



MEN OF THE WORLD

DIASPORIC MASCULINITIES IN TRANSIT(ION) IN MAXIM D. SHRAYER'S *WAITING FOR AMERICA: A STORY OF EMIGRATION*

ABSTRACT Maxim D. Shrayer's memoir centers on his family's sojourn in an Italian town of Ladispoli, where emigrants awaited admission into the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. As I will demonstrate, using contemporary scholarship located at the intersection of diaspora and gender studies, this species of narrative delayed gratification is central to the memoir's representation of gender and sexuality. Ladispoli is a "diaspora within diaspora," a geographic, legal, and sexual grey zone, which both destabilizes the queer diaspora/heteronormative nation binary and allows non-normative sexualities and masculinities to flourish, only later to be (almost) subsumed by the marriage plot that habitually underlies the theme of national belonging.

KEYWORDS MASCULINITIES, SEXUALITY, DIASPORA, IMMIGRATION, GENDER, MAXIM D. SHRAYER

In 1987, propelled by anti-Semitism in its various Soviet and post-Soviet guises, Maxim D. Shrayer and his parents left the muddled Moscow of the early *perestroika* years for Providence, Rhode Island. At the end of this journey, portrayed in Shrayer's memoir¹ *Waiting for America: A Story of Emigration* (2007), the author and his family settle in the United States. Contrary to the conventions of immigrant literature, the primary focus of the memoir is neither on the

¹In an astute nod to the on-going theoretical discussion of the position of autobiographies and memoirs between "fact" and "fiction," Maxim D. Shrayer, Professor of Russian and English at Boston College, writes in a preface to his memoir,

Waiting for America: A Story of Emigration is a creative product of memory and imagination ... Fictionalization and poetization, I believe, are not—and should not be regarded as—the opposites of narrative truth-telling; rather documentary homebrew is aged, purified, and given as an artistic vintage by the writer's conscious use of language, style, and narrative structure. Trying to discern where precisely the

^aSouthern Illinois University Edwardsville.

All correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Helena Gurfinkel, Department of English Language and Literature, Peck Hall, Box 1431, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Edwardsville, IL 62026. Email: hgurf@siue.edu

family's hardship in its country of origin nor on the rigors of adaptation to its new home. Instead, Shroyer's account centers on his and his family's sojourn in the Italian town of Ladispoli, where emigrants from the former Soviet Union awaited admission into the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, that is, on the interval between Russia and Rhode Island, between being an ostracized minority in their country of origin and becoming U. S. citizens.

The delayed narrative gratification reflects the memoir's representations of gender and sexuality. It is in the geographical and legal grey zone of Ladispoli that the text allows "the implosive force of mobile sexuality" (Patton & Sánchez-Eppler, 2000, p. 13) to flourish. Queer—in the sense that it departs from normative Western gender and sexual inscriptions—Jewish maleness shares the memoir's transitional space with outspoken women, who unsettle patriarchal familiar structures. In the context of *Waiting for America*, Ladispoli is a romanticized location, which, precisely for this reason, functions as a queer space, or stage, upon which the complex identitarian experiences of late-twentieth-century migrant subjects unfold. Though not exactly a carnivalesque, Shakespearean greenwood, Ladispoli is a queer place because it is governed by the force of desire: for America, for intellectual and cultural experience, for sexual and romantic encounters. My abundant use of theatrical references is not accidental. Ladispoli is also queer because it affords its wondering inhabitants, Russian-Jewish émigrés, a certain freedom of constructing, performing, or "staging," as Martin Manalansan (2005, p. 154) puts it, their gender and sexual identities, and of voicing or reclaiming desires that had hitherto been silenced, even if, admittedly, the emerging non-normative voices are often tentative.

Most pertinently to the present discussion, however, Ladispoli is queer because it cannot be identified as either a diaspora or a homeland. The nation/diaspora duality is unable to contain or sustain this space; it may provisionally be called a "diaspora within diaspora." The very dichotomy of diaspora/homeland deployed in the contemporary scholarship at the intersection of Diaspora and Queer Studies may be in need of collapsing, or queering. In the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, immigrant relocations have followed a trajectory that is more complicated than "a national home-to-diaspora" one. It is now possible to have more than one homeland, or none at all, and to belong to several diasporic communities at once. Shroyer's memoir portrays a group of emigrants, whose unique historical, legal, and cultural circumstances present an opportunity to unsettle such a duality. At stake in my reading of *Waiting for America* is a complication, through the formulation of a "diaspora within

writer has strayed from the double phantom of verity and authenticity strikes me as a losing proposition. (p. xi)

I discern in the author's words a license to treat this memoir as a work of fiction—and not just a straightforwardly "factual" look back—which I intend to do throughout. Likewise, for the purposes of my analysis, "Maxim," or "the narrator," is a fictional persona/character, and not the author, though the former may have characteristics or experiences in common with the latter.

diaspora," of the idea that queer/sexually transgressive diaspora and the gender-conforming, heteronormative nation are mutually constitutive only through a stark opposition.

A DIASPORA WITHIN DIASPORA

Daniel Boyarin's (1997) pioneering study of Jewish diasporic masculinity, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, draws connections between the politics of nationalism and normative heterosexual masculinity and, conversely, between diaspora and what he terms "gentler" (p. 157) or "feminized" (p. 151) Jewish masculinity. Boyarin's work seeks to "understand what happened to Jewish culture as the regime of heterosexuality increasingly impinged on it in the nineteenth century. Much of [his] argument turns upon the claim that psychoanalysis and Zionism were two specifically Jewish cultural answers to the rise of heterosexuality at the *fin de siècle*" (p. 28). As a nationalist ideology, Zionism "is truly the most profound form of assimilationism, one in which Jews become like all nations, that is like Aryans ..., but remain Jews in name (and complexion): Bar Kochba, warrior Moses, and Maccabee: not Trancred ... or Siegfried ..." (Boyarin, 1997, p. 276).

Freud believed that nationalism would cure his fellow European Jews of "effeminate degeneracy" (Boyarin, 1997, p. 276). The notion of "effeminate degeneracy" does not take into account a specific kind of diasporic European Jewish masculinity that "furnish[ed] European culture with the possibility of a male who is sexually and procreationally functioning but otherwise gendered as if 'female' within the European economy of gender" (p. 26). The patriarchal sex/gender system adopted by the (primarily secular, middle-class) Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was misogynistic, as well as homophobic: "The bourgeois ideology ... disenfranchised women ... by insisting that their *only* functions were to be decorative and reproductive, while earlier, more traditional Jewish cultures stipulated a wide range of important public, economic activity for women" (p. 321). Conversely, to Boyarin, the less assimilated Eastern European Jewish communities that embraced both matriarchate and gentle (or feminized) masculinity, whether heterosexual or queer, represent an alternative to the gender fictions of the European middle class. He makes a crucial link between these fiction and the ideologies of nation and, conversely, between the Ashkenazi Jewish diaspora and queer sexuality and non-normative gender. His essay "Outing Freud's Zionism" (2000) contains an even crisper distinction: "Diaspora is ... queer and the end of Diaspora would be the equivalent of becoming straight ..." (pp. 78-79).

From the late 1990s onward, Boyarin's innovative analysis has inspired a number of essay collections and monographs² that have radically critiqued the stability of national identities and sexual norms on an international scale and

² See Patton and Sánchez-Eppler (2000), Hawley (2001), Braziel and Manur (2003), Manalansan (2003), Bhaskaran (2004), Gopinath (2005), Lubhéid and Cantú Jr. (2005), Parreñas and Siu (2007), among many others.

insisted that “sexuality scholarship closely attend to the dynamics of past and contemporary immigration, and that immigration scholarship attend to the dynamics of past and contemporary immigration” (Luibhéid & Cantú Jr., 2005, p. xxxv). As Meg Wesling (2008) points out, various studies of sexuality, diasporas, migration, and national (dis)identifications generally “... posit an analogy between queerness as that which subverts gender normativity, and diaspora as that which troubles geographic and national stability” (p. 31), thereby agreeing with Boyarin’s original thesis.

In particular, in her seminal book, *Impossible desires: queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath (2005) puts forth an argument similar to Boyarin’s:

A consideration of queerness, in other words, becomes a way to challenge nationalist ideologies by restoring the impure, inauthentic, non-reproductive potential of the notion of Diaspora. Indeed, the urgent need to trouble and denaturalize the close relationship between nationalism and heterosexuality is precisely what makes the notion of queer Diaspora so compelling. A queer diasporic framework productively exploits the analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other: in other words, queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation. (p. 11)

Gopinath’s and Boyarin’s paradigms are fundamentally important to my analysis of *Waiting for America*, but the terms in which the memoir defines both nation and diaspora do not coincide with theirs. The dichotomous model that they propose has been subject to modifications. Martin Manalansan (2000 and 2003) abandons the binary by suggesting that the identity of Filipino gay men is unstable both in their homeland and in diaspora, though, in each case they have to mask various components of their identity (for example, queer sexuality in the Philippines, and an immigration status in the U.S.). In her materialist analysis of globalized economies, Meg Wesling (2008) (echoing, in a different context, Ray Chow’s [2003] and Suparna Bhaskaran’s [2004] earlier discussions of the privileged position of the diasporic intellectual residing in the West in relation to her homeland) astutely contests the “framework[s] [that] unite queer with the diasporic in a privileged relation to transgressivity” (p. 33) and asks “whether or not the material changes that attend the conditions of globalization, mobility, and diaspora engender the new notions of the normative and the queer ... and new articulations of desire, identity, and sexuality” (p. 45).

While Wesling seeks new models of sexual and gender conformity and transgression, my analysis goes back to Boyarin’s original cultural context, finds a geopolitical location that troubles the diaspora/homeland binary — which in my view, does not obtain in the case of the Russian Jews depicted in Shroyer’s memoir — and questions the very plausibility of the notion of a homeland in their case. By the same token, my reading suggests that, in the context of Shroyer’s narrative, the opposition between queer genders and sexualities and the heteronormative patriarchal family cannot be superimposed easily upon the opposition between dispersion and home. Instead, queer sexuality

and non-normative gender constructions are queer and non-normative precisely because they always exist beyond this binary, in the space that is neither a diaspora nor a home.

The idea of the country of origin as a national home, spiritual or physical, on which Diaspora Studies relies, is problematic in the case of the community portrayed in *Waiting for America*. The Shrayers have no strong ethnic or cultural roots in either country of which they have been citizens (the former Soviet Union and the United States); they gravitate, simultaneously, and as a result of complex—and shifting—political, ethical, and aesthetic choices, to Russian literature, art, and everyday familial and communal habits, and to many political and cultural aspects of American society.

Moreover, as Rhacel Parreños and Lok C. D. Siu (2007) remind us, "... [R]acism and xenophobia are ... marginalizing forces that impede the full belonging of diasporic groups not only in their place of settlement but also in their place of origin" (p. 13). Members of an oppressed minority in the former Soviet Union, the Shrayers lack a national and cultural home that is fully identified with, fondly imagined (after all, in Benedict Anderson's (1991) classic formulation, all national communities are "imagined"), and, for better or worse, always missed and imitated in diaspora.³ Likewise, while they admire their future home, the United States, they know little about it. Their connection to America is, as the title of the memoir suggests, is largely one of imagination, longing, and waiting: "... [E]verything we knew about it was from movies, from reading, from what we had heard from others" (Shrayer, 2007, p. 120).

Thus, the former Soviet Union as a home, and the United States as a diaspora is not a workable paradigm in the case of the Shrayer family. The diaspora/Israel opposition that is central to Boyarin's argument is not entirely appropriate for the predicament of the Russian-Jewish émigrés either. With the exception of his Israeli relatives, Shrayer's characters never leave the confines of the diaspora, insofar as it is defined through this opposition. Rather, they circulate between its various parts—Russia, Italy, or America—thereby making

³I do not mean to suggest here that all Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants experience a similar affinity or lack thereof towards either the former Soviet Union or contemporary Russia. Their responses range from loyalty and nostalgia to rejection, from a proud adherence to the mark of the cosmopolitan wandering Jew, to the unquestioning assumption of the ideas of Russian nationalism and the valorization of those over a secular or religious Jewish identity, to the taking up of a religious and/or Israeli national identity and the marginalization of various cultural and emotional affiliations with Russia. In *Building a Diaspora: Russian Jews in Israel, Germany, and the USA* (particularly in chapter 18), Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) argue that, while they are torn between their identity as Jews, "Russians," and depending on their place of residence, as Israelis, Americans, or Germans, Russian Jews often remain attached to Russian culture. That said, the experience of the Shrayer family, as portrayed in the memoir, points rather clearly to their affinity with the West, rather than their country of origin, or the Middle East. They have no homeland and live in various diasporic communities. Due to its in-between status, Ladispoli, the backdrop of the memoir, is, in effect, a diaspora within diaspora.

their movement somewhat more illustrative of the Jewish notions of diaspora and exile (*galut*), than of the theoretical diaspora/homeland dichotomy.

Howard Wettstein's (2002) definitions are particularly helpful here:

'Diaspora' is a political notion; it suggests geopolitical dispersion. It may further suggest ... involuntary dispersion from a center, typically a homeland. With changes in circumstances ..., a diasporic population may come to see virtue in diasporic life. And so 'Diaspora'—as opposed to *galut*—may acquire a positive charge, as today it has for some ... *Galut* is, by contrast, a religious, or almost religious notion ... One of its important resonances is a concomitant of involuntary removal from homeland: dislocation, a sense of being uprooted, being somehow in the wrong place. To view one group as in *galut* is to suppose that ... the proper order has been interrupted. Perhaps the dispersed group has been punished ... (p. 47)

However, the Shrayers', and their emigrant cohort's, unique situation is too complex to be resolved by the diaspora/*galut* distinction for a number of reasons. Strangers to messianic, organized religion, they do not see their world wonderings as the state of *galut*, brought on by a historical or theological catastrophe, or by a punishment for a transgression, and they have a rather tenuous connection with Israel. The "positive charge" of diaspora is applicable to their condition, inasmuch as a number of Shrayers' characters, most notably the narrator's mother, enjoy their status as citizens of the world, which, according to their definition, means being affiliated with Western (especially European) culture. But while, culturally, Shrayers' emigrants do "see virtue in diasporic life," the issue of the lack of consent to the diasporic state that is fundamental to Wettstein's definition (to him, diaspora is a condition of "involuntary dispersion from a center") is complex and multivalent in their case.

In the 1980s, the Russian Jews' journey westward was, due to both state-sponsored anti-Semitism and the convoluted and rigid emigration procedures that involved the confiscation of the Soviet citizenship, a combination of forced exile (albeit of a non-religious nature) and voluntary escape fueled by a desire to live on the other side of the Berlin Wall. After all, the Shrayers leave Moscow after many years as *refuseniks*, who had been denied the permission to emigrate. This combination of circumstances collapses the diaspora/*galut* dichotomy that is important to both Boyarin and Wettstein, albeit for different reasons, and, ultimately, leaves us in need of a new paradigm.

Unlike earlier theoretical paradigms, my reading of *Waiting for America* does not take the term "diaspora" to mean a generally fluid, transgressive cultural and geographical identity that exists in contradistinction to a firm, well-defined, normative national identity, acquired through birth and maintained through subsequent affective and cultural—if not necessarily legal—affiliations. In a sense, Shrayers' emigrants, wherever they are, always only have the former. The distinction that I make is, rather, between the (also diasporic) territory of documented citizenship (identified here with places as disparate as the Soviet Union, Israel, and the United States) and the attendant normative configurations of gender, sexuality, and marriage, and that of a passport-less, temporary grey area, a "diaspora within diaspora" represented by a place such

as Ladispoli, with its relatively unproblematic accommodation of non-normative genders and queer sexualities.

GENDER INSCRIPTIONS

In the course of his stay in Ladispoli, the young narrator enters into a passionate affair with a young Italian woman, Rafaella, whose appearance and appeal, in hindsight, seem to the narrator to be “stylized and overwrought” (Shrayer, 2007, p. 106). The couple “played a waiting love game, whose main suspension of reality consisted in pretending we were lovers in a small American coastal town ...” (p. 120). Simultaneously, the young man rekindles the relationship with an old flame from Moscow, Lana, with whom he lives out “a modern refugee story set in Italy” (p. 116). There is certainly nothing particularly transgressive or illicit about these youthful liaisons, but the narrator describes his adventures with Rafaella as a “secret tryst” (p. 120).

Shrayer’s text achieves the effect of transgression by underscoring subtly the performative, artificial, stylized, meta-fictional, and thus, in a sense, denaturalized, or queer, characteristics of the sexual and emotional boundary-crossings that go on in Ladispoli. In the romanticized setting of Rome and its suburbs, departures from the putatively natural, traditional constructions of gender and sexuality take place: a bespectacled intellectual from Western Ukraine becomes a “gigolo” (p. 103), who carries on an affair with an Austrian hostel owner; men assume traditionally feminine social roles, while women form an assertive matriarchy; queer male subjectivities emerge from the state of oblivion and erasure.

While Boyarin’s (1997) definitions of diaspora and homeland are removed from the Shrayers’ predicament, his discussion of Jewish diasporic maleness remains indispensable. In *Waiting for America*, several male characters illustrate a model of normative heterosexual masculinity that is coterminous with a nationalist project: one that emphasizes sexual prowess, aggression, and power, instead of gentleness and submission. Tellingly, and certainly consistently with Boyarin’s analysis, all these characters are either Israeli citizens, or those who hold up mainstream Israeli masculinity as a model for all Jewish men.

Pinya, the narrator’s Israeli paternal great-uncle, visits the Shrayer family in Ladispoli. When Uncle Pinya arrives in Italy, he is no longer young, but is still “single and still hungry to live” (Shrayer, 2007, p. 191), a polite Russian euphemism for aggressively insatiable sexual desire, particularly given the sexual connotation of the verb “to live” in Russian.⁴ His very appearance communicates masculinity of a Biblical cast:

He was about five-seven, with a lion’s main of hair. Very dry but still very animate—like a mountain river in the summer that still remembers itself turbulent and full of spring torrents. The oval of his face and his distin-

⁴ Particularly in a medical context, but in other contexts as well, “to live/live with” is a euphemism for being sexually active and/or having sexual relations with someone.

guished, raven nose were shaped much like those of our male cousins ... However, Uncle Pinya's skin had acquired the permanent cinnamon stain of the desert. (p. 191)

Here Shroyer strategically defamiliarizes Pinya's masculinity. He looks somewhat like his Russian relatives ("his [...] face and [...] nose were shaped much like those of our male cousins"). Even in a description of such decidedly gender-non-specific features as the shape of a face or a nose, the narrator underscores the Uncle's likeness to his "male cousins," thereby stressing his manliness. The simile that likens Pinya's energy to a river functions to establish a contrast between the Uncle's "natural" (or normative) libidinous manliness and his cousins' citified, feminized one. The "permanent cinnamon stain of the desert" denotes nature but connotes culture and ideology. It marks Pinya as an Israeli and makes his overall appearance redolent of precisely the kind of Biblical heroes who, to Boyarin, symbolize the paradox of nationalism as assimilation. The lion-like, animated Uncle epitomizes normative, genteel, power-driven masculinities, "Siegfrieds" and "Maccabees" all at once. However, in the narrative logic of the memoir, the Shroyer men never join Uncle Pinya in his ideological pursuits, nor do they emulate his masculinity.

What I see as the narrative's indirect rejection of, or at least ambivalence about, Israel's national narrative is reflected in the protagonists' choice to disregard the Israeli visas that had been their ticket out of the Soviet Union in the first place, and to immigrate to the U. S. instead. The Shroyer family is divided on the issue along the gender lines, but ultimately, puts the mother in charge of the decision where to emigrate, which also keeps the family in the non-normative, in-between space of Ladispoli longer, both literally and symbolically. Literally, had the Shroyers decided to emigrate to Israel, they would have been allowed to leave Italy much sooner. Figuratively, Ladispoli is a space that legitimizes and protracts the state of matriarchy, and the accompanying "feminized" (Boyarin, 1997, p. 157) masculinity, marginalized in the space of documented citizenship/nationalism.

Maxim's mother, an English professor, whom the memoir depicts as a big-city woman, and who "abhorred in advance the prospect of living in the provinces" (p. 148), is determined to live in a large American urban area. Conversely, Maxim's father, the doctor and writer David Shroyer, is torn between his desire to get to America, thereby fulfilling his longtime dream as a *refusenik*, and to pay tribute to his Jewish identity. In Vienna, the Shroyers undergo an interview with the representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, who attempt to persuade the ex-Soviet Jews to immigrate to Israel. Maxim's mother considers such an interview "arm-twisting" and "turn(s) chalk-white" with fear (p. 14), while his father experiences guilt:

They were pressuring me. Shaming me. 'A Jewish writer and a sufferer like you belongs in Israel.' And what's worse, a part of me agreed with what they said. Both of them came from Russia as young men in the early 1970s. They served in the army. One of them, the one with the scar, was wounded in 1973. It was hard to look them in the eye. (p. 15)

Not only is the father momentarily drawn to the nationalist narrative, but he is also in awe of the normative model of masculinity (similar to Uncle Pinya's), which the two Ministry of Absorption functionaries represent, that of military discipline and war scars. However, in the Shroyer family, the mother's desire to stay in Ladispoli and move to America ultimately prevails. As both the father and the son follow the mother's decision—thereby rendering themselves subordinate by the normative patriarchal standards—the trajectory of the Shroyer family becomes mother-identified.

Overall, the memoir admires and endorses (as does Boyarin) the matriarchal nature of the transitory Ladispoli community, exemplified, in particular, by the narrator's mother's casual friend Alina Soloveitchik. Gopinath (2005) decries both "the nationalist overvaluation of the heterosexual female body" (p. 19) and the erasure of queer femininity from the male-dominated discussions of queer diasporic sexuality and gender (pp. 77-78). In the absence of the strict nation/diaspora dichotomy, however, Ladispoli, represents a space in which the female body is not co-opted by either discourse and, though not queer according to Gopinath's definition, is allowed to transgress by controlling the gaze. Alina's appearance is striking: she is "tall" and "hefty," with "unsparingly perceptive chocolate-brown eyes" (p. 208). The contrast between Alina's "larger-than-life personality" (p. 209) and the quiet, submissive demeanor of her husband, Lyonya, or Leonid, is ostensibly stereotypical, verging on a cliché; yet it is also vividly illustrative of Boyarin's definition of gender relations in the diasporic Ashkenazi culture: "Alina Soloveitchik did most of the talking in her family, leaving to her quiet husband Leonid the multiple tasks of carrying their belongings, supervising the children, and also being a silent witness to what she called 'telling it like it is'" (p. 208).

Alina forms a friendship with Maxim's equally charismatic mother: "My mother ... used to dominate over her Moscow female friends in an understated, trendsetting fashion. But she was so emotionally drained ... that at the beach she let Alina take charge of her spirits ... A couple of times [the narrator's father and Leonid] went fishing off the jetty, but the bond was really between the women, the mothers" (p. 209). The word choice—"used to dominate," "take charge"—clearly indicates the women's strength, and the men's relative marginality.

To David Shroyer's consternation, his wife receives "an inappropriate compliment" (p. 162) from a fellow-emigrant named Anatoly Shteynfeld, while Alina is vocal about, and proud of, her sexuality, which at once disturbs and enthralls everyone from her timid husband, to her powerful Ukrainian ex-lover, to the casual onlookers on the Ladispoli beach: "'Alinochka, hold the towel. They're staring!' The usually phlegmatic Lyonya loses his nerve. 'What's the big deal? Let them stare all they want. You should be glad your wife still has something to offer to the world'" (p. 214). Alina is no property of her husband's, or any other man's; she belongs and offers herself to the world. Prior to emigrating from Russia, she had had an extramarital affair with a Communist functionary, a "classic Brezhnevite golden boy from the provinces ... He's now sort of trapped as second secretary of the regional party committee" (p. 213).

Upon discovering the liaison, Alina's husband "got down on his knees and begged me. Begged me for hours, to stay with him. For the children's sake, he said. And so here we are, going to Cleveland" (p. 213). In a move that obviously reverses the patriarchal family structure, the narrative empowers and liberates female sexuality, and gives the male character the unenviable—and stereotypically female—task of keeping the family intact, despite infidelity. In Ladispoli, the flaunting of the flesh at a public beach for all the world to see is Alina's inalienable right as a matriarch.

Alina epitomizes the tormented state of divided ethnic and geographic loyalties characteristic of a diasporic subject; she is in a permanent state of nostalgic longing and transition, looking back and forward at once. Alina is half—Jewish and half—Ukrainian. While she is ambivalent about her Jewish heritage, and, as the narrator puts it, "self-hating" (p. 214), she nonetheless constantly underscores the similarity of her last name to that of Joseph Soloveitchik, the prominent American rabbi and scholar, though there is no family connection between the two. She is devoted to her father, an Ukrainian air-force colonel:

Having had an Ukrainian, non-Jewish father gave Alina a feeling of superiority. Torn between Ukrainians and Jews, she was of two minds about emigrating, even after two years as a refusenik ... Alina was also the first Jew from Ukraine I'd met who was so ardently pro-Ukrainian and so anti-Russian. (p. 211)

Alina has no homeland to speak of. As a Soviet subject, she is implicated, and imbricated, in the politics of suppressed Ukrainian nationalism, anti-Semitism, and her own wavering desire to emigrate to the West. In effect, by way of complicating Boyarin's and Gopinath's dichotomies, she is torn between several diasporas at once, rather than between a homeland and a diaspora. Her sexuality disrupts the boundaries of the patriarchal family, to which she is compelled to return. Admittedly, her husband's abject begging is an unusual way of maintaining patriarchy; nonetheless, the result is the same: both in the Ukraine and in the U. S., the spaces of citizenship, the traditional family needs to remain intact. In Ladispoli, however, which is a permissive space, a diaspora within diaspora, Alina can keep her husband in submission and show her body to the world.

Heterosexuality, though central to the narrator's and most other characters' experiences, is frequently disrupted by queer desire, the appearances of which are brief but rendered significant by their very brevity. The introduction of two queer male characters, Evgeny and Alexandr, in Ladispoli, illustrates the disruptive force of sexuality in a diaspora within diaspora, a place that gives legitimacy to desires and identities that are, at worst, illegal, or, at best, marginal in the (also diasporic) space of documented citizenship, from and toward which the narrative moves. The Shrayers' stay in Rome begins with a purportedly factual account of the narrator's aunt's smuggling of her friend Evgeny Katz, the "first violin" (p. 48) of an unmentioned symphony orchestra, from Moscow to the West in a suitcase. The musician emerges from the narrator's aunt's trunk while the family is moving into their modest Roman hotel:

And what I saw after that was perfectly phantasmagoric. A plaid throw that used to cover the old divan in my aunt and grandmother's living room in Moscow began to quiver, and then a human hand jutted itself out of the corner of the trunk. We saw a short man, with a Checkovian goatee sitting up in the trunk, apparently adjusting his eyes to sunlight. (p. 47)

Though a bearer of a "Checkovian goatee," the character who is literally about to emerge is Chagallian much more than he is Checkovian: a diasporic Eastern European Jew, a violinist, a semi-fantastical "fiddler in the trunk." On leaving the trunk, Katz declares, "I'm going to ask for political asylum in Rome" (p. 48).

Katz, then, is not particularly concerned about reestablishing his Jewish identity, either in America or in Israel. Unlike the hundreds of emigrants who long to abandon the geographical and legal limbo that is Rome/Ladispoli, Evgeny Katz specifically desires to reside in Italy. Eventually, we grow to understand Katz's reasons for leaving Russia—and for remaining in such a limbo—a little better, though the text gives us these reasons casually, almost as an afterthought:

The story of the man from the Manchurian trunk has a happy ending. To this day I haven't found out the reason behind my aunt's risky enterprise. They weren't, my aunt insisted, lovers, and I'm inclined to believe her ... The violinist was granted a political asylum and stayed in Italy ... He changed his Jewish feline last name to a Russian aquiline name—a long one ending in "off" and hinting at refinement and nobility. Evgeny lives with his boyfriend, a former La Scala tenor. He runs his own music school in Rome, near Piazza Navona. He recently recorded the complete Brahms violin sonatas. (p. 49)

Despite the passing reference to Evgeny's sexuality, the narrator also suggests that the musician, who "had left a wife and two children in Russia" (p. 49), and Maxim's aunt may or may not have been lovers. Most likely, they were not; however, behind this unusual rescue story is a species of queer, non-procreative relationship between a heterosexual woman and a gay man that, as Eve Sedgwick taught us,⁵ supersedes and replaces a heterosexual procreative bond that Evgeny leaves behind.

While presumably leaving partly because he was persecuted as a Jew, Evgeny forges an identity that is consistent with his status as a non-heterosexual dweller of a diaspora within a diaspora. He leaves a normative family behind, and, instead of preserving his Jewish identity, goes back and chooses a Westernized, pseudo-Russian last name ending with the characteristic "off." He is neither a Jew nor a Russian; he is a queer father and a permanent exile happily suspended in the diasporic grey zone of Rome. In some ways, his professional identity is the only stable one for him, and, if anything, his choice of

⁵ See Sedgwick's famous reading of James's "The Beast in the Jungle" in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990, pp. 182-212).

Italy stems from the association of this country with the best in the musical world.

What comes out of the Manchurian trunk is not a baby but a violin: "Evgeny Katz picked the bundle up, untied the twine, and unwrapped it, freeing a black violin case from the bosom warmth of a kid's pink blanket" (p. 47). The image at once reproduces and reverses conventional birth and, consequently, the very concept procreative heterosexuality. The Manchurian truck lined with "Scottish plaid" (p. 47), oddly reminiscent of the bag containing a baby, left in the Victorian station by the absent-minded Miss Prism of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, symbolizes the suspension of identity in a space beyond nationality and compulsory heterosexuality simultaneously. In *Waiting for America*, Ladispoli and Rome are, then, the geographical equivalent of the well-traveled trunk: a space beyond dichotomized geopolitical certainty and sexual normativity.

The figure of a non-heterosexual male Jewish musician is the focal point of transgression in Ladispoli. While getting a haircut from a Russian-speaking barber, the narrator enters into a conversation with such a musician's grandfather, a menacing- and old-fashioned looking Mountain Jew⁶ who, before emigrating, had lived in Baku, the capital of the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. The old man discusses his family, particularly his grandsons, with the narrator: "My grandson's a sissy. I have two other grandsons—in the Israeli army. My older son went there in the seventies. They are warriors, like real men in our family ..." Earlier on, the old man mentions his roots and connection to the Caucasus, "We are from the lost tribes of Israel, you see. We'd been in the Caucasus a long, long time. Long before the Azeris and various others. We were all warriors and winegrowers in our family, and I was the last one" (pp. 92-93). The elderly man's derision of his gay grandson, who is also a musician, is simultaneous with his glorification of the "real" manhood of "warriors and winegrowers," whether Israeli or Azeri. Normative manhood (embodied here, and in the case of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption representatives, by military service) is linked to two narratives of secular nationalism: his grandsons' self-identification as Israelis (illustrated by their early emigration in the 1970s, as well as by their service in the IDF), and his family's mythical narrative of belonging to the Caucasus Mountains ("We are from the lost tribes of Israel ... We'd been in the Caucasus a long, long time").

The "sissy" grandson, Aleksandr Abramov, does not fit the mold of militarized masculinity. He has a hand that is "small like a child's" (p. 93) and "limp" (p. 95), and feels close only to the female part of his family: "I only love my mother and little sister ... and ... and," he paused" (p. 94). "The love that dare not speak its name" emerges both from the silence of the ellipsis, the in-

⁶ The appellation "Mountain Jews," or "Tat," refers to the Jews who have resided in the Caucasus Mountains, particularly in Dagestan and Azerbaijan. A number of Mountain Jews have emigrated to, and settled, in Israel.

evitable stereotypes of a small hand⁷ and a mother attachment. Seeking a common ground during their “sole lengthy conversation,” the two young men discuss what it was like “growing up Jewish” in the Soviet Union. While Maxim describes his life as a Jew as “tough,” Aleksandr paints a seemingly idyllic picture:

We were like a family – Azeris, Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians, European Jews, Mountain Jews, you name it. Oh, you have no idea. It was such a happy life. I didn’t want to leave, you know. I had everything there. I went to a special school for musically gifted children. At our Baku conservatory I had the best teachers. Oh, it was wonderful there. When we were leaving my whole neighborhood came to say goodbye. We all walked to the cabs, like brothers, arm in arm. I will never forget that, you see, never. And he was there, too ... To my simple parents he was an Azeri. To my fanatical grandfather he was a Muslim dog. But he was Adonis to me, you understand, Adonis. (pp. 94-95)

The young musician may be deluded about the alleged lack of anti-Semitism in the region, but what is more striking is the consistency of the connection between queer sexuality and an in-between identity that refuses to attach itself to an ethnicity, religion, or nationality. Aleksandr (whose very name may be indicative of the “Greek love”) reminisces not only about the diverse ethnic mix of his neighborhood but also about an imaginary band of brothers, walking “arm in arm,” with his lover in their midst. His sexuality is coached in Greek terms that go beyond either man’s cultural affiliation.

Queer identity locates both in music as a cosmopolitan art (as it does in the case of Evgeny Katz) and, banally and inevitably, and yet unusually for the context of this memoir, in classical antiquity. Aleksandr’s Jewish identity, Soviet citizenship, and his upcoming immigration to America, are all obscured by a Hellenist reference to an object of desire. Aleksandr is not at home in the Soviet Union, and, unlike the narrator, he is not “waiting for America”: his diaspora within diaspora is Ancient Greece, and the place where he can express his longing for Greece and its acceptance of same-sex desire is Ladispoli.

Though the narrator himself is heterosexual, he assumes, for the duration of his stay in Ladispoli and Rome, an identity that is structurally feminized, or at least somewhat removed from the mainstream Western constructions of masculinity. For example, he spends much of his time shopping for food and window-shopping for clothes. Curiously, he inherits the conventionally female penchant for shopping from his father:

⁷ Small hands and a limp handshake have a long history as both stereotypes and subversive gestures: “Indeed one of the things that most repelled the Victorian journalist Frank Harris upon meeting Oscar Wilde was that ‘he shook hands in a limp way that I disliked’ – presumably owing to his ‘effeminacy.’ The very handshake of the ideal male Jew encoded him as feminized in the eyes of European heterosexual culture, but that handshake constituted as well a mode of resistance to the models of manliness of the dominant fiction” (Boyarin, 1997, p. 151).

This is my father's influence, no doubt, as my chic and metropolitan mother never cared for the experience of dealing with farmers in their stalls, of checking out the wares and negotiating prices. My father, however ... taught me the lexicon and grammar of shopping and bargaining at Russian farmers' markets, and I put it to good use in Rome. (p. 97)

The narrator recalls "turning into a Roman housewife and heading for Piazza Vitoria" (p. 96). When not shopping at the "Round Market" in Piazza Vitoria, he "ogled at the clothing stores and at the fashionable people" on Via Nazionale. The cultural construct of a shopping man is not at all unusual in the diasporic, Russian-Jewish context, but that is precisely the point. Both in Russia, among the non-Jews, and in America, the country to which the narrator is about to move, shopping is the province of a woman, and in the brief time between national identities, the young narrator unabashedly assumes the role of a housewife. He inherits the conventionally feminine roles that are, nonetheless, culturally specific to European Jewish maleness.

The young man's apparently final incorporation into normative masculinity happens right before his departure for America. The memoir concludes with the young narrator's conversation with his mother on the eve of their departure for the United States. As they attempt to picture their new home, the narrator says, somewhat suddenly, "I think American girls are very sexy," while his mother adds, "I think it would be wonderful. And especially your American wife. I can almost picture her" (p. 225). Both the young man and his mother strain their imaginative capacities in an effort to understand what America is, and what their lives will be like. One aspect of their future existence is clear: it is bound up with the heteronormative family and marriage. Queer characters, such as Evgeny and Alexandr, and untraditional performances of gender, such as the feminine activity of window-shopping, or matriarchal decision-making, are likely to remain in Ladispoli. The move to America is not a move from a homeland to a diaspora, or vice versa; it is, rather, a lateral move within a diaspora, which, nonetheless, promises the Russian Jews citizenship, documented legibility, and legal rights. It also, however, demands that the heteronormative masculinity and marriage plot re-emerge as the dominant narratives.

In an earlier prolepsis, the narrator describes a trip from the U. S. abroad, during which he saw his Israeli Uncle Pinya for the last time: "In the summer of 1998, less than a year before I met my wife and my life changed forever, I took my last long trip as a bachelor ... I had visited my dear Estonia and also stayed in Poland, where Jewish memories were for sale in Krakow's Jewish town. ... After that I went to Israel and spent two weeks touring the country" (p. 204). The very experience of the diasporic life through world travel happens at the end of the narrator's bachelor life, as if marriage not only "changes his life" but also helps him settle permanently in his new home(land).

AFTER DIASPORA?

Though the narrator ends his own story of waiting for America with a sense of impending conjugal felicity, one of the text's most vivid concluding

images takes the reader away from a domestic idyll and back to Ladispoli. Three years after his arrival in America, the narrator visits Alina and Lyonya Soloveitchik in their new home in Cleveland, where they lead a rather prosaic but apparently successful and well-adjusted lives: "Alina was working as a lab tech. Lyonya ... went back to school to get 'an American PhD.' On the inside, their ranch house in Cleveland Heights had the look of a Soviet apartment, and the wife and husband Soloveitchik both still looked very Soviet, especially so in contrast to their own Americanized children" (p. 212). The interior of an immigrant's home often serves to problematize the issues of belonging and adaptation. Martin Manalansan's (2005) description of a gay Filipino man's small New York City apartment divided into an "American" and a "Filipino" section (pp. 150-152) is a compelling illustration of this phenomenon.

Likewise, an inside/outside divide, both aesthetic and cultural, clearly marks the space that the Soloveitchiks inhabit in the United States. Underneath the veneer of placid suburban existence pulsates an irreducible and intractable non-identity that precludes domesticity from setting in, and the middle-class suburban outside from coalescing conveniently with the "foreign" interior. This non-identity harkens back to the "diaspora within diaspora" and is anchored in the image of Alina's body, in Ladispoli, available to the desiring narrative gaze: "I cannot imagine the Ladispoli beach without the Soloveitchiks in the center of the shot. Standing on the floral sheet under the stupefying mid-day sun, Alina is changing out of her black bikini with gold buckles" (p. 214). The queer space that the immigrants had left behind is depicted as a woman who is untamed by patriarchy and publicly sexual.

The memoir, then, does not conclude with an entirely happily-ever-after domestic scene; in effect, mediated by a fond memory, Ladispoli infringes both upon the normative domestic scene and upon the territory of national identity, or citizenship, and renders the latter territory diasporic. This intrusion troubles and redraws the boundaries of the homeland in the diaspora/homeland binary and calls into question the viability of the binary itself. *Waiting for America: A Story of Emigration* is a text that depicts the complexity of the contemporary narratives of perennially diasporic global migrants and offers the possibility of creating a theoretical paradigm that resonates with their experiences.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Ben-Rafael, E., Lyubansky, M., Gluckner, O., Harris, P., Israel, Y., Jasper W., & Schoeps, J. (2006). *Building a diaspora: Russian Jews in Israel, Germany and the USA*. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
- Bhaskaran, S. (2004). *Made in India: Decolonizations, queer sexualities, trans/national projects*. London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Boyarin, D. (1997). *Unheroic conduct: The rise of heterosexuality and the invention of the Jewish man*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Boyarin, D. (2000). Outing Freud's Zionism. In C. Patton & B. Sánchez-Eppler (Eds.), *Queer diasporas* (pp. 71-104). Durham, London: Duke University Press.
- Brazier, J.E., & Manur, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Theorizing diaspora: A reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Chow, R. (2003). Against the lures of diaspora. In J. Evans Brazier & A. Manur (Eds.), *Theorizing diaspora: A reader* (pp. 163-184). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Gopinath, G. (2005). *Impossible desires: Queer diasporas and South Asian public cultures*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Hawley, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Postcolonial, queer: Theoretical intersections*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Lubhéid, E., & Cantú, Jr., L. (Eds.). (2005). *Queer migrations: Sexuality, U.S. citizenship, and bordercrossings*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Luibhéid, E. (2005). Queering migration and citizenship. In E. Lubhéid & L. Cantú, Jr. (Eds.), *Queer migrations: Sexuality, U. S. citizenship, and border crossings* (pp. ix-xlvi). Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Manalansan, M. (2000). Diasporic deviants/divas: how Filipino gay transmigrants 'play with the world.' In C. Patton & B. Sánchez-Eppler (Eds.), *Queer diasporas* (pp. 183-203). Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Manalansan, M. (2003). *Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Manalansan, M. (2005). Migrancy, modernity, mobility: Quotidian struggles and queer diasporic intimacy. In E. Lubhéid & L. Cantú, Jr. (Eds.), *Queer migrations: Sexuality, U. S. citizenship, and border crossings* (pp. 146-160). Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Parreñas, R., & Siu, L.C.D. (2007). Introduction: Asian diasporas—new conceptions, new frameworks. In R. Parreñas & L.C.D. Siu (Eds.), *Asian diasporas: New formations, new conceptions* (pp. 1-28). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Patton, C., & Sánchez-Eppler, B. (2000). Introduction: With a passport out of Eden. In C. Patton & B. Sánchez-Eppler (Eds.), *Queer diasporas* (pp. 1-14). Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Sedgwick, E.K. (1990). *Epistemology of the closet*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Shrayer, M.D. (2007). *Waiting for America: A story of emigration*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Wesling, M. (2008). Why queer diaspora? *Feminist Review*, 90, 30-47.
- Wettstein, H. (2002). Coming to terms with exile. In H. Wettstein (Ed.), *Diasporas and exiles: Varieties of Jewish identity* (pp. 47-59). Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Wilde, O. (1981). The importance of being earnest. In S. Weintraub (Ed.), *The portable Oscar Wilde* (pp. 430-507). New York: Penguin.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.