"DON'T GOSSIP!": EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF PAST AND PRESENT IN POST-SOVIET, DIASPORIC IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

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"Don't Gossip!": Exploring the Intersection of Past and Present in Post-Soviet, Diasporic
Identities
(Under the direction of Dr. Jacqueline M. Olich)

In this master's thesis, I examine the identity of two Russian-speaking, diasporic

groups: the first, an elderly community of Soviet immigrants living in Brooklyn; the second,

an online community of Russian-speakers from all over the world. I investigate these

groups' post-Soviet identities through the lens of a Medicare scam involving the first

population, in which Nina Vatolina's (1915-2002) 1941 *Don't Gossip!* propaganda poster was

displayed to encourage complicity. I parse what the poster's role in the scam indicates about

the identity of its elderly, Brooklinite viewers, and analyze online, Russian-language

reactions to the illegal application of Vatolina's poster for clues into the identity of this

virtual diasporic group. I conclude that the former group is limited by its nostalgic

relationship with its Soviet past, but that the latter group can comfortably vascilate between

its Soviet and immigrant identities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"When my brain begins to reel from my literary labors, I make an occasional cheese dip."
John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces*

Although physically, this thesis is the product of two long semesters in Davis Library, symbolically, it is the culmination of years of love, preparation and support. Many people and institutions have helped me along my journey, and they deserve acknowledgement: first and foremost, I thank my parents, Drs. Ann R. Steiner and Richard A. Bidgood, for giving me the tools (genetic, behavioral, environmental, and material) to accomplish my goals, academic and otherwise. Second, I thank the Russian Department at Wellesley College, especially Dr. Thomas P. Hodge, for teaching me the importance of hard work and persistence in all things Slavic. Third, I thank my cohort at the Center for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, as well as the faculties of The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and Duke University for their warmth, humor, and encouragement; I also thank both The University of North Carolina and Duke University for their financial support in the form of two academic year Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships. Last but never least, I thank Marshall J. Thompson for his love, friendship, and patience.

I could not have done this without all of you.

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INTRODUCTION

Photo Credit: Robert Mecea/AP Photo, *The Washington Post,* July 16, 2010

Figure 1: Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division of the U.S. Department of Justice Lanny Breuer, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York Loretta E. Lynch, and law enforcement officials announce the charges against Drivas, Wahl, and others at a July 16th 2010 press conference in the U.S. Attorney's office in Brooklyn.

On July 16, 2010, the recently formed Department of Justice-Health and Human Services Medicare Fraud Strike Force arrested ninety-four people "for their alleged participation in schemes to collectively submit more than $251 million in false claims to the Medicare program." According to a press release from the Department of Justice, the arrests,

made in Miami, Baton Rouge, Brooklyn, Detroit, and Houston, constituted the "largest

federal health care fraud takedown since Medicare Fraud Strike Force operations began in

2007."[1] Within hours, newspapers across the United States had picked up the story, relating

through Associated Press and authored articles the staggering degree to which doctors,

nurses, and so-called "professional patients" had profited from lax regulating of Medicare

claims. The media exposed to the national eye the techniques the conspirators used,

including submitting false claims for unnecessary or never rendered services, and

underscored the federal government's commitment to work "aggressively-- and

collaboratively-- to pursue health care criminals...and to bring these offenders to justice."[2]

     The American print media's reporting focused specifically, however, on the role

of "elderly Russian immigrants" in an isolated scam perpetrated by the Bay Medical Care

clinic, a Russian-speaking health care center in Brooklyn. Accused of stealing over $72

million from the federal government, the scam's organizers, Drs. Gustave Drivas and

Jonathan Wahl, allegedly paid their patients "in exchange for using their Medicare numbers

and a bonus fee for recruiting new patients."[3] In the so-called kickback room, where patients

received bribes, task force agents found a copy of a 1941 agitation-propaganda poster by

Soviet artist Nina Vatolina (1915-2002) displayed prominently on the wall. The lithograph,

originally deployed to discourage viewers from revealing State secrets to the Nazi enemy

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[1]Press Release, "Medicare Fraud Strike Force Charges 94 Doctors, Health Care Company Owners, Executives and Others for More Than $251 Million in Alleged False Billing," *United States Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs*, July 16, 2010, http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2010/July/10-ag-821.html.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Press Release, "Medicare Fraud Strike Force Charges 94 Doctors, Health Care Company Owners, Executives and Others for More Than $251 Million in Alleged False Billing," *United States Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York,* July 16, 2010, http://www.justice.gov/usao/nye/pr/2010/2010jul16.html; Kelli Kennedy, "36 Arrested in Medicare scams totaling $251 million," *The Washington Times*, July 16, 2010, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/16/36-arrested-medicare-scams-totaling-251-million/

during wartime, depicts a stern-faced woman in a red kerchief with her index finger raised to her lips; below her face read the words "Не Болтай!" and the reminder, "будь на чеку, в такие дни подслушивают стены. Недалеко от болтовни и сплетни до измены."[4]

The poster's moment in the American spotlight began with an article by *New York Daily News* staff writers Kerry Burke and John Marzulli on July 16, 2010, entitled "82-year-old, 14 others arrested in $80 million Medicare scheme: cops." The piece was published following a news conference held by Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice Lanny Breuer at the U.S. Attorney's office in New York. During the conference, Vatolina's poster was displayed as evidence against the Brooklyn Bay Medical Care clinic.[5] It even served as the inspiration for United States Attorney of the Eastern District of New York Loretta E. Lynch's pun that, with the use of surveillance tools and personnel, the walls "had ears and they had eyes."[6]

In their article, Burke and Marzulli not only dwell on Vatolina's Russian-language poster, but also feature a photograph of Lynch standing solemnly next to a reproduction of the work displayed on an easel (fig. 1). The writers report allegations by the clinic's building manager Carlos Bowen that "[patients] came by the ambulette load...hundreds of them. All of them Russian. They turned away Hispanics, blacks, everybody else."[7] Through their

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[4]"Don't Gossip! Be on guard, these days the walls have ears. Gossip isn't far from treason."

[5]Kerry Burke, et al., "82- year-old, 14 others arrested in $80 million medicare scheme: cops," *The New York Daily News,* July 16, 2010, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/ny_crime/2010/07/16/2010-07-16_82yearold_14_others_arrested_in_80_million_medicare_scheme_cops.html; Christopher M. Matthews, "Brooklyn Healthcare Fraud Team Makes Big Splash," *Main Justice* (blog), July 16, 2010, http://www.mainjustice.com/2010/07/16/brooklyn-healthcare-fraud-team-makes-big-splash/print/#comments_controls

[6]Kelli Kennedy, et al., "Medicare Scams: 94 Charged in Schemes Totaling $251 MILLION," *The Huffington Post,* July 16, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/17/medicare-scams-94-charged_n_650043.html

[7]Burke, et al., "82- year-old, 14 others arrested in $80 million medicare scheme: cops."

focus on Vatolina's poster, as well as through their emphasis on the perceived nationality of the clinic's patients, Burke and Marzulli paint the clinic as a Russian "Medicare mill where 'professional patients' lined up in a 'kickback room' for payoffs." They suggest, through their visual focus on Vatolina's poster, a link between the Russian-speaking scammers in Brooklyn and the string of unrelated fraud operations busted concurrently throughout the country.[8] This framing of the crime, facilitated by Vatolina's poster, was perpetuated in publications throughout the nation.

In bringing to the forefront the alleged ethnicity of the scammers, as well as the physicians' use of a Soviet propaganda poster to communicate with their co-conspirators, the Department of Justice and newspaper reporters across the nation made two significant assertions about Russian-speaking immigrants. They suggested that old fears of Stalin's totalitarian regime continue to loom large enough to direct, control, and limit the behavior of this population. Additionally, they imply that this group identifies more strongly with their Soviet past than with their American present, allowing them to work with coethnics to cheat their host country. These assertions, which reached a substantial audience through American mainstream and Russian-language media outlets, became a portal for defining post-Soviet diasporic identity. Through conversation and debate, Soviet émigrés worldwide attempted to negotiate their stance on the issues of generation and nationality brought up by the poster's effective redeployment. In this way, the poster prompted this population of viewers to articulate the relationship between their Soviet pasts and their post-Soviet presents.

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[8]Christopher M. Matthews, "Brooklyn Healthcare Fraud Team Makes Big Splash," *Main Justice* (blog), July 16, 2010, http://www.mainjustice.com/2010/07/16/brooklyn-healthcare-fraud-team-makes-big-splash/print/#comments_controls

In this master's thesis, I am interested in exploring answers to two questions: First, what can Drs. Wahl and Drivas' decision to display Vatolina's poster in their kickback room tell outsiders about their perception of their patients' post-Soviet identity? And second, what do online reactions to their choice reveal about the Russian-language digital diaspora's own post-Soviet identity? The answers to these questions serve as a window into the multiple real and virtual identities of Russian-speaking, ex-Soviet immigrants today. They will provide insight not only into the nostalgic and cultural makeup of these diasporic groups, but also into their self-perceptions, and where they position themselves in relation to their Soviet past and post-Soviet present. As we approach the twenty-year anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, such a portrait acquires a particular salience; by accessing it through an event that questions post-Soviet, diasporic identity, I will emerge with a to-the-minute snapshot of these émigré communities.

This multidisciplinary master's thesis draws on theories and methodologies from a wide range of fields to answer my research questions. In my second chapter, I will establish how the patients' reaction to Vatolina's poster informs an understanding of their "self-perceptions of identity and minority status" using reception theory.[9] I will then situate the poster's redeployment in a long history of reappropriating official propaganda tools for unofficial uses employing art historical and sociological theory. I will also use cultural, linguistic and demographic studies of Soviet-Jewish émigrés in Brooklyn to evaluate their susceptibility to the fears, humor, and nostalgias evoked by the poster; I will pay particular attention to the perceived rejection of Soviet Jews by American Jews, examining how the

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[9]Janet Staiger, *Media Reception Theories* (New York, NY: New York University, 2005), 164.

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poster speaks to this problematic relationship.[10] Then, I will explore the potential for the

poster to serve as an advertisement of a particular set of behaviors and services using

marketing studies. Finally, I will interweave the unique qualities of the group I identify

through the poster to characterize this population's relationship to their Soviet past and

American present.

In my third chapter, where I examine the online, Russian-language reaction to the

clinic's use of Vatolina's poster, I will use studies of computer mediated communication to

explore the notion of a digital diaspora, explaining how and why the Internet has become a

locus for post-Soviet identity construction.[11] I will utilize linguistic theory to code and

analyze ten virtual conversations about the case from the standpoint of content, language

code switching, and avatar development based on fifty-four fundamental criteria. I will

indicate how changes in generation and lived experience move this community of readers

away from the poster's first horizon of expectation, opening it to new interpretations and

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[10]U.S. Attorney Loretta Lynch reported that, although the conspirators were all in the United States legally, she "did not have information about their histories outside this country, such as whether some of them were in the KGB or had criminal backgrounds." (Samuel Newhouse, "Brooklyn Feds Raid Russians in Largest Medicare Fraud Ever," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, July 16, 2010, http://www.brooklyneagle.com/categories/category.php?category_id=4&id=36809).   When concrete information about this patient body is unavailable, I rely on historical and demographic facts to substantiate my conclusions about this community's identity. "'Russian' New York is made up of mostly Jewish Russian speakers." According to sociologist Philip Kasinitz, when Jews were permitted to leave the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, over 500,000 emigrated to metropolitan New York. Beginning in the 1980s, Soviet Jewish families formed a "residential enclave and thriving commercial district known as 'Little Odessa' under the elevated train along Brighton Beach Avenue." Thus, while we cannot be certain that Drivas and Wahl's patient body included ethnic Jews, based on this group's age (over 65), the location of the scam (Brooklyn), and the fact that the clinic served Russian-speakers, we can be almost certain that it did. As a result, it would be methodologically remiss to exclude Jewish identity from this discussion. (Philip Kasinitz, et al., *Inheriting the City: The Children of Immigrants Coming of Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 23, 37 and Annelise Orleck, *The Soviet Jewish Americans*, *Volume 68* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 1999), 2).

[11]Many of these rely heavily on the pioneering work of anthropologist Arjan Appadurai as explored in his text *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

actualizations.[12] I will then apply historian Sheila Fitzpatrick's definition of *Homo sovieticus*

to my findings, showing how the Russian-speaking Internet diaspora has responded to the

case by picking elements of Soviet, American, Russian, and Jewish culture to create a meta-

identity they can tolerate.

       In my conclusions, I will collate the primary characteristics of post-Soviet identity

that the answers to these two questions yield. I will provide insight into how the Russian-

speaking émigré in Brooklyn reconciles her Soviet past and American present, and explore

how members of the Soviet digital diaspora parse their hybrid identities online. In exploring

on what levels this poster resonated with its audiences, and what this indicates about these

particular groups of viewers, I will demonstrate how Vatolina's poster functioned as a portal

for identity construction and evaluation for those who saw it first- and second-hand. This

will position me to suggest some further applications of my study, illustrating how this

research fits into broader conversations about post-Soviet, diasporic identity.

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[12]The first horizon of expectation is defined by German pioneer of reception theory Hans Robert Jauss and subsequent theoreticians as the horizon projected by the first reading of a work. (Anthony Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: Collected Works with New Essays* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) 42.)

CHAPTER 2

COMRADE STALIN, IN THE CLINIC, WITH THE POSTER: LOOKING FOR CLUES
TO BROOKLYN'S POST-SOVIET IDENTITY

In this chapter, I explore the question: what does Drs. Drivas and Wahl's decision to display Vatolina's 1941 lithograph poster in the kickback room of their clinic reveal about their patients? Specifically, I use the patients' compliance with the poster's message to inform my understanding of this population's relationship with its Soviet past and American present. Looking through this lens, I draw on scholarly research to examine several cultural characteristics of the poster's clinic audience. These characteristics inform the portrait of post-Soviet identity among elderly, Russian-speaking Jews living in Brooklyn that I paint here. My conclusions in this chapter bring to life one of two diasporic identities I investigate in this paper. They will also position me to explore nuances and developments in post-Soviet diasporic identity through comparison with a younger generation of viewers in Chapter 3.

It is easy to dismiss reflexively the role of Vatolina's poster in perpetuating the scam in Brooklyn, and to argue instead that bribery motivated these patients to stay quiet. Indeed, why would this population relinquish an easy way of making a large sum of money in the name of honesty? However, Drivas and Wahl deliberately selected this particular poster to be displayed in their kickback room, and special operatives agents uncovered the scam through wire-tapping and undercover reconnaissance, not through informants within the patient body. This indicates that the poster's message and its viewers' behavior were

congruent. Clearly, the poster resonated with its clinic audience on several levels, and these viewers took its message seriously. The ways in which I propose it did so are supported by demographic and attitudinal information provided by contemporary scholarly research.

<div style="text-align:center">METHODOLOGY</div>

Unable to interview Drs. Drivas and Wahl, or the seven co-conspirators arrested with them, I draw instead on information and theories gleaned from a variety of academic disciplines to answer my research question.[13] These include the fields of visual studies, media studies, diaspora studies, reception theory, and socio-linguistics.[14] I will employ a variety of theoretical perspectives to suggest reasons why this specific poster was used to communicate with this patient cohort in this scenario. I will explore what the poster's efficacy tell us about this audience, its relationship with its Soviet pasts, its Jewish identity in America, and its attitudes its members as a community. I will propose several different levels on which the poster could resonate with this viewership, tapping scholarly studies of this demographic for support and validation. In aggregate, my research in this section will provide a window into this enclave of Soviet immigrants through Vatolina's poster that will serve as a point of comparison with the Internet diasporic community I explore in the next chapter.

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[13]Those who were arrested include Drs. Drivas and Wahl, along with Sergei Shelikhov, Irina Shelikhova, Leonid Zhelesnyakov, Elena Girenko, Katherina Kostiochenko, and Veronykha Tchernytchenko (Press Release, "Medicare Fraud Strike Force Charges 94 Doctors, Health Care Company Owners, Executives and Others for More Than $251 Million in Alleged False Billing.")

[14]This portion of my analysis does not rely substantially on how other émigrés from the former Soviet Union living in Brooklyn imagine that they might have read the poster in the Bay Medical Care clinic's "kickback room." Although these voices are, from one standpoint, valuable to a discussion of this issue, they may minimize or obscure the capacity of this poster to have certain effects on viewers of which they may not be aware; this is especially true in a discussion of redeployed propaganda, whose intent is to foster a particular attitude in viewers without their knowledge.

ANALYSIS

In its original deployment, Nina Vatolina's poster was designed to articulate and reinforce the official ideology of the Soviet state among the masses; in Brooklyn, conversely, the work was used to support illegal activity among a group of ex-Soviet, émigré individuals. The unique qualities of the Medicare-eligible, Jewish-Soviet audience living in Brooklyn I explore here changed substantially the way Nina Vatolina's poster was read. The lithograph as deployed under Soviet power and this same work deployed in the context of the July 2010 Medicare scam became available for different interpretations as a result. Changes in viewership, including their ideological frameworks, relationship with the dominant culture, and nostalgia for an empire that no longer exists, permitted the same poster to serve these two radically different motivations in these two contexts.

In its first incarnation, the poster delivered its message to its viewers in a way that discouraged any interrogation. Indeed, like all Soviet propaganda, Vatolina's poster was designed to facilitate a particular, State-sanctioned behavior in a way that would happen without the viewer's conscious awareness. Art served this goal particularly well under Soviet power, where images were understood to have an objective message that resisted the convergence of artistic text and meaning through the eyes of the viewer. Instead, "the range of interpretations of the content of a work of art" was considered to be "by no means infinite" or equal in value," recommending visual media as a powerful tool for communicating the concrete ideologies of the State.[15]   The result was a cannon of propagandist works designed

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[15]Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 80.

to "predigest art for the spectator."[16] This genre of art was thought to obviate the need for viewers to formulate their own reading of its messages.

In its original deployment, the message of Vatolina was meant to be injected into the "inert" Soviet populace according to what political scientist Ellen Mickiewicz terms the "hypodermic effects model" of Soviet mass media. In this model, ideologically-supportive slogans, symbols, and visual representations of the State and its people bombard the audience in such a way that their meanings are absorbed just as they are presented.[17] As a result, the hypothetical reader adopts the messages and attitudes they advocate unquestioningly, denying her the opportunity to evaluate them.[18]

A visual final vocabulary, or the symbolic representation of fundamental concepts, is integral to the success of propaganda according to this model. The late American philosopher Richard Rorty first articulated the term final vocabulary in the field of linguistics to describe "the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives."[19] These words, for which there are no synonyms, are the only way a language has to identify such abstract notions as "true," "good," "right," and "beautiful." Without these words, it is impossible to express these fundamental ideas short of defining and explaining them.

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[16]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina (New York: NY, Routledge, 2000), 55.

[17]Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 181.

[18]A hypothetical reader is defined by Peter Rabinowitz as "all those ideal readers whose existence is created by the critic himself or herself...included in this category, for example is the *narratee*...the fictional counterpart of the narrator, the person to whom the narrator directs the story." (Peter Rabinowitz,"Whirl without End: Audience-Oriented Criticism," in *Contemporary Literary Theory* ed. George Douglas Atkins, et al. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 83.)

[19]Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

A *visual* final vocabulary, then, is a set of symbols that allows the deployer to express these fundamental concepts without encouraging the viewer to define them. In official propaganda, a visual final vocabulary allows the State to shape and direct the collective understanding of important ideological ideas through images. The Soviet Union's propaganda machine sought to conceive of and enforce an ideologically-supporting, visual final vocabulary for all its citizens as a way of maintaining control over them. In doing so, it successfully usurped images like that of a red star, a sickle and hammer, or a kerchiefed peasant woman, ascribing a specific meaning to them within the context of Soviet power. It accomplished this not only on flags and in film, but also, and perhaps most effectively, using a fixed visual lexicon displayed on propaganda posters.[20] The most compelling of these posters used visual cues that resonated with the greatest number of viewers, including generalized images of people, places, and situations that excluded few and avoided misreading.[21] As sociologist Victoria Bonnell argues, the repetition of this ubiquitous visual vocabulary on propaganda posters like Vatolina's turned works of art into indexical signs, imbuing them with ideological significance and State-constructed referents;[22] this ascription of meaning, in turn, allowed these posters to function as heuristic short cuts for their viewers, who adopted their messages immediately, without interrogating them.[23]

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[20]Theresa Sabonis-Chafee, "Communism as Kitsch," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev,* ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 365; Lev Trotsky, "Vodka, the Church and the Cinema," in *Problems of Life* by Lev Trotsky (London, UK: Methuen & Co., 1924)

[21]Karen Petrone, "Motherland Calling?" in *Picturing Russia: Explorations in Visual Culture* ed. Joan Neuberger and Valerie Kivelson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008)*,* 199.

[22]Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

[23]According to O'Shaughnessy, when used in visual propaganda, symbols show consumers in explicit, but easy to process, terms how the propagandist feels without inviting scrutiny or interpretation of her point of view. (Nicholas O'Shaughnessy, *Politics and Propaganda: Weapons of Mass Seduction*, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 6.)

In her text, "Communism as Kitsch," visual studies scholar Theresa Sabonis-Chafee draws a connection between the implementation of the hypodermic effects model to inject a visual final vocabulary into the masses, and what twentieth century Czech politician and philosopher Vaclav Havel called the "auto-totality of society." "As the vocabulary of the system becomes increasingly internalized--as the 'correct' answers become more reflexive," she contends, "the individual becomes more complicit, even if he or she does not fully believe the words of the vocabulary."[24] According to this philosophy, then, the original Soviet audience of Vatolina's poster was meant to understand reflexively and immediately the message it was designed to convey. Because of the autototality propaganda posters facilitated in this monolithic political atmosphere, their viewers, according to Sabonis-Chafee, supported the system's rule unquestioningly, while suffering under it at the same time.

This is not, however, the model according to which Vatolina's poster was redeployed in the Medicare scam revealed in July of 2010. Indeed, substantial changes in implied reader, context, and horizon of lived experience in Brooklyn allowed different aspects of the work to come into view before its elderly, ex-Soviet audience.[25] New "conditions of access and conditions of appearance" resulting from the poster's recontextualization opened the work to additional, secondary meanings in the Bay Medical

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[24]Sabonis-Chafee, "Communism as Kitsch," 365; Havel himself writes that, "if ideology originally facilitates (by acting outwardly) the constitution of power by serving as a psychological excuse, then from the moment that excuse is accepted, it constitutes power inwardly, becoming an active component of that power. It begins to function as the principal instrument of ritual communication within the system of power." (Vaclav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe,* ed. John Keane (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985), 31.)

[25]Wolfgang Iser, *How To Do Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Inc., 2006) 68.

Care clinic; these changes and consistencies provide insight into characteristics of the poster's viewing audience that I explore here.[26]

This understanding of the historical life of art as a triangular interaction between author, work, and public was first articulated by German pioneer of reception theory Hans Robert Jauss; his scholarship is predicated on the notion that, "because a work [of art] does not have an inherent meaning," but rather "becomes actualized....at the moment of its reception by a community of viewers," it is available for multiple readings when deployed in new contexts before new audiences.[27] Jauss calls the first reception of a work of art its "horizon of expectations" (*Erwartungshorizont*), a concept described by art historian Paul Smith as "a kind of historical stage against which the work is illuminated, poised to engage its prospective spectators."[28] As readers' horizons of lived experience grow and change with subsequent generations and historical contexts, new aspects of the work become apparent to different viewers. A work of art only becomes "actualized" upon a "fusion of two historical horizons, those of its history and its audience consummated;" in the context of the July 2010 Medicare scam, changes in population, generation, and ethnic identity shaped the way this actualization occured.[29]

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[26]Anne D'Alleva, *Methods and Theories of Art History* (London, UK: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd, 2005), 115.

[27]Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,1981), 54.

[28]Paul Smith, et al.,ed,, *A Companion to Art Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2002), 453.

[29]Smith, et al., ed., *A Companion to Art Theory*, 453.

This is not to say, however, that the original reading of Vatolina's poster by its ideal audience were lost entirely upon its redeployment in Brooklyn.[30] Indeed, because the poster "came into existence in a specific historical moment and therefore continues to carry the charge of its origin into its present reception," the original message of Vatolina's work, don't gossip, continued to be accessed by viewers seventy years later in Brooklyn.[31] That viewers read and heeded this warning in the poster provides insight into their ongoing relationship with the socio-historical context in which Vatolina's work debuted. The degree to which this group's reaction coincides with the poster's first horizon of expectation indicates how firmly it clings to or rejects Soviet identity; this makes Vatolina's poster a powerful and appropriate tool for assessing post-Soviet identity, especially absent the opportunity for interaction with the deployers or viewing population.

Owing to their age, many among the patient viewership likely consumed the poster in its original deployment, meaning that they shaped and were shaped by the work's first horizon of expectation. However, skepticism and negativity toward the regime present among an audience of elderly, Jewish ex-Soviets in Brooklyn affected the degree to which the poster's message could be directly injected into their subconscious.[32] Instead, I argue, the poster was deployed and received here, first, in a humorous and ironic way, based on this community's horizon of lived experience. By reappropriating an official symbol for an anti-official use, Drs. Drivas and Wahl advertise an irreverent, tongue-in-cheek attitude toward

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[30]In the recontextualization of a propaganda poster like Vatolina's, which relies on a fixed final vocabulary to communicate one meaning to an ideal viewer, this holds especially true.

[31]Smith, et al., *A Companion to Art Theory*, 451.

[32]Ewa Morawska, "Exploring Diversity in Immigrant Assimilation and Transnationalism: Poles and Russian Jews in Philadelphia," *International Migration Review* 38, No. 4 (2006): 1374.

the former Soviet State and, by association, toward American governmental authority. That they believed this treatment would resonate with their audience evidences this group's negative relationship with *official* Soviet life and authority.

This particular reuse of a Soviet propaganda poster is a continuation of a long tradition of socialist humor that treats ideological symbols ironically in order to call into question the authority of the state. Referred to in its late Soviet incarnation as *stiob*, this type of humor "differed from sarcasm or derision. It required a certain *overidentification* with the ideological symbols exposed to such treatment, often to the point that it was almost impossible to tell whether the symbols were supported or de-legitimized by subtle ridicule."[33] By reusing a Soviet propaganda poster to communicate an important, unofficial message to their patients, Wahl and Drivas downplay the seriousness of their actions, encouraging their audience to view them with humor and irony. I posit that this *stiob*-like treatment of Vatolina's work in America could have prompted its viewers to disregard the authority of the American government and its ideologies.[34]

In employing this type of humor to communicate with their patients, Drivas and Wahl evidence not only this viewership's familiarity with Soviet symbols, but also its appreciation for an irreverent treatment of them; this suggests a complexity in this population's relationship with the former Soviet Union, where profound disappointment in

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[33]Alexei Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev* ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999)

[34]Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 250; 252.

public life and tender nostalgia for private life dwell together in the collective memory.[35]

This paradoxical attitude coincides with this age group's many contradictory life experiences:

As historian Donald Raleigh indicates in his book, *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk About Their Lives,* the first Soviet generations both witnessed "success in transforming the country into the other superpower," and survived "shortages, deprivations, famine, arbitrary terror, relentless mobilization of people and resources, and a horrific war with its many telling consequences."[36] As a result of these tumultuous times, this generation experienced inflated expectations for a better life and deep disappointment in the failure of State institutions to invoke change.[37] Through the performative shift of its decontextualization by Wahl and Drivas, the poster highlights for viewers incongruities "between messages and cultural forms in the official and nonofficial spheres;" because of its redeployment in Brooklyn, it underscores that these dissonances exist here in the United States as well.[38]

Drawing on their patient body's existing frustration with the inadequacies and cultural complexities of the American health care system, the poster encourages viewers to feel let down by official government safety nets designed to protect citizens; this in turn

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[35]Narspy Zilberg, "In-Group Humor of Immigrants from the former Soviet Union to Israel," in *Language and Communication in Israel*, ed. Hannah Herzog and Eliezer Ben-Rafael (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers: The State University, 2001), 130.

[36]Donald Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk About Their Lives* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5.

[37]Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34.

[38]Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids: Transforming Power, Identity, and Aesthetics in Post-Soviet Nightlife."

facilitates a disaffection with and disrespect for the State's power.[39]   This reaction parallels

the disappointments in the shortcomings of Soviet institutions that eventually catalyzed the

USSR's collapse, ones that Wahl and Drivas may have hoped to revive through Vatolina's

poster.[40] This use of *stiob*-like humor suggests that the doctors may have hoped to redirect

their patients' disappointment in Soviet State authority toward a disregard for American State

authority. With this in mind, I suggest that the poster may have helped to rationalize

Medicare fraud among this population by harnessing ongoing negative feelings about the

Soviet system.

By reusing a propaganda poster in an unofficial way, Wahl and Drivas

communicate the behavior they seek from their patients while playing into an apolitical

disregard for the rules of the American system already in place within this community.[41]

They accomplish this by decontextualizing an official Soviet symbol, encouraging a

humorous but skeptical attitude toward State authority that I read as indicative of their

patients' troubled relationship with their country of origin. In spite of this dislike for Soviet

society, however, Wahl and Drivas' reuse of Vatolina's poster also evidences a disinterest in

engaging with and assimilating to American society. This is an attitude, according to

scholarly research, prominent among elderly, non-English speaking Soviet immigrants in the

United States. Because the poster's message in its original context suggested that spies were

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[39]Meryl Brod, et al., "Older Russian Emigrés and Medical Care," *Western Journal of Medicine* 157 (September 1992)

[40]As Padraic Kenney writes in an assessment of the Velvet Revolution in Central Europe, "Anti-communism did not mean...waging war against the regime, or even engaging in dialogue with the communists...In place of loathing of the regime, or the desire to reform it, came indifference." (Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.)

[41]Brod, et al., "Older Russian Emigrés and Medical Care," 335.

all around, in its American context it heightens distrust for cultural outsiders and advocates

an intense reliance on fellow Russophones for viewers of this generation.[42] By positioning

the American government and its agents as the enemy in the friend/foe dichotomy established

by Vatolina's poster, Drivas and Wahl reinforce the "shared dislike of American values and

cultural patterns" felt by older Soviet émigrés in Brooklyn. This helps sustain the "negative

relationship...between acculturation and the American and Russian cultures" already extant in

Brooklyn and especially the Brighton Beach neighborhood.[43]

Because this population is not only Soviet, but also Jewish, its attitude toward the

dominant culture is additionally complicated by its ambivalent relationship with American

Jews. Although this group's emigration to the United States was facilitated primarily by the

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, its subsequent integration into New York Jewish life

encountered many roadblocks. Therefore, in deploying this poster to discourage contact with

those outside the scam, Wahl and Drivas resonate with this population's existing "feelings of

being rejected by American Jews." As a result, the patient body was motivated to "turn away

from Americans" and "toward other Russian Jews," enabling a self-isolation of this enclave

of viewers from the dominant culture that facilitated their complicity with the scam.[44]

This feeling of rejection finds its root in the significant religious identity shift

undertaken by members of this population after their arrival in Brooklyn.[45] From an imposed

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[42]Steven J. Gold, "Community Formation among Jews from the Former Soviet Union in the United States," in *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Migration and Resettlement*, ed. Noah Lewin-Epstein, Yaacov Ro'i and Paul Ritterband (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishing, 1997), 277.

[43]Dina Birman, et al., "Acculturation and Alienation of Soviet Jewish Refugees in the United States," *Social & General Psychology Monographs* 120, No. 1 (1994)

[44]Gold, "Community Formation among Jews from the Former Soviet Union in the United States," 277.

[45]The majority of these, we can safely assume, were third- and fourth- wave Russian-Jewish immigrants.

Jewish identity leading to persecution under Soviet power, this group expected the chance to

embrace their Jewishness after moving to the United States. This transformation was

motivated in many ways by the immense social and political capital available to Russian

Jews in the United States.[46] This increased emphasis on Jewish identity was reinforced by

the

> many instances [in Soviet history] in which Jews were identified as the primary
> source of the country's ills...the consequence of this scapegoating has often been
> severe violence and repression directed against Jews – including, at different
> times, pogroms, purges, show trials, professional and educational quotas, bans on
> religious expression and ridicule in the popular culture.[47]

In the United States, Soviet Jews hoped, they could finally celebrate openly this identity that

had historically both defined and isolated them.

In fact, while the Soviet State and society subordinated this population because of

their Jewishness, American Jews rejected them for being too "Russian" (Soviet).[48] In large

part, this was owing to the fact that Soviet Jewish immigrants did not publicly practice their

religion in the same way as American Jews, as well as to other cultural and linguistic

distinctions. As anthropologist Fran Markowitz writes,

> Use of the Russian language, added to the unexpectedly demanding behavior at
> Jewish agencies and a surprisingly low amount of synagogue attendance on the

[46]David Laitin, "The De-Cosmopolitanization of the Russian Diaspora: A View from Brooklyn in the 'Far Abroad'," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 13, No. 1 (2004)

[47]James E. Gibson, et al., "Russian Anti-Semitism and the Scapegoating of Jews," *The British Journal of Political Science* 37 (2007): 194.

[48]In sociologist Philip Kasinitz' text, *Inheriting the City: Children of Immigrants Come of Age*, one Soviet-Jewish interviewee reports that, "It's like a joke. Back in Russia, I was considered to be a Jew. Here, I'm considered to be a Russian!" (Kasinitz, et al., *Inheriting the City: Children of Immigrants Come of Age*, 37.)

part of the immigrants combined to shape American Jews' perception of these Jewish immigrants as 'Russians'.[49]

This resulted in what can be termed the "supreme irony" of this population's immigration experience: they were too Jewish to be Russian in the USSR, and too Soviet to be Jewish here.[50]

I suggest that this irony opens the door to several other readings of Vatolina's poster in its Brooklyn context. The most significant of these, from the standpoint of identity, is that the poster urges these viewers not to reveal the scam to outsiders because of the ways it would detriment their acculturation into the American Jewish community. Indeed, one of the poster's messages in its redeployment is to keep the fraudulent kickbacks quiet from those who would attribute them to "religiously nonobservant, uninformed, and...culturally Russian" outsiders, further precluding this population from becoming Jews in the United States.[51] This reading suggests that this viewership perceives that it has a negative reputation among American Jews, and evidences its desire to integrate into the greater Jewish community more fully.

In addition to this interpretation, however, Drivas and Wahl's deployment of the poster in this way also indicates that they hope to hide behaviors that mark them as Soviet, rather than eliminate them. This reading of the poster, then, helps to reinforce this group's

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[49]Fran Markowitz, "Jewish in the USSR, Russian in the USA: Social Context and Ethnic Identity," in *Persistence and Flexibility: Anthropological Perspectives on the American Jewish Experience,* ed. Walter P. Zenner (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 87.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Joseph Flaherty, et al. "Demoralization and Social Support in Soviet-Jewish Immigrants to the United States," *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 27, No. 2 (March-April 1986): 150, quoted in Birman, et al., "Acculturation and Alienation of Soviet Jewish Refugees in the United States."; Birman, et al., "Cultural Transitions in First-Generation Immigrants: Acculturation of Soviet Jewish Refugee Adolescents and Parents," *Cross-Cultural Psychology* 32, No. 4 (July 2001).

unified isolation outside the dominant American culture and American Jewish identity. Through this use of the poster, Wahl and Drivas position the scam as the behavior of a "separate sub-group (apart from American Jews)" where their patient body can be "the Jews they have learned to be in the Soviet context."[52] It helps link the co-conspirators to an identity they continue to perceive as having deep cultural meaning (Soviet Jewish) rather than to one that elicits negative stereotyping by the dominant culture ("Russian"/Soviet).[53] In this reading, the slogan, *Не Болтай!* seems to suggest that viewers keep the scam private from outsiders for whom it would reinforce stereotypes about "Russians;" at the same time however, it is being used to encourage the very Soviet behaviors that form the basis of these detrimental stereotypes in the United States. [54]

In facilitating a split between Soviet Jewish and American Jewish identities, the poster's message also helps reinforce a mentality of trustworthiness and solidarity among its elderly Russian-speaking audience in its new context. The poster reminds viewers of their obligation to fellow Russophone scammers not to expose their co-conspirators should they be caught because it evokes their shared language and history.   The linguistic and cultural characteristics of the "Don't Gossip!" poster among this group of viewers reinforces that "all involved will keep their mouths shut; that if anyone is caught, he or she will not give up the others; and that the conspirators will do what they say they are going to do" because of the

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[52]Markowitz, "Jewish in the USSR, Russian in the USA: Social Context and Ethnic Identity," 87.

[53]Birman, et al., "First-Generation Immigrants: Acculturation of Soviet Jewish Refugee Adolescents and Parents," 464.

[54]In comments on American media websites that published the story, the extent to which this occurred once the scam was revealed is staggering; managing editor of *Russkaia Reklama* Leah Moses addresses these very concerns here: Nora Kurtz, "From Tbilisi to Brooklyn's Brighton Beach, Leah Moses talks about her journey and her work," *Voices that Must Be Heard,* January 26, 2011, http://www.indypressny.org/nycma/voices/459/news_1/news/

group's common heritage.[55] In this way, the poster plays on and provides support for the idea of trustworthiness inherent among members of the same socio-linguistic ethnicity. This is predicated on the extant notion within this community that a shared cultural background and kinship bind and obligate individuals to one another in "ramified interpersonal connections...within which people set valued, consequential, long-term resources and enterprises at risk to the malfeasance, mistakes, or failures of others."[56]

As Drivas and Wahl's deployment of this poster indicates, this attitude is widespread among this elderly Soviet émigré audience in Brooklyn, and results in a correlative lack of behavioral and identity assimilation with the dominant American culture. Among this viewership, the xenophobic attitude toward ethnic outsiders Vatolina's poster illustrates prevents this community from fully incorporating their American identity into their Russian-speaking Jewish identity. This factor limits the range of people with whom this group interacts, ensuring that certain attitudes and cultural norms are preserved.[57] In establishing an environment where members of the same background are motivated to deceive outsiders by a poster from the former Soviet Union, the doctors introduce the *svoi/ chiuzhye* paradigm frequently used in Soviet society to distinguish "us" from "them." This indicates where this audience positions itself in relation to its Soviet past, as well as to its new American homeland and compatriots.[58]

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[55]James O. Finckenauer, et al., *Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture, and Crime* (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 23.

[56]Charles Tilly, "Trust Networks in Transnational Migration," *Sociological Forum* 22, No. 1 (March 2007): 7.

[57]Sergei Tsytstarev, et al., "Relationship of Perceived Culture Shock, Length of Stay in the U.S., Depression, and Self-Esteem in Elderly Russian-Speaking Immigrants," *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 9, No. 1 (2000): 40.

[58]Translated as "us" and "them," the svoi/chiuzhye paradigm is explained in depth in Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 103.

Aside from the poster's ability to disenfranchise Soviet authority while preserving a Soviet Jewish identity, it is significant that Drivas and Wahl specifically selected a *Stalinist* propaganda poster to display in their kickback room. The doctors' decision to reuse Vatolina's work provides insight into the generation of their intended audience and this group's awareness of Soviet law. For viewers who are familiar with the context in which Vatolina's poster first debuted, the work in both its original and new contexts conveys a two-fold message. The first part of the message is that revealing secrets about the collective will make the collective vulnerable to outsiders. The second part of the message is that there are punishments for betrayal that are both harsh and quick to be administered. The poster warns viewers in both its original and new contexts not to expose the group. To reveal to disguised outsiders state or scam secrets would hurt the well-being of the collective while, on a more basic level, attracting authorities' attention to the existence of the group.[59]

Owing to their age and lived experience, there can be little doubt that the elderly Russian-speaking immigrants in Wahl and Drivas' clinic were aware of the punishment for treason to which the poster tacitly alludes. Treason was, according to Soviet constitution Article 64, the most serious crime committable in the Soviet Union, and warranted "deprivation of freedom for a term of ten to fifteen years with confiscation of property with or without additional exile for a term of two to five years, or by death with confiscation of

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[59]This mentality dates back to the poster's original deployment. Here, it was meant to support the Soviet myth that "there were saboteurs everywhere…Originally, the poster referred to the need to remain silent during wartime since rumors were said to aid the enemy. But the worker with her finger to her lips pointed to the enemy within as well." (Adele Barker and Bruce Grant, ed. *The Russia Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 398.) As the group's behavior and reaction to the poster suggest, these elderly Soviet Jewish émigrés are, on some level, similarly "at war" with the United States government and culture.

property."[60] What this audience could not know, however, is what the consequences for treason would be in the poster's redeployed context. Because of the criminal, rather than official, scenario in which the poster was reused, audience members in Brooklyn could only infer what would happen if anyone intentionally or inadvertently revealed the scam to authorities. By redeploying an artifact from the Stalinist era of Soviet power, Drivas and Wahl emphasize the aesthetic distance between the "horizons of expectation of the work's first readers and that of later readers." This process helped its Brooklyn viewers "highlight and re-engage what was so provocative of horizontal change on the level of aesthetic and, ultimately, lived experience" in the poster's original deployment.[61] The audience's awareness that there would be consequences for betraying the collective derived from the context of the poster's Soviet usage; in Brooklyn, Drivas and Wahl used this awareness to enforce complicity with the work's message.

By electing to use an image produced under Stalin and during World War II, Wahl and Drivas indicate that their patients are old enough to understand and be motivated by the poster's twofold message. They also show that this group is capable enough at speaking (seeing) Bolshevik to remain complicit with its message in order to gain the rewards provided by the scam while avoiding punishment.[62] The group was intended to recognize the socio-historical, generational context of the poster, reinforcing a fear of exposing the scam

[60]Ferdinand Joseph Maria Feldbrugge, *Encyclopedia of Soviet Law, Second Revised Edition* (Hingham, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1985), 784; William B. Simons, ed. *The Soviet Codes of Law* (Leiden, The Netherlands: University of Leiden Publishers, 1980), 91.

[61]Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Hermeneutics* (Rome, Italy: Gregorian University Press, 1996), 80

[62]Steven Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 336.

organizers or participants.   Additionally, Drivas and Wahl's use of this poster also evidences

their audience's disinterest in cultural assimilation in favor of retaining their Russian-

speaking, Soviet-Jewish identities.   Indeed, the friend/foe dichotomy posited by the poster

in its new context coincides with this group's belief in the trustworthiness of their compatriot

conspirators. The way the poster plays on preexisting fears, distrusts, and attitudes toward

American government and society makes it a particularly effective tool for enforcing

complicity among this group of age-appropriate viewers.[63]

In positioning Russian-speakers as members of a trust network based on ethnic

and cultural similarities, Vatolina's poster underscores the Soviet past that unites its audience.

The poster evokes the common social memories of this group that persist in spite of post-

emigration changes in class, religion, and rates of assimilation to the dominant culture. By

displaying an image that speaks to these shared experiences, the doctors at the Bay Medical

Care clinic, I suggest, gained access to their patients' nostalgias for another time and place

that exists in spite of their resentment toward the Soviet State and system.[64] Invoking this

collective nostalgia may have helped the doctors gain their audience's complicity in the

scam.

The poster's potential to elicit nostalgia in its viewers evidences another aspect of

this population's complex relationship with the former Soviet Union; the potential for a piece

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[63]"An immigrant cannot be expected to acquire American attitudes if the individual does not assimilate--for example, if he or she does not learn English...Aging [also] slows attitude change and tends to produce more conservative positions on social problems." (Victor Goldenberg, et al., "Social Attitudes of Russian Immigrants to the United States," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 136, No. 4 (1996): 423.)

[64]This phenomenon, whereby relics from the Soviet period take on a nostalgic appeal in spite of their relationship with the many problems of the Soviet era, relate to their ability to "restore an unambiguous point of departure, a return to a neat and stable social taxonomy." (Serguei Alex Oushakine, "Crimes of Substitution: Detection in Late Soviet Society," *Public Culture* 15, No. 3 (2003): 431.)

of redeployed kitsch to resonate with those who left the USSR voluntarily indicates that their attitude toward their former homeland is not entirely negative. Drawing on scholar and media artist Svetlana Boym's (1966-) writings about the power of images in fostering Soviet nostalgia, I propose that this poster elicited a specific type of nostalgia in those who viewed it in the post-Soviet United States. This nostalgic response, I argue, suggests a positive relationship to certain aspects of Soviet *private* life, youth, and feelings of belonging among some of its former citizens.

Vatolina's poster serves as an artifact of the original, personal context in which viewers remember it in its American context. Consequently, the poster hung in the clinic kickback room may have prompted viewers to feel a sense of longing for "the very real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities that the reality of socialism afforded--often in spite of the [Soviet] state's proclaimed goals."[65] A loss in authority and professional status as well as a feeling of helplessness as a result of cultural and language barriers upon moving to the United States positions this viewership to miss elements of their old life that the poster accesses.[66] These emotions can exist in spite of indifference or opposition to official State ideologies, and are strengthened by approaching older, visual texts from the perspective of new lived experiences. Indeed, as the space between the first horizon of expectation and the current horizon grows, there is continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories in viewers' interpretations of these works. The result

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[65]Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 8.

[66]Tanya Fitzpatrick, et al., "Older Russian Immigrants to the USA: Their Utilization of Health Care Services," *International Social Work* 43, No. 307 (2000)

is a partially nostalgic reading that departs sharply from the first horizon of expectation experienced by the ideal audience.[67]

The particular type of inconclusive and fragmentary nostalgia that Vatolina's poster could access has been identified by Boym as ironic nostalgia.[68] As Boym indicates, this manifestation of nostalgia relies on a re-conceptualizing of "home" as a mythical place that may have never existed as it is remembered in the here and now. This type of nostalgia can only be accessed from afar, whether from another time or another place, or both. It is a "romance with one's own fantasy" that would disintegrate if confronted with the realities of that past.[69]

Boym also suggests that this nostalgia, or an "ache of temporal distance and displacement," is cured by "a return home, preferably a collective one."[70] She emphasizes that the desire to return home is not rooted in a sense of longing, but rather in the anxiety that is prompted by those who point out historical incongruities between past and present. Because nostalgics want to replace history with a private or collective mythology of their pasts, neither the individual nor the group can be permitted to question "the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition."[71] In this way, the poster served as a particularly powerful nostalgic tool in the common space that is the Bay Medical Care clinic.

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[67]Maria Todorova, introduction to *Post-Communist Nostalgia* ed. Maria Todorova, and Zsuzsa Gille (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2010), vii; Athena Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity: An Ethical Reading of Exodus 4* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 235.

[68]Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 284.

[69]Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), xiii.

[70]Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, 44.

[71]Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, 45; Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xv.

I suggest that Wahl and Drivas recognized the potential for Vatolina's poster to help viewers escape from their vulnerable and insecure present to an identity in their remembered past that felt richer, more secure, and more appealing.[72] In displaying the poster, the doctors may have sought to increase the appeal of its message by helping viewers to identify with past versions of themselves, reclaiming their place in the now-absent collective through their nostalgic remembrances.[73] The type of remembering Vatolina's poster provokes could help viewers to construct and reconstruct their own identities, reinforcing their membership in a cohort with others who share that same sense of self. This process is particularly important for older immigrants who report in studies missing "concrete local sights or places remembered from their youth," like the collection of physical artifacts of which Vatolina's poster is a part.[74]

These qualities of Vatolina's poster suggest that Wahl and Drivas were aware of their viewers' nostalgia for certain elements of Soviet life. By displaying the poster, they indicate an understanding of the "fascinating mixture of sarcasm and nostalgia" for socialism that both characterizes and limits this audience.[75] Through the poster, the doctors communicate that they ascribe to this contradictory nostalgic worldview even as they make fun of it, increasing the appeal and acceptability of their scam in the eyes of their patients. This evocation of nostalgia through images, called the *fin de siècle* phenomenon, has been

[72]Barbara Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect," *Journal of Advertising* 21, No. 4 (December 1992): 13.

[73]Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, Y*esterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishes, Inc., 2002), 30.

[74]Ewa Morawska, "Exploring Diversity in Immigrant Assimilation and Transnationalism: Poles and Russian Jews in Philadelphia," 1374.

[75]Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 77.

used to great effect in American advertising for the baby-boomer generation over the past two decades.[76] Its success speaks to the ability of nostalgic images to elicit in the consumer a feeling of membership in a "supportive network that reconnects 'old friends' in a family-like structure."[77] This is a particularly compelling force for older Soviet émigrés, many of whom find themselves lacking not only the physical subsistence provided by the State but also the sense of competency and self to which they had grown accustomed in the Soviet Union.[78]

The *fin de siècle* phenomenon's power is evidenced by the popularity of "nostalgia-evoking products and appeals" in post-Soviet advertisements in Russia. As marketing specialists Susan Holak, Alexei Matveev, and William Havlena found in their study, in the past several years "new products have been introduced by Russian marketers to appeal explicitly to Russian consumers' nostalgic feelings...since the dissolution of the Soviet Union."[79] The notable success of these advertisements/packagings evidences the power of Soviet national symbols to sate a desire for the normalcy and security provided by the Soviet period. While some products have been reconfigured to evoke nostalgic feelings, others simply revert to the images they used under Soviet power. These nostalgic advertisements

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[76]Barbara Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect," 11-22.

[77]Barbara Stern, "Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect," 18.

[78]Brod, et. al., "Older Russian Emigrés and Medical Care."; it is also significant to note that "Cold war propaganda machines in both the United States and the Soviet Union or almost half a century engaged in establishing the "other" as the enemy." This means that, for Russian immigrants in the United States, preconceived notions on the part of Americans can usurp their actual identities. In this particular case, media framing of the scam contributed to this stereotyping. (Markus M.L. Crepaz, *Trust Beyond Borders: Immigration, the Welfare State, and Identity in Modern Societies*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 45.)

[79]Susan Holak, et al., "Nostalgia in post-socialist Russia: Exploring applications to advertising strategy," *Journal of Business Research* 61, No. 2 (February 2008): 176.

signal to consumers that their producers recognize and sympathize with a longing for select elements of the past.

In choosing to redeploy a Soviet poster, the doctors at the Bay Medical Care clinic, I posit, employed the same strategy used by post-Soviet advertisers to appeal to potential consumers. They utilized kitsch to signify their ability to provide the stability and security consumers lost with emigration to the United States. At the same time, by using Vatolina's work in this way, they underscore the inability of the American health care system to provide that same stability. Their reuse of Vatolina's poster to this end suggests that this group of viewers craves the familiarity and consistency of the Soviet Union, if not its day-to-day hardships; this quality helps reframe the kickbacks the patients received as a reclaiming of Soviet financial stability rather than as a reward for compliance with illegality.[80]

The ability of Vatolina's poster to evoke nostalgia is also linked to the fact that it, like others produced under Soviet power, was designed to be a referent of other common histories and myths. It successfully reinforced this collective history through its ubiquitous and consistent deployment across the entire Soviet Union. In a nation of largely illiterate peasants, Bolshevik leaders and political artists struggled to find a visual language through which to communicate convincingly their social and political ambitions to the people.[81] In order to resonate with the greatest numbers, Bolshevik propagandists elected to draw on

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[80]Eliot Borenstein details how a similar advertising technique facilitated Sergei Mavrodi's MMM pyramid scheme in 1994. He writes that, "MMM...even appropriated the trappings of national executive power, becoming a 'hologram state' that flirted with the idea of appropriating supreme government authority." The scheme's advertising campaign relied on the rehabilitation of the word *Khaliavshchiki*, changing its meaning from that of freeloaders to investors/partners, complicit in illegality. (Eliot Borenstein, "MMM and the Marketing of Melodrama," in *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society Since Gorbachev,* ed. Adele Marie Barker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 51, 61.)

[81]In 1918, close to 85 percent of Russians lived in villages. (Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, 22.)

preexisting, familiar images from "religious and folk art, classical mythology, Russian painting, and the imagery of Western European labor and revolutionary movements."[82] These quotations from other artistic contexts helped viewers reinterpret paradigms with which they had become familiar elsewhere (the holy and the damned) in a new political climate (heroes and class enemies).[83] These posters were designed using this lexicon to help viewers understand and support this new political regime as a continuation of other eternal struggles that touched their daily lives.

Vatolina's poster and others like it, then, encompass a myriad of other histories and institutions that go beyond that of the Soviet era in which they were originally deployed. Viewers of the poster are prompted to feel nostalgic not only for the past through which they themselves lived, but also for an eternal and collective conception of home and national myth.[84] In deploying and redeploying Vatolina's poster, its multiple contexts are bound up in one another, endowing the visual vocabulary it uses with a range of polysemic meaning: like the *matreshka* doll so often used to symbolize Russia, each history and context is absorbed and encased in the next history or context as the poster is conceived of, deployed, and redeployed on a forward-moving time line. Vatolina's poster, then, took on several different

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[82]Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, 23.

[83]Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*, 23.

[84]In Vatolina's poster, we see not only the image of a typical peasant woman who is evocative both of the *narod* and of Mother Russia, but of the face of the author herself, upon whom the portrait is based. Her red kerchief calls up associations with the Red Army, while her sternness reminds viewers of the hardship of war and the sacrifices it demands; That Vatolina's poster was published during the Great Fatherland War also endows it with a unique significance in the Soviet and post-Soviet memory. Sovietologist Amir Weiner reminds us that, although "Fifty-five years have passed...the wounds of a four-year war with Nazi Germany have yet to heal." (Amir Weiner, "In the Long Shadow of War: The Second World War and the Soviet and post-Soviet World," *Diplomatic History* 25, No. 3 (December 2002): 443.) Scholar Led Gudkov even goes so far as to assert that the legacy of the War and the cultural trauma it brought about in the Soviet Union are "the most potent symbol[s] of identification in present-day Russia, and the sole prop for national self-belief." (Lev Gudkov, "The Fetters of Victory: How the War Provides Russia With Its Identity," *Eurozine,* May 3, 2005, http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2005-05-03-gudkov-en.pdf, 1.)

context-specific meanings when displayed by Wahl and Drivas; it acquired the ability to prompt not only negative memories of the Soviet state, but also positive associations with conceptions of the homeland, belonging, and memory.

Sociologist Georgia Lagoumitzi finds that the use of nostalgia as a point of appeal for ethnic minorities, refugees and immigrants reinforces their status as outsiders in the dominant society by positing the idyllic nostalgic home against the challenging new home. In her study of repatriated Pontic Greeks, she concludes that, "nostalgia allows evasion from the coercion of social bonds by searching for a 'home' outside the hegemonic logic of the national group."[85] Nostalgia positions the remembered home favorably against the current place of residence when, as scholar Andreea Deciu Ritivoi suggests in her text *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity,* "the nostalgic attempts to rebuild a lost world, to rediscover her lost paradise" by "relating the new environment to the old, familiar one."[86] The potential for Vatolina's poster to access a nostalgic vision of the past is related to this audience's difficulty finding a new identity within the structure of present.[87] By invoking a comparison of the poster's original deployment with its Brooklyn recontextualization, Wahl and Drivas underscore the "hermeneutic differences between the former and the current understanding of the work," raising to consciousness the "history of its reception, which

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[85]Georgia Lagoumitzi, "The Uses of Nostalgia in the 'Imagination' of Diaspora: The Case of the New Pontic Greek Refugees" (paper presented at Diasporas: Exploring Critical Issues, 3rd Global Conference, Mansfield College, Oxford, July 7-9, 2010), 5.

[86]Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity*, 137.

[87]For a more in-depth discussion of the details of this process, see Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," in *Yesterday's Self: Nostalgia and the Immigrant Identity.*

mediates both positions."[88] The result is a measuring of past against present where the past, and therefore, the space and mentality where it is deployed, are always favored.

In this chapter, I have explored and suggested answers to my first research question, assessing why Drs. Drivas and Wahl chose to redeploy Nina Vatolina's 1941 Soviet poster in the kickback room of their clinic. Using scholarly studies to contextualize the different ways in which Vatolina's poster could resonate with its Brooklyn audience, I uncover four likely characteristics of this patient group: I find that, while their attitude toward the Soviet State may be irreverent, their memories of their *personal* pasts are, at least in part, nostalgic. I also determine that, although this cohort lives in America, they relate more closely to their Soviet identities. This combination of characteristics indicates that this group has, in many ways, resisted forging a new, hybrid identity combining the past and the present. The multiplicity of identities experienced by these elderly, Russian-speaking Jews limits identity construction rather than encourages it, and compels them to obey the exhortation of Vatolina's poster.

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[88]Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* trans. Timothy Bati (Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis University Press, 1982), 20, quoted in Wolfgang Iser, *How To Do Theory*, 57

CHAPTER 3

**"THESE DAYS, EVEN THE WALLS HAVE EARS": LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF
THE POST-SOVIET, DIGITAL DIASPORA**

In the previous chapter, I answered my first research question, using Vatolina's poster to access characteristics of the Soviet diaspora community involved in Drivas and Wahl's scam.   In this chapter, I tackle my second question: How have Russian-speakers worldwide reacted to the role of Vatolina's work in a scam that defrauded the American government? Widespread media coverage of the poster, which was seized as evidence in court proceedings against the Bay Medical Care clinic staff and patients, attracted the attention of Russian-speakers worldwide; that the image serves as the *de facto* illustration for a crime committed by "Russian" émigrés has elicited diverse reactions among members of the Soviet diaspora. The poster's use, and the American print and sound media's fixation on it, has motivated this population to consider and debate their many intersecting national, post-national, religious, and cultural identities.

In this chapter, I will focus on virtual, Russian-language reactions to the English-language media's focus on Vatolina's poster. Using content analysis of ten diverse, Russian language discussions of the case, I will highlight key themes in these reactions to Vatolina's poster that provide insights into the self-perceived identity of members of the Soviet Union's digital diaspora. Like the previous chapter, which sought to explore the unique characteristics of the clinic's target audience as revealed by the poster, this chapter will paint

a dynamic picture of members of the Russian-speaking digital diaspora through their reaction

to the poster. Nearly twenty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the appearance of

this poster in Brooklyn and the academic and popular conversations it has sparked provide a

contemporary window into the relationship between Russian-speakers, the former Soviet

Union, and their new homes.

Because the Internet has become a vital sphere in which Russian-speakers all over

the world interact with one another, my analysis of Russian-language reactions to Vatolina's

poster will also contribute to ongoing scholarly conversations about "digital diasporas,"

which are becoming an increasingly important way of studying cultural identity.[89]

Specifically, I hope to show how the online material I analyze fits into the larger role of

"digital diasporas" in producing "rituals of maintaining solidarity in communities, of

commemorating and mourning, of mocking others' versions of history and their memories."[90]

In examining the online reactions to Vatolina's poster's media presence, I provide a topical

trope through which to explore the many different affiliations and allegiances with which

Soviet immigrants self-identify online. By analyzing Russian-language responses to one

particular issue, I illustrate the myriad intersecting identities Soviet immigrants perform two

decades after the collapse of the USSR.

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[89]A "digital diaspora" is an online, public sphere that enables members of a diaspora to create a linked community even as their members live in geographic dispersal. (Angel Adams Parham, "Internet, Place and Public Sphere in Diaspora Communities," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14, No. 2/3 (Fall/ Winter 2005): 349.); Press Release, "Russia has Most Engaged Social Networking Audience Worldwide: Yandex Reached Nearly 80 Percent of Russian Internet Audience in August 2010," *ComScore,* October 20, 2010, http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases/2010/10 Russia_Has_Most_Engaged_Social_Networking_Audience_Worldwide/%28language%29/eng-US

[90]Vera Zvereva, "Diasporas and the Language of Memory in Russia and Ukraine," *Memory at War Inaugural Workshop, King's College,* June 2010, http://www.memoryatwar.org/publications-list/Zvereva%20paper %20workshop%20June%202010.pdf

The misrepresentations of Russian involvement in the scams nationwide brought about by the American media's focus on Vatolina's poster elicited a wide range of reactions on Russian-language online news sites, blogs, and forums. These responses, while divided according to self-identified national, religious, and cultural lines, represent a global attempt on the part of Russian-speakers online to situate themselves individually and as a community in relation to their Soviet pasts and post-Soviet presents. Using the commenting capabilities of online newspapers, as well as those on blogs and chat sites, Russian-speakers all over the world are engaging with the cultural implications of the American media's obsession with Vatolina's poster. These online conversations provide the various ethnic niche of the greater immigrant population with the opportunity to compare itself with stereotypes about "Russians" brought up by the American media's fixation on Vatolina's poster. In short, for all Russian-speaking groups, the use of the poster by the doctors in the Bay Medical Care clinic and its subsequent spotlight in the media have introduced a portal for creating and establishing culture and nationality; the poster has thus been redeployed a third time as a tool for defining post-Soviet, global identity. Here, I seek to explore what is being said in this conversation, and how repeated motifs compare and contrast with the conclusions I drew in my first chapter.

INFORMATION ON INTERNET IDENTITY

Before I begin my analysis, it is important to note how the use of Internet data as the basis for an identity conversation to the exclusion of other types of communication, including face-to-face interaction, both enhance and problematize my conclusions. First,

because the Internet is largely geared toward younger people, older people, including many

first-generation immigrants from the former Soviet Union, may be excluded in some way

from this conversation.[91] This means that I focus here on a community from a different

generation than that which I examined in my first chapter.[92] Second, demographic

information about the people participating in this online conversation is typically not

provided in order to protect users' anonymity.[93] While this is, in some ways, problematic

because it prevents us from seeing who is participating in this conversation from the

standpoints of socio-economic status, age, place of immigration, year of immigration,

education, and other defining factors, in other ways, it is actually helpful. Indeed, because of

the anonymity the Internet provides, participants can self-identify as any number of ethnic or

religious identities without fear of face-to-face discrimination, and are free to interact with

groups they might avoid in real life; these are the conversations that will prove most

revealing to this discussion.[94] Third, those who comment on the Internet are a self-selecting

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[91]95% of people ages 18-29 use the Internet in America while only 42% of people 65 and over use it. ("Demographics of internet users," April 29-May 20, 2010, *The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project,* http://www.pewinternet.org/Static-Pages/Trend-Data/Whos-Online.aspx.) In Russia, correspondingly, the age of the average Internet user is 30 years old. ("Сколько нас, какими мы были, чего достигли?" *День интернета 2010: ежегодный городской праздник,* October 1, 2010, http://www.ufacity.info/internet_day/2010/)

[92]Research in 2006 indicated that the prevailing profile of the visitors to Russian-language diasporic Internet sites is young people, ages 20-35, who have resided in the host country for over five years, have an academic education, and are middle-class. (Marina Zeltser-Shorer, "Russian Diaspora On-Line: Community of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union on the WWW," *Trans: Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften,* No. 16 (April 2006))

[93]The extent to which there is actual anonymity online is debatable. (See Helen Kennedy, "Beyond Anonymity, or Future Directions for Internet Identity Research," *New Media and Society*, 8 (2006), 864.) We will encounter linguistic and cultural cues in the data analyzed in this paper that challenge the notion that the Internet is a completely anonymous locus. Nevertheless, the sense that the Internet is an anonymous forum emboldens participants to express their true feelings. (See Nelly Elias, et al., "Spinning the Web of Identity: The Roles of the Internet in the Lives of Immigrant Adolescents," *New Media and Society* 11, No. 4 (2009): 536.)

[94]Parham, "Internet, Place, and Public Sphere in Diaspora Communities," 349; For a particularly relevant discussion of what this can mean for certain groups, see: Paul Goble, "Internet Helping to Define Identity of Russia's Muslims, New Study Says," *Georgian Daily Independent Voice,* November 9, 2010, http://georgiandaily.com/index.php option=com_content&task=view&id=20369&Itemid=72

group of individuals motivated to articulate something specific about this case and about the way they relate to the coverage of Vatolina's poster.[95] Although this use of Internet sources affects the range of opinions we encounter online, we have few alternatives; by looking at letters to the editor, we face the same problems while skewing the age demographic high and eliminating the potential for cross-generational comparison in these two communities. By holding focus groups, we introduce the possibility of participants hiding their feelings in the face of an outsider. All things considered, the Internet provides the best way to avoid these pitfalls, and demonstrates in an exciting, real-time, topical way how new technologies are being incorporated into the processes of performing diasporic identity, one that is particularly popular among Russian-speakers.[96]

METHODOLOGY

In my large-scale search for Russian-language responses to the English-language articles featuring Vatolina's poster, I used the Russian search engine Yandex.ru and looked for the terms "не болтай" and "медикэр."[97] I chose these terms because I wanted to examine how the use of Vatolina's poster in the scam framed the Russian-language responses the case elicited. My search resulted in thirteen sources, but I eliminated two because they were summaries of the facts of the case on which no readers reacted. Of the comments,

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[95]This is opposed to those who "lurk" online, or read without commenting.

[96]Press Release, "Russia has Most Engaged Social Networking Audience Worldwide: Yandex Reached Nearly 80 Percent of Russian Internet Audience in August 2010."

[97]Google and other popular, American search engines are notoriously bad at handling Russian language searches. I chose Yandex, therefore, to conduct my search for Russian-language results, even though its results may provide more duplicates than a web scraper: Andy Atkins-Krüger, "Yandex Continues to Thrive in Russia," *Search Engine Land* (website), November 2, 2010, http://searchengineland.com/yandex-continues-to-thrive-in-russia-54536 utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+searchengineland+%28Search+Engine+Land%3A+Main+Feed%29

forum conversations, and online editorials that comprise these sources, participants respond either to Russian-language summaries of the facts of the case (the version most frequently used of these is by Sergei Merinov) or to online opinion/editorial pieces in Russian on the English-language media's framing of the scam and its focus on Vatolina's poster.[98]   There is no way of ascertaining whether all the Russian-speaking respondents whose opinions I analyze read the original articles in its English, and I can only speculate on how doing so might have affected their responses.[99]

After collecting my Russian-language responses, I coded them, looking for terms and themes that indicated first, that the online conversations Vatolina's poster sparked dealt with larger-scale identity formation and second, helped to identify specifically which facets of identity. I completed my coding without the help of a language analysis bot because my data sample was of a manageable size. Because the websites I found that addressed Vatolina's poster were all geared toward a Russian-speaking, diaspora audience, I looked for linguistic cues such as transliterated English words in the responses to indicate which international identities were being layered over or reconciled with a Soviet identity to create a new, hybrid persona. I also looked for positive and negative references to the Soviet Union and to non- or ex-Soviet countries to gauge to which degree the English-language coverage of the poster spurned anger or nostalgia for the past. Additionally, I searched for terms and references to gender differences, and religious and cultural references to determine the role these signifiers played in this online conversation about identity.

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[98]This is the article published in *Российская газета*. It can be found here: Сергей Меринов, "Не Болтай! Мошеники в США исользовали советский плакат," *Российская газета,* July 19, 2010, http://www.rg.ru/printable/2010/07/19/vrachi.html

[99]In some instances, forums provided a link to one of the English-language articles covering the case; in other instances, commenters responded to Russian-language coverage of the case.

Because studies of the Internet from a socio-anthropological, rather than computer science, perspective are still a relatively new phenomenon, scholarly findings suggest several different, and sometimes contradictory, methods of data collection and analysis. Some, like sociologist Emily Ignacio, find that that the most appropriate model for examining a diaspora as it takes place on the Internet in various diasporic landscapes--chatrooms, new sites, social networking sites, etc.--includes a mixture of participant observation and conversation/language analysis.[100] Others, like women's studies scholar Rose Marie Kadende-Kaiser, remind us that "simulations of actual interactions where a researcher actively seeks participant involvement in a planned experiment...fail [] to stimulate 'natural' communication in a virtual world."[101] She suggests instead that resisting interfering in the "interactive internet process, where the users are free to intervene whenever they feel the need to, without coercion by any outside force," is the most appropriate approach for data collection, preferring instead to rely primarily on interactions that had already taken place for her data. This is because, "on some occasions, these [wireless] communities do not even form around a central person, place, corporeal organization or with the benefit of face-to-face interaction among members."[102]

Although each of these techniques has merit, I elected to rely heavily on the model recommended by scholars in Kadende's camp. I looked only at the comments I collected online without participating in the conversation or seeking to correspond with

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[100]Emily Noelle Ignacio, *Building Diaspora: Filipino Cultural Community Formation on the Internet* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 13.

[101]Rose Marie Kadende-Kaiser, "Interpreting Language and Cultural Discourse: Internet Communication among Burundians in the Diaspora," *Africa Today* 47, No. 2 (2000): 125.

[102]Philip N. Howard, "Network Ethnography and the Hypermedia Organization: New Media, New Organizations, New Methods," *New Media and Society* 4, No. 4 (2002): 556.

respondents outside of the Internetscape. I chose this method of research for several reasons, some logistical and some theoretical. First, in this project, I am not interested in exploring how the online community I examine is an extension of a real-life diaspora community; in fact, because the Internet permits us to hear from participants all over the world, it would be nearly impossible to find a physical community that corresponds to the virtual group we encounter online. Second, because scholarly research shows that unique qualities of the Internet (a sense of anonymity, the ability to connect with people all over the world, the freedom to explore new personaes) facilitate conversations about diasporic identity, I did not research the lives of the respondents outside the e-diaspora. I focused less on the fact that they were extending their diaspora on the Internet and more on what their responses said and how the many freedoms of the Internet helped this conversation happen. Third, I studied all the Russian-language, online responses to the scam I could find between July and November 2010. By the time my data collection began, the threads on the forums and the responses to the op-ed articles I encountered were already dead. Although it would be an interesting extension of this project to restart these conversations several months after the fact, doing so would change my body of responses from one expressed organically to one facilitated by an outsider.

DIGITAL DIASPORAS

Initially describing the larger Jewish community displaced from Israel, the term diaspora now refers to any ethnic or national group who has elected or been forced to abandon their homeland. Diasporas communities around the world include Armenians,

Greeks, Chinese, Indians, Lebanese, Baltic Germans and, of course, former Soviet citizens both abroad and in the countries of the former Soviet Union.[103] Primarily, experts in the field research and evaluate the unique qualities of various diaspora communities, particularly in relation to both the dominant cultural identity in their new homelands and their compatriots in their original homelands.[104] They focus on ways that diaspora communities maintain ties with one another and with their homelands, while incorporating their immigrant identity into a new, hybrid persona.

What is a relatively new area of exploration in diaspora studies, however, is the role that computer-mediated communication (CMC), including the Internet, plays in creating, articulating, or blurring the lines between diaspora communities abroad and their homelands. Digital diasporas, their formation, and their role in maintaining and changing a community's identity appeared as a focal point of scholarly inquiry in fields as diverse as anthropology, sociology, media studies, and cybernetics in the mid-1990s.[105] Predicated on the notion that "the resources that can be accessed via information technologies [such as the Internet] are critical to the development and nurturing of communities," scholars have begun developing new ways to evaluate the importance of online chat rooms, forums, news sources, and expert-specific websites in constituting virtual places to perform diasporic identity. [106] Following a

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[103]Rogers Brubaker, "The 'Diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, No. 1 (January 2005): 2; I consider Russian-speakers in the former Soviet countries to be members of the Russian-speaking diaspora because they were forced out of the Soviet empire by its collapse in 1991.

[104]For a particularly informative assessment of how this process yields hybrid identities among Russian-Jewish adolescents in Israel, see Elias, et al., "Spinning the Web of Identity: The Roles of the Internet in the Lives of Immigrant Adolescents."

[105]Paul C. Adams, et al., "India.com: The Construction of a Space Between," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, No. 4 (2003): 415.

[106]Ramesh Srinivasan, et al., "Diasporic Information Environments: Reframing Immigrant-Focused Information Research," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 58, No. 12, (2007): 1737.

pioneering study by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai examining the importance of new forms

of electronic media in creating a "more complicated, disjunct, hybrid sense of local

subjectivity," many diverse scholars have begun to look with interest at the unique

phenomenon of the e-diaspora.[107] Scholars explore these "ethnoscapes" as virtual spaces for

members of cultural minority groups to cultivate "new ties...because of a common identity

that is based on a former place of residence."[108] These online communities allow immigrants

to "discover or sustain that commonality with those 'back home' and with others who have

migrated," meaning that, according to scholars, participants become "much more likely to

continue to retain strong ties to their region of origin" than they were before the advent of

digital diasporic communities.[109]

   With an eye to these new innovations in the "doing" of diasporas, scholars from a

variety of disciplines have begun to develop research techniques and methodologies for

examining these virtual spaces with the goal of extracting the significant and evolving role

CMC plays in diasporic identity formation. Pioneering studies in this new virtual turn have

looked explicitly at Russian/Soviet diasporas around the world for insight into how and why

these identities are being articulated online. This is in large part because of the extreme

popularity of the RuNet (a term used to refer both to the .ru domain and to Russian-speaking

[107]Arjan Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 197.

[108]Harry Hiller, et al., "New Ties, Old Ties, and Lost Ties: The Use of the Internet in Diaspora," *New Media and Society* 6, No. 6 (2004): 733; Arjan Appadura, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 48.

[109]Hiller, et al., "New Ties, Old Ties, and Lost Ties: The Use of the Internet in Diaspora," 733, 735.

websites in general) among Russian-speakers around the world, and the proportionately very

high use among Russian-speakers of social networking forums.[110]

RESEARCH

In my research, I performed linguistic analyses on ten disparate, Russian-language

sources where participants discussed the Medicare fraud case and, specifically, the Brooklyn

Bay Medical Care clinic's use of Vatolina's poster in their "kickback" room. Each of these

sources was geared toward a different, Russian-speaking audience. I looked for fifty-four

different criteria in these sources, including positive or negative references to Jews, positive

or negative references to America/Americans, whether participants defended the scam's

participants, and whether they used possessive ("Наш," "Наши," "Свои") or third-person

("Они," "халявщики," "жулики," "Совки," "Мошенники") to refer to them.[111]

Additionally, I developed criteria for examining the online personae those commenting

constructed for themselves. These included categorizing the thumbnail photo accompanying

their screen names according to gender or cultural cues, the screen names themselves for

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[110]According to Henrike Schmidt and Katy Teubener, contributors to the interdisciplinary research project Russian-Cyberspace.org, RuNet initially rose to extreme heights of popularity because it provided an alternative to mainstream Russian culture. Unlike content on television or radio, which is determined by normative guidelines, RuNet offers a "space for free articulation of non-normative cultural activities." In the post-Soviet space particularly, RuNet "may be interpreted as a symbol for both hopes and fears related to the overall atmosphere of change and transformation." (Henrike Schmidt, et al., "'Our RuNet'? Cultural Identity and Media Usage," in *Control + Shift: Public and Private Usages of the Russian Internet,* ed. Henrike Schmidt et al. (Norderstedt, Germany: Books on Demand GmbH, 2006), 15, 20.); Statistics from May of 2010 indicated that 12 million users of the RuNet have their own blogs, and that a given search on Yandex.ru yields 15 million sites with a .ru domain name. ("Сколько нас, какими мы были, чего достигли?" *День интернета 2010: ежегодный городской праздник*)

[111]Translated as "those who belong to our circle" the terms "Наш," "Наши," and "Свои" have a special connotation in Soviet understanding to mean those who fall between activists (whistle-blowers) and dissidents. They are not die-hard supporters of State ideology, nor interested in tearing it down. (Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 104.) "Они," "халявщики," "жулики," "Совки," "Мошенники," conversely, are words that denote those who do not belong in our circle, including free-loaders, cheats, criminals, and those who ascribe to an activist mentality.

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nationality clues, users' employment of idioms, use of non-Russian words, and the origin of the signature they included at the ends of their posts. Because many commenters do not provide any explicit identifying information about themselves, these elective components that go into creating an online identity can give us clues into who is participating in this conversation, as well as to what degree they feel comfortable relinquishing their anonymity.[112] Last, I looked for direct and indirect references to the poster in the comments and how participants in these conversations reacted to it. This helped to solidify the characteristics of this group suggested by their other responses.

DATA[113]

After coding my responses, I condensed my findings into the following trends:

Table 1: User Identity

Identity	Frequency
Female	20
Male	13
Russian Screen Name	17
English Screen Name	56
Hybrid Screen Name	30
Russian Signature	13

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[112]As Dr. Donald Raleigh pointed out in a conversation with me, a desire to remain anonymous when discussing this case is particularly salient because of how it relates to Vatolina's poster, whose message reminds those in the know not to identify themselves.

[113]My data analysis is, by nature, subjective. I worked, however, with Elena Maksimova, a native of Russia and a professor of Russian at Duke University as I coded my responses for outside, expert confirmation that I was interpreting them correctly. The categories represented here, of all of those for which I coded my sources, were the most salient to this conversation about identity production and reproduction.

Identity	Frequency
English Signature	8
Russian Idioms	18
English Idioms	1

Table 2: Attitudes and Opinions

Referenced Terms	Frequency
Soviet Union Positive	6
Soviet Union Negative	12
America Positive	15
America Negative	38
Jews Positive	7
Jews Negative	9
Russians Positive	3
Russians Negative	25
References to Soviet Culture	22
Concerns about mistaken impressions of Russians/Soviets in host country	36
Fraud-Justified	37
Fraud-Not Justified	47

ANALYSIS

What I have found is that the Russian-speakers processing the advent of

Vatolina's poster's redeployment as well as the American media's focus on it largely self-

locate in a liminal state between their Soviet and assimilated-immigrant identities.[114]

Although with regard to screen name origin, my results indicate that nearly three times the participants in this conversation selected one incorporating English, rather than Russian words (56:17, 3.29), a substantial number elect to create a screen name that transliterates a Russian word into Latin letters (30). This, paired with their use of Russian signatures and idioms, indicate that they are creating hybrid online identities. Indeed, Russian signatures appeared 13 times, while English signatures appeared only 8 (.615), and 18 Russian idioms appear in the text compared with 1 American one (.005).[115] Although my results should not be considered entirely conclusive, owing to the potential for commenters to elect to remain anonymous deliberately, the multiculturalism suggested by my findings is supported in the content of the comments I analyzed:

Although an overwhelming number of responses (40) refer negatively to the host country (the United States) compared with 16 positive references (a ratio of .4), 13 comments refer negatively to the Soviet Union, while only 7 refer positively (a ratio of .53). In spite of the fact that the aggregate total of comments referring to the United States is significantly higher than the total referring to the Soviet Union (56:20), the ratio of positive to negative

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[114]Five of the sources are written explicitly for Russian-speakers in America (www.valera_kolpakov@livejournal.com, www.Vulfov.com, www.1977echg@livejournal.com, www.general_denikin@livejournal.com, www.russian-bazaar.com); one of the sources is written for Russian-speakers in America and Russia (www.chayka.org); one of the sources is written for Russian-speakers in New York (www.arikagan.com); one of the sources is written for Russian-speakers everywhere in the world (www.forum.privet.com); and two of the sources are written for specific groups of Russian-speakers (www.baku.ru, a forum for people from the city of Baku all over the world, www.megapolis.org/forum, a forum for Russian-speaking Jews all over the world). Although we cannot assume that all commenters live in the United States, the majority of sources are written for Russian-speakers who live in America, and no languages besides English, Russian, and Hebrew (transliterated with Latin letters) are represent in the comments.

[115]One of these was a quote for Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. The protagonist, Alex, uses a hybrid of Russian and English (Nadsat) to describe a girl he encounters.

comments about the Soviet Union is only slightly higher than the ratio of positive to negative

comments about America.

This seems to indicate that members of the digital diaspora participating in this

discussion are using the redeployment of Vatolina's poster as an opportunity to parse out their

identity relation to their Soviet pasts. Indeed, like the poster's Brooklyn audience, the online

consumers of Vatolina's poster approach the work with a new horizon of lived experience.

As a result, the work is defamiliarized, underscoring the distance between the poster's

original context of deployment and its recontextualization in contemporary Brooklyn and in

the American media.[116] Accordingly, this new reading highlights incongruities between the

mentalities, political atmosphere, and cultural attributes evoked by the poster and its

redeployment, encouraging viewers to evaluate where they stand in relation to those Soviet

conventions. What they find through this comparison is that, although America may not be

the perfect place for them, neither was the Soviet Union.[117]

This response pattern is consistent with the changing nature of translocal identity

brought about by new technologies, particularly the Internet.   According to scholars,

> migration...used to be more "bipolar," in that once people moved to another place,
> they settled into their new home and began life anew. With the assistance of new

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[116]"Defamiliarization, or "ostronenie," is a term coined by Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky to mean making familiar objects unfamiliar or difficult in order to "increase the…length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." By decontextualizing Vatolina's poster, Drivas, Wahl, and the American media effectively defamilarize it. This process forces viewers to compare the first horizon of expectation with the horizon of lived experience. (Viktor Skhlovsky "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays,* ed. L.T. Lemon et al. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.)

[117]This exact sentiment is often reflected in other Soviet immigrant websites. Many commenters in scholarly studies put forth the notion that, "despite the pain" of having been mistreated under Soviet power, "true Russians should not ignore their ethnic roots." (Filipp Sapienza, "Communal Ethos on a Russian Émigré Web Site." Paper presented at the International Conference for Cultural Attitudes Toward Communication and Technology, London, August 1998, 130.)

technologies, newer groups tend to maintain multithreaded and simultaneous footings in their cultures of origin and settlement.[118]

In this new context, participants use their experience in the Soviet Union to understand and process their attitudes toward their host country. They experience the "new culture through the prism of the old," clarifying their attitudes toward the United States by relating them to their shared Soviet pasts.[119] This process can explain the high incidence of negativity toward both the Soviet Union and America, as commenters find that both their pasts and presents lack fundamental criteria they require to be considered "home."[120] While members of the non-digital diaspora might attempt to recreate their former home with co-ethnics in the country of relocation, members of the digital diaspora are able to do so online; this provides them with a "reprieve from the stress of new surroundings, as well as a homeland context from which to interpret them," while still promoting acculturation in the real world.[121]

Another significant attitudinal trend manifested by the digital diaspora's responses to this issue is that Jewishness does not seem to be a defining characteristic of this population's identity. This is evidenced by the overall low incidence of Jewish references in the coded material, as well as the fairly even ratio of positive to negative comments about Jews. To me, this indicates two related characteristics of the post-Soviet identity being created and reinforced in this online conversation. First, because there is not a substantial

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[118]Filipp Sapienza, "Nurturing Translocal Communication: Russian Immigrants on the World Wide Web," *Technical Communication* 48, No. 4 (November 2001): 435.

[119]Ibid.

[120]This conclusion is supported by other studies, including Zeltser-Shorer, "Russian Diaspora On-Line: Community of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union on the WWW."

[121]Sapienza, "Nurturing Translocal Communication: Russian Immigrants on the World Wide Web," 435; Zeltser-Shorer, "Russian Diaspora On-Line: Community of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union on the WWW."

degree of anti-Semitism demonstrated in the comments, we can conclude that the participants

in this conversation are, or want to appear to be, tolerant; indeed, at .77, the high ratio of

positive to negative comments about Jews suggests that the Internet has helped facilitate an

exchange of Soviet anti-Semitism in the form of Jewish scapegoating for greater open-

mindedness.[122] This can be explained, in part, by the wide variety of nationalities, religions,

and ethnic identities represented on the Web. As a result, "Émigré communities used to

maintaining cultural values in geographic seclusion must incorporate a wide range of cultural

ideas into the discourse of communal identity on the web."[123] This suggests that the

digitization of the Soviet diaspora has the effect of forcing participants to tolerate and respect

the wide range of opinions and identity constructs presented on these websites, even when

these do not correspond to an individual's own beliefs.[124]

Second, as a side effect of the tolerance digital diasporas facilitate, Jewish identity

may have become less of a defining characteristic for online participants of that cultural

identity. Indeed, although historically "Jews were kept distinct both by anti-Semitism or--for

immigrants--by their cultural apartness," in this online space where multiculturalism is the

norm, Jewish participants are no longer defined by their outsider status.[125] The result, as

manifested in this virtual conversation, is the surprisingly low incidence of both anti-

Semitism and extreme Zionism. This is especially significant owing to the fact that the

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[122]Robery Byrm, "Anti-Semitism in Moscow: A Reexamination," *Slavic Review* 53, No. 3 (Autumn 1994): 846.

[123]Sapienza, "Communal Ethos on a Russian Emigré Web Site," 119.

[124]Kilic Kanat, "Ethnic Media and Politics: The Case of the Use of the Internet by Uyghyr Diaspora," *First Monday* 10, No. 7 (July 2005)

[125]Zvi Y. Gitelman, et al., *Jewish Life After the USSR* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 59.

scam's participants were likely Jewish and that the nature of the scam itself coincides with

Soviet stereotypes about Jews.[126]

In spite of relative neutrality on the topic of Jewishness, many of the participants

in these online conversations indicate an extreme dislike for Russians in their responses.

Indeed, in my coding data I found three positive comments about Russians and 25 negative

ones (.12). I speculate that there are two explanations for this trend. First, when commenters

use the term *Russian* in this conversation, they are often describing Russian-speakers who

have moved to the United States owing to the facts of the case; second, many of the

generalizations they make about Russians are, in fact, incorrectly attributed to an inherent,

cultural identity of this group. These subtleties are manifested in the following comments:

> Я бы хотел обратить внимание властей что творят "русские" в Бостоне. Это
> и получение ненужных лекарств тоннами "впрок" (через "русские" аптеки
> которые не берут co-payment), и помощь на дому, которую многим не
> предоставляют, а вместо нее предоставляют откаты, и фиктивные разводы
> среди стариков (многим из которых за 80) чтобы получить еще одну
> квартирку на шару. Список можно продолжать.[127]

Here, the author places the word *Russians* ("русские") in quotations in order to distinguish

this population from the post-Soviet population with which he associates himself. He

expresses a disappointment in the behavior of "Russians" in Boston, singling out elderly

people for behavior psychologists and health-care providers attribute to specific generation

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[126]Soviet stereotypes about Jews in 1960 in the Soviet Union include: "Jews are business and money-minded; Jews are deceitful, dishonest, unprincipled, insolent, and impudent; and Jews are clannish and aid each other." Also, as the Doctors' Plot indicates, a fear of Jewish doctors dominated Soviet perceptions of this ethnic group. (William Korey, "The Origins and Development of Soviet Anti-Semitism: An Analysis," *Slavic Review* Vol. 31, No. 1 (March 1972): 112.)

[127]"I would like to bring the government's attention to what "Russians" are doing in Boston. It is both receiving unnecessary medicine by the ton "for future use" (through "Russian" pharmacies that don't charge a co-payment), and home care that many aren't entitled to but instead receive kickbacks for, and fictitious divorces among old people (many of whom are over 80) in order to get yet another apartment for free. The list goes on." Арэн, July 17, 2010 (14:29), comment on "Как русскоязычные 'уделали' Medicare на $251 млн...," *Privet* (forum), July 16, 2010, http://forum.privet.com/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=160376

and cultural characteristics.[128] This commenter demonstrates how the term "Russian" serves

as a floating signifier in the translocal space that is the post-Soviet Internet; in this virtual

locus, additional identities (immigrant, Soviet-minded, unaccultured, criminal) are attributed

to this nationality by members of that same diasporic origin as they attempt to distance

themselves from those who are less assimilated.

This comment demonstrates that Vatolina's poster has obligated this virtual

community of Russian-speakers to create a spectrum of desirable and undesirable qualities

within their shared national identity. A second comment illustrates a different way in which

participants in this conversation parse out their relationships with their ethnic origins:

> Я на практике в Суздале в женском общежитии забыла маникюрные
> ножницы в душе. Вернулась тут же - их уже не было. Девочки тамошние, с
> которыми были хорошие отношения, ходили, спрашивали со мной - никто не
> отдал.... И теперь, когда вспоминаю, не то, что жалко, а неприятно. Я бы их
> сама отдала, если бы попросили, а так...[129]

In this instance, this Russian-speaking commenter indicates how a negative experience with

dishonesty in Russia (Suzdal) informs her negative impression of Russians as a nationality.[130]

She attributes an unpleasant event in her memory to the nationality of the person who

perpetrated it against her, in spite of the fact that she shares the same heritage. Theft occurs

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[128]"There is no question about over-utilization of health care by Russians. Health care is being tremendously overutilized"..."They are reportedly socialized from years of surviving communism to manipulate the system to access the maximum amount of possibly benefits." (Karen Aroian, "Health and Social Service Utilization Among Elderly Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union," *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 33, No. 3 (September 2001))

[129]"In the women's dormitory at a practice in Suzdal I once forgot my manicuring scissors in the shower. I went back right away, but they were already gone. The girls there, with whom I had a good relationship, went around and asked after them with me- no one gave them back. And now, when I think about that, it's not that it's sad, but rather unpleasant. I would have given them back myself if I'd been asked, but as it was…" (Agrafena, July 20, 2010 (16:59), comment on "Как русскоязычные 'уделали' Medicare на $251 млн...," *Privet* (forum), July 16, 2010, http://forum.privet.com/viewtopic.php?f=4&t=160376)

[130]This comments is part of a larger thread on the dishonesty of Russians.

in dormitories the world over, but this commenter credits this particular instance with the Russian cultural context in which it took place. She, like the previous commenter, attempts to draw distinctions of good and bad within the Russian-speaking community, and takes this opportunity to distance herself from the kind of Russian (Soviet, non-immigrant, uncultured, uneducated) that would steal someone else's property on a national or personal level.

The high number of critical comments toward Russian-speakers demonstrates how online participants in this conversation are motivated by Vatolina's poster to problematize post-Soviet identity issues. They attempt, on a public forum, to position themselves in opposition to the negative reputation of former Soviets as organized criminals in a way that constitutes a post-Soviet doing of identity.[131] Ironically, however, an equally high number of comments indicate that participants use their Soviet pasts in the form of cultural references and allusions to process their opinions about this issue (25 comments). This type of reaction indicates the degree to which Soviet identity continues to inform these commenters' worldview, in spite of widespread interest in disassociating themselves from negative aspects of it. Examples of these associations with Soviet identity include references to Soviet theatre, literature, and even explicit comparisons of differences between Soviet and American understandings of nationality. This picking and choosing of elements of Soviet identity constitutes the simultaneous demonizing and idealization of the Soviet Union and its associations both at home and abroad frequently practiced by immigrants from former Soviet countries.[132]

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[131]Scholarly texts go so far as to attribute Russian-language crime to an inability on the part of some immigrants to acculturate. (Larisa Fialkova and Maria Yelenevskaya, "Incipient Soviet Diaspora: Encounters in Cyberspace," *Nar. umjet* 42, No. 1 (2005): 75.)

[132]Larisa Fialkova, et al., "Incipient Soviet Diaspora: Encounters in Cyberspace," *Nar. umjet* 42, No. 1 (2005), 86.

Because Vatolina's poster is both an artifact of Soviet culture and a tool used by demonized Russian-speakers to commit crime, it serves as a symbolic embodiment of both positive and negative aspects of Soviet identity. As a result, it functions here as a structure in relation to which commenters can position themselves to parse their post-Soviet identities. Because Vatolina's poster is the one element of this case that links Soviet identity, Russian identity, and immigrant identity, commenters' characterizations of it flesh out the portrait of the digital diaspora being painted by their other responses. Their understanding of its significance helps us to grasp better their situation between Soviet and ex-Soviet identities.

The majority of commenters who address Vatolina's poster express concern over the associative link between criminality and Russian-language identity facilitated by the poster's popularity in the American press (4 comments). They observe that,

> Статьи проиллюстрированы советским плакатом "Не болтай!" Сразу становится ясно, что речь идёт о русскоязычных мошенниках, которые предлагают своим сообщникам держать язык за зубами.[133]

Because of the bold, visual association with Russian-speakers the poster provides, they worry that "раскрытое мошенничество ударит по репутации русскоязычной диаспоры в Соединённых Штатах."[134] The connection with criminality that the poster provides spurns this population to disassociate itself from the negative behavior of these "Russians."[135]

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[133]"The article is illustrated by the Soviet poster, "Don't Gossip!" It immediately becomes clear that the conversation is about Russian-speaking swindlers, who are asking their accomplices to keep their lips sealed." (Александр Сиротин, "Мошенничество с Медикером.")

[134]"The uncovered scam strikes a blow to the reputation of the Russian-speaking diaspora in the United States." (Евгений Новицкий, "Афера года глазами читателей," *Русский Вазар*, No. 28, July 22-28, 2010, www.russian-bazaar.com/Article.aspx?ArticleId=17479)

[135]This notion is supported by the fact that 47 comments indicated disapproval of the Medicare fraud scam and only 37 indicated that they believed the crime was justifiable. Of the 37, the majority blamed the U.S. government for making Medicare crime so easy to commit, and the doctors for orchestrating the scam.

Other commenters debate the intent for which Vatolina's poster was redeployed in the kickback room in the first place. Their responses indicate a wide range of reactions to the clinic's use of the poster. One even suggests that the poster was false evidence provided by the FBI.[136] The author of a LiveJournal post about the case asserts that,

> На суде в Бруклине, **в качестве шутки** был вывешен известный советский плакат сталинской эпохи, где изображена девушка с приставленным к губам указательным пальцем и надписью - "Не Болтай!"[137]

His understanding is that the poster was displayed purely as a joke without any deeper significance. He is challenged by another participant in the conversation, however, who suggests Drivas and Wahl may have intended to do more with the work. This poster writes,

> Не уверен что плакат в качестве шутки. Он якобы висел в комнате мед офиса, где пациентам выдавали наличные за плодотворное сотрудничество. Вот на суд его вытащили чтобы продемонстрировать злодейскость мошенников честной публике. Публика исправно ужасается."[138]

These perspectives indicate that various participants in this conversation have different readings both of the motivation behind displaying the poster and also of the negative repercussions it will have on the reputation of Soviet immigrants. This

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[136]"Теперь по всем телеканалам показывают советский агитационный плакат с надписью «Не болтай», который оказался не в том месте, не в то время. Если бы на стене висел другой плакат, то и ему сотрудники ФБР придумали бы «правильную» трактовку." ["Now on every television channel they're showing a Soviet agitation poster with the caption 'Don't Gossip," that didn't appear in that place or at that time. If a different poster had hung on the wall, workers for the FBI would have thought up a 'correct' interpretation."] (Новицкий, "Афера года глазами читателей," *Русский базар*, No. 28, July 22-28, 2010, www.russian-bazaar.com/Article.aspx?ArticleId=17479)

[137]"At the trial in Brooklyn as a joke was hung a famous Stalin-era poster, where a girl is depicted with her index finger to her lips and the caption – "Don't Gossip!" (general_denikin, "В США арестованы 94 человека за взяточничество. Пациенты брали взятки у врачей (!!!!!!!)," *С махновской рожей* (blog), *Живой Журнал*, July 17, 2010, http://community/livejournal.com/rusam/2399711.html)

[138]"I'm not sure that the poster was meant as a joke. Supposedly it hung in the room of the clinic where patients were given cash for effective cooperation. They brought it to the trial to demonstrate the criminality of the scammers to the honest public. The public, rightly, was horrified." (bad_company, July 18, 2010 (4:04), comment on general_denikin, "В США арестованы 94 человека за взяточничество. Пациенты брали взятки у врачей (!!!!!!!)," *С махновской рожей* (blog), July 17, 2010, http://community/livejournal.com/rusam/2399711.html)

demonstrates the range of attitudes present toward the Soviet past and its authority

represented in this segment of the digital diaspora. For some responders, like the author of

the original LiveJournal post above, the poster is only meant to be ironic. Indeed, when

confronted with the prospect that perhaps the poster was not intended as a joke, he replied,

"Ну, я понял, что плакат висел в поликлинике. Но приволокли его в суд может и в

шутку."[139] This commenter likely views the Soviet Union as ideologically defunct and its

symbols available for decontextualization. His reaction may also indicate a nostalgic

appreciation for the ironic treatment of Soviet symbols practiced during the last several

decades of the empire.

His interlocutor's reaction, however, speaks to something different. To this

viewer, the poster was redeployed in order to elicit fear in its Brooklyn audience. His

response shows his certainty that the poster was capable of evoking memories of Soviet

punishments for betrayal even in a post-Soviet diaspora context. His comments illustrate

that he has an ongoing relationship with Soviet identity that allows him to relate to the

poster's original deployment in a serious way.

What these responses suggest, when paired with other conversations surrounding

the case, is the emergence of an inclusive identity on the Internet located somewhere between

Soviet and non-Soviet. Indeed, although respondents indicate a desire to distance themselves

from some aspects of Soviet identity, they demonstrate, too, a reliance on their Soviet past to

process their present. Significantly, this liminality does not seem to cause these members of

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[139]"Well, I understand that the poster was hung in the clinic. But dragging it to the trial might have been a joke." (general_denikin, July 18, 2010 (15:58), comment on general_denikin, "В США арестованы 94 человека за взяточничество. Пациенты брали взятки у врачей (!!!!!!!)" *С махновской рожей* (blog), July 17, 2010, http://community/livejournal.com/rusam/2399711.html)

the digital diaspora anguish. Indeed, while a high proportion of negative comments both about America and the former Soviet Union seem to indicate that majority of respondents are equally unhappy in both places, other qualities of their responses show something different: The desire to correct the negative impressions about Russian-speakers publicized by this case indicates to me that the participants in this conversation intend to remain in their host countries. Their presence on Russian-language website directed toward members of the diaspora, conversely, demonstrates an interest in "articulat[ing] diverse and hybridized imaginations of home" with other coethnics.[140] These reactions indicate a commitment to extracting what is best from both identities to forge a new sense of self. This new identity will allow members of the digital diaspora not only to get by, but to thrive. The result is a "quasi-diaspora that is no longer oriented towards the teleology of return" but rather, toward inventing a post-Soviet space where émigrés can "preserve those part of their homeland that they miss the most while being in full control of the frequency and intensity of their relationships with its virtual form.[141]

This theory is confirmed by language patterns manifested in all the sources: borrowing words from English and transliterating them into Russian, as well as creating hybrid Russian-English screen names, demonstrates a commitment to "acculturation and social inclusion" that indicates a desire for a hyphenated identity.[142] This mixed language use also indicates how unique advantages in both Russian and English help to create a more rich

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[140]Srinivasan, et al., "Diasporic Information Environments: Reframing Immigrant-Focused Information Research," 1737.

[141]Schmidt, et al., "Virtual (Re)Unification? Diasporic Cultures on the Russian Internet," 547.

[142]Larissa Remennick, "Language Acquisition, Ethnicity, and Social Integration among Former Soviet Immigrants of the 1990s in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, No. 3 (2004): 448.

mode of expression for these users. Through code-switching and borrowed words, this population fills in literal and conceptual holes in each language. This shows that, while valuing their linguistic and cultural background, former Soviet "immigrants [online] nevertheless do not seek formal separation from the host society."[143] Instead, they hope to enhance their post-Soviet identity through language using cultural concepts borrowed from English.

Like Sheila Fitzpatrick's sympathetic description of *Homo sovieticus,* these members of the Soviet digital diaspora pull strings and mouth slogans simultaneously to find a mixed identity that will let them survive.[144] Without abandoning entirely the Soviet past they need to process their post-Soviet present, they select those characteristics of their former identity they hope to preserve and distance themselves from those they do not. The result is a hybrid identity that is at once nostalgic, critical, traditional, modern, Soviet, Russian, and functional in a multicultural setting.

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[143]Remennick, "Language Acquisition, Ethnicity, and Social Integration among Former Soviet Immigrants of the 1990s in Israel," 449.

[144]Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 229.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

In examining the relationship of two diasporic groups to the recontextualization of

Nina Vatolina's 1941 agit-prop poster in Brooklyn, my research demonstrates different ways

in which these groups situate themselves between their Soviet past and their American

present. The first group, comprised of elderly Soviet immigrants living in Russian-speaking,

Jewish communities in Brooklyn, manifests a disdainful but frightened relationship with

official Soviet life. Simultaneously, however, this population demonstrates a nostalgia for its

Soviet religious and private life that inhibits its ability to acculturate into the dominant

society. The second group, made up of younger Russian-speakers living throughout the

world but primarily in the United States, criticizes certain elements of Soviet life while

relying on others to process its present. This population's reactions, speech patterns, and

online identities demonstrate an attempt to retain perceived positive cultural characteristics of

its past while rejecting those that inhibit integration into the host society.

I attribute these substantial differences to changes in generation, interaction with

outsiders, and the development of new networking technologies. Indeed, for members of the

Brooklyn Bay Medical Care clinic's patient body, language barriers, as well as learned

cultural habits, confined this group largely to interactions with one another.[145] The result is a

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[145]Studies indicate that "host language acquisition" is key in attaining "economic success and social integration in the host country. (Remennick, "Language Acquisition, Ethnicity, and Social Integration among Former Soviet Immigrants of the 1990s in Israel," 431.)

community that mimics the "thriving sub-culture of 'Little Odessa,' populated by ethnic businesses accessible only to Russian-speakers."[146] Its inhabitants are characterized by "old age, relative poverty, and low rates of integration in the American mainstream."[147] That Nina Vatolina's poster resonated with this audience in a criminal context both results from and evidences not only this group's voluntary, intimate relationship with Soviet identity, but also their inability to evolve out of it. Their lack of alternative identities prohibits these individuals from betraying the trust of their ethnic group. These constraints give those with appropriated Soviet authority the power to victimize this diasporic cohort.

Members of the digital diaspora, on the other hand, manifest a different relationship with their Soviet pasts that is related both to their generation and to their interaction with a broad range of Russian-speakers. Younger Soviet immigrants developed more tenuous ties with Soviet mentalities and culture both because a shorter percentage of their lives were spent there and also owing to the ideological disaffection that characterized the pre-Perestroika period.[148] As a result, they are less defined by their Soviet identities and more committed to finding a way in which these can be adapted to their lives in their host countries. Additionally, this group's use of modern technology, namely Internet forums and cultural websites geared toward the Soviet diaspora, increase the community of Russian-speakers with whom they associate. Unlike the elderly Russian patients at the Bay Medical Care clinic, the online Soviet diaspora is forced to interact with unfamiliar attitudes, opinions, and memories of Soviet culture. The result, as we can see from responses to

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[146]Remennick, *Russian Jews on Three Continents: Identity, Integration, and Conflict* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 180.

[147]Ibid.

[148]Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, 115.

Vatolina's poster, is a new collective unafraid of simultaneously loving and hating the Soviet Union.

While my innovative approach to this study of transnationality and the Soviet diaspora has been unconventional, it paints a vivid picture of two comparable models of post-Soviet identity. By relying on attitudes toward the reuse of a Soviet artifact in an entirely new context, I capture the relationship of two different groups of viewers with their pasts. I attribute my success in this to the way Vatolina's poster encourages readers to compare previous horizons of expectation with the horizons of their lived experiences. Both groups underwent, either through compliance with Vatolina's poster or discussions of its redeployment, an evaluation of their "own commitments and concerns: to better discover what they are, to reconfigure them, to place the ideas [they] have about [their] aims and identity in a different perspective." The results are public self-assessments of these populations' relationships with their Soviet pasts and diasporic presents. These constitute the compelling conversations about post-Soviet identity and its performance that I listen in on throughout this text.[149] This trope provides significant advantages over others used to study translocal communities because it does not require these groups to articulate their relationships with their Soviet pasts to an outsider. Instead, I rely on their actions and inside conversations for an accurate, unaffected picture of these two collectives.

Although I believe this project has demonstrated in a compelling way how post-Soviet identity can be at once stagnant and evolving, there are a number of different ways I could expand this project in the future. First, I could tackle the idea that post-Soviet identity

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[149]David Miall, et al., "Beyond Text Theory: Understanding Literary Response," *Discourse Processes* 17, No. 3 (1994), 351.

expression changes depending on where and for whom it is performed. I could accomplish

this by comparing interviews with immigrants from the former Soviet Union about their post-

Soviet identity with conversations about identity formation undertaken online. This project

would broaden the scope of my current undertaking by reframing my study as an

investigation of identity and alterity as articulated at the border of encounters with others.[150]

Second, I could explore the extent to which the post-Soviet identity of the

Russian-speaking immigrant community in Brooklyn is unique within ex-Soviet

communities worldwide. I would accomplish this by comparing it with other similar,

Russian-speaking cohorts in the United States (Brookline, MA., and Philadelphia., PA among

others) and Israel on the basis of interviews and participant-observation. This project would

further refine the notion I present here that generation shapes post-Soviet identity creation,

providing a more holistic impression of third- and fourth-wave, Soviet immigrants around the

world today.

Last, I am interested in testing the extent to which the autototality Soviet

propaganda facilitated in its original deployment carries over into a post-Soviet, American

deployment. Would the Bay Medical Care clinic's Brooklyn patient body react to Vatolina's

poster in the same way if they saw it for sale in a store? In a school? In a home? The

association of Vatolina's work with illegality, Soviet and American authority, and nostalgia

for socialism's stability in the context I investigate here clearly affects how it functions as a

tool for defining and performing identity. Would the result be the same in a different

context?

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[150]Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 197.

In conclusion, I suggest that studies monitoring the development of post-Soviet identity contribute to our collective understanding of the global population's changing face; this is important, as the development of a hybrid, post-Soviet identity predicts greater integration of Russian-speakers into various societies, promising more contact with immigrants from the former Soviet Union.   An awareness of the Soviet legacy among different diasporic populations gives those from different communities insight into behaviors, mindsets, and attitudes shaped by this past. This in turn helps to facilitate productive interactions with Russian-speakers the world over.

I also assert that redeployed, Soviet kitsch is a compelling lens through which to examine post-Soviet identity construction. This is owing both to its culturally-specific aesthetic style, as well as to the compelling visual vocabulary of which it makes use. Because kitsch has the power to elicit a nostalgic reaction in its viewers, it prompts them to evaluate their relationships with their past. My study demonstrates how the shape and character of this relationship changes based on the context and community in which the kitsch is redeployed. With these observations in mind, I suggest that particular scholarly attention be paid to the power of the visual to spark identity performance in the post-Soviet space, and hope this master's thesis contributed to ongoing discourse on this subject.

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