UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN FAILED ÉMIGRÉ CHARACTERS IN *SAVE MY CHILD!* BY CYNTHIA OZICK AND *THE MUDDLE* BY SANA KRASIKOV

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Abstract: *Two stories about well-established individuals in America endeavoring to get immigrant visas for relatives from the Soviet Union and Ukraine in times of crises are the focus of this contribution. One story is based on renowned Jewish American fiction and essay writer Cynthia Ozick (1929-). Ozick's Russian first cousin begged for assistance in 1990, prompting the first work of fiction under study, while the second story echoes circumstances revolving around the mixed, Ukrainian-Russian family of Sana Krasikov (1969-), a Ukrainian-born Jewish American novelist and story writer, set in February-March 2022. The would-be immigrants quickly become so alienated by people and the "lifestyle" in the modern capitalist host countries (USA and Canada) that they return to their politically and economically unstable country of origin (the Soviet Union and Ukraine). Ozick's plot is narrated by the older American host reflecting on Czarist pogroms, Soviet purges and the Shoah which destabilizes preconceived expectations as the story metamorphosizes from a historical reflection of mass murder into satire about a Soviet Jewish greenhorn. "Save My Child!" is interpreted within the context of the "Soviet Jewry Movement" in which numerous efforts were made on many fronts by Israel and the United States to enable free emigration of Soviet Jews. Krasikov's story on the other hand is set in the February 24, 2022 invasion of Ukraine by the Russian military in which fake news, propaganda and censorship successfully manipulate opinions of Russian speakers and others abroad. A friend of the Kyiv-born New Yorker narrator of "The Muddle" undercuts fixed beliefs of a clear dichotomy between invading Russian violators of an independent souverain nation and Ukrainian defenders when she, an ethnic Ukrainian character, sides with invading Russians (accommodating her ethnic Russian husband). "Save My Child" (1996) and "The Muddle" (2022) are set thirty years apart in unlike historical crises, yet they share common features such as in drawing would-be emigrants behaving in peculiar ways, deviating widely from their charitable hosts' expectations.*

Keywords: *Jewish American fiction; Soviet Jewry Movement; Russian invasion of Ukraine; Jewish emigration; collapse of the Soviet Union.*

"You don't know what it's like to be treated
as an enemy because you want peace."
– S. Krasikov

Introduction

The current war taking place between Russia and Ukraine has shattered the stability not only of Ukraine but of trade and political and diplomatic relations between Europe and other trading partners around the world, and there are fears that Russian aggression may spill over to other countries. Dominating Russian politics since the end of 1999, the current president of the Russian Federation has declared the collapse and breakup of the Soviet Union as a

great problem for Russia and has partially rooted the motivation of his full-scale military assault against Ukraine to the consequences of this historical event of December 1991. According to the Russian president's nationalist, irredentist claim, Ukraine "is the inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space" (Düben 2). The ongoing war has cost the lives of more than half a million soldiers and civilians (as of the writing of this essay). On March 17, 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for the president of the Russian Federation for war crimes (den Boer *et al* 463). These enormous breakdowns make the stories under study relevant as reflections of recent events of momentous historical significance. While Ozick's "Save My Child!" was published before Putin ascended to the presidency (so he is accordingly not referred to), Sanikov's "The Muddle" mentions him twice, though not by name: Putin is referred to as "the Turd" (Sanikov 159, 164).

The stories focus on misunderstandings due to preconceived constructions of the unknown other, even though this unknown other belongs within the family. In Ozick's story "Save My Child!" set during Gorbachev's *perestroika* reform policy, vast information disseminated in the United States as part of the "Soviet Jewry Movement" convinces American Jews to assist those wishing to emigrate from the Soviet Union due to anti-Semitism. "The Muddle" reflects Russian propaganda through radio, television and social media that persuasively influences not only Russians but provide "talking points" to a fictional ethnic Ukrainian character to side with the aims of the ongoing Russian "special military operation."

Cynthia Ozick and Sana Krasikov have indicated separately from the fiction writing that their stories are closely linked to and inspired by the aforementioned chaotic events which have caused considerable hurt and conflict in their own family relations, revealing the chaos not as just a massive international catastrophe but as a personal one as well since the characters constitute fictionalized family members of the authors. Both narrators are New York Jewish women who have retired and wish to be helpful. A New York-born Yiddish-speaking American, Ruth Puttermesser, like Ozick, has never visited the country from which her parents emigrated and replicates much of Ozick's heritage in this story. Likewise, Shura Kravetz is a Ukrainian-born Jewish emigrant who moved with her husband to the United States after college and speaks Russian: she has written computer software for a living in the U.S. Sharing the same initials as the author Sana Krasikov, Shura Kravetz's very close Ukrainian friend Alyona Korolenka, residing in Kyiv, at first denies that any invasion will take place and later expresses apathy about the Russian attack, much to Shura's surprise. Krasikov indicates in the "Contributors' Notes" section of the anthology publication *Best American Short Stories* that Shura and Alyona are "almost as mirror images" of her

relations undergoing "a kind of civil war among fathers and sons, wives and husbands, something that tested long-standing bonds" (Krasikov 294).

The Uninformed American Narrator of "Save My Child"

Set in the context of the Soviet Jewry Movement, Cynthia Ozick's story satirizes how many Russian Jews exploited American empathy for Jews "stuck" in the Soviet Union to visit the United States for the purpose of enriching themselves and exploring new opportunities. While the near-universal portrayal of Soviet Jews in the United States consisted of the denial of freedom to practice their religion and in particular, as victims of systematic anti-Semitism, as Senderovich observes, there was "widespread participation of Jews in Soviet society as members of its highly skilled professional classes [which] turned many Soviet Jews into what could at one and the same time be seen both as persecuted minority and as cultural elite" (102). Nevertheless, the perception in the United States was not nearly so nuanced. The persecution of Soviet Jews and anti-Semitism pervaded reports and publications in American journalism in the 1970s and 1980s, most frequently concerning Soviet physicists Andrei Sakharov (1921-1989) and Natan Sharansky (1948 -). Kelner views the activists in the Soviet Jewry Movement as an effective operation which also played a particular role in helping shape American Jewish identity, particularly in its international outlook and self-perception (2008: 2). An example of this is pointed out by Beckerman who refers to the guilt American Jews felt for their own perceived insufficient help for the millions of European Jews persecuted and murdered in the Nazi era which compelled American participation in the Soviet Jewry Movement (Beckerman 2010: 5).

Like Americans generally, New York lawyer Ruth Puttermesser, narrator of "Save My Child!", conceives Soviet Jews predominantly as victims worthy of sincere compassion and assistance and regards the Soviet Union of early 1990s consisting of "ghosts of antique hatred [that] were yet to be awakened" (Ozick 93). In newspapers Ruth reads about schoolchildren in Moscow who "have their noses bloodied to the taunts of *"Zhid! Zhid!"* (94). Ruth Puttermesser then offers a soft maternalistic attitude towards her guest Lidia Girshengornova, her cousin's daughter, when she arrives in New York City.

The Soviet Jewry Movement and the American Host

A consideration of the background to emigration from the Soviet Union is here of interest, since it offers an explanation to the misunderstandings between characters in Ozick's perplexing story. The sixty-year-old narrator of "Save My Child!", a character frequently recurring in Ozick's shorter fiction as well as her novel *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997), Ruth Puttermesser recalls her

own long-deceased ancestors who managed to emigrate from Czarist-era pogroms or from the Stalin-ordered "purge" of Jewish intellectuals in the late 1930s: "her father who, fleeing the brutish Russia of the czars, had left behind parents, sisters, brothers, all swallowed up in the Bolshevik silence, dwindled now in their brittle cardboard-framed photographs" (Ozick 92). Ozick's Jewish characters in the U.S. did not experience post-October Revolutionary Soviet life, but only read about it from afar. Likewise, the faded photographs her father had kept of beloved siblings constitute Ruth Puttermesser's only memories of her Russian family tree. She had never personally met her aunts, uncles or cousins since Ruth had been born in the thirties. This disconnect plays a key role in her subsequent fantasizing of imagined lives of Jews still residing in the Soviet Union in the 1990s, an imagination largely fed by an organized media campaign started in the 1960s. Keeping American Jews with Eastern European heritage ignorant of their Shoah-surviving relatives of the Soviet Union was an intentional consequence of the dearth of communication among siblings separated by continents and political systems that was enforced in the Soviet Union in part because letters from America were looked on with great suspect during the cold war in Moscow: "*Stop! We are afraid of a letter from America! They will take us for spies!*" was a message sent in code to Ruth Puttermesser's father (Ozick 92).

Ruth recalls her father's reaction to the news of his mother's death in the Soviet Union, a Jewish Tatar, and multiple memories flooded his brain: "all the lost aunts and uncles, the Muscovites, the wartime sufferers; Velvl in his school uniform with round pale eyes" (Ozick 95). All of these people in Ruth's family are dead and only the next generation of two continue the family tree.

Kept in this way ignorant of cousins and other relatives, Puttermesser, like millions of other Americans, is game for manipulation by the Soviet Jewry Movement that filled in the blanks of American imagination about how utterly menacing life was for Jews. "The construction of the figure of the 'Soviet Jew'" (Sernderovich 105) aimed in practical terms above all to mobilize Americans to facilitate the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, a country in great need of increasing its Jewish population after gaining densely Arab-inhabited territory in the Six Day War. This mobilization took on many forms besides the obvious political pressure that American congressmen and presidents put on the Soviet Union over numerous decades.

For example, *The Jews of Silence* (1966) by Elie Wiesel (1930-2016), the result of his travel research financed by Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper, describes Soviet Jews lacking the chance to practice their religion. The end-effect of the book, widely read among American Jews, was that Soviet Jews needed to be retrained to the religion of their ancestors, thus becoming Jews who would no longer be silenced Jews but authentic. In Wiesel's writing, as

Senderovich points out, "the 'Soviet Jew' emerged as a silent creature" (105), and that Wiesel's "sense of the proper 'home culture' reveals the necessity of American Jewish intervention" (106). Wiesel wrote that Soviet Jews he visited provided ample evidence that, "Without knowing why, they define themselves as Jews. And they believe in the eternity of the Jewish people, without the slightest notion of the meaning of its mission. That is their tragedy" (Wiesel 50).

Mixed with the notion of Soviet Jews as a religiously-persecuted minority were those who engaged in dissent. Western media extensively covered the plight of Soviet dissidents in the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom were Jewish: the aforementioned physicist Andrei Sakharov and his wife Yelena Bonner, as well as his assistant Natan Sharansky. These men were imprisoned, but with media attention they eventually were released and Sharansky was eventually permitted to emigrate to Israel, although Sakharov, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975, died in the Soviet Union. By 2005, over 500,000 Soviet Jews emigrated to the United States (Zeltzer-Zubida 214) and over 815,000 emigrated to Israel (Anon: no date).

Some Jews who have remained in Russia have been involved in business enterprises, gaining enormous wealth obtained during the underpriced privatization of state enterprises in the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin. Some emphatically support the Putin regime to this day. Alexander Khinshtein (b. 1974) is a Russian oligarch, politician and significant supporter of Putin while Vladimir Zhirinovsky (1946-2022) was an extreme right-wing politician and nationalist. One Jewish Russian oligarch, Roman Abramovich (1966-), is famous in the West as the former owner of the Chelsea soccer club in London. On the other side of the Russian political spectrum, Boris Berezovsky (1946-2013) was a business oligarch who became a critic just one year after Putin had assumed the presidency and died under mysterious circumstances, like many influential journalists and opposition politicians. Mikhail Khodorkovsky (b. 1963), former owner of the Yukos oil company and for a period Russia's richest man, is a Putin critic living in exile after having served over a decade in Russian prison (Guriev and Rachinsky146). Former chess world champion Garry Kasparov (b. 1963 as Garik Weinstein) is another well-known Russian Jewish critic of Putin currently living in exile (Kasparov 2012: 34).

An unusual case involves another right-wing Jewish supporter of the Russian president named Yevgeny Prigozhin (1961-2023) who famously led the "Wagner Group" which served the Russian government as a private mercenary army (modelled on Eric Prince's company Blackwater) until Prigozhin led a short-lived mutiny against Russia's military in June 2023. Two months later, on August 23, 2023, a bomb exploded onboard Prigozhin's airplane which crashed, killing him along with (the non-Jewish) Dmitry Utkin,

former special forces officer who served as Wagner commander and professed Russian Nazi principles. Utkin has been photographed receiving state military medals from Putin in the Kremlin, while simultaneously the Russian president designates Ukraine a fascist Nazi state (Marten et al 4). Despite some influential Jewish people remaining in the Russian Federation, the majority of Soviet Jews emigrated from 1990 to 2002, with significantly smaller waves emigrating annually since then.

The influence of the Soviet Jewry Movement does not suffice to explain why the Soviet Union suddenly allowed so many Jews to emigrate. There is substantial evidence that documents stolen in the 1980s for Israel by the convicted U.S. Naval analyst and spy Jonathan Pollard (1953-) was "sold" to the Soviet Union for the price of unfettered emigration of Soviet Jews *en masse* to Israel: "the Israelis repackaged much of Pollard's material and provided it to the Soviet Union in exchange for continued Soviet permission for Jews to emigrate to Israel" (Hersh 26). Israelis have never returned the hundreds of thousands of sensitive secret technical documents which would only have interested the nuclear-superpower adversary of the U.S. (Hersh 27). While insisting that he stole information useful for Israeli defence, Pollard also handed over secret nuclear submarine technology to his Israeli handler, vitiating a major part of the offshore American nuclear deterrence. CIA Director William Casey stated that "Israelis used Pollard to obtain our attack plan against the USSR – all of it. The co-ordinates, the firing locations, the sequences. And for guess who? The Soviets" (Borger np). He was incredulous how a friendly country like Israel could trade these military secrets to the Soviet military. In short, it is settled that Jonathan Pollard's spying in 1984-85 enabled well over one million Soviet Jews to emigrate.

At the start of Ozick's story, the danger to Jews in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev appears entirely different from the religious issues Wiesel presented in his book, or even of limited opportunities because of anti-Semitism. Receiving a telephone call of desperation from her cousin Zhenya in Moscow, Ruth Puttermesser regards the plea to aid a relative coming to USA from the crumbling Soviet Union as a solemn duty. She senses a strong possibility of Russians scapegoating Jews who might be exposed to the kind of violence experienced by Jews during the depressed economy in Germany in the 1930s.

Ozick's story reveals Ruth suffering an identity crisis of identity for her semi-lost family heritage in Russia as a mysteriously hidden history due to what she understands are "Jews of silence." Ruth Puttermesser knows few facts from her deceased parents' distant childhood, so as the Russian Jewish émigré Lidia, as Ruth understands from her first cousin, finds herself in dangerous circumstances, Ruth conceives her as a potential scapegoated Jew in the collapsing economy. Reflecting Wiesel's *The Jews of Silence*, Lidia,

like most Soviet Jews, does not regard the Jewish faith as a part of her identity. Rather than Jewish, Lidia identifies as a Christian: "She was moved by icons, by Holy Mother Russia. She told how she often wept at Eastertime, and how Jesus had once appeared to her in a dream, looking exactly like a holy painting on an ancient icon" (Ozick 101). Indeed, who is this mysterious Lidia, Puttermesser ponders. What secret horrors has she experienced "over there" in the Soviet Union? Was she forced to religious conversion in the Soviet assimilation process? How difficult will it be to "retrain" her to Judaism? Ruth condoles with Lidia without knowledge about her life, making assumptions based on media reports produced by the Soviet Jewry Movement. She thinks Lidia as something of an enigma, not exactly fitting into the construct of the Soviet Jew, given her overconfidence and her own sense of how the world really works. Ruth naturally assumes Jewish suffering when there was none.

In some ways, Lidia fits the stereotype of East Bloc immigrants rather than the expected construct of a Soviet Jew. Indeed, there appeared very little of any Jewishness in Lidia. Ruth was nevertheless determined to save Lidia from assumed danger because of Ruth's father:

> "*Save my child!* But it was no longer Zhenya's voice; it was the voice of Puttermesser's papa. The pathos – the Bolshevik upheavals, the German siege of Moscow, the hunger, the Doctor's Plot, the terror" (Ozick 96).

Hence, Ruth Puttermesser also projects her imagined Soviet Jewish pathos onto Lidia by figuring her father's stories from Czarist Russia into Lidia's biography.

Yet, the appearance of Lidia in her Manhattan condominium constitutes Ruth's eventual peripetia: she comes to realize that she knows almost nothing about Soviet Jewry. Thus, more than most American seeking their roots, Ruth Puttermesser wishes to know, now as a sixty-year-old, not only about her relatives, but where she came from and who she really is as a diaspora Jew, in order to revisit the souls of her late immigrant parents, and not merely their graves in Staten Island. In other words, Ruth anticipates meeting not merely her living relatives of today, but in a peculiar way her ancestors through her cousin's daughter Lidia. Ruth imagines Lidia resembling more closely the repercussions of impoverished backwardness and overt anti-Semitism of both media reports she consumed as well as those pre-Soviet, Czarist Russian experiences as she recalls the names of her ancestors; uncles, aunts, and grandparents that she heard so much of from her late father.

Puttermesser's father in large part replicates Cynthia Ozick's father, a Talmud scholar who fled imperial Russian-dominated Lithuania in 1913 to avoid conscription. After settling in the Bronx, instead of continuing his rabbinical studies, he and his wife opened a pharmacy, established a small

family, and assimilated to some extent while apparently forgetting almost nothing of the old country. Her Russian family history along with her cousin's request for assistance inspired Ozick to produce a satirical portrait of the phony repression of Soviet Jews, supposedly in danger of new pogroms, and their half-genuine efforts to migrate in order to escape personal financial calamity as the economy of the old system collapsed under reformer General Secretary Gorbachev. "'Gorbachev!' Lidia scoffed [to a journalist]. 'Everybody hate Gorbachev, only stupid peoples in America like Gorbachev'" (Ozick 100). Soviet citizens who summed up the situation sought out with avidity the economic opportunities which would emerge through privatization under President Yelsin. Otherwise, another possible alternative to the ensuing poverty was sought out by emigrating to either Israel or the United States. "Lidia was after money, that was the long and the short of it" (Ozick 100), and not the museums, a visit to the top of the Empire State Building or any other cultural experiences that New York City had to offer.

The Soviet Jew Who does not Immigrate

Ozick's story somewhat deteriorates into Soviet Jews stereotyping with Lidia's reaction to a modern American grocery story, her paranoia about the telephone being bugged, her constant selling at high prices of what Ruth regards as cheap Russian folk art (Ozick 97-98), and Lidia's explanation of the fate of photographed relatives. As Ruth concludes, "there were no happy stories among these photos" (Ozick 98).

Lidia decides to work as a cleaning lady and insists on working at this lowly position for cash even though she graduated from university with a degree in biochemistry and her resume included a few years as a sports "doctor" maintaining the chemistry of Soviet athletes by testing their blood and urine. Ruth surmises that she gave her charges steroids or other performance enhancing drugs. Despite Ruth's emphasis that better positions could be attained with her degree, Lidia insists: "I tell before, I want clean for womans" (Ozick 98). Ruth advertises her services, but Lidia changes the wording from Ruth's "Russian émigrée" to "Soviet newcomer." Lidia's boyfriend Volodys calls from Russia frequently:

> "He afraid I stay in America," Lidia said. "He afraid I not come back."
> "Well, isn't that the point?"
> "Just like Mama!" (Ozick 99).

To Lidia, "mama" was preposterous because she thought she knew what was best for her daughter but in Lidia's mind, mama was completely out of touch, much like Ruth. For one American gentile, Lidia becomes the femme fatale, an enchantress who hypnotizes him with her exotic spell only to

abandon the handsome, innocent North Dakota sales manager in the end. Lidia's exotic charm is manifested in her exotic appearance and attire, her Russian accent and convoluted grammatical constructions in English, her enticing way of looking at men, and her confident independence including morally ambiguous behaviour. Lidia attracts weak-kneed Pete Robinson who particularly enjoys a take-charge woman. She intrigues Pete as a real capitalist who, at the same time, can appear frivolous. After Lidia learns she is pregnant with Robinson's child, she returns to her Russian boyfriend, having saved a considerable sum of money from sales and earnings from her one and a half months in the United States.

Cynthia Ozick's real first cousin named Sonya lived in Moscow, the daughter of her father's deceased sister. Later in the 1990s Sonya moved to Israel (like the fictional mother of Lydia named Zhenya). The character Lidia Girshengornova is based on Sonya's daughter who flew in from Moscow and lived with Ozick and her husband for six weeks in 1990 in their Manhattan condominium. Ozick "portrayed this woman's moneymaking drive, her disgust at the sentimentality of left-leaning Americans towards the Soviet regime [under Gorbachev], her hard charm and ambition." (Brockes n.p.). About half a decade later Ozick finally met her first cousin Sonya face-to-face in Israel. Later Sonya read the slightly altered version of the *New Yorker* story in Ozick's novel *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997) and Sonya felt personally insulted, writing to Ozick, "What did I ever do to hurt you?" Sonya has since broken off all contact with her fiction-writing first cousin (Brockes 2011).

In Lidia, Ozick celebrates in the end a rootless, transitory and thoroughly assimilated Russian who, to the edified New Yorker Ruth, comes off less like a near penniless Abraham Cahan greenhorn arriving off the boat and more like a female version of a Budd Schulberg New York Jewish character with Ruth Puttermesser figuring out what makes Lidia run. Nostalgic as she ages, Ruth Puttermesser misses her deceased, Yiddish-speaking immigrant parents. In the course of the visit, it becomes obvious to her that Lidia Girshengornova cannot deliver on Ruth's unrealistic expectations of reviving her parents' characteristics of an older generation from the "old country" just as she fails to correspond to the media construct of the Soviet Jew.

Russian-Ukrainian Families Divided

In "The Muddle" the Ukrainian-born, Russian-speaking émigré Jewish writer Sana Krasikov presented herself fictionally as a New York emigrant from Ukraine, Shura Kravetz, who responds in an understandable horrified shock after the 24 February 2022 Russian invasion of her native country. She regularly phones with Alyona with whom she has been friends since elementary school. Both Shura and Alyona are almost 70 years old and have

both suffered significant health issues. Shura, who is recovering from cancer treatment, has to wait until day five before she gets any news from Kyiv over Skype: "We're alive" (Krasikov 145). Shura senses neglect by her friend: why hasn't she contacted her as everyone watches missiles raining down on Kyiv and thousands of Russian tanks rolling ever closer to the capital?

Shura calls Alyona's son Pavel who had emigrated to Toronto, Canada two decades earlier: he reports that his parents are "waiting it out in the apartment" (Krasikov 147) in Kyiv rather than evacuating the city and fleeing westward like nearly everyone else. The personnel of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv had already cleared out. News broadcasts show hundreds of thousands of denizens of the capitol chaotically fleeing to escape exploding Russian missiles by overcrowded trains or in incredible traffic jams on highways heading west. Shura is astounded that they are remaining there in the midst of all the danger. Alyona's imposing and imperious husband Oleg, the son of a Soviet colonel, "to be sure, was Russian" (Krasikov 146) while Alyona was proudly Ukrainian on both sides of her family. Shura and Alyona as schoolgirls attended the same public schools, "Zhidovskaya shkola" – the Jew School – it "was how the Ukrainians and the Jews both referred to School No. 6" (Krasikov 147) where the Russian language was the medium of instruction. They sat next to each other throughout their primary and secondary school education due to the traditional Soviet alphabetizing of seating arrangements (Alyona Korolenka and Shura Kravetz) and became friends for life.

Although presciently warned by Shura of Ukraine's precarity due to an invasion by Shura who specifies over Skype the massing of Russian tanks, troops and weaponry on the border just a week before the invasion happened, Shura notes the insouciance of Alyona who entertains no worries whatsoever: "In Kharkiv, their hands are already tired of baking *karavai*" or the traditional ritual of salt and bread greeting of strangers "that some Ukrainians had greeted Germans back in '41" (Krasikov 149). Staggered by this comment linking the contemporary Russian invaders with the Nazis of yesteryear being greeted by Ukrainians, Shura as a Ukrainian and a Jew, cannot comprehend how Alyona can possibly express pro-invasion rhetoric with this loaded association, and notes how she goes on increasing in iniquity.

The "pure" Ukrainian Alyona's anti-Ukrainian complaints in December 2021 are unequivocal: "They act like they're the cops, roaming the streets after dark and stopping anyone they want, asking for papers… And they're anti-Semites" (Krasikov 150), Alyona emphasizes to her Jewish friend living far away from it all in Croton, New York with her husband Misha, echoing the Russian president's speech on February 24, 2022 claiming that "the Ukrainian regime comprises murderous fascists" (Aleksejeva 27). She is affected with the Russians. Indeed, Alyona deems her Ukrainian state as fascist rather than a democracy just like Russian propaganda designates the

democratically-elected government Russia seeks to eliminate. A debate consequently ensues on Shura's initiative on Skype about Jews, with Shura finding Alyona's sharp remarks mystifying:

> "How could the fascists have colonized the state when your President is a Jew? And the defense minister too."
> "You think *that* proves anything? Your Trump was practically a Jew himself with his Kushners running the shop. Did that stop him from saluting your neo-Nazis when he got up on a balcony?... Zelensky's afraid they'll topple the government if he doesn't kiss their asses. You should hear them talk. An army of lions being led by sheep. Big deal, Jewish President – we change Presidents every five years."
> "Better than every twenty-five," Shura replies (Krasikov 151).

The perspectives these lifetime friends take are heterodoxy with each rejecting the other's accepted beliefs about Ukraine. Thus, Alyona and Shura stubbornly maintain their points of view, and refrain from discussing politics .

Once they realize that the war shall be lasting more than the Russian propaganda promised, instead of escaping westerly Oleg and Alyona decide to move closer to the Belarus border where most of the invading forces attacking Kyiv came from. "Oleg and I are tired of this whole muddle" (Krasikov 151) and Alyona even seems apathetic to the violence and death taking place nearby. In the beginning of March they "retreat" to their dacha and garden in a village in the Zhitomir region, the city of which the Russians have been shelling regularly. Remaining as composed as she can, Alyona's description of her vegetable-growing activities masks killings of civilians, the tens of thousands of Ukrainian children kidnapped to Russia, and the aforementioned war evacuations taking place all around them. They discuss the town where both women attended school that was shelled and Shura describes the destruction of two schools.

Over Skype, Pavel relates to Shura how conversations about the 2014 Russian takeover of Crimea and Donbas in his Toronto apartment among expat Ukrainians become intolerable for the new Canadian immigrant Oleg who "lifted his glass, and started singing one of those old Russian-veteran songs – We Need Only Victory!" (Krasikov 154). Pavel rebukes his father for this provocation, an opprobrium among his wife's local Ukrainian church friends visiting his flat who had helped them settle in Toronto twenty years earlier. Krasikov reifies the notion of Pavel's Ukrainian identity by standing up to his Russian father: they embody the two nations. The son's rejection of being Russian symbolizes Ukraine denying Putin that it must be subordinate and dominated over by Russia.

Even though his mother is fully Ukrainian and Pavel is mixed, half-Ukrainian and half-Russian, he certainly "behaves" more Ukrainian by being

independent. He speaks the Ukrainian language with his family at his home in Canada and takes a stand against the Russian military aggression, which at that point took place only in Crimea and Donbas. His mother Alyona however, speaks Russian at home and always "rolls over" for Oleg. She tells "the version of history that exists in Putin's mind" (Düben 11) which is repeated endlessly over the airwaves.

Because of this infelicitous family confrontation between the Russian father and his Ukrainian son, the parents pack and leave Toronto for Ukraine in complete disregard for the months of Pavel's bureaucratic toil to obtain their immigrant visas. That took place a few years earlier. Now in March 2022, Pavel mistakenly believes "Aunt" Shura might convince his mother who suffers from advancing stages of diabetes to leave Ukraine after the full-scale invasion and move back to Toronto. "My father is impenetrable. If it was just her, I could convince her to come back, get some proper care. But as long as she's around him… He's contemptuous of the way I live" (Krasikov 154), thus emphasizing Pavel's belief in his father's overbearing domination. Pavel however, does not know that it was in fact his mother who made Oleg pack up so that they could depart for Kyiv immediately, as she tells Shura. Above all, Alyona wants harmony in her marriage and knows that her husband would not tolerate any challenge to his traditional patriarchal position of dominating power over all family issues. It amazes Shura that it is Alyona who had insisted on leaving Toronto while sections of Ukraine were under attack by Russia. Over Skype Shura makes a valiant effort to convince Alyona to leave Oleg and move to Toronto where she can get her own apartment, but Alonya is too weak to leave Oleg: "You don't know what it's like to be treated as an enemy because you want peace." For Alyona, living in peace with her husband tops escaping the war in Ukraine, but it also comes at a very high personal price. She never sees her Ukrainian-speaking son, daughter-in-law or grandson ever again, and can receive no treatment for severe diabetes.

Conclusion

Both stories, written by Jewish American authors, offer as background information the historical plight of Jews even though no contemporary experience of anti-Semitism is depicted in either work. Cynthia Ozick recalls Soviet crimes that took place against Jews, referring to "ghosts of antique hatred were yet to be awakened" (Ozick 93) and that reports indicate that in Moscow, schoolchildren "have their noses bloodied to the taunts of *'Zhid! Zhid!"*" (Ozick 94). There were indeed a few isolated incidents from that period. The Russian neo-Nazi gang known as the "Werewolf Legion" set fire to the Olympic sports hall in Moscow where the Messianic Jewish conference was being held, and they organized "a series of arson attacks on movie theatres that showed Steven Spielberg's Holocaust film "Schindler's List." The

Werewolf Legion members were eventually criminally prosecuted in 1996 in Yaroslavl (anon 1996: n.p.). Attacks on Jews were infrequent compared to how the Soviet Jewry Movement described the situation. Sana Krasikov likewise makes references in her story to the past murder of Jews in Ukrainian pogroms: Bandera, Shukhevych, Odesa and Proskurov (Krasikov 161).

Following guidance originating from the Soviet Jewry Movement, Ruth Puttermesser perseveres in obtaining a visa for a Soviet Jew for whom she is made to believe was in danger merely for being a Jew, but is also like her extended family members "all swallowed up in the Bolshevik silence," echoing Wiesel's "silenced Jews" motif. Ruth describes the process of sponsoring Lidia's visa application: "She wrote to the State Department, she wrote to her congresswoman, she wrote to her two senators, she wrote to HIAS and NYAMA. She visited offices and filled out forms." (Ozick 94). Similar efforts are performed by Pavel for his parents, in all probability a less onerous procedure in Canada. While their immigrant visas to reside in Toronto were secured, Alyona decide that they must return to Kyiv.

Ozick and Krasikov project family responses to crises in the early 1990s as the Soviet Union is in its last throughs and in 2022 as Ukraine defends itself from a brutal invasion. Both stories effectively reveal how the process for immigrants moving from one country to another can lead to wildly distorted perceptions of reality, not only for those moving but for their hosts as well. The authors bring these historical (and current) events to life by projecting their family conflicts into a realistic contemporary setting. Krasikov comes from a "mixed" background much like Pavel, with a mother from Ukraine and a father with Georgian and Crimean background (Leyshon n.p.). While poverty and social institutions collapsed for many Russians in 1990, Lidia's (and Ozick's extended) family do not appear to suffer destitution. Likewise, there are no deaths reported among the characters of Sanikov's story nor in her family in Ukraine (as of this writing).

"Save My Child!" and "The Muddle" were first published in *The New Yorker* in 1996 and 2022 and anthologized in The *Best American Short Stories* series in the following year, respectively. Ozick did not write a follow up story, though she has written a series of stories revolving around the narrator Ruth Puttermesser. To date, Krasikov has not followed up on "The Muddle" either. However, previous to this recent short story, she has published about "reverse immigration" in her award-winning historical novel *The Patriots* (2017), revealing a significantly greater complexity to the remarkable story of Russian Jews.

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