishness and American / Canadian Jews:	– Otherness/alienation/US/Canadian Jewish community defining us (and the places our families come from) for us without our input – "invisibility" (e.g.,in whiteness, in American Jewish spaces); the trauma of being mis-identified+ – -"Saving the Soviet Jews" - us as charity cases – Our relationships to Mizrahim (Middle Eastern Jews), Sephardim (Spanish/Moroccan Jews), and other Jews of color – Being a "polovinka" — half "Russian" and half "Jewish"+

Using this list, application responses, and other collectively generated brainstorming tools, I created an "arc" of six sessions, 2-hour synchronous for Season 1. Sessions were led by groups of 3–5 participants who had been organizing around these topics for many years and/or were pursuing relevant graduate studies, although anyone was invited to co-lead. In the spirit of critical pedagogy, sessions were participant-centered, and discussion and disagreement were encouraged (Freire, 1968/2000). The guiding ethos of "What can we do together that we could not do in any other space?" privileged the specificity and complexity of analysis that many

dynamics in the workplace, using one's body at actions (for those who are able), mutual aid and direct action work, pedagogical work, financial redistribution, and more.

participants had yearned for in other leftist political contexts. To highlight a few examples, in the session on Money and Reparations, facilitators not only discussed racial capitalism, antiblackness, and reparations generally but also involved participants in working through their familial relationships to scarcity in the context of Soviet Jewish and immigrant history and articulating dreams of abundance and collective care. The session on Palestine, in particular, enabled participants to share family stories, make meaning, and build collective counterhegemonic anti-Zionist identity in a way that was only possible with other anti-Zionist Soviet Jews.[27] We also discussed how internalized aspects of white supremacist and capitalist culture interacted specifically with our Soviet Jewish inheritance to manifest as individual and shared urgency, scarcity, and safety. These were the critical conversations participants had not been able to have elsewhere.

This critical pedagogical work through (not apart from) queer Soviet Jewish recognition lowered defensiveness, strengthened critical analyses through complexity and specificity, and bolstered antiracist, decolonial, and anti-capitalist political commitments. While participants had a diversity of experience with, interest in, and capacity to do anti-oppressive work, everyone had agreed via the intake survey to join a group dedicated to challenging white supremacy and colonialism. Rebecca was intrigued by what she called "the social justice component" of the group. While she remembered previously reacting defensively at a lecture on whiteness, thinking "my people just got here, we have other trauma," in the Kolektiv she found "a community that can see me, or pull me out of the story, showing me that I am implicated." Indeed, *being seen* in a way that complicates American whiteness by taking into account Soviet Jewish history, actually helped make critical whiteness work more possible. Her comment recalls J.K.'s reflection that attending to trans and immigrant shame made their own dissections of "white privilege" more possible. While there are certainly limitations to learning in insular, predominantly white spaces (i.e.,, without Palestinians, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color present), the shared recognition that these sessions afforded opened space for critical learning. Masha says,

> Having the opportunity to have these conversations with people, especially with our particular identities, has made it so much more possible to speak about myself, locate myself. That combating shame piece. And feeling like, "Oh, nobody needs to know that my parents have cultivated wealth, and now I have it." Yeah, there's shame there. But not sharing these parts of me is not in line with my values. And so, the Kolektiv has given me an opportunity to really learn about how to do that for myself. And also, the "anti-white supremacy culture" thing . . . just to put some of those things in practice.

[27] We learned about and responded to Soviet Jews being used as a demographic weapon against Palestinians in Israel, defined Zionism, and shared responses to how Israel was discussed in our families: "the only place that would allow us," "less desirable than the U.S. as a place to emigrate to," "Post-Soviet people get treated poorly in Israel." Together, we challenged narratives of weaponized trauma ("Everyone wants to kill Jews that is why we have Israel," "Israel is a safe haven," "Israel is protecting us"), colonial and racist ideologies ("There were no Palestinians in Palestine before the Jews arrived," "it was a barren land," "The Arabs want to 'wipe Israel'—and therefore us—off the face of the Earth," "Israel is important to protect+defend as the only democracy in the Middle East"). We centered Palestinian experience and fights for sovereignty, while holding complexity ("A place where relatives and friends live; a place of familiarity/Russian-ness"). We ended by discussing BDS (Boycott Divest Sections) as one way among others to support and fight for Palestinian liberation.

Whereas Masha's immigrant history was disregarded in most antiracist white spaces, the Kolektiv supported her to leverage it toward racial justice. Like others have explained, this was mediated by "locating" herself and "combating shame." In the group, she found herself more able to talk about the wealth her parents had cultivated in their time in the U.S. and to challenge her own urgency and perfectionism. Like Masha, other participants have reported both being more honest about their power and resources and actually redistributing them. For example, after developing a decolonial analysis in the group's first season, Rebecca began paying the "real rent" land tax to the Duwamish tribe in Seattle. Others have worked through issues of cultural appropriation and white fragility and have taken action to challenge white supremacy and colonialism both within this space and outside of it, including in their own families and in American Jewish organizations.

Over time, a collective ethos emerged of internally "rooting" or grounding into shared histories and positionalities in order to "radiate" or express an ethically oriented, anti-oppressive praxis. In the "Rooting and Radiating" activity (Appendix M), participants drew themselves as plants, visually identifying the histories and inheritances in which they found grounding as the roots, and the values and actions they wanted to express in the world as the flowers or flower petals. This was an exercise in identifying and articulating how our shared histories inform our shared commitments. Among the roots, participants labeled "babushka, assimilation/ immigration, moving a lot as a kid," "herbs, ancestors, grief," "ritual and tradition, language and foodways." And among the flowers, "self acceptance, justice, kindness, connection," "queer, Jewish, anti-Zionist space, queer liberation, abolition, centering poor and working class people," "radiating the desire to produce art," "Palestinian solidarity," "having hard conversations and holding myself and others close to me accountable." Later, they used Google Slides to synchronously compile their ideas in a speculative digital garden (Appendix N). What emerges from these individual and collective visions is a garden that roots in where we came from, transforming inheritances of harm and nurturing inheritances of promise to inform where we are going. Together, the group envisions a future for itself that is "rooted in love and acceptance," collaborative, joyful, speaking ancestral languages, directed toward safety in solidarity/alliance rather than whiteness, funny, and devilishly handsome. The co-created world we envision is one that is intergenerational, creative, intersectional, inclusive, and diverse, unbounded by walls and prisons, in which land is rematriated and in which conditions for healthy living and thriving are provided for all. K.L. later reflected,

> I found it very meaningful when we did the exercise of thinking through an FSUQJ diasporic сад/garden [sad, garden] envisioning the year 2040. There was a time I couldn't imagine living past 40—doing an exercise as a group where we imagine not just surviving but thriving is no small thing. I'm not sure the enormity of it even fully sank in at the time because I was so engaged in the activity, but it resonates.

For this person and others in the group who had discussed their struggles with suicidality, the future was not a given. As they suggest, in this synchronous activity, participants "dared to dream" not only of survival but also beyond it. As Muñoz (2019) suggested, this was the queer ideality and longing "that propels us forward"—"the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (p. 1). Through our connections and collaborative creations, participants were virtually planting our own, particularly

Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant queer futurity, one all of us were actively in the process of co-creating.

Zine/Samizdat

The Kolektiv's zine/samizdat (self-published text) publication reflected the collective critical consciousness developed through the group's first season and articulated participants' commitments to leveraging their histories toward collective liberation. Rooted in the Soviet tradition of "samizdat" or self-publishing, this 76-page color publication was collectively produced after the first season (May 2020) and shared in a public virtual launch. Unlike the group's heretofore internal work, the zine offered participants a chance to integrate their learning by articulating themselves in writing and artwork, that was shared with external audiences.[28] Given that shame thrives on repression and hiding, the zine challenged it with agentive visibility. For example, Stepha's piece assertively articulates the anti-Soviet stereotypes they heard growing up, written around a can of sprats labeled "FUCK ASSIMILATION" (Appendix O). In creating this artwork and sharing it with an American audience, Stepha released the shame of American xenophobia and resolutely reaffirmed herself as a Soviet Jewish immigrant. Irina further politicized this identity, leveraging her Soviet Jewish history against the prescriptions of racial assimilation. In an essay called "Наш Чебурашка, Reclaiming Cheburashka" (Nash Cheburashka, Our Cheburashka), Irina employs the iconic Soviet cartoon about "a beast of unknown origins" who is unrecognized by dominant society and strives to find recognition by becoming a Communist Pioneer, toward the group's anti-assimilation commitments. She writes,

> So now, what is our obligation? What is our legacy? To live fully and queerly as the post-Soviet Jews that we are. To fuck with gender norms, to fuck with capitalism, to fuck with whiteness, and Zionism. Even and especially when we're being told that we're not real and we don't exist and that we're making life for ourselves and others difficult by being our true and authentic selves. Healing for me in this moment is to recognize myself as a Cheburashka and stop trying to be a Pioneer; reject the lure of settler colonialism and white supremacy. For better or worse, we are all Cheburashkas and what we're building together is our Домик Друзеи (Domik Druzei).

[28] The final step of sharing this work with the public also forced Kolektiv members, especially those organizing the zine launch, to consider our work in relation to contemporarily oppressed groups with greater rigor. Just as a small volunteer group was compiling the zine and planning the event, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown sent much of the world to Zoom. Moving our event online meant that it would be available to a much broader audience, which raised anxieties (amongst members) about how our work may be received within a racialized context. Notes from our planning meetings reflect anxious discussions around how our work may be received by Black and Indigenous people in the U.S., Jews of color, non-Ashkenazi Soviet Jews, people living in the former Soviet Union, and others. Given our whiteness, we were worried that "taking up space" would cause harm. We refined and shared a tentative statement of our political vision and commitments, discussed our relationship to Indigenous land, and selected Black and Muslim-led abolitionist campaigns to distribute funds to: #BelieversBailOut and #BlackMamasBailOut. We also led a guided meditation that envisioned our sacred landscapes, shared our foods, played our music, exhibited maps of our families' stories, and moved unapologetically between Russian and English. Finally, by performing selections from the zine, we articulated our complex commitments to racial justice, decolonization, and Palestinian liberation, not just as leftist white queers but specifically as queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jewish immigrants living in the U.S. and Canada. None of our (Soviet Jewish) parents were there, though some of our partners' (leftist, American) parents were, a complexity in and of itself. Nevertheless, we were ecstatic. Notes from the planning committee's debrief meeting reflect the mixture of vulnerability and exhilaration that came with finally sharing ourselves in this way to an audience numbering more than 60.

Irina locates healing in the political work of "reject[ing] the lure of settler colonialism and white supremacy" and instead "liv[ing] fully and queerly." Their use of the pronoun *our* claims this commitment for the whole group. Because Kolektiv members were inculcated into American settler colonialism, whiteness, and racial capitalism and used, as Jews, to justify Palestinian dispossession, it is their responsibility to directly challenge these systems.

Her other zine entry demonstrates how this looks, discursively and artistically. In her artwork (Appendix P) and accompanying essay "Eligibility Factors: What do We Declare? What Do We Deny?" (Appendix Q), Irina confronts her family's transition from "Yids" (derogatory name for Jews) in the USSR to "white," in the U.S. context, adding later, "that's what we became in the United States—legally and socially—assimilated, homogenized, privileged, unrecognizable as having culture or past." In a further engagement with the racial complicity of "new immigrant whiteness" (Sadowski-Smith, 2018), she remixes the "Eligibility Factors" checklist from her grandfather's U.S. citizenship application, which asked if he was associated with the Communist Party, to propose "a different kind of eligibility. A reckoning with a broader range of harms and accountability that doesn't easily fit into a check-box." The new form subverts the original intention of the form, instead asking the reader about their associations with the "Capitalist party," genocide of Native American people, trans-Atlantic slave trade, and Zionism.

These articulations subverted the colonial political orientations that participants were expected to espouse as white(ned) immigrants and as Jews. Inevitably, this caused tension with parents, traumatized immigrants who pursued safety in racial capitalism and Zionism. One artist reclaimed the Russian word for shame or disgrace that is used in some families to express her indignation at the Soviet Jewish immigrant communities' support of oppressive ideologies (Appendix R):

> My queerness is not a Pozor / my Jewishness is not a Pozor / my anti-Zionism is not a Pozor / my anti-capitalism is not a Pozor
> your RACISM is a Pozor / your MISOGYNY is a Pozor / your HOMOPHOBIA is a Pozor / your TRANSPHOBIA is a Pozor / your ZIONISM is a Pozor / your white supremacy is a ПОЗОР!!!

As the declaration builds in visual intensity, the artist declares her personal and political alliances as a queer, Jewish anti-Zionist, and anti-capitalist. Like Irina's use of Cheburashka, this artwork reclaimed Russian-speaking and Jewish identity from reactionary conservatism and compulsory Zionism. While some participants' elders did not have strong connections to Israel, others constantly came up against their parents' Zionism and disregard for Palestinian sovereignty. In an interview, Rivka reflected on an argument they had with their babushka on Victory Day:

> It comes up the same way: we experienced all this trauma, we had to create Israel bc it was the only way we could exist. And I'm like, babushka, there had to be a way . . . there didn't *have* to be a Jewish state.

In a powerful zine/samizdat entry, another participant (Anya T.) discursively comes up against this particularly Soviet Jewish justification of Zionism in her own family:

> i am 14 when i first read that Gaza is on fire i ask mama what Nakba means she tells me go play piano do my homework don't ask questions Palestinians don't exist Israel is the only reason we're safe do you know why we left so you could be Jewish i didn't come to this country for you to become an anti-Semite

As she talks back in her own emergent voice, the tension mounts:

> i ask her about Deir Yassin she answers Babi Yar i ask her about checkpoints tear gas eighteen year olds carrying machine guns she doesn't answer her silence speaks for her says Israel will keep us safe whiteness keeps us safe and all i want to do is scream back Zionism is choking us whiteness is killing us

As the last lines imply, members of the group are rejecting the idea that safety for phenotypically white Jews is found in whiteness and settler colonialism. Rather, their collective consciousness articulates Western coloniality and imperialism, Christian hegemony, and extractive racial capitalism as regimes of power that utilize liminally positioned groups like Jews with some benefits but ultimately protect wealthy, white Christians and their profits. Safety, then, is more aptly forged through solidarity with groups who suffer the most from these systems and is pursued through a praxis of anti-capitalism, decolonization, and reciprocity with the land.

While ultimate the zine lives on as a tangible product that circulates in the world, educating and inspiring others, its primary effects were internal. Luba says,

> Working on the zine was not about what we produced, but was the process of actually uncovering and working with the feelings and the stories and everything that I've learned, as an immigrant, to really not pay attention to in order to adapt, in order to fit in. Assimilation is forgetting and compartmentalizing, and eventually those pieces disappear from our identities and our memories. So, this was a process of remembering and honoring. It really opened up something inside of me internally, and being able to share that externally was just an added gift of the process, not the goal. The whole process, both internal and external, created a new level of integration that I didn't think was possible. This was the start of some major healing of the rupture that occurred when we emigrated and as we assimilated.

As Luba created her zine entry, she "uncovered" those parts of herself that she had repressed in order to "pass" as a white assimilated American. Her statement echoes a central theme of this chapter: that the excavation and integration of previously shamed histories and identities was itself a counter to assimilation. Through both creative production and sharing, participants challenged whiteness both by naming their political commitments and by keeping "those pieces" of Soviet Jewish history and identity alive. "Integration" became a necessary condition for the pursuit of justice.

Critical Responses to White American Jewish Spaces

The Kolektiv's complex approach to interrogating whiteness both addressed complicity in whiteness and attended to the pain of participants' subordinate position in relation to white American Jews, who threatened to be yet another assimilatory force. Early on in the first season, many participants connected over shared experiences of alienation and shame in many American

Jewish groups and institutions, where the experiences of white, assimilated, middle-class, semi-religious Ashkenazi Jews were assumed to be the norm, and Soviet Jews were looked down on. As K.L. bluntly shared in her interview, "American Jews are so exhausting." In the "Dear (especially white) American Jews" zine entry (Appendix S), I highlighted some of these gripes: Soviet Jews were not yours for "saving, not everyone can afford summer camp, the 'old country' isn't old to us, the USSR was antisemitic—don't romanticize it"; and "Eastern Europe is neither a graveyard nor a playground," among many others. I concluded by declaring, as the zine also embodies, that "post-Soviet Jews are here and we are writing our own stories." As participants shared and discussed their alienating experiences in American Jewish schools, camps, synagogues, and organizing spaces, they came into a collective critical consciousness that helped validate their anger and replace their shame with a political analysis that explained these dynamics to be the result of American imperialism and orientalism, and of some white American Jews' own racial assimilation.

As Soviet-American Jewish relations emerged as an important site of critical analysis, the Kolektiv offered the language and courage to make liberatory interventions. This happened both in conversation with American Jewish spiritual leaders and educators and through creative production that alchemized participant shame into power, resulting in changes in American Jewish institutions. For example, in March 2020, Luba invited me to join her in writing a solicited response essay to Jo Kent Katz's (Kent Katz, 2020) newly released Map of Internalized Anti-Semitism. In that essay, which was later included in the zine, we articulate the ways we are misrecognized in Jewish spaces, cast off shame ("We've walked around with shame, often overcompensating by working extra hard to fit in, at our own expense"), and "ask white Ashkenazi American Jews for heightened awareness around the assumptions they make around Jewish knowledge and experiences." Furthermore, responding to the use of headscarves and stereotypical Eastern European accents to reference the "old country," we proclaim that "To us, tropes like Baba Yaga are not abstractions or sources of comedy; they evoke our own babushkas, whose hands we held or had to let go when we emigrated." The essay reads as a stand against assimilation and a resolute assertion of immigrant identity, "reject[ing] the pressure to forget who we are," for "this, in itself, is healing."

As months passed, participants gained the courage to make these truths more public. In October 2020, seven members of the group responded to an invitation from the radical Jewish land project Linke Fligl by creating a performance entitled "Befriending Our Ancestor Comrades, a Former Soviet Jewish Lineage Healing Workshop" and performing for an audience of predominantly American Jews (October 8, 2020) (Appendix T). In the 6-minute, 24-second video, the group satirized the "ancestral healing" industry by performing a humorous and critical takeover of an American Jewish ancestral healing workshop by a set of bilingual English-Russian speaking Baba Yagas. In the video, an American facilitator assumes everyone in the audience immigrated on a boat from the old country, while an American scholar of Russian flaunts her knowledge (experiences we have shared). The process of creating the performance offered us a chance to express ourselves sardonically on our own terms, but also to share these views with host communities with which many of us continue to be in relationship.

While some of these articulations had a bitter flavor, they were also creative and humorous acts of individual and collective self-love *and* invitations for American Jewish communities to see us and respond. Despite internal contention, many of us have continued to do this work as we inevitably have friendships, organize, attend services, and work in the host context. This has included conversations with American Jewish leaders and magazine editors,

and a co-written letter to a prominent leftist Jewish publication that currently remains unpublished. In these dialogues and writings, which are often vulnerable and laborious, and not always well received, we articulate the relationships between American and Soviet Jews in the contexts of U.S. centrism, Western imperialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism, and make a case for the importance of queer, Soviet Jewish immigrant perspectives. At the same time, as internal Domik notes attest, we remain vigilant of the energy this takes, noticing when it feels more depleting than generative and adjusting our investments accordingly.

Like many efforts that confront power from marginal positions, this external relational work has been alternately empowering, generative, healing, and draining for those who were directly involved in it. In some cases, our respondents were apologetic, gracious, curious, and supportive, making extra efforts to include us and extend opportunities so we can share our knowledge. In other cases, they met us with defensiveness. The vulnerability and exhaustion that have come from self-advocacy in American Jewish spaces has only reinforced the drive to continue cultivating our own community, on our own terms—what Stepha has called "hosting our own table," rather than always sitting at someone else's. As will be illustrated later in this chapter, this community continues to host Jewish and Soviet events, create rituals and ritual objects, offer political education, produce translingual Russian-English-Yiddish content, and create art and performance. Ultimately, this creative production at "our own table" is what generates joy and gives us the energy we need to continue the work. Furthermore, it points to the dialectic between the internal and external, the need to address our own pains and to resource one another, in order to show up better to the broader political work in which we participate outside of the Kolektiv.

Contested Approaches to Justice Work

Through the first two seasons, a tension emerged around how to use our time together, reflecting group members' disparate personal needs and relationships to justice work. While some participants appreciated the direct confrontation with whiteness and power with which I initiated the group (e.g., devoting the first organized session to the topic), others wished the processing of painful queer Soviet Jewish experiences had been more foregrounded. In an interview after the first season, Masha shared,

> [Others in the group] have been doing so much more work on their relationship to race and whiteness, so it stood out as a gap in my work, and I appreciated that. It was amazing to be in a space where I felt that I learned so much and didn't have to be agitating and pushing because others were sharing that information and work.

Whereas Masha had previously experienced being a lone agitator in some spaces of white people, the Kolektiv's explicit focus on complicating and challenging white supremacy attracted others who had also been doing years of relevant personal and external work. She further explains that topics of whiteness and Zionism were approached with nuance and complexity, challenging a "hardline" tendency that came from a "subsumed by whiteness kind of place" that actually curtailed her thinking. Another participant, K.L., shared in an interview that they "appreciate the complete and total lack of hand-wringing about our whiteness." They contrasted the approach I modeled in the group with an internal antiracism caucusing at their workplace where "there was so much white guilt pouring out." She went on,

> No one in our group is like this—we are like: yes, we benefit from this, let's keep it going. No one's crying about it. Maybe there are people who I haven't noticed and if they were genuinely felt emotions, then giving them some space is fair, given the enviro we have cultivated. If you can't shed white tears here then where can you shed them?

As she observed, as a group, we did not use our time together to descend into guilt or helplessness but rather tried to interrogate the consequences of white supremacy. To that end, the ethos of "lets move on" meant: let's move on from guilt to understand how we got to a place of complicity, how we and others are harmed, and how we might best approach collective liberation. As Irina expressed in her essay on Cheburashka, this solidarity work was *part* of healing intergenerational trauma.

Although participants did not "shed white tears" during the live sessions, a few participants did express a frustration at what they perceived to be the premature foregrounding of white complicity over attention to the painful effects of our shared subordinate identities and familial and intergenerational trauma. In an interview after Season 1, K.S. shared that they had come to the group wanting to "talk about what it is to be a Soviet Jew and not be wanted anywhere [and] wanting to look at the exiled parts and tell them it's okay," but instead they perceived "the exiled parts were brushed aside." They perceived that discussion of the ways we caused harm (as white settlers) were privileged over the ways we ourselves had been harmed. They explain, "I felt like I was subverting dialogue about whiteness when I was trying to articulate my own humanity, because I have been denied that. Like, I am still not done grieving the years I've been in survival mode." They came to the group wanting, and perhaps needing, to discuss their own adverse experiences, to "grieve" with others who faced antisemitism in the Soviet Union, familial abuse at home, and assimilation in North America, toward reclaiming their "own humanity." For them, this was a need that preceded discussions of white complicity. While they eventually came to understand why we "needed to talk about whiteness," they also lamented that the group ethos, as I largely established it, included "an expectation of us having to do the work [of] deconstruction and allyship without first actually feeling safe." Perhaps because they already felt their extended community "did not have [their] back," safety for them meant being known and building trust with other group members, especially through addressing shared struggles of subordinate identities[29]. People of color have rightly questioned the precondition of white "safety" as a prerequisite for interrogating white supremacy, given the urgencies of ending ongoing racial violence (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In this case, however, K.S.'s need for "safety" cannot be reduced entirely to white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018), as it encompassed a

[29] K.S. has since reflected to me the following nuances (personal communication, April 26, 2022): "Dismantling white supremacy/settler colonialism is important work, and I am definitely not exempt from it. During the time referenced in your paper, I had been engaging in discussing/examining/deconstructing whiteness in multiple other spaces (my graduate degree, friend groups, even my therapy sessions), and I felt sad about KGV being yet another space where I would be doing uncomfortable work and pushing myself further into emotional burnout. I was seeking connection and belongingness (as I was thoroughly depleted), and space to grapple with some of the FSU [former Soviet Union-related things, that I couldn't find anywhere else]. What drew me to KGV was the hope to be seen and understood in my unique context, by those with shared experiences. I needed to put on my oxygen mask first, but I felt as if to access it, I had to enter a complex password, and pay an admission fee. It would have been easier if I wasn't already suffering from hypoxia. Anyway, back then I didn't have the same boundaries that I have now. I think if I had the same opportunity today, I'd have made different choices. I don't regret being part of the early days of KGV, and I did find some of what I had been looking for. I've found meaning in the tough experiences, and it's helped me take what I needed and leave what I didn't behind. Thanks again for starting this group - it was magical."

genuine desire to work through their own (queer, trans, neurodivergent) Soviet Jewish immigrant pain with others who shared some of their experiences.

While the processing of pain and shame is not inherently or inevitably politicizing, it *was* an important component of the group's broader work toward justice and collective liberation. Stepha helped articulate this connection between the earlier participant's desire to build trust by being known and the political orientation of the project:

> Coming from places where people are fragmented or shamed, sometimes you just need to air your grievances first and have a group of people you can feel your feelings with, and then together form a shared critique. The very first step is getting together, then getting to know each other, articulating our experiences, then moving toward a shared analysis, after noticing there are some striking patterns. Only once this foundation has been constructed then the outward facing stuff can happen.

As Stepha suggests, finding and discussing commonalities and patterns in shared experience, especially feelings and grievances, is the way toward developing a shared political analysis. In other words, people's pain, shame, and trauma cannot be bypassed through leftist or antiracist agitation but must be taken on directly, with similar others in the context of a radical political project. At the same time, because structural violence persists, personal healing must be continuously politicized and located in relation to other contemporary oppressions. Through this approach, the tension around "what to prioritize" becomes generative, revealing that people of liminal subject positions (e.g., queer, white Jewish immigrant) must simultaneously address the complex ways that the "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990) simultaneously renders them benefactors, victims, and villains.

This question of "priorities" must ultimately be understood through shared perceptions of scarcity and urgency. Survey results and interviews after the first season reflected a collective anxiety of how to most meaningfully utilize synchronous time that felt scarce. Several participants shared that, while they appreciated the structured format of the synchronous sessions, they also felt that too much was packed into each 2-hour experience, especially given that 23 people were sharing the space. For me, this was an experience very similar to teaching. Just as I did in the classes I taught at UC Berkeley, through the first season I periodically reminded participants that we were just "opening up" these topics, and we would hopefully have the rest of our lives to keep working on them. Still, my own excitement, anxiety, and internalized white supremacy created urgency that manifested in overpacked session plans. By the end of Season 3, the stewarding committee/Domik Druzei and other facilitators were making more concerted efforts to release this pressure by planning fewer activities within the sessions and offering participants choice. For example, following a participant suggestion, we created topical breakout rooms that participants could choose (an affordance of Zoom's new features), and structured twenty minutes for breakout rooms, rather than the usual ten. This helped conversations to develop organically and created a perception of spaciousness rather than of scarcity.

Creating a New Queer Soviet Jewish Immigrant Diasporic Culture

Cultural and Spiritual Reclamation and Reimagining

Along with transforming intergenerational trauma and building collective critical consciousness, the third emergent component of the Kolektiv was the creation of queer, Soviet (Ashkenazi) Jewish immigrant diasporic culture. This insistence on living a culture beyond

American whiteness involved both maintaining shared familial Soviet Jewish cultural practices and reimagining them through radical and queer perspectives. Among other practices, language and food emerged as lifelines to cultures that preceded and challenged North American assimilation. Language, as an important carrier of our culture's wisdom, pain, sarcasm, and humor, has played a pivotal role in this reclamation and maintenance. While participants vary greatly in their ability to speak, read, and write in Russian, nearly all grew up speaking Russian in the home or were raised by Russian-speaking parents. Thus, the Kolektiv was a translingual space, English-dominant with spontaneous Russian outbursts, especially used for jokes, impressions, and echoes of phrases heard in the family, alongside occasional additions of Yiddish. As Soviet Ashkenazi Jews, members discussed the complexity of Russian as both an imperial language that was forced upon our Yiddish-speaking ancestors and a language that our families used and thus also shaped. As the nostalgic language of our childhoods and the carrier of our elders' culture and epistemology, its continuation felt immediately important. Given that some participants' connection to language had been severely ruptured via assimilation, more fluent others translated Russian words into English, both aloud and via the Zoom chat feature. Recently, at an in-person baby-welcoming ritual for one participant, friends rewrote childhood songs in Russian, co-created a Russian-language Азбука (azbuka, alphabet book), and recorded Russian-language lullabies for the baby.

Food emerged as another site of cultural maintenance. Participants maintained and repaired ruptured foodways by sharing chai (tea), hosting Zoom cooking nights (e.g., making vareniki or dumplings together), and leading workshops on familial practices of fermentation and pickling, utilizing healing herbs, and more. At in-person events, participants have cooked borscht and feasted on селёдка and икра (selëdka and ikra, herring and caviar) together. The first time the stewarding committee or Domik Druzei met in person for a retreat, we were exhilarated to be with a group of friends who wanted all of the same snacks as us (all from the post-Soviet delis, of course).

Beyond food and language, participants also worked together creatively to visibilize and reimagine less-apparent cultural practices. For example, in Season 3, Rebecca began the creation of a "ritual library" of cultural practices ranging from the recitation and memorization of poetry, to капустник (kapustnik variety show), прогулки (progulki, strolls or long walks), баня (bania, sauna, steam bath), and superstitions (e.g., присесть (pris'est', or sitting down together before travel), not whistling in the house, saying тьфу, тьфу, тьфу (tfu tfu, as if spitting at the devil over left shoulder to ward off evil). As the small group stewarding this project discussed in their brainstorming meetings, this work involved recognizing the sacred and poetic in these mundane practices which had persisted through Soviet secularization. It was with this spirit that two members of the Kolektiv recently led a small group of others on a mushroom foraging trip on Northern Pomo land. With gratitude to the land's Indigenous stewards and respect to take only what we could eat, our leaders helped us continue our parents' and grandparents' practices of identifying trees and crouching low to the moist ground to find succulent chantarelles and hedgehogs. Weeks afterward, Luba reflected, "this was something I was yearning to do and learn about, and that is deeply present in my lineage and blood, but I had no idea how incredibly alive and vitality-inducing it would make me feel." Her words express what practicing cultural reclamation actually *feels* like: deeply connecting to oneself, to others, to ancestors, and to the land one is on. In the group, practices like foraging mushroom and reciting poetry came to be read as manifestations of spirituality, especially in the context of our inherited secularism. Each of these practices carried its own ancestral wisdom about ways of connecting (with one another,

with the natural world), indispensable knowledge to maintain, reimagine, and pass on, especially in the alienating contexts of settler colonialism and racial capitalism.

The group's shared queerness inevitably infused our cultural and spiritual reclamations. Under Rivka's leadership, for two years in a row the Kolektiv has hosted an annual Gregorian "Novyi God / New Year" virtual party, honoring the major Soviet secular holiday that our families celebrated (and continue to celebrate), complete with the traditional ёлка (ëlka, New Years' tree), стол (stol, hosted table), тосты (tosti, long toasts), and капустник (kapustnik or variety show) (Appendix U). Whether Soviet or Soviet Jewish, the culture that most participants' families share is characterized by hospitality (copious amounts of food and drink), friendship, humor, sarcasm, and a reverence of literature, art, and music. This celebration rejected the religious American Jewish insistence that the ëlka necessarily perpetuates Christian hegemony, continuing the holiday's spirit of hopeful celebration in the post-Soviet diaspora. Furthermore, as politicized queers in the Soviet diaspora, our interpretations of this beautiful inheritance tended to be colorful, critical, inclusive, and flamboyant. Past капустники (kapustniki, variety shows) featured a menu of performances (appetizers, hot foods, dessert, and chai), including Soviet Jewish анекдоты (anekdoty, jokes) and recitations of Alexander Pushkin's steamiest poetry, as emceed by a group of Kolektiv members outfitted in drag as Papa Fima, Mama Sveta, and Дядя (Diadia, Uncle) Roma, roles inspired by their own Soviet Jewish family members.

Aside from life-giving performances, the group also afforded a radical, queer Soviet Jewish reimagining of spirituality and religion that challenged multiple waves of assimilation. This is most evident in group members' creative reclamation and reinterpretation of Judaism, in response to Soviet atheism and against Zionist prescriptions. In a group survey for a session titled "Kosher Pork: FSU Spirituality, Ritual, Practices" (Season 3, March 2021), participants' responses reflected both the diversity of group members' relationships to Judaism and a general trend toward observing some form of Jewish spiritual practice (Appendix V). As Rivkah (not to be confused with Rivka) shared,

> knowing that even my parents did not have the freedom and luxury to be able to learn about, practice, or share this part of their lives much in the Soviet Union [ ] it feels like a special form of Tikkun (healing) that I hold dear.

Rather than rupture connection to Soviet Jewish culture and history, thereby assimilating into American Jewishness, or reduce it to critique of Soviet Jewish immigrant conservatism (a favorite topic among American Jews), these "current" relationships encompass learning aspects of Judaism that were not available in the Soviet Union (e.g., liturgy, prayer) *and* intentionally reimagining Soviet Jewish cultural practices (ritual, language, food, epistemology, ways of relating) and histories through the lenses of queerness, decolonization, anti-capitalism, and antiracism in the politicized, new diasporic context. Not all survey respondents were interested in pursuing Judaism: "I personally don't believe in supernatural things nowadays 'divine' or otherwise. (Unless we're talking about the drag queen Divine—she's amazing)" (K.C.). Still, those who were wanted to do this through their complex identities. Masha wrote, "I am on a mission to make it my own and develop a generative relationship to [Judaism]," adding, "I want it to be soviet and queer as fuck."

The group's holiday observances reveal that, like other aspects of de-assimilatory work, the regeneration of these relationships was also a collective, relational process. In the Kosher Pork session, facilitators asked, "What if we got to define Jewishness for ourselves? Instead of

others defining and measuring it for us?" The collective answer was found in the Kolektiv's observance of Jewish holidays via Zoom: Hanukkah 2020, High Holidays 5781/2020, Passover/Pesach 2021, Days of Awe 2021 (High Holidays), and Hanukkah 2021 (Appendix W). Under Rivka's leadership, each event was co-planned and co-hosted by a group of Kolektiv members, most of whom had gained some knowledge of Judaism in the U.S. These events blended Soviet Jewish culture with Jewish religious and spiritual practice, which were co-taught without assumptions of knowledge. For example, in Hanukkah 2020, participants gathered on Zoom to light menorahs, share their relationships to Hanukkah, swap latke recipes, and laugh together. Reflecting on Hanukkah's relationship to Jewish visibility, participants discussed the guiding question "What does it mean to embody our identities while still acknowledging the history of cultural erasure, displacement, and ethnic cleansing of Native people here on Turtle Island and in Palestine?" Then, rooting into the definition of Hanukkah as "re-dedication," the group discussed specific ways that they practice gratitude, reciprocity, ritual, and dedication on occupied land, in their various geographic contexts.

Aside from holiday observance, Kolektiv members collaborated to create artworks that visualized the relationship between their spiritual reclamations and political commitments. In 2020, Irina, Aravah, and I co-founded Krivoy Kolektiv art collective and created the project "The Four Mitzvot of Queer, Soviet Jewry" (Appendix X), a set of the translingual embroidered scarves that adorn our heads and proclaim our Jewish, decolonial commitments: "Abolition это мицва (eto mistva, is a mitzvah); A Free Palestine это мицва; Queer это мицва; Rematriation это мицва." Not only did this project bring together Judaism and the Russian language, but in 2021, it was the only explicitly anti-Zionist Jewish work in a Jewish art show touring Europe. Collectively, these examples demonstrate how Kolektiv members mobilized their forced secular histories and shared resources toward "intersectional rather than ethno religious conceptions of liberation" (Omer, 2019, p. 10), forging relationships to both Jewishness and Judaism that were not possible in the Soviet Union and that were not offered to them by hegemonic American Judaism. Together, this collection of discussions, holiday observances, ritual objects, and art pieces might surprise many: American Jews who were disappointed in our secularism, Zionists who reject Palestinian sovereignty, some of our own family members who still shudder at religion. While my own Jewish religious identity is still very much in flux, I often wonder how my ancestors feel about these reclamations, especially those who were the last in the lineage to be religiously observant. For my part, I am overjoyed by the unexpected queer Soviet Jewish culture (and perhaps even political theology) that seems to be emerging. This queer refusal to forget challenges the inevitability of assimilatory erasure and offers a creative, joyful, and meaningful future in its place.

Toward a Praxis of Politicized Care

Perhaps just as important as *what* the group has been able to do together (e.g., processing feelings, co-learning, sharing culture), is *how* we have done it. After all, the ways we related also constituted the culture we were co-creating. In fact, when the group is understood as an aspirational political project toward collective liberation, the way participants treat one another and co-create the space *is* the praxis, or the ongoing practice of values and ideals. As discussed in my methodology and methods chapter, the queer, feminist pedagogical architecture of the group centered participants' experiences and voices through a critical power analysis. This was evidenced in my individual hour-long phone calls with new members, participatory curriculum planning through shared Google Docs and discussions, and the design of sessions through whole-

group with small-group and pair-share formats. Participants themselves also contributed to this participatory ethos, offering the practice of "stack" (putting an * in the Zoom chat to mark your place in line for sharing) and suggesting "chevruta" (partner) assignments and "gruppochki" (small groups) to foster relationship-building outside of our scarce synchronous time together. Judy shared in a survey response, "I've also never been great at participating in large group discussions, so I really appreciated other opportunities to participate in breakout groups, chevruta, Slack, and individual study/creative opportunities." These practices offered many pathways to participation and learning. Sasha affirmed "the dynamism of new co facilitators each week and getting to learn from/with different people." Sasha added, "I really appreciated the co-facilitation because it felt like everyone could really have a stake in the project." In this way, the valuing of people's experiences, knowledges, and gifts, which was pedagogically structured into the group, not only facilitated engagement but also reflected and established a political culture of care. Outside of the sessions themselves, participants and I further showed care for one another in the Community Agreements,[30] through individual and group feedback sessions and via a mutual aid program I created after the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Over time, *care* was clarified and articulated as a culture of respect that encompassed holding one another lovingly accountable in our political work, rather than tearing each other down. As mentioned previously, Season 3 saw growing pains as the group nearly doubled in size, a decision that the group had voted on but had not predicted the effects of as we brought new people into a collectively developed project. In the months that followed, a few newly onboarded members directed their criticism of the group to individual members of the stewarding committee (Domik Druzei) through phone calls and messages that we experienced as disrespectful and unkind. While Domik members compassionately understood the delivery as the manifestation of pain, these situations required exhausting repair processes and caused lasting harm. In response to perceived hostility, the Domik revised the Community Agreements to add the disclaimer that was shared earlier in this chapter:

> This is not just any radical, lefty space. Many of us are carrying familial and intergenerational wounds and this kolektiv is an opportunity to deeply show up for

[30] I began the group with six Community Agreements that I had often used in the undergraduate courses I taught: Speak from "I" (avoid "we"; strive to not make assumptions); Make space, take space (be aware of how much you're speaking/listening); Practice confidentiality; Impact over intent; Explain; Don't assume knowledge; Strive to understand—ask follow up questions (e.g., Can you say more?). Over the next several weeks, the document was revised by the group to further develop an ethic of care that attends to power by articulating a "brave" versus safe space and naming how to "make space" for others to share—especially those of marginalized positions in the group (e.g., "Stack" speaking order, "pass if you want"). A "brave space" meant one in which questions of power and oppression were directly addressed, and discomfort on the side of power was considered part of the political work. Confidentiality and consent were also further clarified in the group, as some group members were not out to their families or Soviet Jewish communities and did not want to be publicly identified; thus, this practice was crucial for collective care. In September–October 2020, the production of a collective performance raised internal questions about cultural appropriation and our own use of ancestral tropes and Russian accents for external audiences. The planning group created a collective Google Doc, where all participants added their diverse opinions and questions on the topic, and then used the collectively sourced information to come to an agreement and move forward with performance planning. This process revealed the diversity of opinions in the group, the importance of respecting one another's positions, and the necessity to address conflict with care when it arises. In October 2020, as Season 3 began with the Domik Druzei stewarding the group for the first time, a new agreement was added: "Practice repair and relationship building in the group: Please reach out to a Domik member for support, whether you'd like to repair with another Kolektiv member, with the entire group, or with someone in the Domik."

> ourselves and each other in new ways. We show up with an intention to interrupt these historical patterns.

The document was further revised to foreground "joyful relationship building and co-liberation, within our group and beyond," as pursued through specific practices, including "loving accountability," repair, and non-disposability, each of which was described in greater detail along with citations. While these changes were a direct response to specific interpersonal conflicts, they also reflected a range of collective emergent fears: of not being "radical enough," of being "disposed" of in today's "cancel culture," and of perpetuating white supremacy by not sufficiently holding each other accountable for harmful practices and beliefs. In this way, the spirit of collectivity and ethic of care were not ways to evade difficult questions about power but rather a necessary *part* of the group's politic. They made the ongoing release of shame and transformation of trauma possible and forged a new and more liberatory culture, in praxis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I approached the participatory virtual project Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon as a site for cultural and political de-assimilation among white(ned) queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants who were primarily raised in the U.S. and Canada. My study of the group's pedagogical, creative, and interpersonal work suggests that the virtual-hybrid group fostered connections among people of shared positionality and history that challenged internalized shame, nurtured the development of critical consciousness, and creatively narrated queer, post-Soviet Jewish immigrant identity against assimilatory prescriptions. I also discussed the challenges and limitations of the project, including the negotiation of internal differences of identity and power, competing motivations and needs, and varied approaches to collective political work. My analysis affirmed the Kolektiv as an aspirational project of queer, immigrant home-making (Ahmed, 2000), although one motivated not only by shared estrangement but also by a shared cultural and political desire to challenge assimilation, destroy violent systems, and build new relationships. As such, it was both necessarily critical and inherently creative. As participants "dared to dream" of a community they did not yet have, they stepped up to the exciting and imperfect work of creating a world more just and beautiful than the one they knew, together.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In December 2021, I presented the findings of this study to a predominantly American audience at the Association for Jewish Studies annual conference in Chicago. Following my talk, the session moderator posed a provocative question: Would the queer, post-Soviet Jewish diasporic culture that I had been speaking of exist beyond my generation? I felt an electric current shoot through my body, the same feeling I had experienced when I first read the historian Zvi Gitelman's (2016) assertion that Russian-speaking Jews are "currently populated by two or three generations and will likely be transformed out of existence in the not-too-distant future" (2016, p. 2). The suggestion that the history and culture my grandparents and parents passed down to me would simply be 'transformed out of existence,' leaving only American whiteness or Jewish American whiteness in its wake, enraged me. Having studied settler colonial history, I knew this was not just a natural process of cultural change, but a political project meant to write Indigenous people, Black people, and immigrants out of history entirely, or else to weaponize their experiences (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2022; O'Brien, 2010; Said, 1979). I was glad to be at the conference so that I could challenge this question, not only through theory but through the praxis of "re-existence" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2019) that I had been pursuing with Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon.

Although I had just spent my allotted fifteen minutes discussing our exciting efforts at re-imagining, I of course knew that the children of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants are not impervious to the corrosive forces of assimilation into American whiteness. Furthermore, my awareness was not theoretical or abstract, as it may have been for those whose relatives had assimilated long ago, but present in my body, which was itself the site of assimilatory struggle. This affliction circulated through my digestive system, which was inflamed by American additives and preservatives, and tangled my tongue, which skipped like a scratched record when I spoke my own mother Russian tongue. It was marked by the persistent hum of anxiety that I also recognized in my collaborators and participants. To be fair, neither the moderator nor the historian had been ill-intentioned. They were perhaps simply removed enough, and thus bold enough, to gesture at the concerns that always hovered overhead: Was the Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora (in the U.S.) as we knew it doomed to dissolve into existing American whiteness, as had been the case with previous Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant groups? What did this mean for/about diasporic Soviet Jewry? And, what did it mean for/about American whiteness and settler colonialism?

Ultimately, I answered the moderator with an anecdote: The morning of the conference, I had driven to my session directly from an elaborate baby-welcoming ritual for Irina, one of my collaborators and a member of the Kolektiv stewarding committee. Eight people from the Kolektiv, seven of my collaborators and I, had gathered that weekend to support Irina, or Irochka as we lovingly call her, to welcome the new generation of our diasporic community. We prepared борщ (borscht) with картошка (kartoshka, potatoes) and сельодка (sel'odka, pickled herring), hosted a flamboyant капустинк (kapustnik, "cabbage party") in which we performed translingual Russian/English skits and songs in drag, collectively illustrated a Russian-language азбука (azbuka, alphabet book), and participated in a Russian children's book read-aloud. Few of us had grown up with Judaism, but we bookended our time together with Shabbat and Havdalah rituals, complete with candle lighting and the blessing of the wine. We also participated in a closing ritual (devised by Jo Kent Katz) in which we collectively imagined the newborn being safely placed in Irina's arms, releasing the trauma-based fear that had been

passed down to us in favor of a more hopeful future. That weekend, the theoretical debate of our cultural survival took tangible form. We were actively pursuing it, not only for ourselves or some kind of abstract future, but for a new generation that was to arrive in a matter of months.

Discussion of Main Findings: Imagination and Re-Existence

While I cannot foretell the future of the Soviet Jewish diaspora any more than anyone else, my work speaks to the dynamic, unfolding present. I engage this present through the questions posed above not as a detached observer, but as an interested participant who has much at stake. As vulnerable as this is for me, it is also imperative. Through a discussion of my collaborators' life histories and the cultural and political organizing efforts of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, my project addresses the foreboding suggestion that Soviet Jewish culture is on the verge of diasporic extinction. Undoubtedly, as I demonstrated in Chapters 4-6, this group's cultural makeup is shifting because of its geographic and temporal displacement. At the same time, my findings suggest a more complex alternative to cultural extinction. In fact, Gitelman himself states, "Ethnic identities are often reformulated, and 'Jewish identities in general are to be understood as constructs in response to circumstances'" (p. 270).[31] Approaching culture as dynamic rather than essentialized, quiets alarms and opens up space for recognizing the critical and creative ways that my collaborators and participants, all queer and gender marginalized 1.5 and 2nd generation Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, reimagined their inherited cultural practices and political orientations in their new diasporic contexts.

The weaving of my collaborators' individual (de)assimilation stories in Chapters 4-6 and my discussion of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon's collective praxis speak to a project of "re-existence" as discussed by Mignolo and Walsh in *On Decoloniality* (2018). Mignolo and Walsh engage Adolfo Albán's term, which he uses primarily to discuss the construction of Black subjectivities, to reference "the configuration of ways to exist and not just resist… as subjects, to build society and life despite adverse conditions… a re-existence as subjects and with others in radically distinct terms" (p. 95). As they explain, such a project "requires creative pedagogies-methodologies of struggle" (p. 96) that orient not just against an existing order, but *for* a new one, "call[ing] forth the agency, action and praxis of the otherwise" (p. 95). To this end, the Kolektiv is an explicitly *pedagogical* project to the extent that it encourages critical imaginings beyond/against existing oppressive structures, and mobilizes collective learning and unlearning toward this goal. Furthermore, the project involves practicing and articulating alternative modes of relating to one another, to ancestral inheritances, and to existing structures that challenge the reproduction of violence, instead offering a chance to practice mutual support and accountability.

The individual transformations and the collective work I have discussed through my empirical study offer a concrete example of how such praxis may actually look for one particular group who share history and positionality. Chapters 4-6 engaged with the politics of this new context explicitly, illustrating how my collaborators negotiated assimilation into U.S. settler colonialism and racial capitalism via the intersection of their superordinate (white, middle-class) and subordinate (immigrant, working poor, Jewish, queer, gender-marginalized) positions. Chapter 4 laid out the racialized geopolitical context and set of structures that enabled their immigration and middle-class ascendency and analyzed their caregivers' normative choices around housing and schooling, alongside a discussion of resultant cultural losses. Chapters 5 and 6 denaturalized white racial assimilation through an empirical study of white racial identity

[31] Gitelman cities Jonathan Webber's "Modern Jewish Identities" in *Jewish Identities in the New Europe,* 1994, p. 82.

formation and leftist politicization, including the analysis of shame as a mediating factor in my immigrant collaborators' shifting investments in American whiteness. Specifically, I articulated the ways white immigrant shame, as it intersected with queer shame and feminized gender socialization, facilitated identification with liberal whiteness, manifesting for some as both white saviorism and martyrdom in the context of leftist political work and teaching. Conversely, I demonstrated how the transformation of that shame alongside the cultivation of antiracist critical consciousness challenged hegemonic investments in racial capitalism. Chapters 4-6 culminated in a discussion of the affordances and limitations of white antiracist affinity groups that do not account for immigrant, class, and queer experiences at the peripheries of hegemonic whiteness, setting the groundwork for a pedagogical project that would interrogate more specific shared histories and positionalities.

Chapter 7 unpacked my design and co-implementation of such a project: a live, virtual group study of queer and gender- marginalized 1.5 and 2nd generation Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S. and Canada who contested their own prescribed assimilation through cultural and political organizing. The group's critically oriented and creative work suggested that, while an essentialized Soviet Jewish culture (if there ever was one) indeed cannot be sustained, a new queer and politicized diasporic culture is being collectively *imagined* and pursued as a form of re-existence (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). As such, it served as both a method and a site for the kind of collective radical imagining that Maxine Greene (2011) championed when she wrote that community "ought to be a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming…. Reaching toward some common world" (p. 39). In this case, imagination-in-praxis encompassed transforming the intergenerational trauma alongside the maintenance, re-interpretation, and queering of inherited cultural practices in ways that respond critically to our current diasporic contexts. It was the pursuit of an explicitly *politicized* culture that involved actively challenging colonialism, white supremacy, and racial capitalism, even and especially as we were implicated in these systems. Finally, it was made possible through interpersonal relationships—the heart and future potential of de-assimilatory work.

These relationships and the broader work of the Kolektiv respond to both the political program that aims to extinguish my culture and the scholars who theorize this as an inevitability. The question of whether Soviet Jewish culture would die along with me was particularly painful to receive because my collaborators and I had just spent three days working against this assimilatory project in the most joyful, creative, imaginative and embodied ways. In fact, our intentional time together was both a healing balm and a politicized action directed at challenging this very possibility.

Theoretical Implications

The first scholarly contribution of my work is quite simple: I name queer and gender-marginalized Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S. and locate our positioning between the Soviet and American empires. Perhaps because 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants from the former Soviet Union have only recently come into adulthood, I have yet to find studies that do this. Just as many participants of the live, virtual group study marveled at meeting other queer and gender marginalized Soviet Jewish immigrants for the first time, I also hope that readers realize that we are great in number. This simple act of "revealing" that which is otherwise obscured daily by American whiteness does some work to trouble whiteness as a homogenizing force.

Aside from naming a group otherwise unimagined in the literatures on whiteness, contemporary migration, and Soviet Jewry, my study transcended more typical, depoliticized analyses of immigrant acculturation to critically engage Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish histories positionalities, and futures. My application of decolonial, anti-imperialist, queer and critical race analytics revealed something that had been overlooked by both historians of Soviet Jewry and scholars studying contemporary immigrant racialization: that Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants were not unproblematically white, but *problematically so,* and thus, quite worthy of critical inquiry. In this way, my work follows that of Karen Brodkin (1998) and Eric Goldstein (2006). Whereas most studies of contemporary migration (rightfully) focus on immigrants from the Global South who face great structural adversity in the U.S., the omission of Soviet Ashkenazi Jews from such discussions only further naturalizes whiteness. Conversely, my critical focus on this subject group reveals the ways that U.S. imperialism, settler colonialism, white supremacy and racial capitalism continue to function together not only through the exclusion of many immigrants, but also through the *inclusion* of some who are deemed assimilable. At the same time, my work documents the unfolding cultural and spiritual costs of such assimilation, as well as the ongoing attempts of some recruits to imagine an alternative to this bulldozing process.

The empirical nature of my work merits highlighting, as it revives archival scholarship on immigrant whitening in the era of neoliberal multiculturalism. While the notion of transnational or global whiteness has certainly been named (Leonardo, 2002; Sadowski-Smith, 2018), with few exceptions, empirical scholarship on constructions of imagined and immigrant whiteness taper off around the 1960s, suggesting that the whitening process had somehow concluded (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006; Roediger, 2006). Conversely, my project illustrates that, just as settler colonialism has been revealed as a *structure, rather than an event* (Wolfe, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012), so whiteness is also an ongoing process. Furthermore, whereas most work on immigrant whiteness has relied on archives to narrate history, my empirical, qualitative study of a group whose racialization is *in process* enabled me to interrogate living immigrants' negotiations of whiteness with psychological depth and nuance. For example, I could not reduce my collaborators' experiences to "becoming white" (Brodkin, 1998) because their imaginative, discursive, relational (and sometimes material) work was contesting this very force. I encompass this complexity in the term "white(ned)," a slight variation of Bouteldja's (2016) "whitened" that employs parenthesis to simultaneously acknowledge the structural-material functions of whiteness while pointing to its constructedness and challenging its futurity.

My work further contributes to existing studies of immigrant whiteness by complicating existing binary discussions of the racial "in-betweenness" of Ashkenazi Jews (Brodkin, 1998; Goldstein, 2006) and by locating anti-whiteness within broader decolonial projects that attend to intersecting power structures. "In-betweenness" arguably maintains a Black/white binary, given that when one is "in-between," they are situated in relation to two extremes. While I follow previous scholars in maintaining the centrality of antiblackness to white immigrant racialization, my study engages the whitening process in a larger matrix of power, locating it in relation to the intersections of settler colonialism, imperialism, cis- heteronormativity, and Christian hegemony, as well as the specific racializations of other immigrants, including various Asian, Latinx, Arab and Muslim groups. Whiteness thus emerges in my study as fundamentally *relational* not only vis a vis antiblackness, but also through other co-constituent colonial structures of power that affect all racialized groups. This suggests that while whiteness must be locally understood, it cannot be studied or challenged in isolation or solely in relation to one axis of power, but must

always be imagined as part of larger anti-imperialist and decolonial projects that attend to intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and relationship to land.

In regard to scholarship on critical whiteness, my study provides a pedagogical approach to the neo-abolitionist movement in critical whiteness studies. Whereas reconstructionists attempt to salvage whiteness through white antiracism, abolitionists of whiteness endeavor to end whiteness as a category of meaning and structure by advocating for the white people's denunciation of and divestment from whiteness. Neo-abolition, as discussed by Leonardo (2009), provides a "third way," where "reconstructionism would provide the entrance into whiteness and abolitionism its exit" (p. 134). In this approach, the "critical hope" of reconstructionists is directed toward the necessary first step of white people "[coming] to terms with what whiteness has made of them (p. 134). However, because whiteness is still by definition racist, the 'exit' of this approach is not the recovery of whiteness, but "the end of Whites as we know them" (p. 133). Although we did not discuss the abolition of whiteness in the Kolektiv, my own alignment with neo-abolitionism informed my approach to this project. It was one attempt at a race-conscious confrontation of whiteness (including related anxieties, need for belonging, and ethical responsibilities) among a group with shared history and positionality.

Furthermore, my analysis of collaborators' critical racial consciousness development and the Kolektiv's anti-whiteness work addresses the psychological and emotional consequences of conferred whiteness, contributing critical discussion of *liberal* whiteness to existing scholarship on the emotionality of whiteness (Ahmed, 2000; Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013; Matias & Allen, 2013). I also offer empirical and praxis-based insight into how the alienation brought on by whiteness may be countered through alternative connections and relationships to oneself and others (Soviet Jewish immigrant culture, queerness and gender expansiveness, anti-capitalism, neurodiversity, etc.), aiding the project of divesting from racialized belonging. Ultimately, I design, study and contribute a holistic and relational approach to neo-abolitionism among white people. While antiracist and decolonial learning and activism are a core part of this work, they are pursued alongside relationship building, the processing of shame and intergenerational trauma, creativity, ritual, joy, and nervous system co-regulation. As will be discussed below, these are also important practical implications for white antiracist projects, in which whiteness is too often homogenized, white middle-class non-immigrant experience is assumed as shared experience, and whiteness is redefined via militant antiracism.

I also make a unique contribution to empirical research methods for the study of race, through the co-creation of the live, virtual group study that went on to become Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon. Most qualitative studies tend to employ ethnographic observations, surveys, interviews, and artifacts as instruments and sources of knowledge, the most "participatory" of these being group interviews or focus groups. In my study, however, I drew on multiple participatory research and pedagogical methods including collaborative inquiry (CI), Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Freirean critical pedagogy to develop a new method that I will call a "Semi-structured, historicized affinity group" approach to pursuing questions of identity, power, and social change among people of shared familial and ancestral histories. Through this method, which can be pursued virtually, in person, or in hybrid context, participants of shared histories and positionalities are recruited to engage in synchronous storytelling, collaborative learning, collective imagining, and creative production around shared questions and political goals. At minimum, the group requires an initiator to serve as lead facilitator/ researcher and a group of participants who are both interested in the predetermined topics/ questions and willing to co-

create the group. Co-creation may encompass participating in dialogue, co-planning and co-facilitating group sessions, and contributing to a collaborative cultural artifact, such as a zine.

As Chapter 7 has demonstrated, whether virtual or in-person, such a group may double as a site of political education and cultural production *and* research, as the dialogue and artifacts generated by participants populate a new archive that challenges cultural extinction and informs the larger questions posed by the researcher and the group. Perhaps most importantly, this method facilitates the growth of supportive relationships that may be sustained far beyond the group's structured work. Admittedly, this method requires a significant time investment from both the initiator[32] and participants, as well as some minimal financial resources.

Practical Implications

Just as my first scholarly contribution documented queer and gender-marginalized, Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant stories, my work's primary practical implication also has brought this constituency together in an intentional, synchronous and structured way for the first time. Despite the complexities of bringing together a heterogeneous group with some shared histories, the virtual group I developed and later co-stewarded as Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, has offered participants a means to connect, heal together, pursue visibility, feel their own power and brilliance, and to realize that their vulnerabilities are not their wounds alone or pathologies but are shared as a collective experience. As many shared, this has been liberating and life-changing. While such an "impact" is difficult to quantify, as Chapter 7 demonstrates, the individual and collective energy, knowledge and power that many of the Kolektiv's participants have generated both supports their own well-being and strengthens their contributions to justice movements. As activist and educator Dr. Penny Rosenwasser has shared with me, this work of building collective trust, love, and power has "the effect of ripples in a pond" (personal communication).

Beyond its own membership, the work of the Kolektiv has been especially impactful in many organized American Jewish spaces, especially among assimilated white American Ashkenazi Jews. Through the zine, cultural events, and our own strengthened confidence to speak up in these spaces and in relationships with American Jewish rabbis, healers, and organizers, participants brought new awareness of Soviet Jewish experience in ways that challenged white American assumptions of Jewishness, helping further reveal and dismantle Ashkenormativity[33] and U.S.-centrism. Specifically, both our new collective voice and our empowered individual voices have offered insight into how contemporary Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant experiences differ from those of white, middle and upper middle-class Jews who were born and raised in the U.S., especially in liberal secular or religious families. By articulating both what American whiteness has offered us and what we are currently losing to it as 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants (and especially as a group who quickly went from a position of racial subordination to dominance), we encourage white Jews who have been here for a few generations also to consider and feel what the costs of becoming white have been to them and their families (as well as the costs to Black people, Indigenous people and people of color).

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[32] The Dissertation Completion Fellowship through UC Berkeley's Graduate Division granted me $20,000 for one academic year of "data collection," funding my housing, food and transportation in the first year that I developed and stewarded the Kolektiv. I supplemented this funding with private tutoring. Collaborators and participants were not financially compensated.

[33] Ashkenormativity is the hegemony of Ashkenazi Jews over other Jews, including Sephardic, Mizrahi, Ethiopian Jews, among others. Despite the diversity of Ashkenazi Jews, in the U.S., "Ashkenormativity" often assumes a particular white, U.S.-born Ashkenazi experience that diverges from the experiences of my Soviet participants and collaborators.

For example, when we give talks in American Jewish spaces, we share stories of how American whiteness has offered some of us a chance to blend into the dominant racial category, or at least not stand out as Jews, the way some of us and our parents had in the former Soviet Union. We also share the role of imagined pan-European whiteness in facilitating our emi/immigration. At the same time, we explain the ways that Americanization and assimilation into whiteness has made it more difficult for us to maintain our mother tongue and connections with Russian-speaking relatives, and has obscured our own recent histories of racial persecution and survival in the former Soviet Union (which, unlike weaponized Central European Jewish histories, are not taught in American schools). We have shared this information with progressive synagogues, decolonial organizing spaces like Jews on Ohlone Land (a solidarity project for Ohlone land rematriation in Oakland, CA) and Linke Fligl (a queer, Jewish land project in New York), anti-Zionist organizations like IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace, and publications like Jewish Currents magazine. It is my hope (and suspicion) that this information has helped leaders in these spaces approach justice-work with greater complexity, open mindedness, and criticality.

Both this research project and Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon serve as a model for other individuals and groups (both within and outside of white and/or Jewish contexts) who want to challenge the political weaponization of their histories and identities. They may be particularly relevant for other white(ned) people or those in proximity to whiteness, "model minorities", or immigrants with racial and/or class privilege. While the Kolektiv is not meant to be replicated directly, it nevertheless offers a framework for people who are both somehow privileged their new contexts but also distanced from their roots (as well as those whose roots and histories have been weaponized in support of the existing order) to reimagine and mend cultural ruptures and mobilize their histories and privileges toward justice and liberation. This process, which some participants have come to call "rooting to radiate"[34] involves connecting with others of shared histories, positionalities and experiences to help one another "root" into shared histories to inform how they "radiate" in the world, or participate in social action. As Kolektiv members have externally shared our work, many of our non-white first and second-generation queer and gender-marginalized immigrant friends expressed that they also wanted to find "their version of the Kolektiv." Meanwhile, many white American Jews have expressed gratitude for the ways we have modeled healing the cultural, linguistic and relational fractures of assimilation by sharing our grief, investing in our cultures, and re-imagining our political subject positions. Rivka further argues that such cultural-political work is not limited to immigrants or their descendants, but may be relevant to *anyone* involved in justice work:

> Culture needs to be at the center of political movements. And, in order for people to have an honest and dedicated sense of self and sense of politic and sense of moral code, they have to understand where they come from, who they are, the intersections of their identities. And if they come from a line of people who are marginalized versus a line of people who are colonizers, there has to be a reckoning with both of those things. So, I

[34] The personal inquiry work of "rooting" involved confronting our colonial, racial and class complicities; understanding the roles we play in broader systems; addressing the resulting privileges and costs (both to us and people of color); challenging the draw of safety and stability related to familial scarcity; breaking apart our investments in whiteness (and other structures of power); and generating our own cultural and historical "well to draw on" toward solidarity with other groups. "Radiating" meant externally participating in social action, especially outside of the Kolektiv. Thank you to Sasha for offering this articulation (personal communication, April 18, 2022).

> think it's important because the work we're doing is beyond cultural identity. It's also understanding our relationship to power, to lack thereof, to violence, to our histories, which then shape how we approach politics right now. And so, it's a cultural analysis and I think everybody should be doing that. I think that's the kind of work that allows people to actually build foundational movements. Because it's not based on nothing, it's based on either a shared sense of purpose, or at least an understanding of where the others are coming from. And I think that's really important right now for a lot of groups. I think we're seeing more niche groups within cultures, subcultures, and especially within Jewish diaspora, of people kind of joining together to create coalitions so that they can approach Jewish issues from their specific lens, and then also have the cultural camaraderie with each other, to feel less alienated essentially. But, it's a combination of feeling less alone and also how it influences our politics.

While Rivka focuses on Jewish organizing contexts as the site of such alliances, as they allude, the same may be said of many other groups. In no small part due to the liberatory re-imagining and organizing efforts of the Black and Indigenous activists behind Black Lives Matter and #LandBack, people of various backgrounds are addressing the alienation of colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy by pursuing connection to their own histories and joining in coalition with like-minded others. Equal parts inquiry, praxis and dreaming, the questions and methods that I have developed and implemented offer one way to approach this greater project.

Limitations

It is inevitable that a project initiated by a white scholar that loftily orients toward the "pursuit of collective liberation" from within settler colonialism, white supremacy and racial capitalism is characterized as much by its constraints as by its idealism. Despite the critical nature of my inquiry, I am still a white-identified person re-centering whiteness (Ahmed, 2004), the very concept I seek to dismantle. Inevitably, I speak from within what Ellsworth (1997) terms the "double bind" of whiteness, employing a system of white supremacy to work against white supremacy. My approach may seem to imply that white people can be both the cause of the problem and its savior, and that we can do this by using white tools. This may inspire some scholars to inquire as to where people of color fit into this work (Leonardo, 2013). These meritable critiques stand as contradictions of the project. At the same time, as I've argued throughout this project, the particular *uneasiness* of the recently white(ned) Ashkenazi Soviet immigrant position necessitates that cracks be made in the concept of whiteness. My project does not simply reify whiteness or expand it, but rather reveals that which does not already fit (that is, the Soviet Jewish histories, epistemologies and cultural practices that are being erased) in order to challenge the concept entirely.

Having been socialized in the U.S. for most of my life, my own internalized (American) whiteness likely speaks through this project as much as I attempt to speak against it, including in ways of which I am unaware. Particularly problematic is the notion that an insular group positioned as white immigrant-settlers can meaningfully challenge white supremacy and settler colonialism. Indeed, the fact that my participants, collaborators and I continue to benefit materially from the dispossession of Black and Indigenous people and people of color around the world makes the project incommensurable with ideals of racial justice and decolonization. Furthermore, because the Kolektiv was an all-white space for Seasons 1-3, the group inevitably reified whiteness even as we attempted to challenge it (some of these limitations are discussed in

Chapter 7). Despite the epistemological limitations of creating yet another space in which whiteness was protected from challenge by people of color (Delgado, 2017), I maintain the importance of bringing together this group critically to address whiteness *through* shared histories and identities, including queerness, gender-marginalization, and Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrant experience. It is also important to note that this was hardly the only political group with which participants were involved. Most of then participated in other organizing projects, including interracial, intergenerational, and inter-faith efforts.

That being said, I worried that the comforts of white settlerhood sometimes enabled vagueness. In the Kolektiv we did our best to approach concepts like "collective liberation" and "decolonization" through epistemological, socio-political *and* material lenses (e.g. we both critically discussed our own presence on this land and encouraged one another to pay local Native land taxes), but were often limited by time. With no prerequisites of political knowledge of experience, Kolektiv members had varying levels of experience with topics like decolonization and land rematriation, abolition, and reparations. Furthermore, our joint political education on each of these was limited to one or two 2-hour sessions with 20-30 people, hardly enough time for a "deep dive" or to make thorough connections across sessions. For this reason, I often shared that we were all individual works-in-progress, and were just at the beginning of our collective political work. Even as the lofty goals of collective liberation and decolonization guided me and the stewarding committee, the project was much more modestly and practically oriented toward grappling with structural violence and healing some of its ruptures.

As discussed in Chapter 3, this study is further limited by the academic form through which I communicate, a Western-Eurocentric text-based literacy practice within a colonial and white supremacist institution (although one also subject to internal contestation). As Hambel (2005) has argued, "whiteness is at the heart of academia and perpetuated by its expansion" (p. 78). I both participate in this expansion *and* I make attempts in my methods to contest some of academia's Eurocentric and patriarchal positivist tendencies. Even as I employed non-conventional collaborative and feminist methods, so many times in my process I wished I could visually illustrate this dissertation, rather than write it in linear form. I also wished that I had read the work of scholars Indigenous to the former Soviet Union and Soviet Jews, rather than rely on non-Soviets or Americans to inform my theorizing. I am still a novice at decolonizing and de-Americanizing my own mind and body. This limitation reveals itself through inconsistencies in my scholarship.

For example, while I ground my project in decolonial and anti-imperialist theory (Chapter 2) and express corresponding political aspirations, my dialogic interview protocols largely privileged questions related to whiteness and class over those of colonialism and imperialism. This is partially a reflection of the choices I made amidst time scarcity (e.g. while my later interview questions did ask about settler colonialism and Zionism, I ran out of time and chose to focus more on whiteness and racial capitalism). More deeply, it is reflective of my own shifting political consciousness, which developed over the last seven years from narrowly privileging a critical race analysis that largely took settler colonialism for granted (as this is what I was exposed to in my early graduate studies) toward a U.S.-centric decolonial analysis and, most recently, a global decolonial and anti-imperialist framework (including a critique of Zionism). This personal scholarly development has also been paralleled by a growing collective consciousness among settlers, as evidenced by the increased publicity around #NoDAPL, #LandBack, and other longtime Indigenous sovereignty and rematriation efforts. For example,

some Kolektiv members have shared that the Kolektiv offered their first exposure to settler colonial theory, but that now they are seeing much more of this analysis online.

While my own socialized American whiteness and settlerhood limit my critical inquiry, my experience as an immigrant has been an asset to this work, as it contests any natural claim I might otherwise make to this Indigenous land. As an immigrant whose family was racially othered in our home context, both my presence here and newly ascribed whiteness are already troubled and ripe for critical inquiry. Having learned the critical history of my own migration, I also know that my arrival was made possible by the settler colonial Israeli and U.S. governments and by white American resources (that is, by the dispossession of Palestinian and Indigenous others). I am also aware that whiteness and middle-class status play a large role in granting me the personal distance from war and racism that have enabled me to "heal" some intergenerational trauma (in contrast to my own parents, and to many people harmed by these structures). All of this is to say I would not dream of claiming my innocence through this project. At the same time, like Houria Bouteldja (2016), I "plead extenuating circumstances" (p. 29): I was brought to the U.S. as a child, in an era when Ashkenazi Jewishness was already sublimated into whiteness. What is left to do but contest my unearned privileges and power, even as I cannot absolve myself of them? As a political project, this study is thus both inherently incomplete and ethically imperative. I cannot save the project, and the project likely cannot save me, but I must still pursue it.

It is also important to interrogate the "biases" that I bring to this work as not only a stewarding member of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon, but also the founder of the live, virtual group study that preceded it. My embedded position not just inside, but at the *center* of the inside, can obscure my own assumptions and preferences, which inevitably circulate through the project. Although I involved others in co-developing the group in myriad ways, and owe much of my analysis to their articulations, ultimately, I alone am writing this dissertation and producing this scholarship. Even as I interviewed nearly half of the first season's participants and used this knowledge to write Chapter 8 , it is still likely that I am privileging my own experience and viewpoints in my writing. Furthermore, it may be possible that participants were more comfortable sharing positive feedback, than critical or negative feedback, further limiting my findings. I hope that by sharing the drafted chapter with my core collaborators and soliciting their feedback, I was able to account for some of these oversights. I also look forward to continuing to co-write about this work, both with Kolektiv members as I have already done and with others outside of the group, who may expand or challenge my analyses.

Beyond these concerns and limitations, scarce time—or the perception of time scarcity––was a great challenge of this project. Some may be skeptical to learn this, given that I have spent four entire years developing this project, "gathering knowledge," (Merrick, 2020) generating meaning, and writing up my findings. However, my eyes were wider than my mouth, and I gathered far more than I could work through and write about. This is especially the case with recordings of Kolektiv sessions and related interviews, in which group participants shared countless brilliant insights that did not make their way into these pages. At times, I found myself emotionally saturated and unable to sift through more content. Among this treasure trove are our group's lengthy discussions of anti-Zionism, whiteness, and financial redistribution, as well as notes related to our internal organizing processes. I hope the future will bring abundant opportunities to share this work.

Future Directions

Scholarship

The projects of transnational whiteness and "new immigrant whiteness" should continue to be critically theorized via multiple, intersecting axes of power. In this study, I primarily engaged with the intersecting ideological and material functions of U.S. global power including American humanitarianism and Cold War xenophobia, American and Israeli settler colonialism, U.S. racial capitalism, and cis- heteropatriarchy. While I briefly touched on Christian hegemony in my discussions of Jewish shame, future theorizations should further consider how Christian hegemony and Islamophobia work in concert with racial capitalism in the post 9/11 era to uphold white supremacist settler colonialism, and how some new immigrant groups are assimilated into this project against others. More attention should also be paid to how racial neoliberalism, as a specific form of racial capitalism, functions both locally and globally to create new white(ned) subjects. To the extend that such a project follows a neo-abolitionist orientation, future work would benefit from being placed in conversation with decolonization and Black abolitionism, including the ongoing work of abolishing the carceral and military state (Davis et al., 2022; Gilmore et al., 2022). Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants can certainly be a site of this study, but it may also be pursued through comparative analyses of other groups, including non-white Soviet Jewish immigrants, white Latinx immigrants, and various Middle Eastern groups who have their own complex relationships to whiteness.

Another fruitful avenue for study may be the comparison of Soviet Jewish immigrant racialization and assimilation against those of other Cold War-era immigrant and refugee groups, including Vietnamese, Cubans, Cambodians, etc. While each of these certainly populations has its own history and relationship to the U.S., it can be generative to discuss how queer 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrants, for example, contend with the differing American weaponizations of their histories. For example, I can imagine a fruitful conversation between my project and Mimi Thi Nguyen's *The Gift of Freedom* (Nguyen, 2012). Another avenue for comparative inquiry is the discussion of global peripheral whitenesses, including Soviet Jewish whiteness in the U.S. context and the racialization of Eastern European immigrants to Central and Western Europe. (I ventured into this area by participating in a European conference on "Migration to/from/within Central and Eastern Europe: Decolonial perspectives on race, gender, sexuality and class" in Nov 2021). Such scholarly pursuits would nurture new alliances and coalitions, placing critical scholars of whiteness, Jewish Studies, and Eastern Europe in conversation with critical scholars of migration from the Global South.

My research has also generated a few promising lines of critical inquiry related specifically to Soviet Jewry. Just as Pauline Peretz (2015) challenged the U.S.-centrism of existing American accounts of the movement to "Save the Soviet Jewry," critical, Soviet Jewish immigrant perspectives have much to contribute to counter-narratives of Soviet Jewish migration. Such scholarship could build on the few works (Lazin, 2009; Peretz, 2015) that discuss the role of Israel in Soviet migration and further contest American and Jewish exceptionalism. Just as I critically analyze a "Save the Soviet Jews" Passover haggadah in Chapter 2, there are many other primary sources waiting to be deconstructed through critical race and anti-imperialist lenses. Such future work may also consider the role of Christian hegemony in the development of white American Jewish tribal saviorism in this movement, in the context of Holocaust exceptionalism. Of course, such a project would need to be pursued with great nuance and compassion, so as not to discount the experiences of refuseniks and Soviet Jewish political prisoners, or to minimize the protections that this immigration did afford many of us

(something that has only become more obvious to me with the recent Russian attack on Ukraine). A second, related, research project that I did not have the capacity and physical space to pursue in this dissertation concerns the relationships of Soviet Jewish immigrants in the U.S. to Zionism and the state of Israel. My preliminary research shows that these relationships differ from those of many American Jews on account of the historical differences between these populations, and range from Zionist to anti-Zionist to disengaged, especially among various generations. There is much more to be said here about how 1.5 and 2nd generation Soviet Jewish immigrants negotiate their relationships to the "Jewish state" with and against their families, including in solidarity with Palestinians and anti-Zionist American Jews.

Cultural and Political Organizing

In addition to continued scholarship, there are both internal and external future directions for the work of the Kolektiv. First, while there have been various articulations of the group's politics, the group is ripe to collectively draft a manifesto that articulates our political commitments with greater clarity and specificity. As the group's structure continues to respond to the desires and capacities of its membership, the ongoing work of re-imagination and re-existence can be further informed through greater attention to cis-heteropatriarchy, disability justice, and embodiment. As discussed in Chapter 7, the group is in its earliest stages of unpacking the various "queer" identifications among participants, including ways some members are privileged by this identifier (e.g., by having access to queer community while having the protection of a cishetero-appearing relationships) while others are actively marginalized (e.g., feeling unsafe on the street, estranged from family, etc.). Central to this discussion is the way transphobia works through and within the group. Similarly, the group needs to attend critically to the ways ableism and neurotypicality function in the space, and to imagine how disability justice work can inform our organizing.

Finally, while I cited Resmaa Menakem's (2017) work on cultural somatics, greater attention can be directed toward addressing intergenerational trauma and internalized white supremacy in the body and the (co-)regulation of nervous systems among new white(ned) immigrants. Even when white people develop consciously antiracist orientations, their investments in white supremacy continue to circulate through their nervous systems. As Menakem argues, compassionate attention to the nervous system can challenge white embodied experience of whiteness as fragile and vulnerable (and conversely, of Blackness as threatening). Individual and co-regulation of neural fight, flight and freeze responses that emerge from intergenerational and familial trauma can also create room for resilience, challenging victimization and defensiveness. This work should continue to be implemented (e.g., in a new season of the Kolektiv or a similar group), as well as studied and written about.

As relationships internal to the group continue to be nurtured, the future of Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon and of this broader political project lies in the praxis and study of coalition and alliance-building among people whose histories have been "barbarized" and weaponized by imperial/colonial projects. This is not a new idea. Black feminist, lesbian groups like the Combahee River Collective (1977) have modeled building collective power out of shared positionality, while scholars like Audre Lorde (1984) and Adrienne Rich (1986) have articulated visions for coalitions of difference. Rich spoke to the importance of "recognizing our location, having to name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted" (p. 219). Meanwhile, Lorde (Lorde, 2012) wrote that the strength of women (Lorde's word) lies in recognizing these differences as creative, "and in standing to those distortions which we

inherited without blame but which are now ours to alter" (p. 283). The lesson I glean is that we must all learn where we come from, understand both the convergences and asymmetries of our experiences, and work together to mobilize those differences toward shared dreams that supersede individual material desires. Slabodsky (2014) offers a Jewish way forward, suggesting that groups who have been recently deemed "barbaric" by dominant "civilizing" regimes (as I would argue Soviet Jews were in American context), may root into their ascribed barbarism to develop counternarratives that dialogue with those of colonized people.

Opportunities abound for future scholarly, creative and political alliances with several groups. One promising avenue involves cross-racial alliances among queer, post-Soviet Jewish immigrants to the U.S., including with Bukharian and Kavkazi Jews, as the predominantly white, Ashkenazi-dominant Kolektiv hardly represents the diversity of Soviet Jewish immigrants. Within American Jewish organizing, it is important to continue strengthening relationships with Black Jews, Indigenous Jews and Jews of color as well as Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, to support, learn from and inform their ongoing efforts at challenging white supremacy in Jewish spaces. Second, decolonial and anti-Zionist work may be continued through connections with Indigenous American and Palestinian-led organizations, American Jewish organizations (so long as post-Soviet positionality is visibilized), and with the anti-Zionist Soviet Jewish emigrés around the world (e.g., in Germany, occupied Palestine).

As mentioned earlier, a third promising direction involves connecting with other politicized 1.5 and 2nd generation (queer) immigrants, especially Cold War-era immigrants from Communist regimes who also received refugee status (e.g., Cuba, Vietnam), "model minorities," and immigrant groups whose histories have otherwise been weaponized to support U.S. imperialism and global capitalist rule (e.g., white Latinx people). Some of these groups share with Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants not only a model minority or model immigrant status, but also reactionary political orientations (e.g., to Communist regimes) that uphold dominant regimes. It is very exciting to imagine young, politicized, and queer members of these communities who re-imagining the legacies of their diasporas join in conversation, co-education, and creative production.

Finally, connections should continue to be built with queer, Soviet Jewish immigrants around the world. I attempted this work during the pandemic by co-hosting a sovemstnii stol, or joint table, with Darja Klingenberg, a post-Soviet Jewish scholar based in Germany. Using Zoom, a projector, and a screen the Domik Druzei (Kolektiv stewarding committee) gathered outside of Chicago and virtually connected with a large group assembled by Darja in Berlin to form one long dinner table. Together, guests shared art, poetry, song, and conversation in a two-hour exchange around (post-)Soviet Jewish experiences in their respective geographic and political contexts. As relationships develop in these four areas, creative, cultural and political collaborations may take form.

While it has been a longtime dream to also connect with queer and Jewish people in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the Russian war on Ukraine, now six weeks in duration, has inevitably prioritized the collection and distribution of material resources over such cultural connections. For example, Luba, Irina and I paused the solicitation of entries for our second zine (which was to include work from countries of the former Soviet Union), and instead directed our efforts toward fundraising and supporting Luba's family in Ukraine. This war has made obvious both our distance from the lands we left, and our persisting connections to them, however fraught and fragile. As many Americans, including assimilated Ashkenazi Jews, turn to me and other members of the Kolektiv to help them make sense of and respond to the war, I find myself

wanting more than ever to further mend these relational and linguistic fractures. While this is aspirational for now, connection with individuals and groups who organize in the very places we emigrated from may offer a promising direction for other post-Soviet immigrants dedicated to global anti-imperialist, decolonial and queer movement work.

Epilogue

While writing my Introduction to this project, I was helping my friend and collaborator Luba raise money to support her great uncle and others like him who were either trapped in Ukraine or fleeing the Russian military attack. As the war rages on more than two months later, Luba's uncle and one of her childhood best friends have tragically passed away. Meanwhile, in Chicago, Irina—our other friend and collaborator, whose baby-welcoming ritual we had attended last winter—gave birth to a healthy child. As recent immigrants, how do we hold the chilling contrast between our relative safety in our new host context and the suffering of our relatives who stayed? Furthermore, how do we continuously recognize that a parallel contrast exists *within* our very own cities, where Black and brown people are targeted by state violence, although the degrees or timescales of suffering may differ. While our American whiteness may offer us physical safety for the moment, there is little psychic comfort our racial assimilation.

Meanwhile, in her few weeks on this planet, Irina's baby has been wrapped in Irina's Soviet childhood blanket and listened to the sounds of the same Russian-language records Irina heard as a child. She/they will inherit their parents' Soviet Jewish and Filipino cultures, and will likely be brought along to organizing meetings and actions. They will also be supported by a community of queer Soviet Jewish immigrant тёти-дяди (tioti-diadi, aunt-uncles) who are eager to help them maintain ties to their roots. Only time will tell whether our efforts will be sustained by the generations to come, or how they might be transformed by them. For now, my hope is that this project attests to the reality that post-Soviet Jews immigrants are not blanketly sublimating into American whiteness, but rather that some of us are actively resisting the erasure of our cultural and historical memory, however limited and contradictory our efforts. We do this by gifting the baby Adidas tracksuits and Cheburashka toys, foraging грибы (gribi, mushrooms) together, celebrating Passover as a group, attending political actions, and redistributing money. And, we do it by sharing our stories—both with one another and with anyone willing to listen.

Even as our elders pass, marking a new and painful aspect of immigrant rupture, the relationships we've developed with one another help us sustain our inheritances a little longer, queerly re-envision them, and create an archive for the future. If decolonial pedagogies "are the struggles, practices, processes and wagers for life" (Mignolo & Walsh, 2019, p. 95), then relationships, collective memory, and imagination are the center of our pursuit of life. French-Algerian activist Houria Bouteldja (2016) concludes her book by stating that white people "lack the imagination to think up other horizons. Because they have lost their memory…" while colonized people of color, in the face of adversity, "preserve this memory" (p. 138). She calls on white Jews, specifically, to draw on "self-love" and honor the memories of their ancestors by entering into solidarity with colonized people of color, rather than investing in colonial whiteness (p. 66). I share her vision, but question where my collaborators and I, as immigrants and children of immigrants, exist in relation to the white/non-white binary. We have been whitened within a few decades and yet we still carry our ancestral and familial memories in our bodies. The ongoing Russian war on Ukraine has only made these memories more potent and accessible. The fact that we have not yet lost our memories is a blessing, a place from which to respond to Bouteldja's call for solidarity against whiteness and colonialism. Like the countless great

activists who have come before me, I also dare my fellow Soviet Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants to betray the protections that compromise our humanity. I dare us to love ourselves and one another enough to do so.

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Appendices A-X

Appendix A

Social Media Post for Live, Virtual Group Study

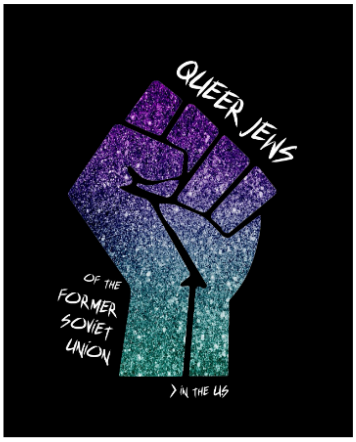
Appendix B

Call for Participation for Live, Virtual Group Study

connect - question - discuss - feel - process - (un)learn - document - respond - create - act - imagine - repair - support - laugh - build - grow

FSU - QUEER - JEWISH VIRTUAL GROUP STUDY & PARTICIPATORY ART STUDIO

> for women, trans + nonbinary -identifying Jewish immigrants/settlers from the former Soviet Union to the U.S.



Who | for anyone who is:

- a Jewish immigrant/settler from the FSU (former Soviet Union) to the U.S.,
- + born in FSU or caregiver/parent born in FSU,
- + identifies as both queer and woman, femme, trans, or gender nonconforming

What | a co-facilitated, virtual group that meets online regularly to:

- discuss, learn together, and respond to issues of U.S. white supremacy, settler colonialism, and racialized capitalism, from our particular subject positions
- use art to (re)build and record collective memory - lived, familial, ancestral (no art experience necessary)
- connect and form relationships <3

Commitment |

- participation in 6 online meetings, October - December 2019 (we may extend into Spring too, but that's not required for you to participate right now)
  - commitment to meeting online 2 times/month, for 2 hours each time via Zoom
  - time TBD based on group availability, but likely Sunday afternoons/evenings
  - 1-2 hours/week additional reading, journaling, planning, etc.
- willingness to participate in broader phd dissertation project on FSU Jews negotiating U.S. racial and economic structures, including:
  - consent to recording of group Zoom sessions (you will not be identifiable)
  - 1-2 hours of one-on-one interviews in Spring 2020
  - potential for interviews/oral history with family members (not required)

How | if you are interested in participating, please:

- fill out this short application by August 23rd, 2019 to share your interest and availability
- look out for an email from Sophia for next steps
- contact Sophia at ms.sobko@gmail.com with any questions

Why |

- this is a chance to document our individual and collective stories & understand together both where we come from & where we are heading!
- this group will form the basis of my phd dissertation at UC Berkeley, which I intend to make as participant-informed and accessible as possible > more details will be shared

connect - question - discuss - feel - process - (un)learn - document - respond - create - act - imagine - repair - support - laugh - build - grow

Appendix C

Application for Live, Virtual Group Study

Thank you for your interest in participating in this co-facilitated virtual culture circle / group study / art studio for queer, Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union to the U.S.!

I am so excited to connect with you, learn together, feel through things, and create! Please note that this group will meet using Zoom live video conferencing, and is intended to be highly participatory and co-facilitated. That said, the work we do together will also inform my PhD dissertation on FSU Jews negotiating power in the US. I see my role as one of making space for us and getting us resources.

This short application will help give me a sense of your interests and your capacity to commit to the group. Please reach out with any questions: ms.sobko@gmail.com. Thanks for taking the time!

Please fill out this form to officially enroll in the FSUQJ Fall group!

We will be meeting every 2 weeks on SUNDAYS, PST: 5-7pm / CT: 7-9pm / EST: 8-10pm.

We will meet via Zoom on the following dates: Sun 10/27; Sun 11/10, Sun 11/24; Sun 12/8, Sun 12/22, Sun 1/5

1. What's your name and what pronouns do you use? (e.g. they/them, she/her, he/him, etc.)
2. How did you hear about this project?
3. How do you identify in terms of gender and sexuality? (use the terms that are right for you)
4. How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity? (use the terms that are right for you)
5. How old are you?
6. email only
7. Please share your email address and other best ways to reach you: IG, text (include phone #), FB, etc.
8. Where are you currently located and/or where will you be located in Spring 2020?
9. Were you born in FSU and/or were your parents/caregivers born in FSU? Please explain briefly.
10. What would you like to get out of a bunch of queer FSU Jews meeting online across the US? Is there anything in particular you want us to do together?
11. What QUESTIONS are you interested in related to intersections of queerness, FSU experience/identity, Jewish diaspora, and U.S. power structures (race, class, etc.)? What are you curious about, grappling with, etc?
12. Are there any knowledges, skills, passions, interests, etc. that you want to contribute to the group? (e.g. writing, photoshop, somatics, history, clowning, singing, ritual, etc... anything!)
13. Can you commit to participating in 6 online meetings total, from October - December 2019? (We will meet online 2 times/month, for 2 hours each time via Zoom. There will be an additional ~1 hr/week of reading, journaling, planning, etc.)
14. What days/times* might work best for you for Oct - Dec 2019? (keep in mind that we must accommodate participants from all U.S. time zones, and that we only meet 2x a month) *mark all that might work for you, to the best of your knowledge
15. Are you open to or interested in co-facilitating one or more of our sessions? (or activities within the sessions)?
16. Our work together will inform my PhD dissertation on FSU Jewish immigrants & systems of power. Do you consent to participating in this study, via recordings of our Zoom sessions and 1-2 hours of interviews? (you will not be identifiable in any of this). *You are absolutely able to participate in the group without consenting to the research!

17. Are you open to or interested in involving any of your family members (caregivers, parents, grandparents) in oral histories or interviews?
18. Is there anything you can tell me about your participation style, learning style, etc., especially as you imagine being in a call with 20-25 people? Has anything helped/hindered you from facilitating in both large and small group discussions online?

Appendix D

Enrollment Form, Live, Virtual Group Study

A note on Commitment: I know everyone has very full lives. At the same time, the container we create together is very important, so I ask that you commit to attending all of the meetings. Below you can note in advance if you have a conflict with any of the dates. It is okay to miss one meeting (out of 6) if necessary. More absences will negatively affect the group.

1. First name & last name
2. Preferred name (what you want us to call you in the group)
3. Email address
4. Pronouns (they/them, she/her, he/him, etc.)
5. Age
6. Location
7. What is your FSU connxn?
8. How do you identify in term of gender?
9. How do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?
10. Email address
11. Phone # (for text reminders)
12. Are you able to make it to at least 5 out of the 6 meetings?
13. Are there any meetings you know you CANNOT make? Please check the box next to the meeting date that you CANNOT attend.
14. Would you be able to attend an additional intro meeting (1 hour) on Sun, 10/20, PST: 5-6pm / CT: 7-8pm / EST: 8-9PM? (as of now, this is a tentative date)
15. Do you have any questions or is there anything you want me to know?

Appendix E

Interview Protocol for Post-Season 1 Reflections with Kolektiv Participants

Introduction

- This will be recorded
- Purpose of this part of the study: to understand what we got out of the experience, what are the possibilities of meeting live/online and challenges
- Semi-structured

Basics

- How did you get connected to the FSUQJ group/project
- What was your reaction when you saw the flyer? Why did you choose to join?

Benefits

- Were there any benefits to participating in this group? If so, what did you take away, gain, or learn in the sessions?
- Has the group offered you any political education or shifted your thinking about your own identity in the U.S. at all?
- What was especially memorable - any particular moments, activities, discussions, or experiences?
- What has worked well for you, in terms of how the group was organized, structured, and run?
- Did the group inspire any new projects, connections, ideas, meetings, etc?
-

Challenges

- Were there any difficulties or anything that didn't work for you?
- What changes would you make to how the group was organized, structured, and run?

Co-Facilitation (if the participant had co-facilitated)

- Tell me a little bit about your involvement in planning and facilitating.
- Why did you decide to co-facilitate?
- How did it feel?
- What helped?
- What was hard?

Questions about online format

- Were there any benefits for you around this group being both online and live (as compared to asynchronous and in-person)?
- Any limitations?

What helped your participation in terms of structures, tools, etc.?

- What hindered your participation, in terms of structures, tools, etc?
- Were there any digital platforms/tools that you thought worked well? (Zoom rooms, zoom chat, Slack, googledocs, googlemaps, email)
- Were there any digital platforms/tools that you thought didn't work well? (Zoom rooms, zoom chat, Slack, googledocs, googlemaps, email)

Future

- If we continue to meet online, what would you like to see more of, in terms of **content?**
- If we continue to meet online, what would you like to see more of, in terms of format/structure/organization?
- If we were to write a collective FSUQJ vision statement (for what we are trying to do together), what would you like to include in it?

- Consider that we are a group dedicated to working toward collective liberation and justice from our particular positionalities and experiences as post-Soviet queer Jews. If we follow this vision in Spring 2020, what might our time together look and feel like? How might we do this work?
- Is there anything else?

Appendix F

Kolektiv Jewishness and Judaism survey, Season 3
(developed by Rebecca and co-facilitators)

1. In a few sentences, how would you best describe your experience and relationship with Judaism (either as a culture, religion, or ethnicity)? Feel free to include any associations with cultural, ethnic, or religious Judaism. For example: "Very little to no exposure to religious Judaism, Orthodoxy, etc." I don't know anything about Judaism and have never been to a holiday service but am interested in learning more." " I identify primarily as culturally Jewish, etc."

2. Are you a member of a synagogue or Jewish community?

3. What Judaism-related content would you be interested in seeing from the kolektiv?
- Shabbat or Havdalah Zoom gatherings
- Jewish history
- rites of passage
- connecting to ritual objects
- other

4. If you were to attend a Jewish holiday service or offering with the kolektiv (such as Passover seder or Rosh Hashanah (New Year) services, would it be your main commitment for that holiday? (This could help us plan whether to offer something during the holiday or before/afterwards if folks are already committed elsewhere).

5. Please select all of the Jewish holidays that you would like to see a KGV offering for (and that you could see yourself attending)
- Purim
- Passover
- Rosh Hashanah
- Yom Kippur
- Sukkot
- Chanukah

6. If you are interested in Jewish holidays, please reflect on what is most important to you in this kind of experience. Feel free to include any concerns you have as well about kolektiv holidays. For example: connecting with others, learning about the holidays, saying prayers and doing rituals, etc.

7. Would you like there to be an option to bring significant others to kolektiv Jewish holidays?

8. Do you want to volunteer to plan any of the Jewish holidays? (If yes, please include your name and email in the next questions).

9. Anything else you want to mention that is related to the KGV and Judaism and/or spirituality more broadly?

10. Name (optional)

11. Email address (optional)

Appendix G

Interview Protocol for Dialogic Interviews / Modified Life Histories with Collaborators

Note: this was a flexible roadmap of questions that I shifted as the conversation progressed

Part 1 (1.5 hours)

Introduction:
Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. As you know, this is a pretty long interview- two parts of 1.5 hours each. We will be talking about many parts of your life- childhood through adulthood and covering various topics and parts of your identity. Some of the questions or answers may raise difficult or complex feelings. Please let me know if you are uncomfortable at any point, or if you need to pause or stop.

Section A: Self-Definition
As you know, in our group we all came together around the identity markers of FSUQJ:

- I was wondering if any (or all) of these markers feel particularly important to your identity?
- And, if there are any identity descriptors that are missing here that feel important to who you are, that we may want to touch on during the interview?

Section B: Immigration and Arrival
Let's talk about your family's immigration story.

- Where are you/your family from? What was their immigration route?
- Who from your family immigrated?
- Do you have a sense of why your family immigrated?
- Do you have a sense of how they felt about it? How you felt about it?

Tell a little about your arrival in the U.S. Where did you arrive? Did anyone help you get settled?

- Jewish org aid?
- Govt aid?

Can you walk me through some of the neighborhoods you grew up in, in terms of who was living there?

- in terms of race
- In terms of class
- immigrant vs. US born, languages spoken, etc?
- Any moves? Why?

Who did you live with at different times?

What did your parent(s)/caregivers do for work? What education/work training did they receive in the FSU and in the U.S.? How did this shift throughout their life/your life?

How would you describe your "class" growing up? Do you have any specific memories related to money, your class, needs, desires, etc? Did this shift through your childhood and adolescence?

Section C: Identity, Assimilation, Schooling, etc.
What are some memories of your immigrant-ness? Did others know this about you? Did you share it?

- What words did you use to describe yourself to others, in terms of origin (e.g. Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Soviet)?

Did you grow up around other post-Soviet immigrants? How did you relate to them?

What language(s) did you grow up speaking, and in what contexts? How did you feel about it? What role did your family/parents play in your language development or loss?

Let's talk more specifically about your schooling experiences. What was school like for you?

- Describe the school(s) you attended, in terms of demographics (race, class)
- How was it decided you would go to this school?
- What was school like academically? Were you placed into any special programs (ESL, Gifted and Talented)?
- What were your relationships with your teachers like?
- Who did you socialize with in terms of race, class, and immigrant status?
- Do you recall anything notable from your schooling (curriculum, projects, events, etc.) that excluded, erased, or otherwise identified you as a post-Soviet Jewish immigrant? (*or foregrounded/centered?)
- What did you generally do after school?

Section D: Jewishness and anti-Semitism

Growing up, did you have a sense that you were Jewish? Can you tell a story or example that shows this? What did being Jewish mean in your family? (secular, religious, ethnic, practicing)

To what extent did you and/or your family members experience anti-Semitism, either in the FSU or the U.S.? Did this have any impact on you?

<u>Parts 2 (1.5 hours)</u>

Section A: Whiteness, Racial Capitalism

Growing up, how did you see yourself racially, if at all? Do any memories come to mind?

How are you racially identified in the U.S./Canada today? Do you remember any specific instances or experiences that made you aware that you are racially identified that way?

Do you remember your caregivers/family members making racial statements about people of color or Black people, in the FSU context and/or in the U.S.? Any specific memories?

How do you understand/explain racial inequities in the U.S., particularly between Black and white people?

Has your thinking and feelings about that changed over time? Can you identify a moment, a learning, an insight etc that catalyzed or represented that shift?

How has your awareness of your own racial position in society changed over time, if at all? What has driven those changes? Is there a story or experience you can share? How did you feel?

- Follow up on volunteering, saviors

How does this understanding/analysis affect your behaviors/actions, if at all?

How do you understand/explain wealth inequality in the U.S.?

Has your thinking and feelings about that changed over time? Can you identify a moment, a learning, an insight etc that catalyzed or represented that shift?

How do you fit into this system?

- How has your class experience changed over your life?
- How have economic concerns influenced your decisions? Share some examples of when that's happened--including choices influenced by family.
- How would you describe your class overall and economic security now? Including expecting to have access to family wealth, "earnings potential,"
- Where do you live now? How would you describe your neighborhood (class, race, etc.)?

How does this understanding/analysis affect your behaviors/actions, if at all?

- College, friends, relationships, events, etc…

How do your parents' political beliefs around race and class relate to yours? How does this affect you, make you feel?

- How would you describe your parents/family members' (in the U.S.) political beliefs?
- What do you think informs your parents' political beliefs?
- How have political beliefs, theirs or yours, affected your relationship?

Section B: Settler Colonialism in U.S.

Do you remember your parents/family ever talking about Indigenous people in the U.S. (and/or, in the former Soviet Union)? What do you remember?

How would you describe the relationship between Indigenous/Native people and the U.S./Canadian government?

Has your thinking about that changed over time? Can you identify a moment, a learning, an insight etc that catalyzed or represented that shift?

Today, do you identify as an immigrant, a settler or both? Has this changed across your life? What has driven those changes?

How does this understanding/analysis affect your behaviors/actions, if at all?

Section C: Palestine
What did you hear about Israel and/or Palestine growing up? Did/do your parents talk about the state Israel and if so, how?

What is your relationship to Israel and Palestine? What about your family? Do you have relatives in Israel? Have you spent time there?

How would you describe the relationship between Israel and Palestine?

How does this understanding/analysis affect your behaviors/actions, if at all?

Section D: Gender & Sexuality
How would you describe your gender as a kid? As a teenager? Did it change as you grew up?

What memories do you have about being aware of your gender? What feelings are associated with those memories?

How did you identify in terms of sexuality? Did this shift as you grew up?
Were either of these identification important to how you thought about yourself, when you were a kid or a teenager?

Did your family's perceptions and expectations of your gender align with how you felt?
If not, how so?

Did your family's perceptions and expectations of your sexuality align with how you identified? If not, how so?

Growing up, did your parents express certain assumptions or expectations for you in terms of gender or sexuality, romantic relationships, marriage, kids, etc? (May be duplicated in suggestions above)

Are you in contact with your parents/family members? If so, do they know you are queer?

If so, how do they relate to this, and/or how has your relationship been affected?

How have parental expectations of you related to gender, sexuality affected the way you've lived your life, if at all?

<u>Part 3 (1.5 hours)</u>

Section A: Post-Soviet and Jewish Identity Today

Building on what you said last time… What does being post-Soviet (or Russian, Ukrainian, etc.) mean to you now? What words do you now use to describe this identity? Is there any story or experience you can share about this? Do you consider this an important part of your identity? How so?

Do you have any post-Soviet community/communities now? How does this feel for you?

Has your Jewish identity changed over time, if at all? If so, how? How does being Jewish show up in your life now, if at all? Do you have any story to share? How does this feel?

What has your relationship to American Jews and/or to American Jewish spaces (e.g. synagogues, explicitly Jewish organizations, etc.) been? How are you feeling about this now?

How have your parents responded, if at all, to your Jewish identity/practices, if applicable? Share a story/moment. How does this feel?

Section B: Political Beliefs and Visions

Is there anything else you haven't yet said about your political beliefs, or any issues you work on that we haven't talked about that you would like to share?

Do you have a vision for how society should function? What changes would you like to see?

How do your identity or past experiences inform this vision, if at all?

Are you involved in any social action toward your vision? If so, on what areas/issues and in what capacity (e.g. cultural worker, artist, organizer, use my body, educator, etc.)?

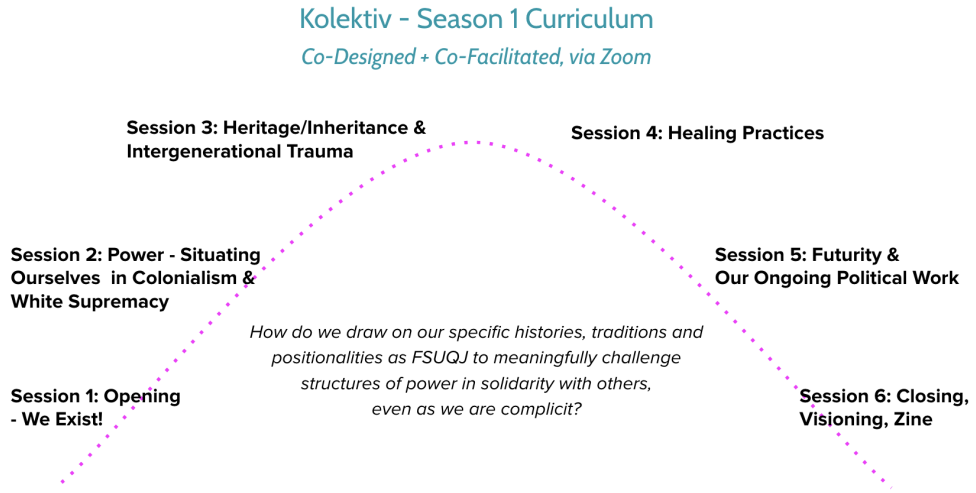
- Do you pursue this work through any organizations, the place you work, etc?

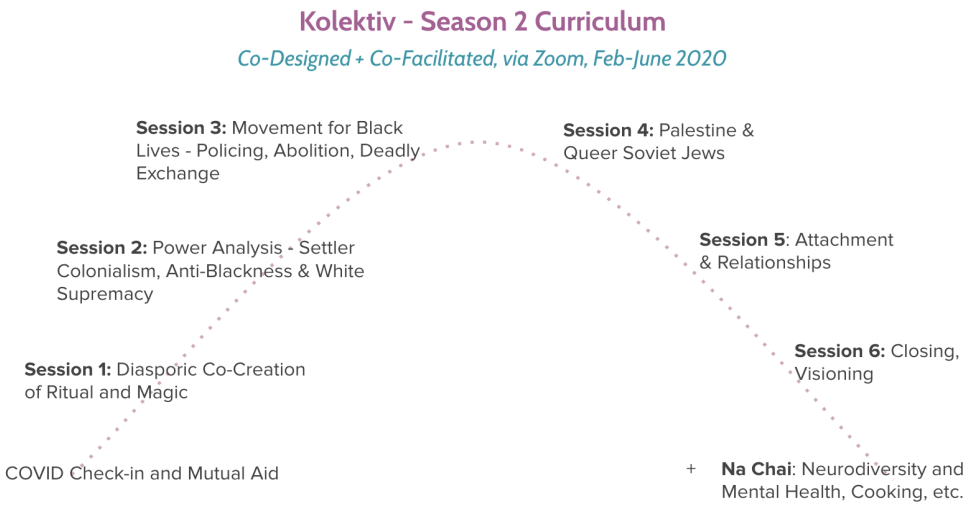
What are some of the complexities and contradictions you sit with as you participate in this work from your particular positionality and/or identity?

- What questions are you sitting with right now?
- Connxns to family, ancestry

Appendix H

Kolektiv Goluboy Vagon Season Overview, Sessions for Seasons 1-3





Season 3: Winter 2021 - Summer 2021

Sunday, Jan 10 4-6 pm PST *Welcome!*	*Sunday, Feb 14th 4-6pm PST* *Money / Reparations*	*Sunday, March 14th 4-6pm PST* *FSU Jewish Spiritual Practices & Ritual*	*Sunday, April 18th 4-6pm PST* *Nashi Kishki / Guts!*	*Sunday, May 9th 4-6pm PST* *Politics in the Post-Soviet World*	*Sunday, June 27th 4-6pm PST* *Political art / comics*	*Sunday, July 11th 4-6pm PST* *Seks!*	

Appendix I

Kolektiv Responses to Question of Familial and Ancestral Inheritances, in synchronous GoogleDoc

****~what have your family members and ancestors carried with them as they've relocated? what have they left behind, and where?~****

Left behind:
"They left everything behind" - language, culture, friends +++++
Spelling of their names +++
Patronymics (otchestvo)
Valenki
Changing their names ++
Graves ++
Collective trauma ++++
Denial, shame, guilt, secrets & lies ++++
Purpose - belief in Communism / the Soviet project / working for the collective good
Connection / family / holding onto family
Negative reaction to Communism - manifesting in love of capitalism and mistrust of social services
Assumption that the government is corrupt / mistrust of institutions
Forced sense of identity
Recipes +
Photos
Gold left in Belarus
Pain
Scarcity
Resilience ++
Swear words (but mostly I brought them over here): huy, pizdets, blya...etc.
Tenderness and care
Hospitality
Sex-negative attitudes+

****~what have you inherited from them? are there things among these that you'd like to leave behind?~****

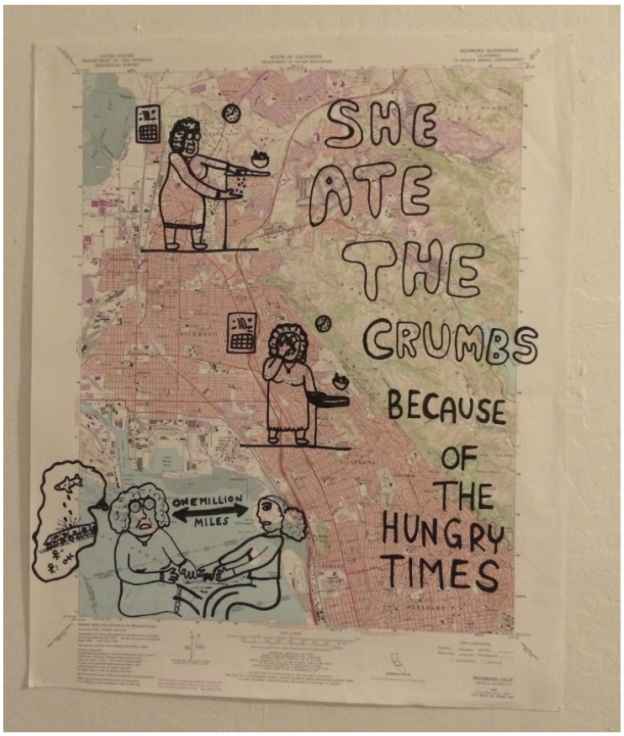
Food anxiety ++++++++
Digestive issues +++++
Scarcity mentality ++++++
Hoarding tendencies +
Pessimism and existential angst +++
Extreme risk aversion +++++
Stress reactions to minor things +++
Feeling like I have to work the system +++++
Invalidation of emotions +++++++
Amazing and embarrassing ability to haggle ++++
Things being never good enough / impossibly high standards / perfectionism ++++
Holodetz
    (I want to keep holodetz)
The holodetz of superstitious pessimism (i.e. can't acknowledge/appreciate when things/people are good because evil eye will dry up your luck like the desert we wandered)
Superstition
    (I want to keep my superstitions) +++_
Valuing higher education +++++
Valuing of intelligence / elitism ++++++
Judgemental / critical / discerning ++++++
Pressure to succeed / extreme work ethic ++++
No flavor / tolerance for spicy food +++++
Lateness ++
Anti-semitism+
Internalized antisemitism
Racism ++++
Neurosis +++
Militancy / militant cleanliness +++
Insularity, isolationism
Pressure to marry and have children (for the parents who gave up so much)++
Keeping bad things to ourselves, not sharing feelings openly +++
Alla Pugacheva, Boris Moiseev, Tatiana Bulanova, Valeria - all of the Russian Estrada +

LEOPARD PRINT +++
(Keeping leopard print, gold and Novi Russki aesthetic) +
Political apathy
Fatalism +
Internalized shame ++
Tapochki (slippers) ++
    (Keeping tapochki) +
Halat (housecoats) ++
Fat-phobia, body shaming ++++
Keks (pound cake)

Keeping:
Joking/laughing your way through the hard stuff +
-chki and -nka for cuteness +++
Bad jokes about herring
Feeling comfortable with breaking rules, scams, etc. — scrappiness ++
Perseverance
Being able to quickly open up with strangers--for better or worse
Knowing how to host guests ++++
Caring for family and maintaining family history
Long toasts during meals ++
Chai / tea +
Writing long epic poems for each others' birthdays
Valuing reproductive rights / less stigma about abortion +

Appendix J

Judy's submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat, on intergenerational trauma and food scarcity

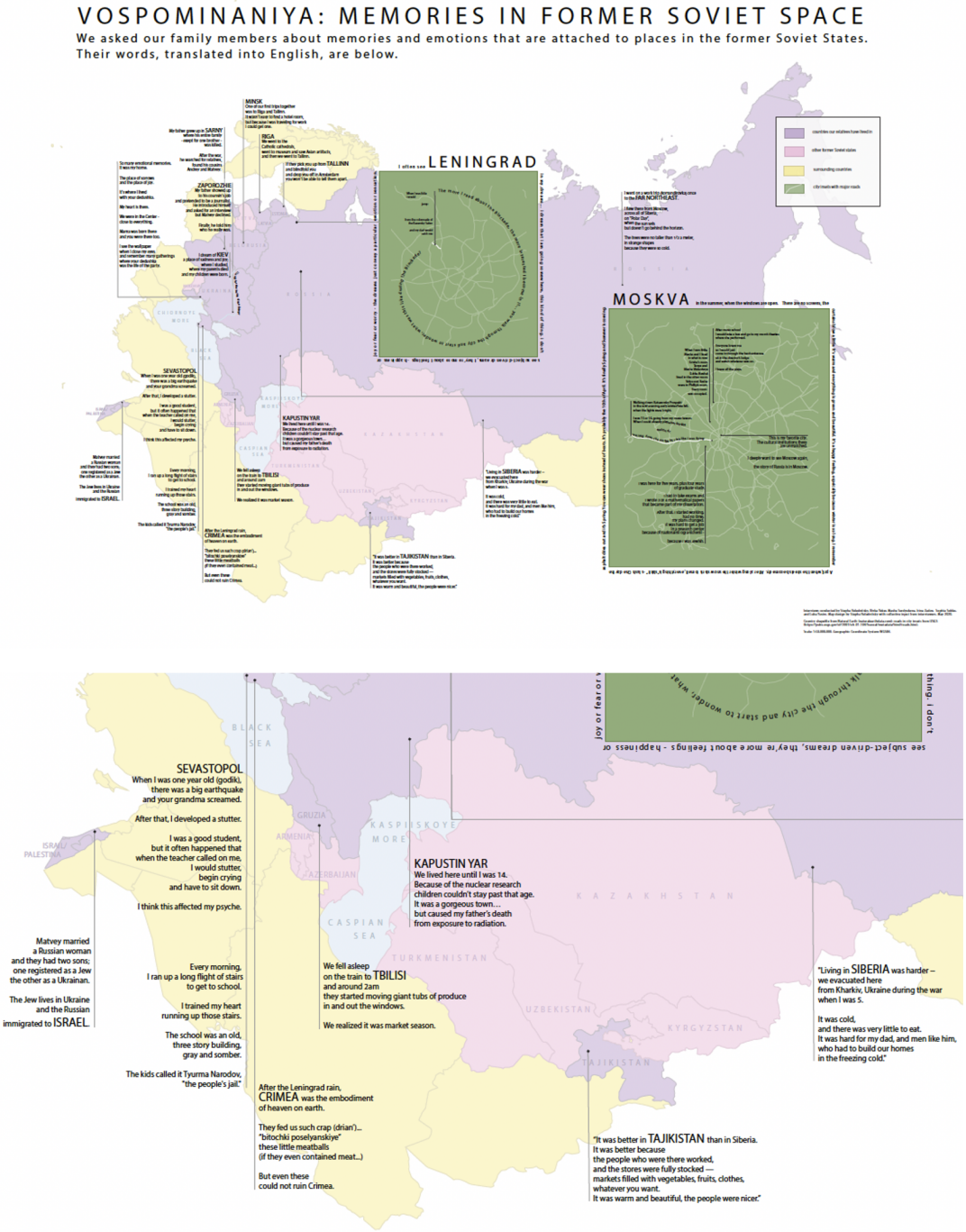


Appendix K

K.S.'s fibre sculpture "Family Ties," shared at a Kolektiv session on intergenerational trauma

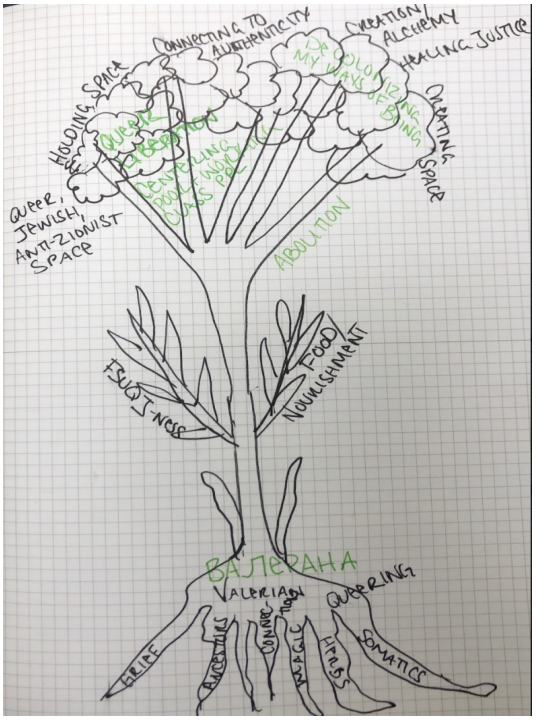
Appendix L

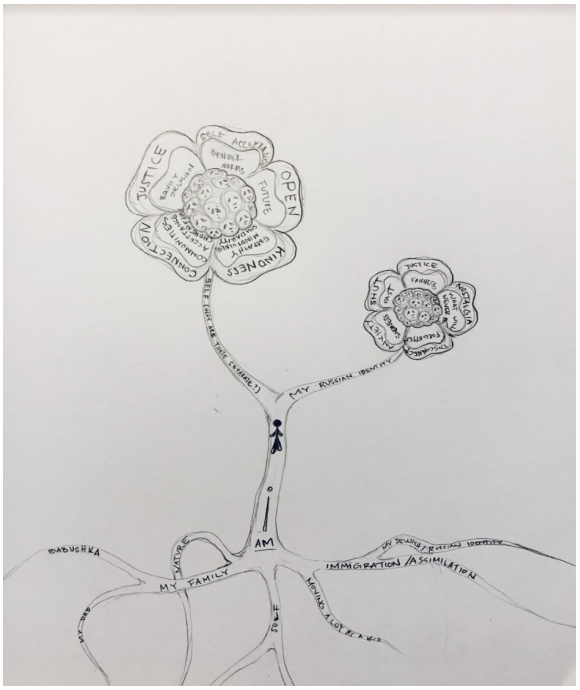
Collective story maps, designed by Stepha

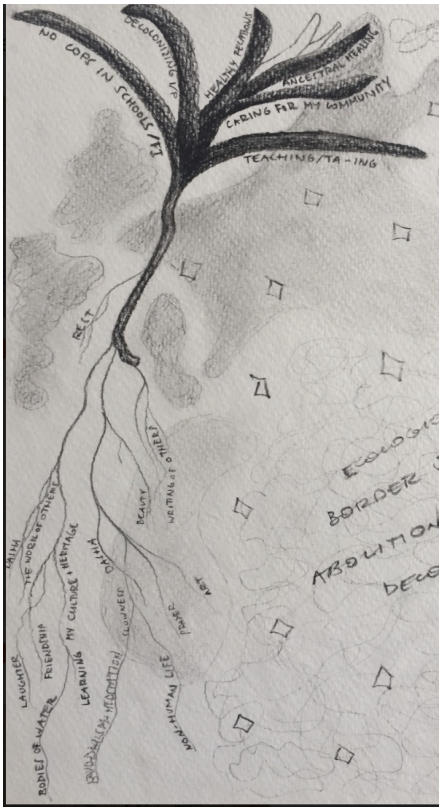


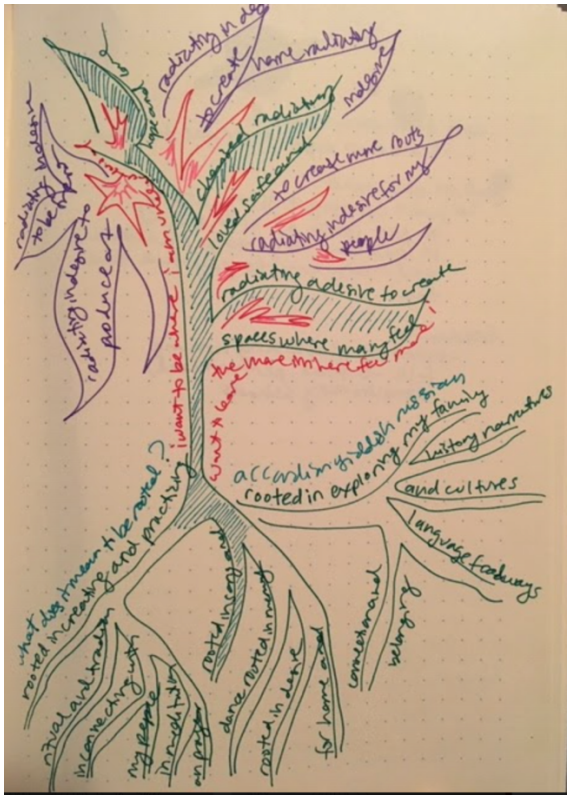
Appendix M

Examples of "Rooting and Radiating" activity from Kolektiv members









Appendix N

Kolektiv Diasporic Garden 2040, collectively-generated GoogleDoc

FSUQJ diasporic сад / garden: *in the year 2040...*

I, as an individual, am..

safe, surrounded by friends, thriving, courageous, powerful, supported by family
Unafraid and in community with others who are unafraid+
Happy, fulfilled and nourished by what I put my energy into

I am connected to my various communities, physical and virtual, spiritual and emotional, artistic and academic, through established brave and safe spaces that are accountable, warm, and constantly evolving.

I am connected to my languages, to my heritage and the cultures and history of the places I live and frequent, am connected to and learning about the people I surround myself with

-liberated, surrounded by family both chosen and blood who support and love me unconditionally
-have a loving community of mutual care, raising children,
-free +
-living collectively, growing our own food, raising children / animals together
- understood and valued +
- not doubting my belonging
- am not guided by economic concerns
- feel like I'm seeking abundance not avoiding scarcity
- playful and expressive +
- rooted in community +
-not averse/fearful of negativity, conflict, challenges
-thriving, creating, playing, nervous system regulated, more deeply connected to land,-+
grounded, and moving from a place of authenticity
-constantly trying to do better and questioning my beliefs and their sources +
- frankly, difficult to imagine my future. Hopefully fulfilled, at peace with myself and sense of self
- am called by my given name

FSUQJ diaspora is/looks/feels...

-Speaking our ancestral languages +
-Looking for safety in solidarity/alliance, not in whiteness or in Israel +
-warm
-finding belonging across diaspora (and in many places) +
Building intergenerational community ++
- Finding ways to pass our histories/inheritance forward in a positive way

Loving
Constantly evolving, but rooted in love and acceptance
Inclusive (not gatekeeping), supportive of its members
Has public representation
-solidarity with other communities
- connected to our radical histories (stories, heroes, sayings, "victories")
Something easy to stretch out your hand and grasp - easily accessible and very present
Not just trauma
Collaborating, kind
Is so present that there is room for nuance and variety
- coherent and humane politics :^) k
Connected, justice focused, mindful of both the past, and the heritage we all carry, and the direction we are moving forward understanding of nuance, full of joy
-still have a very good sense of humor and are devilishly handsome ;)
- consistently cooking familial & ancestral foods
accepting, non-judgemental, open, empathetic, honest, reliable

Society is/looks/feels…

- Able to meet everyone's physical needs/health needs (physical and mental)
> Intentionally inclusive
Resource allocation- people's basic needs are met
Structured around conflict as generative and as something that enables meeting individual and collective needs, rather than enabling destruction +
Anti-oppressive +
Balance of time spent on labor and on creativity/playfulness is more aligned +
Conditions for healthy living and thriving: good healthcare, education...housing, basic standard income +
Unbounded by walls, borders, prisons
Inclusive and with collective liberation -- no power, or hierarchy
Intergenerational, generative village <3
Accessible, inclusive, diverse. Caring for the most vulnerable.+ Kind, loving. In harmony with the planet.
Free of money, walls, prisons, police & borders
Basic needs are ensured for all people with dignity & respect
Still exists/we got our asses in action about climate change
Land has been rematriated!! + +
A non-broken Eastern Europe
- mutual aid in full force
-focused on equity and empathy, values kindness and difference
-a transformed relationship to difference, vulnerability, and imperfection
abolitionist, intersectional, diverse, equitable, communal, meditative.

Appendix O

"Fuck Assimilation," Stepha's submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat

Appendix P

"Here, we're white," Irina's submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat

Appendix Q

"Declare/Deny," excerpt from Irina's submission to the Kolektiv zine

Part 7. Additional eligibility factors.

Please answer all of these questions. If you answer "Yes" explain on a seperate paper.

1. Are you now, or have you ever been a member of, or in any way connected or associated with the Capitalist Party, or ever knowingly aided the Capitalist Party directly, or indirection through another organization, group or person, or ever advocated, taught, believed in, or knowingly supported or furthered the interests of capitalism? ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. During the period of 1492 – 1890, did you serve in, or were you or your ancestors in any way affiliated with, either directly or indirectly, any military unit, war campaign, raid, forced removal, ethnic cleaning, or genocide of Native American people? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   a. Do you or your ancestors participate in or benefit from the theft of Native American land, culture, languages, and/or spiritual practices? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   b. Do you currently have relationships with, support, or advocate for reparations of Native American people, land, culture, and sovereignty? ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. During the period of 1526 to 1865, did you or your ancestors participate in, or where you affiliated with, either directly or indirectly the trans Atlantic slave trade? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   a. Do you or your ancestors participate in or benefit from the theft of African American people, property, culture, languages, or spiritual practices? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   b. Do you currently have relationships with, support, or advocate for reparations of African American people, land, culture, and sovereignty? ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. During the period of 1897 to 2020, did you or your ancestors participate in, or were you affiliated with, either directly or indirectly Zionism? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   a. Did you or your ancestors participate in or benefit from the occupation of Palestine or the displacement of Palestinian people? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   b. Do you currently have relationships with, support, or advocate for reparations of Palestian people, land, culture, and sovereignty? ☐ Yes ☐ No

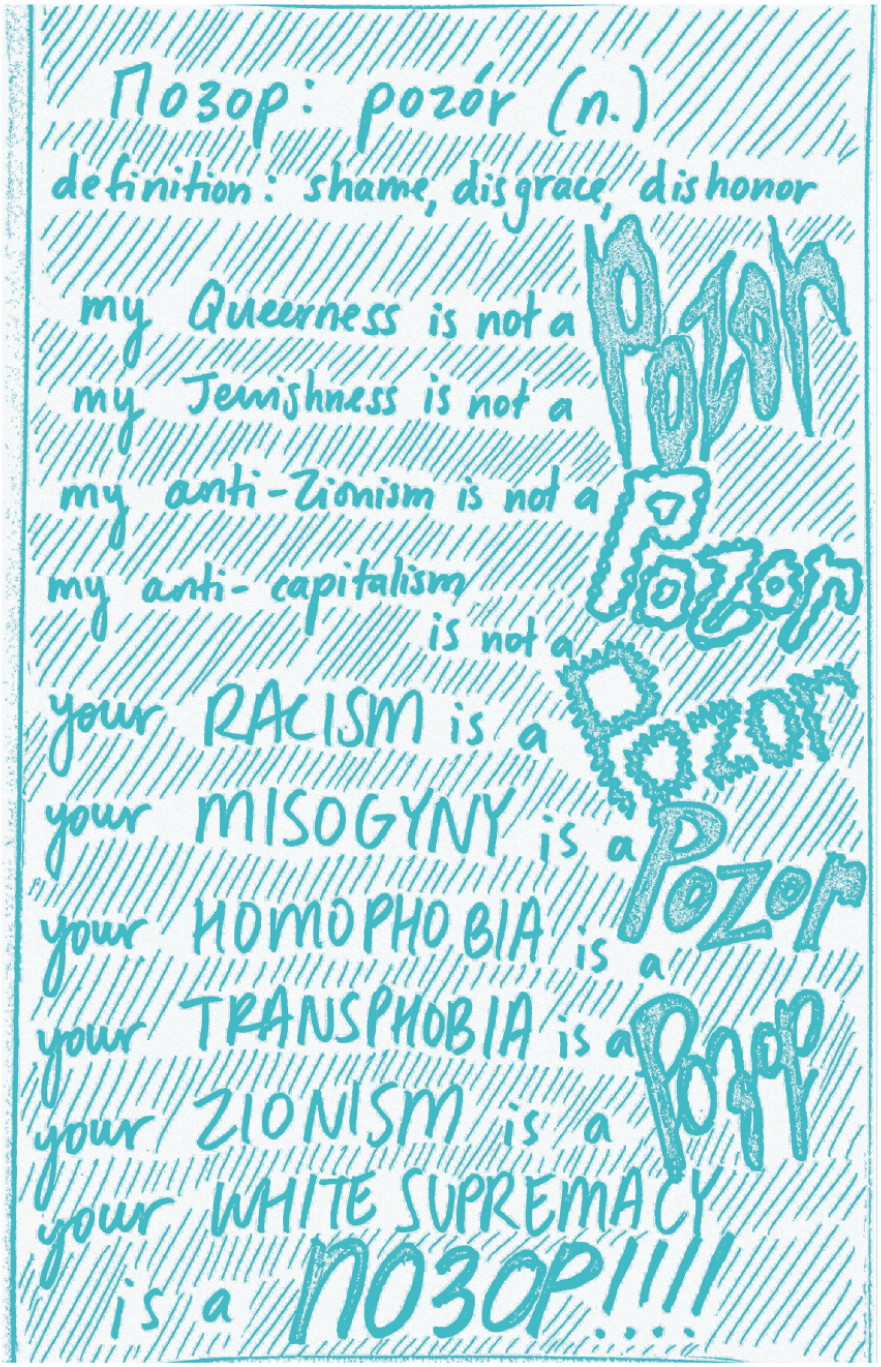
5. Have you at any time, anywhere, ever ordered, incided, assisted, or otherwise participated in or benefited from settler colonialism or white supremacy? ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. Have you or your ancestors at any time, anywhere, been harmed by settler colonialism or white supremacy? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   a. Have you or your ancestors been the victims of genocide? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   b. Have you or your ancestors been been victims of occupation? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   c. Have you or your ancestors been been victims of forced relocation? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   d. Have you or your ancestors been the victims of oppression? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   e. Have you or your ancestors been the victims of assimilation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

7. Have you at any time, anywhere, considered or taken action to repair the generational trauma and structural harm caused by white supremacy and settler colonialism? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Appendix R

"Pozor," Anya T.'s submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat



Appendix S

"Dear American Jews," My (Sophia's) submission to the Kolektiv zine/samizdat

Appendix T

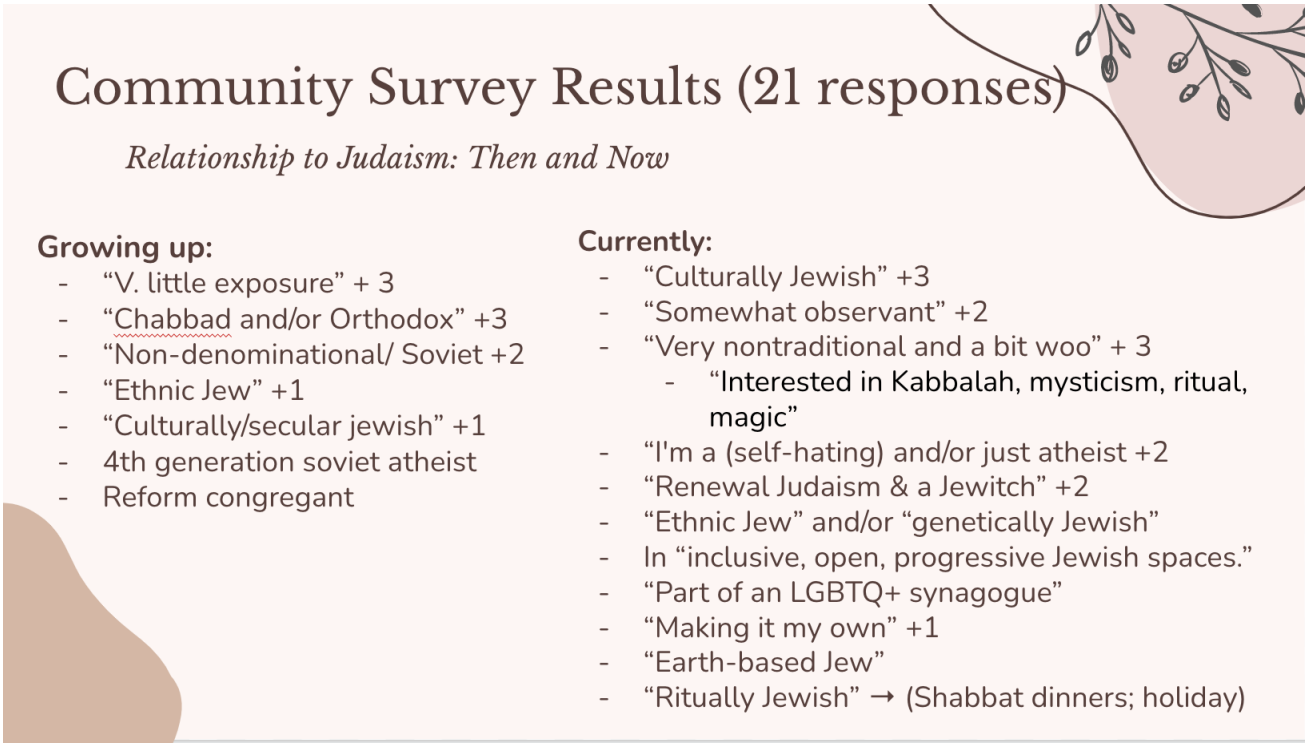
Screenshot from "Befriending Our Soviet Jewish Ancestors" virtual performance

Appendix U

Save-the-date image from Kolektiv Novyi God/ New Year 2021 virtual event

Appendix V

Survey results from Kolektiv survey on Jewishness/Judaism,
for synchronous co-learning session entitled "Kosher Pork" (Season 3)



Appendix W

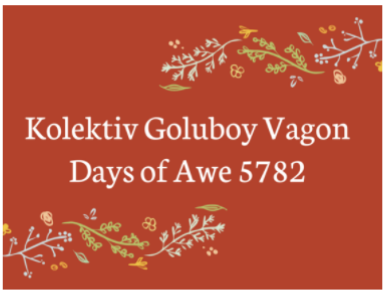
Save-the-date images from Kolektiv virtual Jewish holiday observances

HANUKKAH 2020: (1) Welcomes/Introductions/Check-ins (2) Candle Lighting (3) Relationship to + Our Interpretations of Hanukkah (4) Recipe share / backgrounds of latkes + other Hanukkah foods (5) whenever you want to leave - latke frying, hanging + drinking, eating!

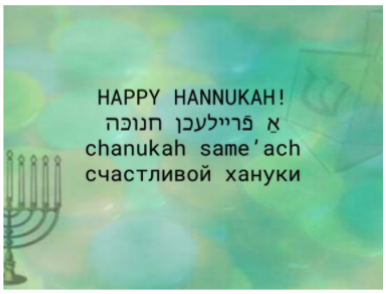
HIGH HOLIDAYS 5781 / 2020: (1) Welcome (2) Guided Meditation (3) High Holidays 101 + shofar blowing (4) Ritual - release (5) Closing - apples & honey + niggun (6) debrief

NEW YEAR / NOVIY GOD 2021: (1) sovmestniy stol & kapustnik featuring 14 performances + Dyadya Fima, Dyadya Roma and Tiotia Alla, (2) talent show and toasts, (3) dance party

PASSOVER / PESACH 2021: (1) Welcome (2) Pesach 101 (3) Pesach in the USSR - the Red Haggadah (4) Blessings (5) Collective FSU seder plate (6) Discussion (7) Rugrats (8) Closing



DAYS OF AWE 2021: (1) What are days of awe? (2) yablaki i miod, (3) collective Tashlich ritual, (4) group Shmita reflection



HANUKKAH 2021: (1) menorah lighting, (2) Hanukkah story and Hanukkah's pagan roots, (3) sharing a meal over post-Soviet tiktok

Appendix X

"The Four Mitzvot of Queer, Soviet Jewry" (2021), digital photographs of embroidered headscarves, by Krivoy Kolektiv: Irina, Aravah and me (Sophia)